



# CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

**Monday, February 28, 2022 Minutes**

**SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING**

7:38 – 8:19 p.m.

President Hart presiding

Roll Call: Present: Mattox, Moore, Russell, Cobb, Cuda, Larson, Hart  
Absent: None

Also Present: Mayor Seren, Niermann O’Neil

**Black History Month Presentation**

**Opening Welcome**

Council President Hart welcomed everyone to the Black History Month Presentation. She said when she was a kid, she didn’t realize the American history she was taught in school was white history; she assumed it was just American history. When she got into high school, they started an elective course called Black history. They were required to take American history, but Black history was elective. She remembered thinking the history should all be in the same book and she was surprised it was segregated. She said all of us are a part of American history and that’s why this month is important. Council President Hart thanked Councilwoman Russell, Councilman Mattox and Councilman Cuda for their work in organizing the program. She also acknowledged and introduced Mayor Seren, as a historic figure in the City, as not only the first Mayor but as the first Black Mayor in Cleveland Heights history.

**History of Black History Month**

Vice President Cobb stated he had a similar experience to Council President Hart’s regarding the history he learned when he was younger. He remembered when he attended school, there was no celebration of Black history and very little taught about Black history except as a footnote to other events in American history. He noted the reason Black history is now celebrated as more than a footnote is attributed to the efforts of Dr. Carter Woodson, whose parents were slaves. Although he didn’t start high school until he was 20, Dr. Woodson went on to become just the second Black person to get his PhD from Harvard. Vice President Cobb stated in pursuing his degrees, Dr. Woodson recognized there was no interest shown by the academic community in studying or teaching Black history. In 1915, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History; its mission being the scientific study of the neglected aspects of Negro life and

history. In 1926, the Association sponsored Negro History Week, selecting the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. From there, it took decades to grow into Black History Month; fueled by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, a growing awareness of the Black identity and by the contributions of Black Americans to history. In 1976, as part of the Bicentennial celebration, President Ford officially recognized February as Black History Month. Since then, it has grown to become a well-established part of the calendar year, school curriculum and American culture. Vice President Cobb then introduced Cuyahoga County Council Vice Mayor and Candidate for Lieutenant Governor Cheryl Stephens to present the rest of the program.

### **Program Presentation**

Cheryl Stephens stated in 1969, Kent State developed the first month of Black History and from there, the nation began to honor African Americans all month long. She felt incredibly proud it has its roots in Ohio. She said as she travels Ohio while campaigning, she still remembers the base. She stated the base here is diversity. She said she welcomed the month and the sharing of the month with the people who are a part of this. She recognized the friends and colleagues who came, including the superintendent. She stated this is a joint effort and communities are not healthy unless their children are healthy. They work hard to make sure the educational system as well as municipal government is strong and represents us well. For years, Cleveland Heights has had the honor of honoring students who would read, write and create some sense of rhythm in the community. She said we wanted to recognize the diversity of the people of color and the joy they bring to life. She then introduced Nadia Walker as the first presenter.

### **Reading & Writing**

Nadia Walker recited her poem “Our Story” and Maya Angelou’s “And Still I Rise.”

### **Presentation of Certificate**

Councilman Cuda thanked Taylor Evans for her work in getting the ball rolling on the event, as well as Dr. McKinney, Jen Holland and Superintendent Kirby. Councilman Cuda asked Ms. Walker who her other favorite poet is, to which she replied Jacqueline Woodson. He then asked what inspired her to write the poem. Ms. Walker stated the way she perceives her own people is in a very positive way so she took the way she sees people of color and put it down on paper. Councilman Cuda then presented Ms. Walker with her certificate.

### **Reading & Writing**

Najee Coore recited a poem written by fellow student Artrese Roberts entitled “My.”

### **Presentation of Certificate**

Councilman Mattox presented Najee Coore with a certificate for his participation in the event.

Councilwoman Russell noted throughout history, African Americans authors have represented a rich and diverse body of literature. She stated their narratives have added to American

storytelling, have shifted perspectives and created a new dialogue around race, culture, policy, religion and society. These stories entertain, educate, inform and shape how the Black experience is viewed and understood in America. Councilwoman Russell stated Artrese Roberts' poem had entertained, educated and informed her. She then presented Ms. Roberts with a certificate for her participation in the event.

### **Music – Cat Burglars**

Cheryl Stevens introduced a string quartet called the Cat Burglars, made up of Heights High students Sophie Muller, Patricia Chen, Ella Herr and Cassie Sisson. They performed two musical pieces.

### **Presentation of Certificate**

Councilman Mattox thanked everyone for coming. He stated it was great to see so many gifts and talents displayed as we celebrate the month. Councilman Mattox shared the Bantu word 'ubuntu' which means "I am because of who we all are" to describe how he feels about Black History Month. He said Black History Month reminds him of the weight and the strength that comes along with who we are as people. The weight comes from the responsibility because we are standing on the shoulders of everyone who came before us, many who are in the room today. Because of the doors they've opened up, he said it's allowed us to go a little bit further, so there is a weight and a responsibility. He said he is passing the baton onto the students to lead and take us into the next generation so our voices are in rooms they otherwise wouldn't be in. The second thing is strength. The weight is from everything the people before have carried and every door they've opened for us but we also get their strength and the tenacity they've left behind. He said as we celebrate Black History Month, know you carry the weight of everyone else behind you but you also carry their strength into every room you go into. Black History Month should remind you that you are not by yourself. He said there is great responsibility in remembering and celebrating those who have gone before us but you also carry their strength in you and you are the future. He then presented Sophie Muller with her certificate.

Councilor Moore stated she felt the entire night had been so moving and she felt full from everything the students had given. She said what she loves about the diversity of Cleveland Heights and what she loves about Black History Month is it's claiming space here, in history and in the world. She wanted the young people to know they belong in the world and on every path they go on. She said they deserve to be there and they should take up space and to not let anyone make them think you need to be smaller. She then presented Patricia Chen with her certificate.

Councilor Larson stated it's been an honor to be there with all the future leaders and she cherished each and every one of them. She then presented Ella Herr with her certificate.

Councilwoman Russell discussed the Negro String Quartet, founded by Felix Weir playing music composed by Felix Weir and Arthur Boyd in 1920. The group remained active until 1933. On November 28, 1925, they performed at Carnegie Hall. She told the Cat Burglars if they continue to play how they've been playing, she bets one day they will be featured at Carnegie Hall. Councilwoman Russell thanked everyone for participating in the program and said, as African Americans, be proud, stay focused and be true to yourself. Know you are the future. When you

open the door, be bold and understand you have a voice in society and a place at the table. Remember African American Month and African American history is American history. She said to make sure, as you move forward in your journey, to grab someone else to take them with you, but stay focused and be blessed. She then presented Cassie Sisson with her certificate.

**Closing Remarks**

Mayor Seren stated the creation of Black History Month was only necessitated by the negation of Black history. Blackness itself was created out of the socioeconomic and psychological need for whiteness in America, and we have still not let go of that need. He recognized Vice President Cobb, Councilman Mattox and Councilwoman Russell for making Black history as the first three elected Black Council Members to serve together in the City's 100-year existence. He stated because we've just reached this milestone in 2022, these nights are still required. He thanked the students who contributed and recognized them as a symbol of the work to come; Black history yet to be made. He wanted everyone to leave with that charge in mind; to celebrate Black history every month by making Black history and by actively pushing back against efforts to diminish Black accomplishments. He thanked everyone for showing up to recognize Black history and encouraged everyone to keep showing up for all of our Black futures.

**NEXT MEETING OF COUNCIL: MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2022**

Respectfully submitted,



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Melody Joy Hart  
President of Council



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Amy Himmelein  
Clerk of Council