



RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Wednesday, October 15, 2025, 6:30 PM
MEETING MINUTES

ATTENDEES:

Checked boxes indicate present. Unchecked boxes indicate absence.

Community Members:

Dr. Pat Grant (Chair), Sonia Canzater, Dr. Isaac Cudjoe, Joseph Hurst, Dr. Tasnuva Khan, Shane Lloyd, Akufuna Ngonda, Judith Thomas, and Gustavo Torres.

County Staff Members:

James Stowe (Vice Chair), Selena Mendi Singleton (Parliamentarian), Dr. Anthony R. Alston, Ilana Branda, Lieutenant Oneil Ormsby, and Dourakine Rosarion.

Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice Staff:

Tiffany Ward (Chief Equity Officer) and Harrieta Shangarai

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 by Dr. Pat Grant (Chair)

AGENDA

- No objections. The agenda was adopted.

MINUTES

- The minutes for the September 17, 2025, meeting were approved.

PRESENTATION – Street Naming Process

The Montgomery County Planning Board staff provided an overview of how Montgomery County streets are named and the process for renaming them, including the legal aspects.

Presenters included:

- Rebeccah Ballo – Historic preservation division Chief
- Matthew Mills
- Parker Smith

Rebecca oversees the historic preservation area and conducts much of the research on Confederate street names, playing a significant role in those renaming efforts. Matt is with the legal office, and Parker has been on the front-line staff who worked through the street renames.

The Committee heard a powerful briefing on the County's street and facility renaming initiative, a direct response to the Council's June 15, 2020, directive to confront structural racism and remove public honors that perpetuate harm. The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), a bi-county regional planning agency established in 1927 and chartered by the State of Maryland, led this effort in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. M-NCPPC oversees planning, zoning, and parks management, and operates through five departments and two Council-appointed Planning Boards. In collaboration with Montgomery Planning and Parks, M-NCPPC launched a comprehensive review of County-owned streets and facilities named after Confederate figures, or others misaligned with County values. Phase 1 resulted in the renaming of J.E.B. Stuart Road, J.E.B. Stuart Court, and Jubal Early Court, which were replaced with names honoring Black community leaders Geneva Mason and William Dove. The renaming ceremony in July 2021 included descendants from the Scotland community. This initiative affirms that naming is not neutral; it is a public declaration of who we honor and who we exclude. The Committee emphasized that renaming is a necessary act of racial justice and called for continued transparency, community leadership, and structural accountability in future phases. *Please see the attached PowerPoint presentation.*

Discussion Summary (Post-Presentation): Street Renaming Process and Challenges

The Committee engaged in a candid and complex discussion following the presentation on Montgomery County's street renaming initiative. Several key lessons and concerns emerged:

1. **Identification Challenges:** Determining which streets were named after Confederate figures or other problematic associations proved difficult. Last names alone were insufficient to confirm intent, and the ambiguity of historical naming conventions complicated the process.
2. **Overwhelming Scope:** The County's directive included over 1,200 names—first and last—linked to segregationists, slaveholders, and Confederate sympathizers. Committee members emphasized that such a broad scope was unmanageable without clearer criteria and a deeper historical context.
3. **Governance and Authority:** The Planning Board and full Council were consulted to ensure alignment and support. Their backing was critical to interpreting the mandate and legitimizing the renaming process.
4. **Geographic Names Excluded:** Streets named after geographic locations were generally excluded from renaming efforts, as they did not carry the same symbolic weight or historical harm.

Parker Smith outlined the renaming process, governed by a 2014 manual and overseen by the Planning Board and Council. Criteria for renaming included:

- Serving the public interest (e.g., safety concerns).
- Addressing historical harm (e.g., Confederate associations).
- Correcting administrative or naming errors.

The process involves notification, submission of a Statement of Grounds (SOG), and coordination with the Department of Transportation, as well as affected residents.

Community response: Feedback was mixed. Some residents expressed frustration over administrative burdens (e.g., updating driver's licenses), while others welcomed the opportunity

to honor African American leaders. The process solicited community input but did not require approval, which helped maintain momentum while respecting diverse perspectives.

Additional considerations:

- No funding is available to compensate residents for administrative changes.
- Indigenous representation in street naming remains limited, though potential names have been identified.
- Avoiding duplicative or overly similar names is essential for clarity and distinction.

Legal guidance from Matthew Mills and logistical oversight by Parker Smith continue to shape the process, including reviews of private developments in Gaithersburg and Germantown to ensure naming appropriateness.

The Committee reaffirmed that renaming is not merely symbolic; it is a structural intervention aimed at confronting historical harm and building a more just public landscape.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Item 1. Joe Hurst, lead for the RESJAC Town Hall Planning Committee, provided an update on the plans for a RESJAC Town Hall.

RESJAC will host a pivotal Community Town Hall on October 25, 2025, at the Mid-County Regional Services Center, a space equipped to accommodate up to 200 participants. The Town Hall will bring together subject-matter experts, community members, and key stakeholders in a structured, multilingual dialogue focused on Education, economic opportunity, Public Health, and Public Safety. Interpretation services will be provided upon request to ensure full participation for those with limited English proficiency, and a flyer will be distributed to invite broad community engagement.

All committee members were encouraged to attend and actively participate in this important convening. It was emphasized that their presence is crucial to advancing inclusive policy, amplifying community voices, and informing recommendations to the County Council, County Executive, and state partners.

RESJAC Town Hall – Logistics Summary:

The program agenda for the event includes:

1. Opening Session: Remarks by Tiffany Ward, keynote by Georgia Coffey, a fireside chat with Georgia Coffey, and moderated by Selena Singleton.
2. Breakout Sessions: Focused on Education, Economic Opportunity and Housing, Public Health, and Public Safety, led by expert facilitators.
3. Closing: Highlights from sessions and closing remarks by Dr. Grant.

Snacks will be provided. A flyer is being finalized, and interpretation services will be available upon request. Volunteers are needed for roles like check-in and greeting. Promotion will be led by Tiffany's team, with support from RESJAC members. The event is community-focused, with

no political representation, and aims to generate actionable next steps. A follow-up report and future town hall are being considered.

Item 2. Judith Thomas-Mayorga, Lead of the RESJAC Election Committee, provided a brief update on the process for nominating new RESJAC officers for 2026. She shared that the process to elect the next officers of our body is now underway.

Election Date: November 19, 2025

Elections Committee: Judith Thomas-Mayorga is the Lead, RESJAC Election Committee. Dr. Isaac Cudjoe and Dourakine Rosarion are also members of the committee. They will contact all members to identify those interested in taking on leadership roles.

Positions Open for Election:

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Second Vice Chair
- Parliamentarian

Dr. Grant encouraged all members to participate and consider nominating themselves.

Next Steps:

- The Elections Committee will circulate the nomination document and structure.
- Members are urged to respond promptly and courageously.
- Once nominations are established, a ballot will be devised and sent to the members so that they can vote for the new officers.

NEW BUSINESS

Item 1. Selena Mendy-Singleton, a RESJAC member, shared information on the responsibilities of a Racial Equity Lead and what she does in that role.

The RESJAC presentation reaffirmed Montgomery County's uncompromising commitment to racial equity and social justice. Through the activation of Racial Equity Core Teams, which are diverse, cross-functional groups comprising formal and informal leaders, the County is institutionalizing equity as a daily practice, rather than a distant goal. These teams are charged with dismantling systemic barriers, co-creating action plans, and embedding equity into budgets, policies, and departmental culture. The Council's declaration is clear: racial equity is a core value, and every department must be accountable for transformative, transparent, and community-rooted change. – *Please see the attached PowerPoint Presentation.*

Additional discussion:

Following the presentation, a motion by Gustavo Torres was unanimously approved to invite all departments to present on how they are embedding racial and social justice into their operations, budgets, and practices. The discussion laid bare a troubling reality: only three departments currently have dedicated staff for racial equity work. Members voiced deep concern that most departments treat racial and social justice as peripheral, if not invisible, despite its centrality to

the County's values and the lived realities of its residents. The call was clear: equity cannot be optional, symbolic, or siloed. Every department must be accountable for dismantling systemic harm and building structures rooted in justice, transparency, and community power.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

- Director James Stowe was not present, so Selena Mendy Singleton provided an update on the 2025 Civil Rights tour that recently took place. Selena shared the tour, which consisted of a 2,700-mile bus ride and spanned 9 days. The tour is a living classroom, honoring the legacy of struggle while preparing all to carry it forward. More details will be shared when Director Stowe joins us.
- Indigenous Peoples' Day – October 13. Dr. Grant emphasized that it is crucial to acknowledge how Indigenous peoples have stewarded, resisted, and thrived on these lands for tens of thousands of years, long before the narrative of "discovery." October 13 is not solely a commemoration of Columbus Day; it is also a time to recognize and honor the dignity, sovereignty, and enduring resilience of Indigenous peoples.
- Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Dr. Grant shared that Black women face a 40% higher mortality rate from breast cancer, driven by systemic inequities in healthcare access, education, and treatment. This is not biology alone. Early screening, informed care, and equity in prevention are encouraged.
- Supreme Court Rally – Voting Rights at Stake. Dr. Grant shared that the case of *Louisiana v. Callais* challenges the voting power of Black communities. The Civil Rights Tour connects directly to this fight. We stand on the shoulders of giants, and now it is everyone's turn to protect the ballot.
- Voter registration will be available at the Town Hall.
- World Food Day – East County Mobilization. Food is a human right. Yet food insecurity continues to plague our communities. East County is leading a bold push for food equity because no one should go hungry in a county of abundance.
- International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (Friday, October 17, 2025). Poverty is often viewed as a personal failure, but it should be regarded as a policy choice. This day will serve as a reminder that justice demands economic transformation, not charity, but rather structural change.
- Climate Justice Academy – Dr. Khan reported that the launch and partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection's Climate Justice Academy has begun. Over 12 participants, many from immigrant and refugee communities, are being trained to lead climate action in their neighborhoods. Language access is prioritized. The first session began on September 20, and the movement is growing.

ADJOURN

- Meeting adjourned at 7:35 by Dr. Grant, Chair.