

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
February 14, 2022 - 5:30 p.m.**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

2/14/2022 - Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED BY AUDIO AND VIDEO CONFERENCE WITHOUT A PHYSICALLY PRESENT QUORUM OF THE ROCK ISLAND CITY COUNCIL DUE TO THE DISASTER DECLARATION ISSUED BY GOVERNOR PRITZKER.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll. Present: Alderpersons Dylan Parker, Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, Moses Robinson, Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson, and Mayor Mike Thoms. Alderperson Randy Hurt was present via remote connection. Absent: None. City Staff: Interim City Manager John Gripp, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak. No residents volunteered to speak in person or virtually.

PEARSON CONSULTING LLC PRESENTATION

Charles Pearson CEO of Pearson Consulting addressed Council via remote connection. Mr. Pearson remarked his company specializes in African American historical resource development and provided additional background information. He said the City of Rock Island partnered with Pearson Consulting and QC PastPort to nominate City-owned properties to the National Register of Historical Places associated with 20th Century African American history. Once City Council approves this project, it will also be part of Black Life Along the Mississippi River. Once the project is completed, for the first time in the history of Rock Island County there will be properties within Rock Island listed on the National Register associated with African American history.

Mr. Pearson described the project as the City of Rock Island African American Historical Research Project 2021, and pointed to a summary handout. He said this summary details the need, urgency, threat, and timeline of the project. He noted that the City Manager, the Budget Manager, and the Rock Island Historic Preservation Commission completed a planning process in November 2021 and updated Council on the project. He pointed to the slide presentation, titled

Black Life Along The Mississippi River, as an inventory of landmarks and sites associated with outdoor recreation, conservation, and wildlife. He said the City of Rock Island did not have an inventory of African American properties to utilize, and the County of Rock Island did not have enough.

Mr. Pearson provided a description of Pearson Consulting's specialties, including research, fact-finding, surveying, mapping, and identifying underserved African American resources. He detailed the services the company is able to provide, and provided an example on the type of work the firm is currently performing in Iowa. He then described the firm's mission for Black Life projects. He noted that the proposed project for Rock Island would begin with an estimate, and that there are no hidden charges. He added that those on his staff are vetted and chosen for their expertise and ethics.

Mr. Pearson said when Black Life projects are completed, they aim to make sure there is an outlet in which youth can participate. He noted that in the summer of 2022 their firm will offer 20 students a one-week camp with benefits to assist the Iowa African American Heritage Trail staff and volunteers with researching and documenting Black life in Iowa between 1850 and 1970. He mentioned the outdoor recreational activities to be included in the camp, and that the Iowa African American Heritage Trail would be connected to local, state, and national park systems while including historically Black neighborhoods.

Mr. Pearson discussed a 2016 event in which he was asked to present as a speaker on the African American experience in the Quad Cities. He noted his involvement with Jim Collins, former President of the John Deere Foundation, and Virgil Mayberry, local historian and former Rock Island Alderperson. He noted that for the Juneteenth holiday in 2021, Ryan Sadler, Director of the Friends of MLK for the Martin Luther King Jr. Interpretive Center asked him to present a traveling exhibit as part of the Juneteenth Festival. He then discussed the scope of the Black Life Along The Mississippi River project. Mr. Pearson then discussed another aspect of the Black Life Along The Louisiana Territory involving Dubuque County.

Mr. Pearson next detailed his previous involvement in the Quad Cities African American Empowerment Network, which he classified as a big asset in mapping and planning potential sites in the region. He discussed his involvement with the Friends of MLK group and the foundation of the MLK Interpretive Center. He noted Shellie Moore Guy's participation in the Juneteenth presentation in 2021, the knowledge he gained from her, and that he described his project goals in the area. He also discussed additional local 20th century African American historic landmarks and other potential landmark sites. He detailed how Rock Island County was affected by the Louisiana Purchase with regard to Fort Armstrong, as well as the role the County played during the era of slavery and the Civil War. He also discussed the potential for Rock Island being a stop for the planned Juneteenth Bike Ride & BBQ Competition, saying the City would be a good choice for the Quad Cities' representative.

Mr. Pearson elaborated on plans for the City's 20th Century African American Historic Resource Research Project. He said one problem was the City did not have African American properties on the National Register of Historic Places. He said nominating certain properties would increase the City's inventory, and would place the City in a leadership role for which other communities could model. Mr. Pearson pointed to the proposal written for the City, and noted the one goal of the project was to engage Rock Island's African American community in the historic and cultural research of its own history, specifically Longview Park, Douglas Park, and the downtown area. He discussed how he came to partner with Ms. Natalie Linville-Mass in her role with QC PastPort to engage the City in applying for the federal grant. He also noted that the Historic Preservation Commission needs more African American partners, and African American property owners and citizens in the community should be engaged in the process. He said the one objective of the project is to have an area of the City that is underrepresented listed as a national, state, or local landmark.

Mr. Pearson said the first proposed activity would be a public meeting to review information that pays tribute to the City's African American residents, as well as acquire additional information that may have been missed since the City's inception. He noted the importance of transparency and having a say in the process. He added that none of the proposed activities can be implemented without prior approval of City Council.

Mr. Pearson entertained questions from Council. Alderperson Robinson said the presentation given was not part of the grant application, and asked Mr. Pearson how the presentation would be a part of the grant. Mr. Pearson replied that the Black Life Along The Mississippi River project was in process, but Rock Island did not have properties in the National Register of Historic Places. He noted also that there had never been an African American on the Historic Preservation Commission, and African American property owners had never been introduced to the preservation plan. As a result, they contacted the City to see about nominating certain properties to the Register.

Alderperson Robinson reiterated that he was asking how Pearson Consulting was planning to include the presentation as part of the grant. He said the project involved surveying, researching, and documenting historic sites, but noted he did not see how that incorporated the Black Life Along The Mississippi River project. He questioned whether there were two different projects. Mr. Pearson said there are two different projects, but also two different funding sources. He said the National Park Service grant is specifically to nominate City-owned properties for the National Register of Historic Places. Alderperson Robinson replied that was not in the grant, noting that the grant showed the purpose as infrastructure and narratives. Mr. Pearson said the infrastructure, narratives, and signage portion of the project was to be through QC PastPort, and his portion was to place the City in position to research properties for the Register.

Alderperson Robinson asked if he was to be surveying, or taking information from others doing the surveying. Mr. Pearson replied it was a combination of both, as he will re-research information, and if anything is missed, the story or property will be added to an existing survey. Alderperson Robinson asked if he had a team that worked with him. Mr. Pearson replied with examples of various project partners. Alderperson Robinson said a check of the Pearson Consulting website did not reveal team members, and asked if there was a team under him. Mr. Pearson replied that depending on the project, he subcontracts with other professionals.

Alderperson Robinson said he researched the Pearson Consulting website and was unable to verify documentation of Mr. Pearson's stated 20 years of experience, and asked how he obtained expertise in historical data, surveying, and registering historic sites. Mr. Pearson said developing historical resources, as well as being the only African American on the Preserve Iowa board. He noted he had received awards for historical preservation initiatives. He said preservation has two elements, both architecture and significance, and that his expertise is in significance and not traditional architecture. Alderperson Robinson asked for clarification that Mr. Pearson does not have experience in architecture, but did have expertise in seeing survey documents and reading reports about resources that others have done. Mr. Pearson replied he did develop strategic plans for those resources, and that he did not have a degree in architecture or historical research. He said his experiences and partnerships over a 20-year span put him in a position to create strategic plans for traditionally African American resources.

Alderperson Parker thanked Mr. Pearson for his presentation in identifying historical assets in the community. He asked Mr. Pearson to confirm that the scope of the project is roughly adding municipal properties to the National Register of Historic Places, and that Pearson Consulting's role in the process was bureaucratic by applying for the grant. Mr. Pearson confirmed yes, and if the process began and manpower resources were low to identify properties, they could outsource the work to the Illinois State Historic Preservation office or National Park Service.

Mayor Thoms thanked Mr. Pearson for his time.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

MOTION:

Aldersperson Poulos moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Parker seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Parker, Poulos, Healy, Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, and Swanson. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.



Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk