

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee

Location: Frederick Douglass Elementary School Library

MEETING MINUTES December 13, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

APPROVED

ATTENDEES:

Committee Members: Charles Avery, Erica Bush, Dwight Brooks, Gladys Burke, Valerie Bush, Carlotta Coates, Gertrude Evans, Margaret Good, Glory Howard, James Roberts, Larry Roeder, Larry Simms, Sylvia Smith, Michelle Thomas

Absent: Tammy Carter, Joyce Jackson, Mary Randolph

Guests: Charlotte Coates, Helen Avery, Alvin Dodson, Nathan Bailey

LCPS Staff: Kevin Lewis, Beverly Tate, Melissa Tello, Kathy Devens, Sara Howard-O'Brien, Donna Torraca

Charles Avery welcomed the Committee and guests. Two Committee members provided public comment.

Margaret Good presented the LDAA with a 1935 printing of a dollar bill explaining that there was not currency printed with a date of 1941 but the 1935 dollar was in circulation at that time. This Silver Certificate dollar bill is a gift from the Frederick Coin Exchange in Frederick Maryland. (Note: Margaret Good took the initiative to find this currency for the Committee. LDAA will keep the dollar bill for future installation at Douglass HS as part of the commemoration.)

Michelle Thomas provided comment on the Union Street School building and the current request by Loudoun County for applications for the Resident Curator Program. Loudoun Freedom Center is submitting a proposal for consideration and asked for letters of support. Ms. Thomas plans to meet separately with the LDAA at their next scheduled meeting.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the November 8, 2021 meeting. Gert Evans made a motion to approve and Margaret Good seconded.

Joint Board of Supervisors & School Board Committee Briefing:

Kevin Lewis reviewed a draft motion with the Committee regarding the request from the Joint Board of Supervisors and School Board for the DHS-CC to assist with recommendations for reconciliation of the operation of segregated schools in Loudoun County and the forced sale of the Douglass High School. Committee members inquired about the time commitment needed and whether LCPS staff could be utilized. Mr. Lewis stated that the meeting commitment has not been established at this time but both LCPS Staff and Loudoun County Staff would provide assistance for this task. Gladys Burke read the following motion into the record and Larry Roeder seconded the motion:

I move that the Douglass High School Commemorative Committee accept the invitation of the Joint Committee to assist with the request for recommendations on the reconciliation for the operation of segregated schools in Loudoun County and the forced sale of the DHS property. The DHS CC proposes to provide a status update and recommendations to the Joint Committee within six months of being designated to participate. If designated, DHS CC would form a sub-

committee which will allow work on the Joint Committee's request simultaneously with the commemorative effort. Recommendations on commemoration are also proposed within the six-month timeframe.

Roll call was taken, and the Motion was adopted 14-0 with 3 members absent (Tammy Carter, Joyce Jackson and Mary Randolph).

Memorandum of Understanding Update:

Kevin Lewis provided an update regarding the MOU's with each group for space at Douglass High School. He explained that staff is still drafting the initial language and working with Loudoun County Parks & Recreation who will also be utilizing space at the building and providing management and coordination of activities in the building when not in use by LCPS. Once the MOU's are drafted the LCSB Attorney will review and then he will meet individually with each group. The MOU's will be presented to the School Board for final approval. There was discussion regarding the number of tours that are anticipated and how often the space will be needed for evenings and weekends. In discussing the opportunities for tours, Mr. Lewis clarified that no tours are to take place during the business hours of the LCPS services (8-5) as there will be children present and this would be a security issue. Mr. Lewis noted that information from the three organizations on how they envision the tours taking place will help facilitate the MOUs and the management of the facility with Parks & Recreation. There was no consensus at this time but a recommendation of at least one weekend a month and one evening to begin was generally accepted.

There was also discussion on the three organizations and their standing membership meetings. These meetings need to be discussed to determine how to reserve these dates in relation to Parks & Recreation scheduling the 1941 portion for other community events. It was also noted that the MOUs should take into account the involvement by each organization to curate the exhibits.

Mr. Lewis also stated that LCPS is planning to restore the rooms in the front portion of the building as they were in 1941. He asked if the Committee was in agreement that LCPS can move forward with this restoration while the Committee continues to discuss commemorative opportunities. Based on the discussions to date for the commemorative recommendations there are not any proposed ideas that would be impacted by starting the restoration. The Committee was in agreement that LCPS could move forward.

Subcommittee Reports:

Mission Statement: Glory Howard provided an overview of the three proposed Mission Statements for the Committee for consideration. Upon review of all three statements and discussion among the Committee, Dwight Brooks made a motion for Mission Statement #2 and Michelle Thomas seconded. The Mission Statement reads as follows:

The mission of the DHHC (DHS CC) is to identify collect, preserve, and display, memorabilia, documents, photographs, oral history, digital records, and other materials that commemorate and honor the rich legacy of past and present generations who fought to overcome systemic racial challenges to ensure African American children in Loudoun County could receive an

accredited secondary education; as well as working with local diverse community organizations to promote and maintain the rich heritage of the historic Douglass High School.

Roll Call was taken and the above Mission Statement was adopted 14-0 with three members absent (Tammy Carter, Joyce Jackson and Mary Randolph).

Front Plaza/Entry Area: Larry Roeder provided an overview of the location of the proposed statue in the front of the building with offset to the left of the plaza when you are facing the building. The concept provides circles and steps up to an incline where two bronze sculptures, human size, would be located, representing students and their uphill battle for equal education opportunities. The students would be walking toward Douglass High School. The subcommittee also suggests that organizations and groups, as opposed to individual names, that supported the school during segregation such as teachers, custodians, bus drivers, etc. be recognized in the circular steps leading up to the statutes. This would be representative of the students standing on the shoulders of many people that made this all possible. Lights and a water feature are still of interest on the campus but not necessarily associated with the statue. The shape of the steps (round or rectangular) as well as ADA access to and around the statue was also discussed.

Amphitheater: Valerie Bush and Jim Roberts presented the subcommittee's suggestions for the amphitheater. Elements include a covered podium area with a wall at the back to place a name for the area. They suggested that this area be dedicated to the Countywide League and that signage be placed nearby to explain the significance of the Countywide League. In between the seating areas, grass could be maintained to provide additional seating space and more green space behind, removing some of the suggested landscape trees that are currently shown for that area. Additionally, flags representing Mayday could be placed along the back of the area.

Gladys suggested that the NAACP officers be located somewhere in the project.

Timeline: Gert Evans reviewed the subcommittee ideas which included both inside and outside opportunities. The subcommittee suggested that the inside timeline be pictorial to best tell the story, along with minimal verbiage. The outside timeline could highlight the Countywide League information in the amphitheater area. The statue could have information on the years of struggle. The subcommittee provided a detailed outline of possible content for timelines. There was discussion on the audience for the timeline noting that there will be students along with parents in the building every day. The question was asked as to whether other parts of the building could be utilized for the timeline. It was noted that they could be but those areas would typically be closed off at night. The question as to how far the timeline would extend was also raised noting earlier discussion on stopping the timeline at 1968.

Construction Update & Priorities for Decisions

Melissa Tello provided an update on the construction and reviewed with the Committee various elements for their consideration and input:

Monument Sign: The Committee felt the examples provided were too plain. They would like the sign to have more visibility and not compete with the statute. It was suggested that the text size be changed to emphasize certain words in the name such as Douglass High School.

Outbuilding Screening: The alleyway between the shop/band building and other building on the campus could be screened. The Committee was in agreement on decorative screening in this area.

Shop/Band Building Mural: Ms. Tello explained that a mural on the outside of the building would be challenging, particularly since this is also a historic building. It was suggested that a mural could be placed on the inside wall. The Committee expressed a desire for a large graphic image such as the photo showing students working inside the building. Ms. Tello noted that this building would also serve as a multi-purpose space. The Committee had no issue with bathroom facilities being added to this building. Ms. Tello noted that interpretative signage could be added to the front of the building that speaks to the history of the building which was used as a shop, classroom and band building.

Gym Area Opportunities – Inside and Outside: The exterior mural was discussed and the potential challenges for this area. It is still possible but there are some brick and window elements that will need to be avoided. Exterior murals need to be touched up or re-done after a period of time. That is something to consider and perhaps plan for future funding should the mural be placed outside.

The inside of the gym has several mural and timeline opportunities. The Committee requested that the rams head that currently exists be changed and reflective of the current LDAA logo. Valerie Bush offered to provide a jpeg of the rams head desired. The Committee was concerned with the acoustics in the gym and how that can be improved. They suggested screenprints in this area potentially changing intermittently with acoustic panel improvements.

Kiosk & Display Cases: Sample kiosk and display cases were shared with the Committee. They discussed moveable as well as fixed. The importance for flexibility for the front meeting space was emphasized. Location on the stage in relation to the Frederick Douglass picture was noted. There was a question regarding the budget and funds for ongoing curation. The suggestion was made to consider an endowment as a part of the Joint Committee reconciliation review for the ongoing commemoration. There was also discussion regarding space within the classrooms in addition or instead of the main hall area. There was also a question about utilization of the break room as an interactive area.

Time Capsule Update:

Melissa Tello shared that an initial, non-invasive investigation of the cornerstone was conducted and nothing was found at this time. LCPS will continue to pursue with other non-invasive options before considering masonry removal. There will also be a ground penetrating radar (GPR) check of the area between Market Street and the building to see if there might be a time capsule in this location. For the new Commemorative Committee time capsule, a sub-committee will be formed.

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 13, 2021

Oral History:

Larry Simms stated the 21 video interviews have taken place to date. The team traveled to Maryland earlier in the month to interview Mr. Hankerson. The team will continue with interviews in January and February including a roundtable discussion.

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