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Selection for 'seamless' transition lasts 11 weeks

Tracing McGrath's path from MES to State House

BY PAMELA WOOD AND JEAN MARBELLA

SUN INVESTIGATES

Coronavirus cases were peaking. Hundreds of thousands of Marylanders were out of work and struggling to get state benefits from a balky online system. Then, a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd, reigniting the Black Lives Matter movement with widespread demonstrations.

If there ever is a good time to lose a chief of staff, for Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, it wouldn't have been this May.

Chief of Staff Matthew A. Clark, who dated back to Hogan's first term, had been key in overseeing the many moving parts of the state's

pandemic response. But he had accepted a position at the University of Maryland Medical System in Baltimore, and his last day was May 29.

With so many pressing issues, there was no pause button for a leisurely search for a replacement. Hogan selected someone familiar and within reach, and who could start June 1: a former aide who had left to run a little-known branch of state government, but recently returned on loan to help Hogan's team with the *See MCGRATH, page 7*



Roy McGrath was the director of the Maryland Environmental Service before he replaced Matthew A. Clark as the governor's chief of staff on June 1. He resigned Aug. 17.

Officials: Internet plan to take year

Network beaming into state's rural areas won't help students this fall

BY LILLIAN REED

Maryland plans to build a wireless network for education that could beam a reliable, high-speed internet connection to homebound students, reaching the state's most rural, isolated pockets.

But the network will likely take a year to build. In the meantime, many students are being asked to learn virtually this fall, despite living in parts of Maryland internet service providers have passed over for expansion.

Officials don't have a clear picture of exactly which students live in unserved areas, nor where they are located. For now, the state has prioritized building the network around rural communities over population-dense locales like Baltimore.

School systems will have to make do with a patchwork of solutions to help students among the estimated 324,000 rural Marylanders who lack access to high-speed internet, according to a 2019 report from a state task force.

"It's like they say, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago," said Scott Boone, IT director for Kent County, one of the first regions slated for the new network. "When's the next best time? Right now. This may not be our last *See INTERNET, page 13*

A rediscovered log cabin with a mysterious past in Hagerstown showcases one of Maryland's forgotten Black communities



BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS

Terence Moore, right, takes a photo with Scott Guillory, from left, Jessica Scott and Reggie Turner at the log cabin.

'A little underdog'

BY CHRISTINA TKACIK

The discovery came through trauma. On a wet evening in 2018, a patrolman with the Hagerstown police crashed his cruiser into 417 Jonathan St., a tiny house at the center of the city's historic African American neighborhood. The house was condemned; its elderly owner went to live elsewhere. When the demolition crews arrived and began to rip off the vinyl siding, they saw horizontal timbers, still bearing the ax marks of the person who hewed them from tree limbs perhaps 200 years ago.



The upstairs of this log cabin, which dates from the 19th century, will be part of the restoration to turn the building at 417 Jonathan St. in Hagerstown into affordable housing.

At a time when more Americans are thinking about Black history, the log cabin on Jonathan Street has become what one blogger calls "a little underdog," capturing attention from preservationists around Maryland and beyond. This summer, a statewide preservation advocacy group based in Baltimore purchased the building with plans to bring it back to life as a residence. In Hagerstown, activists hope the refurbished old cabin will be a catalyst for change in one of the state's oldest African American communities, a likely stop on the Underground Railroad.

"We're building steam, and we've found friends and advocates from across the state that are willing to help," says Reggie Turner, a Hagerstown financial adviser appointed by Gov. Larry Hogan to the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture.

A step forward came this year, when *See CABIN, page 13*

CHADWICK BOSEMAN 1977-2020



ROBYN BECK/GETTY-AFP 2019

Chadwick Boseman, 43, who died Friday, was diagnosed with colon cancer four years ago.

Actor portrayed Black icons prior to 'Panther' fame

Secret battle with colon cancer leaves many shocked by death

BY RYAN PEARSON
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — First Chadwick Boseman slipped on the cleats of Jackie Robinson, then the Godfather of Soul's dancing shoes, portraying both Black American icons with a searing intensity that commanded respect. When the former playwright suited up as Black Panther, he brought cool intellectual gravitas to the Marvel superhero whose "Wakanda forever!" salute reverberated worldwide.

As his Hollywood career boomed, though, Boseman was privately undergoing "countless surgeries and chemotherapy" to battle colon cancer, his family said in a statement announcing his death at age 43 on Friday. He'd been diagnosed at stage 3 in 2016 but never spoke publicly about it.

The cancer was there when his character T'Challa visited the ancestors' "astral plane" in poignant scenes from the Oscar-nominated "Black Panther," there when he first became a producer on the action thriller "21 Bridges," and *See BOSEMAN, page 12*

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CABIN

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Preservation Maryland agreed to purchase the home from its previous owner, Richard Davis. He charged them only \$15,000, likely less than the lot was even worth, says executive director Nicholas Redding. Now, Redding's organization is raising around \$200,000 to restore the log structure. "The idea is to use this one project to kickstart revitalization for the community," he said.

Hagerstown's poverty rate is 27%, nearly triple the state's. And Jonathan Street is considered one of its poorest areas.

Walking down Jonathan Street, 60-year-old resident Gracson Bell pointed out landmarks from his memory: the second-floor barbershop that had stood next to the beauty parlor. For many years, a stable ran parallel to Jonathan Street; it was demolished to make way for public housing.

A few blocks down, he said, was the bowling alley where an attendant reset the pins by hand. During segregation, Black residents wouldn't have been allowed inside Hagerstown's all-white bowling alleys. "Back then, the community had to rely on itself," she said.

"It was a very nice neighborhood," said Anna Scott, 90, who lives in another Jonathan Street house. Her grandfather, who worked for the railroad, built it. "Everybody was so nice and friendly. We'd sit out on the porch and converse with one another."

Bell's grandmother worked multiple jobs including washing dishes to help afford her house in the neighborhood, where he lives in today. Some neighbors worked at the Coca-Cola bottling plant where Habitat for Humanity is now located. Others cleaned the ornate homes of white people.

"The ties of this community to the national story (of African American history) is something that needs to be explored more," said Turner, the financial adviser. "So much has been lost and suppressed."

In a meeting last year with the city council, Turner blamed local leaders for not doing more for the area, calling the decline of Jonathan Street "a community failure." Council member Lewis C. Metzner shot back that the failure was not on the city, but on residents for not coming forward.

Together with consultant Tereance Moore, Turner is on a mission to preserve the neighborhood, building by building. Within a few years, they want to see the area flourish as a dynamic business and residential district as well as a tourist destination. Moore, who works with budding entrepreneurs, says he wants to see the area become a "self-sufficient community," one with more owner-occupied housing.

After trying, and ultimately failing, to save another old house in the area — the crumbling former home of Robert Moxley, who led the No. 1 Brigade Band of U.S. Colored Troops before the Civil War — the two set their sights on the little log cabin.

During a recent visit to the cabin, Redding, with Preservation Maryland, pried open the back door, pausing in case a stray animal had decided to take up residence. Finding the house unoccupied, he shone a smartphone flashlight around the collapsing interior.

The things wrong with it would give a first-time homeowner nightmares. Besides the buckled front wall where the police cruiser hit, there are foundation problems and water leaks. A loft is insulated with cardboard boxes from the 1920s; the electrical outlets practically scream "not up to code." It needs all-new plumbing and HVAC.

Through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity, whose Washington County chapter happens to be in the neighborhood, Redding's group plans to turn the cabin into new housing for a low-income resident. It's the first time in 40 years that Preservation



BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS

A statewide preservation advocacy group has purchased the log cabin at 417 Jonathan St. in Hagerstown and plans to renovate it.



Some of the restoration funds for the log cabin on Jonathan Street are being raised by Elizabeth Finkelstein, who is selling \$25 enamel pins that say, "Save all the old houses."

Maryland has purchased a building; Redding says it will pave the way for more projects like it at a time that preservationists are thinking critically about how their work can benefit communities.

The project is led by Ziger Snead Architects, a Baltimore-based group that's worked on high-profile restoration projects like the skylight of the George Peabody Library. They hope to break ground on the project this fall, says Redding, and finish by spring.

Restorers are debating whether to add on a siding to the exterior. In the 19th century, "It was seen as rather uncouth" to leave a log structure bare. "It sort of seemed like you hadn't made it," Redding said. Filled in with chinking made from clay and horsehair, the logs were likely covered by slats fairly early on both to protect the wood and to give a more polished appearance.

Jessica Scott, program director for Habitat for Humanity for Washington County, is looking for the right person to place in the log cabin once it's completed. This is the first historic preservation project Habitat has participated in in the area, and the log cabin will need an added level of care. At around 800 square feet, it's just big enough for one person or an older couple, she thinks, perhaps "someone really into history."

As with all Habitat properties, the prospective homeowner will be expected to put in 200 hours of "sweat equity," helping out with the home's reconstruction. The down payment Habitat requires in Washington County is low, typically around \$400,

and the mortgage is designed to be affordable.

Some of the restoration funds are being raised by Elizabeth Finkelstein, founder of the website and Instagram account Cheap Old Houses, which has more than 1 million followers. Through September, Finkelstein is selling \$25 enamel pins that say, "Save all the old houses," and donating proceeds for the Jonathan Street house. She called the cabin "a little underdog." The timing was right, she said, to elevate a house with Black history.

"This is a very heated and exciting time in ... cultural recognition, in understanding what stories we're not telling"

On her platforms Finkelstein elevates the everyday, pointing out the woodworking in a middle-class 19th-century home or the ornate light fixtures in another. "For so long the field of historic preservation has focused on one particular narrative about our history," she said. While the grand estates of the wealthy are made into landmarks, everyday homes and history have been forgotten, she said.

Jonathan Street gets few mentions in Maryland history books, but as early as the 1790s, the area was home to a mix of free and enslaved Black people living side by side, says Turner. They built churches like the Second Christian Church and Ebenezer A.M.E., which began in a log cabin and later was used as a hospital for Union soldiers during the Civil War.

"A lot of the enslaved people in that area would live in the Jonathan Street community and go to the house in which they were

actually enslaved," says Lynn Bowman, an associate professor at Allegany College. An expert in Western Maryland's Black history, she spent 10 weeks researching the neighborhood's history, poring over census records and other archival materials. "No one was really appreciating the historical significance of that street and area," she said.

During the time of slavery, Redding says "there certainly would have been Underground Railroad activity" in the Jonathan Street area. But determining which buildings were used is difficult: "It was a secret society. So people didn't keep records."

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Black-owned businesses thrived on Jonathan Street, then home to Route 11, a highway that was later re-routed. Some were listed in the Green Book, a motorist's guide to Black-friendly establishments during the Jim Crow years. Baseball great Willie Mays stayed at the now-demolished Harmon Hotel on the 300 block of Jonathan Street while his team played in Hagerstown.

Neighbors had differing accounts of who lived in the little log cabin on the 400 block. Was it Mr. Ford? Or Ms. Loretta Brown, who had a little dog named Brown Eyes? Davis, the home's previous owner, declined through a friend to be interviewed. Redding said a genealogist is working on figuring out the exact history. Census records show that in 1920, the inhabitants of 417 N. Jonathan St. were Charles H. and Maude A. Ford, a married couple. He was a janitor at the police station.

A century years later, Redding pulled a rusty nail out from a timber. A cut nail, distinctive to the 19th century, helps date the structure; but Preservation Maryland plans to have dendrochronology done to date the wood within a few months of when it was cut. Archaeologists will dig up the site of the backyard, hoping to discover the location of the privy; ancient toilets can be treasure troves for researchers.

Outside, Redding placed his hand on one of the timbers, caressing the hew marks; a visceral connection to the past. The various types of notching on the ends of the wood indicate the house was repurposed from the materials of other buildings, reuse common in the 19th century. People rarely threw things away then, Redding says, something that's almost incomprehensible now. But for the most part, the wooden timbers here are still strong, ready to provide shelter for the next resident of Jonathan Street.

INTERNET

From page 1

pandemic."

Maryland's wireless education network echoes a federal program that set aside bandwidth exclusively for education in the 1960s. At the time, institutions didn't know how to use it — and the federal government is now aiming to auction off the remaining bandwidth to commercial internet service providers and mobile phone companies.

The state has earmarked \$15 million in COVID-19 pandemic relief funds: the CARES Act and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief funds.

Radio frequencies are often considered preferable for bringing broadband internet to remote, rural areas. That's because the network can be built using existing utility poles, water towers and other tall structures.

Republican Gov. Larry Hogan created the state's Office of Rural Broadband in 2017 to work with county governments and private companies to bring service to those without broadband internet. Kenrick Gordon, director of the office, said the state has opted to build the wireless education network on a spectrum of radio referred to as the 3.5 gigahertz band.

Radio waves, or spectrum, can be imagined as strings in a piano. Each "string," or section of spectrum, may produce slightly stronger or weaker signals that are able to reach varying distances. If too many carriers try to send data across the same section of spectrum, or "piano string," interference can occur and delivery speeds can slow dramatically. That's one of the reasons cellphone signals can falter in large crowds.

Gordon chose the 3.5 GHz band for the wireless education network because it can reach distances up to six miles away and deliver data at relatively high speeds. And the state would not need to secure a license from the Federal Communications Commission in order to use it, meaning that

installation can occur quickly.

However, using unlicensed spectrum also means there's a slightly higher risk of interference from commercial internet and cellphone service providers, and in some cases branches of military. In order to conserve the amount of bandwidth available to students, the network will not be available to other individuals in a child's household, Gordon said.

The state is negotiating with an unnamed Maryland-based nonprofit to build, own and operate the network, he said. The state intends to commission a feasibility study by mid-October to determine where students without internet access are located and what it will take to deliver the network to them, Gordon said.

The director hopes for the network to be fully operational across the state by August 2021.

While the funding for the network flows through the Maryland Department of Education, the project is being championed by an office focused solely on rural broadband needs. As a result, it's unclear whether students in Baltimore — where high-speed internet is often unaffordable or not available — will be able to access the network.

"We're focused on unserved rural students to start with because they really don't have any other option," Gordon said. "As the network gets built, as funding becomes available, the goal would be also to expand it into some more urban areas to help with the digital divide in urban areas."

Funding for the wireless network includes \$5 million earmarked for "urban" areas, which Gordon said is defined as an area in which an internet service provider has infrastructure and customers -- not necessarily a region with high population densities like Baltimore.

In Baltimore, 96,000 households — more than 40% — lack broadband access, a recent Abell Foundation report found, citing census data.

While the state works to set up the network, the Maryland Department of

Education has left school systems to decide how best to deliver educational materials this fall. And the Office of Rural Broadband has issued stopgap grants to school systems to fund interim solutions for their students, Gordon said.

Multiple school systems have set up internet signals in school parking lots, or on buses that can be driven into neighborhoods where children lack broadband access. Somerset County schools, for example, are looking to provide students with a week's worth of lesson plans that can be downloaded and taken home, Gordon said.

Some school systems have used CARES funds to purchase internet hotspots for their students. However, hotspots can only function if there are cellphone towers nearby to carry the signal, Gordon said.

While some rural students are guaranteed to take home hotspots that won't be able to work, the devices will still help Gordon's office to determine where the children who lack internet and cellphone service live. Those are areas Maryland's new wireless network need to prioritize, Gordon said.

The state's plan to build wireless education network is fairly cutting-edge, said Boone, of Kent County. Boone serves on the board of the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit that advocates for the expansion of such infrastructure.

Recently, coalition officials have called on the FCC to restore an obscure program called the Educational Broadband Service, or EBS, which has origins dating back to the Kennedy administration.

Educational Broadband Service originally set aside a portion of the 2.5 GHz spectrum — another "piano string" — to be used exclusively for educational purposes. The frequencies required an FCC license to use, meaning there was significantly less radio traffic or interference.

Maryland's wireless education network is modeled somewhat off the program. The Educational Broadband Service spectrum is

capable of reaching further distances than the 3.5 GHz spectrum, but at slower speeds, Gordon said.

However, the five-member Federal Communications Commission stripped the educational requirement in 2019 from the 2.5 GHz spectrum — which is now considered prime radio wave real estate for commercial internet service providers and mobile phone companies developing the next generation of networks. The FCC intends to auction off the remaining licenses for that spectrum on the open market.

Advocates, including those with the coalition, are now calling on the FCC to reverse its decision, and give educational entities priority in the auction. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed circumstances, they argue. Advocates point to Northern Michigan University, one of the few educational entities in the country to use that spectrum to provide reliable broadband in the state's upper peninsula.

In the meantime, Boone said he has applied for a special waiver from the FCC that would allow Kent County to use the coveted 2.5 GHz band.

Gordon doesn't have much faith that the FCC will change direction.

"We obviously would support trying to get that back," Gordon said. "If we were given the opportunity, I think, yes, the state would be in favor of that 2.5 [GHz band] being brought back to educational use."

Furthermore, Gordon said, Maryland students cannot wait for the FCC to reverse course. Children need a reliable internet connection immediately, and the 3.5 GHz band is available.

Still, he worries that the cost of the network could creep up depending on geographic factors. And the state likely won't know how much the project will cost or how well it will function until equipment is installed.

"I can say with some certainty that we won't hit 100% of the students," Gordon said.