

African Heritage Commission - February 10, 2021

Present: City Staff, Kathy Wilson and Mollie Hinderaker. Commissioners Edmonds, Thornton, Staine, Pepper, and Ellison.
Temporary chair: John Staine

Public Comment: Councilor Janet Kennedy thanked the Commissioners for their service on the African Heritage Commission. She reported that the development of the Martin Road Trail, renamed Waabbizheshikana, is an important project for the Indigenous Community and would like to see a similar project in Western Duluth, particularly the Oliver Bridge and the U.S. Steel site, that highlights the contributions of the African Heritage community. Comments to the Parks and Recreation Commission are being taken until Feb. 17. Commissioners were encouraged to have a voice in the development of these areas and their significance to the African Heritage community.

Elena Foshay and Duane Hill representing the Work Force Development Board addressed the Commissioners seeking advice to help the WF Board improve their services to employers and those seeking employment. WFD works with employers on diversity, equity and inclusion and provides job seekers with training and goal setting. The Commissioners were asked what they were hearing about needs in the community and how WFD could reach out to those in need of services. Suggestions included: reach out to a variety of organizations such as the Family Freedom Center not just the NAACP, talk to people where they are and pay people (gift cards) to share their ideas one on one or as part of a focus group, talk to students particularly at the colleges, be present at job fairs and family nights at schools such as Myers Wilkins, identify those who could serve as community consultants (reimburse them) to identify the various factors that get in the way of securing a job.

By-laws: The Commissioners voted to approve the following Statement of Purpose of the African Heritage Commission:

The purpose of this Commission is to ensure that the views of the African Heritage community are incorporated in the decision making, future planning, and stewardship of the City of Duluth. The Commission will endeavor to act as a guide in the development of public policy, planning, and services so that the African Heritage community is adequately represented in these processes. The Commission will aim to plan, develop, and implement community projects that recognize and increase the awareness of the contributions of African-Heritage history; to encourage and assist the teaching of African-Heritage history; and to recognize sites in the community that are significant to African-Heritage History.

The next virtual meeting is on March 10, 5:30 PM. Demographic data requested from the city staff will be reviewed and discussed. The data requested of city staff by the Commissioners include employment, businesses, education attainment, health disparities, justice and legal system, and general demographic statistics about the African Heritage community.

Submitted by Gail Schoenfelder

African Heritage Commission - January 13, 2021

Commissioners present: John Staine, Verna Thornton, Bernice Pepper, Susie Green, Jebbeh Edmonds. The meeting was held virtually. City liaison: Ben Van Tassel

Public Comment: Henry Banks notified the commissioners of a bill in the legislature and asked for their support. The bill still in draft form is the Philando Castile Omnibus Bill 2021 sponsored by 67A State Representative John Thompson.

Commissioners were informed of two meetings for groups interested in police accountability and reform: Thursday, Jan. 28 and Sun. Jan.31.

Minutes for Dec. 16 were approved.

The Commissioners reviewed by-laws suggested at the November meeting. There was concern about how the statement of purpose is worded, particularly the following sentence: "The commission will endeavor to increase understanding and acceptance of the African Heritage community and culture..." A decision to table approval of the wording until next meeting when Commissioners will determine a preferable change to the statement of purpose.

Next meeting on February 10. Staff will provide demographic data requested by Commissioners, a list of BIPOC owned businesses, as well as city grants and other funding opportunities. Elena Foshay, Director of Workforce Development will give a presentation.

Submitted by Gail Schoenfelder

African Heritage Commission, November 16, 2020.

The African Heritage Commission met for the first time on November 16, 2020. The meeting was held virtually.

As the City of Duluth website states, “The purpose of this commission is to ensure that the views of the African Heritage community are incorporated in the decision making, future planning, and stewardship of the city of Duluth. The commission will endeavor to act as a guide in the development of public policy, planning and services so that the African Heritage community is adequately represented in these processes. The commission will also endeavor to increase understanding and acceptance of the African Heritage community and culture and to increase African Heritage community involvement in all aspects of community affairs in Duluth.”

The Commission has seven members who may serve up to two terms of three years each. The seven members are:

Antonio Carter, Verna A. Thornton, Bernice Pepper, Susie Green, Breanna Ellison, John A. Staine, Jebeh Edmunds.

The Commissioners shared their perspectives on what niche the African Heritage Commission can fill in our community.

Their suggestions and ideas included the following:

Establish a collaborative of groups to engage young people in music, the arts, dance, etc. Recruit professionals to act as mentors and role models for youth; Work towards obtaining a space for African Heritage community to gather for programs, etc; Emphasize recruitment and retention of African Heritage professionals. Promote black businesses and restaurants and develop a network of black professionals so they stay in Duluth; Provide incentives for people of color to get outside and enjoy outdoor activities---provide programs and equipment; Solicit input (maybe with a survey) from African Heritage members of the community to include them in the Commission’s decision making.

A permanent meeting date and time will be set at the next Commission meeting. Additional agenda items will include a discussion to determine the Commission’s Bylaws and a process to adopt them at a future meeting.

The date of the next meeting is to be determined. This date will be posted on the City of Duluth’s website: duluthmn.gov and click on African American Heritage Commission.

Submitted by Gail Schoenfelder