

# Montgomery Preservation Inc.

Promoting the Preservation, Protection and Enjoyment of Montgomery County's Rich Architectural Heritage and Historic Landscapes

September 11, 2017

To the Members of the Montgomery County Council:  
*For the records of two 9/12/2017 public hearings, burial sites legislation*

This letter is sent to express the strong support of Montgomery Preservation (MPI) for Bill 24-17 and SRA 17-01.

For too long, cemeteries in all corners of Montgomery County have been neglected, abandoned, or deliberately destroyed. Many have suffered a dramatic change of environment over the years. A number of Maryland counties have recognized the need for protection: Howard, Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Baltimore, Calvert, and Charles. Please approve these two proposals now, as they will enable Montgomery County to confront this long-identified problem and to correct some of the dire situations that currently exist.

Both bills have merit and are needed to supplement State cemetery protection laws. Recognizing the Cemetery Inventory as a tool for identification and employing the subdivision process to protect burial sites situated in certain places in uncertain times are initiatives that cemetery caretakers, advocates, and the general public can support.

However, the subject proposals are not sufficient. Subdivision is not the only process that determines the future of these fragile historic resources. Burial sites need to be identified on all documents and protected during all phases of planning and permitting - such as sector plans, residential and non-residential construction, tax maps, and road configurations. Provisions for emergency situations and discovery of unknown burials, with a requirement for archaeological protocols and additions to the Inventory, are vital. Enforcement language also needs to be included here. And the Montgomery County Cemetery Inventory - which identified more than 300 burial sites through a research project conducted mostly by volunteers 2004-2009 -- needs to be updated and continue to identify additional burials as they are found. To manage and monitor this important agenda, plus conducting research and outreach activities, a dedicated full-time credentialed staff position is essential, ideally within Montgomery Planning.

MPI concurs with Montgomery Planning staff's analysis of the situation and recommendations for improvements to these bills. And while an advisory board could certainly help in considering other detailed aspects of cemetery preservation, we urge the Council not to delay passage of these initial laws, with suggested amendments. Our burial sites have been without local protection for too long.

Montgomery Preservation urges you to approve the current legislative proposals with an eye to expanding them in the near future to provide more effective coverage. We look forward to working with the PHED Committee toward recognition of historic burial sites as valuable resources and removal of current obstacles to their survival.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors  
Montgomery Preservation Inc.