

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING
June 23, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Webex

Attending: Officer: Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Brad Cole, Michelle Donahoe, Jenn Edginton, Elisa Marcus, Sara Phalen, Gerald Savage, Christina Shutt, and Dick Simpson; **State of Illinois employees:** Jayette Bolinski, Meghan Lindstrom, Joel Sachnoff, George Sisk, Matthew Sprinkle, and Toby Trimmer; 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.

III. Review April and May Commission Meeting Minutes

The Minutes from the April 28 and May 19 meetings were presented for approval. Sara Phalen moved to approve the Minutes, Elisa Marcus seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. New Business

Chair's Update

Gabe reminded the Commission that the positions for vice chair, treasurer, and chair of the Marketing Working Group still needed to be filled. She invited Commissioners to contact her if they were interested in serving in the roles or needed more information about them.

Gabe reported that the federal America 250 was hosting another gathering in Washington in July. She would be attending along with Michelle Donahoe and Erin Drain. She stated that the agenda and priorities had shifted at the federal level and she would report more on those with Michelle at the Commission's September meeting.

Gabe reported that Elisa had put her in contact with Kristen Reynolds, the new CEO of Choose Chicago, and they have discussed partnering for marketing and public relations. Gabe stated that this would also help support the Commission's work to coordinate the Route 66 commemoration to Chicago. She encouraged all Commissioners involved in Route 66

commemorations to reach out to her to find new ways to collaborate with other organizations on those efforts.

Sara asked how the Commission could ensure the Commission's established values are upheld in discussions and by any partner using the Commission's name or branding. Gabe stated that the Commission is a state entity established by legislation with specifically outlined priorities. While the Commission has a partnership agreement with the national America 250 the Commission cannot be compelled to do anything with, for, or on behalf of America 250. Gabe clarified that she would continue to present information of national America 250 efforts to the Commission to be evaluated to determine if they match the Commission's mandate and if they could be feasibly added to the Commission's work in Illinois.

Enjoy Illinois 250th Website

Elisa shared her screen displaying the Illinois Office of Tourism's Enjoy Illinois website. The drop-down menu under "Things to Do" now includes Illinois America 250. Elisa stated that she worked with Gabe and Erin to create an information page about the program and divided tourist sites by the Commission's themes: American Revolution, We the People, Power of Place, and Doing History. She opened each link, explained the chosen layout, and read several site descriptions. Elisa also explained how any photos shared by the public with the Explore Illinois hashtag could be shared on the website and how it would be implemented to feature Illinois America 250 related photos.

Gabe thanked Elisa and Erin for their work on the website and also acknowledged the assistance of Jeanne Schultz-Angel with the Illinois Association of Museums. She clarified that the Enjoy Illinois's Illinois America 250 page is not meant to be a repository of all related sites and events and will link back to the Commission's "<https://www.il250.org>" website.

Gabe opened the floor for questions related to the website.

Dick Simpson asked if a press release could be scheduled to announce the new Enjoy Illinois and Illinois 250 sites. Gabe invited Jayette Bolinski of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to introduce herself and respond. Jayette introduced herself as the Director of Communications for DNR and reported that a meeting had been held to discuss a possible announcement, press release, or news conference. She estimated the earliest anything could be scheduled was mid-July. She also reported the Department

was considering the Pullman State Historic Site as a possible event location and investigating if the Governor would be available.

Michelle asked if the Commissioners should wait until after a press release or other event was held before sharing the new website with the public. Elisa confirmed the website was already live and encouraged Commissioners to share it. Gabe recommended a QR code be created and media language be prepared for the site for Commissioners to share on social media to ensure a more uniform announcement.

State Fair

Gabe invited Joel Sachnoff to reintroduce himself to the Commission and explain what he had arranged for the Commission's presence at the Illinois State Fair. Joel introduced himself as a State of Illinois employee currently working for the Director of DNR and acting as the liaison between this Commission, the Governor's Office, and all other respective State agencies. He stated that the Commission had been offered a table in the Governor's Tent for the duration of the Fair alongside other commissions and agencies. He encouraged the Commissioners to utilize their networks to find volunteers to staff the table and treat the Fair as an opportunity to "soft launch" America 250 to the general public.

Dick recommended a flyer be created with links to the websites that could be handed out to State Fair visitors. Christina Shutt recommended the Commission also distribute small, branded objects such as frisbees. Elisa recommended the creation of paper fans with QR codes that linked to the Commission's websites. Gabe recommended the Commission hold a follow-up conversation to solidify the State Fair plans and possible handouts.

Gabe recommended Commissioners consider signing up for shifts at the State Fair and stated she would also be making the same recommendation to the Commission's many partner organizations.

Erin shared a link in the chat to a State Fair signup form.

July announcement—goals, outreach, media push

Gabe provided a list of goals for the next three months. The Commission will focus on a media and communications push in July and the Illinois State Fair in August. Gabe suggested the Commission begin planning for monthly question and answer or information sharing sessions for partners starting in September.

V. Commissioner Updates

Brad Cole reminded the Commission that the Illinois Municipal League had issued a Request for Proposals for targeted outreach toward municipal officials. Around fifteen proposals were received and the League has narrowed in on five of the proposals. Brad clarified that the timeline the League had solicited for was for July 4, 2025 to July 4, 2026. He promised to continue to keep the Commission updated on the process.

Michelle shared that she would be signing up for the 2025 Smithsonian National Education Summit being run online on July 15 to 17. She reported that she had met with her local National Public Radio station and the staff had many ideas for America 250, including the creation of street crews to go out and gather interviews from the public. She also promised to keep the Commission updated on any possible progress in those plans. Gabe reminded the Commissioners that funding cuts at the federal level have affected media outlets but still encouraged Commissioners to search for opportunities to work with the media to promote the work of Illinois America 250 and uplift stories from local communities.

Christina shared that the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum would unveil a new flag acquisition on July 3 as part of their America 250 commemoration efforts.

Brad shared that the Illinois Municipal League is encouraging municipalities to create time capsules. He recommended other Commissioners also encourage partner organizations to make them. Gabe confirmed many library partners have brought up time capsules as a good way to commemorate America 250.

Gabe congratulated the Commissioners for accomplishing so much with limited resources. She reminded the Commission the next meeting would be in July and then proposed no meeting be held in August.
She

VI. Public Comment

None given.

VII. Adjournment

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