



**COMMEMORATION  
COMMISSION**

**PROGRESS REPORT**

*July 2024*

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# 1. SUMMARY

## I. COMMEMORATION COMMISSION UPDATE

There are 44 members of the Commemoration Commission; 29 are appointed and 15 are ex-officio. There was one meeting of the Commemoration Commission on January 16, 2024. This meeting was introductory and had a quorum. The next meeting was on April 30, 2024. This meeting did not have a quorum and thus could not vote for a chair. The most recent meeting took place on July 25, 2024, and there was a quorum. The co-chairs voted in were Amanda Zettel and Jean-Luc Pierite.

## II. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

The Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittee co-chairs are Imari Jeffries and Suzanne Taylor. The subcommittee has 15 members. Of the 15 members, 4 are ex-officio. About 8 members attend meetings regularly. While this subcommittee has struggled with having ex-officio members attend, it has recently seen a drop in attendance by appointed members.

The Timelines, Archives, and Curricula subcommittee co-chairs are Joe Bagley and Bob Allison. The subcommittee has 15 members. Of the 15 members, 5 are ex-officio. About 9 members attend meetings regularly. This subcommittee has the strongest attendance of the three subcommittees.

The Legislation and Preservation Tools subcommittee co-chairs are Alison Frazee and Lydia Lowe. The subcommittee has 14 members. Of the 14, 6 are ex-officio. About 7 members attend meetings regularly. This subcommittee has seen the largest amount of turnover, with one appointed member expressing intent to leave and 3 ex-officio members leaving the City. The 3 City staff have alternates and designees. However, this subcommittee struggles the most with consistent attendance from ex-officio members.

## 2. VISION

### I. MISSION STATEMENT

“The Commission exists to affirm that our diverse and intertwined community histories are of great value to the City of Boston, that historical tourism should be a driver of true shared prosperity, that inclusive and honest historical memory is a crucial public good worthy of attention and resources, and that communities all over the City should have the tools and resources to research, preserve, acknowledge, and celebrate their history.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the Commemoration Commission is to highlight the importance of historic and cultural preservation of Boston. Like the Office of the Boston Bicentennial, the Commemoration Commission was created to reflect on our histories and pour into the mechanisms that protect, support, and boost history. Unlike the Office of Boston Bicentennial, the Commemoration Commission was created with the express purpose of uncovering blind spots, dealing with both noble and oppressive legacies, and connecting current Bostonians with the histories, ideologies, and truths that mattered enough to shape the past and to shape the present.

The creation of the Office of Historic Preservation and the Commemoration Commission affirms that the purpose for its existence matters, and that the execution of the plans created by the Commission will not only matter but will have the opportunity to shape the future of our City.

### II. GOALS

The Commemoration Commission needs to work on a plan to be implemented for 2025.

The Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittee has identified several ideas they are interested in exploring.

- A website
- Boston-specific 250 and 400 branding
- Marker/Plaque Commemoration Program
  - Including digital markers, maps, and guides for tourists
- Neighborhood, cultural, and historical walking trails
- Parades, reenactments, festivals, fireworks, block parties, media partners and advertising, collaborating with Boston celebrities
- Engagement with the arts
- Series of programming from April 2025-August 2026
- Engaging small or medium-sized businesses and cultural institutions

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<sup>1</sup> Boston, Massachusetts, Municipal Code, Ord. 2021 c. 19 § 1.

- Official Beverages

The Timelines, Archives, and Curricula subcommittee has identified several ideas they are interested in exploring.

- A website
- A history database
- Boston Neighborhood Stories through books, podcasts, video series, and more
- Data, Resources, and Archives collection and curation
- Language access and other accessibility accommodations
- Uncovering obfuscated histories through research, museum curations, BPL exhibits, BPS curriculum and internships
- Digitizing archives

The Legislation and Preservation Tools subcommittee has identified several ideas they are interested in exploring.

- Article 85 Reform
  - Extending delay and reframing delay to another process
- Article 80 Modernization
  - Implementing historic preservation earlier in Article 80 processes
- Grading systems for buildings' historicity and demolition for predictability, which might be implemented after a citywide survey
- Mitigation and mitigation funds when demolition happens for environmental impact and lost cultural or historic impact
- Simplifying landmark petition process
- More historic districts and more weight and legitimacy for cultural districts
- Deconstruction ordinance for climate change mitigation
- Community Preservation Trust/Office collaboration
  - Collaboration with existing projects in Affordable Housing like Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing, Office to Housing, Additional Dwelling Units
- Economic studies about why historic preservation is good for local economy, jobs, affordability
  - Investments in other studies and preservation tools
- Citywide historic and cultural resource survey
  - Would allow BLC staff to act quickly on projects with a database

# 3. SUCCESSES

## I. INTERNAL

Thirty commissioners were sworn in ahead of the first Commemoration Commission meeting in January 2024. Many commissioners were sworn in on November 16, 2023, at the Office of Historic Preservation Vision Event that commission staff organized. The Commission staff member spent months searching for and interviewing all potential candidates. The staff member worked to make sure that the makeup of the Commission accurately represented as many neighborhoods as possible and that it aligned as much as possible with the demographics of the City. The staff member pushed members forward, in collaboration with the Boards and Commissions team. The staff member has built relationships with City departments that would have a vested interest in commemoration work.



Figure 1. This photograph shows new commissioners being sworn in by City Clerk Alex Geourntas at the Bolling Building in Roxbury on November 16, 2023. Courtesy of Genesis Pimentel.

The staff member works closely with the Archaeology team. Together, the teams have planned and executed events that center Archaeology with a commemorative focus, such as an event in Charlestown to discuss an archaeological dig for the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill. In addition, the two teams are working together to launch a series of guides that will live on the City of Boston website as a product that will come out of the Commission as a collaborative effort between the Timelines, Archives, and Curricula subcommittee and the Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittees.

Two people have stepped up to be the Commission chairs, and each subcommittee has two Commission chairs. Each subcommittee has had at least three meetings since the first meetings in February. Over this time period, subcommittees have identified ideas that they believe will engage the public to create excitement over commemoration.

In addition, an internal project management group made up of staff members from multiple City departments that will focus on executing events around the City was formed and has begun to meet. The project management group is working to most effectively collaborate with the Commission and implement the events aspect of the charge.

## **II. EXTERNAL**

Commission staff has been functioning as a representative of the City and of the Commemoration Commission externally and has been attending community engagement events, where surveys have been employed to get resident feedback about the kinds of commemoration they would like to see. There has been an increase in constituents discussing the things they would like to see commemorated.

The City representative has been active in a Bunker Hill 250 planning group to help them achieve their goals, with City support where necessary. The planning group has been meeting frequently to identify a series of events to take place between 2025-2026, funding, branding, and more. The City representative has connected with other organizations to understand their desires and goals. The representative has also identified the need for social media engagement and has created Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok accounts.

# 4. CHALLENGES

## I. INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

The Commemoration Commission is subject to the Open Meeting Law. Open Meeting Law requires commissions to have a quorum. As stated in the Summary section, there are 44 commissioners total, and the quorum for a Commemoration Commission meeting is 23 members in attendance. Every subcommittee has a quorum of 8, due to having 14-15 members. Due to the size of the Commission, there has not been consistent and adequate attendance to meet the quorum requirement

As all public bodies subject to the Open Meeting Law, communication on most matters of the body's jurisdiction with a quorum must be properly noticed. The Open Meeting Law prohibits serial communication between a quorum, including through email, that has not been properly noticed. Since the subcommittees and the Commission have been tasked with putting together plans and projects, the inability to work on and follow up on plans and projects through email has impeded the progress the Commission and subcommittees might make on their tasks.

As the Commission and its subcommittees more specifically define what success looks like, an assessment of the resources necessary to achieve those goals will need to be undertaken.

## II. KEY QUESTIONS

Commissioners have formulated questions because of the unique challenges outlined above:

1. Is a commission the best apparatus to engage in the work outlined by the ordinance?
  - a. This question has come up because the Open Meeting Law has impacted the Commission's ability to make strides in planning due to quorum issues, given the size of the Commission.
  
2. How can we get the Commemoration Commission staff and staff of other departments to more meaningfully work together?
  - a. There is an internal project management group working on 250th/400th events to be planned and executed by the City. There might be use in identifying departments that would undertake plans recommended by the Commission and creating other project management teams made up



of relevant City department members to support the separate plans and goals of each subcommittee.

3. Given that some recommendations made by the commission will fall uniquely under the Office of Historic Preservation's purview and that the Commemoration Commission currently lives there, can the Office of Historic Preservation and internal Commemoration Commission team have a budget for this specific purpose?
  - a. There will be ideas recommended by the Commission in which the most relevant department to undertake and implement those ideas is the Office of Historic Preservation, which does not currently have the budget to implement projects related to commemoration.

## 5. NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the Commemoration Commission and its support staff have laid down several opportunities to push the agenda of each subcommittee and the express goal of bringing value to the City through commemoration and historic preservation.

These opportunities include investigating solutions to the challenges the commissioners face within the confines of the Open Meeting Law. Other opportunities include identifying proper support for the Commemoration Commission and its team as well as identifying collaborative opportunities and enacting said collaboration.

In addition, the Commission will be working on the planning for materials that will be executed by other departments. The Commission will also be working on materials that will be categorized and publicized as functioning under the Commemoration Commission, Office of Historic Preservation, and affiliated departments. Since many residents have identified the Commemoration Commission team as the starting place to express interest in commemorative activities, there is hope that social media will be useful in promoting the Commemoration Commission, significant anniversaries, and other important commemorative undertakings and projects to a larger audience.