

AMERICA 250

CONNECTICUT

America 250 | CT Commission Meeting Wednesday, April 17, 2024 Minutes

Attendees

Commission Members

Hon. Denise W. Merrill, AM250 | CT Chair (In person)
Jason Mancini, AM250 | CT Vice-chair (In person)
Nicolas Angeli (Virtual)
Stephen Armstrong (In person)
Anthony Champalimaud (In person)
Rob Kret (In person)
Catherine Labadia (In person)
Deborah Schander (In person)
Elizabeth Shapiro (In person)
Jonathan Slifka (In person)
Joe Smith (Virtual)
Micheal Werner (Virtual)
Sally Whipple (In person)
Amrys Williams (In person)

CT Humanities (CTH) Staff

Dana Barcellos-Allen (In person)
Adrianna Chesnut (In person)
Mike Kemezis (Virtual)
Sheldyn Oliver (Virtual)
Cyndi Tolosa (In person)
Scott Wands (In person)

Members of the Public

Sarah Blecher (In person)
Jennifer Crookes (In person)
Mimi Madden (In person)
Jackie Mandyck (In person)
Lee McFadden (In person)
Randall Nelson (In person)
Mary Pelletier (In person)
Sylvester Salcedo (In person)
James Taing (In person)

This meeting was livestreamed and recorded with the help of the CT Democracy Center. The recording can be accessed at the following link: [America 250 | CT Commission Meeting - April 17, 2024 - YouTube](#)

The meeting began at 10:08 a.m.

AM250 | CT Chair, Denise Merrill, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for their participation thus far – noting that this group has been at work for nearly two years.

Minutes Approval (Discussion begins at minute-mark 9:20)

Motion: To approve the [AM250 | CT Commission Meeting Minutes from January 17, 2024](#).

First: Deborah S.; **Second:** Steve A.

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

The motion passed unanimously.

****Members present during the vote.***

After the approval of minutes, Denise M. asked the Commission to give a brief round of introductions.

National/Regional Update (Discussion begins at minute-mark 12:08)

America 250 Commission (www.america250.org)

- Launched America's Field Trip Program – an essay contest for middle and high school students
- Launching a variety of tentpole programs – different programs during 2026 (not necessarily affiliated with state programs)
- There will be no funding available for state commissions via the National Commission

American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)

- Coordination with historic sites around the country
- Put together a field guide
- Currently putting together a program guide for low-cost programs that should be published within the month (CTH will share out this information once available)

A Common Cause for All

- National convening of state commissions and interested parties in Colonial Williamsburg; 40 states were represented
- Jason M., Rob K., Scott W., and Cyndi T. attended the conference on behalf of the AM250 | CT Commission
- Filmmaker, Ken Burns, is creating a 6-part series on the American Revolution (to come out in 2025); exciting opportunity to think about this story and Connecticut's part in that story
- 26 states have funding for the 250th ranging from thousands of dollars to millions
- Rob K. is working with...
 - a group of people to try and bottle what happened in Colonial Williamsburg and take it to Washington and have an event with the national 250 caucus to get elected officials and their staff excited about possible opportunities
 - John Dichtl, President & CEO of AASLH, to try and get more federal funding to the grassroots/local levels through existing entities such as Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Park Service (NPS), National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), & AM250 National Commission
 - Trying to get four people (two democrats, two republicans, two from the House, two from the Senate) to sign a letter intended for the Appropriations Committee that would support federal funding for AM250; currently have three people on board and need one additional signature (republican, House); Representative Michael Turner's name (Ohio) was suggested as someone to reach out to as a possibility for the fourth signature

Declaring Freedom Recap (Discussion begins at minute-mark 22:25)

- Held at Connecticut Central State University (CCSU) in New Britain, CT
- Days 1 & 2 hosted primarily by Matt Warshauer and CCSU along with the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies (CCSS)
 - Approximately 250 student participants and 100 educator participants
 - Excellent feedback from participants
- Day 3 hosted by the AM250 | CT Commission and funded by CTH
 - Approximately 220 participants (in person and virtual)
 - Focused on the four themes of the commission (Tell Inclusive Stories, Power of Place, Doing History, For the Common Good)

- o Generally positive feedback with hopes of more specifics in terms of history/project ideas for people in the future as well as more breakout sessions
- Day 4 hosted by the Association for the Study of Connecticut History (ASCH) with support from the CT League of Museums (CLM)
 - o Mix of presentations and conversations with opportunities for facilitated breakout sessions

Highlights from Commission feedback included:

- Possibly combine Days 1 & 2, as well as Days 3 & 4
- Improve the continuity and coordination between all four days
- Mindfulness relating to funding
- Mindfulness relating to who is involved with the planning
- Mindfulness relating to the structures that the Commission is looking to accomplish; let the audience come to the Commission v. targeted audiences
- Conference with one day devoted to each AM250 | CT Theme or different tracks; run as an unconference
- Frequency of when to meet
- More work is needed to get people thinking beyond themes around the Revolutionary War
- If continued, what would the role of the Commission look like, CTH, other organizations, etc.

Funding Update (Discussion begins at minute-mark 56:31)

Denise M., Jason M., and Cyndi T. have spent time over the last 6 months pursuing potential corporate sponsors and private funders trying to get funding, etc. Received a grant from a foundation for \$100k that enabled CTH to hire additional AM250 | CT personnel and continue to seek private funding. Denise M. has put together a Leadership Committee that is also assisting in fundraising.

Nearing the end of the legislative session (two-year budget cycle). The state will not be proposing a new budget this year as the second year of the budget, meaning there is no additional funding proposed by the Governor for AM250 | CT.

Alternative routes of funding include:

- Funds from the remaining allotment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.
- Bond funding – applied for bond funding in the name of the Commission to do things like upgrade historic sites, etc.; \$35m in the bond package

Funding Request Letter (Discussion begins at minute-mark 1:01:57)

Commission Leadership would like to submit a funding request letter to the Governor on behalf of the Commission. This letter was discussed by the Commission.

Motion: To empower AM250 | CT Chair Denise Merrill and AM250 | CT Vice-chair Jason Mancini to further investigate points to include in the funding request letter and said letter would be shared with the Commission (who will be able to view the letter without comment or action), via email, before submitted.

Yes: 8; **No:** 0; **Abstain:** 6*

The motion passed.

**Due to the nature of the motion, all state employees (S. Armstrong, C. Labadia, D. Schander, E. Shapiro, J. Slifka, M. Werner) abstained from this vote.*

[Commission Work Plan](#) (Discussion begins at minute-mark 1:21:23)

Cyndi T. presented the Commission Work Plan document and the committee engaged in conversation.

[Public Comment](#) (Discussion begins at minute-mark 1:47:15)

Comments from the public were made during two separate portions of the meeting. For access to these comments, please fast forward to minute-marks 43:15 - 47:25 and

[Next Meeting](#)

Wednesday, July 17, 2024 at 10 a.m. at Connecticut's Old State House (800 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06103)

[Meeting Adjournment](#) (Discussion begins at minute-mark 2:05:24)

Motion: To adjourn the April 17, 2024, AM250 | CT Commission Meeting.

First: Elizabeth S.; **Second:** Rob K.

Yes: 14; **No:** 0; **Abstain:** 0

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting ended at 12:05 p.m.