



Planning & Development Division
Planning & Economic Development Department

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African Heritage Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 16, 2020, 5:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting –Web-Ex

1. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting started at 5:40 PM, introductions were made.

Commissioners present: Jebbeh Edmunds, Susie Green, Verna Thornton, John Staine, Antonio Carter, and Breanna Ellison.

Commissioners absent: Bernice Pepper

Staff present: Ben VanTassel, Mollie Hinderaker

2. Public Comment

No comments were received prior to the meeting and no members of the public were in attendance to make a comment at the meeting.

3. Chairperson and Vice Chair Appointments

City Staff VanTassel explained that at the next meeting they will try to elect a Chair and Vice Chair for the Commission. In the meantime, VanTassel asked if someone would like to try leading the meeting. Commissioner Staine volunteered.

4. Meeting Calendar

After some discussion, Commissioners confirmed that the second Wednesday of the month at 5:30 PM would be the best recurring meeting time. If that recurring date were to fall on a holiday Commissioners agreed that the meeting would then be held on the preceding or following Wednesday, to be reflected in the Commission bylaws.

5. African Heritage Purpose and Focus

Staff VanTassel reminded Commissioners that at the last meeting they requested to continue their discussion of the purpose and focus of the African Heritage Commission. VanTassel

explained that in the meeting packet there was a document containing purpose statements that were taken directly from the ordinance creating the Commission and that the document was there if needed to help guide the discussion. Commissioners made the following comments:

- Before figuring out specific projects to pursue, they would like to have a better understanding of the African Heritage community in Duluth. Commissioners requested statistics on income levels, homelessness rates, mortality rates, educational attainment, etc.
- Like statistics it would also be helpful to track why people of the African Heritage community are leaving Duluth, a sort of “exit interview”
- Identify non-government partners who are committed to improving the community i.e. employers, institutions, others
- Identify ways to create a “new path” that leads to successes for the African Heritage community rather than continuing to address problems/opportunities like was done in the past
- How can the Commission advocate for the African Heritage community when interacting with City government and other institutions? Ideas included working with the Chamber of Commerce, providing video tutorials and resources for BIPOC communities
- How will the Commission stay connected with community? Zoom meetings, surveys, social media pages/presence, establish a master list of Black owned businesses and organizations
- How can the Commission impact policy? Policy is the way to get results and funding is important- people need to be made aware of opportunities because the current system does not provide those opportunities equitably to the Black community. See Atlanta’s former Mayor, Maynard Jackson, for example of successful public policy initiative at the City level
- How is the City awarding contracts and what does workforce participation look like for the African Heritage community in Duluth? Request to see budget/contract/consultant demographic breakdown
- The Commission should get more coverage so people in the community are aware of their formation. Suggestions included a pitch to the DNT for an article that contains short Commissioner profiles, additional press release, more social media awareness

After the discussion City Staff confirmed that they would report back on the following:

- Statistics on the African Heritage population in Duluth
- Contracting, business, and workforce data as it pertains to the African Heritage community in Duluth
- Connect with City Communications team on visibility of newly formed African Heritage Commission

6. Bylaw Discussion

City Attorney Baldwin walked through the draft bylaws with the Commission and asked for feedback. Baldwin said she will update the bylaws with the changes discussed and send it out before the next meeting.

Feedback for City Staff to follow up on included:

- Initial term staggering and limits- will the Commission be able to get anything done if turnover is too quick and/or if they aren't allowed to serve full terms due to staggering?
- Chair and Vice Chair nominations- if these are voted on yearly how effective will they be and how long can someone be in these positions? How does this interact with term limits?
- Revisit standing committees/subcommittees at the next meeting after discussing what topics they would like to regularly talk about
- Commissioners inquired about a "civility clause" to be put in the bylaws to make sure Commissioners and attendees feel safe and are not harassed during any meetings. City Council may have similar language to use.

7. Adjourn at 7:35 PM

Commissioner Staine first/Commissioner Edmunds second, Motion passed 5:0

Next meeting to be held virtually on January 13, 2021 at 5:30 PM