

**Portsmouth VA 250 Committee Meeting**  
**Portsmouth Economic Development**  
**December 14, 2023**

Present: Karen Washburn, Jacqueline Johnson, Wendy Mathias, James McCann, Pam McKittrick, Tom Sasso, Keith Toler, and Audrey Lassiter

Absent: Billie Cook, Rycy Godette, Dr. Michael Hogan, Councilman Mark Hugel, Heidi Lewis, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, and Dan Schmit

Mrs. Washburn, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Since there was no quorum, approval of the minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

**VA250 Website:** Mr. McCann showed the committee the Portsmouth page on the VA250 website including the 10 photos that he and Mrs. Washburn chose to represent the city ([va250.org/Portsmouth](http://va250.org/Portsmouth)). He noted that he has sent A Post Such as Portsmouth to be added to the events page and will add the Return of Lafayette 2024 event soon. The website will be active until at least 2032 promoting Portsmouth attractions and events.

**Subcommittee Reports:**

**Research and Story Development:** Co-chairs: Tom Sasso and Dr. Newby-Alexander

No committee report. Mrs. Washburn noted that the committee needs to submit stories for the the state VA250 Commission Mobile Museum.

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

No committee report. Neither chair was in attendance.

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

No committee report. Neither chair was in attendance.

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

Mrs. Washburn asked Ms. Johnson to meet with her in January to discuss events in more detail. Mr. Toler explained that the events committee should make sure to have more information about the Fourth of July event. He added that in 2026, Harborfest is being moved back a week to coincide with Sail250. That weekend is also Juneteenth

and will be the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Harborfest. He noted that the city of Portsmouth should be an affiliate with these Norfolk events.

Ms. Johnson explained that Shaggin' on High is the main event on July 4 and is followed by the Tidewater Concert Band and then the fireworks. Mr. Toler added that Portsmouth and Norfolk share the cost of the fireworks. He said that since they do not require amplification, it would be more convenient to have the Tidewater Concert Band at Linear Park (beside Crawford Bay), but it is not an approved location. Additionally, he noted that by 2026 that area could be under construction. He also emphasized that the largest state celebration will be in Williamsburg and each of the neighboring cities has their own celebrations. In reality, Portsmouth will probably only attract Portsmouth residents or visitors from North Suffolk on July 4, 2026.

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

Mr. Toler told the committee that he participated in a video call with the Virginia Tourism Corporation to gather more information about the upcoming grants. He shared these grant opportunities:

- VA Humanities Grant - \$10,000 dollar per dollar matching grant  
Open March 1 – April 15  
Committees can apply for more than one grant for the same event to cover different aspects of the event or program
- VA Commission of the Arts Grant - \$5,000 grant with no match requirements  
Open January 1 – April 1 (Money must be spent July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)  
Only government and non-profits are eligible (SAM.gov number required)  
Suggested theme “Revolution of Ideas”  
any genre of art is eligible (visual arts, music, literary, dance, spoken word, public art, murals) Resources available to the committee include the Touring Artist Roster and the Teaching Artist Roster
- VA Tourism 250 Grant – \$10,000 dollar per dollar matching grant  
Open March 5 – April 4  
Requires 3 partners and a support letter from the tourism office  
This grant can be used for Road to Revolution signage once the history committee identifies sites that require signage  
Cost \$3,000 per sign

- Other grants include an Events Grant for multiple day events and Micro business grants

Mr. Toler added that he has requested \$30,000 in the 2024 budget since this committee has no funding.

Mrs. Washburn recommended applying for a grant for a Post Such as Portsmouth for 2025.

**Grass Roots Outreach:** Co-chairs: Councilman Mark Hugel and Billie Cook

No committee report. Neither chair was in attendance.

Mrs. Washburn noted that she would like to find out from Councilman Hugel what role the military might be able to play in the Return of Lafayette 2024 event.

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

Mr. Toler explained that he can apply for the Virginia Tourism 250 Grant for five Road to Revolution signs as soon as sites are identified.

**Old Business/New Business:**

Mr. Toler told the committee that Mrs. Washburn emailed Councilman Hugel requesting that he look into the City's plans for Sail250. The City Manager has asked to meet with Mr. Toler to discuss the necessary funding for larger ships to dock in Portsmouth during the event. He explained that the deadline is January 15, 2024 to have the paperwork completed, sponsorship funding in place, and a contact person chosen to be on the Sail250 Executive Committee. He added that currently the only location available for large ships to dock is High Street Landing because the seawall railing cannot currently be removed. At present, VA250 ships chosen to dock along Portsmouth's seawall must be able to bridge the railing.

Mrs. Washburn asked Mr. Sasso about including a commemoration of the Burning of Norfolk as part of the Scottish Walk in 2024. Mr. Sasso told the committee that he can get a Lord Dunmore reenactor to participate. He added that with a bit of funding the event could be even larger. He noted that although reenactors are usually free, cannons, horses, and ships receive stipends for attending.

Mrs. Washburn explained to the group that when Lafayette arrives in Norfolk on October 22, 2024, he will take a cruise on the American Rover which will sail over to the Portsmouth waterfront. Norfolk is attempting to secure a French warship with the capability of housing a helicopter which would do a flyover. On October 25, Lafayette will spend the morning at Portsmouth City Park with 1,200 fifth graders. He will then be in Olde Towne from 1 - 2:30 pm with his national entourage. Although that is the same night as the Ghost Walk, there should be no conflict.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned 10:45 am.

**Next Meeting:**

Mrs. Washburn announced that the next meeting be held on Thursday, January 11 at 10 am in the Portsmouth Economic Development Conference Room.