

**Application for a Commemorative Work on  
District of Columbia Public Space**

**Washington, D.C.**

**ENSLAVED PEOPLE WHO BUILT THE U.S. CAPITOL**

Concept One: Legacy Dome

Concept Two: Passage Arch

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*Name of Commemorative Work*

**Triangle Park at Bladensburg Road, 28<sup>th</sup> Street, and Douglas Street NE**

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*Location of Commemorative Work*

*Submitted by:*

**DC Office of Planning**

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*Name of Sponsoring Organization*

**Submitted to the District of Columbia Commemorative Works Committee**

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*Date*

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## **I. SPONSORING ORGANIZATION**

### **1. Name or Title of Proposed Commemorative Work**

Enslaved People who Built the U.S. Capitol

Concept One: Legacy Dome

Concept Two: Passage Arch

### **2. Sponsoring Organization**

*Name of sponsoring organization:* DC Office of Planning

*Address of sponsoring organization:* 7th Floor, 899 North Capitol St NE  
Washington, DC 20002

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*Tax Status of Principal Sponsor:* Sponsor is a DC Government Agency

### **3. Description of Sponsoring Organization**

The Office of Planning (OP) is tasked with planning for the long-term growth of the District of Columbia. OP leads land use, development, cross-systems, and public space initiatives to support the District as a vibrant and inclusive city where all District residents can thrive, regardless of income, race, age, or background. OP guides development throughout the District of Columbia's distinctive neighborhoods by engaging stakeholders and residents, performing research and analysis, serving as the steward of our historic resources, and publishing various planning documents, including the Comprehensive Plan. OP also conducts historic resources research and community visioning, and manages, analyzes, maps, and disseminates spatial and US Census data. In addition, OP engages in public space, urban design, land use, and historic preservation review.

As part of its Urban Design practice, OP staffs the Commemorative Works Committee and manages the DC Commemorative Works Program. OP also manages Commemorate DC, an initiative that supports the commemoration of people, places, and events that reflect the diverse history of District neighborhoods.

## **II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **4. Subject of Commemorative Work**

The subject of this commemorative work is the contributions of more than 200 enslaved people that helped build the U.S. Capitol, an international symbol of democracy. The stories of these individuals are little-known either locally or nationally. Enslaved labor was used in almost every phase of the Capitol building's early construction. From 1792 to 1800, enslaved people were forced to quarry stone, clear the building site, create sculptures, and work long hours in inhospitable weather six days a week. While many were not paid, those who were earned only pennies a day while their enslavers earned \$5 a week. Enslaved people continued to work on the Capitol building until the Civil War. The work and craftsmanship of enslaved people was instrumental in creating the Capitol, yet much of their history has not been documented and brought to light.

### **5. Summary of Proposed Commemorative Work**

Two concept designs for commemorative works celebrating Enslaved People who Built the U.S. Capitol are in a small triangle park at the intersection of Bladensburg Road, 28<sup>th</sup> Street, and Douglas Street NE. Both concepts are by artist Michael Janis, a 20-year resident of Ward 5 and director of The Washington Glass School since 2005. Multi-colored glass is incorporated into the center piece of each concept – in one concept a dome and in the other concept an arch. The site is located near the foundry where Philip Reid, and enslaved laborer, worked on the Statue of Freedom that is atop the US Capitol dome.

### **6. Relationship of Commemorative Work to District of Columbia History and Culture**

Slavery was legal in DC from its founding until Congress passed in 1862 the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act. The Act provided partial compensation, up to \$300 per slave, to slave owners. The Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all enslaved Blacks in the US, came in 1863.

Until slavery ended, enslaved people worked to build the nation's capital, including the Capitol building, from its initial construction up to the Civil War. Little is known about the enslaved people who built the capitol building, but one enslaved person known to have contributed is DC resident Philip Reid. Reid was purchased in Charleston, SC and brought to DC in the late 1840s where he became an enslaved laborer working in a DC foundry. He was part of a team of workmen who constructed the statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Park, the first bronze statue cast in America. In 1860, the commission to cast the Statue of Freedom that sits atop the Capitol dome was awarded to the same foundry. Reid is the only known enslaved person to have worked on the statue - he was paid for his work on Sundays and his enslaver was paid for his enslaved workers' work the other six days of the week. Reid was instrumental in figuring out the complex process to carefully remove the plaster model for the statue from a mold created by an Italian sculptor. After Reid received his freedom in 1862, he went into business for himself.

The proposed location is across 8<sup>th</sup> Street from the site of the foundry where Reid worked.

### **III. PROJECT LOCATION**

#### **7. Project Location**

The project site is a triangle park at the intersection of Bladensburg Road, Douglas Street, and 28<sup>th</sup> Street NE.



*The triangle park looking north from Bladensburg Road*

#### **8. District Government Agency with Oversight**

The site is known as Reservation 313E and was transferred from the National Park Service to the DC in 1972. Today it is maintained by DC's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). DPR was involved in selecting the site for the proposed commemorative work and has been consulted throughout the concept design process.

#### **9. Existing Conditions**

The park is a free-standing triangle and approximately 13,300 sq' (one-third of an acre). It gently slopes from east to west, away from Bladensburg Road, and toward 28<sup>th</sup> Street. The site is mostly grass with a circular paved area at the center with walkways connecting it to adjacent sidewalks. There is a rounded concrete curb at the back of the sidewalk on all three surrounding streets. There are two American Elm trees in the northeast corner of the park – a large elm in good condition and a smaller elm. There are there is a six-foot sidewalk along Bladensburg Road with two streetlights and one street tree in a small tree box. There are sidewalks, overhead utility lines, and continuous tree box with street trees on Douglas Street and 28<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Ward 5 site is located at the Triangle Park bounded by Bladensburg Road, NE, Douglas Street, NE, and 28th St. NE. The park itself is inactive, with the exception of passersby using the bordering sidewalks. This stretch of Bladensburg Road is highly trafficked - most people's interactions with the site are from the sidewalk or driving lanes. There is a bus stop located one block away from the site, attracting pedestrians.

## Site Analysis

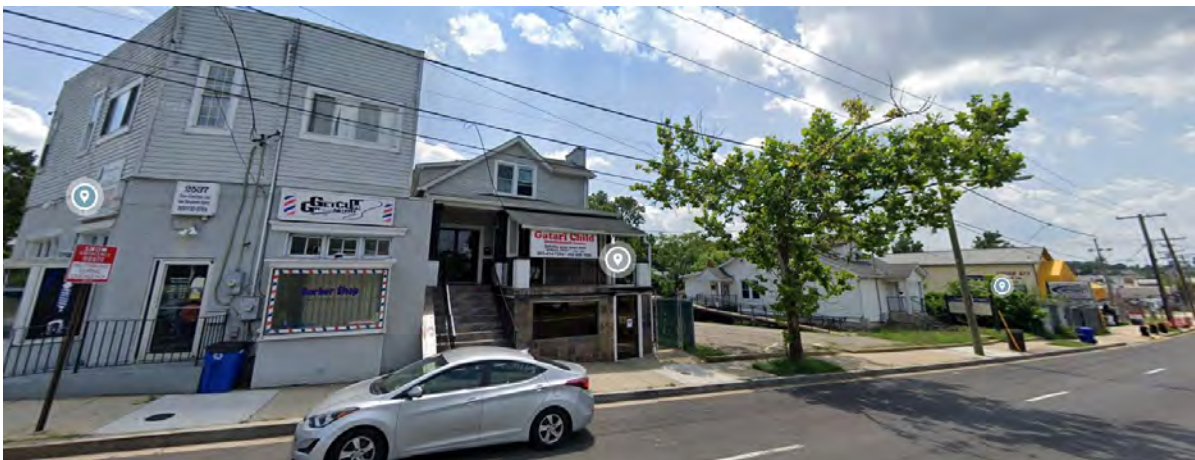
Ward 5



*Site map of Reservation 313E*

The site is along west side Bladensburg Road and defines the south end of a mixed-use commercial corridor (MU-4) that extend from Channing Street NE to South Dakota Avenue NE. It is adjacent to a Planning, Distribution, and Repair zone (PDR-1) to the west.

The MU-4 zone is applied throughout DC and permits moderate-density mixed-use development. It provides facilities for shopping and business needs, housing, and mixed uses for neighborhoods outside of the central core; is in low- and moderate-density residential areas with access to main roadways or rapid transit stops; and, includes office employment centers, shopping centers, and moderate bulk mixed-use centers.



*The commercial area immediately across the street from the site includes small scale businesses, homes converted to business, and parking lots*





*Small-scale residential building and a church are north of the site*



*Industrial uses are directly west of the site, including the former site of the foundry where Philip Reid worked*

## 10. Historic Preservation Considerations

The project site is not located in a historic district and there are no landmark buildings within a three-block radius of the site. The triangle park is an open space created as part of DC's Highway Plan, but that plan does not have a historic designation.

## 11. Project Compatibility with Existing or Future Plans for the Area

There are no commemorative works within 500 feet of this site.

The site is one of three along Bladensburg Road that the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is looking at as a pilot project for resilient small park design. DC has more than 1,100 District-owned small parks and open spaces which amount to a total of 148 acres. This study is part of a larger initiative to improve DC's small parks and open spaces by incorporating resilient design features like those that mitigate heat islands and facilities that collect storm water. The other triangle parks that are part of this project include three to the north at Douglass Street, Evans Street, and Franklin Street. Design of the memorial has been coordinated with DPR and their design team.

There are multiple policies and actions in the comprehensive plan that support commemoration, improving small parks, and investing in the Bladensburg Road corridor.

### Commemoration and Public Art

#### ***Policy UD-1.1.4: Siting and Design of Monuments and Memorials***

Locate commemorative works in places that are relevant to the subject being memorialized, where possible. Design commemorative installations to be accessible to people of all ages and various degrees of mobility, and design them in a way that benefits public life. Explore new types of commemoration, including temporary installations.

#### ***Policy UD-1.4.2: District Gateways***

Create more distinctive and memorable gateways at points of entry to the District and in neighborhoods, parks and open spaces, and neighborhood centers. Gateways should provide a sense of transition, orientation, and arrival through improvements in the form of landscaping, artwork, commemoration, and roadway design. They should be designed to make a strong and positive visual impact.

#### ***Action UD-2.3.B: Playable Art***

Complete permanent artistic play structures in small parks, street corners, or civic buildings to pilot the concept of playable streets.

### Small Parks

#### ***Policy UD-3.3.2: Small Parks for Recreation***

Leverage small parks, including triangle parks, linear parks, and medians, to serve as places for recreation, community gathering, and play by encouraging greater resident and community design and management of these spaces through grant and partnership programs.

#### ***Policy UD-3.3.3: Plazas for Diverse Uses***



Design plazas to accommodate physical activities like dancing or ball play, passive activities like sitting and chess, and cultural events like concerts, exhibits, and historical celebrations. Plazas can also provide space for café-style seating and farmers markets. When programming plazas, consider the needs of users with varying mobility levels.

***Action UD-3.3.A: Cross-Agency Small Parks Partnership Program***

Develop a community partnership program that includes the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and the DC Department of General Services (DGS) to improve and activate small parks through a combination of landscaping, recreation amenities, signage, and street design that contributes to neighborhood recreation, definition, and identity.

**Bladensburg Road**

***Policy UNE-1.2.1: Streetscape Improvements***

Improve the visual quality of streets in Upper Northeast, especially along North Capitol Street, Rhode Island Avenue, Bladensburg Road, New York Avenue, Eastern Avenue, Michigan Avenue, Maryland Avenue, Florida Avenue, West Virginia Avenue, and Benning Road. Landscaping, street tree planting, street lighting, and other improvements should make these streets more attractive community gateways.

***Policy UNE-2.2.3: Arboretum Gateway***

Improve the visual quality of Bladensburg Road and enhance its function as a gateway to the National Arboretum.

***Policy UNE-2.2.6: Extension of H Street NE Arts District***

Work with area stakeholders to develop a strategy for promoting development of an arts district along the eastern end of Florida Avenue NE by considering linkages with the H Street NE arts and entertainment district and planned development on lower Bladensburg Road. Support additional development and visual improvements on the corridor.

## 13. Concurrent Reviews

There are no concurrent reviews taking place. Further design review and coordination will take place as additional funding is identified and further design work is completed. However, multiple federal and District agencies were consulted as part of developing the two concept designs featured in this application, and their feedback has been incorporated. Agencies that were consulted and given the opportunity to provide comments include: Commission of Fine Arts, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, DC Department of Transportation, DC Department of Parks and Recreation, DC Historic Preservation Office, DC Office of Planning, National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Park Service.

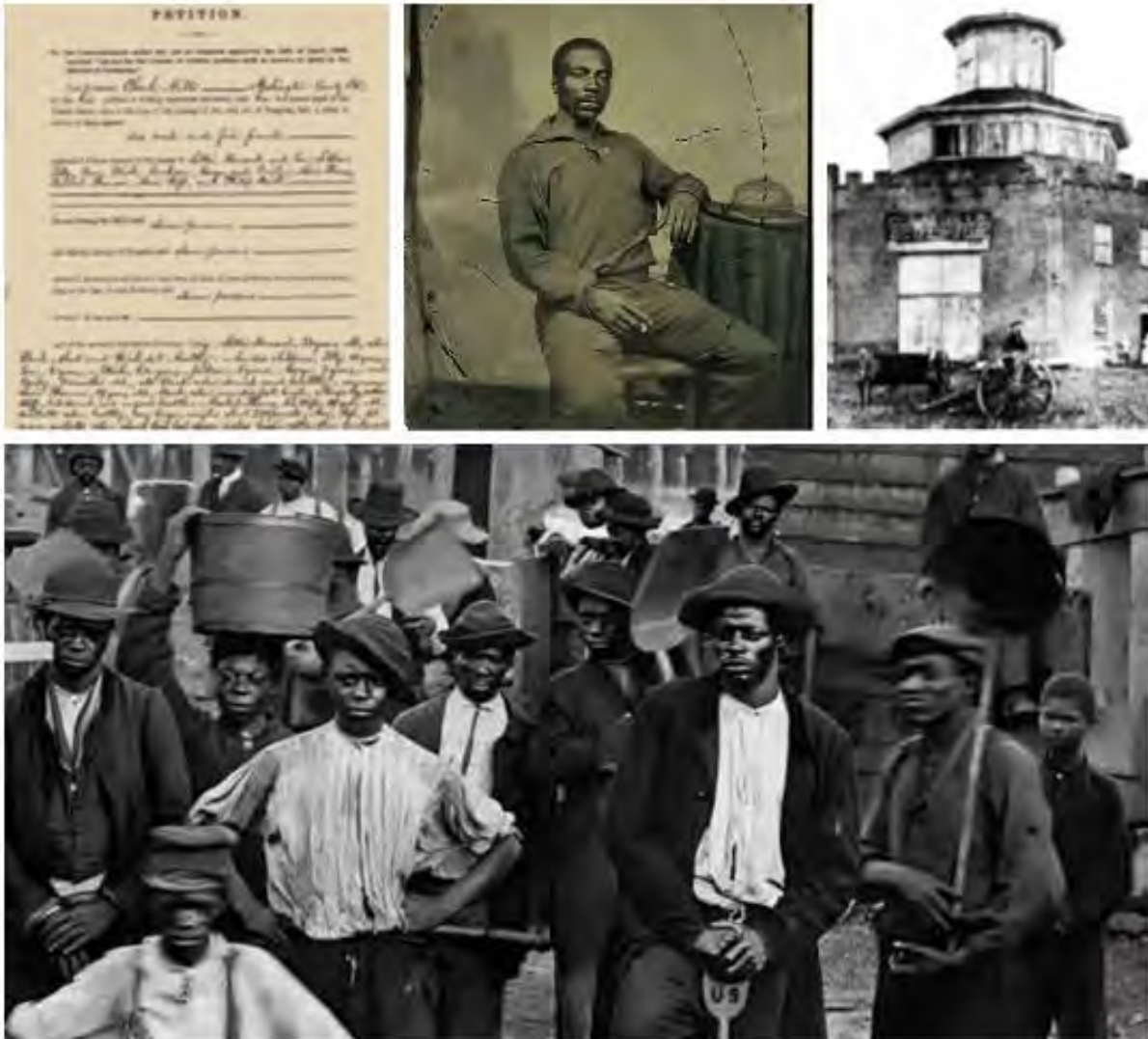
## **IV. PROJECT DESIGN**

## 14. Concept and Materials

**Concept Design**

The design of the memorial is inspired by archival research that identified the roles of individuals like Philip Reid who worked on the Capitol Building. These include images

illustrating working conditions and enslaved people performing work. Interpretation of these historic images in cast glass will be incorporated into the memorial to tell individual stories, ensuring their histories are remembered and acknowledged.



*Archival records documenting enslaved people who worked on the US capitol building will inspire images incorporated into the memorial (images include petition releasing Philip Reid from enslavement, Philip Reid, Clark Mill's foundry, and working conditions of laborers at the capitol building)*

### **Concept One: Legacy Dome**

The first concept for the memorial includes a colored glass dome sculpture that forms centerpiece of memorial. Visitors can walk around and under the colored light that passes through the sculpture. It is surrounded by a plaza that offers gathering space for community. Special paving patterns and signage offer interpretation of the memorial. New plantings and trees soften the edge of the park facing the Metrobus depot and maintain the largest trees at the site. Amenities include an open space for planned activities, benches, landscaping, and low-impact development (LID) areas that capture stormwater.

The dome is supported by columns that include images telling the story of individual enslaved workers with colorful translucent cast glass. The dichroic glass dome creates an abstraction of U.S. Capitol. The top of the memorial includes two rings of stained glass that transition from columns to dome form and hide structural connections. The form serves as a bridge, linking the sacrifices of the past with the aspirations of the present.



*Concept One: Legacy Dome – Site Plan*





*Concept One: Legacy Dome – Perspective*



*Concept One: Legacy Dome – Precedent Image*





*Light grey granite pavers provide a canvas to receive colored light that is filtered through the sculpture and large scale etching of simplified version of US Capitol Building elevation will be to the northwest of the sculpture*



*New native shade trees frame the sculpture and shade the plaze; plantings include White Oak, American Elm, American Linden, American Beech, and native perennials and grasses*



### Concept Two: Passage Arch

The second concept includes a colored glass arched gateway that forms the centerpiece of the memorial. Visitors can walk around and through the colored light that passes through the sculpture. The plaza offers gathering space for community and interpretive inlays sharing information on enslaved people who built the US Capitol Building. Amenities included in the memorial include new and existing trees that frame the sculpture and offer shade. Benches and LID areas ring the plaza, focusing on the sculpture. An interpretive panel is on axis with the arch and shields the view of adjacent Metrobus facility.

Cast glass panels in the arch columns tell stories of individual enslaved workers surrounded by colorful translucent glass. The arch is an abstraction form of the of U.S. Capitol Building.



*Concept Two: Passage Arch – Site Plan*



*Concept Two: Passage Arch – Perspective*



## Materials



*Primary narrative glass artwork to be prepared by Michael Janis. Glass used in outdoor settings, including cast glass at Library of Congress and outdoor artwork. Glass provides unique contrast between light and weight of theme.*



*Glass artwork contrasts to industrial site context - light patterns created by the artwork make the space inviting and ever-changing, encouraging repeated visits and ongoing community use. Architectural glass is highly durable, capable of withstanding harsh weather conditions and heavy traffic. Its vibrant colors and intricate designs captivate viewers and add visual appeal to busy streetscapes.*



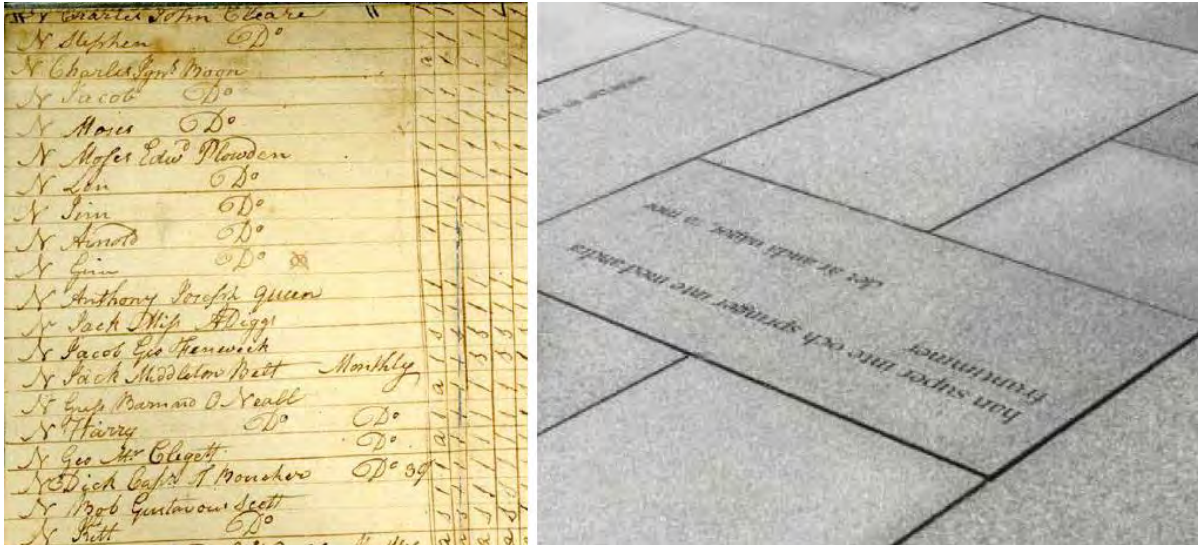


*Plaza and sculpture offer place for people to gather and rally*



*Glass infill panels to be created via series of community workshops held at nearby Washington Glass School, providing opportunity for public engagement to invest emotionally in the project*





*Etched names of the 122+ known enslaved workers who built the Capitol Building will be arrayed in a field across the central plaza*

## 15. Infrastructure

There are no related infrastructure improvements required to complete this project.

## 16. Environmental Analysis

An environment impact assessment will be completed for this site when additional funding is identified, and further design work is completed.

## 17. Proposed Timeline

A timeline for implementing a preferred concept for this will be undertaken as additional funding is identified and further design work is completed.

# **V. COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

## 18. Community Outreach Program

Two public meetings were held to engage the public in the design of the commemorative work concepts.

### **Visioning Workshop**

The Ward 5 Visioning Workshop was hosted at the future memorial site on Saturday, April 20th, from 10am-12pm. In total, we received 35 direct comments. Seven formal interactions (and demographic information) were captured through a sign-in sheet. Staff estimated they had an additional 3-5 informal interactions with stakeholders.

### *Participant Demographics*

Though it had the smallest number of participants, Ward 5’s engagement was the most evenly spread across race and gender. 43% of stakeholders were White, 29%Black, and 29% Latinx. At this first Visioning Workshop, staff did not document formal interactions. However, anecdotally, there were very few. Because the study area meets the City’s threshold for language support services, Spanish translation was provided for the one-pagers and boards. A Spanish translator was also available onsite. However, all workshop attendees self-reported speaking English at home. Future engagements for this study area could more creatively engage the Hispanic community.

#### *Stakeholder Feedback*

- There was no clear preferred future experience on the site.
- Stakeholder preferred designs that had multiple, active uses.
- In their captured comments, attendees asked that the memorial incorporate nature.
- Most mentioned words were “nature” and “Street.”
- In both instances, “street” referred to the view/experience from the sidewalk or driving lanes. These comments were in line with current usage – mostly stakeholders interact with the site from the sidewalk/street as there is no attraction/programming onsite.

#### **Design Workshop**

On Saturday, June 22, 2024, the project team hosted a Design Workshop for the Ward 5 Commemorate DC project outside the Langdon Recreation Center. On the day of the event, the project team pivoted to an alternate location nearer to the Langdon Pool. This pivot occurred in large part due to lack of foot traffic near the planned workshop site and the presence of a large population of families at the adjacent Landon Pool. The project team relocated and instead set up feedback stations at the entrance to the pool, posting a sign at the entrance to the Recreation Center to communicate with attendees. The temperature was dangerously hot on the day-of, shortening the amount of time passersby were willing and able to stand outside to discuss the project.

#### *Stakeholder Feedback*

The project team spoke with 19 community members who provided comments about the concept designs. Based on observational data, most participants were seniors or families with young children. Attendees were African American and White, and roughly an equal number of men and women participated (staff’s observational data). Staff engaged a family of about five in Spanish (one adult and four youths). Many of the responding community members are active in the local arts scene, providing uniquely constructive feedback.

The 19 attendees provided 26 comments on the concept designs, the majority of which (19 of 26, 73%) were in support of Concept 1. Seven respondents liked the dome structure because it “echoed the Capitol dome,” and called on the idea of “a home.” Another stakeholder appreciated that “you can be in it, not just walk through it.” Five people believed that the dome was more “visually ‘readable’ from a distance” than Concept 2’s arch.

One stakeholder expressed concern that the dome could be used as a shelter for unhoused populations. Five respondents asked that the stories of the craftsmen who worked at the Foundry, and specifically Philip Reid, be incorporated into the design. One stakeholder stating that Philip Reid and the enslaved people who worked at the Foundry should be the

subject of the memorial. Another stakeholder expressed interest in maintaining the existing circulation pattern at the site and including a physical representation of the former foundry.