



CITY OF BLOOMINGTON
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION COMMISSION

Tuesday December 14, 2021

The meeting began at 5:00 p.m. via Zoom call

Commission Members: Jess Davis, Gloria Howell, Lily Kleinlein, Treon McClendon, James Sanders

Staff: Michael Shermis

Associates and Guests: Daniel Baron, Dan Enslow, Jordan Shifriss

Public Comments (non-MLK Commissioners): James moved public comment to the start of the meeting since there were guests to present to the group. Jordan Shifriss and Daniel Baron were there as part of Congregation Beth Shalom and Noah's Ark. They've been looking for a way to be more active in social justice and racial equality initiatives and in speaking with local community member Liz Mitchell, they were given the idea that rather than always asking Black leaders to give speeches and do the work, they could consider an event in which white people address their own journey through America's racism. Jordan clarified and asked the Commission if it would be worthwhile or appropriate to have an event in which a panel of speakers address white people's journey in undoing racism. Here were Commissioner's responses:

- James and other Commissioners expressed that the idea may need to be vetted more and brought to the Commission as a proposal to review.
- Jess noted that her impression is that they are simply looking to filter this idea through the Commission before moving forward, and cautioned that sometimes, while well-intentioned, this type of work could create a white echo chamber in which only white voices are heard and implicit bias is never uncovered.
- Lily noted that in the Black History Mobile Museum this was all mentioned—that racism is actually a white problem/white history and it is unfair to pin it as Black history. Jordan said he would like to speak to Liz to clarify what she meant with her suggestion.
- Gloria noted that she would caution any group from creating an entire initiative or event based on one comment from one person, and suggested that they seek out the experience and opinions of more Black people before diving into this idea. She thanked them for coming to our group to bounce their ideas, and said that she understands that Liz may have simply meant that Black people are always asked to do the work of undoing racism, especially around Black History Month, but she would personally like to celebrate Black History versus talk to white people about how they deal with racism or are working to be an ally. She said that even when presented with the best of intentions, it may not always be taken that way.
- Treon added that while he understands what they want to do, doing it during Black History Month would come off as somewhat selfish because it is taking Black History through a white experience. He challenged them to dig deeper into the "why" and purpose of such an event. He suggested attending and supporting Black led movements and events during that month.

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- James echoed these thoughts regarding Black History Month and said that he feels the idea needs to be vetted more, saying that people of color have been taught how white people have dealt with racism but those stories outweigh the stories of Black experience. Daniel said he understands and is mostly looking for ways for the Congregation Beth Shalom Racial Task Force to take action around social justice, criminal justice, housing, and education and asked for suggestions on who they could turn to for better reflection and being allies. Jordan said they would like to put together some sort of presentation or product, documented in a way that the community can reflect and grow over time. Jess suggested they look into groups that are already working in these areas and taking on roles of service rather than leadership. Dan Eslow joined the meeting and noted that the City's Racial Task Force is starting a book study, open to the public, and this may be a way to begin.

Approval of Minutes: Commissioners reviewed the previous meeting minutes via email. Gloria made a motion to approve the minutes from November, Treon seconded. All approved.

Staff Liaison Report: Michael noted that he will keep the Commissioners updated regarding virtual versus in-person meetings once a determination is made. He sent a flyer and social media post to distribute for the upcoming events. All other updates below.

Old Business:

- A. MLK Program:** Michael shared an updated program. Several pieces needed to be finalized, including determining the emcee. James is willing to serve as emcee but is open to other voices. Treon agreed he could emcee this year. Michael also said we need someone to recognize the volunteers, and Gloria offered. The next item to decide is what songs will be used to open and close the event. We discussed the various songs used in the past, and all present preferred to omit We Shall Overcome and Lift Every Voice and Sing. Several commissioners noted that they felt that We Shall Overcome can feel like a romanticization of progress and the end of racism, and somewhat disregards all of the hard work that is yet to be done, often highlighted in the rousing keynote speech given right before the final song. James and Gloria felt that there would be updated songs that could be more appropriate for the tone of today's social justice and equality work. All suggested that in the library of songs the AACE can perform there would be a couple songs that are a great fit for this year, and several Commissioners noted that new songs could give the event more of an upbeat and activating start and finish. Michael said that this year it would be a good idea to put effort into someone from the Islamic Center for the closing words, a group we have not had speak in years if ever. Dan had suggestions and contacts to email to Michael.
- B. MLK 2022 Fund Development:** Michael said that donations have been really high this year, currently at \$11,250. So far, \$4,500 has been collected from the pledges. All media sponsors have ideas for being more involved and active this year and we have several groups tabling including NAACP and WFHB. Cardinal Stage donated 2 sets of tickets for a drawing for those to fill out the evaluation. James asked when we may be able to return to funding

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service projects. Michael said that it is looking like next year federal funding for service projects might return, and we will also have a year under our belt of the current initiative of training for the curriculum and outreach, leaving more time to focus on service projects.

- C. Curriculum Development and Volunteer Recruitment:** James asked if Commissioners need to fill out the volunteer form, and Michael said yes, if commission members are willing to be a facilitator they should fill out the form. Jess said that Michel is handling volunteer recruitment and that the lessons are done, except that MCCSC gave feedback and are now giving a whole second review of the amended curriculum. The timeline for them to be included this year is closing quickly. The rest of the schools have lesson plans and a schedule of when the lessons will be recorded. Gloria and Jess are working on the training videos to be recorded in early January. Early January they will also train volunteers using these videos and other in-person elements. Michael said there are already 12 presentations schedule on MLK Day at The Project School and 2 at Harmony after MLK Day. Some of the volunteers will have a long day, 4 hours of teams of 2 for various grade levels. Jess noted that we don't have enough volunteers but we have had a good representation of Black people in the volunteer group so far. Lily suggested that this may be a great resource for Daniel and Jordan from the previous discussion, and Michael will follow up with them with details. Dan asked that the info be sent to him as well.

New Business:

- A. Legacy Award Nominees:** This year we had a robust slate of nominees for the award. Jim Sims, Tiana Iruoje and Jeanetta Nelms were all nominated. Michael and James spoke before the meeting about a best voting method on zoom. Commissioners sent their preference to Michael via private chat: 3 is the most preferred, 2 is middle, 1 is least preferred. Nominators spoke on those they nominated, and Commissioners also had the nomination forms via email in advance. All Commissioners and nominators spoke to how deserving all candidates are this year and how difficult it would be to choose. Jeanetta Nelms was the winner after an extremely close vote!
- B. Election:** Since there were only 4 Commissioners on the call, Michael said that we could push the vote back a month. Treon said that he will not be part of the Commission next year. James suggested we table the topic until January.

NAACP Update: Gloria updated that the next meeting will be in January, continuing with first Tuesdays at 6:30pm. They will do Black History Moments at the start of every meeting. She hopes that the membership will grow in the new year.

Commission on the Status of Black Males Update: James said that they are doing a hats/gloves drive for Fairview Elementary, are planning the Youth Summit in the spring, and continue to hold monthly dialogues with community leaders each month over zoom.

Announcements: None

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Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 6:17 pm.

Upcoming Meetings:

January 25, 5:00-6:00 pm, location TBD

February 22, 5:00-6:00 pm, location TBD

March 22, 5:00-6:00 pm, location TBD

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