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Honorable Members of the County Council:

On behalf of Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG), where I serve as executive director, I am pleased to submit the following testimony. PHG is proud of the positive contributions we make to the health and well-being of residents while helping steward the historical, natural, cultural and recreational resources of Howard County. Thanks to the support provided by Howard County Government over the last seven years, PHG, as the non-profit managing entity of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area (PVHA), has been able to effectively carry out its mission of preserving, protecting, interpreting, and restoring the environment, history and culture of the river valley for all.

We respectfully ask that you support the \$80,000 in FY27 Community Service Partnership (CSP) grant funding for our organization in the operating budget. The success of Maryland Heritage Areas depends on support from local governments, which, in turn, benefit from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) program through access to additional grants, free educational programs, stewardship activities, and heritage tourism. We grew our volunteer force during the year, continued our water quality monitoring program at 12 Howard County sites, provided 170 hands-on water quality education opportunities, removed 45,202 pounds of trash during stream clean-ups, planted 102 trees and maintained another 1055 including a new food forest at Patapsco Valley State Park Avalon, led stewardship events that removed over 570,000 square feet of invasive plants, and offered a range of free environmental education, history and recreation programs.

The return on Howard County's investment in the PVHA is high. Some recent highlights include:

- \$350,000 in funding for partner organizations in Howard County during the last two years, along with \$40,000 distributed through our state-supported PHG mini-grant and sponsorship programs.
- With a diverse and widely educated and experienced staff as well as a dedicated board of directors comprised of 19 community members, our experience and expertise marks us as unique among the state's 13 heritage area management entities, allowing us to effectively and efficiently leverage public and private grant funding to work with and support partners in a range of activities.
- Increased engagement with Howard County's Spanish-speaking community, including hosting our second Festival del Río program last summer, which we are continuing this year, and expanded our work with the Howard County

PATAPSCO HERITAGE GREENWAY is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to preserve, protect, interpret, & restore the environment, history, and culture of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area.

Center for African American Culture and secured MD250 grant funding to support an exhibit and storytelling project exploring Howard County's black history.

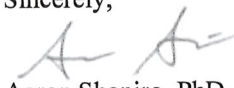
- Funded over \$15,000 in projects through our EC250 Legacy Fund, which provides grants to organizations for programs, events, projects and learning experiences that raise the visibility of Ellicott City's history and/or beautify and enhance the Ellicott City Historic District.
- Expanded youth engagement through events with Girl Scouts of Central Maryland-Howard County Cluster, partnered with and hosted educational programs with Atholton High School, Hebbville Elementary School's Green Club, Mt. Hebron High School, Phelps Luck Elementary School, Bonnie Branch Middle School and Centennial High School, and created stewardship and educational events in partnership with Rotary Clubs of Howard County.

We recognize the importance of promoting heritage tourism and supporting local organizations, which is highlighted in our social media, print materials and on our website at patapsco.org. Through a capacity building grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, we are working with a consultant to develop our next fundraising and development plan. We recently adopted a new six year action plan (FY27-FY32) that will help bring increased vitality to our heritage tourism activities, enhancing the visitor experience and drive interest in local businesses. This effort involves ongoing technical and professional support to our partners and a focus on interpreting and exploring an inclusive history of the region that values the contributions of all. This is vital in encouraging people to live, work and play in Howard County.

We experienced the tragic passing of our past president, incomparable advocate for the Patapsco community and dear friend, Grace Kubofcik, whose memory and legacy lives on in the work we do across the watershed. Her passing coincided with the creation of our first annual Friend of the Patapsco Award, which we named in her honor. Fred Dorsey was honored with the first award at our An Evening in the Patapsco Valley event at the Elkridge Furnace Inn this past September and we look forward to recognizing another deserving awardee this coming year.

We promise to always strive to provide Howard County a valuable return on the investment it makes in PHG and to serve the needs of this community. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Aaron Shapiro, PhD
Executive Director