



America 250 | CT Commission – Special Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 20, 2023

Context: Subcommittee discussions from the January 18, 2023 AM250 | CT Commission meeting inspired the commission to call a special meeting to further discuss how it will instill the principles of belonging and inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) within its framework. Leading up to this special meeting, the commission hosted a series of community listening sessions during the month of March to hear from Connecticut’s residents about what they envision for the upcoming commemoration of America 250. Responses from the listening sessions were then compiled to share with the commission during this special meeting. This special meeting is of great significance as it is designed to clarify the role of the commission and help guide the work of the commission and subcommittees.

Attendees

Commission Members

Jason Mancini, AM250 | CT Vice-chair
Stephen Armstrong
Anthony Champalimaud
Steven Hernández
Andrew Horowitz
Catherine Labadia
Douglas Lord
Merle McGee
Arienne Orozco, designee of the Secretary of the State
Deborah Schander
Jonathan Slifka
Hon. Stephanie Thomas
Sally Whipple
Amrys Williams

CTH Staff

Mike Kemezis
Gregg Mangan
Sheldyn Oliver
Cyndi Tolosa
Becky Vitkauskas
Scott Wands

Facilitator

Richard Josey, Jr.

The meeting began at 8:37 a.m.

Minutes Approval

A motion was made to approve the January 18, 2023 commission meeting minutes.

Motion: To approve the AM250 | CT Commission Meeting Minutes from January 18, 2023.

First: Douglas L.; **Second:** Stephen A.

Yes: 12*; **No:** 0; **Abstain:** 0

The motion passed unanimously.

**At this time, 12/14 of the attendees were in the meeting.*

IDEA Workshop

The group participated in a round of introductions with facilitator Richard Josey introducing himself to the group last. Richard is the founder and principal consultant for Collective Journeys. Much of Richard's work is centered around diversity, inclusion, and belonging while looking at the intersections with mental health, mental illness, and trauma.

The goal of this meeting is to see how the commission understands the concepts presented and how those concepts fit into the work of the commission.

The meeting structure consisted of Richard sharing thoughts and posing questions (many relating to the feedback from the community listening sessions) with time for reflection and response from commission members; a dialogue for collective learning and understanding. IDEA-inspired activities were also embedded into the meeting with an emphasis on the importance of shared language and understanding.

Highlights from the community listening sessions feedback...

- Words used to express how the public hopes to feel after the 250th were: proud, hopeful, inspired, energized, connected, informed, patriotic, etc.
- Ways for the public to feel that the 250th is for them: include elements of accessibility and having events in “safe” spaces for people to experience, appeal to children, sense of connectedness, etc.
- Ways the public needs to be supported: monetarily, shared language, communication that facilitates working together v. being siloed, database of presenters relating to revolutionary history, slate of programs/activities, etc.
- Ways the public wants to be engaged: while the public seemed passionate about being included, there didn't seem to be a vision of how this could/would look. This may be a good opportunity for the commission to explore and help create
- Think about which voices were absent from these listening sessions. How can the commission continue to spread the word in a way where it ensures communications are reaching all of Connecticut's residents?
- Challenges presented: funding, time, the framing/scope of parameters around this commemoration, and ensuring all stories are told.

Highlights from today's discussion...

- Part of what the commission must reconcile with during this process comes from knowing that the 250th anniversary of America (as well as the notion of belonging, diversity, inclusion) has different meanings to different people and has had very different outcomes for varied groups across Connecticut; if this document was redrafted, what would/could it look like today?
- As much as America 250 is a commemoration of the past, it's also meant to be forward-looking toward “a more perfect union”
- Trust between the commission and Connecticut's residents is essential to the success of this process; how can the commission's work to be seen as trustworthy?
- Relationship-building takes time and deserves continued outreach and effort
- Raise tolerance for discomfort; lean into facts
- Consider a group of collective behaviors and definitions for how the commission will approach work through the lens of humility, “emotional justice”,¹ belonging, IDEA; it is imperative to underpin this by exploring/understanding how power functions and operates in this dynamic to successfully move people and conversations forward
- How can the commission wear authority in a way that encourages the sharing of power so that all people are able to craft their own meaningful connection to this effort?

¹ Term coined by Esther A. Armah. *Emotional Justice: A Roadmap for Racial Healing*.

- Important to understand that looking at the commemoration through the lens of the restructuring of society is different than looking at it through the lens of psychology, safety, inclusion when coming together for conversations – while both essential, they are not the same; think about what is trying to be accomplished. It is imperative to have clear goals moving forward
- Think about creating resources for the public, i.e., agreed upon set of documents and questions relating to 1776, readiness self-assessment/planning tool-kit, IDEA-rubric that could lend credibility to events, engage the public in what historical research entails and how it can support/empower them to interrogate and investigate their own approaches to how they engage in the commemoration; a process is needed
 - Transparency will be key for the commission for how it will approach the study of 1776's legacy
 - In what way will the commission engage with interpretations offered by local historians and historical sites?
- Think about themed series of conversations as the commission moves through the process

The meeting ended at 12:47 p.m.

Next Meeting

Date: April 19, 2023

Time: 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Location: Connecticut's Old State House (800 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06103)