



THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



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America250PA Chester County Commission
Chester County Library & District Center

January 5, 2023

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Blackburn; James Christ; Barbara Cohen; Fernando Fonseca; Kieran Francke; James Garrison; Susan Hamley; Conor Hepp; Ernie Holling; Malcolm Johnstone; Michelle Kichline; MaryFrances McGarrity; Winifred Moran Sebastian; Bruce Mowday; Brian O'Leary; Heather Reiffer; Beverly Sheppard; Karen Simmons; Mark Slouf; Randell Spackman; Robert Williams.

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Mary Sue Boyle; Jane Dorchester, Nicole Flamer, Paul Kahan; Alexander Parham; Cliff Parker; Krystine Sipple; James Ziegler.

STAFF PRESENT: Laura DeMatteo; Gene Huller; Sally Warren.

VISITORS PRESENT IN PERSON: Peter Benton; Brandi Levine; Elizabeth Watson.

CALL TO ORDER:

The America250PA Chester County Commission meeting, held at the Chester County Library & District Center on Thursday, January 5, 2023, was called to order at 4:04 PM by Chair David Blackburn.

It was noted by Mr. Blackburn that Bruce Mowday and Krystine Sipple had been appointed by the Chester County Board of Commissioners as new Commission members. They were welcomed aboard.

ACTION ITEMS:

Appointment of 2023 Officers:

Mr. Blackburn shared that the officers' terms run on the calendar year and that the Commission would need to appoint officers at the beginning of the year. Karen Simmons, Chair of the Nominating Committee, along with Brian O'Leary and Nicole Flamer (not present), reported that the committee met in December, and decided that because the officers had only served for two meetings, they recommended that they continue in their current roles. On behalf of the committee, staff reached out to the current officers to see if they would continue, and all those officers subsequently agreed to continue to serve in 2023. Ms. Simmons also shared that two days before the meeting, Kieran Franke had sent a letter to the Commission nominating Ernie Holling as chair. Ms. Simmons shared that it was felt that Mr. Holling should wait a year, as the Nominating Committee made its nominations based on the fact that there had only been two Commission meetings. Ms. Simmons said that she would like to proceed with the

recommendation to continue with the same slate of officers for 2023, with the consideration that processes be developed for a more formal nominating process starting two months before the end of the year. Mr. O’Leary made the motion to elect the following as officers for 2023:

David Blackburn, Chair
Winifred Moran Sebastian, First Vice-Chair
Ernie Holling, Second Vice-Chair
Heather Reiffer, Secretary

Mr. Blackburn reminded the Commission that there was a nomination from the floor for chair, without nominations made for the other officer positions. Mr. Francke said that he felt he had a right to respond, stating that there was no communication from the Commission and that it was a “ship without a rudder.” He would not withdraw his nomination because he believed better communication and leadership is needed, that Mr. Holling was better suited for that, and that Mr. Holling indicated that he has the time to serve as chair. Ms. Simmons felt that while some role clarification is needed, the communication from staff and other committees has been very good and that it does not have to come from the Chair. Mr. Holling stated that he did not seek this nomination but is willing to serve in any way the Commission feels is best. Ms. Simmons said that the issue could be sent back to the Nominating Committee if the Commission preferred, or Mr. Blackburn could call the vote. Mr. O’Leary shared that his understanding was that the Nominating Committee could make a recommendation, and there can also be nominations from the floor. Commissioner Kichline said that if there was a concern about the definition of the role of officers, that should be discussed by the Nominating Committee. Mr. Blackburn shared that because of the quarterly meeting structure, he did not feel comfortable waiting until the next Commission meeting in April. Mr. Francke then made a motion to add the nomination process as “New Business” after the Public Comment item on the agenda.

Mr. Blackburn noted that the 250th Commission was young and had only met quarterly, and that as the Commission moves into 2023, committees will continue to become more organized. It is appropriate to step back and focus on the specificity of roles of chairs, etc. Beverly Sheppard noted that communications would improve with her new staff role that is just getting underway.

Mr. Blackburn stated that there was a motion on the floor to nominate Mr. Holling as chair and asked if there was a second. There was no second.

A MOTION TO APPROVE THE SLATE OF OFFICERS PRESENTED BY THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE WAS MADE BY MS. SIMMONS, SECONDED BY BARBARA COHEN, AND PASSED BY VOTE OF THE COMMISSION WITH ONE NAY.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FOR THE OCTOBER 6, 2022 MEETING OF THE AMERICA250PA CHESTER COUNTY COMMISSION WAS MADE BY MR. O’LEARY, SECONDED BY MR. FRANCKE, AND PASSED BY UNANIMOUS VOTE OF THE COMMISSION.

DISCUSSION AND INFORMATION ITEMS:

Chester County Heritage Tourism Plan:

Mr. Blackburn introduced Peter Benton, Elizabeth Watson and Heather Reiffer of Heritage Strategies, LLC who made a presentation on the Chester County Heritage Tourism Plan. Mr. Benton described their work in developing management plans for National Heritage Areas. He said that while Heritage Strategies is developing the Heritage Tourism Plan, there are two

additional components to the planning process: SWELL, a branding, advertising, and design firm, will work on a community identity and branding piece; and ConsultEcon, a visitor analysis and market planning firm, will work on the marketing plan and visitation analysis. He also shared that Heritage Strategies reports to a steering committee made up of representatives from the Chester County Planning Commission, the Chester County Conference & Visitors Bureau (CCCVB) and the Chester County History Center. He shared the development of a theme structure and topics, with the goal that every site, stakeholder and community can find their place in the thematic framework. Mr. Benton also described the development of an inventory of active historic sites and said that the team is collecting data on sites with the help of the 250th Commission's Heritage Sites Committee. He shared that the Philadelphia Campaign's story is well-developed, with a thematic structure composed of heritage centers and tour linkages, and that a goal should be to implement the components of the Brandywine Battlefield Task Force's planning by the 250th Commission. He shared that the thematic structure allows all communities to find a place within it.

Mr. Benton described an Outdoor Exhibit Program where sites can apply for funding and assistance to develop outdoor signage that interprets sites and makes them accessible to visitors. The Outdoor Exhibit Program will be managed by a central implementing entity but will also allow for grassroots participation. Mr. Benton went on to describe a proposed Community Interpretation Program where communities and municipalities can develop brief interpretive plans that will support the implementation of the "Appreciate" goal of *Landscapes3*, the Chester County Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Benton cited Marshallton and Phoenixville as communities that are already successfully conducting community interpretation programs.

Ms. Cohen shared that the Town Tours and Village Walks program encourages community participation and helps to encourage site content development. Ms. Watson referred to programs such as Town Tours and Village Walks as those that "activate" places and thematically link them to other sites in a region. She said that the goal is for residents and visitors to return to sites multiple times, and to spend time and money in the region, with the hope to create more permanent programming. Mr. Benton noted that the full heritage tourism experience includes lodging, dining and other experiences, and not just historical interpretation. He said that all of these elements need to be linked together. Ms. Cohen asked how all the information from various sites can be synthesized. Mr. Benton responded that the Heritage Tourism Plan is taking interpretative programs that are already underway, linking them together, and building upon them.

Mr. Francke asked how the implementation will be paid for. Mr. Benton replied that this is yet to be determined and that the consultant team will be working with the county to determine a funding structure. Commissioner Kichline mentioned that while the 250th Commission is full of representatives from great sites around the community, its membership does not represent the full county and its stories. She asked how Heritage Strategies and the Commission's Heritage Sites Committee would be working with these other, lesser-known sites. Mr. Benton replied that they have been working on identifying sites, but that the expectation in the future would be that sites would reach out to the implementing entity about opportunities for marketing and capacity building recommended by the Heritage Tourism Plan.

Commissioner Kichline also asked how the Plan would target the Gen Z population. Ms. Watson replied that the heritage tourism planning piece of the planning process is just the tip of the iceberg for what could be done, and that it does not directly address what is being done in schools. She recommended that the 250th Commission focus on a potential legacy project: something impactful and memorable in the way that generations still recall the bicentennial commemorations in 1976. Ms. Watson also noted that it will be important to develop itineraries to link one place to the next, so that visitors will have multiple experiences in the region. Mr.

Holling shared how the Communications & Marketing Committee will help with communications with municipalities, historical commissions, and HARBs. Mr. Holling asked if the Communications & Marketing Committee would be able to talk to representatives from SWELL. Mr. Benton replied that SWELL will be working on branding, and ConsultEcon will be working on marketing, and would coordinate with the 250th Commission where appropriate. It was asked whether schools could come up with the graphics and logos. Mr. Francke suggested that high school students could be engaged to create infographics. Mr. Benton shared that the community identity piece would be presented as templates. SWELL intends to build on the wayfinding signage that has already been designed and will be installed by the CCCVB.

James Garrison shared an op-ed from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in which broad participation in America250 programming was advocated. Mr. Garrison asked how the Heritage Tourism Plan relates to the 250th planning. Ms. Watson replied that the Heritage Tourism Plan is really a small “circle” compared to the America250PA Chester County Commission, and that the 250th Commission has a more important role than the Chester County Heritage Tourism Plan. Mr. Garrison wants to see something lasting with the 250th, that endures beyond the Semiquincentennial and demonstrates that the 250th is important to us as a nation.

Mr. Blackburn asked Mr. Benton how to get in touch with Heritage Strategies going forward. Mr. Benton replied that their liaisons are Laura DeMatteo and Ms. Sheppard, and that the Commission was encouraged to reach out as needed.

Committee Coordination:

Ms. Sheppard reported that funding had been approved to support her role as Committee Coordinator for the 250th Commission on behalf of the Chester County Planning Commission, in response to the need to create more structure for committee coordination and communications, as well as to develop processes for moving forward. Ms. Sheppard asked that all committee chairs include her on their email lists in their committee communications. She noted that this project could result in extraordinary things and that Chester County should shine through it. She shared that our charge from the top – the national and state 250th Commissions – is to make the 250th more participatory, with as many voices as possible, and that we need to broaden our outreach to support this. She also noted that the Chester County 250th Commission needs to work closely with schools to develop curriculum and to connect historic sites with schools. Commissioner Kichline noted that the County Commissioners meet with the county’s school superintendents regularly and can facilitate a meeting for the Education Committee. Ms. Sheppard emphasized that the Chester County 250th Commission needs to be the point of connection for our communities to work together effectively.

Committee Reports:

Heritage Sites

Mark Slouf reported that the committee is working on researching and supplying information for the active heritage sites spreadsheet provided by Heritage Strategies, LLC, and is intending to complete it by the end of January. The committee is holding off on more focused work with heritage sites until the theme development is further along. Mr. Francke asked how to recommend sites for inclusion on the list. Mr. Slouf reported that the committee was developing its own list of heritage sites that should be accounted for and asked that any additional sites missing from the list to be sent to him. Ms. Reiffer asked that those suggested sites should also be forwarded to her as Heritage Strategies has a side list under development of sites that did not meet their criteria as “active.” Ms. Reiffer clarified that “active sites” were those that currently have features that can be experienced by the public on a consistent basis. Ms. Reiffer explained that she has maintained the active site inventory list, which includes site that have self-guided exhibits, tours, and other consistently available experiences. Ms. Reiffer also shared that they are maintaining side lists of sites that may not be visitor-ready. Mr. O’Leary reminded the

Commission that the intent of the plan is tourism, which is why the criteria have a higher scale for inclusion on the “active sites” list. However, some of the sites on the “side list” could be featured as part of the 250th Commission’s commemorative planning.

Partnership

Ms. Reiffer reported that the Partnership Committee had their second meeting a couple weeks prior, and determined that the main item that needed resolution was whether the Chester County 250th Commission would have an open or closed system in terms of their partner participation. An open system would mean that organizations create programming and the 250th Commission would market it; and a closed system would mean that organizations would apply to the 250th Commission to participate in programming. Ms. Simmons reported that this was clarified at a Program & Event Committee meeting the day before, where it was determined that the Partnership Committee will focus on an open system with criteria, templates, and tools for participation by sites and organizations created by the 250th Commission, and the Program & Event Committee will focus on programs that the 250th Commission develops.

Communications & Marketing

Mr. Holling reiterated that this committee is there to support the others. He reported that the committee meets weekly via a virtual platform in order to focus on start-up. It is planning a committee retreat on Saturday, January 21st at a location to be announced. Terence Farrell, a former Chester County Commissioner, and a member of the America250PA Commission, will present at the retreat. Mr. Holling shared that it has been extremely difficult to get information from America250PA, so the hope is they can learn more through Mr. Farrell. The committee has also launched a SharePoint site to keep its documents and calendars and would like to see this happen for the whole Commission. Mr. Holling expressed concern about the functionality of Google Drive vs. SharePoint. The committee has also set up an email address specifically for the committee: 250comm@ccato.org. Mr. Holling also reported that they invite speakers to their meetings and continue to seek new members consistent with their goals. Ms. DeMatteo noted that there was an email address established for the 250th Commission, as well as a website. Mr. Holling wants everyone to be able to use the system and wants to take it outside the County site so that it is accessible to all. The Commission’s documents were currently available and shared with Commission members via Google Drive.

Mr. O’Leary mentioned the need to further develop the 250th Commission’s website. Susan Hamley shared that the committee is also focused on marketing, and that during the retreat they will focus on some of these tools. Ms. Simmons asked the committee whether there were plans to calendarize events on the website and inquired whether a relational database could be developed for this purpose. She noted the need for an online events calendar, and that Phillyfunguide was no longer functioning.

Education

Ms. Sheppard cited the *Philadelphia Inquirer* op-ed shared by Mr. Garrison earlier to share that there was a need to restore civics to school curriculum, and that the Education Committee would be important in driving this conversation. Ms. Sheppard said that the Semiquincentennial presents an opportunity to renew the teaching of American history and Pennsylvania history in schools. It was suggested that schools could partner with historic sites on curriculum and field trips. Mr. Blackburn shared that the Central Bucks School District recently voted to remove a segment of its history curriculum to replace it with something else. Ms. Reiffer expressed concern that many of the historic sites do not currently have the staff or program infrastructure to support field trips. The cost of busing and the overall reduction of field trips was also mentioned. Ms. Sheppard shared that the committee would need to be creative in how to reach schools and get into the classrooms through online resources. Ms. Sheppard anticipated the need to establish subcommittees to further investigate various aspects of the Education Committee’s work.

Program & Event

Randell Spackman reported that the Program & Event Committee held its first meeting. The committee is considering two types of events: internal, Commission-sponsored events; and external events driven by individual nonprofits and municipalities. The latter would need to be vetted. The committee discussed offering suggestions and a toolkit with criteria for groups to come up with potential events. The need for a searchable events calendar was cited as an important need. Ms. Hamley stressed that in the 250th Commission's programmatic planning, there should be a focus on how Chester County will stand out. She noted other high-profile events that will be taking place at the same time, such as the MLB All-Star Game scheduled to take place during summer 2026 in Philadelphia. She further noted that there is a need to collaborate with Philadelphia to draw people outward. Mr. Francke felt there was an opportunity to supply volunteers for events throughout the county. Ms. Simmons clarified that the Program & Event Committee will focus on the development of Chester County 250th Commission-sponsored events and the Partnership Committee will focus on external events. Ms. DeMatteo shared the draft calendar for the Commission that is on the Google Drive, including state and national 250th Commission projects. She would like to attend the next Program & Event Committee meeting and also talk to Ms. Sheppard about developing applications for America250PA programming. Mr. O'Leary stressed that the Commission needs to be able to tell the County government what it should be doing in 2026 and what funding is needed from the County to make 250th commemorations happen.

Development

Ms. Simmons shared that the Chester County Community Foundation has offered and has been contracted by the County to serve as the fiscal agent for raising private funds for the 250th Commission. She indicated that this is separate from any public money that might be allocated. The committee's focus will now be on the development of a case statement that explains the significance of the Semiquincentennial and the 250th Commission's plans for commemorating the anniversary. This case statement can then be presented to potential funders in solicitations for support.

Formalizing of Partnerships and Co-Sponsorship Opportunities

Ms. DeMatteo reported that she is waiting to hear back from the Public Information Officer with the County and Jaclyn Victor, the Director of Partnerships & Engagement at America250PA, about established systems for entering into and formalizing partnerships, and if there is something standardized to be posted on the 250th Commission's website. She noted that she knew that this was of particular relevance to the Partnership Committee. Mr. O'Leary shared that there was a need for a framework and guidelines for participation by groups so that the 250th Commission can vet them and set standards.

Frequency of Meetings

Mr. Blackburn shared that as the Commission becomes more organized, some members have expressed a need for more frequent meetings. Mr. Holling suggested that there be monthly meetings, with a hybrid model to facilitate attendance and encourage public participation. The meetings should also be recorded so they can be heard afterwards. It was also suggested that the meetings occur in the same location in a central place in the county for consistency and to make them more accessible. Ms. Simmons suggested that bi-monthly meetings would be more reasonable for people's schedules, particularly with all the committee work. Mr. Blackburn reminded the Commission that the meetings had already been advertised publicly as quarterly. Mr. Blackburn suggested adding meetings in intervening months as workshops. Mr. O'Leary and Ms. DeMatteo will look at the County calendar, as well as available technology and will follow up with the Commission about adding additional meetings.

Mr. Blackburn also indicated the need to have a meeting for committee chairs in the next month to coordinate together and will put out a Doodle poll to that effect. He also mentioned the need for issuing standardized questions for potential non-250th Commission committee member participation. It was noted that committee meeting dates are posted on the Communications & Marketing Committee's SharePoint site.

Mr. Holling shared that there were two items under New Business. First, the bylaws currently state that the Commission membership is limited to 29 members. He suggested that this be rephrased to say that the Commission is comprised of members appointed by the County Commissioners, so that the 250th Commission would not need to change the bylaws to add new members. Second, it might be necessary to provide an honorific of "Associate Member" for members of committees who are not members of the 250th Commission. Providing the honorific would need to be approved by the Chair. Mr. Holling will draft job descriptions to describe these for future consideration.

Public Comment:

Sally Warren, a staff member of the Chester County Planning Commission and county resident, shared that the American Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library Company of Philadelphia offer a fantastic digital collection called "Revolutionary City: A Portal to the Nation's Founding," which is a resource for students and teachers using primary source documents pertaining to the founding of the country and the American Revolution. She suggested it would be an excellent resource for the 250th Commission's work.

ADJOURNMENT:

A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 6:20 PM WAS MADE BY MR. HOLLING, SECONDED BY MR. SPACKMAN, AND PASSED BY UNANIMOUS VOTE OF THE COMMISSION.

Respectfully submitted,



Heather P. Reiffer, Secretary