

**Portsmouth VA 250 Committee Meeting**  
**Portsmouth Economic Development**  
**November 9, 2023**

Present: Karen Washburn, Billie Cook, Rycy Godette, Councilman Mark Hugel, Wendy Mathias, James McCann, Pam McKittrick, LaVoris Pace, Tom Sasso, Dan Schmidt, Keith Toler, and Audrey Lassiter

Absent: Dr. Michael Hogan, Jacqueline Johnson, Heidi Lewis, and Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander

Mrs. Washburn, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Mr. Toler moved to accept the consent items as presented. Mr. Sasso seconded, and it was approved by all.

**Guest Speaker: Mr. LaVoris Pace, Norfolk Deputy City Manager**

Mrs. Washburn welcomed Mr. Pace to the meeting.

The committee discussed partnership opportunities between Portsmouth and Norfolk. Mrs. Washburn asked the co-chairs to consider partnership ideas.

Mr. Pace told the group that Karen Scherberger (Executive Director, Sail250 Virginia; Executive Chairman, Norfolk Festevents) has proposed a quarter million-dollar expenditure for Norfolk events. He added that their VA250 Committee is going through the budget process to determine what to request from the city. He attended a meeting in Richmond to learn more about the available matching grants. They are going to ask for funding in the budget so they have money for the required match to receive the grants. He noted that the committee is trying to determine which events that are already scheduled can be added to the VA250 events list. Mrs. Washburn said most of the grant matching that she received for the Virginia Humanities Grant was in-kind. She told the committee that the \$10,000 grant was approved. She explained that \$7,000 of it is earmarked to outfit the Virginia Youth Regiment in the uniforms of the Ethiopian Brigade and First Rhode Island Regiment. The other \$3,000 will be used to pay for James Fayette to visit all 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes in Portsmouth.

Mr. Pace and the committee discussed three possible events that could have partnership opportunities.

**Burning of Norfolk – January 1**

Mrs Washburn asked Mr. Pace about Norfolk's plans to commemorate the burning of Norfolk. They briefly discussed a possible joint event.

## **The Return of Lafayette – August 2024**

Mr. Pace suggested meeting with Ted Baroody (Festevents Chief Executive Officer) to discuss partnership opportunities. Mrs. Washburn explained that she would like to have a joint fireworks show to accompany and the 42 bonfires along the waterfront.

## **Sail250 – June 2026**

Mr. Pace said the Sail250 event is already in place and the Norfolk City Council has determined that it will coexist with the Juneteenth events. Mr. Toler noted that it will also be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Harborfest.

Mr. Toler said Mrs. Washburn has not received any update from the City Manager. Mrs. Washburn added that Sail250 is on the same day as the Juneteenth celebration with the Urban League of Hampton Roads. She feels this could be an opportunity to share additional stories about the Black Jacks and Underground Railroad. She feels both cities can participate in connecting the two events.

Mr. Pace said the goal of the Norfolk committee is to have events across the city with civic leagues, etc. He will share information once he has the funding in place.

Councilman Hugel asked how the military fits in with the event planning.

Mr. Toler responded that the Navy will be celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Mr. Sasso added that the Marine Corps will also be celebrating their 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## **Old Business/Subcommittee Reports and New Business/Subcommittee Assignments:**

**Research and Story Development:** Co-chairs: Tom Sasso and Dr. NewbyAlexander  
Mr. Sasso reported that he and Dr. Newby-Alexander have been emailing and are working on adding more members to their sub-committee. He noted that “A Post Such as Portsmouth” has been set for Saturday, April 13.

Mrs. Washburn explained that the state VA250 Commission is soliciting stories for the mobile museum. She tasked Mr. Sasso with finding out more information and following up on the scanned documents that were discussed at the October meeting. She also requested he take the lead on the Dunmore Trails.

**Education and School Outreach:** Co-chairs: Rycy Godette and Heidi Lewis

Ms. Godette reported that she has reached out to Pam McKittrick and connected to Wendy Mathias to gather more committee members.

Mrs. Washburn added that the \$10,000 grant is basically for education. She asked the sub-committee to take over the process of scheduling James Fayette to visit the 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes, as well as finalizing plans for Portsmouth Public Schools' participation in the October 25<sup>th</sup> City Park and Olde Towne events. Additionally, she requested they schedule a mobile museum visit, as well looking into other educational resources offered by the VA250 Commission.

**Museums, Public Art, and Exhibit Development:** Co-chairs: Dr. Michael Hogan, and Dan Schmidt

Mr. Schmidt told the committee that he will reach out to Dr. Hogan this week. Mrs. Washburn said the next VA Humanities grant cycle is in the spring and the museums should be part of the funding.

**Events:** Co-chairs: Jacqueline Johnson and Audrey Lassiter

Ms. Lassiter explained that she will contact Ms. Johnson next week and start working toward adding sub-committee members.

**Grants and Marketing:** Co-chairs: Keith Toler and Wendy Mathias

Mr. Toler reported that in addition the VA250 grants, the Save America's Treasures, Inspire Grant is a federal grant that is available. It funds museum related projects and needs to come from the Museums, Public Art, and Exhibit Development committee.

Mr. Toler handed out copies of the proposed information for the VA250 website noting that it is limited to a maximum of 900 words. He requested the committee members review it and respond by Wednesday, November 15.

Mrs. Washburn explained that it is important to take advantage of the free marketing that is available. She recommended focusing on adding locations and attractions to the VA250 website.

She asked if there are any grants for local television spots, public service announcements, etc. Mr. Toler suggested applying for the VTC grant again in the spring to use for marketing.

**Grass Roots Outreach:** Co-chairs: Councilman Mark Hugel and Billie Cook  
Councilman Hugel reported that he has shared the information with the Mayor's Military Affairs Committee and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard base officer. He added that Naval Medical Center Portsmouth is interested in coordinating events around the Seawall Festival, and he has also started discussions with local Navy and Coast Guard officials.

Mrs. Washburn suggested making contact with the civic league presidents.

**Sites and Signage:** Co-Chairs: Pam McKittrick and Keith Toler

Mr. Toler explained that the VA250 Tourism grant closes November 30. This is the grant that will fund signs. He will reach out to Drew Gruber and get information on the cost. He requested the Research and Story Development sub-committee give him more information to be used on the signage.

Mrs. Washburn thanked Mr. Pace for attending the meeting.

She asked for a motion to adjourn. Councilman Hugel moved to adjourn the meeting. Mrs. Cook seconded, and it was approved by all.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned 10:36 am.

**Next Meeting:**

Mrs. Washburn suggested the next meeting be held on second Thursday, December 14 at 10 am in the Portsmouth Economic Development Conference Room.