



America 250 | CT Commission Meeting
Minutes
Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Attendees

Commission Members

Hon. Denise W. Merrill, AM250 | CT Chair
Jason Mancini, AM250 | CT Vice-chair
Nicolas Angeli
Stephen Armstrong
Anthony Champalimaud
Andrew Horowitz
Michael Johnson
Robert Kret
Catherine Labadia
Douglas Lord
Merle McGee
Arienne Orozco, designee of the Secretary of the State
Deborah Schander
Elizabeth Shapiro
Jonathan Slifka
Joe Smith
Hon. Stephanie Thomas
Sally Whipple
Amrys Williams

CTH Staff

Aдриanna Chesnut
Lisa Comstock
Mike Kemezis
Gregg Mangan
Sheldyn Oliver
Cyndi Tolosa
Scott Wands

Guests

Russell Blair
John Dichtl

Members of the Public

Lee McFadden
Alice Ridgway

This meeting was livestreamed with the help of CT Democracy Center and was recorded and uploaded to CT Humanities' YouTube Channel: [AM250 | CT Commission Meeting - YouTube](#)

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m.

AM250 | CT Chair, Denise Merrill, welcomed the commission to the meeting and reminded them that they've been called together at the bequest of the Governor to embark on this multi-year commemoration, celebration, and reflection on the 250th anniversary of the American War for Independence – beginning with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The commission is here to inform and attract public attention to the role of Connecticut in this historic event.

AM250 | CT Vice-chair, Jason Mancini, shared that CT Humanities has been working behind-the-scenes on putting the infrastructure together to administer this commission. He also announced that Cyndi Tolosa will now serve as the official America 250 | CT Project Manager.

Minutes Approval

Motion: To approve the AM250 | CT Commission Special Meeting Minutes from March 20, 2023.

First: Stephen A.; **Second:** Jonathan S.

Yes: 15; **No:** 0; **Abstain:** 4

The motion passed.

National Update

American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)

John Dichtl, President and CEO of AASLH joined the meeting. John's presentation explained the need for history and cultural organizations to articulate a bold vision for this commemoration and to work together to collectively advance said vision.

AASLH will hold a virtual summit, *Commemoration Reconsidered*, April 27-28. For more details, please visit: [250th Anniversary – AASLH](#)

You can view John D.'s presentation, in full, at the following link: [AM250 | CT Commission Meeting - YouTube](#) (*Opportunities of the Semiquincentennial*, John Dichtl – 24-minute mark)

Commission members had an opportunity to ask questions regarding John's presentation.

A Common Cause For All

AM250 | CT Vice-chair, Jason Mancini, AM250 | CT Commission Member Robert Kret, and CTH Deputy Director of Grants and Programs, Scott Wands attended *A Common Cause For All* in Williamsburg, VA. This event was sponsored by the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission and had 34 state delegations in attendance, including all 13 original colonies. States came together on the 250th anniversary of the Committees of Correspondence to begin thinking collectively about the commemoration of the series of events that led up to the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

There is a possibility this will become an annual event through 2026.

There is a need for funding across all states – all commissions have discussed limitations of how far they are able to go in this endeavor with current resources.

The Commonwealth of Virginia commissioned research to explore public attitudes about patriotism, American identity, and the upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A presentation of these findings will take place on Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 12 p.m. For more details, please visit: [Americans, Our History, and the 250th](#)

America 250 Foundation

A request has been sent to the AM250 | CT Commission. The request involves a contract/agreement for the use of the national logo. In this contract/agreement, the America 250 Foundation also includes \$10K to support the work of the commission.

Other commissions have expressed concern with the foundation's request due to mishandlings within the foundation up to this point with some of the commissions returning the funds and/or disassociating themselves from the foundation. With that in mind, it is being reorganized, reoriented, and re-envisioned with a more detailed announcement coming in July.

It was the AM250 | CT Chair's suggestion to submit the proposal to the Department of Economic Community Development's (DECD) legal staff to see what the obligations and liabilities might be and therefore table this discussion until the July 12 Commission Meeting when more information is gathered.

Public Commission Requirements

Freedom of Information

Russell Blair, Director of Education and Communications with the CT Freedom of Information (FOI) Commission joined the meeting to clarify FOI meeting provisions held by agencies of the public:

- Committee (in this instance, Commission)/Subcommittee
 - If a committee creates subcommittees, the subcommittees are also considered agencies of the public and must adhere to the same meeting provisions as the parent committee
- Meetings
 - All public agencies must file a schedule of regular meetings with the Office of the Secretary of the State
 - If it is necessary for the commission to meet outside of its schedule of regular meetings, the commission will need to call for a "special" meeting – the difference being that items cannot be added to the agenda during a special meeting
 - For an emergency meeting, the emergency must be clearly stated within the minutes and uploaded within 72 hours; only matters relating to the emergency may be discussed during the meeting
 - For executive session, any records exempt from FOI can be discussed, i.e., bids, personnel, pending claims and litigation, security, etc.
 - For hybrid meetings, the meeting link must be posted 48 hours in advance of the meeting
 - For fully remote meetings, in addition to the minutes, a recording of the meeting needs to be uploaded to the agency's website within seven days and remain on the agency's website for 45 days
 - *For more information on hybrid/remote meetings, please visit: [New-Primer---Remote-Meetings.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)
 - Meetings must be open to the public
 - Public comment is not a requirement of the FOI Commission and can be decided by the committee/subcommittee, etc.
- Agenda
 - The goal of the agenda should be to apprise the public of what is going on – the more specific, the better
 - Must be submitted within 24 hours to the Office of the Secretary of the State
- Email Addresses
 - Personal email addresses may be used for matters relating to a committee/subcommittee, etc., but note that it will be subject to any records request for communications relating to said committee/subcommittee, etc.
 - Outside of FOI, email correspondence related to a committee/subcommittee, etc. may also be subject to Connecticut records retention laws
 - If an option, using an email address linked to the committee/subcommittee, etc., may make dealings easier to manage
 - If a quorum of a committee has discussion over email on the business before the committee, it could be construed that an improper meeting took place

For FOI-related questions, call the Office of the Freedom of Information at 860.566.5682

Commission Workspace and Communications

A new commission Google workspace is up and running and will be used to share and store documents relating to the work of the commission. There are separate “spaces” for each subcommittee with each commission member already preassigned to their designated committee(s). Within the spaces, subcommittees will find documents relating to their subcommittee, i.e., past minutes, committee descriptions, and a template for minutes. There is also a separate space for the full commission that has all meeting minutes and materials as PDFs for reference. In addition to the individual AM250 | CT email addresses created for commission members, subcommittee email addresses were also created, i.e., education@ct250.org will be shared with the public but linked to the email addresses of each of the members on the education subcommittee so that all are apprised of incoming notices. The same has been done for all other subcommittees.

Commission email addresses have been set up for each commissioner.

CTH will use its AM250 | CT Zoom account to help subcommittees set up/record meetings.

Listening Sessions Feedback

Toolkit Development

- Clearly define the toolkit/planning guide and include the definition within the document(s)
- In terms of organizing the toolkit, it may prove beneficial to create themes/categories and give examples for the user as opposed to a simple list of items
- Identify funding sources/opportunities
- Use language that is accessible for all users and work to present materials
- Think about what other accessibility tools exist and work to embed them in the toolkit
- Facilitate targeted focus groups to help inform the toolkit which will then go on to inform a planning guide

Additional thoughts shared outside of the toolkit:

- Utilize natural delivery systems to communicate all things AM250 | CT-related to the public
- Think about issuing a state-wide challenge to town councils to engage the public in a way that the public would find meaningful and interesting

Recap on IDEA Workshop

Action Plan and Resources

The commission discussed items “B1” and “C2” in the [Action Plan](#) document:

- B1 – The commission agreed that CTH Staff can prepare a document and the Community & Organizational Engagement (COE) Subcommittee can use the staff-prepared document to develop next steps; both staff and the COE will report out at the July 12 commission meeting
- C2 – The commission agreed that the toolkit feeds into the creation of a planning guide and that the creation process will be ongoing as it will be open to continuous updates via feedback received from the public

For clarification purposes, it was reiterated that there will be an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Subcommittee amongst the other list of subcommittees within the commission. Each member who is on the IDEA Subcommittee will also participate on one other committee – ensuring that the latter committee adheres to an inclusive approach in the work that takes place within the subcommittee and brings in diverse audiences.

Themes and Guidelines

In February, the commission submitted its annual report to the Governor. The report included three themes for which the commission would use to support, connect, and enhance AM250 | CT initiatives over the coming years. A fourth theme titled “A More Perfect Union” was proposed at today’s meeting. The description of the proposed theme can be found in the [Themes and Guidelines](#) document.

Discussion ensued for the fourth theme with alternate names suggested:

- Unfinished Revolutions
- Pursuit of Happiness – A phrase used in the Declaration of Independence
- The Next 250
- The American Experiment
- Civic Engagement
- To Secure These Rights – A phrase used in the Declaration of Independence
- For the Common Good – Connecticut specific
- We Hold These Truths

In the interest of time, the commission will respond to these suggestions and/or share more of their own via a Google document in the new Google workspace.

It was suggested that the Guiding Principles/Behaviors/Values portion of the Themes and Guidelines document be rewritten in a way that is more accessible/user-friendly.

Public Comment

In-person

Lee McFadden, Connecticut Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), current State Vice Regent, Connecticut DAR America 250 Chair, and Chair of the Governor Jonathan Trumbull House in Lebanon – Lee M. shared that the 2,300 “Daughters of Connecticut”, spread amongst 42 chapters across the state, are anxiously awaiting direction from the commission. Lee M. announced that she will be the contact person that the commission can use to share any messages.

Alice Ridgway, Litchfield America 250 Committee – Alice R. would appreciate suggestions for the technology to further develop plans for an online resource tool. Alice also inquired whether the AM250 | CT Commission had plans for regional/county/town convenings. AM250 | CT Chair Denise M. responded “yes” and mentioned that she is planning to work with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) to establish committees in any interested town.

Livestream

WPAATV & Community Media Center, Wallingford Public Access Association – “Please consider community tv in the communication plan.”

Next Meeting

July 12, 2023 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Connecticut’s Old State House, 800 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06103

Motion: To adjourn the April 19, 2023 AM250 | CT Commission Meeting.

First: Amrys W.; **Second:** Douglas L.

Yes: 19; **No:** 0; **Abstain:** 0

The motion passed.

The meeting ended at 12:11 p.m.