

**Douglass High School Commemorative Committee**  
**Frederick Douglass Elementary School Library**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**May 24, 2021, 6:30 p.m.**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Committee Members:** Charles Avery, Erica Bush, Dwight Brooks, Gladys Burke, Valerie Bush, Carlotta Coates, Gertrude Evans, Margaret Good, Joyce Jackson, James Roberts, Larry Roeder, Larry Simms, Sylvia Smith

**LCPS Staff:** Kevin Lewis, Lottie Spurlock, Bev Tate, Sara Howard-O'Brien, Donna Torraca

**Absent:** Tammy Carter, Glory Howard, Mary Randolph, Michelle Thomas

Charles Avery and Erica Bush, Co-Chairs, DHS Commemorative Committee (Committee) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Charles Avery is a DHS alumnus (Class of 1968) and Erica Bush is a descendant of a DHS alumnus. Both Charles and Erica represent the Loudoun Douglass High School Alumni Association (LDAA), as a member and Vice President of the Board of Directors, respectively. Charles introduced Kevin Lewis with Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), Assistant Superintendent for Support Services.

Mr. Lewis thanked the Committee for their interest and time in this very important project and provided an overview of the construction inside the historic 1941 section of the building. He explained that there was no set budget for the commemorative project and the Committee was encouraged to look at all options and opportunities both inside and outside the building. Mr. Lewis offered that the Committee should determine how best to commemorate and then we would see how to implement items, phasing over time or using other measures, if needed.

Erica Bush introduced Beverly Tate, Director of Planning Services for LCPS. Ms. Tate provided an overview of the FOIA information included in the Committee packet. The Committee was asked to use the email address provided in the meeting packet for communication with Staff to provide ease in capturing discussions with Staff, should information become the subject of a FOIA request. ([DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org](mailto:DouglassRenovation@LCPS.org)). She then introduced Lottie Spurlock, Director of Equity for LCPS, Sara Howard-O'Brien, Land Management Supervisor, and Donna Torraca, Planning Coordinator with the Planning Division.

The Mission Statement for the Committee was provided by Mr. Avery:

Our mission is to capture the history of the Douglass High School and put it on display for all to see. This history will be available for our children and our children's children and for all who have any connection to this iconic building. We have the opportunity to put our stamp on this historical landmark.

Committee members introduced themselves, their connection, if any, to Douglass High School, their organization affiliation, and why they are interested in helping with this Committee.

Gladys Burke representing the Loudoun County Heritage Commission introduced herself. She moved to Leesburg around 1981. She has friends who belong to the NAACP and Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association (LDAA) and is familiar with the history and excited to be a part of

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
May 24, 2021

the Committee. While she was not born and raised here, she has raised four children here and feels she is part of the community.

Next was Margaret Goode with the Loudoun Preservation Society, one of the oldest preservation organizations in Loudoun County. She was also the past Preservation Director for the Waterford Foundation for many years. She knows some of the graduates who live now in Waterford. She loves the Mission Statement and is looking forward to supporting that goal.

Gertrude Evans, appointed by the Loudoun County School Board introduced herself. She is also the Historian for the Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association and is a volunteer with the Edwin Washington Project. She is a 1966 graduate of Douglass High School, attended the former Douglass Elementary School, and is a life-long resident of Leesburg.

Sylvia Smith attended Douglass High School for one year after which Ms. Smith's father petitioned to have her attend school at Loudoun Valley. She was transported to Richmond to take a test. If 'they' passed the test, they could attend the school. She attended Valley and graduated in 1966 and studied there with Joyce Jackson, Gertrude Evans and Larry Sims. She has always been interested in this school and stated that this was a great opportunity to put our stamp on our school.

Along side Ms. Smith was Joyce Jackson who was born and raised in Leesburg. She attended Douglass Elementary School and Douglass High School for two years before transferring to Loudoun County High School. Ms. Jackson's parents attended Douglass High School along with other family members. It has a very large place in her family's hearts and it's a special tribute to a community to ensure that their children were educated. She has taught at Leesburg Alternative School (Douglass) and then moved to Simpson Middle School and taught there for a number of years. She has been active in education for a long time and she is pleased to see that there is interest in preserving the school's legacy.

Lottie Spurlock, Director of Equity for LCPS, introduced herself and a little about her family. She talked about growing up in Petersburg, Virginia and how there are connections with the stories being told today and stories she heard from her parents. It is obvious, from the stories this evening, that there is a lot of history and a great legacy that we are trying to build and she is happy to be on the journey with the Committee.

Director of the Edwin Washington Project, Larry Roeder, introduced himself and talked about his project regarding the segregated history in Loudoun County and the connections to Douglass High School. He spoke about tiles that were found in Leesburg Training School and how that might be something to display at Douglass HS. Mr. Roeder is an historian and a retired diplomat.

Loudoun County School Board Appointee, Valerie Bush, is also a member of the Executive Board for LDAA. Ms. Bush's father is a graduate of Douglass and her mother a graduate of Valley. She has learned about the basic history of the County and the school and is excited to be a part of the process and learn a more in-depth history of the school.

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
May 24, 2021

Carlotta Coates, President of the LDAA, is a Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Appointee and a proud descendent of a 1954 graduate of Douglass High School. Ms. Coates comes from generations of Loudoun County residents, growing up hearing stories of Douglass. She is also a recipient of a scholarship the LDAA gives to descendants of Douglass High School. She would like to capture the history in a meaningful and respectful way.

James “Jim” Roberts is the representative to the Committee on behalf of the Thomas Balch Library. Mr. Roberts grew up in Leesburg and is a 1956 graduate of Douglass High School. He has a great deal of history to tell about Douglass and shared that his uncle was the first custodian at Douglass High School and he use to help him as a small boy clean the building. The history on the plaque on the outside of the building tells you a lot of the history of the building but the stone below tells you a lot more. It was normal practice at the time of construction to bury items under the cornerstone of a building. He would be interested to see what, if anything, was buried there. His mother was the Treasurer of the Countywide League when the school was built.

Next was Dwight Brooks, Loudoun County School Board Appointee, who stated that he didn't grow up in Leesburg, but a small community called Oak Grove. When they built the airport, they had Douglass Elementary School, so he rode the school bus each day. His mother petitioned the School Board to remain at Oak Grove since it was so much closer to their home. Her request was denied but there may be information in the School Board minutes. He mentioned both of his parents are in their 90s, and are good resources for historical knowledge. He is a 1965 graduate of Douglass. He feels the education he received from Loudoun County was good and that the teachers should be commemorated somehow.

Larry Simms, a life-long resident of Loudoun County and Loudoun County School Board Appointee, grew up in western Loudoun. He recalled getting up early to catch the bus from Purcellville to Douglass High School. There were several children in the Simms family that attended Douglass High School. Five of the seven graduated from Douglass High School. Mr. Simms attended two years at Douglass and graduated in 1966. Mr. Simms has been a history teacher in Loudoun County for 44 years.

Sara Howard-O'Brien and Donna Torraca with LCPS Planning Division also introduced themselves to the Committee as well as Brandon Hunt, Dean at Frederick Douglass Elementary School.

After all Committee members and Staff were introduced, the Committee was reminded that the meeting schedule was provided in their initial packet and most meetings were scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday's of the month through the end of December, with an exception in October due to holidays. All meetings will be held at Frederick Douglass Elementary School except the June 28<sup>th</sup> meeting which will begin and end at Douglass High School for a site visit. Erica also mentioned the contact information provided at the bottom of the meeting schedule.

Ms. Burke asked if the expectation was to have the project complete by December 13<sup>th</sup> or are the plans for this to continue beyond that date. Erica explained that completion is an unknown and we are just scheduled for now through the calendar year. As we begin discussions there are items that we will need to prioritize as renovations begin to factor in any commemorative

Douglass High School Commemorative Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
May 24, 2021

concepts the Committee would like to implement. Overall, the plan is to come up with ideas, provide those to the School Board, and then work on content.

Mr. Lewis provided additional direction regarding completion of the project, explaining that the non-historic end of the building will be worked on first and only begin construction in the historic part of the building once the Committee has provided commemorative concept input. We want to do this right, so we want you to take your time. Additionally, you do not need to limit this project to a budget. We want the Committee to decide how this story should be told and then we will determine whether we can afford it, if there is a need to ask for more money, if there is a need to phase it, etc. We don't want this project to be stifled by budgets or schedules. We may get to some point down the road where we need an end date but let's see what you come up with.

Sara Howard-O'Brien provided a review of the Commemorative Suggestion Tracking Chart and examples of commemorative ideas which were provided previously by the project architects and included in the initial meeting packet.

There was a question as to what part of the building was to remain. Ms. O'Brien explained that the building will remain intact. We are not adding to the building or taking away from the building but renovating the inside. We are trying to take the 1941 portion of the building back, as much as possible, to the original 1941 building. It is not a complete preservation, but we are going to try and take it back as closely as we can.

Mr. Brooks asked if there were any plans for the shop building. Sara explained that Parks & Rec. currently uses that for a day care center. The outside is original, but it has changed inside.

Mr. Avery then discussed the Sub-Committee Assignments of interior and exterior to begin discussions at the next meeting. The Co-Chairs felt that smaller committees would provide better discussion opportunities and given the amount of work to be done, they felt the best approach. Further breakdown of groups may develop as the discussions progress. Committee members were asked if they had any concerns with their assigned group, and there were no objections to assignments.

Ms. Burke asked what time frame the Committee would be "telling the story" about. Would the story also include the Alternative School history? The Committee discussed but nothing was decided. There was also a discussion on the future building name. Carlotta Coates noted that whatever the name of the building it needs to include "formerly Douglass High School". This building should be remembered for the high school. Mr. Lewis stated that the Committee could decide what the building should be named.

The Co-Chairs thanked everyone for coming and noted that an Agenda for the next meeting on June 14<sup>th</sup> would be provided by email prior to the meeting.