

MAINE BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
Meeting Notes
January 29, 2018
2 p.m., Legislative Council Chambers

PRESENT:

Senator Bill Diamond
Sen. Jim Hamper
Representative Jim Handy
Peter Gore (for Dana Connors, Maine Chamber of Commerce)
Heather Perry, Gorham Superintendent of Schools
Alison Sucey, Maine Tourism Association
Hayden Anderson, Maine Humanities Council
James Ritter, Maine State Library
Bernard Fishman, Maine State Museum
Steve Bromage, Maine Historical Society
Jason Libby, Maine Historic Preservation Commission
Samantha Warren (for Jim Page, University of Maine System)
Nina Fisher, Maine Community College System
Dave Cheever, Maine State Archives

ABSENT:

Governor Paul R. LePage
Senate President Michael Thibodeau
Rep. David Haggan
Beth Gibbs, Thomas College
Julie Richard, Maine Arts Commission
Esther Anne, Wabanaki Reach
Matthew Dunlap, Secretary of State

GUESTS:

Grant Pennoyer, Legislative Council Director
Peter Merrill, Maine Cultural Affairs Council (CAC) Chairman
Terry Hayes, Maine State Treasurer
Kristen Muszynski, Communications Director, Secretary of State's Office
Denny Keschl, former Rep. and current Museum Commission member

Grant Pennoyer called the meeting to order at 2:08, provided an overview of the enabling legislation about the Commission, describing it as a "broad charge" upon the members to observe appropriately the 200th anniversary of Maine attaining statehood. He then asked the Members present to introduce themselves.

Upon nomination by Rep. James Handy, and a seconding by Sen. James Hamper, the Commission unanimously elected Sen. Bill Diamond to serve as Commission Chairman.

Chairman Diamond asked Peter Merrill to apprise the Commission of the work already done by the CAC.

Merrill reported that the CAC agencies (Arts, Historic Preservation, Museum, Library, Humanities Council, Historical Society, and State Archives) have been focusing on the 2020 Bicentennial and view it as a “unique opportunity to reach every corner of the state,” to present and understand Maine’s history, where we are now, and how best to prepare for the future, recognizing that the history cannot be sanitized and should include “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” He said that the CAC envisioned an initial steering committee to function as a clearinghouse for ideas, developing and coordinating plans and programs, and fundraising.

Merrill shared a prioritized overview of the CAC’s proposal, including a General Fund bicentennial proposal of \$2 million for community-based programming and \$1 million for a signature 2020 event, an increase in New Century Community Program annual funding from \$40,000 to \$200,000, and a new Cultural Building to house all of the agencies and to replace the current building that has outlived its usefulness.

He also recounted the legislative history regarding an unfunded \$75,000 request to begin bicentennial planning and to form the Commission. The second attempt to have money appropriated is now before the Legislature, though the bill advanced on a divided report from the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

Sen. Hamper opined that the \$75,000 appropriation should not be expected before the end of the current legislative session and he asked who would serve as the State House contact for the Commission and the public.

Chairman Diamond allowed as how the Commission is confronting a lot of questions and has the latitude to respond accordingly to perceived needs.

Grant Pennoyer said that the enabling bill had no provision for legislative staffing and instead called for administrative support to be the responsibility of the CAC. As a “base allocation in anticipation of the receipt of outside funding,” the bill allows for a \$500 allocation.

Nina Fisher offered that the Community College System could provide some clerical needs and a meeting place should the occasion warrant.

James Ritter said that any private contributions to the Bicentennial could be forwarded to his office for deposit in the CAC’s Special Revenue account.

Dave Cheever said that the Archives could serve as an interim secretary to the Commission until the communications apparatus could be established and, with funding, staff hired.

The Commission then discussed the prospect of fundraising. Peter Gore offered that there are likely donors – individual and corporate – who would want to associate with the Bicentennial and perhaps sponsor facets of it.

Rep. Handy wanted to be clear that sponsorship, while welcome, should not also mean ownership of a program or event. Gore and others offered that different levels of funding should result in commensurate levels of recognition.

Steve Bromage asked whether the Commission could yet identify the “level of our ambition” regarding the Bicentennial. Peter Gore concurred and said that from a fundraising perspective, it is “easier to pitch” an appeal to a prospective donor based on identifying with an event or a program.

James Ritter said that the Bicentennial should have a “signature event,” but that part of the Commission’s purpose is also to present the commemoration as a launch point to consider how to prepare for Maine’s future.

The sense of the Commission was that additional time is needed to answer the “level of ambition” question, and that building a Commission structure using committees might expedite that process.

The mechanics of State funding for the Bicentennial received attention. While the \$75,000 request is wending its way through this legislative session, Sen. Hamper, chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, said that the dollar figure supported by the Commission could receive consideration up until the final day of the session.

However, he cautioned, he is not aware of “any appetite” for a sum as high as \$2 million for an event, and that any appropriation will not be fast-tracked any earlier than April.

Sen. Hamper added that if the Commission wants to propose a larger appropriation than in the current bill, such a request would need to be broached to Gov. LePage.

Grant Pennoyer pointed to the legislation and its requirement that the Commission conduct at least one public hearing. Samantha Warren suggested that the hearing could be held sooner rather than later to gauge public interest and derive a sense of direction from it. Chairman Diamond supported the idea of a hearing, but said that he would prefer that the Commission’s committee structure be further developed prior to such a hearing.

Rep. Handy said that the Commission and its committees could benefit from engagement by the public and that the Commission should welcome outside consultants.

Steve Bromage said that many individuals and organizations have been looking for leadership for the bicentennial and might now approach the Commission with energy and ideas.

The Commission then discussed committees that could divide the work and accelerate planning progress. Chairman Diamond agreed to circulate a list of the committees and solicit from the members their preferences. Upon learning those, the Chairman said he would populate the committees and appoint their respective chairmen, reserving the right to appoint members if there were significant holes to be filled. He asked Cheever to circulate the sign-up and provide him with the results. From there, he said, the Commission could set its next meeting date.

The meeting adjourned at 3:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Dave Cheever, acting-Secretary