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**September 13, 2022**

**Joint Board Matter with**

**Chairman McKay, Supervisor Lusk, and Supervisor Smith**

**Black/African American Historical Marker Project**

Members of the Board,

In July of 2021, the Board approved a joint board matter presented by myself, Chairman McKay, Supervisor Lusk, and Supervisor Smith, together with the Fairfax County School Board launching a Historical Markers Contest for Fairfax County, now known as the Black/African American Historical Marker Project. The Inaugural Historical Marker Contest was to focus on the African American history of Fairfax County and allow new stories to be shared with our community. It was to help ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive retelling of the diverse and rich stories that created the Fairfax County of today. The project's goal was to focus on narratives and oral histories of our African American communities, whose history, culture, and accomplishments in the County are underrepresented in our history books, lessons, and markers.

This contest was derived from the Virginia State Black History Month Marker Contest and inspired by the incredible work of our Fairfax County teachers to focus on Historical Markers, including Maura Keaney School Based Technology Specialist at Kings Glen Elementary School, whose class had a winning submission.

Our hope was that inviting students to participate in this project would allow for a deeper understanding of history, and a chance for students to participate in and engage with their local government.

Since then, through the tireless efforts of staff, students, teachers, and volunteers, as well as buy in from members of the community, we have made tremendous progress with the project. Numerous students, classes, and scout troops submitted a total of 53 proposals of individuals groups and locations relevant to Black/African American History here in Fairfax County. From there, a committee of appointees from Board offices, community organizations, and student representatives reviewed the proposals and selected 14 finalists that would be considered for Historical Markers by the Fairfax County History Commission's historical marker review committee. That committee was tasked with reviewing the finalists for feasibility, historical accuracy, and ensuring there is no more than one marker per magisterial district. The committee has approved six (6) outstanding markers that fulfilled these criteria and were recommended to begin the installation process over the next year. Each of these incredible people were crucial to the history of Fairfax County, helping define the community we have today.

These 6 markers are:

- Louise Archer
  - An educator and principal for a one-room segregated school in Vienna who also established one of Fairfax County's earliest 4-H Clubs for African Americans.
- Lillian Blackwell
  - Sued successfully to ban segregation of public accommodations.

- Annie Harper etc.
  - Challenged the constitutionality of Virginia's poll tax.
- Gunnell's Chapel
  - Once enslaved Robert Gunnell donated land where a chapel was built.  
The chapel was also used as a schoolhouse.
- Colin Powell
  - Four star General, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State, and founder of organization America's Promise.
- West Springfield 16
  - Information about 16 enslaved persons who labored and lived where West Springfield High School is located today.

A more detailed description of each Marker can be found in the attached materials. The next step in the process will be working with staff and the History Commission to refine the language of the marker, work with a vendor to create the marker, and plan installations in the defined locations across the County.

There are so many who have put countless hours and energy into this project. As an attachment to this Board Matter, you can see many FCPS students, staff, county staff and volunteers, and members of the voting committee who helped make this project a reality. We would therefore like to honor the selected submissions of this project and thank all our students, teachers, staff, and volunteers who helped make this idea a reality.

Therefore, we move that the Office of Public Affairs prepare a proclamation to be presented in the Board room to honor the students with submissions selected for Historical Markers, as well as the County staff, volunteers, FCPS staff, and voting committee residents for their efforts and participation in this contest that has allowed us to engage deeply and authentically with the contributions of our Black/African American community in Fairfax County.

## **Attachment I:**

In 1922, **Louise Archer** became teacher and principal for a one-room segregated school in Vienna. Devoted to her students, she often transported children to school herself and worked to improve their learning experiences. She organized a Parent-Teacher Association to raise funds for supplies and a new building, which opened in 1939 with three rooms. Archer also established one of Fairfax County's earliest 4-H Clubs for African Americans.

Mrs. **Lillian Blackwell** and her youngest son, Lawrence, were plaintiffs in a 1959 suit that led to the integration of Fairfax County schools. As a member of civil rights groups in Northern Virginia, she picketed restaurants, theaters, and hospitals in the 1950s to protest the exclusion of black patrons.

In 1963, Mrs. Blackwell and an Arlington resident filed a lawsuit in federal court against movie theaters that had refused to sell them tickets on the basis that there were no sections set aside for black patrons. A special three-judge panel ruled that a Virginia law providing for segregated seating was unconstitutional.

In 1964, Gum Springs resident **Annie Harper** filed a lawsuit in a federal district court, challenging the Virginia Board of Elections concerning the constitutionality of Virginia's poll tax.

Harper alleged that her 14th Amendment right of equal protection was being violated by requiring her to pay a tax to vote. A three-judge panel dismissed the case. Upon appeal, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case and the poll tax was made illegal in 1966.

**Gunnell's Chapel**, where blacks worshipped following the Civil War. Gunnell's Chapel was erected around 1879. The small wooden structure was the home of an African-American Methodist congregation. The chapel was built on land belonging to Robert Gunnell, a black farmer in Langley. In later life, Gunnell was affectionately called the “mayor of Langley.”

**General Colin Powell**, who was the son of Jamaican parents, was born in Harlem, NY. He served in the Army for 35 years. Powell was the first African American appointed as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Staff. He founded America’s Promise which helps at risk students. At his home church in McLean, Powell’s efforts encouraged members to tutor students at McFarland Middle School in Washington, DC.

**The West Springfield 16 are 16 enslaved persons** who once lived and labored on the property now occupied by West Springfield High School. Their first names, ages, and values were included in an estate inventory of an 1856 will.

## **Attachment II:**

This project could not have come together without the help of so many people. Thank you to everyone who made this possible, particularly our residents who shared their stories.

- Stephanie Duffield and Patty Gray from Haycock Elementary
- Sean Miller - South County High School
- Girl Scout Troop 3686-Camille McCarthy, Nancy Hanson, Jennie Moonis
- Karla Bruce – Chief Equity Officer of Fairfax County
- Dawn Hyman – Project Manager for One Fairfax
- Crystal Santos – Public Information Officer for Public Affairs
- Tracey Wynne – Director, Community Relations FCPS
- Mary Lipsey – History Commission- Chair of the Marker Committee
- Cheryl-Ann Repetti – Chair of the History Commission
- Aryeh Kalender – Staff Aide, Office of Supervisor Palchik
- Alicia Hunter - Coordinator, Social Studies K-12, Fairfax County Public Schools
- Deborah March – Culture Responsive Pedagogy Specialist, Fairfax County Public School
- Robert O’Quinn - Technology Program Manager
- Katina Matthews – NCS Regional Community Developer
- Ramona Carroll – Program Manager for the Community Impact Unit
- Suzette Reynolds – Interfaith Coordinator-NCS-Community Impact Unit
- Tammy Mannarino – History Commission
- Maggie Gowan – Teacher, West Springfield Elementary School
- Maura Keane – School Based Technology Specialist, Kings Glen Elementary School
- Brian Heintz, Teacher-Applied History Class, West Springfield High School

### Voting Committee Members:

- Mr. Edwin B. Henderson
- Mr. Ronald L. Chase
- Mr. Jevon Walton
- Ms. Barbara Glakas
- Ms. Michele Audrey Togbe
- Ms. Madison Judd
- Ms. Talia-Rose Diorio
- Dr. Spencer Crew
- Ms. Sylvia Taylor
- Mr. Renko Hardison
- Mr. Bunyan Bryant
- Mr. David Houston III
- Mr. Boisseau Woltz III
- Rev. Dr. Sheila Graves
- Mr. Edward Yost