

**Meeting Date: May 28, 2026**

**Attendance:**

- ~~Akiba, Sukia~~
- Bastola, Kashish
- ~~Brown, Thabiti~~
- Collins, Melissa
- ~~Dance, Kwame~~
- ~~Davis, Jeff~~
- Greenidge, George

- ~~Johnson, Xenia~~
- ~~Lubintus,~~  
Gassendina
- ~~Mason, Natassa~~
- ~~Wyzard Jones,~~  
Cheyenne

**City AFC Staff**

- ~~Brown, Deidre~~
- ~~Diana Milkey~~

*\* Arrived after the meeting  
was called to order*

Action Items will be highlighted in yellow

**Call to Order**

This meeting is called to order by Chair Jeff Davis at 6:38 PM.

**Agenda and Minutes:**

**1. Opening and Orientation**

- a. Acting Executive Director Deidre Travis Brown notes that two members of the public are online, but there will be no public comment due to it being a Working Session.
- b. Commissioner Cheyenne Wyzard-Jones says that the purpose of this meeting is to identify potential purchases that could be chartered by subcommittees and voted on in the regular meeting scheduled for June 2<sup>nd</sup>. She states that the purpose of this meeting is for the subcommittees to meet and for commissioners to be able to ask questions on the work.
- c. Chair Jeff Davis begins by grounding the Commission using the Ordinance and emphasizes the importance of centering the mission of the Commission in the work that is done. He poses two questions:
  - i. In your own words, what is the purpose of the Commission?
    1. Commissioner Gassendina Lubintus states that justice is overdue and that the truth-telling and delivery of reparations to residents of Cambridge is important to her, even though she does not identify as an American Freedmen.
    2. Commissioner Thabiti Brown states that his interest lies in analyzing and researching the past to better the institutions that are harming people today. He notes that some of the landmark decisions like the Voting Rights Act are being ignored today, and decisions like that undermine affected parties. He notes that events like the proposed Juneteenth

- celebration feels tangential to the work, however, and says that he is open to changing his mind, but wants to make it clear that to him, the focus should be on the research and movement towards policy.
3. Commissioner Xenia Bhembe notes specifically that the most important pieces to her are the identification of harm and avenues for justice but emphasizes that the importance of the identity of American Freedmen and their descendants are the most important part of the Ordinance. She believes that conflation of multiple Black identities have diluted the importance of reparations for those affected by chattel slavery.
  4. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES echoes what others have said, adding that what stands out to her is the investigation and reporting on the ongoing harms here in Cambridge, focusing on what needs reporting and to whom. She also agrees with COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE about the dilution of the American Freedman as an identity and a people within Cambridge.
  5. Commissioner Natassa Mason agrees with people who have spoken, emphasizing its importance in Cambridge as a “small-town” culture with a “global influence,” noting the systemic harms and how they are particularly difficult to navigate for black and brown people in a wealthy, historic city. She expresses concern that the community does not know the definition of what an “American Freedman” is.
  6. Commissioner Kwame Dance states that his understanding was that his role would be based in learning and research, focusing especially on the “adequate, effective, and prompt” suggestions for reparations. He takes issue with the language surrounding “adequate” and “prompt,” displaying more hope for aiming for reparations that are “effective.”
  7. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS says that he interprets the Ordinance as a way to give voice to the voiceless and identify where oppression is still a problem. He emphasizes the importance of education and storytelling and that this is one of the only reparations groups in the country at the moment. He makes a specific note that a “conversation” is meant to understand, a “discussion” is meant to reach an outcome, when speaking in reference to the upcoming subcommittee discussions.

## **2. First Subcommittee Discussion – Community Engagement**

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- a. Present from the subcommittee
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- i. Xenia Bhembe
  - ii. Gassendina Lubintus
  - iii. Kwame Dance
- b. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS asks commissioner Sukia Akiba which subcommittee she would like to join. She joins the Community Engagement subcommittee.
- c. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE starts by rereading the definitions of who an American Freedman is as stated in the Ordinance and encourages people to focus their ideas on that community.
  - i. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE asks if focusing too closely on American Freedmen ignores the need for broader community engagement and education.
- d. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE asks the subcommittee for what ideas they have for the **upcoming 30 days**.
  - i. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE says that getting marketing materials in order is important, such as Commissioner photos, informational videos, or a videographer for interviews to do a promotional push.
    1. COMMISSIONER GASSENDINA LUBINTUS agrees and suggests a “Meet the Commissioners” series with introduction videos
  - ii. COMMISSIONER GASSENDINA LUBINTUS suggests also setting up “listening sessions” so the community can access meetings and they feel heard. She also suggests tabling or visiting pre-existing events.
  - iii. COMMISSIONER SUKIA AKIBA suggests a brochure/one-pager as to what the American Freedman Commission is to spread awareness.
    1. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE suggests using the brochure from the last meeting to edit and send out for people in the city.
    2. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE also suggests Juneteenth as a way to disseminate any marketing materials they have.
- e. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE asks ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEIDRE TRAVIS BROWN what the city’s process for hiring a designer or photographer would be.
  - i. ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEIDRE TRAVIS BROWN suggests discussing logistics at the next full body meeting.
- f. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE asks what purchases could help within the next 30 days to advance the ideas from point 2.D
  - i. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE proposes talking about video and photography at the next full meeting

1. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE suggests David Matthews as a photographer.
- ii. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE suggests some kind of swag, but expresses concern that there is no cohesive brand yet.
  1. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE suggests a local vendor to do a design. COMMISSIONER SUKIA AKIBA agrees with this idea. He says that this could advance the work.
- iii. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE asks about ancestry and DNA testing kits, but expresses concern about vetting the correct vendor and the lack of time. She asks how many to secure.
  1. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE says it depends on the rate, but suggests starting with 100.
- iv. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE suggests giving away Juneteenth Red Sox game tickets to get people to engage with the Commission.
- g. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE asks what actions the subcommittee can do in **the next 60-90 days** to advance the work of the Commission.
  - i. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE suggests declaring and clarifying who are American Freedmen as a body. The CE subcommittee should have that as part of their information to distribute
- h. Summation
  - i. By June 3, the Commission can create informational handouts to spread basic education and create a brand identity.
- i. Questions from other commissioners
  - i. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES asks for clarity regarding what swag is available to order.
    1. ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEIDRE TRAVIS BROWN says that every purchase should be related to the identity of American Freedmen and that it should support the mission.
    2. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES says that she'd be interested in partnering with local American Freedmen artists to design visually.
  - ii. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS suggests a t-shirt or other apparel identifying the wearer as an American Freedmen. He also says that the vote will be taken on these ideas next Tuesday, June 2.
  - iii. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE will send what will be voted on in email for Commissioners to review ahead of next week.

### 3. **Second Subcommittee Discussion – Research**

- a. Present from the subcommittee
  - i. Thabiti Brown

- ii. Jeff Davis
- iii. Cheyenne Wyzard-Jones
- b. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN asks what ideas they have to meet the needs of the commission to complete within the next 30 days that is aligned with the goals of the Commission.
  - i. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES suggests her previous proposal to call in Chandra Banks and/or Saskia Van James to help educate and train the Commissioners internally about work that has already been done.
    - 1. She emphasizes the need for accountability and being able to communicate as a body, and that Chandra Banks can provide a good consultation for that
  - ii. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES also suggests some kind of vocal support for senator Ayana Pressley's Reparations bill.
  - iii. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS wants to find out how many people identify as American Freedmen in Cambridge and defining what an American Freedman is. He also expresses that DNA testing kits don't tell you anything about ethnicity, and that may be lacking if they focus too hard on the DNA kits.
  - iv. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS also says that they should identify what work has already been done across the country and locally.
  - v. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN adds the idea of transitional justice and getting some kind of training surrounding that. He also likes the idea of learning about the global transitional justice movement, meaning both to grow knowledge and align it with their work.
    - 1. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES agrees and says that publishing with voices from the Commission is imperative to educating the public, whether that's an official publication or a social media type presence
  - vi. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES suggests a "Reparations Study Hall" to give out to the Community as a reading list
    - 1. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN suggests partnering with the Library for this with community conversations or a book club
  - vii. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES also suggests getting specific data surrounding housing and redlining in Cambridge and finding a way for implementing solutions
- c. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN asks what ideas that are for the next 60-90 days for the research subcommittee aligned with the goals of the Commission
  - i. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN starts by suggesting creating an \_\_\_\_\_

- arc of learning or a framework for research for the next fiscal year to present to the Commission
- d. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES asks what purchase goals they have to align with the outlined goals
    - i. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS expresses that he is not sure that expenses need to be made in the next 30 days. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES and COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN disagree.
    - ii. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN suggests the following:
      - 1. Website or blog they can publish on
      - 2. Reparations study hall with the library
      - 3. Engage Chandra Banks and Saskia Van James for internal trainings
  - e. Questions from the Commission
    - i. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES expresses concern about the DNA testing kits. Multiple other members of the Commission agree with this.
    - ii. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE says that his cousin is part of a team with Tufts that is interested in collaborating but states that he will not be involved with the decision due to conflict of interest.

#### **4. Full Group Review**

- a. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS asks if there are more comments on the discussions from the subcommittee meetings.
- b. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES asks what is needed for invoices and processing with being prepared for the end of the fiscal year.
  - i. Staff Diana Milkey confirms the deadline for invoices is June 5<sup>th</sup>, but she needs invoices for payments by June 3<sup>rd</sup> at the absolute latest.
  - ii. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS says that voting on Tuesday will be related to purchases.
- c. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS expresses concern about equity for vendors and vendor selection
  - i. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN agrees but notes that Chandra and Saskia helped to create the American Freedmen Commission and that they could learn from what they have already done.
- d. COMMISSIONER KWAME DANCE asks if it would be a problem to accept proposals
  - i. ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEIDRE TRAVIS BROWN says that it would be done through the City purchasing office to ensure equity
- e. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS makes a motion to extend the meeting to 8:40.
  - i. Seconded
    - 1. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE – Y
    - 2. COMMISSIONER THABITI BROWN – Y

3. COMMISSIONER GASSENDINA LUBINTUS – Y
  4. COMMISSIONER SUKIA AKIBA – Y
  5. COMMISSIONER CHEYENNE WYZZARD-JONES – Y
  6. COMMISSIONER NATASSA MASON – Y
  7. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS – Y
- f. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE asks DM to send a digital version of the brochure to review. **DM will send this to all Commissioners.**
  - g. COMMISSIONER XENIA BHEMBE also says that transparency and equity in choosing vendors is essential in reducing institutional harms.
  - h. COMMISSIONER JEFF DAVIS closes by saying identifying how they are going to operate should come first, followed by how to align financial goals for the next fiscal year.

**5. Time-Sensitive Updates & Dismissal**

- a. Next Meeting: June 2, 2026

**Meeting Adjourned**

Chair Jeff Davis adjourned this meeting of the American Freedmen Commission at 8:40 PM.