

# VA250

## American Revolution Commission (VA250)

Full Commission Meeting  
Tuesday, October 21, 2025, 10:00 AM  
Virginia General Assembly Building  
Richmond, VA

### DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

#### Members Present

*Chairman Terry L. Austin, Vice-Chair Mamie E. Locke, Carly Fiorina, Delegate Alex Q. Askew, Jean Ann Bolling (Virtual), Christy S. Coleman (Virtual), H. Benson Dendy III, David Duncan, Sue Gerdelman, Secretary of Education Aimee R. Guidera, Peter Hedlund, Mark Ingrao, Delegate Paul E. Krizek, Julie Langan (Virtual), Justice Elizabeth McClanahan (Virtual), Rita McClenney, Senator Ryan McDougle, Eric H. Monday (Virtual), The Honorable Kenneth R. Plum (Virtual), Alyson Ramsey, Jackie Stone*

#### Call to Order and Remarks

*The Honorable Terry Austin, Chair*

The Meeting was called to order at 10:08 am by Chairman Austin. A quorum was present.

Chairman Austin welcomed those attending in person and virtually, and noted that the semi-quincentennial in Virginia has begun, with programs and exhibitions that are substantive, balanced, and thoughtful. He noted that through the Mobile Museum and the VHMC/JYF exhibition, we are engaging, educating, and inspiring. Through the grants programs, we are enhancing and amplifying. And through our multi-state convenings, Virginia leads the nation in the 250th. Chairman Austin thanked Vice Chair Locke, Honorary National Chair Fiorina, and VA250 staff for their tremendous efforts.

#### Approval of Minutes from April 8, 2025

The Chairman noted that the January meeting of the Commission was cancelled due to the closure of buildings in Capitol Square resulting from water supply issues within the City of Richmond. Minutes from the April 8 meeting of the Commission had been distributed and posted online. There being no changes, a motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Dendy, seconded by Ms. Ramsey, and passed unanimously.

#### Development Report

*Ben Dendy, President, Virginia Commemorations, Inc.*

Mr. Dendy reported that to date, \$5.7 million has been raised, including the recent in-kind gift from Volvo Trucks North America of a new Volvo VLN truck for the Mobile Museum. Mr. Dendy also noted a successful challenge grant from the Old Dominion Highway Contractors Association and a new challenge grant to car dealerships from the Virginia Automobile Dealers

Association. Chairman Austin expressed the gratitude, respect, and appreciation of the companies, banks, nonprofits, associations, and individuals whose generosity contributes to making programs so successful.

**Grant Recommendation Approvals** (Requires 2/3 vote)

**VTC-VA250 Marketing Leverage Grants: Round 6 (Summer 2025)**

*Staci Martin, Virginia Tourism Corporation*

Ms. Martin presented Round 6 of VTC-VA250 Marketing Grant Program Recommendations, comprised of 15 recommended awards, totaling \$139,000 and matched by the applicants with an additional \$171,000. Several highlights of programs in Round 6 include: the statewide passport, an exhibition at the Army Historical Foundation in Fairfax County, “Call to Arms,” events in Newport News showcasing women in the military, a Colonial Kids Day event in Clarke County, and additional events showcasing the Mobile Museum in the City of Salem.

Ms. Martin noted several presentations that she and Ms. Wilson have given to statewide partners to highlight grants and resources available to localities, including presentations to the Small Business Administration, Rural Summit, and VA1 Tourism Summit.

Last, Ms. Martin mentioned several statewide engagement ideas for activation from tourism sites to small business across the state, including “Collaborative Commemorations” marking milestone anniversaries in 2026; gardens in patriotic colors; display of bunting and banners, etc.

**Virginia Humanities Grants: Round 3 (Summer 2025)**

*Peter Hedlund, Virginia Humanities*

Mr. Hedlund thanked members of the Commission who joined peer reviewers and VH staff to serve on the grants review panels over the past rounds, including Jean Ann Bolling and Gretchen Bulova. Recapping the VH-VA250 grant program, the first round funded all 14 applications received, the second round funded 20 of 22 applications, and the third and final round funded 31 of 42 applications. Applicants whose projects were not funded due to budgetary considerations, we directed to other potential funding sources when available.

A variety of statewide programs have been funded, including Sail250 events in Yorktown, a performance by the Williamsburg Symphony, exhibition at the National Museum of the US Army, and a project at the Virginia Quilting Museum on quilts aligned with the revolutionary period.

A motion was made by Delegate Krizek to approve the VTC-VA250 and VH-VA250 grants as recommended. The motion was seconded by Ms. Stone, and passed unanimously.

**Update: Give Me Liberty: Virginia and the Forging of a Nation**

*Christy Coleman, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation*

Ms. Coleman reported that, to date, more than 55,000 visitors to the VMHC have gone through the exhibition, which closes in Richmond in January and reopens at the American Revolution Museum in Yorktown on July 4.

Ms. Coleman also noted the collaborative VA250 passport that JYF is cosponsoring with the VMHC and other partners. More than 100 different historic sites are participating, and passports will be distributed beginning in November.

### **Advisory Council Updates**

#### **African American Advisory Council**

*Senator Mamie Locke, Chair*

Senator Locke noted that the AAAC held meetings in June and September providing information and updates on activities taking place, including Juneteenth Freedom Fest (Hampton), Fourth at the Fort (Fort Monroe), the American Music Collaborative and Soul Food Anthology/Table of Truth, African Landing Day, and Run Richmond 16.19 (which hosted more than 2,200 participants from 31 states and two other countries).

Senator Locke noted that the July 4 event at Fort Monroe was a great success by all accounts, with many participants, vendors, young people, and an interactive “Expressions of Freedom” section. Presentations from Dr. Anthony Parent of Wake Forest University were prominent, and a book signing for his latest publication was held. In addition, greetings from descendants of the William Tucker family brought greetings from Angola to those assembled at Fort Monroe for July 4.

Senator Locke reminded members that local committees are the engines for public engagement, ensuring that African American stories are being included in the fabric of the commemoration.

#### **Tribal Nations Leadership Advisory Council**

*Chief Stephen Adkins, Chair*

On behalf of Chief Adkins, who was away on pressing personal business, Reggie Tuppance, senior staff advisor to the TNLAC, offered updates. Mr. Tuppance engages directly with chiefs and attends tribal conferences, powwows, and events. A proposal is being circulated for a Signature Event in Jamestown on April 24-25, 2026, and would include cultural presentations, dance, art, vendors, and panel discussions. A primary focus of the event will be resilience, looking from past to present over 250 years.

Mr. Tuppance highlighted Indigenous participation in Fourth at the Fort activities, including a ceremony as part of the naturalization ceremony, participatory dancing, hands-on community demonstrations, and the Indigenous drummers who were part of the Grand Ceremony.

#### **Education Steering Committee update**

*Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera, Chair*

Secretary Guidera reminded the Commission of the three goals of the Education Steering Committee: (i) Make History Come Alive; (ii) Spark a Civics Renaissance; and (iii) Celebrate Democracy. Several successful programs were highlighted, including the State Civics Bee (presented in partnership with the US Chamber of Commerce), “Reading Revolution,” and the Expressions of Freedom Contest that invites students to express what freedom means to them, with winning entries printed in a booklet available across the Commonwealth and buried in a time capsule at the Washington statue in Trafalgar Square.

### **Update on Mobile Museums, Marketing Plan, 2026 Signature Events**

*Carly Fiorina, National Honorary Chair*

#### **National Honorary Chair Remarks**

Ms. Fiorina commended the Commission for its substantive, bipartisan leadership and noted that Virginia continues to serve as a national model for the Semiquincentennial commemoration. She emphasized that the Commission has remained focused on meaningful programming centered on education, engagement, inspiration, and a lasting civic legacy.

Ms. Fiorina highlighted the Commission’s commitment to inclusive, authentic history and its success in fostering broad collaboration among state agencies, local commissions, educational partners, cultural institutions, and private-sector collaborators. She noted that Virginia’s approach to the Semiquincentennial has positioned the Commonwealth as a national leader and source of guidance for other states and institutions.

She further discussed legacy initiatives intended to extend civic renewal beyond 2026, including the Semiquincentennial Pledge and expanded civic education efforts. This includes the “How Well Do You Know Your Country?” initiative, which draws from questions used on the U.S. citizenship examination and is being disseminated incrementally through media and digital platforms to promote civic understanding and participation.

Noting that a Spending Plan will be presented at the January meeting of the Commission, Ms. Fiorina provided updates on plans for 2026:

#### **Mobile Museum Expansion**

She announced that a second Mobile Museum would launch in the coming weeks, with a formal unveiling ceremony planned in Southwest Virginia. With two Mobile Museums operating concurrently, the Commission will be able to advance its goal of visiting middle schools.

She noted that, to ensure full statewide coverage, particularly in rural and geographically dispersed areas, the Mobile Museum program timeline has been extended through December 2027.

Chairman Austin reiterated that the two mobile museums will serve communities either through a hub and spoke model, or by directly visiting the sites, as most appropriate.

## 2026 Marketing Plan

Ms. Fiorina reported that approximately 70 percent of Virginians currently know little or nothing about the upcoming Semiquincentennial celebrations, underscoring the need for a comprehensive public awareness campaign. The marketing strategy is designed to be localized, inclusive, and nonpartisan, and is structured around six geographic regions of the Commonwealth. The campaign is intentionally non-competitive with existing marketing efforts by Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), destination marketing organizations (DMOs), and historic institutions, and instead seeks to leverage and amplify those efforts.

Ms. Fiorina stated that the total anticipated marketing expenditure is approximately \$7.5 million, with the bulk of the spending planned for calendar year 2026.

She outlined the roles of the Commission's marketing partners as follows:

- **Creative Development:** Brand Federation is responsible for the creation of VA250 creative assets, including flagship videos, sizzle reels, and visual storytelling elements supporting major initiatives such as America Made in Virginia, the Mobile Museum, and signature events.
- **Messaging and Narrative:** JMI, led by James Warren, works within the America Made in Virginia framework to tailor messaging to specific communities across the Commonwealth in order to increase engagement. English Major supports the refinement and shaping of VA250's public-facing messaging and narrative.
- **Distribution and Performance Metrics:** Stagwell manages digital distribution and audience development, including the creation and maintenance of targeted email lists. Key performance indicators include click-through rates, list-building metrics, and the ability to deliver targeted outreach for specific regions and events.
- **Earned Media:** The Hodges Partnership is responsible for driving earned media coverage around specific programs, initiatives, and events to increase public awareness of VA250 activities statewide.
- **Advocacy and Opinion Media:** BlackRock assists with identifying and advancing earned media and advocacy opportunities, including op-eds and leadership placements, with a focus on national and DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia) audiences.

Ms. Fiorina further noted that all marketing content developed through the campaign will be made available for free use by partner organizations, institutions, and corporate collaborators to further amplify reach and awareness.

## Signature Events

Ms. Fiorina provided an overview of the Commission's planned 2026 signature events, noting that the scope and geographic breadth of programming is unmatched nationally. Planned events include commemorations honoring indigenous peoples, programming at

Monticello, Stratford Hall, Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, Alexandria, and other locations across the Commonwealth.

Highlights include the “In the Eyes of the World” event at George Washington’s Mount Vernon, in partnership with America250, Juneteenth observances throughout Virginia, African Landing Day commemorations, and a Governor’s Address and Naturalization Ceremony on July 4, 2026, followed by a nationally televised evening program in Colonial Williamsburg. The commemorative year will conclude with a signature event at the Historic First Baptist Church.

### **Procurement Policy**

*Cheryl Wilson, Executive Director*

Ms. Wilson presented a draft procurement policy developed in accordance with the 2025 Appropriations Act.

During discussion, an amendment to Section 10 of the policy was proposed to expand the language to require offerors to certify that they are not barred or disqualified by any state, territory, or governmental entity, rather than limiting the certification to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The amendment was accepted as appropriate and consistent with best practices.

Commission members also inquired about conflict-of-interest provisions. Counsel confirmed that conflict-of-interest and ethics safeguards were addressed within the policy’s ethics and public contracting language, including certifications related to non-collusion, inducements, and improper influence.

A motion to approve the procurement policy, as amended, was made by Delegate Askew and seconded by Delegate Krizek. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Staff Updates**

*Cheryl Wilson, Executive Director*

Ms. Wilson provided staff updates highlighting continued growth and engagement across VA250 initiatives. She reported that media impressions have significantly exceeded 2024 levels, reflecting increased public awareness and engagement statewide. She noted that the number of commemorative partners continues to grow rapidly, encompassing businesses, cultural institutions, associations, and community organizations across the Commonwealth.

Ms. Wilson highlighted several statewide initiatives and recent events, including leadership by Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in coordinating a Red, White & Blue Gardens initiative across the state. Additional program highlights included Two Lights for Tomorrow, Army 250, Juneteenth commemorations, July 4 programming, and Navy 250, all of which demonstrated strong participation and collaboration.

She also shared examples of expanding visibility for VA250 through collegiate athletics, community activations, partner toolkits, and the continued growth of local and statewide events

listed on the VA250 website. Ms. Wilson emphasized the importance of Commission members encouraging participation in local committees and the commemorative partner program to further amplify outreach and engagement.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Austin expressed appreciation to staff for their continued work and dedication. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 am.