

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING
September 16, 2024, 1:00 p.m.

Webex Meeting

Attending: Officer: Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Ada Cheng, Brad Cole, Christina Shutt, Michelle Donahoe, Jenn Edginton, Jessica Harris, Sara Phalen, Gerald Savage, Dick Simpson, Senator Doris Turner, Andy Van Meter, and Nikki Williams Rucker; **Department of Natural Resources staff:** Meghan Lindstrom and George Sisk; one member of the public: Madeline Cruz.

I. Welcome

Chair Gabe Lyon called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

II. Roll Call

A quorum was present.

Jessica Harris joined the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

Andy Van Meter joined the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

III. Review July 15 Commission Meeting Minutes

The Minutes from the July 15 meeting were presented for approval. Brad Cole moved to approve the Minutes, Dick Simpson seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. Chair's Update

Gabe provided a brief update on the broad work of the Commission. The working groups had been established and plans and timelines are being solidified. Later in the fall the commission will need to make a concerted effort to alert the public about the upcoming anniversary statewide and work to gain their commitment.

Jenn Edginton reported that the official Illinois America250 website was close to completion and an email list had been established. Dick asked if there was a date set for the website's public release. Jenn could not provide an exact date but told the Commission the website would be live before the next meeting. Gabe recommended the Commissioners develop a messaging points, a Frequently Asked Questions document, and basic outreach tools in preparation for the website launch.

Gabe shared that she and Senator Doris Turner had met with Deputy Governor Andy Manar to discuss the future of the Commission. Doris said they left the meeting assured the Governor's Office was strongly committed to America 250, offered staff support, and Gabe had made a pitch for a launch event including the governor.

Gabe said they did not discuss appropriations in the meeting. She recommended the Commission develop a detailed budget in January and February and identify tangible deliverables. Dick warned that the State budget was already being developed and the Commission could receive no funding if they wait until 2025. Doris supported Gabe's timeline and said the work of the budget will not truly begin until February or March. She recommended the Commission begin to gather a list of all funding they would like to request. Gabe stated she would speak to the individual working groups about their funding needs and have a request drafted by January for the Commission to review.

Gabe proposed the Commission create an executive committee and a committee to establish bylaws. George Sisk provided copies of current bylaws used by other commissions with the Department of Natural Resources.

Christina Shutt moved to create a bylaws committee that is tasked with creating bylaws for the Commission. Jenn seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Christina moved to create an executive committee for the Commission. Jessica seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

V. Working Groups

Nikki Williams Rucker presented for the Youth Engagement working group. The group had met once and discussed different strategies on how to interest youth in the anniversary of the founding of America. They decided on Project Soapbox in which students write and perform a soapbox speech or create an art installation. They still need to decide where an art installation could be placed or if it would be moved throughout the state. The working group will also focus on how to engage people outside of Chicago and assist under-served people to overcome barriers for participation. Christina offered the expertise of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum's Chief Logistics Officer, who already oversees a statewide art competition that is also a collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education. She also offered to consider America250 as a theme for the next competition. Michelle

Donahoe requested to be invited to any meetings scheduled about this to discuss how the Education working group could participate.

Brad reported for the Commemorations working group. The working group had discussed possible partnerships throughout the state with local municipalities, associations, universities, and groups such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution. One early goal the working group chose was to create at least one commemorative event in each county or work to rebrand an existing event as America250. A long-term goal would be to establish an event or rebrand one in every city and town but that would require greater time and resources. Brad asked the Commission to consider a large statewide event to be held in Springfield or Chicago, similar to the Bicentennial events held in Illinois in 2017 and 2018. Sara Phalen cautioned the Commission against such large events if they required funding that could be used to help reach broader cultural institutions and minoritized groups.

Christina left the meeting at 1:44 pm.

Brad stated that state agencies, colleges, and local governments would have better connections to their communities and could help with broader outreach. Other neighborhood or ethnic business entities around Chicago could help identify and reach underprivileged groups. Doris recommended the working group also partner with community groups who host annual celebrations, such as Juneteenth.

Gabe stated that the Commission would need to decide at a future meeting if they would be underwriting or fundraising for events.

Dick recommended that the Commission work with the Institute of Cultural Affairs to train people to run a town hall meeting in all 102 Illinois counties in 2026. He would reach out to Brad and Gabe by email with a written proposal.

Michelle reported for the Education working group. The group met once and was considering possible partners and audience. They decided to segment the audience into Kindergarten through 12th grade, higher education, and families. The initial efforts of the working group will be directed towards finding what resources and projects are currently available and future efforts will be focused on how to best share them statewide. The working group also decided to start formulating resources such as booklists, curricula, and oral histories, especially prioritizing Native American histories and those of other traditionally unheard voices because they are usually missing from historical

documents. Gerald Savage volunteered his assistance with the oral histories, citing his own experience as a Road Scholars Speaker.

Gabe reported that the Marketing working group had not yet met but the Department of Tourism had expressed interest in partnering with them.

VI. Goals for announcement

Gabe proposed the Commission consider the form of the public announcement of the Commission. Either a press release, which could be issued quickly, or an in-person announcement involving Governor Pritzker, which would take longer to be released. Michelle proposed the Commission pursue both forms of announcement. Dick recommended the Commission prioritize an in-person announcement and create a short document of themes and other notes commissioners can share before the official release.

VII. Legal/Ethics Issues/Update

George Sisk provided commissioners with a handbook which contained information about the Open Meetings Act, the Ethics Act, and the Freedom of Information Act, which they are required to comply with. He directed commissioners who have questions about the handbook to reach out to him by phone or email. If they have legal questions he advised commissioners to share them with Gabe, who would be responsible for reaching out to George for answers.

George informed the Commission that the issues with the trust fund in the Treasurer's Office had been resolved. Checks would be the quickest donation to process since all direct deposit donations to the fund would require donors to complete an ACH form. All expenditures from the fund would need to be processed by the Department of Natural Resources' Fiscal Office. George would reach out to Gabe once the process was determined on how the Commission could access the funds.

George informed the Commission about their required annual trainings. Commissioners would be required to complete trainings on the Open Meetings Act, the Ethics Act, sexual harassment and discrimination prevention, DEIA, and LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion. Public State university employees would be exempt from completing the ethics and sexual harassment and discrimination prevention trainings if they had already completed them in 2024, but all other trainings would still need to be completed. Paper-based versions of all but the Open Meetings Act training

would be sent out to commissioners by email.

VIII. Public Comment

None given.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.