



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

Monday, January 27, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.
Conference Room A, City Hall Complex
1 Junkins Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call:** The meeting was called to order at 4:03 p.m.

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

Members present via Zoom: Jill Minot-Seabrook (Seabrook), Seacoast African American Cultural Center; Rev. Robert Thompson (Thompson), (NAACP Seacoast); JerriAnne Boggis (Boggis), Black Heritage Trail NH

Guests: Chris Dwyer (Dwyer), Chair of Portsmouth Public Art Committee (PARC); John, Portsmouth, NH

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 November 18, 2024 meeting:** Sterry moved to accept the minutes of the November 18, 2024 meeting. Patterson seconded. All in favor. The motion was approved.
3. **Update on anticipated maintenance activities for 2025:** Hallowell advised he has received a quote to rewax the bronze sculptures and repaint the letters on the Court Street side; refinishing the pedestal and recoating the metal figures from Daedalus Conservation. He has approval to have the work done and it is scheduled to be done before Juneteenth, weather dependent. Dwyer has been very helpful working with Jerome Meadows to coordinate the repairs for the Sankofa. Meadows will lay out the tiles on sticky paper in the design of the Sankofa and then send it to Portsmouth to have the tile work done by Johnny Hudson, a tile expert. Hudson stated that he has 3 different types of grouts that would hold up in our winters. He will clean up the area, re-grout it and then protect it while it dries. Meadows has the original template, so it should look identical to the original.
4. **10th Anniversary of the African Burying Ground:** Steele and Boggis stated that the Black Heritage Trail has been discussing hosting a few events to honor the 10th Anniversary of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. The Trail has been working on an augmented reality piece which will be assessable via mobile phones

at three (3) locations telling three (3) different stories of the Burying Ground. Boggis offered to send the original PowerPoint on this project to the Committee and they hope to have the prototype ready by May. DCM stated that the Dinah Chase Whipple installation is scheduled for June 9, 2025. Hallowell stated that any work being done at the Memorial Park is scheduled to be completed a week before Juneteenth. Assistant Mayor proposed that all the local organizations and the City meet offline to discuss collaborative plans for Juneteenth and report back to the Committee. John asked if there would be a rededication of the African Burying Ground after all the repairs were completed. Assistant Mayor stated that this would need to be decided by the various local organizations.

5. **Process for further evaluating research options and possible curation:** DCM has reached out to UNH and they are interested in working with the City on curation, but want to make sure that the Black community and the Committee does in fact want to curate any remain, namely the teeth that were held back for possible further research. DCM also stated that with the Juneteenth deadline pending, which would be the optimal time to reinter the remains. As there are a number of questions to be answered, she asked the Committee for input what the process should be; e.g.; a special Committee meeting in the evening to enlist public input. The Assistant Mayor stated that she felt that this should be discussed at a larger conversation within the community at a public forum. Sterry stated that she spoke with Amy Michael at UNH who stated that there aren't any new DNA processes but would be happy to come to a Committee meeting to discuss further. Boggis stated that she would like more information before any decisions are made as DNA technology has advanced since the last testing was done. She also asked if there are other institutions that the Committee could reach out to. This would also include reaching back out to UNH. A conversation ensued about reaching out to other organizations who maintain African burial grounds for assistance, and it was agreed that this would be helpful. Seabrook mentioned the National Museum of African American History and Culture in D.C. and that the only national African burial sites is Portsmouth and in New York. DCM will work on a timeline to reach out to other organizations and to schedule a public meeting in March. Hallowell stated that it would be important to make the decision regarding the reinternment vs. curation. The Sankofa vault was not intended to be reopened. DCM will look at past minutes to determine what prior Committees' intentions were regarding the remains. Per Dwyer – the meeting was of the descendants, not the Committee. The Assistant Mayor and DCM will work on a tentative schedule, list of questions and outline regarding the public meeting.
6. **Mission of the Committee:** DCM provided a draft mission statement per the discussion at the November 18, 2024 meeting. Discussion, clarification and comments ensued, and an updated version will be presented at the next meeting.
7. **Other Business:** Sterry followed up on research she offered to conduct regarding a talk at the library 2 – 3 years ago regarding African and Native American Indian burial sites.

8. **Public Comment:** John from Portsmouth suggested that everyone review the video from the original ceremony of the African Burying Ground and had questions regarding the process of reinterning the remains and if some of the old tiles would be used in the repair of the Sankofa.
9. **Adjournment:** Motion by Steele to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Green. All in favor. The motion was approved. Meeting adjourned at 5:23 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, March 3, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes prepared by:
Barbara Zulkiewicz

Minutes approved: March 3, 2025