

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING
May 19, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Webex

Attending: Officer: Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Brad Cole, Michelle Donahoe, Jenn Edginton, Lindsay Laren, Elisa Marcus, Sara Phalen, Gerald Savage, Christina Shutt, and Andy Van Meter; **Department of Natural Resources employees:** Meghan Lindstrom, Joel Sachnoff, and George Sisk; members of the public: Erin Drain and Kayla Pilgrim.

I. Welcome

Chair Gabe Lyon called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and a quorum was present.

Brad Cole moved to approve the Minutes from the April 28th meeting. As the Minutes were not yet finalized Brad withdrew the motion.

III. New Business

Chair's Update

Gabe stated that the appointment of Brad and Christina Shutt at a previous meeting was done incorrectly. The Commission will need to discuss the bylaws to determine the method of appointment for the vice chair and treasurer at the June meeting.

Andy Van Meter and Christina joined the meeting at 2:06 p.m.

George Sisk clarified that the Commission will need to discuss whether to leave the authority to appoint officers to the Executive Committee to the Chair or if nominations are to be made, discussed by the Commissioners, and then voted on. Gabe thanked Brad and Christina for their willingness to serve on the Executive Committee.

Gabe reminded the Commission that the Marketing Working Group still needed a Chair.

Gabe reminded the Commission that Kayla Pilgrim was attending the meeting at the Commission's request as an America 250 youth ambassador.

Gabe reported that she had attended the first convening of the White House's 250 task force. This was an invitation-only meeting to hear the new administration's priorities for the anniversary. The primary goals were “renewed love of American history,” “experience beauty”, and “adventure and innovation.” Gabe reported the task force was in the process of mapping out a number of initiatives and were focused on the moment of the founding of the country, the Founders, and revolutionary ladies. Gabe assured Commissioners that she will be diligent in identifying any potential opportunities or challenges that may arise due to the creation of the task force. Gabe also confirmed the Commission would continue with Congressional initiatives including “America's Field Trip.”

Gabe reported that the Commission has seen greater participation in America 250 planning from visitor bureaus throughout the State. The list of relevant sites has grown more robust and will be sent out to the Commissioners to review and identify gaps. Gabe anticipates the list will be prepared for public release by July.

Gabe shared that a municipal and partner kit had been designed and would soon be sent out to Commissioners. The kit will make it easier for Commissioners to share information about the Commission and will include signs with QR codes intended to be posted in public spaces.

Gabe recommended the Commission start finalizing plans over the summer, focus on raising awareness of the anniversary with the general public, and have a presence at both state fairs.

Joel Sachnoff left the meeting at 2:16 p.m. He rejoined the meeting at 2:17 p.m.

Joel reported that he is working to secure a table for the Commission in the Governors Tent or the First Lady's Tent. The next concern will be to ensure staffing for the table. He will inquire about help from the Department of Natural Resources but many of the staff are already responsible for manning other tents and running Conservation World. He recommended Commissioners activate their networks to help secure volunteers especially for the DuQuoin State Fair in southern Illinois. Gabe stated she would reach out to the Commission's partner organizations to inquire if they had any interest in a presence at the state fairs.

Gabe opened the floor for questions.

Brad asked if the document shared by Erin Drain in the chat was the finalized one-page marketing tool for the Commissioners or if it would undergo further revisions. Erin stated that it was a general marketing poster but two more were being developed. One is being developed specifically for municipalities with a menu of recommendations on how to participate and another is for promotional partners with similar but not identical context.

Youth Engagement Presentation: Kayla Pilgrim, Youth 250 Bureau

Gabe invited Kayla to share her work with the Youth 250 Bureau. Technical difficulties prevented Kayla from sharing her screen for a slideshow. Gabe stated that she would send the slideshow to the Commissioners after the meeting via email.

Kayla explained the goals and work of the Bureau and how their assistance to organizations have led to a measurable increase in engagement from younger generations. Michelle Donahoe provided a testimonial on how guidance from Kayla and her coworkers in the Bureau have helped her institution in planning for an America 250 exhibit.

Gabe thanked Kayla for her time and willingness to act as a youth engagement resource.

Kayla left at 2:33 pm.

IV. Working Group Updates

Education

Sara Phalen provided the report for the Education Working Group. She reported that she personally spoke at the Northern Illinois Mayor's meeting the previous week and had several follow-up meetings with their local museums. To combat the ongoing funding cuts and uncertainty she had been encouraging city support of these museums and encouraging museums to partner regionally to develop stronger programming and outreach.

Sara also reported that she is planning to attend the Association of Midwest Museums conference being held at the end of July. She will also be attending an Illinois-specific convening that will be held at the conference. Gabe requested that Sara provide Erin with a few sentences about each of the meetings and presentations she has been attending. She also suggested meeting to discuss regional partnerships, how to tie in local visitors bureaus,

and potentially developing a series of webinars to help build regional connections. Sara reported that she is hosting a series of meetings over the summer for DuPage County museums and offered to provide copies of those meeting agendas.

Lindsay Laren reported that she held another statewide librarian meeting. She shared a plan to produce a resource guide for libraries to encourage and highlight ways libraries can integrate 250 into existing initiatives. The plan will also include ideas for programming and will be ready by September.

Gabe asked Joel if there was any information or guidance on when the Commission would have resources for style guides, logos, and the basic toolkit template. Joel reported that he had spoken with Jayette Bolinski, communications director for Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Department does not have the capacity to build out resources like style guides. The Department of Central Management Service (CMS) produces those for DNR so Joel has reached out to them. He cautioned Commissioners that he did not have any insight into CMS's potential production time.

Christina supported the development of a standardized library guide. She suggested a guide could also be helpful to support efforts in other states.

Gabe requested that Lindsay provide an update on the plan's progress at the June meeting.

Gabe recommended the Commissioners write short publicity language on all the ongoing outreach work and initiatives. These would be standardized in preparation for a late July release on social media accounts. Gabe stated she would send out more specific language requests to Commissioners and would follow up with a summary once given clarity from Joel and the Governor's Office.

The Commissioners briefly listed other ongoing efforts on Commission initiatives, outreach, and partnerships.

Gabe reminded the Commissioners that she would reach out by email to share resources from Kayla and the Youth 250 Bureau, a list of sites in development, and partner toolkits. She stated that she would provide more details about the state fair opportunity at the Commission's June meeting.

V. Public Comment

None given.

VI. Adjournment

Gerald Savage moved to end the meeting, Elisa Marcus seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:59 p.m.