



Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, TN

Legislation Text

File #: RS2023-124, **Version:** 1

A resolution urging the Mayor of the Metropolitan Government to pursue all options to ensure the preservation of the Morris Memorial Building, including using the building to house a museum dedicated to African American and Civil Rights history.

WHEREAS, the Morris Memorial Building was opened in 1926 as the home of the National Baptist Convention, an African American Christian denomination; and

WHEREAS, prominent Black-owned architectural firm McKissack & McKissack designed and constructed the Morris Memorial Building, which was named for Reverend E. C. Morris, a former slave who attended the Nashville Normal and Theological Seminary and went on to become National Baptist Convention USA Inc.'s first president; and

WHEREAS, the building was home to Baptist Sunday School Publishing Board, McKissack & McKissack, Citizens Savings Bank and Trust Company, and Atlanta Insurance Company's Nashville location; and

WHEREAS, the Morris Memorial Building created a national model for Black excellence and self-determination by fostering a vibrant hub for enterprise and creativity in the city's urban core; and

WHEREAS, the building has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since January 2, 1985, for its importance in architecture and Black history; and

WHEREAS, significantly, the location on which the Morris Memorial Building was erected was historically the site of the Commercial Hotel and the home of Nashville's largest slave-trading firm Dabbs & Porter, an atrocious part of Nashville's history; and

WHEREAS, the Morris Memorial Building is the only remaining building that was originally associated with the cluster of African-American businesses in the core of downtown Nashville; and

WHEREAS, this site is an important reminder of the evils of slavery in Nashville's history which was then transformed into a shining example of Black excellence, both in architecture and in business; and

WHEREAS, the Morris Memorial Building is now under contract for purchase by a developer who seeks to use the building as a hotel; and

WHEREAS, recent inspections of the building by the developer indicate there is no asbestos, its structural integrity is sound, and estimates for rehabilitation were lower than those anticipated by the previous mayoral administration; and

WHEREAS, utilizing part of the Morris Memorial Building as Metro office space will save taxpayers money, and, over time, more than pay for the cost to purchase and rehabilitate the building; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Government has endeavored for decades to create a museum dedicated to its African American and Civil Rights history; and

WHEREAS, due to the national and international historical significance, the Morris Memorial Building would be

an appropriate location for a museum, and interested donors have come forward who would support the development of a museum should the Morris Memorial Building be purchased by the Metropolitan Government; and

WHEREAS, a museum would be a permanent place to exhibit the contributions of African Americans to the development of Nashville and an investment by Nashville to confirm its commitment to Equity and Inclusion; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Government should explore the purchase of the Morris Memorial Building, or, if purchase is not feasible, work with any potential buyer to ensure the preservation of this important piece of Nashville's history.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan County Council hereby goes on record as urging the Mayor of the Metropolitan Government to pursue all options to ensure the preservation of the Morris Memorial Building as soon as possible, including the potential to purchase the building or work with any potential buyer. Preservation of the Morris Memorial Building includes the establishment of a museum exhibiting the contributions of African Americans to the development of Nashville and the Civil Rights movement in Nashville.

Section 2. That this resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.