



American Revolution Commission (VA250)

African American Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, June 10, 2025, 10:00 AM

30 Ingalls Road

Fort Monroe, Virginia 23651

MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order and Welcome

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Chair

Senator Mamie Locke opened the meeting at 10:09 AM, welcoming in-person and virtual attendees. She acknowledged special guests from the City of Hampton and noted that Gaylene Kanoyton was en route from Norfolk. The meeting opened with optimism, underscoring the collaborative nature of the council's efforts. Senator Locke set the tone for a forward-looking and inclusive commemoration of the 250th anniversary.

Remarks from National Honorary Chair

Carly Fiorina

Carly Fiorina thanked Senator Locke for her leadership and emphasized that the 250th commemoration is about the present and future, not just the past. She highlighted that July 4, 2026, is only 13 months away, and that July 4, 2025, begins in less than a month. Fiorina described the commemoration as a "season of civic renewal" centered on continuous engagement. She encouraged the council to focus on meaningful and inclusive programming that fosters connection among all Virginians.

Juneteenth FreedomFest

Gaylene Kanoyton, Virginia NAACP

Gaylene Kanoyton presented on Juneteenth FreedomFest, beginning at 10:32 AM, highlighting expanded exposure and programming, including gospel choirs, African drums, jazz bands, and a community conversation panel. The event includes community awards, health screenings, food and retail vendors, and the VA250 Mobile Museum. Concerns were raised regarding Sail250 overlapping with Juneteenth in 2026, with multiple attendees emphasizing that Juneteenth deserves its own recognition. Locke and others questioned if plans were finalized and emphasized the need for separate observances. Fort Monroe representatives stated Sail250 was intentionally scheduled during Juneteenth with inclusive programming. However, some participants expressed discomfort with symbolic gestures such as placing Juneteenth flags on tall ships. The council urged more intentional outreach and collaboration with Juneteenth organizers moving forward.

America Made in Virginia: Fourth at the Fort

Bill provided updates on the Fourth at the Fort event, scheduled 24 days from the meeting. Key highlights include a naturalization ceremony, flag raising, and “Out of Many, One,” festival featuring cultural performances and civic discussions. The event will run from 3–9:30 PM, including a drum circle, land recognition ceremony, and sister city salute to Angola. A variety of vendors, community groups, and faith-based organizations have been invited to participate. Drumming performances are scheduled throughout the day to address concerns about limited stage time. Flexibility remains in programming, and Senator Locke was encouraged to offer feedback. The event aims to represent all Virginians and inspire a year of civic engagement leading to 2026.

American Music Collaborative

Nikki Thorpe, Virginia Symphony Orchestra

Melinda Gainer, American Music Collaborative

Melinda Gainer introduced Soul Food Anthology, launching June 16, 2025, with a pilot event at Guava restaurant. The anthology explores colonial-era Virginia food histories and their cultural roots, paired with local music by neo-soul artist Zaya. The effort includes filming B-roll content and curating historically significant menus. On July 5, the “Table of Truth” national potluck is planned, encouraging community dialogue. The collaboration aims to blend history, music, and cuisine to foster cultural understanding.

Run Richmond 16.19

Max Plank, Djimon Hounsou Foundation

Addie Richburg, National Alliance of Faith and Justice

Max Plank, representing the Djimon Hounsou Foundation, discussed the Run Richmond 16.19 marathon, focused on African American history and cultural healing. Now in its fourth year, the event includes 35 nonprofit partners and aims to draw over 3,000 participants in 2025 and 5,000+ in 2026. The event integrates cultural storytelling through music and art and seeks inclusion in the 250th commemorations. James Warren noted the event’s cultural focus distinguishes it from others and proposed the council walk the event together. Senator Locke affirmed her interest in participating. There was openness to incorporating the Mobile Museum into the experience.

Other Business and Adjournment

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Chair

Senator Locke acknowledged Eola Dance for her liaison work with the African American Advisory Council and VA250. Connie Matthews Harshaw shared details of a Juneteenth groundbreaking for Williamsburg’s First Black Church on June 19, with public opening of the Bray School to follow. Locke previewed upcoming events including a November 8 “Let Freedom Ring” Foundation ceremony and a Slavery Conference at Colonial Williamsburg October 24–25. Carly Fiorina reiterated the council’s importance in leveraging every opportunity to build meaningful engagement. Maureen Elgersman Lee noted the Bray School’s role in Juneteenth programming. Cheryl Wilson shared an invitation to a July 4 VIP Reception at Fort Monroe. Senator Locke adjourned the meeting at 11:35 AM.

Advisory Council Members Present:

The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, *Chair, Senate of Virginia*

Carly Fiorina, *National Honorary Chair*

Eric W. Claville, *Executive Advisor to the President for Governmental Relations, Norfolk State University*

Alicia O. Cohen, *Former Vice Chair, Loudoun VA250*

Connie Matthews Harshaw, *Board President, Let Freedom Ring Foundation, First Baptist Church*

Professor Ervin Jordan, *Associate Professor and Research Archivist, University of Virginia*

Dr. Maureen Elgersman Lee, *Bray School Lab Director, William & Mary*

Patrice Lewis, *Government Affairs Manager, Gentry Locke Attorneys*

Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, *Professor of Virginia Black History and Culture, Norfolk State University*

Phyllis Terrell, *Director of Communications, Fort Monroe*

Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward, *Director, Hampton University Museum*

James Warren, *Founder and CEO, Share More Stories, JMI Vice President of Brand Strategy*

Guests of the Council Present:

Gaylene Kanoyton, *Virginia NAACP*

Max Plank, *Djimon Hounsou Foundation*

VA250 Staff Members:

Cheryl Wilson, *Executive Director*

Kevin Hampton, *Assistant Director of Education & Programs*

Bill Schemerhorn, *Event Designer*

Eola Dance, *African American Advisory Council Advisor*

Jeremy Martin, *Logistics and Meetings Coordinator*