

Ralph Bunche Advisory Committee
3 p.m. - June 22, 2022
King George County Citizens Center

Members present: Annie Cupka, Cathy Binder, Nick Minor, Chris Clarke, Claudette Jordon, Phyllis Cook, Cathy Cutright, Terri Rinko, Renee Parker, Mike Hubbard, Lisa Hull, Stephanie Burch, Tameka Heyward-Jackson.

Remote: Pegi Wright.

Absent: Cristina Turdean, Shannon Tolliver.

Annie Cupka had provided members with a meeting agenda and packet of documents related to renovating the historical former school. They included a report from an earlier Ralph Bunche advisory committee, studies from Wiley/Wilson, as well as grant guidelines for a 2023 Industrial Revitalization Fund application from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development (DCHD).

Introductions

Ms. Cupka kicked off the first meeting of the newly-revitalized and recently-appointed advisory group, saying the new committee was the right group to take the current project forward.

Members introduced themselves and named their agency, organization or community affiliation.

Appointment of Advisory Committee Officers

On a nomination by Ms. Cupka, consensus was reached without objection for Renee Parker to be Chair of the committee. Phyllis Cook volunteered as Recording Secretary and Claudette Jordon as Vice Chair, with concurrence from the committee without objection.

Mission/Vision Statement

Ms. Parker drew attention to the wording printed on the bottom of the agenda, with Ms. Cupka saying it was a vision statement from the earlier committee, adding it came from page 7 of the 2015 committee report, which had been distributed, and noting a mission statement was also included in the same report, which she read aloud.

It was agreed by consensus to keep the two statements under review with Ms. Parker suggesting the two be blended but kept concise. She asked members with suggestions to email them to her for consideration prior to future decisions.

Subcommittee Appointments

Ms. Parker asked if members wished to volunteer for four suggested subcommittees: Business Plan, Fundraising/Grants, Marketing/Communications and Museum/Historical.

Members gave their preferences and absent members were also suggested for various committees. Assignments were tentatively offered, with Ms. Parker suggesting membership on subcommittees could be fluid, and with the potential for adjustments to balance subcommittee numbers. Agreement without objection was for Ms. Jordon, as a Ralph Bunche High School alum, President of the Ralph Bunche Alumni Association and member of the earlier advisory

committee to be on all committees. It was suggested members of subcommittees could communicate prior to the next meeting to select chairs and notetakers.

Adoption of Regular Meeting Day/Time

Following discussion, it was agreed by consensus without objection that meetings would take place monthly on the second Wednesday of the month, 3-4:30 p.m. at the Citizens Center or locations to be decided.

Ralph Bunche High School Building Tour Date

A brief 30-minute tour was scheduled at the start of the next meeting at 3 p.m. Wednesday, July 13. Following the tour, committee members will reconvene at the University of Mary Washington-Dahlgren campus, offered by Mike Hubbard, saying members could also view the panel display of “The Ralph Bunche Road to School Desegregation in King George County, Virginia.”

Member Comments/Questions

Ms. Cupka announced she and Cathy Binder and members of County staff had had a recent meeting with an official from DCHD about making application to the Industrial Revitalization Fund for the Ralph Bunche project.

They were informed that considerably more funding than usual was expected to be available for grants over the next two years, with the bulk of the increase coming from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) passed by Congress.

Ms. Cupka said the County Board could apply for \$1M, for which no matching funds would be needed toward the grant. But she added the grant application could also show matching funds were available, noting the \$500K from the National Park Service previously awarded for roof repair could be named as such, which would make the grant application more competitive.

She also said the documented support of the Ralph Bunche Alumni Association was a key advantage for the grant application. The plan would also include requesting letters of support from state and federal elected officials.

Ms. Cupka said she and Ms. Binder intended to discuss the project later that evening at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Cupka also said she intended to make a motion to direct County staff to develop the grant proposal.

She also said she intended to ask the Board to draft a local ordinance to designate the area around the historical former school as an “Abandoned School Revitalization Zone.” Such a designation would also be an asset to supply added flexibility toward the project and would make the grant application stronger.

In response to questions, Ms. Cupka said staff was directed on June 7 to have a study done on abatement for hazardous materials in the building as well elimination of mold and other problems due to water incursion, which need to be addressed all around the building and its foundation, and for repair/replacement of building eaves and overhang. A recent engineering estimate pegged the cost for that at about \$500K. A new well and a septic system are also needed and that could bring the total up to \$1M. The grant application closes in August and an answer on an award would be expected in early fall.

Ms. Cupka advised that if the committee can get this project firmly fleshed out, a corporate sponsor might choose to reveal itself.

Mr. Hubbard and Lisa Hull both urged a broad mission be adopted to include numerous potential mixed uses and partnering with other county and regional entities and colleges and universities for uses for the former school building and ancillary building. Tameka Heyward-Jackson suggested another subcommittee could also be created to explore potential uses for the buildings and grounds.

Ms. Jordon agreed, saying that's the idea and the entire site contains a total of 33 acres, noting that decades ago it had been a hub for the Black community, as Edgehill Training School, then King George Training School and finally Ralph Bunche High School in 1949, following a successful lawsuit (Civil Action #631), which was subsequently combined into the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In addition to the key component of a museum gallery to tell the story of "The Road to School Desegregation in King George County" and its role across the nation, members chimed in with other numerous uses such as possible post-secondary instruction in various trades and professions, including heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC), plumbing, nursing, family care services, cosmetology, construction, environmental agriculture and sustainable agribusiness, finance, culinary and food science, and installation of a commercial kitchen for food prep instruction and event catering. Office space could potentially be provided, such as for Virginia Cooperative Extension. Space could also be available for meetings and other activities, including larger gatherings in a refurbished gym. Outdoor space would also be available for a variety of uses, including community garden plots, kitchen garden and/or demonstration garden.

The meeting adjourned at 4:16 p.m.