



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

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African Heritage Commission Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday, January 13, 2021, 5:30 p.m.**

Virtual Meeting –Web-Ex

Commissioners present: Jebbeh Edmunds, Susie Green, Verna Thornton, John Staine, Bernice Pepper

Commissioners absent: Antonio Carter, Breanna Ellison

Staff present: Ben VanTassel, Kathy Wilson

1. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting started at 5:59 PM.

2. Appoint Temporary Chair to Convene the Meeting

Susie Green volunteered to be the Chair person for this meeting.

3. Public Comment

- Written comments received prior to meeting:
  - Local activist Henry Banks invited the Commission to review a State of MN Omnibus Bill related to Philando Castile. The Commission discussed the Bill and was generally in support of it.
  - A local group working on police accountability sent information about meetings they will be holding. City staff will email those details to the Commission.
- Gail Shoenfelder, representing the League of Women Voters, introduced herself and explained that the Duluth LWV sends representatives to public meetings to stay informed about what's going on. She stated she was there to listen and would report back to the LWV with a summary of the meeting.

4. Approve Meeting Minutes for December 16, 2020

Staine/Edmunds to approve the December 16, 2020 minutes – **motion passed 5:0**

5. Bylaws Review and Approval

Commission Pepper expressed concern over the language used in section 3.2 Purpose and inquired if it could be changed. She felt the language placed the burden of gaining acceptance for the African Heritage community on the Commission, rather than holding the City accountable to accept the African Heritage community. Commissioners Green, Staine, and Thornton expressed understanding for Commissioner Pepper's concerns and support for changing the language. Commissioner Staine, while supportive of changing the language, felt that if it couldn't be changed, it would not impact the Commission's purpose in practice. Attorney Sara Baldwin from the City Attorney's Office stated that she had copied that language from the City Ordinance that was voted on by City Council to form the African Heritage Commission and that she was not sure if it could be changed in the bylaws. Attorney Baldwin will follow-up and provide clarification to the Commission.

Green/Pepper to table the discussion of bylaws until the next meeting so the Commission can get more clarification on whether the language in the Purpose section has to exactly match the language in the Ordinance or not – **motion passed 5:0.**

The Commission decided to table the issue until the next meeting so that City staff can provide more information.

#### 6. Purpose and Focus Discussion Follow-up

- Demographic Information update
  - At the last meeting the Commission requested demographic information regarding the African Heritage community in Duluth. City staff asked the Commission for more detail and specifics on what kind of data they would like. Commissioners listed data and information they would like including employment, businesses, education attainment, justice and legal system, health disparities, and general demographic stats about the African Heritage community.
- Businesses and Contracting efforts discussion
  - City staff stated that the Director of the Workforce Development Department would be presenting at the next meeting and that she would be better suited to answer questions/discuss this topic. The Commission asked to see information about her presentation before the next meeting so they could prepare questions.

#### 7. Next Meeting Topics (February 10<sup>th</sup>)

- Workforce Development Director Elena Foshay presentation
- Commissioner Thornton requested the City publicize the Commission so community members know that it has started meeting and know when the meeting are so they can join.
- Commissioner Thornton also suggested that the Commission make a statement on the insurrection at the Capitol. The Commission was supportive. Commissioner Thornton volunteered to draft a statement that the Commission could review at the next meeting.

8. Adjourn

Green/Pepper to adjourn the meeting at 7:19pm – **motion passed 4:0** (one Commissioner had to leave 5 minutes prior to adjournment so was not present to vote)

Next meeting to be held virtually on February 10, 2021 at 5:30 PM