

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee

Location: Douglass School & Community Center
(Formerly Douglass High School)

MEETING MINUTES

June 28, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

APPROVED

ATTENDEES:

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

Guests: Helen Avery, Barbara Sheppard Bush, and Janet Wiggins

LCPS Staff: Dr. Scott Ziegler, Kevin Lewis, Lottie Spurlock, Scott Klose, Bev Tate, Sara Howard-O'Brien, Donna Torraca

County Staff: Steve Torpy and Rameir Martin, Parks & Rec
Jon Mattia and Linda Leonard, Douglass Community Center

The meeting began in the gym of the Douglass School and Community Center (formerly Douglass HS). Committee members and guests were welcomed to the meeting and provided an opportunity to review some of the commemorative concept boards and historic photos. Sara Howard-O'Brien welcomed the group and provided an overview of the evenings plans. LCPS Superintendent Scott Ziegler also welcomed and thanked the Committee for their participation in this historic commemoration. The Committee was then led through the building to the front historic section, formerly referred to as the gymnasium or auditorium.

Once settled in the front historic area, the group was welcomed by Kevin Lewis and provided an overview of the construction project and plans for the building. He asked for the groups' guidance regarding the use of the rooms, layout of the stage area and for any other information they could provide that would assist in restoring the 1941 building area to its former glory.

Charles Avery then welcomed the group and provided a quick overview of the evenings plans before turning the meeting over to Erica Bush for introduction of guests and request for any public comment to the Committee. There was no public comment given.

Barbara Sheppard Bush introduced herself. She was a 1968 student at Douglass High School and then integrated to Loudoun County High School where she graduated in 1972. Ms. Bush worked at the school, beginning in 1977 assisting with a pre-school program for 25 years.

Helen Grant Avery was also in attendance. She is the wife of Charles Avery and attended Douglass High School for four years, 1965-1968 until integration. She graduated in the spring of 1969 from Loudoun County High School. Mrs. Avery was in the choir at Douglass HS and did performances with the theatre group also. She recalled pep rallies in the auditorium/gym and was a cheerleader also. Ms. Avery later noted that the school held prom and homecoming dances with a King and Queen. Students that wanted to be King or Queen raised money and the one that raised the most got to be the queen. Ms. Avery noted that they would spend a long time getting ready for the prom, as much as six weeks.

Committee Member Mary Randolph introduced herself as a 1961 graduate of Douglass High School. She remembered the prom in the main hall during her years at the school. She noted a room on the east side of the auditorium where ice cream and treats were kept. She also recalled that one didn't have to cross the railroad tracks to get to the school.

Committee Member, Michelle Thomas, also introduced herself. She is the current President of the NAACP Loudoun Chapter as well as Founder and President of the Loudoun Freedom Center. Ms. Thomas expressed her interest in space at Douglass for the NAACP and identified Room 206 as a desired location.

The Committee then reviewed the minutes from the June 14, 2021 meeting which included additions provided by Gert Evans and Larry Roeder prior to the meeting. Several additional corrections were offered, mostly correcting spelling of names. Gladys Burke made a motion to approve the minutes as amended and Valerie Bush seconded.

After breaking for a short dinner, the group moved outside for a tour of the potential commemorative spots and sharing of ideas. Tammy Carter provided an overview of what she envisions could happen in the front plaza area, along the side of the building and in the rear of the building, including the path to the W&OD Trail. Ideas from Tammy and other Committee members included:

Front Plaza Area:

- Placing "Formerly Douglass High School 1941-1968" in the peak of the roof at the front of the building.
- Removing the Paul H. Tobler Memorial Stone (Mr. Tobler was the Assistant Principal at Douglass Alternative School for 23 years.)
- Statue in front plaza with water surrounding. Lights within the water reflecting up. Suggestions for statue include one with children and adults/teachers, child with a backpack and perhaps have a progression rising up lower to higher to represent the struggle for black education
- Stone or quartz benches
- Include a distinctively landscaped area
- Names in reflection space and plaza area
- Suggestion to identify the names of the Countywide League in this area
- Removal of trees in front of school to provide better sight of the school building
- Repositioning of the building signing (name TBD) either to the left or the right of the plaza
- The historic marker needs to be redone
- Retain the MLK sign in its current location
- Something in front of the windows when the trees are removed
- Corner stone time capsule and new time capsule

Side of Building:

- Repositioning the Margaret Lloyd Memorial Stone to a different area on the school site; perhaps in the front plaza or within the amphitheater

- Big planters with information about Douglass HS history; this could be a “did you know” facts conversational approach
- Eating spaces or a spot for coffee with round tables with 2-3 chairs outside of building, along either side of the building
- Fence line around basketball courts with greenery and lights
- Fountain with Ram shape inside
- Names on Pavement and Bricks

Rear of Building:

- Mural – Perhaps by the artist Shawn Mitchell Perkins who has done several in Washington D.C.
- Suggestion was made to consider using LCPS students to create the murals
- Suggestion to provide a timeline on the rear gym wall
- Question as to whether a mural could go on the side of the building too?
- Decorative fencing around basketball court area

Path to W&OD:

- Canopied walkway with plants over top and misters; provide benches and historic markers along the pathway

The Committee members then returned to the inside of the building and broke out into their two groups for further discussion of commemorative ideas both inside and outside.

INSIDE COMMITTEE:

- Commemorate graduates and all those who attended the school, i.e. separate graduates and non-graduates
- Framed class photo of each graduating class (where should these be placed)
- Recognize teachers and the years they taught
- Display Case – Interactive Database where people can enter who attended, add pictures to provide a visual with the name
- Brochure in lobby with guided tour information and welcome
- Diorama of school and town – group to determine what year and exactly where inside (suggestion to be near entry)
- Displays with memorabilia
- Booths with panels and pictures in breakroom
- Living Legends – Computer display with who went to the school, helping in the community that is a rolling display on a monitor
- Video recordings
- Add Crowdsourcing Site so people can leave information about Douglass HS alumni; identify what the student was involved in while attending (choir, sports, band) This information could also cross reference the name of the individual with the brick paver (with name) in the plaza
- Circular wall of names outside
- Whatever name is chosen for the building it should include “Formerly Douglass High School”

- Large photo of Frederick Douglass on the back of the stage
- Bust of Frederick Douglass
- Suggestion: there is a lot of information to cover and we want to maximize our space. Whatever is decided we don't want to duplicate. There was also a recommendation to avoid "over loading" one particular area.

OUTSIDE COMMITTEE:

- Statue in front of building with statue of children in it going in a slope toward the school to symbolize the struggle, including adults and teachers
- Plaques on each side of statue with historic information
- Reflective space with water feature
- Repositioning the monument sign from the middle to a side
- Remove trees so they do not detract from the plaza and the building (however many are needed)
- Replace whatever trees are removed and replant trees somewhere else on the site
- Time capsule
- Pavers with names
- Lights and flowers in the front
- Benches made of stone
- Find a home for the Margaret Lloyd Memorial
- Symbolize May Day somehow – flags, historic pictures perhaps at amphitheatre
- Removal of Tobler signage
- Timeline should end in 1968

The subcommittees came together, and each group reported to the larger group. Tammy Carter was the spokesperson for the Outside subcommittee and Erica Bush was the spokesperson for the Inside subcommittee. In preparing for the commemoration, the question was posed as to what message is the Committee trying to convey? When visitors arrive it (the collective commemoration) should say, welcome to our experience. It was also noted that the stage had a big picture of Frederick Douglass. Mr. Avery noted that the agenda should keep the discussion of a statute or bust of Frederick Douglass.

There was also discussion regarding the name of the building. Tammy Carter and others provided suggestions, including:

- Douglass High School Community Engagement Center
- Douglass High School Educational & Performance Center
- Douglass High School Educational Event Center
- Douglass High School Community Outreach Event Center
- Historic Douglass High School
- Douglass Countywide League Center

There was a question as to what the School Board actually named the school. LCPS Staff will check School Board minutes and provide exact language at next meeting.

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The group also requested a dedication and at that time ensure the mention of the Countywide League participants. They would also like a plaque in honor of them. The suggestion was made to also include the NAACP and Charles Houston.

The meeting closed with a reminder that the next meeting would return to Frederick Douglass Elementary School at 6:30pm.

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