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DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL COMMISSION 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission), a statutory and bipartisan agency of the Virginia General Assembly, was created in 1992 to honor the memory and legacy of Dr. King and to continue his work through educational, historical, and cultural programs, public policy analysis, and public discourse on contemporary issues.

The Commission's projects in 2020 included:

Emancipation and Freedom Monument

Dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the fight for freedom, the Emancipation and Freedom Monument (the Monument) will feature a 12-foot bronze statue representing newly freed slaves and will highlight notable African American Virginians. The Monument, designed by Thomas Jay Warren of Oregon, is targeted for completion in 2021 on Brown's Island in Richmond.

Monument Status

The Monument's 12-foot bronze figures were completed by the artist in 2020 and are in storage at the foundry in California awaiting shipment and installation on Brown's Island. Due to site issues and delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the contract with the artist will need amendments to account for adjustments to the timeline, additional storage costs, and additional site costs once a new timeline and budget are known.

Site Status

The City of Richmond, Venture Richmond, and the Department of General Services executed an agreement in December 2019 to donate 0.029 acres on Brown's Island to the Commonwealth as the site for the Monument. The three parties are prepared to close on the property once the Commonwealth's due diligence to accept the property is completed.

As part of the Commonwealth's due diligence, DGS conducted phase 1 and phase 2 environmental studies, which found arsenic and chromium at the site at levels that are recommended for voluntary remediation. Under federal law, both the City of Richmond and the Commonwealth will be liable for cleanup of any contaminants found on Brown's Island once the property transfer is complete. Therefore, the Commonwealth is working with the City of Richmond to develop a soil management plan prior to closing on the property.

Funding

As of the end of 2020, the Commission has paid \$651,177 to fund the project, which includes two installments paid to Mr. Warren per the Commission's contract with the artist and reimbursement to Venture Richmond for the removal and reinstallation of the Mill, a statue that was previously installed on the Monument's site. As the contract currently exists, \$303,290 is due to the artist upon final approval of the Monument. The Commission will pay additional project management and legal costs when the project is completed.

The Commission continued to receive donations in 2020 through the Virginia Capitol Foundation, the Commission's fiscal agent.

History of Lynching in Virginia

The History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group (the Work Group) was formed in 2018 to shed light on the long and painful history of lynching in the Commonwealth of Virginia by compiling and documenting the names and stories of victims of lynching in Virginia, creating programmatic outreach that will bring awareness of this history to communities across the Commonwealth, and assisting communities in their efforts to memorialize victims of lynching.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Work Group was unable to hold several public events across the state that members had tentatively planned for 2020. However, some local groups hosted virtual events recognizing Virginia's history of lynching. On September 26, 2020, a Virginia Department of Historic Resources historic marker was unveiled in Harrisonburg and dedicated to honor the memory of Charlotte Harris, the only African American woman lynched in Virginia. The marker is the third historic marker in Virginia dedicated to a lynching victim, following the installation of markers in Charles City County and Charlottesville in 2019.

The Work Group determined that it would move forward in 2021 with events in Richmond, Danville, Hampton Roads, and Culpeper.

African American Legislators in Virginia

Nearly 100 formerly enslaved African men served in the General Assembly of Virginia between 1869 and 1890 until subsequent state constitutions, the Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws stripped away the franchise for African Americans. The Commission's website is home to a comprehensive database of these legislators, detailing their lives and contributions to Virginia's history. Working in partnership with the Library of Virginia, the Commission continues to support and maintain this database.

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