



Connecticut's America 250 Commission First Convening
Minutes

Date: Friday, November 18, 2022 | Location: Connecticut's Old State House

Attendees

Commission Members

Present commissioners listed in the meeting minutes.

CTH Staff

Aimee Cotton Bogush
Adrianna Chesnut
Mike Kemezis
Gregg Mangan
Susan Muro
Sheldyn Oliver
Cyndi Tolosa
Scott Wands

This meeting was livestreamed with the help of the actively anti-racist public relations firm, [The Narrative Project \(TNP\)](#).

The second half of this meeting was recorded by CT Humanities (CTH) due to not yet having had the Commission's consent during the first portion of the meeting. The recording picks up during the agenda item, "Taking AM250 to the People." You can access this video [here](#).

The meeting started at 10:11 am.

Connecticut's America 250 (CTAM250) Commission Chair (and Former Secretary of the State), the Hon. Denise W. Merrill, welcomed meeting attendees (CTAM250 Commission Members and CTH Staff) to the first convening of the CTAM250 Commission. Denise M. also gave warm greetings on the Governor's behalf as he was unable to attend this meeting.

There was great significance in holding the first convening at Connecticut's Old State House (OSH) located in downtown Hartford – home to the first written constitution in the American colonies, the Fundamental Orders. The OSH "served as one of Connecticut's state capitols from 1796 to 1878... and was declared one of the first National Historic Landmarks in 1960... now operat[ing] under a public/private partnership between the Connecticut General Assembly and the Connecticut Democracy Center."* The OSH is a powerful site where civics and history meet.

**To find out more about the history of the OSH and the programs that it oversees, please visit:*

[About - Connecticut's Old State House](#) and [Education – Connecticut's Old State House](#)

The first 35 minutes consisted of brief introductions made by each CTAM250 Commission Member. The CTAM250 Commission Members in attendance are as follows (Please note that members are listed in alphabetical order by last name alongside their organization/affiliation. This rule, however, does not apply to the Chair and Vice-chair of the Commission who are placed at the top of the list and in order by commission classification.):

CTAM250 Chair, Hon. Denise W. Merrill, Member of the Public
CTAM250 Vice-Chair, Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D., CT Humanities
Nicolas Angeli, Connecticut Democracy Center – Youth Leader
Stephen Armstrong, Connecticut State Department of Education
Anthony Champalimaud, Troutbeck – Member of the Public
Andrew Horowitz, Ph.D., Connecticut State Historian
Michael Johnson, Designee of Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation
Robert Kret, Connecticut Historical Society (CHS)
Catherine Labadia, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Douglas Lord, Connecticut Library Association (CLA)
Merle McGee, Everyday Democracy – Member of the Public
Deborah Schander, MLIS, JID, Connecticut State Librarian
Elizabeth Shapiro, Director of Arts, Preservation and Museums / Connecticut Office of the Arts
and State Historic Preservation Office / Department of Economic & Community Development
(DECD)
Jonathan Slifka, Department of Aging and Disability Services
Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of State Elect
Maisa Tisdale, Mary and Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community
Sally Whipple, Connecticut Democracy Center
Amrys O. Williams, Ph.D., Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO)

Members of the Commission who were unable to attend today's meeting, but who are very much looking forward to the future work to take place, are as follows:

Kathryn D'Amato, Designee of the Governor
Steven Hernández, Esq., The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
(CWCSEO)

Reflection: Commission Assembly

Mission/Charge

CTAM250 Chair, Denise M., reiterated the mission/charge of the CTAM250 Commission: “[T]o plan and coordinate activities... celebrating the 250th anniversary of the nation’s founding; and... enhance tourism, economic development, historic education and preservation, and outdoor recreation within the state; and... coordinate, engage, and liaise with the U.S.

Semiquincentennial Commission, and other local, county, and state commissions, as well as private and public organizations and partners... and... will develop, encourage, and execute an inclusive celebration, commemoration, and observance of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence through civic, cultural, and historical education events and programming; and... will promote the documentation, identification, and preservation of cultural and historic resources, including archives, buildings, landscapes, objects, and sites related to the semiquincentennial period.”

The above, as well as more detail regarding the CTAM250 commission, can be found in the Governor’s [Executive Order No. 22-2](#).

Because of the many different directions this anniversary can take the group, it will be important for this commission to keep focused on *Connecticut’s* place in the story as an original colony – emphasizing the power of place. It is also critical that the Commission honor the ideals of the period as they think about its continuity and resonance into the present and future – uplifting revolutionary ethos on behalf of everyone.

With 169 towns within Connecticut, it will be important for this commission to try to create unity amongst these communities in preparation for the AM250 anniversary; this commission will attempt to build bridges so that all participating individuals, organizations, etc. can work in conjunction with one another as opposed to inadvertently siloing themselves.

CTAM250 Chair, Denise M., shared a book suggestion, [American Nations by Colin Woodard](#), as a resource that helps to explain how disconnect develops amongst groups of people.

The Commission was reminded of its duties as members of a state-appointed commission and encouraged to read the [Public Officials and State Employees Guide to the Code of Ethics](#).

Commission Composition

In creating the composition of this commission, it is important to ensure there is representation across Connecticut’s state agencies. There is active intentionality to include tribal voices, as well as those from Black and Brown communities across Connecticut; however, there is more work to be done. As the Commission gets further into this process, there is the expectation that more voices and stories will be represented. While it is important that all stories are told, it is equally as important to make space for people to take the time to reckon with history – encouraging critical questions of reflections such as, “What was learned?” and “How will I move differently in this world as a result of what I’ve learned?”

It will be important to reflect the Commission’s definition of “inclusion” and develop a set of guiding principles as the Commission makes its way through this work.

CTH's Role

CTH will function as the administrator with CTH Staff supporting the implementation of goals and initiatives set by the Commission.

CTH will also function as the fundraiser – working to secure funding for this initiative.

CTH is looking to hire a CTAM250 Coordinator to help aggregate the logistical pieces of event coordination, etc.

*The state of Delaware recently posted a call for a coordinator. The CTAM250 Commission can use Delaware's [America 250 Coordinator job post](#) as a model.

AM250 National Landscape

CTH Director of Grants and Programs, Scott Wands, shared a [PowerPoint](#) with the group as he spoke to AM250 on a national scale via the lens of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) [Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial: Making History at 250](#). For more information from AASLH, click [here](#).

Taking CTAM250 to the People

Possible Outcomes

- Community Conversations – Invite communities to be directly involved with the CTAM250 planning process; this is a great way to start gathering information from these communities. Commission to send out a missive to all towns sharing the work that is taking place, and to ask if there is someone in their town who they would like to designate as point person in this project.
 - Try to find a way at the local level to coordinate with ancillary groups, i.e., artists and small business, as they are not necessarily always represented at town meetings, forums, etc. Want to make sure to capture as many voices and stories as possible.
 - The Planning Charrette Model was referenced – a very specified community-based tactic used for reaching out to many different organizations working towards a shared goal: [Public Participation Guide: Charrettes | US EPA](#). A specific date can be chosen, i.e., designating July 1, 2023 as the Charrette statewide conversation happening in every community with the Commission providing a guideline to each town on how to conduct this conversation effectively.
 - Libraries will provide a critical overlap as every town has a library. Libraries can host events such as those listed above as they have the rooms, the equipment, and follow compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), etc.
 - Community Colleges are also great venues to host meetings, events, etc., as they, too, are ADA compliant and have a “ready-made” audience for conversations happening at a local level.

It is important to think about ADA compliant venues – especially during the lead up for this type of anniversary. There is an inclination to want to host meetings in historic buildings relating to an historical event but it's important to remember that historical buildings weren't built to be ADA compliant and that if we are thinking about hosting meetings, events, etc., we want to try to be as inclusive as possible by surveying the spaces we use.

- Involve teachers to help brainstorm effective ways to engage students, as well as, find forums where students can share their own thoughts and ideas on how is best to engage students.
- Connect to the people through Tourism – Planning what campaigns look like that can support cultural tourism in Connecticut, but to also connect any tourism efforts with efforts happening in other states, and ultimately, at the national level.
- Involve art museums as they have many historical and contemporary collections – real opportunities to partner.
- Create a reading list for the public.

CTAM250 Resources/Logistics

Status of CTAM250 Website – There is a CTAM250 website that is up and running: [America 250 | CT \(ct250.org\)](http://America250|CT(ct250.org)). Currently listed is the Executive Order 22-2, as well as Governor Lamont’s press release, and the names of the commissioners. It will also list all recordings of CTAM250 meetings, agendas and meeting minutes, AASLH resources, etc.

- Possible listserv for those who want to be involved
- Possible newsletter to keep people apprised of progress
- Ensure the website is tested to meet accessibility standards

Status of CTAM250 Network – CTH is currently working with a networking platform tool that may be a good way to keep this group connected and in contact with one another. More to come.

Status of [CTH Resources](#) – Before the Pandemic, CTH, along with other Partner organizations, came together to start brainstorming around Connecticut’s part in the AM250 anniversary. This Excel Spreadsheet has tabs for Events, History Organizations and Literature that connect to the American Revolution. It is a working document that is meant to be added to as the Commission gets further into this process.

Timeline

The Commission shall further... [s]ubmit an action plan to the Governor and General Assembly by January 1, 2023, that outlines the Commission's goals, mission, and recommendations, and an annual report each subsequent year that includes any update on the action plan, implementation benchmarks, and related deadlines and schedules..." (Executive Order 22-2)

The Action Plan will include a timeline of activities, i.e., community conversations (if agreed upon), fundraising, the structure of subcommittees, etc. The Commission will not be running programs as much as providing support and helping to organize individuals and organizations already doing things in to recognize this anniversary.

**There may be a thirty-day grace period for submission.*

In terms of grantmaking, for projects hoping to be conducted during the anniversary year of 2026, planning needs to happen as early as 2024/2025.

The anniversary date is July 4, 2026.

The termination date of the Commission, as stated in Executive Order 22-2, is June 30, 2028.

There is a hope that the work that takes place within this Commission, and in communities across Connecticut, extends beyond the anniversary date. There is an opportunity to leave a legacy of inclusion beyond the time this anniversary takes place, i.e., when looking at museums, schools or public libraries, the Commission can work to strengthen their archives with information, presentations, or online exhibits that didn't exist before.

The work of this commission can be framed in a way that encompasses all of Connecticut's communities by asking participating individuals, organizations, etc. to provide introspection, reflection and reckoning around what this anniversary means to them, especially when it comes to the granting process, as it may be more effective to ask people to speak to how they view themes such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness rather than fixating on the specific date of 1776.

As the Commission helps to support other organizations plan their events, it will be important to be mindful to try to have organizations talk to one another to avoid competing events. It will be wonderful to create a timeline that can foster communal support across the state and have a comprehensive calendar.

Subcommittees

- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA)
Description: To ensure that inclusion, diversity, equity, and access are codified in the Commission's core principles and that the Commission carries this work into the future.
- Municipal Outreach (Communications)
Description: To focus efforts on reaching out to town representatives at the regional council level regarding the importance of town organization around the AM250 anniversary.
- Community Outreach (Events/Programs)
Description: To focus efforts on engaging with Connecticut's communities as they work to create community conversations. This work would take place after municipal outreach has been made via the Municipal Outreach Subcommittee. This subcommittee would also focus on creating a comprehensive calendar of events, etc.
- Tourism
Description: To integrate the tourism perspective into the goals and initiatives of the Commission.
- Education
Description: To focus on a broader conception of the word education and how to reach both public and private institutions of learning.
- Youth Council
Description: To focus efforts on reaching young audiences through various channels including social media, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, etc.
[Made By Us - Meeting Curiosity with Credibility \(historymadebyus.com\)](http://historymadebyus.com) – A possible resource when thinking about how to engage interested younger audiences.
- Development
Description: To fundraise/solicit both public and private funds.
- Governance
Description: To focus on the creation of bylaws and structure of the Commission.

All subcommittees to identify a chair of their subcommittee as well as identify people who are not on the commission who may be a good fit for their subcommittee.

Comments Shared from Livestream Viewing

“As you went through your committees, I would encourage that you consider the disabled, both physical and developmental, as members... [many] autistic youth that are passionate about history that may be interested in being involved.” – J. Polsgrove

Frequency of Meetings

The Commission decided to meet quarterly, but more frequently in the beginning.

The Commission decided on hybrid meetings (in person + virtual).

The next commission meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 18, 2022 from 10 am to 12 pm at Connecticut’s Old State House (800 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06103).

The meeting ended at 12:18 pm.

Action Items by the Next Meeting

CTH Staff to:

1. Sheldyn O. to send around committee descriptions to the Commission so that they can choose their preferred subcommittee.
2. CTH Development Officer, Cyndi T., to reach out to commission members for names of people and organizations that might be contributors to this work.

Commission Members to:

1. Identify the subcommittee of which they would like to take part. Email decision to CT Humanities Executive Assistant, Sheldyn Oliver (soliver@cthumanities.org)
*Item 1 to be completed by end of day, Friday, November 25, 2022.
 - o Subcommittees to have had first meeting in December *before* the full commission regroups on 1/18/22.
2. Share names of any individuals, organizations, etc. who should be a part of the conversation. Names can be emailed to Sheldyn O.

CTAM250 Chair & Vice-Chair to:

1. Assemble a DRAFT action plan to present to the commission for reworking on 1/18/22.

Additional Links

- Materials and information provided by Grace L., State Outreach Coordinator for the America 250 Foundation: [AM250 Dropbox](#) (Materials and Information include the video recording of the 9/27/2022 AM250 Convening, all presentation slides, an AM250 State Contact List, and AM250 branding guidelines)
- Work of other Commissions:
 - o [NJ Commission Executive Summary](#)
 - o [PA Commission](#)