

History Commission

June 8, 2022

A meeting of the History Commission was held this date beginning at 4:03 p.m. in Council Chambers at City Hall, 80 Broad Street.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

Present: Harlan Greene, Chair, Councilmember Peter Shahid, Peg Eastman, Wilmot Fraser, Angela Mack (at 4:26), Mickey Rosenblum, and Dale Theiling.

City staff: Philip Clapper and Andrea Derungs.

Also Present: Marsha Higgins, Councilmember Waring, Diane Hamilton, Donna Jacobs, and Althea Richardson-Latham.

1. Call to Order

Chair Greene called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. April 6, 2022

Dr. Fraser said that the approved document still referred to those persons held in bondage as “slaves.” At a prior meeting, they had discussed changing that word to “enslavement,” such as using “Enslavement Trading Complex” as the titles for the plaques. Otherwise, the Commission would be supporting the defamation of a group of people by encouraging the thinking that they were sub-human in some way or another. He felt that would be to the Commission’s and the City’s detriment.

Chair Greene said he was talking about what they had agreed to two meetings prior. The State Archives did not fully change all instances of the word “slave” in their write-up. That version of the texts passed at the prior meeting.

Dr. Fraser said he was unable to attend that meeting. He thought they had dealt with it when they had sent it back to them. He said that someone from somewhere else wanted to put up a sign in Charleston denigrating African American people. He said Denmark Vesey did not accept that designation, and he did not feel they should even consider accepting it.

Ms. Rosenblum said she thought they had discussed the problem previously, and they had come to the conclusion that they couldn’t say something to the effect of “the Enslaved People Complex.”

Dr. Fraser said “Enslavement Complex” was what they sent back.

Chair Greene said the Archives had taken most of their suggestions, but not all. When it came up for debate, it was possible to change it. They did take it out most of the time, but they kept it in the title.

Ms. Eastman said they had discussed how it would not be good writing to say one word a hundred times on anything if it were to be properly written.

Mr. Theiling said the question was the approval of the minutes. He said they should accept the minutes, but with the understanding that any member of the Commission could present a motion to amend something that had been completed in the past. They could submit further recommended changes to the Archives.

Chair Greene agreed. The issue was whether they would approve the minutes.

Dr. Fraser said they should not accept them as they stood, because they contained the word and referred to his ancestors as slaves. There was no reason to accept that out of a document in 2022.

He said that repetition was simply a technical issue, rather than one of content, and certainly not one to be favored against insults and degradation against an entire group of people who were wrongfully held in bondage. He said that kind of wrong needed to be articulated in any text which he was willing to approve.

On a motion of Peg Eastman, seconded by Dale Theiling, the Commission voted to approve the April 6, 2022 minutes. The vote was not unanimous. Wilmot Fraser voted against.

Dr. Fraser motioned that the word "slave," designating a group of people held wrongfully in bondage, should be excised from the "Slave Trading Complex" title and the text and be replaced with the term "enslavement," indicating that the people were being wrongfully deprived of their human rights.

Mr. Theiling said that should have been written out. He thought it would be well received if it were written in the form of the letter.

Chair Greene said that the text itself left no doubt that slavery was wrong. To him, that was the entire message of the plaques. They were talking about the cruelties and injustices of slavery. In addition, since it was already approved, the plaques may already have been made.

Dr. Fraser said they should smelt them down if that was the case.

Ms. Eastman asked who had the final word, the Commission, or the State Archives.

Chair Greene said it was the Commission.

Councilmember Shahid said people were enslaved. The term slavery vs enslavement was an important distinction. The term in the text was about a complex. The complex was not enslaved, it was simply identifying a complex with a word. He asked Dr. Fraser if they should use the word "slave" in reference to the complex, as it was not a person.

Dr. Fraser said the first word on the proposed plaque was "slave." His motion was to change the word to "Enslavement Trading Complex," which described the commercial activity which people engaged in in an attempt to enslave people. "Slave Trading Complex" implied that there were a group of people known as "slaves" and viewed as sub-human which were being traded.

Ms. Eastman proposed a compromise, like with "the Mart."

Chair Greene asked for clarification on Mr. Theiling's suggestion.

Mr. Theiling said that since they were asking the State Archives to do something, he felt it should be asked in a letter.

Chair Greene asked Dr. Fraser if the reference at the bottom of the text to the sponsor, the "Old Slave Mart Museum," was problematic.

Dr. Fraser said the Old Slave Mart museum was the actual name of the institution, which existed before it had been integrated into the City. He felt they needed to review that, as well, but it was not before the Commission.

Chair Greene said they were asking the Archives to change every instance of the word “slave” to “enslavement” or “enslaved.”

Dr. Fraser said that was correct. They were talking about a group of people who had been acted upon wrongfully. They were not talking about a group of people who were in fact slaves. They needed to get that concept in the minds of people. They could not be putting up signs in 2022 that designated a group of people as “slaves.” He said that every time a black child walked past one of those signs, they were designated a part of an inferior caste. That could not stand. They had worked too hard to make the society a better place to turn back now.

On a motion of Wilmot Fraser, seconded by Councilmember Shahid, the Commission voted to notify the South Carolina State Archives via letter to ask that every time the word “slave” was used in the text and title for the “Slave Trading Complex,” that it be changed to a form of “enslaved” or “enslavement.”

The vote was not unanimous. Peg Eastman abstained. Chair Greene voted against.

Chair Greene asked Dr. Fraser if he wanted to write something to send to the Archives.

Dr. Fraser said he would write a note.

3. Carr-Richardson Park Historical Information

Chair Greene called on the Maryville-Ashleyville Neighborhood Association to present their historical information.

Ms. Higgins, president of the Maryville-Ashleyville Neighborhood Association, said that what they had to present that evening was historical information about the Town of Maryville and some citizens from the Town that would be displayed at the Carr-Richardson Park.

The Carr-Richardson Park was already under construction, and was located on Bender Street. The target date of completion was the second quarter of 2022, around July.

The Neighborhood Association had put the information together and had worked on it for quite some time. City staff had received the information in February of 2022. She apologized for the delay in its arrival to the Commission. It was completed because the Neighborhood Association wanted the feedback of the Commission.

Some of it was long. They understood that it would be reviewed, and the Commission would give their feedback and suggestions for revisions in order to make it more presentable. The information would be presented in the form of markers and displays at the park.

The Association had also given the Commission a file of displays of various historical items across the Charleston area to show examples for information displays.

They understood that it would cost money to display the historical information. They had discussed that with Mayor Tecklenburg and the project manager for the Park, Ms. Beth Brownlee. The Association had a meeting with Ms. Brownlee and other Parks officials on the 14th of June to talk about the financial part of the displays. They had been told that the park had been budgeted, and there was no separate budget for the historical information. They would look at what was left from the construction of the park, and that would be available for their use.

They had discussed amongst themselves ways they might have been able to raise funds should the need arise. They could reach out to those in their community, friends of their community, and

former residents of their community to raise funds. They did need to know exactly how much they would have to raise, if anything.

She thanked Ms. Rebecca Hopkins in Neighborhood Services for putting the historical information and pictures in a viewable format.

The Carr-Richardson Park was named for Thomas Tobias Carr, the last mayor of the town of Maryville, and Mr. Clement Richardson, who was the first president and founder of the Neighborhood Association.

If the Commission had any questions, they would be happy to answer.

Chair Greene said it was great to see Maryville getting its due attention. He said there was a recent book that had come out on Maryville, the Preservation Society carried it, *Maryville, the Audacity of a People* by Diane Hamilton. She was in the meeting room, as well. He thanked the Neighborhood Association for the information and the presentation.

Because they did not know the final format and final word length, if they approved everything at the meeting, they would doubtless have to come back and change it at some point. He suggested possibly proceeding by giving recommendations as to what do to next. They did not know how many words there would be. They often struggled with getting as much information to the public with as few words as possible, because words equaled money.

When they changed the Judge Fields plaque, they had suggested putting the important information first. That plaque would be several hundred or a thousand dollars to do, and only had 216 words. Each side of the plaques they had just talked about had about 100 words. The plaque they had previously approved for the Work House only had 360 words. He had gone through the documents given to the Commission, and the Thomas Tobias Carr, Sr. portion had 428 words. Mr. Richardson, Sr., had 450 words. Mary Matthews Just had over 1,000 words. Mary Ellen Green Carr had 370 words, which was close to a workable number. The History of Maryville itself had approximately 820 words.

He said he hated the fact that money was going to determine how many words got put out. There were numbers of ways to proceed. The City could do bronze plaques, they could do paint on wood. His thought as to how the Commission ought to proceed was that they could give suggestions on how to resubmit so that when the City did come up with the format, they would have a good idea of what they would be going with, so that they could streamline it and be ready to go when the funds became available.

Councilmember Shahid asked if they were also erecting a monument to Dr. Just.

Chair Greene said they were.

Councilmember Shahid asked if that would be a part of the same funding package.

Councilmember Waring, from the audience, said that it would.

Councilmember Shahid asked Councilmember Waring to come and speak. He said himself, Councilmember Waring, and Councilmember Sakran all had parts of Maryville-Ashleyville, so they were all involved in the process.

Councilmember Waring said he wanted to thank everybody who had been working with the City on the project.

He expressed that Maryville-Ashleyville's history was important, and that one way they could present the information was digitally through screens, especially on the interior. It was obviously not viable outside. The problem was paying for it. They were going to work with the Mayor and City Council to get the money.

In terms of a waterfront park, the area had the absolute best view of Charles Towne Landing unless you were in Charles Towne Landing. It was straight across and had a panoramic view. There was a lot of history there. They had not appropriated the funding. If they knew what they wanted to do, then they could get close to the funding needed for it.

Chair Greene said that was comforting to hear.

Ms. Hamilton said she had spent 12 years researching her neighborhood. She said the park was more than just a traditional park. They were looking at it not only as an opportunity for the residents, but also for the entire Charleston area. They were trying to add to the history of Charleston, and they also wanted to make their history known outside of their immediate area. It was not just a park, but a way to preserve their history and pass it on to the future.

They originally envisioned that visitors could go to the front of the building and be able to learn something and see the connection between Maryville and Charleston. They also wanted the interior to have learning opportunities. She liked the idea of digital technology. She asked the Commission to look beyond it being just a park.

Ms. Jacobs said she wanted to speak about the technical aspects of signage. She had visited a museum in St. Augustine called Lincolnton Cultural Center. There, they had a digital exhibit like the one Councilmember Waring had spoken of. It was not limited by words.

She had also been working closely with the IAAM on some Settlement Community exhibits, and there were no word limits to parts of the exhibit at all, though it depended on what part you were in. With physical signs, it depended on the signage. They had been working with the Greenway, and some of the signs there were not as restrictive as an engraved plaque was.

She asked the Commission to vet the historical information instead of crafting words. That way, when it came time for them to choose the type of signage, they would know they had accurate information and could fit the signage they chose. They were not yet at the point where they needed micro-editing.

Ms. Richardson-Latham said Clement Richardson had been her father. She said the history on the signage needed to come from the family. She said, "Nobody knew more about daddy than we did." She wanted input on the final versions. She loved everything that had been done so far. Chair Greene said they all agreed that the residents from Maryville-Ashleyville were the experts.

Ms. Higgins said the historical information had been written up by the family members. They tried to capture the history from those who knew most about it and were dedicated to the particular subjects.

Chair Greene said he thought that the Commission could be editors to some extent due to their experience with getting information onto signs for public view. He agreed with Ms. Hamilton that the story of Maryville needed to be told to the world, and not just to the people of Maryville. He said some things that were obvious to the residents were left unsaid, but would not be obvious to outsiders. For instance, the most obvious thing that was not stated was that the Town probably lost its charter because it was a Black community. That was one thing the Commission did. They

basically had to sit down and make the history clear to someone who may not even have known what the Civil War was. You had to present it as though the reader knew nothing.

He said Maryville was truly a story of race. He did not feel that was present enough in the text. The most important thing had to be in the first paragraph. They often assumed that people were not going to read the full text. If people only read the first paragraph, they would get the summation of the history.

There was a wealth of information from the families. However, he felt there needed to be a uniform voice, so that after all the information was compiled, someone could go through and fix them. Some were in the past tense, and some were in the present tense. Some even had tense changes within the same document. He thought the content was wonderful, but what the Commission could do was shape it so that the most obvious things were brought forward.

Dr. Frasier said he was very happy to see that kind of effort by African-American people in an African-American community moving forward to tell the story of how they caused that town to grow, and all of the travails it had to go through in order to grow and to persist. Those things needed to be known.

He hoped they would highlight the work of Ernest Everett Just. Dr. Just was not an ordinary scientist. He was often referred to as a god of science or an Apollo of science. He was a founder of cell biology, a whole scientific discipline, which the world had benefitted from. To know that had started in Maryville could help a lot of young people decide that they wanted to be scientists, that they wanted to know more, rather than sitting around or doing destructive things. The only way they could benefit from that story was if they told them.

Ms. Mack said she thought the project was a wonderful endeavor. She was in the business of exhibitions and displays, and said she encouraged having the information make the point as quickly as possible on each of the plaques.

She asked if the City had considered the possibility of contracting with an exhibits designer. There had to be cohesion. If there was the opportunity for digital, that was the person the go to.

Ms. Higgins said Mr. Jason Kronsberg had mentioned that. They would hopefully talk more about it on June 14. They were resources the City had used in the past and would be available to them.

Ms. Mack said she would really encourage it, partly because it provided an outside eye. Much like Chair Greene had been talking about, it all had to be written for the person who knew nothing, not even where they were located.

Ms. Higgins said that she had been told that a person 50 years in the future needed to be able to understand what they wrote.

Ms. Mack said that was exactly correct.

Ms. Higgins asked for a recommendation on word count.

Ms. Mack said she would not worry about that until they determined where the plaques would be and how they were going to be displayed, both interior and exterior, because the two had to make sense with each other. On top of that, there had to be wayfinders, because you wanted to be able to tell your story in a succinct manner. If they wanted people to come into the exhibit from the back or the side, they had to account for that. An exhibits designer could do that.

Chair Greene said they should lead with the story of Maryville. The Commission was often in the business of trying to save words. Since so many of the people were related, he recommended not repeating information over multiple plaques.

He said in the current document, sometimes only a last name was given and not a first name. Some things were in quotes, but without citations of where the quotes were from. Those were small editorial things that if they could get them figured out before it came time to set up the exhibits, it would go more smoothly. If something wasn't germane to the topic, it should have been removed. It was terrible that so much of it was so interesting, but his suggestion was to focus on the community, and the difference between the two sides of the community. It was a story of race and of African-Americans achieving something wonderful in a terrible environment. They were not there to pull punches; they were there to tell the truth.

He reiterated Ms. Mack's suggestion of finding an exhibit designer to help them.

Councilmember Shahid said that those who hadn't seen the park ought to go and see it. It was under construction. Higgins Pier was near there, they had Charles Towne Landing, and in between all of those would be a new County Park that had been in the works for several years. So, the corridor of piers, landings, and parks along Old Town Road would change the complexity of West Ashley significantly.

The facility would be used not just for kids to come to play. It was a park. It would be a venue which he suspected would be visited by many people for different types of events. It was a great opportunity to inform the wider community. It was a work in progress. He asked how long it would be until it was fully constructed.

Councilmember Waring said it would supposedly be finished in August. He said Ms. Mack was correct in regard to her comments on how to tell the story to visitors. There would be a walking trail, and not everyone would necessarily enter at the same point. He said it would be great if the Commission could get a copy of the site plan between then and the next meeting.

He, Ms. Hamilton, and Ms. Jacobs had spoken about the possibility of a historic corridor encompassing the former Town of Maryville, Ashley Plantation, and Charles Towne Landing. There was a lot of history there in the span of less than a mile. A little bit further back was the old German internment camp. A historic corridor on St. Andrews Blvd. was another project the Commission could look at.

Chair Greene asked the guests from Maryville-Ashleyville if they had any specific questions.

Ms. Higgins said they had answered many of their questions, and they would follow the recommendations.

Mr. Theiling asked if the Commission would be waiting on the neighborhood, or the other way around.

Chair Greene said the Commission would be waiting on the neighborhood to implement their suggestions and have the meeting on June 14 to get a sense of the formats that would be used, and then they would come back with a more streamlined version so that not a lot of editing would be needed.

Ms. Mack said that, as Councilmember Waring mentioned, it would be helpful to have an actual layout of where the signs would be on the site so there was no confusion.

Chair Greene said City staff and consultants were there to help with that.

On a motion of Chair Harlan Greene, seconded by Angela Mack, the Commission voted unanimously to accept the information and applaud the residents of the Maryville-Ashleyville Community and to say that the Commission was there to help in any way to get the project done as speedily, as historically accurate, and as user-friendly as possible.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:06 p.m.

Philip Clapper
Clerk of Council's Office