

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION



Public Hearing
on

Bill 23-172, the “Alethia Tanner Park Designation Act of 2019”
Bill 23-264, the “Woody Ward Recreation Center Designation Act of 2019”
Bill 23-327, the “James E. Bunn Amphitheater Designation Act of 2019”

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee. I am Ella Faulkner, the Deputy Director of Administrative Services for the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). I am pleased to testify before you today in proud support of the proposed designations of three community assets within DPR's inventory; the park at 227 Harry Thomas Way, NE in Ward 5 currently called NoMa Green, the Amphitheater in Oxon Run Park in Ward 8, and the Benning Park Community Center in Ward 7.

DPR believes that the naming or renaming of public assets should include as robust of a community engagement process as possible. With regard to Bill 23-172, the "Alethia Tanner Park Designation Act of 2019, we applaud the NoMa Business Improvement District and NoMa Parks Foundation for their efforts in soliciting quantifiable, broad-based community support to garner public input on the future name of NoMa Green, just as they did in the naming of Swampoodle Park. Over two thirds of the more than 2000 survey participants voted to name the park "Tanner Park," in honor of Alethia Tanner. This 2.5-acre parcel, formally owned by Pepco, is north of New York Avenue and bounded by Harry Thomas Way NE on the west and the Metropolitan Branch Trail on the east. Currently under development by the NoMa Parks Foundation, the park will provide outdoor recreation and community gathering space and serve as NoMa's "backyard." The intentional creation of spaces like the NoMa Green is vital for the health and wellness of our residence as the District population grows.

Ms. Tanner, who was born a slave in Prince George's County, Maryland in 1781, purchased her freedom in 1810, as well as the freedom of at least 18 others. During her remarkable life, Ms. Tanner was a business woman, owned real estate, and was a supporter and sponsor of educational and religious institutions for the free African-American community in

Washington DC. In addition to supporting several schools for free African-American children, her entrepreneurial ventures included a produce stand in Lafayette Park, where her large clientele included President Thomas Jefferson. She also funded the education of family members, including her nephew, John Francis Cook, Sr., who founded Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church. The legacy of Alethia Tanner is one that should be heralded in our city and we at DPR are proud to support Bill 23-172, the “Alethia Tanner Park Designation Act of 2019,” which would name the NoMa Green in her honor.

Moving on to Bill 23-327, the “James E. Bunn Amphitheater Designation Act of 2019”, we would note that Oxon Run Park is a jewel in Washington, DC’s crown of outdoor space. It is the home of the second largest cherry blossom tree grove in the District, the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center, and over three miles of trails. Oxon Run Park also boasts the only amphitheater in DPR’s inventory located east of the Anacostia River. Nestled within the park near Mississippi Ave and 13th Street, SE, the amphitheater is a beacon in the community much like its proposed namesake James E. Bunn,

James Bunn was a well-known businessman, former Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, a driving force in the redevelopment of St. Elizabeths Campus, and the founder of Congress Heights Main Streets. As a longtime member of the Friends of Oxon Run Park, Bunn, as he was affectionately known, was instrumental in securing the park’s Cherry Blossom grove. DPR is happy to join in support of Bill 23-327 the “James E. Bunn Amphitheater Designation Act of 2019,” and in honoring James E. Bunn by naming the Oxon Run Amphitheater after him.

Finally, we are proud that Bill 23-264, the “Woody Ward Recreation Center Designation Act of 2019” seeks to honor one of our own. Benning Park Community Center was first opened in 1971 and will be undergoing an \$11 million modernization in 2020. DPR and the Department of General Services (DGS) are currently working to review proposals for the project’s general contractor. When completed, Benning Park will have improved landscaping and upgraded storm water management, a refashioned entrance, a new elevator, along with other Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance measures, and a state-of-the-art fire safety and security system. We will also be updating the Center’s kitchen and boxing center. The modernization provides the perfect opportunity to effectuate the signage and data updates that accompany a renaming of this significance. If this bill moves forward, by this time next year we will be celebrating the grand reopening of the modernized Woody Ward Recreation Center.

In addition to being a former NFL Player and highly respected member of the community, Woody Ward was a dedicated employee at the Department of Parks and Recreation for 47 years. He was a fixture in the Benning Park Rec, serving at that site from 1988 to 2014, and founding the basketball league that still carries his name. Woody’s commitment to recreation and youth development has made an indelible mark on the DPR and Benning Park community, and his DPR family cannot think of a more fitting honor than renaming the center, which he dedicated much of his life to, in his honor.

We look forward to continuing our work with DGS, community members, and local leaders, as we aim to preserve these community assets and the legacies of these great Washingtonians for generations to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am available to answer any questions that you or the committee may have.