

Nebraska Commission on African American Affairs  
2023 Second Quarterly Meeting  
April 20, 2023

1. Meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. by LaShawn Young
  - a. Roll Call: Members Present Glenn Freeman; Laban Njuguna; Connie Edmond; Karine Sokpoh; Vernon ; Gwen Easter; John Carter.
  - b. Members arriving late: Toni Clarke 9:43 a.m.; Clarice Jackson- 9:53 a.m.; DeMoine Adams -10:50 a.m.
  - c. Member Not Present: Femi Awodele
2. Vernon made a motion to accept the minutes from the January 2023 meeting. The motioned was seconded by Karine. No discussion or objections are noted. The motion carries by unanimous vote of the members present.
3. Connie stated she had some edits to the information under new business agenda items. She stated the information that her husband has family relationship concerning the Stable Gray was not correctly noted.
4. Connie further noted that state bids were accepted for the website project and Stable Gray was recommended by Karine and Femi.
5. AN executive director search is currently being conducted by Zelle, which is an employment recruitment firm that assist with selection, interviewing and onboarding of new hires.
6. Connie introduced Candance Reed, who was acknowledge as a staff person for the Commission from the temporary employee pool of the state. Connie acknowledges that the packets the members received were completed by Candance.
7. Connie stated she wanted to clarify that Candance Reed's position was not that of an administrative assistant, but a temporary helper. Connie said it is not Candance's job to answer phones or emails from the public or perform general day-to-day administrative tasks. Candance's position is to mainly act as a project manager and keep up on legislative issues and tasks.
8. John Carter gave the update on the office space status. John stated the state building services team had agreed to allow the Commission to use the first and second floor space in the Ferguson building located at 700 South 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Downtown Lincoln. The building is older and in need of some cosmetic repair and upkeep but will be significantly less expensive than the office space in the U.S. Bank Building. John Stated final contract terms were being discussed and an agreement would be drafted to be approved by the executive board and the Commission. The space is only temporary until the renovations in the main capitol can be completed, at which time, the Commission can select a permanent office space in the state capitol building at no cost to the Commission as outlined in the statute. However, the renovations in the capitol building are not expected t be completed until 2026.

9. Further discussion was had on whether the Commission should seek to obtain an office space in Omaha rather than Lincoln, or at least have another work site in Omaha where the executive director could work from, and people could meet.
10. Connie state she would follow up with Travon to found out if there are offices available at little or no costs to the commission in Omaha that can be utilized as an option on a temporary basis.

#### Strategic Committee Report (Karine)

1. Strategic Plan – The committee is looking for input on the strategic plan from commissioners on Education , Housing, Family and Economics.
2. Discussion was had on whether the plan should say African American and African Immigrant Community so that the language is inclusive of all people of African descent. Connie thinks African American covers all people of African descent and does not need any further modification.
3. LeBan stated the African immigrants do not see themselves in that way and do not think the term “African American” is inclusive of all African since many of them are not U.S. citizens are wo are still without adjusted statuses. Vernon stated there is a distinction. Gwen thinks we are all Americans of African descent now as one people. Karine said she thinks the statement should have more inclusive language because many Africans in America are actually not Americans yet. Glenn stated the law is clear that everyone is included. There should not be a separation. Connie stated we should engage all of the stake holders including those in the African Community but not make such a distinction because that was a controversial question at the outset of the commission forming.
4. Connie discussed what the usual purpose and implementation of a strategic plan represents. Karine wanted to clarify if the position of project coordinator would be added to the strategic plan. The response from the commission was the position of a project coordinator should not be added.
5. Karinne explained the Plan is to have the Executive Director and Commissioners attend as many community events as possible to increase visibility. The Executive Director should attend all commission sponsored community events. That is the purpose of the community meet and greets.
6. The Commission agreed we should have annual meetings with governor and meet with the black senators. Connie recommended we should strive to work with all Senators to maintain a strategic balance and build rapport with as many Senators as possible so that any proposed legislation by the Commission will have a better chance of being supported and introduced to the general legislature. The Commission agreed we should strategically work with all legislative committee chairs and senators.
7. Connie wanted the language in the strategic plan of “international partnership” removed and revert back to the original draft of “corporate organization and agencies.”

8. Connie comments on strategic plan – Connie said we need to be mindful of what we say and what we are doing. We need to understand our goals and ensure they are the same.
  - a. Vision, why, who what. Would like to see what is incorporated into our vision.
  - b. Change the word lobby to engage.
  - c. To promote legislation that impacts the African American Community across Nebraska
  - d. Need Mission Statement
  - e. Stakeholders should be in alignment with the school system, HUD, DHHS, Hospital Community, Legal, Economic Development, Chamber of Commerce.
  - f. The language should state executive branch and agencies and judiciary.
  - g. Add federal agencies.
  - h. Add bar associations and organizations that use and hire lobbyist.
  - i. Commissioners are not stake holders, therefore that language should be removed.
  - j. Every Commissioner should submit language to be considered for our mission and vision statements.
  - k. Clarify what is meant by commissions and executive director attending as many community events as possible. We need only to be present at significant community events.
  - l. Commissioners can attend any community event as an individual but not commit or speak on behalf of the entire commission about issues that have not been approved or previously discussed.
9. Proposed agenda for meet and greet.
  - a. Connie asked without an RSVP, how does the strategic planning committee know how much of anything to purchase for refreshments?
  - b. Glenn asked why we are providing donuts and coffee and other refreshments. Gwen stated there is nothing wrong with offering refreshments. Glenn stated we should seek donations for refreshments from the community instead of incurring costs to the commission. Connie's concern is the commission body should have been consulted to ensure that all commissioners should be able to attend prior to setting a date for the event. Connie stated the dates were established at the time the events were planned. Karine stated the dates were sent to the commissioners via email, but those dates were not convenient for everyone, so a second set of dates were chosen in the interest of getting the event planned. There should be budgets set for these community events. There was further discussion had on the meet and greet planning and the method of how it was finally set up for Saturday.

Policy Committee Report – John Carter stated any recommended changes or input on the proposed policies that were sent to the commissioners for review and consideration is due by April 28<sup>th</sup>.

Finance Committee – Meets monthly after the close of the month. Had meeting with DAS to formalize protocol and standards for turning in expense reimbursement. Glenn stated that the currently used standardize form is professional and standardized.

Connie stated we still have outstanding past due invoices. The past due invoices are because the process has not been done according to protocol that the state requires for payment. The standardized form has been established to help facilitate the payment of invoices and bills of the commission. Some expense must be preapproved by the commission prior to commitment. The lease for the US Bank Building ends June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Morehouse College sent 25K of the 50K that was pledged and expected. Connie stated the 50K was placed into the budget, so if the other 25K is not received the budget needs to be adjusted. The state budget is calculated on a bi-annual basis and a fiscal year. \$490K was appropriated to the commission. However, all of the money was not used. Connie presented to the State an appropriation request to allow the budget to carry over to the next two years to cover much of our one-time costs and to increase some salaries. If not approved, plans are being implemented to spend the excess funds in community events and other significant venues in the community.

Connie said invoices for vendors should not be submitted directed to state personnel. These forms are for reimbursements and vendors, but not for meeting stipends paid to Commissioners for attending meetings. Leban suggested adding email on the form so vendors will know where and who to submit the form to. Karine asked about vendors that want to be paid up front. Connie stated the funds will still have to be approved for expenditures before payment. Leban suggested having a state email for vendor payment submission. There is currently an outstanding invoice for the website company. Karine suggested that we have an email for the finance committee so if the personnel changes on the finance committee, the email will be the same. LaShawn stated the executive director will take on that responsibility to ensure the bills are paid once hired.

Lashawn made a motioned to move up website discussion on the agenda because Karine has to leave the meeting early. The motion was seconded by Vernon. The motion carried by unanimous consent of the commission members present.

Karine gave the website proposal presentation. Feedback on what colors should be used on the website or whether using the state colors is preferred. Recommendations from commission members regarding website color and section to the website are due by April 28<sup>th</sup>.

The logo was presented and discussed, and the consensus of the group was that it is unacceptable and should be reconsidered in its entirety. The proposed logo does not represent what the commission is about and does not support an appropriate branding. Candance was asked to submit ideas as well and will be included in the email.

Legislative Committee Connie – Connie gave report on how the legislative process works and the testimony that was given during the hearing process. Only two bills have actually passed during this legislative session due to the ongoing filibuster. There are some contentions regarding TIFF funding and the TIFF budget. A North Omaha organization showed up in opposition in how corporations were being funded and still allowed to get tax breaks.

Zukowski-Weber was hired to advise on recommendation on what bills should be pursued, but Weber failed to live up to the services that were significant disproportionate to black people. Weber basically gave the organization the bills that were pending that were published. There was nothing offered or presented that Commission could not have ascertained on its own without expending \$15,000. Connie disagrees that we are in the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the second of three quarters and said the commission should not have to spend \$3750 for the entire second quarter. LaShawn stated it was a monitoring contract and not an agreement to lobby.

LaShawn – Personnel committee consideration. LaShawn asked if members would provide feedback concerning the rationale or use of a personnel committee.

Mr. Freeman concerned with asking questions about the process of selecting an ED. He stated he was also insulted by the email that Femi sent stating that he has respect for his elders and does not feel. Glen stated he feels he is getting some undue African influence from a member of the African Community. He also feels that someone is attempting to undermine the chairperson's position, and feels some people are attempting to take advantage of their prior association with the chair.

Glenn stated the last time the ED selection was done it was a problem because it was not properly done. Vernon disagreed that the process was not done properly. Glenn clarified and stated when the commission was given information about the letter, the letter was never shown to the commission. The person that the letter was stated about was never asked any question about the letter. The person should have been given the opportunity to address why she did what she did.

Vernon stated it is not secret that some people had prior knowledge of people on the commission. Glenn stated it seems to be an attempt to be a separation between the Africans and the black community.

Connie asked that the discussion be table to executive session because of some confidentiality of some information.

Connie stated Glenn's concern is duly noted that other commissioners should not attempt to answer for the chair or interject themselves in what the chairperson should be doing in that role.

LaShawn stated she does not need people to speak for her or answer on her behalf. She does not ask anyone to answer for her, she can answer for herself.

Connie motion to table rest of the agenda in the interest of time and go into executive session. The motion was seconded by Vernon. The motion was carried by unanimous vote of the members present.

Executive session Began at 12:10.

Executive session ended and meeting adjourned at 12:14

Minutes prepared by:

John Carter