

\* Late item F2 \*

**Madeline (Lynn) Smith**

P O Box 1127 – 15 Tilbury Drive

Bristol, RI 02809

774.381.8050

madeline-smith@hotmail.com

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via email to: [mcordeiro@bristolri.gov](mailto:mcordeiro@bristolri.gov)

Town of Bristol  
Town Council  
c/o Melissa Cordeiro, Clerk  
Town Hall  
10 Court St.  
Bristol RI 02809

TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE  
BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND  
2022 FEB 28 AM 9:04

Dear Ms. Cordeiro,

Would you be so kind to place my letter of support, content below, into the public file in advance of the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Town meeting and agenda item F2 on the petition to install a port marker in the Town. Many thanks.

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In the Zulu tribe, the traditional greeting is "Sawabona." It has many meanings – I see you, I respect you, I value you, you are important to me. To me, it is a reminder to understand without prejudice, to work hard to be a positive part of my community and to value the people and places that surround me.

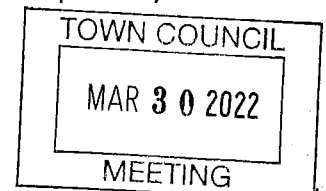
I am writing in support of the petition for the placement of a historical marker on the waterfront in Bristol. *Sawabona* – / see you - is the beginning. What is even more important is the hard work after that reminder.

Historians tell us that from 1705 to 1807 there were 934 documented slave voyages that commenced in Rhode Island. Over 100,000 enslaved people were taken from Africa to the West Indies and North America. Of those voyages, 672 sailed from Newport, 167 from Bristol, 71 from Providence, 21 from Warren, and 3 from other RI locations. Indigenous people in the Bristol area, known as the Pokanoket, were also enslaved.

The Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Markers Project (MPCPMP) has identified 52 arrival sites to date, and has received UNESCO official designation for 42 of those sites to be honored **as Sites of Memory**. From Portsmouth, NH to Key West, FL; from Boston and New York City to Beaufort NC and Oxford MD, markers have been placed to honor those who survived and thrived, and who inspire us today because of their resiliency and ultimate contributions to our community.

Anyone can go to [slavevoyages.com](http://slavevoyages.com) and see the 84 voyages that commenced in Bristol fully documented to date in their database. You can see where those ships arrived and where enslaved Africans disembarked. Charleston is a frequent end point: and this summer that city will unveil its \$100 million International African American Museum whose mission is "to honor the untold stories of the African American journey at one of our country's most sacred sites." The former mayor of Charlestown, Joe Riley, devoted 18 years of his life securing funding for that museum. In 2019 their City Council approved \$60.2 million in construction contracts to begin the process.

The placing of a historical marker is the beginning of a process of creating a safe space for dialogue and discussion. The process should include historians, public figures, elected officials, our nonprofit community, and most importantly our indigenous population and African heritage descendants.



I retired and moved to Bristol in February of 2020. As part of becoming a productive member of the community, I joined Blithewold and Herreshoff and Coggeshall Farm and the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society. When BHPS needed support to fund an intern doing research on African heritage people in town documents, I funded that. When the Parks Department needed help to offer their Summer Concerts on the Common, I sponsored a few in my mother's name and memory. During Covid it was my pleasure to work with the DeWolf Tavern and offer a complimentary Easter Dinner to all the police officers on duty that day. I also signed up to volunteer in the gift shop at Linden Place. When social justice activists projected images of Frederick Douglass on the walls of the mansion, in my mind I heard Mr. Douglass saying "***I see you.***" Our response was ***not*** to turn away, but to host a public, out-loud, community reading of Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" speech, facilitated by Trinity Rep actor, director and activist Joe Wilson, Jr. In 2021 under the supervision and guidance of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallions nonprofit, a ceremony of remembrance and reconciliation drew over 200 people to a Linden Place event on Juneteenth. I was honored to be part of a diversified Education and Re-Evaluation Committee that prepared for that event. When I give a tour of Linden Place, by far and away the most questions I receive are from tourists who want to learn more about the business of slavery: from the DeWolfs, to the town, to the state, to New England.

Recently, Bristol was selected as Rhode Island's first National Scenic Byway by the Federal Highway Administration. Local, state, and federal officials celebrated that designation. In order to be eligible for a National Scenic Byway designation, roads must meet one of six qualifications. One is historic quality.

Lonnie G. Bunch, who was the Founding Director of the Museum of African American Culture and History in Washington DC, and is now the President of the Smithsonian, often remarks that the best advice he ever received was to make sure that historians tell the stories we ***need*** to hear, not just the ones we ***want*** to hear. He also has stated repeatedly that the storytelling needs to include strong and consistent input from our communities of color.

I do not feel responsibility or guilt over what happened centuries ago – but I do feel sadness and empathy. More importantly, today I feel response-able: I am able to choose my response - today. When we know better, we do better. Today, and for our future.

"Yebo, sawubona," is one response to the traditional Zulu greeting: "I see you seeing me." To me, a port marker in Bristol is saying "we see" – and that in *my* town, you are among people who care.

Sincerely,

s/s *Lynn Smith*

Madeline (Lynn) Smith

15 Tilbury Drive, Bristol RI 02809