

Maryland Lynching Commission Continues its Mission

Future Plans Include Public Hearings in Local Communities



John H. Muller January 15, 2020 0 64 2 minutes read



****FILE**** This is the Upper Marlboro, Maryland, tree that the sheriff used to lynch people. Legend has it that a man put a curse on the sheriff before he was hanged and that the sheriff lost his wife to an illness and the sheriff went bankrupt and sold the land to Fred Tutman's great grandfather. (Photo by Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post/Getty Images)

During its recently-held first public meeting of the new year the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created by legislation in 2019, discussed a series of items and suggestions as it seeks to begin holding formal public hearings in local communities throughout Maryland.

Signed into law last April by Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R), the commission was established to research cases of racially motivated lynchings and hold regional public meetings where a lynching of an African American by a white mob in the state has been documented.

According to the legislation, “at least 40 African Americans were lynched by white mobs in Maryland between 1854 and 1933.”

Across the state, several county-based coalitions have gradually formed and held meetings in the past year to examine and discuss racial terror lynchings. However, these meetings have mainly been an outgrowth of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project, a nonprofit entity separate from the state commission.

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A minimum of 10 locations across the state from Western Maryland to the lower Eastern Shore have been identified to hold public hearings convened by the state commission said interim acting Chair David Fakunle of Morgan State University. But without a current budget to fund the state commission's activities, it has yet to be decided when and where the first series of public hearings will be held.

Before the commission submits their interim report, Fakunle said, "We should have a good three or four hearings." Initially due this fall, committee members expressed their intentions to file for an extension to the interim report, as well as file for an extension for their final report, due by law December 2021.

"We should be open before we decide what we can recommend," said Carl Snowden, a long-time civil rights activist in Annapolis. "I would be very curious to hear what people have to say."

When discussing potential locations of public hearings several committee members suggested churches or venues already known for holding similar events, expressing concerns that the selection of government buildings could negatively impact attendance and participation.

"We'd like to have hearings at places where the community already goes," Fakunle said. "I would err on the side of community spaces, especially when we are having this sort of discussion and the emotions we will go through in this process."

Committee members and staff of Maryland State Archives confirmed the state archives in Annapolis will serve as a central repository to preserve records and materials gathered by the commission and their work.

State archivist, Timothy D. Baker, confirmed that upon completion of the commission's work records will be made concurrently available at Maryland's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Morgan State University and Coppin State University in Baltimore, Bowie State in Prince George's County and the University of Maryland – Eastern Shore in Somerset County.

Still, in order to facilitate meetings across the state, committee members continue to express the need for budget appropriation to cover the costs of postage, duplication and travel, as well as other incidentals. Additional potential budget needs for a videographer, genealogists and oral historians have also been voiced by committee members.

However, any appropriation made during the current legislative session will not be available until the start of the fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Prince George's County Meeting Jan. 18.

The Prince George's County Committee of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project will hold its next public meeting on Saturday, Jan. 18, at the Upper Marlboro Town Hall from 2 to 4 p.m. to continue exploring ideas for community remembrance. At least five documented cases of racial terror lynchings occurred in Prince George's County.

Reportedly, several members of the Montgomery County group will be present to discuss their experience in planning and executing a successful and well-attended soil collection ceremony to commemorate the lynching of George Peck in Poolesville last November.

Meetings in Baltimore and Howard counties have also been scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 18.

For information on the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project and county-based meetings happening across the state, visit mdlynchingmemorial.org.

Public meetings of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be held the second Monday of each month. Feb. 10 will be the date for the next committee meeting with the announcement of the location forthcoming.

For information on the state commission visit the new website, msa.maryland.gov/lynching-truth-reconciliation.