

# Douglass High School Commemorative Committee

Location: Frederick Douglass Elementary School Library

## MEETING MINUTES

July 26, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

### ATTENDEES:

**Committee Members:** Charles Avery, Dwight Brooks, Valerie Bush, Carlotta Coates, Gertrude Evans, Joyce Jackson, Mary Randolph, James Roberts, Larry Roeder, Larry Simms, Sylvia Smith, Michelle Thomas

**Absent:** Erica Bush, Gladys Burke, Tammy Carter, Margaret Good, Glory Howard

**Guests:** Helen Avery, Janet Wiggins

**LCPS Staff:** Lottie Spurlock, Sara Howard-O'Brien, Donna Torraca

Charles Avery welcomed the Committee and guests and asked if there were any public comments before the meeting began.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the July 12, 2021 meeting. No revisions were offered. Dwight Brooks made a motion to approve the minutes. James Roberts seconded.

Charles offered the amended schedule for the remainder of the year which would eliminate November 22 during the week of Thanksgiving from the calendar. No comments were received, and the calendar was amended accordingly.

The Committee then reviewed the Mission and Theme of the group. Charles reminded the group that they are recording and making history. Committee members shared their thoughts on what their mission is. Thoughts included:

- Making citizens of Loudoun County aware of the history of the school and that it was a very important part of Loudoun County's history.
- Recognizing those like the Countywide League who struggled for the school and black education
- Preserving the history of the black education and the history of Douglass
- Show the resiliency, resourcefulness and self-sufficiency of the black community
- Tell the story of the struggle and how the black citizens came together as a community including economically.

After watching a video of the Tokyo Olympic torch lighting Charles encouraged the Committee and guests to offer additional comments on why the group was formed. What do we want folks to see, feel, and touch? For everyone that walks through the door, what should the connotation be?

- Want people to be inspired and uplifted when they visit the school; Want other to feel that they too can overcome whatever challenges they may be facing.
- Show the pride of the black community in the building and its history
- Want people to understand the history of the school and the black Americans that made this happen. Capture the struggle, pride and passion that was involved to ensure their children had educational opportunities.

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The Committee then discussed the question of the stage area and whether the stage should be brought back to 1941 which would extend it into the current open space by about 19-feet or if it should stay as it appears now in the 1960 version. Sara shared slides to depict the difference and the Committee discussed the pros and cons for each and how the Committee sees the space being used. After discussion, Charles called for a vote:

1941 Stage – 2 Committee Members and 1 Guest voted in favor

1960 Stage (Current) - 9 Committee members voted in favor; 1 Committee member and 1 guest abstained

Sara then explained the location of shelving in Room 206, shared pictures of the shelving in the room, and asked if the Committee felt the shelving was part of the school between 1941 and 1968. After discussion it was determined that the shelving was most likely not part of the 1941-1968 school and could be removed.

Charles mentioned that there should be discussion, in break out section, whether the Committee wanted a mural inside and outside and if so the location of each. There was also a brief discussion about plans for August 9 and August 23 meetings and the requests for dedicated office space and ballots. Sara explained that the intent of the presentations and voting is provide an opportunity for the groups to share their intent of the use of the space, the Committee to ask questions and then to review options for how they feel the space should be utilized and if office space should be provided. The decisions on dedicated office space will influence the commemoration efforts (i.e., are the rooms available for commemoration). If the Committee does not want to provide that input to the School Board then that is an option also.

Lottie also shared that it is an opportunity for the Committee to ask questions and for the presenters to make it clear how they would like to use the space.

Some Committee members offered questions for the stakeholder groups to address when they spoke to the Committee on August 23:

- Where do the groups meet now? What is the advantage of this space versus where the organization is now?
- Would the groups be bringing desks and other items into the space?
- What is the intent of Parks & Rec in the front space?
- What do the groups want to use the space for?
- Will the organizations be bringing guests into the space?

Sylvia Smith also asked about an article she had seen recently regarding the use of the school on Union Street, formerly Douglass/Leesburg Training School. Michelle Thomas shared that it is planned to be a museum, community center, education facility and open as much as possible. There would be meeting space, run through Loudoun Freedom Center and curated through Resident Curators Program celebrating African American History.

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Slides of both inside and outside of the gym were then shared for potential mural opportunities. Mr. Simms stated that all current schools have murals in their gymnasiums. Syliva asked about flags in the gym to represent championships.

**INSIDE COMMITTEE:**

The Inside Committee compared the Stakeholders Commemorative Suggestions chart with the Committee Recommendations and found that they were similar.

The group came to consensus on the following:

- Naming rooms after teachers/staff
- Digital data bank of alumni and students that attended Douglass HS
- Bust of Frederick Douglass/Pictures of Mr. Douglass
- Feeder Schools
- Quotes from educators or leaders displayed around building
- Historic photos of school and town on digital display and looped
- Paint gym in green and gold colors
- Oral histories (digital)
- Maroon curtains for stage
- Maintain the podium
- Display cases with memorabilia
- Mural or Pictorial on Gym Wall; Perhaps athletic picture collage
- Timeline
- Diorama of Leesburg during the school's timeframe

**OUTSIDE COMMITTEE:**

Charles reported that the Outside Committee came to consensus on all that is shown on the current Committee Commemorative Recommendations Chart.