

## **Great Barrington W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Committee**

Great Barrington Fire Station, 37 State Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230

### **DRAFT Minutes of the Wednesday, May 15, 2019 meeting**

Attending: Emily DeVoti, Julie Fagan, Justin F. Jackson, Reginald Leonard, David Magadini, Gwendolyn VanSant, Freke Vuijst, Randy Weinstein, Stephanie Wright.

Absent: Wray Gunn, David Magadini, Leah Reed, Gwendolyn VanSant

Also attending: Berkshire country residents and dedicated Du Bois volunteers Tim Likarish and James Manning, and Great Barrington resident Fionn DeVoti Roland.

#### **1. Call to Order**

Chair Randy Weinstein called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

#### **2. Approval of the minutes.**

The minutes for the meeting of April 2019 were reviewed by the committee.

Motion to approve: Ms. Devoti; Second: Ms. Fagan

Discussion: Ms. Dean asked for clarification on changing the date of the last meeting. Mr. Weinstein explained that there was not a quorum for the regularly scheduled time.

Mr. Manning didn't think that immigration was the committee's issue with the sister cities proposal. It was decided that immigration was indeed discussed, as was the question of visas. Mostly the question was: how could Sister Cities International offer low price for such an extensive bundle of services? It was agreed the language in the last minutes could stand.

Motion to accept minutes: Ms. Dean. Second: Mr. Jackson. In favor: All. (Ms. DeVoti abstained due to her absence from the April meeting.)

#### **3. Financial Update**

Report from Treasurer, Ms. Vuijst:

In the wake of the Legacy Festival, the Committee currently has a deficit of \$1,203.60

Ms. DeVoti made a **motion**: to approach the town to see if we can cover our shortfall with money from the town's Celebration Fund.

Mr. Weinstein seconded. Vote: all in favor.

Ms. Vuijst will ask Ed Abrahams who to approach: the town accountant or town manager.

#### **4. Old Business**

Mr. Weinstein broached the subject of creating criteria for membership on the Legacy Committee. Should there be a minimal number of times a member could be absent before relinquishing their membership?

He mentioned that some members put in more time than others. And that maybe if a member cannot commit to whole participation on the committee, then perhaps he or she should become part of an Honorary Committee or an Advisory Committee, to make room for more active participants to join.

Ms. Fagan said that the term used is usually “unexcused absences.”

Ms. Vuijst said she doesn’t like the whole idea.

Mr. Jackson called it draconian.

Ms. Fagan said that if someone never shows up, and then suddenly turns up to vote and throws a wrench in well laid plans, then the committee should be able to protect itself.

Mr. Weinstein explained that in Jan/Feb each year, there is a LOT to pull off, to get the ambitious festival off the ground, and all hands need to be on deck.

Ms. DeVoti suggested that this year’s festival was put up with adrenaline, it had to be put up so quickly without much lead time, and the few committee members working hardest on it were so focused on getting the events up that they didn’t have time to ask and assign committee members to tasks. She suggested that this year, the committee needs to decide which members will take charge of which events. And committee members must realize that putting up the festival is part of everyone’s responsibility.

Ms. Wright referred to the recent the Annual Town Meeting, at which an overwhelming majority of Great Barrington residents voted in favor of the non-binding referendum to name the middle school after Du Bois by waving their yellow voting papers. (This was a referendum that the committee was not involved in.). Said Ms. Wright: “After seeing all those yellow tickets, we’re just going to have to get bigger and bigger. I didn’t know Great Barrington was THAT much behind Du Bois!”

There was also a conversation about Du Bois and the Communist Party. Ms. Dean questioned if we need more education for the community about the CP and Du Bois’s involvement with and criticism of it. Some kind of informational flyer?

Mr. Jackson mentioned the articles he wrote in the Edge about this very topic. And Mr. Weinstein said that there will be lectures on it in the next Du Bois festival.

## **5. Du Bois Legacy Award Criteria**

Ms. Fagan reported back that the Legacy Award group had met to discuss criteria this week. She submitted a draft of the findings (submitted with these minutes).

Drafted selection criteria:

The Town of Great Barrington will present the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Award annually to recognize outstanding contributions by individuals whose work is either directly related to research, scholarship, literature, arts, or journalism about W.E.B. Du Bois or embodies the principles of his work in civil rights, progressive education, economic justice, or racial equality.

She asked: should we seek community input?

Also, can organizations receive the award or just individuals?

It was agreed that an ad would be written (Ms. DeVoti volunteered to draft it) inviting nominations from the community – or from anyone reading the ad. One does not need to be a Berkshires resident to nominate someone.

Mr. Jackson asked if we should state that anyone currently on the Legacy Committee is ineligible for the award.

Ms. DeVoti said: but what if a person on the committee has an exceptional contribution to Du Bois and his legacy outside of the committee?

Members seemed to agree that this would not go into the language of the award, but that it I understood the award would only be given to a committee member in exceptional circumstances.

Do we give the award to a national figure or someone local?

“I would actually prefer a schoolteacher over Spike Lee,” said Mr. Weinstein. [or was it Stephanie?]

“I don’t know, Spike Lee is pretty bad ass,” said Mr. Jackson.

It was agreed by all that if Spike Lee would accept the prize one year (or some other national figure), the date the award is presented could veer from Du Bois’s birthday. However, there was also a strong feeling that it would be wonderful to give the award to someone in the

Berkshires community this year. And that in the future it would be good for the award to go to someone with at least an affiliation in the Berkshires.

Mr. Weinstein will ask Ed Abrahams if there is a way to set up a form on the town website where people can submit their candidates for the award.

What should be on that form:

-name of nominee

-reason for the nomination

-recommenders name and contact info

There will be a deadline for it to be submitted: July 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **6. 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Boyhood Site**

This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary: 1960 – 2019

Mr. Weinstein will arrange an exhibit at the Library, in conjunction with UMass.

The committee will also plan a gathering to commemorate the event. Because UMass is not active in the summer, the event will probably be in September or October.

There is a question of access to the site. Can the gathering and speakers be in the same place as the food and festivities afterwards?

Can there be parking along the road?

Or can there be shuttles bringing people to the site?

Focus: Looking Backward/Looking Forward, a discussion

Ms. Dean suggested she can approach Ozzie Davis's son.

Ms. DeVoti wondered if any children of Julian Bond might speak.

Mr. Weinstein asked if Ms. DeVoti's father William DeVoti (who attended the original 1969 event) would speak as a local resident.

Ms. Dean suggested bringing in the folk music field.

An anniversary planning group was formed: Ms. Dean, Ms. DeVoti, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Weinstein, Ms. Wright

## **7. Announcements/Comments**

Mr. Leonard is still talking with Berkshire Taconic Foundation. They give one-time grants of \$1,000. The committee missed this year's deadline, but he will check back with them if there is money available with a different deadline, for the Jan 2020 presentation of Wesley Brown's play.

Mr. Manning reported that he is trying to get James Anthony Tyler to write a play about W.E.B. Du Bois, and he is making progress.

Steve Bannon would like to come to the next, June, Legacy meeting.

## **8. Citizens Speak**

Ms. Fagan mentioned that there was an incredible documentary on PBS about Reconstruction which featured Du Bois.

This Saturday (May 18), at 11am, Jamaica Kincaid will speak at Simon's Rock commencement. All are welcome.

## **9. Next Meeting – Adjournment**

The next meeting date was set for Wednesday, June 19th from 6:00 – 8:00pm at the Firehouse.

Ms. Dean made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Vuijst seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:08pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Emily DeVoti  
Recording Secretary