



**TIMELINES, ARCHIVES, AND CURRICULA SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

Boston City Hall Boston, MA, 02201
Held virtually via Zoom

APRIL 3, 2024

Commissioners Present: Joe Bagley, Giordana Mecgani, Tatiana Cruz, Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, Kristen Lafferty, Carolyn Goldstein, Dory Klein, Collin Knight, Kimberly Barzola
Commissioners Absent: David Leonard, Cedric Woods, Angela Hedley-Mitchell, Liza Stearns, Bob Allison, Tatiana Cruz, Joan Ilacqua

Staff Present: Genesis Pimentel, Commemoration Commission Manager; Kayla Skillin, Archivist for Collections Management; Lauryn Sharp, Project Archaeologist; Murray Miller, Director of Historic Preservation

Jim Vrabel, Suzanne Taylor

A full recording of the meeting is available on boston.gov/commemoration-commission

SESSION BEGINS - 1:00 PM

I. WELCOME

- a. Commemoration Commission Manager Genesis Pimentel welcomed attendees.

II. ORDER OF BUSINESS

- a. Meeting minutes were approved.

III. JIM VRABEL PRESENTATION ON WHEN AND WHERE IN BOSTON

- a. Jim Vrabel gave a presentation on his database and website *When and Where in Boston*, which functions as a large scale encyclopedia of all things Boston.
 - i. It is a framework that more information should be added to. He would like history experts to oversee, screen, and edit and for it to be available to the public.
 - ii. The database 2000 entries out of a total of 60,000 pieces of information collected. It has a search function that can be narrowed by Who, What, When, Where, Category, Significance Level. All entries have citations and links. The browse section has pre-sorted entries. You can select more



information about an ethnicity or prominent family and then have all that information transition into a slideshow directly on the website.

- iii. There is a street directory that can lay out into a map and can become a slideshow that goes in order by address. Each neighborhood is divided into sections. The website has a subject taxonomy with overarching themes.

b. Q&A portion:

- i. Commissioner Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai asked about the Boston oddities section. Vrabel discussed an example of Martin Lomasney and his envelope trick as well as Sylvester Graham's speech about vegetarianism that caused a riot in Boston.
- ii. Commissioner Kim Barzola asked about the strengths and gaps of the database. Vrabel discussed that there's a gap for classical music in Boston, despite having worked with archivists at the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He also mentioned that arts, sports-hockey, for example-are also lacking. He stated that most subjects and subtopics are strong, but some neighborhoods are lacking and things historians did not keep track of are missing.
- iii. Commissioner Kristen Lafferty asked about the estimated cost of funding this project. Vrabel commented that it is inexpensive-\$25k for the website development and \$10k for maintenance. He also explained that he wants the site to be built out fully by summer or fall latest, but that it needs institutional support to expand and maintain. He stated that people would want to volunteer to work on the website, so the idea of having to pay staff should not be a big deterrent. He identified the biggest problem as organizing, supervising, and administrating the website.
- iv. Commissioner Beth Prindle asked for clarification on technology, maintenance, and future thinking as well as contributors, vetting, fact-checking, or pre-validation or rejection for the website. Vrabel discussed the technology is conventional three-tier software architecture, single page application user interface, API application, relational database that works through a browser, MySQL, JSON. Web developers have told him the website is easily replicable. Currently, the vetting does not exist. Vrabel has been citing and fact checking by himself, using only published sources and only reputable online sources. He discussed an editorial board and staff doing future review processes.
- v. Chair Bagley asked if this satisfied the timelines component of the Commission.



IV. DISCUSSION

- a. Commissioner Giordana Mecagni discussed that the biggest hurdle for many institutions, including hers, was the constant curation aspect of the project. She also discussed the gaps of knowledge in queer, black, and Indigenous histories in written archives. She asked what would happen if he could not get an institution to host the website. Vrabel replied that though it is not ideal, he will try to put it up and run it with the people who are currently interested. Mecagni introduced the idea of getting City sponsorship and financing from other departments as the Commission is set to expire.
- b. Chair Joe Bagley brought up that there used to be a City Historian, but that role no longer exists and the work that the Historian would do falls on multiple people and there's an issue with budget. This, he said, should be community supported. This doesn't fully fit in the Commission, especially because his work is massive but the Commission has to work quickly to create a guide for other subcommittees.
- c. Commissioner Kristen Lafferty expressed the desire for the Commemoration Commission to be the push for the City to take on this project. Archives is currently working through the Boston Rev 200 archives and seeing all the projects they did is great. This website would be a similar starting point.
- d. Commissioner Carolyn Goldstein reminded the group of prior conversations about needing expansive, inclusive archives. She would have to say that Vrabel's project meets the subcommittee's goals. She would like to find a way to push this as a product but also as a tool to lean into community work. She asked for clarification about Events, Exhibits, and Trails would like to see from this subcommittee.
- e. Chair Bagley discussed bringing this project to DoIT with higher ups on the City side. He also talked about how this feels like a communal encyclopedia that many other institutions have done, so we should look to them as a model for an editorial board.
- f. Commissioner Goldstein discussed how many libraries support professor projects and that there will be many micro-histories of Boston projects that would be great assignments for students.
- g. Chair Bagley would like to begin the discussion of how this subcommittee will make a recommendation of timelines for the EET subcommittee. He also discussed Encyclopedia Virginia's inclusive and expansive editorial board structure and the need to figure out an editorial board structure that would work here. He asked to set up a meeting between DoIT, Lafferty, the director of



OHP, the City Clerk, BPL members, and the TAC co-chairs to make this happen since Boston doesn't have a dedicated commission or historical society.

- h. Commissioner Mecagni asked if the database had walking tours to which Vrabel responded affirmatively. She stated that it would be fun to have a place that has an interactive map that would compile all of this data.
- i. Chair Bagley asked: Are we aggregators or producers? He states that it will be difficult to produce tangible results.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. Suzanne Taylor discussed how the Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittee was concerned about moving forward without this subcommittee's recommendations of key occasion, as quoted in the ordinance. Due to the ordinance's verbiage, the EET subcommittee was hoping to get a sense of key occasions might be to start on their deeper work.

VI. ADJOURNMENT - 2:30 PM

- a. Chair Joe Bagley motioned to adjourn the meeting.
- b. Commissioners Carolyn Goldstein and Giordana Mecagni seconded the motion.