

# Project Gabriel- President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

## Agenda

May 4, 2023

Duration: 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Sheryl Garland (Co-chair), Dr. Clinton Peay (Co-chair), Dr. Leonard Edloe, Dr. Kevin Harris, Bill Martin, Dr. Faye Belgrave, Dr. Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Rhonda Keyes Pleasants, Jonsette Calloway

**Charge:** Based on the findings of the December 17, 2022 report on *Slavery and the Medical College of Virginia*, this Commission is charged with recommending to the Administration and Board of Visitors of VCU specific ways in which the institution should:

- (i) memorialize all enslaved individuals who labored on MCV grounds and property; and*
- (ii) provide a tangible benefit such as a college scholarship or community-based economic development program for individuals or specific communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery.*

## Discussion/Updates

- Approval of [April 27 meeting minutes](#)
  - Minutes approved
- S. Garland provided an update on the May 1 co-chairs meeting with President Rao. Co-chairs met with President Rao to provide a high level overview of recommendations.
  - The meeting was positive overall, and the President was supportive of recommendations, with the following highlights:
    - Highlight partnerships discussed with community colleges
    - Scholarships, signature scholar's ball
    - Relationship with Richmond Public Schools
    - After-school enrichment programs
  - (Garland) President Rao provided items for the chairs to highlight for the May BOV meeting and communicated the need to develop structured framework, resources, associated costs, responsible entities, partners to engage, timelines; think about how to prioritize recommendations in the fall so the recommendations that can be implemented in a short time frame can be done and remaining goals can be implemented over time
- Co-chairs discussed the format of the May 12 meeting—one-page document will be distributed at Board meeting; co-chairs will walk through slides that reference the document

- (Garland) Goal is to highlight that recommendations are preliminary; referencing themes and details in the work plans
- Five minutes will be reserved for next steps and questions
- (Dr. Harris) Will you implement the reverence that is shown in our existing meetings?
  - (Garland) Yes, a slide has been dedicated
- (Garland) Discussion around the First African Baptist Church recommendation
  - The VP Administration was informed of the recommendation; previous assessment was \$13 million to bring the building to museum quality; costs of construction would be approximately \$24 million, with \$1 million for maintenance, operation
  - E&G funds cannot be utilized; Development partners will be briefed
  - (Dr. Peay) Should we adjust the language?
    - (Dr. Belgrave) Agree with the usage of “explore”; recommendation came from sentiments from community
    - (Dr. Ayers) Situation may be better than we might have hoped; note it “as a site to advance each of the elements of VCU’s work on these fronts” to justify the investment—community center, museum, place of reverence; all things can help explain why this is a systemic investment versus just symbolic
    - (B. Martin) Given the important location and how the site relates to other sites in the city, it can be a central point for other things happening within city.
    - (Dr. Ayers) Emphasizing it is central to city, the purpose of the mandate, etc. It fits within the scope of the memorialization committee, but it also has the opportunity to empower the other things.
    - (R. Keyes Pleasants) Would suggest that in addition to term “memorialization,” that we consider adding additional verbiage “interment,” or something around “education” in presenting it to encompass everything the Commission and the Well Project is trying to achieve, which is part of recommendations from FRC.
  - (S. Garland) Presentation should be succinct, and we can embellish the one-pager
  - (Dr. Ayers) Given the suggested investment, FABC should be a centerpiece; “In this work, we discovered that FABC can be the centerpiece of everything we’re talking about;” “lead with the biggest ask.”
    - “as a site of memorialization and focal point for VCU’s campus”
  - (Dr. Harris) “Memorialization site” may resonate more quickly, but also an opportunity for social and economic revitalization that moves the church beyond a museum; social—memorialize and revitalize communities, give place of ownership; possible economic revitalization that could occur as well. This renovation may be a reason why we recruit a faculty member, business, etc.

- (Dr. Peay) It could be a major development piece, tourism
- (B. Martin) It is also where we see the early hymns of freedom of conscience; essential site to telling the broader story for Richmond
  - There is no visitor's center for downtown at this point.
- (Dr. Edloe) A lot of what happened in the health and medical field is in the books, but not embodied in one place
- (Dr. Ayers) It's religious, but also a moral center of the black community itself—many of the black ministers of the post-Emancipation area came out of FABC; also a place where black deacons led long prayers that articulated the moral perspective of enslaved people. It is symbolic—black self-determination, withstanding the wrongs of enslavement, etc.
- (Dr. Harris) Have a third bullet, keep memorialization piece, EMSWP, and the third gets into other areas.
- (Dr. Peay) Moral center; it became the Mt. Sinai. Richmond has provided a lot for the Civil Rights leadership in the country.
- (S. Garland) Must determine what is the purpose of the initiative at Main St. Station and if intent is to truly serve as slavery museum; focus is to tell the story and history of MCV and how it's intertwined with the city.
- (B. Martin) We have to ensure we focus on the mandate; Main St. Station will be much more focused on the slave trade; FABC could serve as a nice complement.
- (Dr. Douglas-Glenn) Likes the nexus about the site being the moral leadership and centerpiece of the community; but is also sensitive of budget and other possible interests.
- (S. Garland) Using “explore the use of” is most fitting; will explain the due diligence that will need to occur over the summer to make the recommendations transition to “final” from “preliminary.”
- (Dr. Peay) President Rao was excited about the concept.
- (Dr. Belgrave) Can we broaden the subject areas for the support programs, as the arts were also mentioned.
  - (Dr. Harris) “H” is healthcare; VA operates under a STEM/H model
  - (S. Garland) We will change that scholarship bullet to:
    - Student Success Programs in multidisciplinary areas, with a focus on STEM/H
  - (Dr. Belgrave) There would need to be a larger group of stakeholders to get into the weeds of the details
- (Dr. Peay) How do we go about moving forward?
  - (S. Garland) In the previous SWAC committee, we put together recommendations, identified responsible parties and developed timelines. The Board signed off and started the process of responsible parties implementing work. Need to see the follow up.
    - The Commission can follow a similar process.
  - (Dr. Ayers) How clearly do we state the mandate? We're aware of all of the complexities, but we do have a state-enforced mandate?— (Slide 8-

“Next Steps”); Note that this is an essential action and going beyond what is required by statute; we listened to the community conversations

- (Dr. Harris) Change questions slide to “do you have any feedback?”

## Action

- Edits to designated slides were made

## Next steps

- S. Garland to reach out to Bill Martin for additional information on Main St. Station project
- S. Garland to work with J. Calloway to refine bullets