

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

Public Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 6, 2023

Harriet Tubman Cultural Center

8045 Harriet Tubman Lane

Columbia, Maryland

The following Commissioners were in attendance: Maya Davis, H. Russell Frisby, Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson, Janice Curtis Greene, Wali Gill, Cheryl McLeod, Adi Nkwonta, Anthony Spencer, Elinor Thompson, and Tamara E. Wilson.

The meeting was called to order at 11:11 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 and then turned the floor over to hosts Commissioner Cheryl McLeod and Commissioner Melvin Kelly who gave the formal welcome.

Commissioner McLeod and Commissioner Kelly thanked the public for attending the meeting.

- Commissioner McLeod shared that the MCAAHC had a public meeting in February 2022 right before the renovations took place to the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center.
  - She and Commissioner Kelly boasted about the major improvements that were done to the beautiful building that is very warm and welcoming to all with various state of the art amenities.
  - Commissioner McLeod took a moment to recognize all county and State of Maryland officials that were present at the public meeting.
    - Mr. Kevin Craft, Ethnic Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives spoke and shared words.
    - The Maryland School of the Deaf Columbia, Maryland campus; the former students of the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center; their family members, friends, as well as Mr. Harry Jones, Executive Director of the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center were recognized at the meeting.
      - An ancestral blessing was given by Commissioner McLeod to recognize the Native Americans and individuals that paved the way for all to be safe and to enjoy what is being experienced in the MCAAHC Public meeting.
      - Commissioner Melvin Kelly shared that 69 years and 8 months ago, that his graduation took place at the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center.

Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson gave a very Happy Black History Month greeting to the public.

- He took a moment to recognize Commissioner Marilyn Hatza who recently passed.
  - Vice Chair Dr. Johnson said that Commissioner Hatza was a fierce advocate for preserving African American History in Baltimore, Maryland.
  - He gave the MCAAHC Commissioners an opportunity to share words about the great work and person that Commissioner Hatza was.
  - Vice Chair Dr. Johnson thanked Mr. Kevin Craft, Ethnic Director of the Governor's Office, for coming to the meeting as well as for giving the citation that was presented that day.
  - Commissioners Cheryl McLeod and Janice Curtis Greene made a special presentation on the work of Commissioner Hatza, her advocacy, tenacity, and bold stance for equity in representation of judges and students from grades 6-12 to compete.

- The Black History Month contest will take place on May 6<sup>th</sup> where lunch will be served, and all students are welcome.
- Chair Wilson shared that she and MCAAHC Commissioners would like to propose an award to be established annually recognize the efforts and work of Commissioner Marilyn Hatza.
  - A nominal amount would be given to the winner, the recipient of this award in perpetuity.
- Chair Wilson placed a motion on the floor that this process be taken in consideration.
  - Vice moved on the motion and Commissioner McLeod seconded the motion and the motion carried.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson asked for a motion to be made in accepting the minutes of the December 2, 2022, meeting. Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson accepted the minutes. Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded the motion, and the motion was carried.

### **Officer's Reports**

*MCAAHC Chair Rev. Dr. Tamara England Wilson*

Chair Rev. Dr. England Wilson gave her report where she shared that she was going to focus on the vision that she set when she was chair back in 2019. She shared that she had:

- The vision was to stabilize the MCAAHC of internal and external factors that caused some shifting.
- Increase the visibility of the MCAAHC around the State of Maryland.
- Increase the MCAAHC's private and public funding support where all these things have been accomplished.

Chair Wilson shared that the FY 2022 fiscal plan, was to:

- Continue to use the expertise of the MCAAHC Commissioners.
- Have the MCAAHC Commissioners take some of the responsibilities of the chair by being representatives on commissions, boards as well as taskforces around the State of Maryland sharing their expertise.
- Continue to work the MCAAHC's advocacy efforts and program partnerships around the State of Maryland offering assistance as well as sharing their opinion.
- Developing and shaping a culture of philanthropy that all MCAAHC Commissioners become a regular part of the funding efforts.
  - Chair Wilson thanked every MCAAHC Commissioner for their commitment to funding and attending the BDM's programs and events.
- The MCAAHC has moved forward with the charge where \$205,000 of the \$200,000 was raised.
  - For the year 2023, the goal is to raise \$200,000.

Chair Wilson shared that in 2019, Chair Dale Glenwood Green was working on increasing the MCAAHC's State of Maryland's museum budget.

- Chair Green did extensive research and put somethings in place to move the progression of increasing this budget to effectively run the Banneker-Douglass Museum, Maryland's Official Repository of African American History & Culture.
  - \$660,000 was the budget for the BDM at that time, which was low.
  - The museum was running into a deficit where it had to depend on the Banneker-Douglass Museum Foundation for additional support.
  - It was determined that \$1.6 million dollars was needed to effectively run the museum.

Chair Wilson said that she was glad to say that the commission had House Bill 10.88 where the commission was successful in receiving \$1.6 million each year for the museum's budget.

- She also shared that this bill also increased the MCAAHC's African American Heritage Preservation Grant from \$1 million dollars to \$5 million dollars.

- Chair Wilson said that the commission and museum now has independent status.
- This means that the commission and the museum have fiscal and operational independence that allows the commission to determine where monies are allocated.
- Chair Wilson thanked the commission as well as the public for meeting with their legislators to help make this process happen.
  - Chair Wilson shared that her last day as chair will be on June 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - Things have put in place for Vice Chair Dr. Johnson to move forward as the new chair of the MCAAHC.
- In closing out her report, Chair Wilson shared that:
  - February 11, 2023, at 11:00 am. a portrait and collage project will take place at the Banneker-Douglass Museum
  - February 18, 2023, at 1 p.m., The Radical Voices of Blackness Speaks of Resistance and Joy Artist Talk Part 1 will take place at the Banneker-Douglass Museum with a conversation with the curator of this exhibit.
    - Chair Wilson gave room to Commissioner Frisby to speak.
    - Commissioner Frisby thanked Governor Wes Moore for providing two pins for the MCAAHC to hire a CFO and Grant Coordinator position.

## Committee Reports

*Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report-Commissioner Commissioner Maya Davis.*

Commissioner Davis shared that the MLTRC had its first retreat on January 27, 2023, at Bowie State University.

The things that were discussed was:

- Public acknowledgement item-representative of the MCAAHC on the MLTRC.
  - It was reaffirmed by the MLTRC that Dr. Fakunle stressed and shared the importance for commissioners to show up and be present at all the public hearings and public meetings.
  - The MLTRC reviewed some of the challenges that affected individuals apart of the MLTRC to commit to this organization.
  - A discussion was also had about learning the commissioner's expertise so that the commissioners can have a very present voice and guidance on certain matters.
- MLTRC's budget for 2023.
  - Initially when the commission was started, there wasn't any funding.
  - An Emit Till Cole Case grant was sought after by MLTRC.
    - \$299,000 was secured for the commission from this grant.
      - To date \$70,000 was used to secure Ms. Stephanie Thompson, the special assistant for the MLTRC as well as funding was used for Heritage Associates an African American research organization.
        - The rest of the funding will go to reconciliation efforts across the state of Maryland.
- MLTRC extension of this commission in 2024.
  - The MLTRC had an extension of this commission to the year 2026 due to a bill proposed Delegate White to have this commission continue to move forward with its work that was affected due to the lag by the pandemic.
    - A hearing regarding this proposal of the bill will take place on February 22nd.
      - If this bill is passed, the final report of the MLTRC must be submitted by December 1,2025.
      - The sunset of the MLTRC will be June 30, 2026.
- MCAAHC Commissioner engagement to this group.
- Outreach for key stake holders was discussed.
  - It was discussed that the MLTRC work with different county coalitions, but it was found out that there are other county groups that contribute significantly to this MLTRC's endeavors.

- The MLTRC is making recommendations to make amendments to this thought process and have the General Assembly consider these groups.
- Strategic Planning for Commission Meetings-there are three standing committees currently.
- They are the research committee, logistics committee, and the reconciliation committee.
  - The public is welcome to join all committees.
- MLTRC hearings.
  - There were many scheduled hearings that took place in 2022.
  - The MLTRC is looking to schedule hearings for the rest of 2023.
    - One can find more information regarding the hearings by going to the MLTRC website for more updates.
      - Commissioner Davis shared that in 2019, the MCAAHC was written in the bill along with the Maryland State Archives as well as HBCU's to work with the MLTRC in helping to secure and recognize the injustices of lynchings that took place in the State of Maryland.
        - Initially, the MLTRC looks at lynchings going back to 1854 to 1933.
          - The MLTRC shared that many people came forth sharing that their family members were lynched in the 1970's – 1980's.
            - The MLTRC has taken a proactive role in making sure that all information like this is properly recognized and secured.
        - Chair Wilson made Commissioner Davis the designee for this commission representing the MCAAHC.

#### *History Committee-Commissioner Reggie Turner*

Commissioner Turner shared information that the History Committee hadn't functioned in many years.

- He spoke with Executive Director Chanel Johnson regarding this committee and received background information on the history of this committee.
- Commissioner Turner said that he and Commissioner Elinor Thompson will be meeting to have discussions on rebuilding this committee as well as establishing a mission statement for this committee.
  - He also shared that the committee is accepting the scholarship process that they are working through.
  - Commissioner Turner also said that the History Committee is working with Commissioner Davis to see how they assist with the Pendulum newsletter.
  - Last but not least, he is reaching out to his own community to see how he can get historic preservation advocates to help his local community move forward as well.

#### *BDM Committee-Commissioner Elinor Thompson*

Commissioner Thompson shared that as part of her MCAAHC duties, she has been assigned to the role of being part of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Grant review panel.

- In addition to this, Commissioner Thompson is also working with the Maryland Historical Trust where her term has been extended for three years with this organization.
  - She is also working with the oversight of cemeteries with the MCAAHC to protect historic sites.
    - Commissioner Thompson made the announcement that the MCAAHC will be having their April 3, 2023, public meeting at the Grasonville Community Center at 5601 Main Street in Grasonville, Maryland.
      - Commissioner Thompson is the host for that meeting.

#### *Carr's Beach Elktonia Beach Report-Commissioner Tony Spencer*

Commissioner Spencer gave a report on Carr's Beach and its rich history.

- He shared that this beach was a part of the Chitterling Circuit for entertainment.
  - Pearl Bailey, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson, James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughn were a few that were part of this great gathering.
  - Carr's and Sparrow's Beach once was comprised of 188 acres. It has been reduced to 5.6 acres.
  - He shared that he serves as a representative of the MCAAHC for this board where he sits on the Chesapeake Conservancy Board.
  - There are 23 parts of the Chesapeake Bay that are recognized but the committee would like to see that number grow to 30 with the recognition of this beach added to it.
    - Commissioner Spencer shared that he also serves on the Caucus of African American Leaders Maryland Statewide Equity board in Annapolis, Maryland.

*BDM Committee-Commissioner Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene*

Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene, Commissioner Cheryl McLeod, and Commissioner Adi Nkwonta have been working on the Harriet Tubman Lifetime Achievement award for the Women's History Month Celebration program.

**Theme: Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Story. Black Resistance Past, Present, and Future.**

**Date:** March 31, 2023

**Location:** Banneker-Douglass Museum, 84 Franklin Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

- This event for Women's History Month, spotlights Harriet Tubman the great conductor of the Underground Railroad who fulfills the theme of this program.
  - Because of her mighty works the Harriet Tubman Lifetime Achievement Award was established to recognize powerful women that have followed in the footsteps of great leadership like Harriet Tubman.
    - The event may be in person, live streamed or online.
    - All of this will be determined by the budget that has not been provided at this time.
    - Advertisement for this program can begin.
    - ASL Interpreters will be investigated for this affair.
    - The committee recommended that Ms. Erika Bridgeford, from the Baltimore Peace Movement be the recipient of this award and keynote speaker for this affair.
      - This organization is a peace movement and an anti-violence organization.
        - Women will be able to share their story in different forms of poetry, spoken word, griot, and other forms of presentation.
          - Commissioner McLeod made a motion to accept Ms. Erika Bridgeford as the Lifetime Achievement award recipient.
          - Commissioner Anthony Spencer seconded, and the motion carried.
            - Commissioner McLeod made a motion that the plans for this women's history month program be accepted with a firm date and time to share with the committee could make friendly amendments and arrangements.
            - Commissioner Herbert Frisby seconded, and the motion carried.

Vice Chair Dr. Johnson took a moment to recognize Chair Rev. Dr. Wilson and Commissioner Janice Curtis Greene for receiving the Herstory Award from the Friends of the Benjamin Banneker Historical Trust and Park as well as the Patapsco River Linx Chapter.

#### *Emit Till Alert System-Commissioner Cheryl McLeod*

Commissioner McLeod shared that in response to Commissioner Tony Spencer's report from the Caucus of African American Leaders that the Emit Till Alert system, that shares of any potential threat in an area, has been approved to be enacted.

#### *African American Heritage Preservation Grant-Commissioner Herbert Frisby*

Commissioner Frisby shared that he and Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson are co-chairs of the African American Heritage Preservation Grant.

- Up until the recent past, the MCAAHC and the AAHPG Committee were only allowed to give up to \$100,000 in grant funding to historical African American projects in Maryland because the grant was only \$1 million dollars.
- Thanks to the legislator, the grant has been expanded to \$5 million dollars.
  - The grant is for historic preservation and not necessarily for community development.
    - Commissioner Frisby mentioned this since the public meeting was in Howard County and there hasn't been an applicant from this county yet.
      - Commissioner Frisby shared that he and Chair Wilson sit and work on the Board of Directors of the Reginald Lewis Museum.

#### *Commissioner Melvin Kelly's Report*

Commissioner Kelly shared that he became an MCAAHC Commissioner under the leadership of Ted Mack, Chairman Emeritus.

- He shared that he will be leaving on June 30<sup>th</sup> when his term limit time expires.
- Commissioner Kelly said that work has been enlightening as an older person serving on the commission and that he will be turning 86 February 19<sup>th</sup>.
- It made him happy to see young people on the MCAAHC move forward with the charge.

#### *March on Washington 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report-Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson*

Vice Chair Johnson said that there are several MCAAHC Commissioners that will be working with Chair Wilson on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the March on Washington.

- He asked that the public mark their calendars for the weekend of August 26<sup>th</sup>.
- There will be a parade that will start at the U.S. Navy Marine Corp Stadium, flow through downtown Annapolis, Maryland and make its way back up to the stadium for programming.
  - Chair Wilson shared that the committee welcomes the public to work on this great affair with them.

#### *Commissioner Dr. Paca's Report*

Commissioner Dr. Paca said that one of the greatest highlights that she shared was seeing Mr. Ted Mack, Chairman Emeritus of the MCAAHC receive the Culvert Prize which is the highest honor that the Maryland Historical Trust bestows to anyone.

- She said that it is rarely given out and that Chairman Ted Mack was the first African American to receive this coveted award.
- In addition to this report, Commissioner Dr. Paca shared that she is from the Eastern Shore where they hosted an exhibition on African American Spirituals at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC for U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Ms. Kentaji Brown Jackson.
  - This was the first non-classical performance at the Cosmos Club.
  - Thirty individuals came from the Eastern Shore to sing African American Spirituals where the audience stood to their feet throughout the evening applauding.
  - In addition to this, a book called, "A City Called Heaven" was prepared for this affair.

### *Commissioner Dr. Gill's Report*

Commissioner Dr. Gill gave a report that he looks forward to working with Chair Wilson on the March on Washington program.

Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson asked that the MCAAHC Commissioners as well as the public take a moment of silence to observe and acknowledge the life of Tyree Nichols.

### *New Business*

Chair Wilson gave a report that in 2019 at the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center, the MCAAHC was challenged to become part of a grant ranking and reviewing system based on a request from the secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning.

- The MCAAHC were not in agreement with the system and request that they change their process of how they handle projects and preserve African American sites in the State of Maryland.
- A task force was devised where Commissioner Steven X. Lee sits on this task force on how the State of Maryland looks to make changes in the sharing of state funds.
  - The task force is making sure that the State of Maryland funds are distributed fairly.
    - The initial conversation took place in the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center.

### *Legislative Agenda*

Chair Wilson shared that the MCAAHC has been working on how the commission moves forward this year building on the success that was had last year in securing \$1.6 million for the BDM and \$5 million dollars for the MCAAHC AAHPG establishing the MCAAHC as an independent agency.

- The MCAAHC request is that annually there will be money added each year to these budgets.
  - Historically the BDM has been underfunded in comparison to other cultural institutions.
    - This will ensure that the BDM does not find itself back in the same situation 10 to 15 years from now.
    - There are continuing growing needs with cost and needs going up but not the funding.
    - BDM Staff members have been working in 2 to 3 positions to keep the museum moving forward.
  - Commissioner Melvin Kelly made a motion to approve what needs to be shared and recommended by the planning committee to the State of Maryland legislatures in expansion of finances to the BDM and the MCAAHC.
    - Commissioner Tony Spencer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Chair Wilson recognized Commissioner Adi Nkwonta whose term with the MCAAHC is coming to an end.

- She thanked her for her expertise, work, and support to the MCAAHC and the BDM.

Chair Wilson also recognized and thanked Ms. Schillica Howard, Curator of the Banneker-Douglass Museum for her great works in producing exhibits for the museum.

- Ms. Howard is pursuing other endeavors where the MCAAHC and the BDM wish her well.

### *Guests Presentation*

The Maryland School of the Deaf Columbia, Maryland campus came to the MCAAHC Public meeting to make a beautiful presentation to the MCAAHC and public.

- A video was shown of the group making their presentation on how Harriet Tubman inspired their lives.
- The Maryland School of the Deaf Columbia, Maryland campus students received the Black History Month contest award for their great works.
  - The students gave a very personal, arousing, presentation before the MCAAHC and the public.
  - The students gave the MCAAHC and the public a very special thank you for their support.

Mr. James Obasiol, a student of the Altholton High School came to the public meeting and gave a very powerful speech on what it takes to achieve world peace.

- He shared that we live in a society that continues to foster equity and inclusion with a historical approach to solving problems to achieve unity.
- Mr. James shared that Howard County is in the top 10 places to live in this country.
- In his speech he shared that across our country segregation is still very prominent.
- Mr. James said that he is a biracial student of black and Asian descent where he has seen and experienced many dynamics because of racism and sexuality.
- He shared that one must disturb marginalized status to have progress.

Chair Wilson then called for a motion to adjourn the MCAAHC Public meeting. Vice Chair Dr. Edwin T. Johnson moved that a motion be made to adjourn the public meeting. Commissioner Melvin Kelly seconded, and the motion carried.

The public meeting was adjourned at 1:42 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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LeRonn Herbert, Special Assistant