

**Meeting Date: March 3, 2026**

**Attendance:**

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Akiba, Sukia      | <input type="checkbox"/> Johnson, Xenia            | <input type="checkbox"/> Brown, Deidre                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bastola, Kashish  | <input type="checkbox"/> Lubintus,<br>Gassendina   | <input type="checkbox"/> Diana Milkey                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown, Thabiti    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mason, Natassa            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collins, Melissa  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wyzard Jones,<br>Cheyenne | <i>* Arrived after the meeting<br/>was called to order</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dance, Kwame      |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Davis, Jeff       |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greenidge, George |  |  |

**City AFC Staff**

Action Items will be highlighted in yellow

**Call to Order:**

Chair George Greenidge called this Commission meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

**Agenda and Minutes:**

**I. Call to Order**

- a. Call meeting to order
- b. Determination of quorum
  - i. Quorum Met

**II. Opening Statements**

**a. Chairperson and Acting Executive Directors' Statements (George Greenidge, Deidre Travis Brown)**

- i. Executive Director Deidre Travis Brown reminds the Commission of remaining related to the purpose of the Ordinance, which is related to reparations on behalf of descendants of chattel slavery in Cambridge.

**b. Review of Agenda & Importance of "Staying on Topic"**

**c. Clarification on Commissioner Opinions & Potential Votes**

- i. Commissioner George Greenidge tells the Commission that this meeting will not be used for voting, instead just a discussion on the budget and proposed ideas

**d. Purpose and Use of Working Sessions**

- i. According to open meeting law, Working Sessions may not be

used to vote on any subject

- ii. To collectively deliberate in open meetings regarding proposals, policy papers, and potential votes

**e. Discussion: Open Meeting Law, Email Communications to Commissioners, and CC Emails to Cambridge Staff (outside of Deidre Brown)**

**III. Administrative Session**

**a. Commission Structure**

**b. Report: George Greenidge and Commission Discussion/Feedback**

**c. Report: Mel Jackson and Commission Discussion/Feedback**

**d. Votes for Review**

**i. Non-Binding Letter of Support**

**ii. Budget Authority for Chairperson**

**IV. Discussion: FY27 Budget**

- a. Overview: How the City Budget Process Works and What is Required from AFC (*Deidre Travis Brown*)

- b. Review: Suggested Spending and Allocations (George Greenidge's Proposal)

- i. Commissioner GG moved this item to the top of the agenda and began reviewing his budget proposal worksheet.

- 1. Outreach Proposal: Up to \$15,000

- a. Meant to provide small grants to commissioners to engage with the Community

- b. Meant to create opportunities for City Staff to engage with other City Staff

- 2. Comments: Outreach Proposal

- a. Commissioner Jeff Davis expresses concern that the lack of subcommittees equates to a lack of structure on which to base the budget, and that the proposed budget items feel "premature" and hyper specific.

- b. Commissioner Kwame Dance expresses agreement and asks to clarify how specific the budget items need to be. GG replies that he is looking only for feedback on the idea and not on the idea as a budget item.

- c. JD asks if the budget amount needs to be set by next week. GG confirms.

- d. KD asks that if a Commissioner doesn't want to use their allotted funds, where does it go? GG

replies that it can be used for anyone else. KD expresses fear of issues with equity in this case, saying that if this can be allotted however, one person could demand the greater part of funding. KD suggests a process to allot funds in this group as necessary.

- e. DTB mentions that Commissioners do not usually have individualized access for funds and instead that budget items have their own sections (e.g., education, events, outreach, as opposed to Commissioner allocated funds)
- f. Commissioner Melissa Collins-Jackson agrees with Deidre and says that she believes the Commission should operate with funds allocated to the whole group as opposed to individualized funding.
- g. GG tells the group that he will write up these comments and it will be voted on at a future meeting.
- h. JD speaks to MCJ and asks if she suggests budget items to line up with subcommittees (e.g., outreach working with an outreach team). He then asks DTB if money in specific areas can be reallocated. DTB confirms that it can be, but the staff will be the ones mostly in charge of that. JD asks if they should identify these subsections.
- i. GG says that that is what they are doing and that he is going to continue through his proposal.
- j. MJC notes that some of the language GG uses expands the scope of the Commission from American Freedmen to all members of the Black diaspora. She also notes that it seems like the proposed budget gives too many individual funds.
- k. GG asks if MJC wants him to “cross out [the term] ‘black diaspora’” on his proposal. She says yes. GG asks her definition of “black diaspora,” to which she responds that people in the “black diaspora” are anyone descended from African lineage as opposed to being descended from people owned as chattel slavery.
- l. GG objects and says that his definition of “black diaspora” includes everyone in the African/African

American community and that they will vote on whether or not this is the case at the next meeting.

3. Grants Program: \$100,000
  - a. Money will be allotted to small groups on approval to convene events or research related to American Freedmen/reparations work in Cambridge
    - i. Grassroots Community Engagement
    - ii. Oral History
    - iii. Public acknowledgement and engagement
  - b. GG notes that he wants to involve the community and people he has made personal connections with as much as possible.
  - c. GG also suggests an event at the end of the year to collect the information/research
  - d. Comments/Questions
    - i. DTB expresses concern that giving too much work or research duty or funding to other community groups may untether the work from the Commission and prevent the Commission from leading the work when others are the ones doing it.
    - ii. GG suggests bringing these proposals to outside groups and friends and to ask people outside the Commission for their opinion on the budget and how funds should be used.
    - iii. MJC says that she likes the concept of the community grants but expresses that \$100,000 out of a possible \$300,000 budget is a little high and more funding should go directly to working on research and Commission work.
    - iv. GG says that the proposed amounts will be in “this year’s budget” as opposed to “next year’s budget.” He says that this year was meant to be a “kick-off” and not a sustainable budget for multiple years.
    - v. MJC asks to clarify that GG’s proposals only are effective until June 30, 2026. GG

confirms.

- vi. KD expresses confusion about whether or not these numbers would be for FY26 or FY27. GG says it could be “either.” KD says he’s excited at the idea of community grants but agrees with MJC’s observation that it may be too much.

4. Cambridge 100 Names Project: \$25,000

- a. Group looking to find names from 1800-1865 of Black ancestry. 1870 is when the first census is done, some were identified as Freedmen, some were not.
- b. Project is focused on finding 100 people in Cambridge to trace their genealogy via DNA.
- c. Money is given to people for memberships to this project and to help support the American Ancestors genealogy project
- d. Comments/Questions
  - i. JD asks if this is a budget allocation. GG says these are just ideas.
  - ii. Commissioner Sukia Akiba expresses support for the proposals and says that we don’t have much more time until the next fiscal year. She signs off early due to feeling ill.
  - iii. Commissioner Xenia Bhembe agrees with the concern that there isn’t enough time to spend this by the end of FY26
  - iv. GG suggests spending it on something tangible like DNA testing kits.
  - v. JD asks what feels most important for the Commission to do in this fiscal year to establish a more concrete foundation. He notes that the rest of FY26 can be slower paced or focused on getting ready. He suggests allocating funds towards creating “brand recognition” around the Cambridge American Freedmen Commission. GG interrupts to say this is only talking about ideas and not the actual application of the ideas. JD says that it

would be a good idea to do this for FY27 but not FY26.

- vi. DTB expresses again that the work of the Commission needs to be tied to the Ordinance and that the Commission has still not identified the work that needs to be done to give recommendations to the City regarding reparations. She says the money needs to tie into Cambridge American Freedmen and reparational justice. JD agrees.

5. Outside Consultants

- a. GG discusses a colleague he knows that has researched relevant information with regards to engaging the community about American Freedmen
- b. He says there are numbers “in the packet” (addendum: This service is proposed at \$50,000)
- c. Comments/Questions
  - i. MJC expresses concern that the colleague is not working with reparations, instead with housing, and that that would fall outside of the Ordinance. She also expresses concern that reaching out to the community at large is too much of a deviation of the purpose of the Commission. GG says that feedback from non-American Freedmen is important because the people who govern the City are not all American Freedmen and that the Commission would benefit from a community “buy-in.” MJC says that the “buy-in” is the fact that the Commission exists and that deviating from the American Freedmen community is not in compliance with the Ordinance.
- c. Melissa Jackson-Collins' Proposed Allocations
  - i. Pre-Juneteenth Celebration – A Great Day in Cambridge - \$50,000
    - 1. Serves as a formal civic acknowledgement of the American Freedmen community in Cambridge and to

- honor the descendants of slavery
2. Bishop Allen Drive – Where Starlight used to be/H Mart area – June 13<sup>th</sup>
  3. Open Art Museum and Luncheon – walk through exhibits of information on different periods of Cambridge history through the lens of slavery and its descendants (e.g. Torie Row, scholars, "Negro Election Day," etc.)
  4. Main Space Gala celebrating Juneteenth and African American Heritage w/ food, DJ, speakers, Youth, artists, etc.
  5. Comments/Questions
    - a. KD expresses that there is another conflicting event on the 13<sup>th</sup> that would have similar vendors/similar crowd. He also asks if setting it up as a "block party" in Central Square might be better, and that maybe it could be even bigger in size. MJC wants to make sure that there's enough food and seating but that expanding it is on the table as long as capacity control exists. She also suggests an event after Juneteenth.
    - b. JD expresses that he wants to make sure it connects directly with the Commission, and that this would be a good idea for expressing the connection to American Freedmen. He also says that \$50,000 might be too low, especially if there is a need for security and other collaborators. He enthusiastically agrees with the idea and endorses it.
    - c. GG asks if this will be internally planned or "outsourced." He asks if this could be a smaller event as a kickoff this year and then a larger event next year, proposing \$25,000 instead of \$50,000. He also says he spoke with some members of the community about a Juneteenth celebration and how they want to collaborate with the AFC, then asks MJC if she is interested in collaborating with another group. MJC says that this project would ideally be mostly focused on the AFC and from the Commission itself.
    - d. Xenia Bhembe's Suggested Allocations
      - i. Bringing in a research consultant on who the people are in

- Cambridge that are affected by the scope of the Ordinance and developing a database.
- ii. Using some of the budget to tell stories of people in Cambridge.
  - iii. Comments/Questions
    - 1. MJC enthusiastically agrees
    - 2. KD suggests connecting with the mayor's programming to get a grant for an intern or assistant to help with this.
  - e. GG asks DTB what she needs for information on developing the budget and what the process is
    - i. DTB says she'll be meeting with a budgeting team to present the whole budget for each respective Commission.
      - 1. Each section has monies allocated to specific items (Food, office supplies, etc.) and she explains the goals of the Commission and how the money will help achieve this
      - 2. Council then has to clear the budgets for each department
    - ii. JD suggests funding for a Community Survey
    - iii. KD asks if they can use the money for a scholarship or reward for students so that money isn't left on the table at the change of the fiscal year.
    - iv. GG asks to know what the City Manager wants for next fiscal year.
      - 1. DTB says there needed to be a 2.1% budget decrease per department per budget. This is taken care of, but she stresses how the Ordinance ties into the impact and outcomes of the Commission is of great importance.

## **V. Other Business**

- a. GG asks all Commissioners to write up which of these proposals are their ideas.
- b. Diana will share these notes with everyone so at the next meeting the Commission will be able to vote.
- c. JD asks if these are the budget items we'll be voting on in future meetings.
  - i. This is confirmed
  - ii. DTB reminds everyone that these items need to be aligned with the American Freedmen Commission. She encourages everyone to come back with a statement on how these items are relevant to the AFC's mission.

- iii. GG asks everyone to send their ideas to him in between.
- d. JD asks how to standardize feedback, and if the staff could produce a form that meets the Ordinance and allows for people to vote specifically.
  - i. Diana offers to make a form for people to be able to respond and vote at the next meeting.

**VI. Next Meetings**

**a. The next meeting is on March 17, 2026**

**Meeting Adjourned**

Chair George Greenidge deemed this meeting of the American Freedman Commission adjourned at 8:46 PM.