



AFRICAN BURYING GROUND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Monday, October 19, 2020

2:30 p.m.

Meeting by Remote Zoom Conference

Members Present: Vernis Jackson, Valerie Cunningham, Dr. Jan Nisbet, Councilor Petra Huda, and Bill "Towny" Manfull

Staff Present: Suzanne M. Woodland, Deputy City Attorney
Nancy Carmer, Economic Development Program Manager
Corin Hallowell, Parks Foreman
Stephanie Secord, Public Information Officer

Guests: Dr. Meghan Howey, Dr. Amy Michaels, Dr. Samantha Blatt, JerriAnne Boggis, Dr. Kathleen Wheeler, and Ellen Marlatt

Acting Chair Woodland opened the meeting and read the following statement after which committee members and invited guests introduced themselves:

Per NH RSA 91-A:2, III (b) the Chair has declared the COVID-19 outbreak an emergency and has waived the requirement that a quorum be physically present at the meeting pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8, as extended by Executive Order 2020-18, and Emergency Order #12, Section 3. Members will be participating remotely and will identify their location and any person present with them at that location. All votes will be by roll call.

1. Acceptance of draft minutes of November 25th, 2019 meeting

On a motion by Dr. Nisbet, seconded by Councilor Huda, the minutes of the November 25, 2019 meeting were unanimously approved via roll call vote.

2. Memorial Park – Maintenance Update

City Parks Foreman Corin Hallowell reported that the African Burying Ground Memorial Park has undergone routine maintenance this year including re-adherence of the colored tiles that separated from the surface of the Sankofa vault cover. A cold weather adhesive was employed to better suit the New England climate. Looking ahead to next spring, the City has engaged Daedalus Conservation from Watertown, MA to resurface the figures in the park. Daedalus specializes in restoration and conservation of monuments.

3. Update and discussion of research opportunities

Acting Chair Woodland provided the following review and update of the research on the remains from the burying ground.

- Earlier this year the City contracted with Othram, Inc., in partnership with Redgrave Research for combined DNA sequencing and forensic genealogy research on two pulverized tooth samples (samples had been pulverized as part of early research following discovery of the burial site).
- The Othram analysis revealed that the pulverized material was not viable for extracting sufficient DNA for sequencing.
- Othram is willing for the City to resubmit two additional samples for analysis of viability, waiving any additional project fee.
- The Committee now needs to determine how to proceed on this offer; namely whether to submit samples from the burials that are more intact.

Archeologists Dr. Michaels and Dr. Blatt reported the following on the dental metrics of the eight teeth evaluated:

- The eight teeth have been measured and dental metrics performed.
- The dental calculus analysis is underway and will require several more weeks to complete the requisite acid washes and analyses.
- Results will help inform on the diet of the individuals whose teeth were studied.
- It will be several more weeks before analysis completion.

Dr. Michaels reported that she was not surprised that DNA sequencing was not possible on the pulverized samples analyzed by Othram and advised that sending a complete tooth would likely yield better results. Further, if the committee is contemplating sending intact teeth for destructive testing, it is advisable to order the most testing analysis possible to gather the maximum information from the material. Dr. Howey agreed and suggested that the Committee may wish to reserve some of the material in anticipation of future advances in technology which will likely reveal much more information about the individuals than is currently possible.

The archaeologists will update and finalize a document that summarizes results of the dental metrics analyses. The Chair will provide copies for the Committee.

4. Curation

The City staff will be working on a draft curation agreement that will enable the burying ground remains to be moved from the care of Independent Archeologist Consultants' to UNH. Among other criteria, the agreement will need to address the location and conditions of storage. Copies of the draft agreement will be sent to Committee members for further discussion and action at the next meeting.

5. African Burying Ground Trust

There is currently approximately \$28,000 in the Trust. Attorney Woodland asked if the Committee wished to undertake a fundraising effort to add to the Trust resources for other research opportunities and park improvements. Ms. Secord, who was involved in the fundraising activities previously on behalf of the African Burying Ground Committee, shared details of the previous two-year fundraising effort which included development of a case statement, community education and engagement, grant and foundation funding applications, and private donor solicitation.

Ms. Jackson asked for an estimate of funding needed for park maintenance and stewardship. Councilor Huda asked for information on the accounting of the previous fundraising effort including revenues and expenses inclusive of in-kind services and costs. Staff will provide the available information to committee members for further discussion on a potential fundraising campaign.

Lastly, Ms. Cunningham asked if the names of students who created the tiles for the park are listed anywhere. Attorney Woodland responded that most the students were minors at the time of the work and, in order to release the names requires student/parent agreement. For this reason the names have not been publicly disclosed. Ms. Cunningham's wish was that the students be included in the historical record as participants in the creation of the Memorial.

6. Other business

Committee Chair.

Attorney Woodland has been serving as Acting Committee Chair since 2019. She asked if any members of the group wanted to replace her and serve as chair to which members indicated satisfaction with her role. No motion was made for another to serve as Chair.

Committee Membership: Attorney Woodland asked for input on expanding Committee membership. She reported that the Mayor would likely be amenable to expanding the Committee. As a Blue Ribbon Committee, membership is not limited to Portsmouth residents only, but the Committee must include some members of the descendent community. With Committee consensus to expand the group, Ms. Boggis and Ms. Wheeler stated their Interest in serving on a larger Committee. The group should think about other members of the descendent community that might be interested in serving so that they can be invited to apply.

Dr. Nisbet made a motion, seconded by Councilor Huda, to recommend to the Mayor that the Committee be expanded by potentially two but no more than four members. The motion was unanimously approved via roll call vote. Attorney Woodland will send a committee application to Ms. Boggis and Ms. Wheeler. Members should contact Attorney Woodland to suggest other potential committee members.

Recording Committee Meetings

Attorney Woodland advised that all the Committee's meeting agendas and minutes are public and posted online. To date, meetings have not been broadcast or recorded. She polled the Committee on this practice going forward. There is a sensitivity around the research findings and it is important to be diligent in reporting the findings and interpretation of the results. Members initially expressed no objection to recording the meetings, but Ms. Cunningham asked if a Committee spokesperson could be designated to respond to press and other inquiries regarding research findings and other Committee efforts. Ms. Woodland offered to handle inquiries on behalf of the Committee.

Following a motion by Ms. Jackson, seconded by Councilor Huda to record future meetings, discussion ensued on the sensitivity of publicly discussing details of the remains. Ms. Cunningham said that there may be questions or problems with certain religious or cultural norms or asking who gives the Committee the right to make decisions on these matters. Options for recording the meetings for general committee

business with a separate non-public meeting for discussion of genetic findings was discussed. Ultimately, the Committee felt the need to further discuss recording and broadcasting the meetings so Ms. Jackson agreed to withdraw her motion. Given the complexities of the issues involved, committee consensus was to put the topic on the next meeting agenda for further discussion.

7. Next Steps/Next Meeting Date

The Chair will circulate a poll to determine the next meeting date as well as explore the possibility of a video or zoom meeting for members to observe future lab work. She will also circulate/recirculate the following documents discussed during the meeting

- Summary of Research Opportunities distributed to the Committee in 2019 prepared by Dr. Howey and Dr. Michaels
- Summary of dental metrics and ongoing dental calculus work discussed in brief at the October 2020 meeting once the document is finalized.
- List of remains and materials available for further analysis
- A draft curation agreement
- Copy of original fundraising case study, donor list and expense accounting.
- Application for Blue Ribbon Committee Appointment for those interested in joining the committee.

8. Adjourn

Councilor Huda made the motion, seconded by Mr. Manfull, to adjourn the meeting. Motion was unanimously approved via roll call vote.

Prepared by Nancy Carmer