

PRESS RELEASE

Local

A NEW CHAPTER IN AMERICAN HISTORY: TOWN OF EATONVILLE ANNOUNCES PROPOSED MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR PARTNERSHIP TO PURCHASE HUNGERFORD PROPERTY FROM ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PENDING SCHOOL BOARD VOTE

Mayor Angie Gardner Champions Visionary Partnership to Preserve Eatonville's Legacy, Fuel Resident-Focused Development and Launch a Multi-Year Master Plan

National

A NEW CHAPTER IN AMERICAN HISTORY: ONE OF THE NATION'S OLDEST BLACK TOWNS MOVES TO PRESERVE LAND AND CULTURE THROUGH PROPOSED NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIP, PENDING SCHOOL BOARD VOTE

Mayor Angie Gardner Champions Visionary Proposal to Preserve the Hometown of Zora Neale Hurston, Fuel Resident-Focused Development and Launch a Multi-Year Community Plan

EATONVILLE, Fla. (September 23, 2025, 5 a.m.) –In a landmark agreement shaped by more than a decade of community dialogue, [Dr. Phillips Charities](#) and [Orange County Public Schools](#) (OCPS) have proposed a historic deal to transfer ownership of the parcel that once housed Hungerford Preparatory High School. [Town of Eatonville](#) Mayor Angie Gardner has voiced strong support for the transaction, which is scheduled to begin on September 30, pending a final vote by the OCPS School Board. This pivotal land transfer would not only protect Eatonville from predatory development but also lay the foundation for a resident-centered master plan that honors the town's rich cultural legacy.

Orange County Public Schools and Dr. Phillips Charities agree to negotiate a fair purchase price for the Hungerford Property. Dr. Phillips Charities would pay \$1 million of the agreed-upon price upfront to the School Board of Orange County. The School Board of Orange County will transfer the property via deed to Dr. Phillips Charities. The remaining balance will be forgiven upon the achievement of the milestones designed to benefit the community, including the development of green space, an early learning center, a community hub and much more detailed below. The property spans approximately **117 acres** and is located at **the Hungerford and Keller Road property sites**.

The property was once home to the Robert L. Hungerford Normal and Industrial School, a historic institution modeled after Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and founded in the late 1800s to educate African American students. Orange County Public Schools acquired the land in 1951. They had been exploring options to sell or develop it in recent years, raising concerns about displacement and erasure of the community's legacy.

Since taking office in 2022, Town of Eatonville Mayor Angie Gardner has led a visionary effort to ensure the future of Eatonville is shaped by those who know it best: its residents. Through a robust series of community listening sessions, Eatonville has crafted a [resident-centered master plan](#) rooted in dignity, access, and mobility.

"This is much more than a land deal. This is about building a legacy and a strong future for Eatonville through a bold, strategic partnership," said **Mayor Angie Gardner**. "I want to thank Dr. Phillips Charities, Polis Institute, and Baker Barrios Architects for their unwavering commitment to protecting Eatonville's legacy. This partnership starts a new chapter and showcases a model that reflects dignity, justice, and opportunity for generations to come. I could not be prouder to lead our town's people into a stronger future built *by us for our* community."

This partnership marks a meaningful step forward, building trust between the Town of Eatonville and its partners while transferring stewardship of the land in alignment with the community's vision outlined in the master plan developed with residents.

Dr. Phillips Charities is a trusted philanthropic organization known for its community-building efforts. Its proven track record makes the organization an ideal partner to steward and preserve Eatonville's heritage by creating a framework for development that can adapt over time. It will strike a balance between growth and affordability, prevent displacement, and provide opportunities for residents.

Under the terms of the proposed agreement:

- By the end of **Year 2**, Dr. Phillips Charities will make significant progress on infrastructure, including the development of **extensive green space and a pavilion** for local festivals. This land will be donated to the Town upon completion
- By the end of **Year 3**, the **Eatonville Early Learning Center** will be completed. Enrollment priority will be given to residents of the Town of Eatonville and the children of teachers and support staff employed at Hungerford Elementary School.
- By the end of **Year 4**, a **Community Hub and Healthcare Facility** will be established, named with input from Eatonville residents
 - Additionally, land will be reserved for a **Town Center and History Museum**, to be donated once construction funding is secured
 - Plans for affordable, deed-restricted housing are also in active discussion. These homes will prioritize residents, teachers, first responders, and seniors. If finalized, Dr. Phillips Charities would donate 4 to 6 acres for a proposed \$4.1 million multi-family affordable housing project.

As part of the agreement, small and local businesses will have access to early opportunities for jobs, contracts, and bidding. This will ensure that economic benefits are felt directly by Eatonville's residents.

"Dr. Phillips Charities does not seek to profit from this transaction," said **Ken Robinson, President and CEO of Dr. Phillips Charities**. "We are here to serve as stewards of this historic opportunity, aligning our resources with Eatonville's long-term vision to build a community that thrives without erasing its soul as the first self-governing, all-Black municipality in the United States, established in 1887."

"I'm very excited for this agreement after years of thoughtful dialogue," said **Dr. Maria Vazquez, OCPs Superintendent**. "I'm also grateful to Dr. Phillips Charities and the Town of Eatonville for their partnership in creating a plan that reflects a shared commitment to honoring Eatonville's rich history while investing in its future."

To learn more about future development plans and upcoming community engagement opportunities, please visit: [Hungerford.townofeatonville.org](https://hungerford.townofeatonville.org). For media inquiries, please contact press@townofeatonville.org or via phone at 407.494.0732. For media inquiries, please contact press@townofeatonville.org or via phone at 407.494.0732. Dr. Phillips

Charities inquiries can be sent to Sophie Henner at shenner@drphillips.org. Additional statements will be available directly following the September 30 board meeting.

About the Town of Eatonville

Incorporated in 1887, Eatonville, Florida is recognized as the first self-governing, all-Black municipality in the United States. Founded by formerly enslaved people with the support of philanthropist Lewis Lawrence and landowner Josiah Eaton, the town quickly became a beacon of Black independence and achievement. Anchored by St. Lawrence A.M.E. Church and the Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School, Eatonville offered residents opportunity, education, and pride at a time when few places did. The town is also renowned as the hometown of celebrated author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, who immortalized Eatonville in her classic works, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Today, Eatonville continues to honor its heritage as a symbol of resilience, self-determination, and cultural identity. To learn more, please visit Townofeatonville.org.

About Dr. Phillips Charities

Dr. P. Phillips was a visionary whose charitable contributions and entrepreneurship helped create a vibrant, thriving community in Central Florida. The Dr. Phillips name has been a major economic and philanthropic presence in the Central Florida community since the turn of the 20th century. Dr. Phillips Charities (Dr. Phillips Inc. and The Dr. P. Phillips Foundation) uses the earnings from its investment and real estate income to give financial assistance to hundreds of charities serving primarily in Orange and Osceola counties. Dr. Phillips has contributed more than \$257 million in grants, pledges and program-related investments to Central Florida charities responding to the needs of the community and directly touching the lives of thousands of children and families. Learn more at www.DrPhillips.org.

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