

Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

Public Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 3, 2020

Mother House of Oblate Sisters of Providence

701 Gun Road
Baltimore, MD 21227

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

The meeting was called to order at 11:08 a.m. by Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson.

Proof of Public Notice

Accepted by general consensus.

Welcome

Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson thanked the public for attending the public meeting. She shared the MCAAHC is a 21-seat body appointed by Governor Larry Hogan for discovering, documenting, preserving and promoting African American Heritage in the State of Maryland. She also said that the commission oversees the Banneker-Douglass Museum, the state's official museum of African American History and Culture as well as the state's African American Heritage grant program.

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson shared that the commission's goal is to educate Maryland's citizens and its visitors to the State of Maryland about the significance and impact of the African American experience in Maryland. Building on the foundation that was laid for 50 years, the commission mission is to be the state's premiere African American commission.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Wilson called for a motion to accept the minutes of the December 2, 2019 meeting.

Commissioner Steven X. Lee shared one correction that page four bullet number one under the Nomination's Committee report should say: "Commissioner Lee was not able to attend the October MCAAHC Public meeting because he was the recipient of the Louis Diggs African American Award which was being given in Baltimore County at the same time."

Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene made a motion to accept the minutes with the minor correction. Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson turned the floor over to Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene.

Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene, host Commissioner representing Baltimore County, provided a welcome and thanked the public for coming to the commission's public meeting at the Mother House Our Lady of Non-Profits of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first prominent work of Val Catholic Women's Initiatives of African descent in Haiti. She said that she is the product of the Oblate Sisters of Providence education where

she was educated in the Catholic school system. Commissioner Greene said that she is a proud Black Catholic who is proud of her culture and mission. She then turned the floor over to Sister Rita Michelle, Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Sister Rita Michelle, Superior General-Oblate Sisters of Providence welcomed the MCAAHC and the public to the Mother House Oblate Sisters of Providence. She shared background history that the Mother House Oblate Sisters of Providence Order was established in 1829 where they provided care and education for black students.

Director's Report

Ms. Chanel Compton recognized Banneker Douglass Museum staff: BDM Administrative Manager and Special Assistant for the Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture; Robert James, Marketing and Communication's Director; and Ms. Sabriyah Hassan, Program Director.

Director Compton took a moment to recognize Mr. Kevin Craft, from the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives who is director of the African and Middle Eastern Commissions that came to the public meeting.

Director Compton reported that:

- The museum's visitation reached a high total of 9,961 visitors. Over the past 10 years, the average visitation at the BDM was 7,500 visitors. The continued goal is to reach over 10,000 in 2020.
- The museum looks to further its goal through community partnerships with various agencies, providing engaging programming as well as presenting enlightening exhibitions.

Director Compton shared highlights from the months of December and January that:

- The Kwanzaa Celebration, that took place, on Saturday December 12, 2020 was led by Kwanzaa expert Culture Queen. Director Compton said that Commissioner Cheryl McLeod began the program with a powerful libation ceremony. Families earned a fresh and unique approach to celebrating the seven principles of Kwanzaa through Black History theme games, interactive music, and storytelling.
- MLK Day with Maryland Legislative Black Caucus took place on Friday, January 20, 2020 at the Banneker-Douglass Museum. A wreath laying ceremony was given during the program where Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson; Senator Bill Ferguson, State of Maryland Senate President; Delegate Darryl Barnes, Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland with many guests also enjoyed a special tour of the museum spotlighting the new exhibit while oral presentations were given of Dr. Martin Luther King's speeches.
- The Black Vote Mural Opening reception, will take place on Saturday, February 15, 2020. This exhibit is a public arts project that showcased 16 mural artists from the State of Maryland. These artists interpreted the Association for the Study of African American Life and History 2020 theme: *African Americans and the Vote*. The BDM staff worked with Tamora Wright, Guest Curator, public artists as well as community partners on this powerful project.

Officer Reports

MCAAHC Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson

Chair Wilson shared that she, Vice Chair Herbert Frisby, and Director Chanel Compton have attended several meetings to build relationships with legislatures and community partners across the state. Collectively they all have been working together making a plea with the Maryland Black Caucus to expand their budget in keeping the commission moving forward as well as increase the visibility of the commission around the State of Maryland.

Chair Wilson reported the following that:

- She, Vice Chair Herbert Frisby and Director Chanel Compton, talked about the MCAAHC collaborating with the members of The DuBois Circle, the Afro Newspaper, and the Reginald Lewis Museum at the MCAAHC meeting in December 2019. The group met and established that their name will be called, "The Maryland Black Women's Initiative (TMBWI)." On Tuesday, January 28, 2020 TMBWI produced their initiatives, established that they would commemorate the women's suffrage movement, support the Black Mural Vote project at the Banneker-Douglass Museum as well sponsor a panel discussion event at the museum. The group is also supporting the historical reenactment of the 15th Amendment parade which will be held in Baltimore City on May 19, 2020. It was reported that Commissioner Maya Davis will be working on this endeavor with the group.
- Chair Wilson and Commissioner Iris Barnes represents the Commission on the Maryland Lynching Memorial Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLMTRC). Chair Wilson has been appointed by the acting chair to the Administrative and Logistics Committee. Commissioner Barnes is serving in the research department of this group. Currently, the MLMTRC is finalizing 10 hearings that will be taking place across the State of Maryland. Commissioner Maya Davis is also serving as staff support for this endeavor.
- The Maryland Heritage Program sent a representative to the December 3, 2019 MCAAHC meeting where they asked the MCAAHC Commission to support the grants review program. It was their first program of this kind where the MCAAHC Commissioners had dialogue of there being representation from the MCAAHC. Two MCAAHC Commissioners shared that they would like to be a part of this process, but one was accepted and made chair. Chair Wilson congratulated and said that Commissioner Anthony Spencer is now the Chair of the first Maryland Heritage Program's Grant Review Panel.
- Chair Wilson shared that the commission wrote a letter to the chair of the Maryland Heritage Area's authority in response to Commissioner Lee's question regarding how African Americans are at a disadvantage when it comes to funding for this program. Initially there was some push back, but a letter was sent Friday, January 31, 2020 back to the commission, acknowledging that the commission was correct of its assessment of funding equal across the board. The MHP is also looking at putting together a group to look at funding so that there is equality for all applicants.
- Chair Wilson and Director Compton have been engaged in conversations with Preservation Maryland in having seats on their board. They felt that there was an issue of equity of having

African Americans receiving grants from the larger amount of money that is available. Chair Wilson and Director Compton have been working with them and have been chosen to work with Preservation Maryland on their online summit. Director Compton and Commissioner Reggie Turner will work on this venture.

MCAAHC Vice Chair Herbert Frisby-Administration and Finance Committee

Vice Chair Frisby reported the following:

- The Commission set a goal of raising \$500,000 for the year end 2021. Vice Chair Frisby reported that the Commission has raised \$125,000 which is 50% of their goal. This financial report is based off of the months of December and January. Vice Chair Frisby said that the MCAAHC does not know whether there will be an increase in the state's budget for the MCAAHC.
- The MCAAHC signed an agreement with the Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation and has been working with the foundation in revising their bylaws.

Committee Reports

Public Relations Committee-Commissioner Maya Davis, chair

Commissioner Davis reported the following:

- The Public Relations Committee (PRC) has not met during the holidays but the committee has been making sure that they had representation at the Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation (BDMF) meetings for the months of December and January.
- Commissioner Anthony Spencer is working with the chair of the foundation on three items that they want to focus on: philanthropy, institution management, and financial transparency.
- Commissioner Elinor Thompson will be working with the PRC by attending the BDMF meeting on Saturday, February 8, 2020.
- The committee is working with Robert James, Marketing Director and Communication's Specialist to get the MCAAHC website information updated by providing the commission's minutes, agendas, and annual reports so that the public has access to these materials. More of these materials will be added after the BDM's Black Vote Mural Project Installation.
- On February 15, 2020, the Maryland State House will have the unveiling of the Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Statues. Commissioner Davis shared that Chair Wilson will give opening remarks for this program. She asked that the MCAAHC Commissioners be a part of that program by introducing speakers for that day as well as represent the MCAAHC and BDM by manning their information table.

Commissioner Anthony Spencer, Commissioner Cheryl McLeod, and Commissioner Steven Lee shared that they would assist at this affair.

- Commissioner Maya Davis asked the MCAAHC as well as the public support Senate Bill 76 and House Bill 76 that are on the Maryland legislative floor. Senate Bill 76 looks at establishing November 1st as a State of Maryland holiday recognizing Maryland Emancipation Day. If accepted, the bill would make Maryland Emancipation Day a public school, bank and State of Maryland Employee holiday. House Bill 76 looks at stopping discrimination based on race-based hair textures and hair styles.

Chair Wilson asked that the PR committee also publish all committee minutes to the MCAAHC website. She said that she wants the sub committees to provide the basic public notice information and agenda as the MCAAHC does for the public meetings to be compliant with the Open Meetings Act.

Chair Wilson gave room for Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene, MCAAHC Open Meetings Act representative to share words. Commissioner Greene also said that all committee meetings public notice and agendas should be published two weeks prior to the meeting date. She asked that all committees consider providing a meeting space that is conducive for the public to be able to attend.

Chair Wilson said that the committees have up to 24 hours to place a public notice of their meeting out to the public.

BDM Committee-Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson and Commissioner Janice Curtis Green Co-Chairs

Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson asked Chair Wilson, for the record that December 3, 2019 minutes reflect that he and Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene are co-chairs for the BDM Committee. Chair Wilson consented that this was fine.

Commissioner Greene, Vice Chair reported the following:

- The committee members are also comprised of Commissioner Maya Davis, Commissioner Cheryl McLeod, Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson, and Director Chanel Compton.
- The BDM Committee held a committee meeting on January 17, 2020 at the Maryland State Archives. From this meeting the group established that there will be a commission led symposium closing event for the Black Vote Mural Project exhibition that will take place at the BDM on Saturday, October 24, 2020. This will be a two-event day. The morning session will consist of an intergenerational three breakout session. Attendees will also be able to produce a mural during their sessions. There will be lunch with the keynote speaker and then all groups will go back to their breakout sessions.
- The evening session will consist of a party with a D-jay. Finger food, soft drinks, beer, and wine will be provided. While the party is taking place, several black mural artists will be painting where a silent auction will take place. The artist will receive a certain percentage for their artwork that is sold.
- A nominal fee will be a prerequisite to attend the day's affair. Registration will be required in advance to determine the amount of lunches needed. This exhibit program is also being used to get the attendees to get out and vote in November.

Nomination's Committee – Chair Steven X. Lee

Commissioner Lee reported the following:

- The committee members are comprised of Commissioner Maya Davis, Commissioner Cheryl McLeod, and Commissioner Reggie Turner.
- The group has spoken together and have six potential candidates as a recommendation to the governor to be MCAAHC Commissioners. Commissioner Lee shared that the committee extends its offer to the public and MCAAHC Commissioners to share names of individuals that fit this criterion. The committee would like to see this group go from six potential candidates to 24 potential candidates.
- Commissioner Lee said that the First African American Children's Museum, "*The Sankofa Museum*", is now open in Baltimore, Maryland.
- He shared that there is a movement in Baltimore, Maryland to establish a museum called the "*Clifton House*" dedicated to Ms. Lucille Clifton. Ms. Clifton grew her family up in that home and was very respected in the Windsor Hill Community.
- Commissioner Lee recognized Mr. Louis Diggs, that was present at the meeting who has the Diggs-Johnson Museum in Woodstock, Maryland.

Due to the time consideration of the MCAAHC public meetings, Vice Chair Frisby asked Chair Wilson if the Commissioner's Report be submitted in writing so that they can be accepted along with the minutes of the public commission meetings. Chair Wilson and the MCAAHC Commissioners collectively agreed.

Historic Preservation/Public Research Committee – Commissioner Iris Leigh Barnes

Commissioner Barnes reported the following:

- The committee members are also comprised of Commissioner Maya Davis, Commissioner Marilyn Hatza, Commissioner Elinor Thompson, and Commissioner Steven X. Lee.
- The committee discussed their mission and goals as well as the type of historical sites and other activities pertaining to Maryland's African American history and culture.
- The mission of the committee is to be a central hub of information for resourceful projects, legislative programs, and events pertaining to Maryland's African American history and culture. The committee encourages the public the same as well.
- The committee looks to rework the MCAAHC website as well as to develop an online calendar where individuals can submit their activities for all to be informed. Information will be spotlighting the recipients supported by the African American Heritage Preservation Grant as well as little known facts around the State of Maryland.

Chair Wilson called for a motion be made to accept the new mission for the Historic Preservation/Public Research Committee.

Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson made a motion to accept the mission for the Historic Preservation/Public Research Committee. Commissioner Steven X. Lee seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Reginald F. Lewis Museum – Commissioner Lopez Matthews

Commissioner Matthews reported the following:

- Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Frisby, and Commissioner Matthews sit on the board of the RFLM. Commissioner Matthews also said that he is the secretary on the board.
- He said that board discussed their will be a program that discusses the significant role of the Black Vote in American Elections.
- Commissioner Matthews reported that the RFLM will have a signature program on Black Roles as Architects in America. He also shared that the RFLM will have their seventh annual African American Children’s Book on Saturday, May 11, 2020. This fair strives to connect African American families to African American books for children.
- Commissioner Matthews closed out his report sharing that he was appointed chair of the publication’s committee for the Association for the Study and Life of African American Life and History.

Individual Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene gave a report that she and Commissioner Cheryl McLeod represented the MCAAHC at the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission’s “*Black Women in Politics to the Ballet and Beyond*” Black History program at Harmony Hall in Fort Washington, Maryland. She said that she was asked to perform as Senator Verda Freeman Welcome at this affair.

Commissioner Steven X. Lee shared that his work as an MCAAHC Commissioner has afforded him to work three Mason museum projects where Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson referred the Colored School Number 24 of Lutherville, Maryland. The black alumni of Towson State University also would like to develop this as a project with Commissioner Lee.

New Business

Commissioner Cheryl McLeod shared that the drumming “*Let’s Talk Initiative*” program at Harriet Tubman public school in Howard County has made a tremendous impact. From this program, a wall of suggestions was produced on where the organization can go from there moving forward with their next steps. A film is being produced by an individual from the Ivory Coast called, “Black is Black.” The film details the communications between African Americans and Africans used to build a bridge together. She said that Howard County is one of those counties trying to bring the communications together between ethnic groups.

Public Presentations

Mr. Louis Diggs noted African American Writer and Historian of African American History in Baltimore County came to the MCAAHC public sharing his capturing Baltimore County's African American History for 31 years. Initially, while retired from the military, he took on the role of being a substitute teacher in the Baltimore County school system. It was there that a young African American male, that he knew, approached him and asked him how he could do genealogy on his family's history. From this conversation, a spark was ignited about doing something to share African American History from Baltimore County.

Mr. Diggs found out in doing his research of the history of African Americans in this county nothing could be found. Because of these situations, Mr. Diggs found himself writing 13 publications, establishing the Diggs-Johnson Museum in preserving the former Cherry Hill African Union Methodist Protestant Church of Granite, Maryland.

Chair Wilson called for a motion to close the MCAAHC public meeting. Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson made a motion to adjourn the public meeting. Commissioner Lopez Matthews seconded, and the motion carried.

The public meeting was adjourned at 1:23 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

LeRonn Herbert, Special Assistant