

VA 250 Committee Meeting
Portsmouth Economic Development
January 11, 2024

Present: Karen Washburn, Billie Cook, Rycy Godette, Councilman Mark Hugel, Jacqueline Johnson, Wendy Mathias, James McCann, Pam McKittrick, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Tom Sasso, Keith Toler, and Audrey Lassiter
Absent: Dr. Michael Hogan, Heidi Lewis, and Dan Schmit

Mrs. Washburn, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:07 am. A motion was made by Mr. Sasso to approve the minutes as presented. Mrs. Cook seconded the motion, and it was approved by all.

VA250 Website: Mr. McCann showed the committee the Portsmouth page on the VA250 website (va250.org/Portsmouth). He noted that the city's first event, [A Post Such as Portsmouth](#), has been published on the site, and will also be shared on their social media pages. Additionally under the Places to Visit tab, Portsmouth has listed Trinity Episcopal Church, Emanuel AME Church, the Hill House Museum, and Cedar Grove Cemetery. He informed the committee that he has submitted information for the traveling museum. He added that the committee needs to focus on filling out the pre-request form for the VA250 Mobile Experience to reserve dates for the museum to visit Portsmouth. This form requires information on the event and plans for the mobile experience as well how school tours will be incorporated. Mr. McCann suggested possibly having the museum visit Portsmouth in the spring of 2025. Schools could visit the museum on Friday and then have it available for visitors at A Post Such as Portsmouth on the next day. Mrs. Washburn suggested putting it at the recreation centers. Ms. Johnson responded that Parks and Recreation would possibly be able to have it at an event in 2025. Ms. McKittrick suggested possibly having it during the Lafayette 2024 event. Mr. McCann noted that the information should be submitted as soon as possible.

Mr. Toler explained that the mobile museum is very large and needs to have enough space to turn around. Mr. McCann added that the trailer is 53 feet long, and the cab adds an additional 18 feet. He explained that complementary panel exhibits will also be available for use in the museums or other smaller locations.

Subcommittee Reports:

Research and Story Development: Co-chairs: Dr. Newby-Alexander and Tom Sasso
Mr. Sasso told the group that he met with the Dunmore Trails committee and they are very Yorktown centric. He did share Portsmouth's history and they are including A Post Such As Portsmouth in their events listings.

Mr. Toler told the subcommittee that as soon as they choose five stories for the Road to Revolution signs, he and Ms. McKittrick will choose the sites. After these steps are taken, he will be able to apply for the VA250 Marketing Leverage Grant.

Mrs. Washburn asked that Mr. Sasso check with Susan Heeley about tying in the 2024 Scottish Walk to Norfolk's commemoration of the Burning of Norfolk.

Mrs. Washburn shared concerns that Sail250 and its tall ships are reminders of the transatlantic slave trade, especially since the event coincides with Juneteenth. She asked Dr. Newby-Alexander how she thought the committee could acknowledge that dark part of Portsmouth's history and, at the same time, share other elements of African American nautical history like the Black Jacks and the Underground Railroad. Dr. Newby-Alexander explained that Portsmouth did not have a large role in the transatlantic slave trade, but the city figured heavily into the domestic slave trade. She noted that when talking about Sail250, many other types of ships transported both foreign and domestic slaves adding that the good, bad, and the ugly were all part of history. She feels history should be discussed in an open way letting the chips fall where they may. She would like to bring in experts to share stories adding that this committee has an opportunity to do something different and important. Ms. Washburn agreed, saying that she hoped the committee would view Sail250 as an opportunity rather than a problem to be solved.

Mrs. Washburn suggested that the ships leaving with free blacks for Liberia was another story that might be important. Dr. Newby-Alexander, added that some were missionaries. She also suggested researching laws that were added in the early 1800s as a result of the increased African American population. These laws were passed to oppress and suppress such as laws preventing African American men from being ship captains or navigators.

Mrs. Washburn asked about Portsmouth's commitment to Sail250. Mr. Toler explained that he has spoken with the City Manager and she cannot commit funds from future budgets. Mr. Toler noted that the deadline for a letter of commitment and an appointee to the Sail250 Executive Committee is needed by January 15. Councilman Hugel

explained that he will meet with the City Manager on Friday and will inquire about these issues.

Mr. Toler noted that this will be a huge event with a great deal of press coverage. He suggested that the Portsmouth representative might be a deputy city manager with authority to allocate city resources. Mrs. Washburn agreed that if the representatives from Norfolk and other cities have the authority to guarantee money at the table then Portsmouth would be at a disadvantage not to have a representative with equal authority. Councilman Hugel asked what he needed to ask the City Manager for specifically as it relates to Sail250. Mr. Toler responded that Karen Scherberger is looking for assurance that Portsmouth will be involved and that someone who can allocate resources serves on the committee. Councilman Hugel asked if Mr. Toler would write a draft letter that he could present to the City Manager for her consideration, and Mr. Toler agreed. He added that the Sail250 Committee also wants to have a list of those Portsmouth events that coincide with Sail250 by January 15. Councilman Hugel will present the letter to the City Manager and discuss including Portsmouth VA250 planning in next year's budget. He added that the fiscal year begins July 1, 2024. Mr. Toler noted that he requested \$30,000 to be used for grant matching since the Portsmouth VA250 Committee itself is not funded.

Mrs. Washburn will draft a list of information and suggestions for the Sail250 representative to use for the executive committee meetings. Dr. Newby-Alexander suggested requesting extra funds in the library and museum budgets to cover new library materials as well as a museum lecture series. She added that these will also require printed brochures and marketing dollars. She suggested hosting events such as inviting James Fayette's descendants for a panel discussion or reenactments events.

Dr. Newby-Alexander noted that people from Portsmouth ended up in Texas and were involved in the Juneteenth effort. She said these stories will make the Portsmouth Juneteenth celebrations more impactful. She noted that there are great resources in the Portsmouth Museums that could be used such as having the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum provide a program on the Norfolk-Portsmouth Harbor which was the third largest in the country at the time of the Revolutionary War. She suggested giving a list of ideas to the museum director.

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

Mrs. Washburn told the group that she met with Ms. Godette and they came up with a plan for the 1,000 students attending Return of Lafayette on October 25, 2024. They will have presentations at Lafayette Park and then Lafayette will get in his carriage and

parade to the waterfront. Mrs. Washburn explained that the Daughters of the American Revolution are providing educational materials. Dr. Newby-Alexander, suggested bringing descendants because it makes young people more interested in learning about their own families.

Mrs. Washburn explained that the VA Humanities grant is funding James Fayette's visit to every fourth grade class in Portsmouth the week before Lafayette arrives. She is going to New Kent County to find out more about James Fayette. Dr. Newby-Alexander said that she has met some of his descendants there. Ms. Godette requested the Daughters of the American Revolution send her their curriculum, and Mrs. Mathias said she would do that right away.

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

No committee report. Neither chair was in attendance. Dr. Hogan called and noted that he will be able to attend future meetings. Mr. Schmit was ill.

Events: Co-chairs: Jacqueline Johnson and Audrey Lassiter

No report.

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

Mrs. Washburn told the committee that VA Commission of the Arts Grant is open and she is going to work with Support Portsmouth Public Art to install a mural featuring famous historic Revolutionary War figures such as Billy Flora, James Fayette, John Braidfoot, and General Lafayette's Aide de Camp, Bernard Magneon.

Mr. Toler suggested having Sam Welty paint the mural to add to his America series. To help cover the cost he noted that The Portsmouth Museum & Fine Arts Commission Grants are currently open. Ms. Mathias added that DAR also has a grant for historic preservation. Mrs. Washburn explained that the Governor's School has a Chamber Orchestra with a broad repertoire of music from Lafayette's time. She's hoping to use grant money to pay their \$2,000 fee.

Dr. Newby-Alexander, suggested adding more than just the Revolutionary War heroes to the mural. Mr. Sasso noted that it could include the Ethiopian Regiment.

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

Councilman Hugel told the committee that he has spoken with Marcus Robbins, the historian and archivist for the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and plans to add him to the subcommittee. Mr. Robbins has been trying to improve Trophy Park so

Councilman Hugel suggested ending Lafayette's procession there. He will also speak with the head of the Coast Guard base to get the correct representative for the subcommittee.

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: No old or new business

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Toler. Ms. Mathias seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 am.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, February 8 at 10 am in the Portsmouth Economic Development Conference Room.