

Michigan Freedom Trail Commission

Meeting Minutes

Location: Michigan History Center, Lansing

Date: August 1, 2025

Roll call

Present for the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission:

- Melinda Babarskis
- George Bayard
- Amanda Campbell Crawford ~ virtual
- Carolyn Carter
- Rochelle Danquah
- Kimberly Holley
- Jamon Jordan ~ virtual
- Adelaide Lancaster
- Nicole Ly

Present for the Michigan History Center staff:

- Sandra Clark
- Sheri Giffin

Guests:

- Gina Hsu, University of Michigan

Call to Order

Danquah called the meeting to order at 11:09 a.m.

Approval of Agenda

Carter moved to approve agenda; Babarskis seconded the motion, and it was approved.

Approval of Minutes

Babarskis moved approval of the May 2, 2025, meeting minutes as amended; Holley seconded the motion, and the minutes were adopted unanimously.

Public Comment:

Hsu introduced herself as a Ph.D student studying water's importance to history.

Standing Committees:

Cultural & Heritage Tourism: Holley gave an overview (attached) of the committee's list of current goals for tourism. The committee has created a list of opportunities including enhancement of the Michigan Freedom Trail map, printed brochures and an e-newsletter. Ly also presented the updates to the Pure Michigan website highlighting the Underground Railroad page and links.

Heritage Gathering & Webinars: Campbell Crawford reported on the 2025 Heritage Gathering. The public conference will be held at the Detroit Public Library on September 6. The committee is also working on creating a virtual webinar series throughout the year.

The committee recommended Karolyn Smartz Frost for the Truth Haviland Award to be given at this year's Heritage Gathering. The award this year is for a historian who has contributed significantly to our understanding of Michigan's UGRR. Carter made a motion to give the award to Karolyn Smartz Frost; Babarskis seconded, and the commission unanimously approved the motion.

Education: Lancaster highlighted the success of the John White Teacher Workshop this past July. The workshop was a joint effort of the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission, the Department of Education, the Friends of Walker Tavern and the Michigan History Center. It was supported by a grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. The main teacher feedback requests focused on curriculum, approved resources and future workshops similar to the John White workshop. The committee will be reviewing the workshop suggestions for the next steps in supporting education in the state.

Sites Identification: Danquah noted that three nominations were submitted to the National Network to Freedom for the July deadline: Woodstock Manual Labor Institute, the Statue at Hart Plaza and White Lake.

New Business:

Giffin shared that the Guy Beckley House recently requested a Michigan Freedom Trail sign. Giffin will be sending out a sign offer letter to the newest nominations to join the signage program.

Danquah noted that new commissioners will need to sign up to serve on one of the above committees.

Old Business:

Campbell Crawford and the officer nomination committee nominated Danquah to continue as Chair and Lancaster as Vice Chair for another year. Carter moved to approve Danquah as Chair and Lancaster as Vice Chair; Campbell Crawford seconded the motion. The commission passed the motion unanimously.

Staff Updates:

Clark updated the commission on fiscal budget concerns and the work on the Heart of the Great Turtle Island project.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.