

**JOINT ~ COM DEV & FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**  
**from MONDAY, JUNE 27<sup>TH</sup>, 2022 [meeting began at 6:10 P.M.]**

**CD PRESENT:** Chair Callahan, Mitchell, Oswald, Schneider, Absent: Lipian

**FINANCE PRESENT:** Chair Stewart, Tollett, Cerra, Davis, Schneider

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Law Dir Deery, Safety Svc Dir Brubaker, Mayor Whitfield, Asst Dir Williams, Asst Dir Calvert, Finance Dir Pileski, Asst Finance Dir Farrell, Asst Law Dir Breunig, Police Chief Pelko, Engineer McKillips, Parks Dir Reardon, Building Official Farkas

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*This is a JOINT Meeting of the Community Development Committee and the Finance Committee of Elyria City Council.  
Community Development has already been called to order and Chair Stewart called Finance to order at 6:10 P.M.*

**1. Approval of the Joint Meeting Minutes ~ May 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2022.**

**Moved by Mr. Cerra, seconded by Mrs. Mitchell to approve the above listed Joint Meeting Minutes.**

**2. The matter of a Professional Service Contract with Media Make Change for the development and production of a Public Resource Documentary.**

***[Discussion Only]* Referred By: Assistant Director Williams**

Dir Williams said Ms. Tara Conley of Media Make Change is here this evening and she is here to give a presentation this evening. This project celebrates and chronicles the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans in the City of Elyria. There will be discussion after this presentation and they are hoping Council is able to glean from this perspective and may have questions and concerns as we go through the development of this project.

Tara Conley introduced herself, she's the Director of Media Make Change, located in Solan, Ohio. She is a university professor and the founder of Media Make Change, which is a media production company that specializes in narrative justice storytelling strategic communications, research and curriculum development. Ms. Conley was born in Oberlin and raised in Elyria until she was about 10 years old. Her grandmother, mother, aunts, uncles, cousins and brother were born or grew up in Elyria and most attending or graduating from Elyria High School. Her childhood home on Mt. Vernon Court was where she first learned to ride a bike. The apartment she lived in on Cambridge Court was where she first learned to stand up for herself and her childhood home on 4<sup>th</sup> Street is where she developed her sense of creativity and wonder and it's where her aunts and cousins would practice their church songs in preparation for Saturday service. Her family lineage runs deep in this City. She left Ohio in 1999 to attend college in Houston, Texas on a track & field scholarship, she was a State Champion in 1999 in the long jump.

Ms. Conley never thought she would return, but some 20 years later she's proud to have returned back to northeast Ohio where her creative projects can finally live and her commitment to this region is unwavering and since the pandemic she decided to leave her position as assistant professor at Montclair State University in New Jersey and has started a new assistant professor role at the school of Media and Journalism at Kent State. She's here today to share with City Council a project proposal that would celebrate Elyria's Black & African American native residents, many of whom share similar stories of growing up and living in this community.

The presentation shown on the screen is the visual of the project that is tentatively titled 'The Black Elyria Project'. This storytelling project would be a public resource and visual documentary that chronicles and celebrates the history of Black and African American folks in Elyria.

The goals for this project are;

1.) to raise awareness about the unique lived experiences and overlooked contributions of Black Elyrian's past and present. 2.) to serve as an accessible storytelling tool for multiracial community engagement. 3.) to produce a public document in the form of a visual love letter to black Elyrians highlighting their memories, milestones and hopes for the future.

Ms. Conley passed out a proposal which she has submitted to the Mayor's office which includes the production package and budget breakdown. She also has copies of the certificate of liability insurance for the project of up to 1,000,000 in coverage.

A full film crew will be part of the making of this project to develop and produce a short documentary film and five digital short videos as well as a team to develop and execute a strategic comp plan for social media, web and graphic design.

In 2005 she produced a documentary work on Hurricane Katrina and she's currently wrapping up production on a film about Elyria's Ike Maxwell. She's consulted with non-profit and philanthropic organizations to create narrative shift campaigns for public school advocacy and racial literacy tools for communities.

This project is a passion project for her and a way to give back to her hometown. Her production website is [mediamakechange.org](http://mediamakechange.org). She wants to leave with a quote from Sam sterling who said quote, "when so much in the world stops making sense, that's when we need to learn and lean into art, storytelling and acts of creation, this is how we forge bonds when everything else seems to want to break them, this is how we find our people and ourselves".

She Thanked the Committee for their time.

Chair Callahan thanked Ms. Conley.

Mrs. Davis asked Ms. Conley if she's reached out to Shirley Brown-Reader, who has written a book and is she involved with this project?

Ms. Conley, said yes, she's talked to Ms. Brown about being involved.

Mrs. Davis asked if Ms. Conley is going into neighborhoods to reach out to older residents that know the story?

Ms. Conley said the plan is to conduct the interviews at City Hall. The certificate of insurance includes transportation to seniors to conduct interviews.

Mr. Tollett said the referral that the committee received was to use ARPA Funds. Does this fit the criteria for those funds?

Finance Dir Pileski said he has not looked into that yet. According to Mr. Williams he has been told that it does fit into that.

Law Dir Deery said she echos the sentiments of Dir Pileski and that her office would have to take a look at it before they made any final decision and recommendations on that.

Dir Williams said they're not requesting the funds for tonight. They did look at where they thought they could come from. They're using Widow Brian as consultants on all of they're expenditures, so before we would make that request they would have reviewed this and given their opinion. They also will be engaged with the Law Dept. If they would determine the eligibility they would clarify it in terms of the recommendation for that.

Mr. Tollett said that it looks like an agreement has already been made with the City, is that accurate?

Ms. Conley said a conversation has been started with the City.

Mr. Tollett said there are several pictures of our Mayor and we've had some history that have come out of this room, Leo and Forrest Bullocks, Judge Howard and more, with lots of history, he wants to ensure those folks will be included.

Ms. Conley said absolutely, she is hoping those folks will be part of this project.

Chair Callahan asked if there were any more questions?

He clarified with Mr. Williams that this is for discussion purposes.

Dir. Williams said yes.

Chair Callahan said that it will be determined from the Law Dir and Finance Dir in regards as to where funds can come from.

Dir Williams said based on this presentation to give some feedback especially as it relates to the history in the longevity. There is research yet to be done. One way of doing that is providing them with names. There are lots of names and people and they want to make sure that this is a historic reflection.

Chair Callahan agreed there is a lot of history going back to so many before us that made an impact in Elyria and describing their stories.

Dir Williams said there is an archive of exceptional things at the Elyria YWCA and there are lots of stories. Part of this project is to chronicle stories.

This is not just for the Black community but for all of our Elyria community.

Mr. Tollett asked who is going to see this, will it shown in the schools?

Ms. Conley said she would love to be able to use this as an outreach tool and an educational tool in not just the community itself, but also schools. They are still trying to figure out where this will be housed, in terms of the virtual space, but it will be free for the public to view. She would love to have community screenings at the library and make it publically available tool.

Mrs. Mitchell said the black churches here in Elyria are so rich with history, Second Baptist Church is getting ready to celebrate its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. So many great folks came out of these churches like Ike Chapman and Leo Bullocks and Oliver Shores and the list goes on. She wants to make sure that the churches are represented and that history is captured as well.

Speakers from the audience;

1. Brenda Arnold Conley said she was one of the first female lineman with the Elyria Telephone Company, she's probably been in everyone's house putting phones in and climbing the poles. Her mother and grandmother has history here. She appreciates the fact that was brought up that there are other historians that can contribute; the Howards and the Bullocks. The black legacy connection, there's a lot of history and resources that have been brought up.

This storytelling about the diversity and the culture of Elyria needs to be brought out. There is a rich culture as a melting pot here in Elyria.

2. Ethan West, 724 Carol Lane said he is Tara Conley's cousin. He's the founder and president of Elyria Black Legacy Connection. It started earlier this year. During February they did a daily feature story on a citizen that contributed to the history of Elyria. They see an absence in stories of black folks, that's why this started. They want to make sure black citizens, not only in Elyria but throughout the US. The work has already been started as far as our group. Research has started on James Taylor, Ike Maxwell, Mitchell's Restaurant and the list goes on and on. There is a big need and the citizens are actually asking. There has been great responses from the City. We are so behind on learning about our black citizens here in Elyria.

Dir Williams said they've been intentional in this engagement. Ms. Conley represents academia, she is an artist and she brings a certain professional capacity to this project and we were very intentional in making sure the person who they thought would be the right partner on this project.

Chair Callahan said this was an excellent discussion, and they will get a little more information in regards with the funding and Mr. Williams asked if this matter can be placed in pending items.

Chair Callahan thanked everyone who was involved in this evening's presentation.

**Mr. Oswald moved and second by Mrs. Mitchell to adjourn this evening's Community Development portion of the Meeting at 6:30 P.M.  
MOTION CARRIED**

***[The evening's meetings continued with the Finance Committee Meeting].***

*Respectfully submitted by, Colleen M. Rosado*

*Council Clerk Secretary/Administrative Assistant*

*CMR/*