



## Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

December 19, 2019, at 1:00 p.m.

Senate Committee Room A, Pocahontas Building

[mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov)

The Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission) met in Richmond with Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, chair, presiding.<sup>1</sup> The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks followed by presentations and discussion. Senator McClellan noted that two of the Commission's legislative members, Senator Rosalyn R. Dance and Delegate Robert M. Thomas, Jr., will not be returning to their seats in 2020 and thanked them for their service to the Commission. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's website](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov).

### Emancipation and Freedom Monument

*Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, Chair; Joe Damico, Director, Department of General Services; Amigo Wade, Deputy Director, Division of Legislative Services*

Several matters relating to the Emancipation and Freedom Monument (the Monument), dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the fight for freedom, were discussed by the Commission. Work is currently in progress on the Monument, which will be installed on Brown's Island in Richmond in 2020.

### Fundraising Events

Senator McClellan informed members of two events in January to promote and raise funds for the Monument. On Saturday, January 18, 2020, the Commission will hold a fundraiser at Virginia Union University that will include a reception and a screening of the HBCU Storytellers Project's documentary *400 Years Later...free-ish*, which features discussion of the Monument and footage of the Monument's maquettes and its production at the foundry. A second event will take place in Harrisonburg on Sunday, January 19, 2020, and will also feature a screening of the documentary.

### Site Progress

Amigo Wade, Deputy Director of the Division of Legislative Services, updated the Commission on the Monument's progress. At the Commission's August 19, 2019, meeting, members

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<sup>1</sup> **Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Senator Mamie E. Locke (vice-chair), Delegate Betsy B. Carr, Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Delegate Robert M. Thomas, Jr., Delegate Thomas C. Wright, Jr., Reverend Ricardo Brown, Dr. Ronald L. Carey, the Honorable William C. Cleveland, Dr. Matthew S. Gibson, Kirk T. Schroder, J.D., Ph.D.

**Members Absent:** Senator Rosalyn R. Dance, Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr., Delegate C. Matthew Fariss, the Honorable William C. Cleveland, LTC Wesley H. Motley, Jr., Juanita Owens Wyatt

authorized the chair to approve an amended contract with the Monument's artist, Thomas Jay Warren, accounting for changes to the Monument's budget and timeline necessitated by relocation of the Monument's site on Brown's Island. The amended contract, signed and effective December 2, 2019, increases the project's budget by \$96,580 and extends the timeline for completion by six months. Upon execution of the amended contract, the Commission processed a payment of \$48,290 to the artist, due upon signing. A final installment of \$303,290 will be due upon completion of the Monument.

Joe Damico, Director of the Department of General Services (DGS), informed members of final steps to be taken by the DGS prior to the beginning of construction at the site on Brown's Island. Finalization of the transfer of the site property from the City of Richmond to the Commonwealth is still pending, due to necessary revisions and re-review of the transfer documents to account for the site change. The property transfer also includes an access easement, which will need to be under the Commonwealth's ownership in order for the contractor to access the site.

Accounting for DGS's period of due diligence and completion of an environmental investigation, construction on the Monument's site will likely begin in February 2020, with a tentative May or June 2020 completion date for the Monument.

### *Fundraising Progress*

The Commission has several grant proposals pending to raise the remaining funds needed to complete the Monument. Dr. Matthew Gibson, Executive Director of Virginia Humanities, is working with several organizations that have shown interest in the project.

### **Virginia Union University Community Leaders Breakfast**

Members of the Commission voted to purchase a 10-seat table for \$2,000 at the Virginia Union University Community Leaders Breakfast on Friday, January 17, 2020. The Commission annually purchases a table for members to support and attend the breakfast. A clip of the documentary *400 Years Later...free-ish* will be shown at the breakfast to promote the Emancipation and Freedom Monument and the fundraising event at Virginia Union University that will take place the following day.

### **Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of Ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment**

March 30, 2020, will mark the 150th anniversary of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The Commission voted to put forth a resolution in the 2020 Session of the General Assembly commemorating the anniversary. Senator McClellan will patron the resolution in the Senate and Delegate Betsy B. Carr will patron the resolution in the House of Delegates.

The Commission is also planning a panel discussion at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture on March 30, 2020, to commemorate the anniversary. The museum has agreed to extend its current exhibition, *Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality*, in order for the exhibition to be open when the program takes place.

### **250th Anniversary of the Establishment of the United States**

Senator McClellan informed members that she has been asked to submit a resolution in the 2020 Session regarding the creation of a commission to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the United States, and she is aware that other members may be submitting



similar resolutions. Senator McClellan asked members if the Commission would want a role in the creation of any such commission to ensure that a full range of historical contributions are addressed.

Members voted to authorize the chair, on behalf of the Commission, to work to ensure that any resolution or legislation regarding creation of a commission to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the establishment of the United States is inclusive of a full range of historical contributions.

### **History of Lynching Work Group**

In 2019, members of the Commission and the History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group (the Work Group) were present at several events recognizing the lives of lynching victims in localities around Virginia. In Loudoun County, on March 14, a community dialogue was hosted to discuss the placement of historical markers at the sites of the lynchings of Page Wallace, Orion Anderson, and Charles Craven. On June 19, the first of these memorials was dedicated, commemorating the life of Orion Anderson, who was lynched in 1889 at age 14. In Charles City County, on April 7, the first Virginia Department of Historic Resources historic marker to memorialize the site of a lynching was unveiled, dedicated to Isaac Brandon, who was lynched on April 6, 1892. In Albemarle County, on July 12, a historic marker dedicated to John Henry James, lynched on July 12, 1898, in Charlottesville, was unveiled as part of the Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project. These events were organized locally within each community.

On September 16, 2019, the Work Group held a program organized by Dr. Gianluca De Fazio at James Madison University. The program included remarks and discussion on the history of lynching in Harrisonburg and in Virginia and focused specifically on Charlotte Harris, who was lynched on March 6, 1878, in Rockingham County. The Work Group plans to host more programs in different regions of the state in 2020.

### **Other Business**

Senator McClellan asked members to consider for discussion at the Commission's next meeting whether the Commission should arrange programming in 2020 focusing on African American members of the women's suffrage movement. The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Kirk T. Schroder, J.D., Ph.D., asked if any updates were available on an unfinished *Brown v. Board of Education* documentary that the Commission supported during the 50th anniversary commemoration of the case. The project was never completed, but the Commission possesses the rights to the documentary. Staff will research whether any components of the documentary still exist and are available to the Commission.

Dr. Ronald Carey asked whether the work of the Commission over past decades is archived and accessible. Senator McClellan noted that much of the Commission's work is available on its website, including work relating the Emancipation and Freedom Monument, the African American Legislators Database, and the King in Virginia Project. Senator McClellan and Commission staff have also retained physical documents and materials dating back to the Commission's creation in 1992.



## Next Meeting

The Commission tentatively planned to meet next in April 2020.

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For more information, see the [Commission's website](#) or contact the Division of Legislative Services staff:

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