



**COMMEMORATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES**

Boston City Hall Boston, MA, 02201

Held virtually via Zoom

**JULY 25, 2024**

**Commissioners Present:** Cedric Woods, Carolyn Goldstein, Lynn Smiledge, Alison Frazee, Kristen Lafferty, Faries Gray, Nat Sheidley, Noelle Trent, Lydia Lowe, Dory Klein, Kyera Singleton, Bob Allison, Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, Amanda Zettel, Kimberly Barzola, Suzanne Taylor, Eric Hanson-Plass, Joan Ilacqua, Giordana Mecagni, David Leonard, Joe Bagley, Chelsea Blanchard, Cyerrah Walker as Council President Ruthzee Louijeune Designee, Celia Richa, Rebecca Tomasovic, Imari K. Jeffries, Margaret Dyson, Chris Osgood, Angela Hedley-Mitchell

**Commissioners Absent:** Tatiana M.F. Cruz, Dave O'Donnell, Maureen Garceau, Liza Stearns, Senator Mike Rush, Juan Lopez, Juan Eusebio, Michael Creasey, Kara Elliott-Ortega, Collin Knight, Jean-Luc Pierite, Kenzie Bok, Konah Brownell/Jay Ash, Sam Tully-Chambers

**Staff Present:** Genesis Pimentel, Commemoration Commission Manager; Alex Meadow, Deputy Director of Partnerships

Press: Alison Pultinas

Public: Emerald Necklace Conservatory, Emily Reed, Ester Farah, Erin Baker

A full recording of the meeting is available on [boston.gov/commemoration-commission](https://boston.gov/commemoration-commission)

---

**SESSION BEGINS - 6:00 PM**

Genesis Pimentel welcomed attendees. Attendees introduced themselves.

**I. ORDER OF BUSINESS**

- a. Commissioner Amanda Zettel and Commissioner Jean-Luc Pierite were voted in as the co-chairs of the Commission.
- b. Commissioner Margaret Dyson made a motion to approve last month's meeting minutes. Commissioner Bob Allison seconded.
- c. The Legislation and Preservation Tools subcommittee: Commissioner Lydia Lowe discussed that the subcommittee has been inviting guest speakers for Article 80 Modernization. The subcommittee has identified that there is an understanding of what is needed: a citywide survey of historic resources with a cultural resource survey or other surveys under discussion with the City, so that preservation is prioritized. For Article 80, the subcommittee has identified the need to be an integral part of the Article 80 process. There have been discussions linking historic preservation and cultural preservation to work



against displacement. Another need that has been identified is more research into why historic preservation is good for the local economy.

- i. Genesis Pimentel added that a discussion with Article 80 that has come up is the transformation of IAGs into CATs, and ensuring that the change isn't in name only. Next steps include a letter or write up to the Planning Department about what the subcommittee would like to see implemented for Article 80.
  - ii. Commissioner Lydia Lowe added that Article 85 Reform has been the guiding force of this conversation, from trying to extend the delay period, to making it a more integrated part of the planning process, and addressing demolition by neglect through regulatory processes.
  - iii. Genesis Pimentel added that the LPT subcommittee has identified opportunities to collaborate with Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing, Office to Housing, Additional Dwelling Units, and more for deconstruction and other climate change mitigation strategies.
- d. The Timelines, Archives, and Curricula subcommittee: Commissioner Joe Bagley discussed that the subcommittee has been focused on compiling information to be inclusive of the City as a whole, and that there has been a realization that the TAC subcommittee needs to integrate with Events, Exhibits, and Trails. He included the discussions with Jim Vrabel who presented them his project, *When and Where in Boston*. Following this presentation, the question around how the City could host his website as a recommendation of the Commission has been raised. Vrabel updated the subcommittee chair, letting Commissioner Bagley know that he acquired funding but still needs a host.
- i. Commissioner Bagley presented the Commission with an early phase website with guides for the 250th and 400th, including trails, a timeline, events, and a landing page for people searching for archives.
  - ii. Commissioner Imari Jeffries praised the idea, as it is something the EET subcommittee had been wanting to articulate.
- e. The Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittee: Genesis Pimentel discussed that the subcommittee has repeatedly identified branding as a necessity. The subcommittee also discussed how to do civic engagement, identifying organizations with the capacity to execute projects, and seeing how to support funding efforts. Another project identified was a series of activations from April 2025 to August 2026, which can and should include events that already exist and events that are created.
- i. Commissioner Suzanne Taylor added that discussion about this being a citywide commemoration where every neighborhood has a reason to feel connected to both the 250th and 400th. She added that having a website with City branding is a good first step.



- f. Commissioner Joe Bagley introduced Jim Vrabel's project to the Commission, explaining that Vrabel needs a large institution like a university or like the City to host it. He explained that currently, Vrabel has private funding and his website is being run by Boston by Foot. The question raised was if the Commission wanted to vote to recommend that the City take the project on. The alternative provided was to invite Vrabel to a future commission meeting.
- i. Commissioner Bob Allison seconded Commissioner Bagley's enthusiasm, stating it would be a good opportunity for the City to engage with the project. Commissioner Allison mentioned that the Boston Public Library did engage with Vrabel prior, but that the project did not go through.
  - ii. Commissioner Taylor agreed with both.
  - iii. Commissioner David Leonard stated that he would love for Vrabel to give the commission a full update because there needs to be an understanding of the funding needs and implications.
  - iv. The TAC subcommittee members shared that they do not have a sense of the funding needs of Vrabel's project.
  - v. Commissioner Chris Osgood shared that he would be willing to connect with the City's Department of Innovation and Technology team to see what it would look like for the City to host something like this.
  - vi. There was a general consensus that the Commission would like to explore the database.
  - vii. Commissioner Giordana Mecagni asked if the commission should request a proposal from Vrabel, but Commissioner Bagley thought it would be too soon without understanding if his tech is compatible with the City and if there is no sense of funding.
  - viii. Commissioner Taylor proposed that DoIT meet with Vrabel to get a sense of compatibility.
  - ix. Commissioner Kristen Lafferty explained that Vrabel's website could use a different hosting service but still be given a boston.gov affiliated URL, depending on the database.
  - x. Commissioner Imari Jeffries asked if there was a sense that Vrabel's materials presented and articulated information that represented a shared idea of equity and inclusion.
    1. Commissioner Mecagni stated that while what Vrabel did is a labor love, ultimately there is concern that one person's perspective might not be inclusive of all groups in Boston, so the data would need to be audited.
    2. Commissioner Leonard stated that it could be a great starting point. Commissioner Bagley added that there was a hope to present something that is incomplete and then have feedback and community engagement.



3. Commissioner Noelle Trent stated there would need to be PR and strategy around how the database is launched because if it isn't presented correctly, then damage control would be immediately necessary. She appreciated the intentionality of having a product to present, but that this would need communication strategies and press engagement.
4. Commissioner Jeffries agreed, adding that this is an opportunity for a counterstory project, which requires parameters and potential chronological narrative frames. He continued by saying that if the Commission endorses a product, it needs the opportunity to contextualize it.

## II. ESTABLISHING FOUNDATIONS

- a. Genesis Pimentel reviewed the 6 month report required by the Commemoration Commission ordinance.
  - i. Commissioner Lowe asked how the commissioners could support advocacy around points made in the report, such as advocating for more capacity.
  - ii. Genesis Pimentel stated another write up for what the commission envisioned might be helpful to reach goals might be helpful.
    1. Commissioner Lynn Smiledge asked if that should be a formal communication between the Commission and the Mayor because there is uncertainty about who other authorities would be as far as budget is concerned.
  - iii. Commissioner Mecagni stated that the legislation is unclear about the 2 positions it discussed and wants to know how to push forward on getting more staff. She also stated that she would like the report to discuss the changes in the Office of Historic Preservation, including the leadership vacuums, as that has been a challenge for the Commission and for the staff.
  - iv. Commissioner Osgood identified two separate concerns arising, which include how the Commission is supported overall and how the recommendations of the Commission get implemented. He stated the Commission should identify the projects that have already been done, projects that the Commission wants to execute, and the budget needed. Osgood explained that this would help think through how to marshal resources.
    1. Commissioner Taylor asked if the report to the City Clerk could elevate the need for a budget because nothing can happen internally without one. She elaborated that the City needs to have a set budget to execute commemorative activities.



2. Genesis Pimentel added that Tourism, Sports, and Entertainment explained that it would be more digestible for the City if there were a plan that then needed a budget, but that Commissioners are unsure what planning is feasible without an understanding of available resources.
- b. Commissioner Chelsea Blanchard asked if there was a method to make a commission into an advisory group.
    - i. Genesis Pimentel explained the process.
    - ii. Commissioner Osgood stated that he believes there are a set of next conversations to be had, especially about external funding.
    - iii. Commissioner Trent flagged concern about what the implications would be when switching from a commission to an advisory group in terms of federal funding, since the federal legislation names Boston. She raised concerns about the optics of going from a commission to an advisory group and whether that would impact support and willingness to ask for funding from Representatives and Senators. She also raised concerns that the switch might make it seem like Boston is not taking commemoration so seriously.
    - iv. Commissioner Leonard stated that potentially there is a compromise where there are advisory groups doing the work and the Commission is a smaller group with oversight that still is the public face.
      1. Commissioner Dyson added that the Commission at-large might be able to remain a commission while the subcommittees become the advisory groups.
      2. Commissioner Trent added that there is work that needs to get done, so she understands we need to figure out how to do so in the most effective way, but there is concern that we will position ourselves as not being as prepared as other cities. She added that any attempt to reduce the Commission is going to be viewed as Boston not taking the 250th seriously and everyone on the call would be implicated. She added that Meet Boston predicted 37 million people coming during this time period, and there is legitimate concern that this will affect tourism dollars and the other economic interests of the City.
      3. Commissioner Taylor agreed, adding that organizations like Revolution 250 have already had events taking place, but that when you look at other cities, they are light years ahead of Boston.
    - v. Genesis Pimentel stated that she would pause on exploring advisory committees and pivot to how to best provide support so that the Commission can actually create a plan the City can execute.



- c. Chair Zettel transitioned into discussing best practices. She stated that the Commission is charged with developing and executing a plan to mark upcoming historical anniversaries, specifically the 250th and 400th. She added it would be helpful to establish a framework that shows us the historical anniversaries that are necessary to commemorate, identify what's missing, and then establish what the priorities are when seeking that out and commemorating it.
  - i. Commissioner Bagley stated that TAC has gotten to a point where they agree they need to create a timeline, list of events, vet it, and bring it to the Commission as soon as possible.
  - ii. Chair Zettel stated that there is an opportunity to flip the narrative and propose that the City of Boston create a technological framework that will house these types of materials, so that Vrabel's dataset is just one piece of the framework.

### III. PLANNING DISCUSSION

- a. Genesis Pimentel asked what the benchmarks and timelines will be for the planning process. She stated that if we are focused on the bare bones American Revolution 250th anniversary, then the first date for events to begin would be April 18, 2025.
  - i. Commissioner Allison stated that groups in different communities are already working to plan things, so while this commission has been discussing frameworks, other groups have been working without City support. He stated that the critical need is to get the Mayor on board. He added that the real reason the bicentennial happened was because Mayor White was proactive, and that things will be happening whether this Commission accomplishes anything or not.
  - ii. Genesis Pimentel agreed and stated that one thing to figure out is what the Commission is able to recommend that isn't being undertaken, what support can be offered to organizations such as recommending a grant program for organizations to apply to 250th funding. Pimentel stated that there is a time limit on when this has to begin.
  - iii. Chair Zettel added that Charlestown currently is at a point in their planning where they are looking for direction from the City in terms of funding, security, and operations, so potentially this Commission might be the structure to interact with that.
  - iv. Commissioner Jeffries stated that the EET subcommittee has been saying the same, and that it would be helpful for City folks to ask what would be helpful to know and what help do you need in order to get the green light for a project to become a City thing. Jeffries stated that the EET subcommittee continues to ask: What is the incentive for those already planning projects to put a City of Boston logo/stamp when they alone



raised the money to commemorate in their own neighborhood with their communities? He adds that not only is there no incentive, it isn't enough for the product of the Commission to be a compilation of projects other groups are putting on because that is easily Googleable. In addition, with 8 World Cup games and Tall Ships, Boston should be doing more than what it already highlights around Independence Day.

1. Commissioner Jeffries expressed that if Commission meetings are to continue the same way, then we have to stop meeting. If there has been a drop in attendance, Commissioner Jeffries argued, it is because the same conversations about capacity keep happening despite knowing what is needed. He added that someone should inform them of the budget and the timelines and City partners, otherwise people will keep going to meetings, doing work, and having that be stalled.
  2. He added that communities of color are raising money and planning events, and there is uncertainty about asking them to add a City of Boston logo to their labor and community building.
- v. Commissioner Bagley discussed the timelines: one being the FY25 budget that was passed that goes through June 31, and if there is any option for funding anything that might happen before then because that is inclusive of the siege of Boston. The other timeline being FY26 being another budget year and what funding could be available there. He added that the latest the plan/recommendation could come is fall this year.
- vi. Commissioner Trent echoed frustrations and added that by the time the Commission was formed, we were behind on budget discussions meaning that the Commission could not have made an informed decision and recommendation for the FY25 budget, and the biggest issue is there is no clear idea of what the City of Boston is committed to spending on the 250th. She stated that she has been convening with other states on both the state and city level and heard the lowest number committed was \$25 million, so if the Commission needs to recommend that the City talk to corporate sponsors, then we say this is the money we need to execute.
1. Commissioner Trent added that this report that goes to the clerk will talk about successes and challenges, but that the Commission was put at a disadvantage when it was convened and that there was no way the commissioners would be able to do the thought work in all the different ways it was prescribed. In addition, the way the commissioners were made to convene to get an adequate budget to do what is being done at the level of peer institutions would also not be possible.



2. Commissioner Trent stated that now we need, over the next two years, about \$50 million dollars because it is going to go back into the City since these are major economic drivers. She added that if the Commission wants to recommend \$10 million in grants or X amount for the office to execute a project, it should do so because relying on busy people to do the City's work for it is not going to work on a reduced timeline. She stated that there needs to be a time limit for the City to decide how it will operate. City Council, she added, needs to be told that they dragged their feet and there is no time to have additional conversations if we want Boston to be competitive for 250. If no one can rely on the official City budget, then there needs to be a supplemental budget passed, corporate partners need to be identified since Boston didn't set the money aside when it should have. The City, she stated, needs to invest in quality branding.
- vii. Commissioner Osgood responded stating that he is happy to work with Genesis Pimentel and think about what can be done in the context of the FY25 budget, how to position the Commission for the FY26 budget, and unlock CPA funding potentially. He stated that identifying what the Commission would most want to invest in, including defining areas of prioritization, will help. He added that beyond funding, understanding how the Commission and City can be helpful in amplifying, messaging, and coordinating for important events, ideas, and initiatives.
- b. Commissioner Blanchard asked if the Commission could vote to ask for funding from the City Treasury or Budget department.
  - i. Genesis Pimentel responded that this recommendation could be included in the report and that there is opportunity to check in with the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion as well as Tourism, Sports, and Entertainment.
  - ii. Commissioner Lowe agreed and asked if the Commission could write a letter to the Mayor, so that there is a political push for the private sector in addition to City funding allocation.

#### **IV. OPEN DISCUSSION**

- a. Commissioner Bagley stated that he felt the best function for this Commission would be making recommendations for allocation of funds as he would be okay with other departments planning events, but he knows that those projects would need to be vetted through an inclusionary lens which this Commission would be good at, similar to CPA but for commemoration purposes.
- b. Commissioner Osgood stated he would be willing to think through what that could look like. He added that there are other allocation decisions being made associated with commemorative events and asked if this group was functioning





as an advisory body for those allocations. He stated that there is a need to define what is being asked for as the first step in the FY26 process.

- c. Commissioner Leonard stated there have been three significant material changes: a new Chief of the Environment, Energy, and Open Space cabinet, electing co-chairs for the Commission, and a written report that begins to articulate the things that are necessary for Boston to have a shot at successful commemoration. He stated the most important next step is going in front of City stakeholders and hearing from us within the next few weeks.

## V. TASKS TO ADVANCE/ASSIGNMENTS

- a. Genesis Pimentel will check-in with Commissioner Osgood and the new Chief of EEOS to identify what exactly the Commission can do, what it needs to be doing, and how the City needs to support it appropriately.
- b. Genesis Pimentel will review the report again and include what has been flagged by the Commissioners as needing to be put in.
- c. Genesis Pimentel will work to figure out if the next step is a letter to the Mayor.
- d. Commissioner Osgood identified questions to answers:
  - i. Is the timeline project something the City can host?
    - 1. Is it something the City should endorse?
    - 2. If yes, how do we roll that out?
  - ii. There is interest in the structure of the Commission, but also an interest in understanding what the options are for amending the structure of this body or the subcommittees.
  - iii. The third set of questions revolves around resources.
    - 1. Is CPA funding available and accessible to the Commission?
    - 2. How do we think about accessing funds over FY25 and prepare for FY26?
- e. Commissioner Dyson stated that there is a very fundamental budget question about internal budgets supporting the work of the Commission and a question around program budgets to deliver on the ideals and goals of the Commission.
  - i. She acknowledged that there is no ability to program without a budget, but no budget without a sense of programming.
  - ii. She will reach out to Genesis Pimentel to share documents on how the Bicentennial worked through and thought through this process.

## VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. There were no public comments.

## VII. ADJOURNMENT - 4:01 PM

- a. Chair Zettel made a motion to adjourn.
- b. Commissioner Allison seconded.