



Community Engagement Council
April 2, 2026
Meeting 6
125 Bull Street

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Facilitators	Clay Middleton, LaSheia Oubre, Joanna Gilmore
CEC Members	Julie Bowling, Walter Brown, Stephen Cofer-Shabica Abigail Dairaghi, Norm Dickerson, Jalen Evans, Shawn Gathers, Harlan Greene, Jerome Harris, Lisa Jones, Madison Lee, Jim Newhard, Patricia Ploehn, Sharon Ramirez, Luqman Rasheed, Joshua Shumak
Advisors	Omar Muhammad
Consultants	--
Liaison	Courtney Howard
Staff	Mark Berry
Invited Guests	Harry Singleton (IAAM), Lenny Lowe (CofC), Brennan Keegan (CofC), Muhammad Fraser-Rahim (Citadel), Laura Lee Worrell (CofC)
Guests	Gerald Mackey, Savannah Waters, Karen Smith, John Fisher, Sam McDorman, Keith Stephenson, Wagia Abdul-Kareem, Clifton R. Polite, Jr. , Allison Foley, Jodi Barnes, Vennie Deas Moone, Allison Sterret-Krause Arianne King Comer, Jessica Wanderhoof (sp?) Austin Dolphin, Daryll Fyall, Donald West, Tiffany Harris

- I. Meeting called to order at 6:05pm (Clay)
 - a. We have hard stop at 7:30pm so the room can be prepared for another event at the facility
 - b. Motion (Jerome)
 - i. To modify the agenda to move item #2 under new business (discussion of motions) to item #1 of old business
 1. Seconded by a CEC member
 2. Approved by voice vote (unanimous)
 - c. Welcome (Joanna)
 - i. To new CEC member Abigail Dairaghi (representing Muscogee Nation)
 - ii. An invitation has been extended to Winona Haire (Catawba) – no response yet
 - iii. Daniel Schmidt has stepped down due to other commitments
 - iv. Our role as facilitators is to support a conversation, not move the group to any particular conclusion or recommendations

- II. Panel discussion - Faith-based and cross-cultural burial and memorialization tradition
 - a. Framing of discussion and reflection on the significance of this particular time considering recent/current Eid al-Fitr (Muslim), Passover (Jewish), and Holy Thursday (Christian) faith observances (Joanna)
 - b. Panelists
 - i. Dr. Harry Singleton (IAAM, Director of Faith-Based Education and Engagement)
 - 1. Perspective: Black liberation thought and literature in the context of African American Christian theology
 - ii. Dr. Brennan Keegan (CofC, Associate Professor of Religious Studies)
 - 1. Perspective: broader Native American religious studies perspective on ways to approach the questions
 - iii. Dr. Lenny Lowe (CofC, Associate Professor and Chair of Religious Studies)
 - 1. Perspective: West African religious thought and thoughts about the dead in a broad sense
 - iv. Dr. Muhammad Fraser-Rahim (The Citadel, Associate Professor of Intelligence and Security Studies)
 - 1. Perspective: broader Islamic African diaspora particularly related to the South and Gullah Geechee tradition
 - 2. Has experience in looking for the grave of an enslaved African Muslim in Washington D.C. and has worked in connection to *Omar* (opera) with Spoleto Festival
 - c. Moderated discussion (Joanna)
 - i. Question – What core beliefs or values shaped how the dead should be treated in your tradition?
 - 1. (Singleton) Doctrine of Remembrance
 - a. The insistence that the dead be buried (biblical reference: from the dust you shall be returned)
 - b. Concept of the final resting place which says that the dead should not be moved
 - c. Important context to consider
 - i. a unique African American culture emerged through the slavocracy
 - ii. African Americans were expected to be content with a state of bondage, as supported by white Christian thought/practice
 - iii. What does it mean in the context of mass graves and bondage? Proper respect was not given to bodies in this context.
 - iv. Dialectical tension between concept of final resting place and lack of proper respect at burial

2. (Lowe) As a cultural anthropologist, can offer a different perspective than a theologian
 - a. The centrality of the dead
 - b. The living don't serve the dead. Honoring the dead is the dead serving the living
 - c. There is nothing about this burial site that honors the dead
 - d. How will us honoring the dead serve the community? (not profit, but rather serve to lift up); something good must come to the living for it to honor the dead)
 - e. Important context to consider
 - i. Congo Catholicism as precursor to voodoo
 - ii. Congo traditions have found their way in Protestant and other religious traditions – we can't ever not live with the dead; we are always living with the dead
 - iii. An opportunity for our community to know more about our dead
3. (Rahim) A historian and former CIA officer
 - a. Goal is to bury the dead quickly because the soul has already transcended. Wrapping the body in a simple white shroud to give dignity in the final step of completion
 - b. Important context to consider
 - i. Reference to a pig pen scene in *12 Years a Slave* film
 - ii. Centuries of West African Islamic tradition, education, intellect, spirituality, sophistication; Muslims not only in the Arabian Gulf
 - iii. Enslaved African Muslims who arrived in the New World were trying to preserve their culture and tradition
 - iv. Many would have not received a proper Islamic funeral, but would be interesting to see if there were prayer beads or other vestiges of traditional Islamic funeral traditions
 - v. 40-60 year gap between African Islam and African American Islam, therefore there were interruptions in the continuity of practices
4. (Keegan) Not speaking on behalf of the Native American voices in the room
 - a. At least 19 tribes in Charleston in the 18th century
 - b. Myth of authenticity – what does it mean to be native? What are native burial traditions?

- c. Site of trade and travel → diverse religious practices and burial traditions
- d. Race doesn't equal religion
- e. Common practices
 - i. Scaffolding burials
 - ii. Removal of tissue from remains then burying bones
- f. Important context to consider
 - i. Record keeping not intact; "the world was only keeping track of white history"
 - ii. Through engagement with settlement society, some indigenous people converted or merged religious traditions
 - iii. Some burial practices that had to be hidden due to colonist perception and understanding (or lack of)
 - iv. Concept of exchange – indigenous people were hyper-diverse and there is not one correct way to think about native practices

ii. Q&A with CEC

1. (Brown) – would it be considered that removing the bodies would be a way to honor the dead, in light of the doctrine of remembrance?
 - a. (Singleton) the valuation of human imperative should take precedence to bricks and mortar; challenge of prophetic critique- we spend so much time trying to convert others based on deleterious perceptions and thoughts of others; when the attempt to continue to uproot is a violation of your own core values—this is problematic
2. (Dickerson) in Islamic tradition, would bodies ever be dug up, removed, and reburied?
 - a. (Rahim) burying the dead is the ideal situation; there are provisions for burial at sea or burning. There is no blanket Islamic push back on exhuming a body; Also important to recognize African traditional religions, not just the larger religious traditions of Islam, Christianity, etc.
3. (Dickerson) the spirit has left the body, so what happens to the body after that?
 - a. (Rahim) final resting place is the ideal but there are provisions within religious acceptability
4. (Dickerson) do you think they still adhered to the religion they brought from Africa in the 1790s?

- a. (Rahim) there were many enslaved Muslims documented (and undocumented); challenges in record keeping at that time so keeping a tally is hard to determine
- 5. (Rasheed) do Muslims bury others or only Muslims?
 - a. (Rahim) In Islamic tradition, anyone who can perform the ritual can bury the dead; An Imam is not required.
- 6. (Cofer-Shabica) please expand on your statement about final resting place; once a person is buried, they are not to be moved. Is that a moral imperative?
 - a. (Singleton) yes, a moral imperative and a theological mandate. The burial was done without dignity (context of bondage), so the final resting place still has a shot. This is a humanizing moment that is deeply entrenched in faith. Core question - How do you want to be remembered in history (reference Chief Justice Warren's question to each of the Supreme Court justices re: Brown vs. Board of Education)?
- 7. (Dickerson) in what context do you mean biblical and moral? Is it the way that they treated the bodies?
 - a. (Singleton) how do we take sanctimonious biblical context and apply it to a non-sanctimonious context. Slavery and the inferiority perceptions of African bodies were theologically mandated by white Christian leadership. How do you humanize those bodies, that in the midst of prevailing prejudice, can transcend those prejudices and make a human valuation?
 - b. The fact that these are African bodies (or other bodies of color) gives way to the idea that these bodies can be moved in the first place
- 8. (Dairaghi) In the Muscogee Nation, we respect all traditions.
 - a. Most important thing for the Muscogee is to protect the dead
 - b. How were these speakers chosen?
 - c. I thought that this was a more discussion-based council, but this seems very lecture heavy
 - d. Commented on the availability of virtual option to participate in the meetings
- 9. (Gathers) At a high level, what do you suggest for next steps in the context of this proposed dormitory project; (Rasheed) what are your personal thoughts on the project?
 - a. Keegan – it's up to living communities to determine how to honor their ancestors
 - b. Lowe – not my place to offer a recommendation

- c. Rahim – for the community to decide what is acceptable – prayers, monuments, compensation and reparations for the descendants of the deceased
- d. Singleton – I would like to see an enshrined area if it can be (example in NY – African Burial Memorial)

III. Old Business

a. Four motions proposed by Jim Newhard

- i. To request that the Board of Trustees clarify its January 16, 2026 resolution to reflect that at 106 Coming Street: meaningful descendant- and community-centered consultation is an ongoing process that must continue through all relevant phases of review and planning, and the results of such consultation must be capable of materially affecting the proposed project’s scope, design, sequencing, timeline, location, or continuation. Further, the CEC affirms that on a site of this nature, responsible and meaningful consultation may require an iterative process that cannot be reduced to rapid or predetermined project scheduling.
 - 1. Seconded by Madison
 - 2. No discussion
 - 3. Vote – approved via voice vote (unanimous)
- ii. To request that the university adjust its preparation and review procedures to allow for CEC review, advice, and comment prior to submission or resubmission of regulatory requests, plans, and reports.
 - 1. Seconded by Jerry
 - 2. No discussion
 - 3. Vote – approved via voice vote (unanimous)
- iii. To request that a CEC facilitator (or designated representative from the CEC if a facilitator is not able) be present at meetings between the university and regulatory agencies when the 106 Coming Street project is under discussion.
 - 1. Amended suggested by Julie – Amend language - Active member rather than present
 - 2. Amendment accepted by Jim
 - 3. Final version of motion - To request that a CEC facilitator (or designated representative from the CEC if a facilitator is not able) be an active participant at meetings between the university and regulatory agencies when the 106 Coming Street project is under discussion.
 - 4. Seconded by Shawn
 - 5. Discussion: Are they on the agenda or part of the agenda; do they have a voice in the meeting? (Joshua)
 - a. The intent is more informal
 - b. Vote – approved via voice vote (unanimous)

iv. To request a complete, independently reviewed comparative analysis of 106 Coming Street and alternative housing sites, updated in light of current archaeological knowledge, in a form sufficient to permit meaningful CEC evaluation of relative site feasibility, whether through direct cost figures or, where the university deems exact figures confidential, through a standardized indexed or normalized comparison. Such analysis should include: projected total cost and timeline for 106 Coming Street under a range of scenarios based on comparable projects, including long-duration scenarios such as Asylum Hill; comparative acquisition, construction, operational, and per-bed affordability measures for alternative sites identified in university presentations, whether expressed directly or through a common indexed standard; and the financial impact of continued land ownership without revenue generation during the excavation period, whether expressed directly or through a comparative indexed measure.

1. Seconded by Harlan
2. Discussion: how would that review be funded in an acceptable way to the CEC? If funded by the College, is that independent? (Jones)
 - a. Dickerson – a firm could take this on, similar to a realtor
 - b. Newhard – getting another set of eyes to review; I am assuming we could trust the College to find a third party to do an independent review
 - c. Shumak – is there a distinction between overseeing the review vs funding the review?
 - d. Ploehn – what if the College refuses to fund it?
 - e. Greene – we make our motions and move forward; this can become complex, but we can always revisit at a later date
3. Vote – approved by voice vote (unanimous)

IV. Old Business

- a. Update from Board of Trustees re: response to resolution (Howard)
 - i. At March 27 Property Committee meeting, gave a report on the work of the CEC, including response to the BOT resolution; read three bold statements from the response
 - ii. Passed out copies of the response to each Trustee in attendance
 - iii. No additional feedback from the Board

V. New Business

- a. Review of slides added to the March 5 Work Plans presentation (Laura Lee Worrell) – see slides
 - i. Information sharing and feedback loop
 1. As the consulting and advisory agency, SHPO to receive all work plan amendments

- ii. Glossary update (NAGPRA)
 - b. Review of previous requests and recommendations made by the CEC (posted on Google drive) showing when made, action taken, etc. (Joanna)
 - i. Themes of questions/concerns have emerged
 - 1. Theme 1: archaeology, expertise, and context
 - 2. Theme 2: role clarity and decision pathways
 - 3. Theme 3: ethical concerns and stewardship of human remains
 - 4. Theme 4: project feasibility
- VI. Meeting adjourned at 8pm (Joanna)

General announcement (Julie Bowling) - Working on planning a prayer service for the individuals buried under Harmon Field. Contact Julie if interested.