

Testimony of Rev. Timothy B. Warner in Support of Including The UpCounty Recreation Center in the FY 23- 27 CIP Budget

Good afternoon Council President and members of the Council.

My name is Rev. Tim Warner, Senior Pastor of Emory Grove United Methodist Church and President of the Heritage Emory Grove Community Development Corporation. I come before you today not only as a faith leader, but as a former resident and advocate for the Emory Grove community, that has waited a long time for its full share of opportunity.

I urge you to include full funding for the reconstruction or substantial renovation of the UpCounty Recreation Center in the FY 27-32 Capital Improvement Program.

To understand the importance of this moment, you must understand our history. More than forty years ago, over one hundred homeownership families were displaced through the County's first and unanimously acknowledged as failed urban renewal effort. In the aftermath, the County built the current recreation center, but since its construction, the facility has seen very little meaningful investment. There has been no updated master plan for Emory Grove since the 1980s, and today the building shows the visible

wear of decades of underinvestment in this historically neglected community.

But today, Emory Grove is not standing still.

Through the vision, investment and leadership of our church and the Heritage Emory Grove CDC, more than 500 new housing units—serving the full range of affordability—construction is set to begin within the next 12 to 14 months. Hundreds of new families will soon call Emory Grove home. Children will need safe places to play. Seniors will need space to gather. Families will need opportunities and programming to connect.

The current recreation center simply does not have the capacity, the condition, or the programming space to meet that future.

At the same time, we are working with Montgomery Parks and the Bethesda Big Train to anchor the restoration of youth baseball as a cornerstone of community life in adjacent Johnson's Local Park, honoring this community's historic legacy. More than simply sports, this effort is about reconstructing positive pathways for young people, community pride, and restoring something that once helped hold this community together.

A modern recreation center is essential to making that vision real. It would serve as the hub for youth development, health, wellness, and community connection.

I recognize that you face many worthy requests in this CIP cycle. But few projects bring together this level of readiness, partnership, and timing. Significant public-private investment is already underway. Housing growth is imminent. The need is real, and the opportunity is now. This moment in the history of both our county and our country demands it.

For Emory Grove, this is not simply a facilities request. It is a matter of equity. It is a chance to correct the legacy of destructive past policy decisions and to invest in a future where this historic community finally has the resources it needs to thrive.

I respectfully ask you to translate your unanimous prior support for Emory Grove into action by fully funding the UpCounty Recreation Center in the FY 27–32 Capital Improvement Program.

Thank you for your service, and for your commitment to ensuring that every community in Montgomery County has a fair opportunity to flourish.