

## **Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture**

Public Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 7, 2019

### **Washington Museum of Fine Arts**

401 Museum Drive

Hagerstown, Maryland 21741

The following Commissioners were in attendance: Iris Leigh Barnes, Lynn Groesbeck Bowman, Maya Davis, Vice Chair H. Russell Frisby, Janice Curtis Greene, Marilyn Hatza, Edwin T. Johnson, Lopez Matthews, Cheryl McLeod, Barbara Paca, Anthony Spencer, Elinor Thompson, Reggie Turner, and Tamara E. Wilson. The following Commissioners were absent: Commissioner Melvin Kelly, Steven X. Lee, and the Honorable Kweisi Mfume,

The meeting was called to order at 11:07 a.m. by Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson.

### **Proof of Public Notice**

Accepted by general consensus.

### **Welcome**

Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson thank the public for attending and Ms. Massie Lane, Executive Director of the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts for hosting the meeting.

Commissioner Reggie Turner thanked the Washington Museum of Fine Arts for hosting the meeting, welcomed the public, and recognized local officials and representatives.

Ms. Rebecca Massie Lane welcomed the MCAAHC and the public to the museum.

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson welcomed new Commissioner Barbara Paca from Anne Arundel County, who shared that she was honored to serve with the MCAAHC.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson called for a motion to accept the minutes of the August 6, 2019 meeting. Commissioner Elinor Thompson made two corrections:

- 1) The Asbury Church was established in 1803 not 1903
- 2) It was founded by Smith Price not Price Smith

Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson made a motion to accept the minutes. Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

**Due to technology issues Director Compton's report was delayed until later in the meeting.**

## **Officer Reports**

### *MCAAHC Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson*

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson shared that the MCAAHC has been highly involved with Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was launched on Thursday, September 12<sup>th</sup>. The Commission has been charged to hold public hearings around the State of Maryland regarding African Americans that were lynched by white mobs and develop recommendations for addressing, engaging, and reconciling communities from the devastation that has taken place in the past through restorative justice. The Commission is now formalizing committees and bylaws. She applauded Governor Larry Hogan for being the first governor to establish this type of commission and his sensitivity for this matter.

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson also reported that she announced with Governor Hogan during the month of October the Underground Railroad celebration and the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Harriet Tubman escape from slavery.

Chair England Wilson shared that all of the MCAAHC Commissioners have been trained in the Open Meetings Act and Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene will be the MCAAHC's liaison to ensure Commission compliance.

### *MCAAHC Vice Chair Herbert Frisby-Administration and Finance Committee*

Vice Chair Herbert Frisby shared that the committee met on Friday, October 1<sup>st</sup> to discuss the finances of the BDM and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala.

Vice Chair Frisby gave the proposed mission statement and action items for the committee: The mission statement and actions items included the committee understanding its role and function under the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, to represent budgetary actions, as well as receive various support of financial assistance from grants and various resources. Action items: includes the committee identifying the bookkeeping system of the Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation, conduct quarterly meetings with Director Compton, review contracts and agreements with grant applications, develop policies and procedures for best practices, as well as attend monthly meetings of the Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation.

Vice Chair Frisby made a motion to accept the committee's mission statement with its action items. Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

## **Committee Reports**

### *Public Relations Committee-Commissioner Maya Davis*

Commissioner Maya Davis reported that the committee met for the first time on Saturday, September 14, 2019 so that they could meet in conjunction with the BDM Foundation meeting. At this meeting it was decided that committee meeting members would rotate in attending the BDMF meeting on the second Saturday of each month. The committee consists of herself, Commissioner Anthony Spencer, Commissioner Elinor Thompson, and Commissioner Marilyn Hatza. Commissioner Thompson will represent the committee at the BDM Foundation meeting in October.

Commissioner Davis shared the committee's mission statement - to be an advocate for the MCAAHC and the BDM to act as a liaison for audience engagement.

Action items: meet with Director Compton and Marketing Director Robert James to develop a plan of action. The committee will meet with the staff of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives to go over their 2020 communication's strategy.

Commissioner Davis made a motion to accept the report for the Public Relations Committee. Vice Chair H. Russell Frisby seconded the motion and the motion carried.

*BDM Committee-Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson and Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene*

Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene, Vice Chair of the BDM Committee reported for the committee. On September 9, 2019 the committee meet with Director Chanel Compton and staff. The following was discussed: a) a need to have a meeting of all BDM stakeholders including members of the community, Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation, local businesses, and non-profit organizations that have similar missions like the BDM; b) the committee will work with the BDM staff to provide an annual fundraising initiative e.g. a wine or Halloween party.

Commissioner Greene also reported that the BDM Committee is looking to increase site rentals at the BDM through such organizations as: fraternities, sororities, collectors, quilters, and other likeminded groups.

She shared the committee's mission statement. The mission of the BDM Committee is to assist in the operation and development of the BDM as well as to support it in all aspects of its operations.

Action Plans: support the BDM in its efforts to follow organizational, federal themes and landmark commemorations relevant to the African American experience; assist the BDM staff in coordinating, researching venues and scheduling traveling exhibits; view & critique existing BDM exhibits & programs; support the BDM staff in publicizing and advertising BDM programs & exhibits; research and provide funding opportunities as well as plan a commission led educational program to be included in the BDM calendar of events, such as a symposium.

Commissioner Green made a motion to accept the mission statement and action plan of the BDM Committee. Commissioner Cheryl McLeod seconded and the motion carried.

*African American Preservation Heritage Grant Committee – Chair Wilson.* Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson reported that the Commission would need to forgo discussion of the committee's report in the public meeting because it would be discussing potential grant recipients. Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson made the motion to go into closed session to discuss and vote on the Preservation Grant and Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded the motion. The motion carried.

## **Director's Report**

Ms. Chanel Compton recognized and thanked those in attendance.

Director Compton presented information on the BDM: a) It's mission; b) location; c) hours of operation; d) its history; e) visitation - in the month of August the BDM had 905 visitors, an increase of 18%, due primarily to the significant support of the MCAAHC; e) budgetary needs – the BDM has a very, limited, budget and receives in-kind donations from the public to sustain itself; f) exhibitions and programs - the tool used to bridge the gap in displaying, sharing, and presenting Maryland's African American Heritage.

Director Compton reported that the museum has a bimonthly Harambee Read Aloud in partnership with the Baltimore Read Aloud organization which provides contemporary books for young people on African American history. The last read aloud featured a reenactment by Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene of the Griot Circle of Maryland, storytelling, and African American drumming.

Director Compton reported that during the month of August the MCAAHC celebrated Ms. Henrietta Lacks with a program in her honor at the BDM. Mrs. Lacks cells ("Hela") were taken and used to conduct extensive controversial medical research. The program emphasized the importance of paying attention to their health history.

Director Compton also reported that Ms. Schillica Howard, BDM Curator of Collections will be leaving the BDM to accept a position as Curator of Collections with the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. The staff wished Ms. Howard the best on her new endeavor.

## **Individual Commissioner Reports**

*Commissioner Iris Barnes* invited the public to join the MCAAHC for the "Lynching in Maryland: The Journey from Truth to Reconciliation" second conference. It will take place on Saturday, November 16, 2019 at the Morgan State University Student Center in Baltimore from 9:30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. She shared that she and Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson are a part of the legislation for this venture. To learn more about the conference one can go to [www.mdlynchingmemorial.org](http://www.mdlynchingmemorial.org).

*Commissioner Maya Davis* shared that she provided "Strike for Freedom" Exhibition Guide 2018-19 for the public from a presentation given by Dr. Celeste-Marie Bernier on the 200<sup>th</sup> Bicentennial of Frederick Douglass.

*Commissioner Elinor Thompson* shared that on September 7, 2019 she, Commissioners Maya Davis, Iris Barnes and Anthony Spencer attended the unveiling of the lynching memorial project in Annapolis, Maryland.

*Commissioner Anthony Spencer* shared that transportation for the "We Rise Gala" will be provided through a stipend given by Director Archie Trader from the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation.

*Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson* announced the Commission's inaugural Veteran's Day tribute Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at the Loudon Park Cemetery. Flags will be placed on the grave sites of U.S. Colored Troops interred there.

### **Public Presentations**

*Reconciliation and Equity Task Force Ms. Kim Poole, Legislative Aide, Office of Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam* shared that on September 11, 2019 experts from abroad gathered at Morgan State University in the Jenkins Hall Behavioral & Social Sciences Center to discuss the Reconciliation and Equity Task Force mission chaired by Rev. Kobi Little and A. Adar Ayira of Associated Black Charities. At this gathering, representatives from the Rhythm People Coalition discussed the importance of achieving culturally competent education for African American students in Maryland. The committee is considering a "Return Trip – Commemorating 400 Year history of African Americans" by Funding and Incentivizing Global Learning, Study Abroad, and Cultural Exchange during the Education Sub Committee. If passed, The Return Trip legislation would guarantee an opportunity for Maryland's education systems and supporting institutions to create environments for proper youth development which considers the sense of belonging and membership, connection and holistic identity needed for efficacy in African American students.

Ms. Poole asked for support of the MCAAHC and public for guidance in helping to achieve this endeavor. Ms. Poole passed out a report and a survey concerning this matter.

*Mr. Robert Bailey, Historic Planner-Maryland Park Services* presented on the John Baker House, the one room schoolhouse, located in Washington County near Fort Frederick State Park. Fort Frederick was a colonial era fort that was built in 1756 and converted into a state park. The fort was used during the French Indian war and was once owned by a free black family, the Wayans from 1857 to 1910. Nathan Wayans, a black farmer, bought the farm, built a home, and established the Fort Frederick School for the Colored. The State of Maryland bought the property in 1973 where it remained a rental property. It has now moved from being a rental property where the property's status is still undecided.

*Dr. Emilie Amt, Historian & Professor, Hood College* shared her research of the African American experience in Frederick County before the Civil War. This included: a) how enslaved individuals escaped from slavery in Washington County; b) the production of a brochure on the rich history of the various sites available for tours – including walking and driving trails that enslaved African Americans traveled to freedom.

*Commissioner Lynn Bowman, Significance of the African American Experience in Washington County* presented on the historic Jonathan Street community. This included: resistance of both the white and black community due to the Eurocentric bias that shaped and affected the community; b) individuals who have made significant contributions; c) the release of her fifth book - "Ten weeks on Jonathan Street, The Legacy of 19th Century African American Hagerstown, Maryland."

*Mr. Nicholas Redding, Executive Director-Preservation Maryland* shared the history of Preservation Maryland and its role through its education and outreach component. To learn more about Preservation Maryland, please go to [www.preservationmaryland.org](http://www.preservationmaryland.org).

*Mr. David Keys, President-African American Culture & Heritage-Frederick, Maryland* shared a video showcasing the organization and its new initiative that in preparation of the opening of the Heritage Center of American History and Culture on 125 E. All Saints Street in Frederick, Maryland, a once a segregated community. To learn more about the organization please visit [aarchsociety.org](http://aarchsociety.org).

#### Adjournment

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson thanked the presented and the public for attending and stated that the Commission would enter into closed session to discuss and vote on the African American Preservation Heritage Grant Committee's report. Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson made a motion to adjourn the public meeting to go into closed session. Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded and the motion carried.

The public meeting was adjourned at 2:18 p.m. for a closed session.

Respectfully Submitted,

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LeRonn Herbert, Special Assistant