



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
AFRICAN BURYING GROUND MEMORIAL PARK COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 18, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.
Law Library, City Hall Complex,
1 Junkins Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call:** The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

Members present: JoAnna Kelley (Chair), Assistant Mayor; Susan Sterry (Sterry), Co-Chair - Portsmouth Cemetery Committee; Dierdre Forte (Forte), Co-Chair - Portsmouth Cemetery Committee; Dariya Steele (Steele), Black Heritage Trail New Hampshire; Ron Baisden (Baisden), member application pending; Dzifa (Joyce) Patterson (Patterson), Seacoast African American Cultural Center; Jason Green, Black Lives Matter New Hampshire

Guest: Chris Dwyer (Dwyer), Chair of Portsmouth Public Art Committee (PARC); Kathleen Wheeler (Wheeler), Archaeologist; John Robertson (Robertson), member of the public.

Staff present: Suzanne M. Woodland, Deputy City Manager and Regulatory Counsel (DCM), Corin Hallowell (Hallowell), Parks and Greeneries Foreman
2. **Review and Approval of draft minutes of the October 21, 2024 meeting:** Steele moved to accept the minutes of the October 21, 2024 meeting. Sterry seconded. All in favor. The motion was approved.
3. **Update on options for repairing the Sankofa on the vault cover:** Sterry obtained an estimate from Coastal Flooring, a local company for \$5,259.61 (\$3,500 for installation and the balance for the tiles and to clean out the existing space). They would use glass pool tiles which would need to be sourced in order to obtain the desired color. Coastal Flooring will use epoxy to set the tiles in the original pattern. Sterry will try to obtain more estimates.
4. **Update on curation options:** DCM and Wheeler reviewed some of the history relative to the discovery of the burial site, the research to date, and the decision by a prior committee to reinter most, but not all the remains. They also reviewed some of the research opportunities and curation options previously discussed over the last two years with prior committee members. DCM shared a draft of a curation agreement for discussion purposes. DCM will follow up Dr. Megan Howey of the UNH Anthropology Department regarding potential curation options.
5. **Any next steps regarding research:** Chair suggested that the Committee invite Dr. Howey or another expert to a meeting to provide input on current DNA testing options. Wheeler recommended curating the remains, rather than reintering, so

that they may be made available for further testing as technology and analysis improve in the future. DCM will schedule a meeting next year solely geared to this subject and to provide the Committee with background materials to help the committee make informed decisions regarding this topic.

6. **Mission of the Committee:** Chair led discussion regarding the possibility of revising the Committee's mission statement to focus less on maintenance of the artist elements of the Memorial Park and more on the stewardship of black and indigenous burial sites and black history in Portsmouth, along with teaming with other organizations that also focused on preserving local black history and associated cultural awareness. Care of the artistic elements would be coordinated with the Public Art Review Committee (PARC) to leverage their expertise. Robertson mentioned a talk he attended at the library by a woman who has done research on the slave cemeteries in NH. Sterry offered to contact the library to obtain further information. A change in the mission of the committee might entail a name change which would be based on the mission of the committee, as it evolves.
7. **Other Business:** None
8. **Public Comment:** None
9. **Adjournment: Motion** by Sterry to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Patterson. All in favor. The motion was approved. Meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

The next meeting of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park Committee will be held in Conference Room A at Portsmouth City Hall on Monday, December 16, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes prepared by:
Barbara Zulkiewicz

Minutes approved: January 27, 2025