

Offered by Councilor Kenzie Bok



## CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

### ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING A BOSTON SESTERCENTENNIAL COMMISSION TO MARK THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF 1776 THROUGH INCLUSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND COMMEMORATION

*WHEREAS:* The Trump Administration recently announced efforts to launch a “pro-American curriculum”, a harmful and politically-fuelled alternative to providing students with an accurate and critical teaching of American history that includes full acknowledgement of slavery, colonization, and systemic racism; *and*

*WHEREAS:* The President also announced the formation of a “1776 Commission”, as both an attempt to undercut the New York Times’ “1619 Project” and to focus history education on the American Revolution; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Boston, with its role at the heart of the American Revolution, has the opportunity to instead use the 250th anniversary of 1776 in 2026 to tell the full range of our history, including the struggles and accomplishments of immigrant, female, indigenous, and Black Bostonians who are too often left out of the official narrative; *and*

*WHEREAS:* The organization Revolutionary Spaces recently modeled such an approach with its commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the 1770 Boston Massacre, which centered on the diverse individuals who were killed and resulted in the commission of a new play about Crispus Attucks by Boston-based playwright Miranda ADEkoje; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Bostonians like George Middleton -- an African-American who built the oldest standing house on Beacon Hill, served in the American Revolution, and pushed for equal school rights for Black children as early as 1800 -- were central to the early days of the Republic and ought to be better known; *and*

*WHEREAS:* In the lead-up to the 1976 Bicentennial fifty years ago, Boston led the way as one of the first cities to begin landmarking buildings for the purpose of historical preservation, with the Boston Landmarks Commission created by state legislation in 1975 largely in response to widespread demolitions of historical buildings; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Since then, there has been no update to the Landmark Commission’s enabling legislation to allow for preservation of a more diverse set of buildings, despite recognition by the historic preservation community of the need for a more

inclusive process with more robust community input and a greater regard for local community history; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Due to state law, only individual buildings with significance above the local level may be landmarked, which makes it very difficult to protect many buildings important to the history of Boston's historically Black or immigrant neighborhoods, leaving only the usually futile option of demolition delay for communities seeking to preserve the structures that are important to them; *and*

*WHEREAS:* Cities such as San Francisco allow for the designation of City Landmarks relevant to local history, which has allowed the city to preserve structures such as the Third Baptist Church Complex, which was the first Black Baptist congregation formed west of the Rocky Mountains and which played an important role for Black community leaders, but would likely not qualify as nationally-relevant; *and*

*WHEREAS:* The 250th anniversary (Sestercentennial) of 1776 provides Boston with an opportunity to plan both commemorative events and propose updates to local and state law that will more fully preserve and honor a history that includes all Bostonians, not only white, affluent, and well-known historical figures; *and*

*WHEREAS:* To make the right use of this opportunity to revitalize and revolutionize our approach to our local history, Boston must begin the conversations now and consider establishing a Boston Sestercentennial Commission to lay out a road-map for the next five years of preparation; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*

*ORDERED:* That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss the possible creation of a Boston Sestercentennial Commission and the types of events and legislative changes it could promote in order to suitably mark the country's 250th birthday in Boston with inclusive commemoration and historic preservation, and that representatives from the Mayor's Administration including the Boston Landmarks Commission, representatives from historic preservation groups such as the Boston Preservation Alliance, the Museum of African American History, and Revolutionary Spaces, and the public be invited to testify.

Filed on: September 21, 2020