

May 23rd, 2025

County Manager  
Assistant County Manager  
Durham County Government  
200 E. Main St.  
Durham, NC 27701

**Subject:** Request for Additional Funding Support

Dear County Manager and Assistant County Manager,

Thank you for your continued support of the Stagville Memorial Project and our mission to establish public art in Durham that honors the legacy of descendants from Stagville Plantation. Your support, especially through the executed MOU in 2024, has been critical in helping us move this vision forward.

Since that agreement, we've secured an exciting development: the City of Durham has approved matching funds and confirmed a prominent downtown location for the artwork, 501 W. Main Street, as part of the upcoming Rail Trail project. We're proud that this collaboration between the city and county will help bring this public artwork to life.

However, while the city's financial contribution matches the county's, the allocation of funds differs significantly from the county-approved budget. Most notably, the revised budget includes a roughly **66% reduction in staff support**, which presents a major challenge for managing this complex, multi-year effort.

To that end, I respectfully request an additional **\$40,000** from Durham County to ensure we can sustain adequate staffing and administrative support through project completion.

Please know that I am actively pursuing additional funding from other sources, including: Monument Lab, the Triangle Community Foundation, local churches, and individual donors. However, many traditional funding avenues, like federal grants, are becoming increasingly uncertain. In fact, we were recently notified that our National Endowment for the Arts *Our Town* Grant was unexpectedly terminated, impacting our plans to seek future NEA support.

Our timeline remains focused on installing the public artwork by **fall 2027**. The additional \$40,000 will be instrumental in ensuring the necessary capacity to see this historic project through to completion.

Thank you again for your ongoing support and for considering this request.

Warm regards,

*Vanessa Hines*

**Vanessa Hines**  
Executive Director  
The Stagville Memorial Project

## About The Stagville Memorial Project

The Stagville Memorial Project is a community-rooted, 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Durham, North Carolina. Our sole mission is to establish permanent public art in downtown Durham that honors the legacy of the descendants of those enslaved at Stagville Plantation, once one of the largest plantations in the state.

Our Board of Directors reflects this legacy, composed of both Stagville descendants and long-time Durham residents, many of whom live, or have lived, in historically Black neighborhoods with deep ties to Stagville's history.

Since receiving Durham County's support in 2021 and achieving nonprofit status in 2022, The Stagville Memorial Project has taken significant steps toward our vision. These efforts include conducting early listening sessions with Stagville descendants to ensure their voices shape the project's direction. In 2023, we were invited to present at the National Council on Public History's annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The following year, in 2024, we finalized a formal MOU with Durham County.

Recognizing that some of the most prominent and accessible sites for public art in downtown, are owned by the City of Durham, we began a multi-year process of engaging city staff and pitching the project for placement on public land. While awaiting a decision, we deepened our research and public education efforts. With generous support from Villanova University's Lepage Center for Public Interest, North Carolina Humanities, and in partnership with the Durham County Library, we launched [\*Making a Way Out of No Way\*](#), a digital exhibit highlighting the contributions of Stagville descendants in Durham from emancipation through Reconstruction. The exhibit is available on our website and through the library's digital collections.

When the City of Durham approved funding for our project in its 2024 budget, we began working in earnest with city staff to develop a timeline, contract, and funding structure. In early 2025, our contract with the city was executed, securing a location for the artwork at **501 W. Main Street**, directly across from the Museum of Durham History. This site will be the plaza of the upcoming **Durham Rail Trail**. Our project will include three key components:

1. A contemporary art sculpture at the plaza's center,
2. A mural installed on the face of a staircase, and
3. A podium introducing the history and offering reflective prompts for visitors.

To ensure this project is shaped by and accountable to the community, we hired a Community Engagement Consultant and are busy completing the first phase of our engagement plan. We hosted a successful community kickoff event featuring a panel discussion with local scholars, a presentation from McAdams, and a community vision board for gathering input. We also

presented at a local Stagville-affiliated church and collected valuable community feedback during the 2025 Bimbé Cultural Arts Festival.

Looking ahead, our next milestone is the release of a **Request for Interest (RFI)** to identify potential artists. We plan to narrow the pool to three finalists who will present their concepts publicly. Following this process, we aim to select and contract with a lead artist or team of artists by the end of the year, with continued community engagement shaping the final design.

# Stagville Memorial Project

