

VA 250 Committee Meeting
Portsmouth Economic Development
Conference Room
March 14, 2024

Present: Karen Washburn, Billie Cook, Rycy Godette, Dr. Michael Hogan, Councilman Mark Hugel, Jacqueline Johnson, Pam McKittrick, Tom Sasso, Dan Schmit, and Audrey Lassiter

Absent: Heidi Lewis, Wendy Mathias, James McCann, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, and Keith Toler

Mrs. Washburn, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. A motion was made by Ms. McKittrick to dispense with the reading of the minutes. Mrs. Cook seconded the motion, and it was approved by all.

February Events Progress Report: tabled until April meeting

Subcommittee Reports:

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

No report.

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

Ms. Godette told the committee that Ms. Kristine Troch is her new supervisor and she has not had a chance to update her on the committee. Mrs. Washburn asked her to send Mr. Sasso a list of emails and phone numbers for the schools.

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

Dr. Hogan said the Lafayette panels will be displayed at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum from April 1 through April 30. He added that in January of 2025 a new exhibit on African American labor in the shipyard will be installed. He said no exhibit can be set up in the museum, but programming is a possibility. It would have to be approved by Dr. Benitez.

Mr. Schmit told the group that the Hill House Museum will have an event every weekend in October and have a tea with Mr. Mark Snyder who portrays Lafayette on

Saturday, October 26, 2024. He explained that in their collection is a tea set that was thought to have been used by Lafayette when he was here in 1824. The museum has had an appraiser authenticate its age.

Mrs. Washburn told the committee that there is a granite marker that was placed in 1824 designating the location of the original Lafayette Arch. It is sitting in the flower bed at TowneBank. She has spoken with Mr. Toler about raising it and adding a placard to explain why it is in this location. Mr. Schmit added that the Hill House Museum has the paperwork showing when it was placed. He offered to get an estimate for the project and see if TowneBank will sponsor it.

Events: Co-chairs: Jacqueline Johnson and Audrey Lassiter

Ms. Lassiter explained to the committee that she has been in contact with Chaplain Karl Gibbs, LT, on the USS George H. W. Bush. He emailed the following: “This summer will mark the 100th birthday for the late President Bush. Our plan is to have a ship-wide Day of Service on Thursday, April 25, in which thousands of Sailors from this ship will descend upon the community as a 'thousand points of light', offering volunteer service.” She explained that Lafayette Park on Crawford Street will be the location of one of the VA250 events, adding that it is in desperate need of landscaping. Ms. Lassiter has contacted Mr. Michael Phillips with the Department of Parks and Recreation to get permission and assistance with this large landscaping project. Mr. Phillips will provide the plants and mulch. Ms. Lassiter will meet with the George H. W. Bush volunteers and provide water, snacks etc. to transform the space for the October 25 event.

Mrs. Washburn told the group that the Main Library will host an event the week before Lafayette arrives, and the Virginia Youth Regiment will set up a camp in front of the library. The local DAR chapter will provide activities including a scavenger hunt, art projects, and more.

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

No committee report. Neither chair was in attendance.

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

Councilman Hugel checked with Jarred Bobzien and Chessie Bray but they were not on the email distribution list. Mrs. Washburn noted that after the last meeting she met with them and there will be a mirrored event for Bonfires on the Bay at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. She added that it might be possible for Lafayette to be able to go to the shipyard. Mr. Sasso offered to provide a 26 foot, 18th century boat with a cannon on the back. Ms. McKittrick added that the DAR is sponsoring the carriage.

Councilman Hugel added that it is currently budget season so he offered to try to obtain funds for events. The new budget begins on July 1, 2024. Mrs. Washburn asked about partnering with Norfolk to host fireworks on October 22. Councilman Hugel offered to inquire about having fireworks.

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

Mr. Sasso told the group that he has researched the signage that already exists. Mrs. Washburn asked about sharing the story of the Tory being thrown out of his church. His house was burned but another house was built on its foundation. She suggested signage explaining about Dunmore's Retreat and the Ethiopian Regiment. Mr. Sasso also suggested Emmanuel AME Church, Billy Flora's story, Benedict Arnold's Headquarters at The Coffee Shoppe, and the location of Cornwallis' headquarters on Court Street. Mrs. Washburn also suggested Trinity Church. She explained that the grant will fund five placards.

Old Business/New Business:

Mr. Sasso contacted the Naval Heritage Society and invited them to come for the Seawall Festival. He noted that they have a land display that could possibly be used. Dr. Hogan will check with Dr. Benitez about including it. Ms. Johnson said that the event details are finalized, but she will check with Mrs. Spratley.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilman Hugel. Mrs. Cook seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 10:37 am.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 11, 2024 at 10 am in the Portsmouth Economic Development Conference Room.