

**Portsmouth VA 250 Committee Meeting  
Children's Museum Conference Room  
October 12, 2023**

Present: James McCann, Karen Washburn, Keith Toler, Councilman Mark Hugel, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Tom Sasso, Rycy Godette, Dan Schmidt, Pam McKittrick, and Audrey Lassiter

Absent: Billie Cook, Dr. Michael Hogan, Heidi Lewis, Jacqueline Johnson, and Wendy Mathias

Mrs. Washburn, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

**Old Business:**

**Electing Vice-Chair & Secretary:**

Mrs. Washburn asked for volunteers for the Vice-Chair and Secretary positions. Mr. Toler volunteered to be the Vice-Chair, and Ms. Lassiter volunteered to be the Secretary. The committee approved them with a unanimous vote.

**Review of Portsmouth's Colonial Events as provided by Mr. Sasso**

Mr. Sasso explained to the committee that he attends the Dunmore's Trails workgroup meetings for the Virginia Revolutionary War Trails which includes the events teams from Yorktown and Colonial Williamsburg. Mr. Sasso stressed that this committee is tasked with choosing the stories that should be told that have historical significance and are relevant to the current time. The committee is also tasked with choosing Portsmouth's stories.

**New Business & Open Discussion – Portsmouth VA250 Organizational Plan (Draft)**

Mrs. Washburn reviewed the organizational plan that was presented and asked for any comments or questions. Dr. Newby-Alexander noted that an additional bullet should be added to the task list that would include thinking larger than just Colonial Era stories. She explained that the terms “freedom” and “independence” are not actually synonyms despite being used as such, adding that “independence is technically more of a political term”. She noted that the issues of freedom were told in different ways at different

locations. Acknowledging these will allow for deeper stories to be told. She offered to draft an additional point for the task list before the next meeting.

Mr. Sasso noted that the beauty of Portsmouth is in the fact that it was a hub of diversity and many other cities' stories came through Portsmouth.

Dr. Newby-Alexander explained that she is on the VA250 Committee for Norfolk, as well and asked how partnering with them will be accomplished.

Mr. Toler told the committee that Mr. McCann attended the first VA250 Committee meeting in Norfolk. Mr. McCann shared that they are considering an event concerning the burning of Norfolk. The group discussed Norfolk's plans which would take place on New Year's Eve, possibly conflicting with Portsmouth's Scottish Walk. They are considering firing cannons from the Portsmouth waterfront toward Norfolk. Mr. McCann will invite Mr. LaVoris Pace, Deputy City Manager, to the next meeting. Mrs. Washburn mentioned that both Lord Dunmore and Gosport founder Andrew Sproule, who fled with him, were Scots, so there might be an opportunity to partner with the Scottish Walk rather than consider it a separate event.

Dr. Newby-Alexander added that people who have left Portsmouth and tell their stories open the global impact of Portsmouth citizens. She gave examples of people who moved to Nova Scotia and their descendants returned many years later. She also suggested having historic interpreters on the ferry to tell stories during events such as Harborfest.

Mr. Toler suggested possibly having a recorded message on the ferry when docents are not available. He also noted that it will be important to consider the impact on the Urban League's Juneteenth celebration here when planning Portsmouth's role in Sail250 which is currently scheduled to arrive on June 19th. Mr. Toler told the committee that Norfolk's Sail 250 meeting will be held on October 24.

Mr. Sasso explained to the group that the Ethiopian Regiment guarded the river crossings. Dr. Newby-Alexander added that the Black Jacks, as Free Black sailors were often called, played a significant role in the Maritime history of the region, but they are never depicted in reenactments.

Mrs. Washburn noted that "A Post Such as Portsmouth" is already an annual event that is perfect for the VA250 calendar. Mr. Sasso added that it should probably be held in April so as not to coincide with other area events. He explained that it is difficult to share the space with the Farmers Market and the committee discussed different options

for the 2024 event. Mrs. Washburn added that the grant was submitted so hopefully that will fund Ethiopian uniforms for the Virginia Youth Regiment.

Mrs. Washburn continued reviewing the organizational plan and each member accepted their sub-committee assignments. She explained that having sub-committees will allow different stakeholders and interested parties to become involved. She asked the members to review the list of proposed events before the next meeting.

**Next Steps/Needed Resources:**

Councilman Hugel asked Dr. Newby-Alexander for a list of resources for the committee to use. Dr. Newby-Alexander agreed to send a a list of books, as well as scanned documents from Virginia historian, Dr. Luther P. Jackson. She will also provide the aforementioned bullet point to be added to the tasks list information.

**Next Meeting:**

Mrs. Washburn suggested the next meeting be held on Thursday, November 9 at 10 am. Everyone in attendance was able to meet that day.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:04 am.