



## Richland County Council

### CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM AD HOC COMMITTEE

April 20, 2017 – 2:00 PM

4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Paul Livingston, Chair; Seth Rose, Greg Pearce, Calvin “Chip” Jackson, and Dalhi Myers

OTHERS PRESENT: Yvonne McBride, Michelle Onley and Beverly Harris

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Mr. Livingston called the meeting to order at approximately 2:02 PM.
2. **ELECTION OF THE CHAIR** – Mr. Pearce moved, seconded by Mr. C. Jackson, to nominate Mr. Livingston as Chair of the committee. The vote in favor was unanimous.
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – The agenda was unanimously adopted.
4. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

**a. Update**

Mr. Livingston stated the Historic Bethel Church turned the property over to the Renaissance Foundation around 1996. At that time, the idea was to make it a cultural arts center that would include civil rights, but other events as well. In 2001, the church formed a non-profit and gave the property to the Renaissance Foundation for the next 99 years. Occasionally, events have been held there.

The County has contributed approximately \$950,000 for operations and repairs at the church.

In 2014, the Renaissance Foundation presented a \$10 million funding proposal to Council for a museum. The proposal included historical tax credits and private sector fundraising. The funding gap was approximately \$1.2 million. The City and the County each agreed to contribute \$600,000, contingent upon the Renaissance Foundation receiving the tax credits. The County was to pay \$75,000 per year out of the Hospitality Tax Fund until the \$600,000 obligation is met.

During that time, the new market tax credits changed somewhat and the facility was no longer within that boundary to receive the tax credits; therefore, the Foundation never received the funding from the County. After speaking with the Finance Director, because of the way the motion was stated, those funds were still being set aside. There was \$225,000 set aside for the project, as instructed by Council.

Mr. Livingston presented, for information, a letter from Mr. Doug Chittum dated June 4, 2014 to the committee regarding the Renaissance Foundation’s funding proposal.

Mr. Livingston stated early last year Mr. Rush put together a civil rights committee to revisit this matter. There has not been any significant progress since that time with the exception of the Foundation working on

a new initiative in terms of funding. The Foundation has developed a new funding strategy to try to move forward. There is another tax credit that is on table that was not available before.

Mr. Livingston stated he would like to have a joint meeting with the City of Columbia and the Renaissance Foundation to receive an update and discuss expectations for the future.

Mr. Livingston presented a list of public/private use civil rights museums. (i.e. Jefferson Center – Roanoke, Virginia; Taubman Museum of Art – Roanoke, Virginia; and Museum of South Texas History – Edinburg, Texas)

Mr. Livingston stated if we move forward on this matter, we may want to visit some of the museums.

Mr. C. Jackson inquired if this is a conversation about a civil rights museum or about funding the Renaissance Foundation Cultural Arts Center at Bethel.

Mr. Livingston stated the discussion is about a civil rights museum. We might decide we want a brand new facility, but this is the history of how we got where we are.

Mr. C. Jackson inquired if the County has invested any money in the current facility.

Mr. Livingston responded in the affirmative.

Mr. C. Jackson stated it will be tough to decide on another facility then.

Mr. Livingston stated that is why he's talking about the facility the way he is because the County has invested in it.

Mr. C. Jackson then stated that is why he asked the question, are we then locked into the Renaissance Cultural Arts Center or are we free to do like Atlanta, Charleston, etc.

Mr. Livingston stated the County is free to do whatever it wants.

Mr. C. Jackson stated the County could just say that is the contribution to Renaissance Foundation. He further stated he is not saying the County not support the Renaissance Foundation, but he knows how foundations work and it has the potential to not be as public as we want it to be.

Mr. Livingston stated it would depend on how we structured it.

Ms. Myers inquired if the County has decided to partner with the City to do a museum.

Mr. Livingston stated that is the discussion we are going to have.

Mr. Pearce stated back in 2014, the County has agreed to work with the City toward establishing something here in Columbia.

Ms. Myers stated she was interested in a cultural museum. She would like to see something that does not focus exclusively, as this one does, on just these six people and the City. The County has so much. In Chairwoman Dickerson's district, for example, the historic schools could be a part of a Richland County cultural history tour. Focusing in on just one building in Columbia cuts out a lot of the history of the County. And once we turn it over to the 501(c)3 it will not be a Richland County facility and will not take in a lot of what the County has to offer. It will be the Bethel Center.

Mr. C. Jackson stated the International African-American Museum in Charleston has major corporate sponsors and wondered where the County stands on this.

Mr. Livingston stated private sector contributions have been a part of the discussions in the past.

Mr. C. Jackson stated the museum in Atlanta is an awesome facility. They have a simulated lunch counter that allows you to put on headphones and hear the conversations that would have taken place at the time.

Ms. Myers stated she does not feel this has a broad enough scope to actually be the civil rights museum or the even the cultural museum for the County.

Ms. McBride stated, although we're not at the point yet, the County needs to get someone with oversight that understands the history, the development of museums, etc.

**b. Next Steps**

Mr. Livingston stated he suggest the next steps to be meeting with the City of Columbia regarding a civil rights museum to discuss where and what would be included in the museum, as well as, the costs.

Mr. Pearce stated the County has done a reasonably good job of inventorying our resources. We know where the Rosenwald schools are, the Harriet Barber House, slave cabins at Goodwill Plantation, the Modjeska Simkins House, Mann-Simons Cottage, etc. There is nothing coordinating all of that together. He would like to see a civil rights museum that coordinates and not just a central building. There is nothing that says you can start here and follow the history from slavery through the civil rights.

Ms. Myers stated she was in Atlanta and they had completed their "cultural history trail" and it is amazing. It is not just a building, there are 3 central buildings, and it takes in the whole of it.

Mr. Livingston stated the discussion has always been about that.

Ms. Myers believes the County needs its own separate project. She stated this is a great project, but she does not want the County's project to get sucked into the City's project because there focus is going to be much narrower.

Mr. Livingston stated there is not a City project.

Ms. McBride stated the City is going to be a part of it because it is a part of the County.

Mr. Livingston stated this is not what we are meeting with the City about. This could be an option, but we are meeting to discuss civil rights.

Mr. C. Jackson inquired about how much money the County has invested in the Renaissance Cultural Arts Center.

Mr. Pearce stated approximately \$1 million.

Mr. C. Jackson stated if you have invested that kind of money you can go into a conversation and talk about something else and move beyond that, but it is easier said than done. That is a huge investment. If you want to just say we were willing to give. He would rather say we were willing to give Bethel/Renaissance Center a \$1 million to upgrade their cultural center and move on and then come back to table to talk about the much larger project.

Mr. Livingston inquired about what the County wants to do and say as it relates to the civil rights museum.

Mr. C. Jackson stated all the things that Mr. Pearce, Ms. Myers and Ms. McBride said should be presented. The City is going to have a role because some of the buildings are in the City limits.

Mr. Livingston stated he is trying to get an idea of what we want the agenda to look like.

Ms. McBride stated she does not think this project will go much further if they do not get some assistance. She stated the project will die and the \$1 million in it will die.

Mr. Rose stated the building has a lot of character and the building is great, but if the County is going to invest this type of funding and take on this venture we need to own the building.

Mr. C. Jackson stated it will never happen. He further stated instead of getting into a confrontation with them, admit the County has helped them as much as we can and we are looking to expand that conversation to be broader opportunity than just a physical location on the corner of Sumter and Taylor Street.

Mr. Livingston stated the most recent proposal has the County contributing approximately 10%. He further stated there have been attempts over the years to get funding from the State that were unsuccessful.

Ms. McBride stated before the County meets with the City we need to find out: What are the expectations of the County? Clarification on what they want?

Mr. Livingston stated the question is not, the expectations of the County since this is a proposal from the Renaissance Foundation. The question is more of what the Foundation wants in regards to the proposal.

Ms. Myers inquired if the City wants to meet or the Foundation wants to meet.

Mr. Livingston stated the Foundation wants to meet and the City agreed to meet.

Mr. C. Jackson suggested having someone from the International African-American Museum come and meet with the County. They can talk about their experiences, which will help the County shape what direction they want to go. They are building a \$75 million project in Charleston and have been working on it for over 12 years ago.

Ms. McBride inquired about the expectations when the County contributed the approximate \$1 million to the Renaissance Foundation.

Mr. Livingston stated it had to do with some work with the facility and a few programs they hosted.

Ms. Myers inquired if we know what the City's goal is for the meeting.

Mr. Livingston stated in his conversations with City Councilman McDowell he also would like to have a civil rights museum somewhere in the County.

Mr. Pearce envisioned someone going to the Convention Center and them telling them we have this civil rights cultural tour that starts by going to...and then you go....

Mr. Pearce further stated that his generation is the last of the segregated south; therefore, his children understand but his grandchildren do not. As a fact, he always takes people to the other ticket window at the Township Auditorium.

5. **ADJOURNMENT** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:45 PM.