

VA 250 Committee Meeting
Portsmouth Economic Development
Conference Room
February 8, 2024

Present: Karen Washburn, Jarred Bobzien, Chessie Bray, Billie Cook, Rycy Godette, Dr. Michael Hogan, Councilman Mark Hugel, Jacqueline Johnson, Wendy Mathias, James McCann, Pam McKittrick, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Dan Schmit, Keith Toler, and Audrey Lassiter

Absent: Heidi Lewis, Tom Sasso

Mrs. Washburn, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. The committee agreed to dispense with the reading of the minutes.

Black History Month Events: Mr. McCann showed the committee the VA250 website events page which currently has four Portsmouth events listed. He added that these events are also listed on multiple calendars. He informed the group that 2 members of the VA250 Commission in Richmond complimented Portsmouth's events, site listing information, and the accompanying photos. Mrs. Washburn asked Dr. Hogan to send information on Portsmouth Museums' events. She added that she has sent an overview of Portsmouth's history which included Emanuel AME Church to be added to the Mobile History Museum.

Subcommittee Reports:

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

Dr. Newby-Alexander told the group that [St. John's Church](#) in Richmond has several upcoming events that might be of interest to the members of the committee.

She added that *A Common Cause to All* conference will be held March 18 – 20 in Williamsburg. Mr. McCann told the group that he has registered to attend the conference. She suggested that in 2025 he apply to be a presenter and invite a historical interpreter to do a 5 minute introduction. Mr. Toler suggested having hand cards printed about the *Return of Lafayette* event to hand out at this year's conference.

Mrs. Washburn told the group that the VA250 website promoted the Portsmouth events in their newsletter. Mr. Toler volunteered to add all of the committee members to the newsletter.

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

Mrs. Washburn told the committee that the schools have asked her to only send 4th grade students from 3 schools to the *Return of Lafayette* event on October 25, 2024.

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

Mr. Schmit told the committee that he and Dr. Hogan will meet next week and have information for the March meeting.

Mrs. Washburn noted that at the last statewide VA250 Committee meeting that Mr. McCann attended, he was asked what events the Portsmouth Museums are hosting. Mr. Toler added that because this is a national event there will be a 6 month advance requirement to be included in the national press marketing campaign.

Ms. McKittrick told the group that there are six Lafayette free standing panels that are touring the country. They will arrive in Portsmouth at the end of March. Mrs. Washburn suggested displaying them in the atrium of the Portsmouth Welcome Center. Mr. Toler told the group that the phone booth, light post, and mailbox will be placed there. Mr. McCann suggested the downstairs of the Portsmouth Art and Cultural Center.

Dr. Newby-Alexander asked the group about student involvement in the Lafayette event. Mrs. Washburn explained that Stephen Alexander portraying James Fayette will be visiting the 4th grade classrooms throughout the city during the week before the *Return of Lafayette* event.

Mr. Schmit told the group that the Hill House Museum has the tea set that Lafayette used when he visited Portsmouth in 1824 and they are willing to have the city display it or use it at an event.

Events: Co-chairs: Jacqueline Johnson and Audrey Lassiter

Mrs. Washburn told the committee that she needs to get the applications for the *Return of Lafayette* event. Ms. Johnson replied that she will send the application and contact information. Mrs. Washburn wants the day to actually have three separate events at Portsmouth City Park, Lafayette Park, and the linear park along the seawall on Crawford Parkway. Mr. Toler noted that the linear park is not a permitted park for events. Ms. Johnson added that using that park will be a larger issue. Ms. Johnson noted that the Department of Parks and Recreation will be willing to host the Mobile Museum at the Back to School event on the last Saturday of August in 2025 at Festival Park. She added that there are thousands of people in attendance at that event. Additionally she noted that

if the Mobile Museum is able to stay long enough, her department would be able to bus students from their program to see it.

Mr. McCann explained that the Mobile Museum can only stay a few days. Mr. Toler suggested having it at the Umoja Festival.

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

Mr. Toler explained that the Marketing Leverage Program from Virginia Tourism is open and grant applications for up to \$20,000 will be accepted until March 14. He noted that he will only be able to apply for one grant and the application must include a lodging component.

He went on to explain that the Marketing Leverage Program VA250 grant application closes March 5. This is the grant that the Museums and Tourism Department can use for signage but the locations need to be chosen soon. This is a reimbursement only grant for a maximum of \$10,000. Mr. Toler then told the committee that the Virginia Commission for the Arts Grant is still not open. Dr. Newby-Alexander explained that this grant opens every 3 months.

Mr. Toler added that other grants are located on the VA250 website including the National Parks Grant, the National Endowment of the Arts Grant, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services Grant.

Ms. Mathias added that the DAR got a \$1,000 grant for the *Return of Lafayette* event.

Mr. Bobzien asked if the city has worked with Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. He added that Building 1 is no longer controlled by the Naval Medical Center. They are planning an event to be held during the Seawall Festival weekend in June. He will check on the possibility of inviting additional participants. They will have a CO Chalet for the business leaders and members of City Council. Dr. Newby-Alexander added that it would be great to invite educators since this is such a rich historical area and the population is not allowed to see it.

Ms. Bray informed the committee that the Norfolk Naval Shipyard is not ready for tours and Trophy Park needs refurbishing.

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

Councilman Hugel told the committee that in the Mayor's Military Affairs Committee meeting they have discussed reaching out to military members to make sure they are

informed about the upcoming VA250 events. Mr. Glagola from the Department of Marketing and Communication is working to set up a specific page to let them know Portsmouth events. Mr. Bobzien suggested having the Public Affairs officers for each military branch spread the information.

Sites and Signage: Co-Chairs: Pam McKittrick and Keith Toler
No report.

Old Business/New Business:

Mr. Toler informed the committee that the City Manager sent a letter to the Sail250 Committee informing them that Portsmouth will participate in the event. Mr. Toler added that he will be on a working committee but the City Manager has not announced the liaison yet

Mrs. Washburn asked Councilman Hugel if it would be possible to have the city's event fees waived for the VA250 events.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Toler. Mrs. Cook seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 11:09 am.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 14 at 10 am in the Portsmouth Economic Development Conference Room.