

TASK FORCE ON ABANDONED AFRICAN-AMERICAN CEMETERIES
Mission San Luis, 2100 W. Tennessee St., Tallahassee, FL 32304
Tuesday, July 20, 2021; 2:00 p.m. – Conclusion

Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members: Dr. Timothy Parsons (*Chair*), Dr. Kathryn O'Donnell Miyar, Ms. Yvette Lewis, Dr. Antoinette Jackson, Ms. Althemese Barnes, Mr. Jeffrey Moates, Mr. Keenan Knopke, Senator Janet Cruz, Representative Fentrice Driskell, and Mr. Jaha Cummings.

Task Force Members Present: All members attended the meeting in person.

Department of State Staff Members Present: Secretary Laurel M. Lee, Ms. Jennifer Kennedy, Ms. Brittany Dover, Dr. Sarah Liko, Dr. Angela Tomlinson, Mr. Johnathan Grandage, Mr. Jon Morris, and Dr. Shruti Graf.

Members of the Public Present: Ms. Connie Burton, Dr. Marvin Dunn, Mr. Greg Baldwin, Ms. Jill Lepore, Ms. Sarah Miller, Mr. Jack Anderson, Mr. Byron Dobson, Mr. Troy Kinsey, and Mr. Phil Willette.

Item I. Roll Call

Dr. Parsons provided opening remarks and called the meeting to order, and Dr. Graf called the roll.

Item II. Welcome Address

Secretary Lee provided welcome remarks and introduced Department staff members – Dr. Parsons and Dr. Miyar – whom the Secretary appointed to serve on the Task Force and Dr. Graf who will be assisting with the Task Force activities.

Item III. Introduction of Task Force Members

Dr. Parsons invited the Task Force members to introduce themselves. Task Force members spoke about their professional experience, efforts, and interests relating to abandoned cemeteries.

Item IV. Overview of House Bill 37 and Task Force Responsibilities

Dr. Parsons provided an overview of House Bill 37 that created the Task Force on Abandoned African-American Cemeteries (Task Force), including the responsibilities assigned to the Task Force.

Item V. Overview of Florida law regarding Abandoned Cemeteries and Recently Discovered Abandoned African-American Cemeteries

Dr. Parsons highlighted the recent discovery of Zion Cemetery and Ridgewood Cemetery in Tampa, Florida, and the New Hope Cemetery in Tallahassee, Florida. In addition, Dr. Parsons' presentation included a brief summary of Florida law relating to cemeteries, county and municipal jurisdiction over abandoned cemeteries, unmarked human burials, disturbing contents of a grave or tomb, and relocation of graves.

Dr. Parsons also provided a proposed schedule for upcoming meetings of the Task Force and responded to questions and comments from Task Force members about protecting abandoned cemeteries and the adequacy of existing laws. Dr. Parsons informed the Task Force members

about the Florida Master Site File (Master Site File or database), which is maintained by the Division of Historical Resources. He mentioned that although this database is not exclusive to African-American cemeteries, it includes a catalogue of thousands of cemeteries identified in the state of Florida. The next meeting of the Task Force will include a presentation on the Master Site File in greater detail.

Item VI. Overview of Florida’s Government in the Sunshine Law

Mr. Morris provided an overview of Florida law regarding public meetings and records.

Item VII. Discussion on Collecting Public Input

Dr. Parsons listed the following 3 methods through which members of the public may submit their comments:

1. Attend the Task Force meetings and fill out speaker card.
2. Send email to an email address that will be established by the Department of State (department) to specifically collect public input on abandoned African-American cemeteries. This email address will be available on the website that the department has created for information relating to this Task Force (<https://dos.myflorida.com/historical/archaeology/human-remains/abandoned-cemeteries/abandoned-african-american-cemeteries-task-force/>).
3. Submit information through the Florida Public Archaeology Network Cemetery Reporting Form (Form), which has been, over the years, a collaborative effort between the Division of Historical Resources (DHR) and the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN). This Form will be available online soon and members of the public will have the opportunity to submit information via the FPAN’s website portal, which will then be shared with the DHR for inclusion in the Master Site File. This information will also be made available through the department’s website relating to the Task Force.

Item VIII. Task Force Member Comments and Questions

Dr. Parsons responded to questions and comments about advertising the public input collection process and tools; and received suggestions from Task Force members about moving to Tampa, Florida, the meeting of the Task Force scheduled for September.

Item IX. Public Comment

Members of the public provided their comments.

Item X. Adjourn

Representative Driskell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Senator Cruz. Dr. Parsons adjourned the meeting at 3:22 p.m.

An archive of this meeting is available on the Florida Channel at:

<https://thefloridachannel.org/videos/7-20-21-task-force-on-abandoned-african-american-cemeteries/>.



Presiding Officer

9/2/2021

Date Approved