CITY OF WEST DES MOINES
CITY COUNCIL MEETING COMMUNICATION

ITEM: Approval of Proclamation Underground Railroad Month

DATE: September 7, 2021

FINANCIAL IMPACT: None

BACKGROUND: The historic Jordan House Museum is one of over 600 locations throughout the United States listed in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program which is operated by the National Park Service. The program coordinates preservation and education efforts nationwide and integrates local historical places, museums, and interpretive programs associated with the Underground Railroad into a mosaic of community, regional, and national stories.

The NPS project builds upon and is supported by community initiatives around the country as well as legislation passed in 1990 and the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998. Its mission, through collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as individuals and organizations, is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the Network to Freedom helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.

In 2019, the governor of Maryland was the first to declare September as International Underground Railroad Month. September is an appropriate month because it marks two significant milestones for Maryland: the anniversary of Frederick Douglass's self-liberation from Baltimore's President Street Station on September 3 and the anniversary of Harriet Tubman's self-liberation from Maryland's Eastern Shore on September 17.

The National Park Service encouraged those entities in the Network to Freedom to consider asking state and local government officials to proclaim September as International Underground Railroad Month. With the Jordan House Museum, as well as Huston Cemetery, playing significant roles in West Des Moines' history, the West Des Moines Historical Society has asked Mayor Gaer to proclaim September as International Underground Railroad Month in West Des Moines.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES (if any): None

RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of Proclamation declaring September 2021 as "Underground Railroad Month"

Lead Staff Member: Allison Ullestad, Arts, Culture, and Enrichment Supervisor

STAFF REVIEWS

Department Director	Sally Ortgies, Director of Parks and Recreation
Appropriations/Finance	
Legal	
Agenda Acceptance	

PUBLICATION(S) (if applicable)

Published In	
Dates(s) Published	

SUBCOMMITTEE REVIEW (if applicable)

Committee			
Date Reviewed			
Recommendation	Yes	No	Split

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Proclamation

International Underground Railroad Month

September 2021

Whereas, in recognition of West Des Moines as a powerful destination for authentic Underground Railroad history and in commemoration of all those involved in the Underground Railroad, including West Des Moines' courageous abolitionists, including James C. Jordan and wives Cynthia and Melinda Jordan, as well as James B. Huston and wife Nancy Hill Huston.

Whereas, in appreciation of the inspiring efforts of the people of West Des Moines who have committed themselves to document, share, and learn about the Underground Railroad through the Jordan House Museum and Huston Cemetery; and

Whereas, the West Des Moines Historical Society acknowledges the significance of the Underground Railroad, and all those involved, for its contribution to the eradication of slavery in the United States and as a cornerstone for a more comprehensive civil rights movement that followed.

Whereas, International Underground Railroad Month provides an opportunity for world-wide open dialogue that illuminates the hopes that arise from freedom for all people.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Steven K. Gaer, Mayor of the City of West Des Moines, Iowa, do hereby proclaim September 1-30, 2021, as International Underground Railroad Month in West Des Moines and do commend this observance to all West Des Moines citizens.

Signed this 7th day of September, 2021.

ATTEST:

Steven K. Gaer, Mayor

Ryan T. Jacobson, City Clerk