



**Planning & Development Division**  
*Planning & Economic Development Department*

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African Heritage Commission Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday, July 14, 2021, 5:30 p.m.**

Virtual Meeting –Web-Ex

Commissioners present: Verna Thornton, John Staine, Bernice Pepper, Antonio Carter

Commissioners absent: Susie Green, Jebbeh Edmunds, Breanna Ellison

Staff present: Mollie Hinderaker, Ben VanTassel, Phillis Webb

1. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting started at 5:45 PM.

2. Approve Meeting Minutes for June 9th, 2021

Staine first/Carter second to approve the minutes for the June 9th, 2021 meeting. **Motion passed 4:0**

3. Public Comment

Councilor Gary Anderson spoke to the Commission as Public Safety Chair of the Duluth City Council. Councilor Anderson gave a formal introduction and let it be known he wanted to be accessible to the Commission. He gave highlights of the City's preliminary plan to spend American Rescue Plan funds. Councilor Anderson also mentioned the City's pilot program for alternate responses to policing; including deployment of social workers, nurses, etc. instead of armed officers.

Councilor Anderson also mentioned his work with community engagement efforts. In response, Commissioner Pepper shared an idea, which was a request for funds that would assist in conducting community surveys for the African Heritage community. The surveys would include incentives be conducted in order to get data on the current needs of community members. Another component to the survey could be a paid position to conduct the work, similar to what a different community member has done for the Latinx community in Duluth. Commissioners agreed this would be a good idea and said it should be further discussed at next meeting with the intention of putting together a proposal to submit to City Council for support.

4. System Mapping Report St. Louis County Homelessness Programs (SLC Staff)

Courtney Cochran and Laura Birnbaum, St. Louis County staff, introduced themselves and presented a PowerPoint to describe homeless statistics throughout St. Louis County. The presentation and discussion highlighted demographics of homeless people served. Areas needing extra focus that were identified through the research include more permanent supportive housing and better shelter navigation. Staff also shared meeting information for a listening session on St. Louis County's American Rescue plan allocation for homelessness programs.

5. Commission Goals

a. Cultural Center

City staff asked for specific directions on what funding opportunities would be the most beneficial for the Commission during their initial planning efforts. Commissioner Pepper stated that communicating through email could work to discuss categories for funding that are currently available. Looking at similar cultural examples around the state was another topic that was discussed to help move along the project and help in forming a business plan/approach. Commissioners discussed the possibility of bringing a proposal to Duluth City Council and whether to receive funds as a 501(c)3 non-profit versus a City entity.

b. Community Outreach

Discussion held earlier.

6. Subcommittees

a. Community Center/Grants (Pepper)

Discussion held earlier.

b. Employer Engagement/Demographics and Data Research (Carter, Green, Thornton)

No discussion.

c. Historic Preservation (Stain, Edmunds)

No discussion.

d. DCSI Law Enforcement Accountability Proposals (Staine, Green, Thornton)

No Discussion.

7. Next Meeting Topics (August 11)

No discussion.

8. Announcements

Next meeting (August 11) will be held in person at Duluth City Hall at 5:30 PM.

9. Adjourn

Meeting Adjourn 7:30 PM.