

Draft Report

Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names

June 6, 2016

Overview

Mission:

From the City of Alexandria Website:

On September 29, 2015, City Council unanimously passed a resolution to establish an Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names. The resolution directed the City Manager to appoint the seven members of the Advisory Group, with two members appointed at-large and one member appointed from each of the Alexandria Human Rights Commission, the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, the Alexandria Planning Commission, and the Alexandria Transportation Commission.

The functions of the Advisory Group are to:

Attend scheduled Advisory Group meetings, which shall be open to the public

Bring community values, knowledge, and ideas into its discussions and considerations

Develop recommendations on actions, if any, that it believes City Council should consider with respect to:

- the status of the *Appomattox* statue on South Washington Street
- the name of Jefferson Davis Highway in the City of Alexandria
- the names of the many streets within the City that are named after Confederate generals and military leaders
- a specific policy on flying of any flags on property owned or under the control of the City*

Hold one or more public hearings to solicit comments from the public on the issues relating to Confederate memorials

* On September 8, 2015, City Council voted unanimously to prohibit the flying of the Confederate flag on City property on Robert E. Lee's Birthday and on Confederate Memorial Day.

Members

After soliciting applicants for the two at-large positions, and recommendations by commission chairs for commission representatives, the City Manager appointed the following members to the Advisory Group:

- Mary Lyman, Chair (representing the Planning Commission)
- Ruth Brannigan (at-large)
- Molly Fannon (at-large)
- Elizabeth McCall (representing the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission)
- James Lewis (representing the Transportation Commission)
- LaDonna Sanders (representing the Human Rights Commission)
- Eugene Thompson (representing the Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage)

The City Manager appointed Craig Fifer, the City’s Director of Communications and Public Information, to provide staff support to the Advisory Group.

Meetings:

As a result of the number of applications for at-large appointments received by the City Manager and difficulty scheduling an initial meeting date during the holiday season, the start date for the Advisory Group’s work was much later than planned. At the first meeting, the Advisory Group voted to ask for an extension of the original deadline to allow time to not only deliberate, but allow fuller public input. In the end, the Advisory Group held five meetings, all but one in the Sister Cities Conference Room (room 1101) at City Hall.

- Wednesday, January 27, 2016, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Monday, February 8, 2016, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Monday, March 28, 2016, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (at Downtown Baptist Church, 212 S. Washington St. (across the street from The Lyceum))
- Monday, April 11, 2016, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Monday, June 13, 2016, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

All members were present for the first meeting, no more than one member was absent from any meeting, and no member was absent from more than one meeting. The agendas, minutes, materials provided, written public comments and a video record of each of these meetings are posted on the City Website at www.alexandriava.gov/Confederate. Some of these are also provided as appendices to this report.

Summary:

All of the Advisory Group's meetings included public hearings, and no meeting was closed to the public. In addition, in the interests of transparency, the Advisory Group avoided any involved, collective email correspondence beyond setting agenda and points for discussion at the meetings (and even these were not contemporaneous group discussions). It was clear early there was not a community consensus regarding these items, but the group did not expect there to be.

The first meeting was divided between general discussion about the goals of the group, and seeking some starting place for discussion, and public input. The two following meetings were almost entirely devoted to public hearings, and the fourth focused on seeking some common ground on how to respond the City's for possible recommendations, but it too included public input. The fifth meeting responded to a draft report. Most Advisory Group discussion about the items to be considered were limited to portions of the first, fourth and fifth meetings

At the first meeting, staff briefed the Advisory Group on mission and aspects of historical context. Craig Fifer reviewed the City Council resolution establishing the Advisory Group as well as the instructions given to the Advisory Group. Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria, gave a chronology of Alexandria's experience during the Civil War, and an overview of the context of the Civil War.

Also at the first meeting, the Advisory Group decided that there should be at least three additional meetings, with one of these primarily a public hearing, but public comment would be received at each meeting. In the end, the Advisory Group expanded the public hearing process to most of two full meetings. They also requested additional information from staff on 1) the costs of changing street signs; 2) the impact on the U.S. Postal Service of changing street names; 3) the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War; 4) Current African American heritage activities and assets; 5) the origin of the name of Forrest Street; and 6) how other cities have handled Civil War issues. Staff provided information at subsequent meetings. These are included in the public record.

Public Input:

The Advisory Group received more than 150 comments through its online feedback form and heard more than 60 speakers at its meetings, with many individuals submitting multiple comments or speaking at multiple meetings. Most individuals providing feedback were local but some were not. Passions ran high in some cases (and this can be seen in the video record), and most commented either on street names or the *Appomattox* statue. Relatively few commented on the question of a flag policy beyond what council already had set regarding the flying of the Confederate battle flag. The decision by the Advisory Group to extend opportunities for public input was meant to offer transparency and also ensure that all perspectives on each item had an opportunity to be heard.

Advisory Group Discussions:

Members offered a range of starting points to the discussions, but positions evolved in some cases. The discussions fell mainly into three areas: whether the group needed to address a general flag policy at all; whether there should be wholesale or individual name changes (if necessary or advisable); and the *Appomattox* statue. There was some separate discussion about Jefferson Davis Highway.

Discussion of Recommendations:

At the fourth meeting, the group began to consider the items individually, and on the basis of whether it ought to make reject making a change, suggest a change, or take no action. There was one exchange of emails prior to the meeting to begin to set up some principles. These ideas were presented in their entirety at the fourth meeting as a starting point, and form the core of the following points.

- 1) The *Appomattox* statue at Washington and Prince Streets is the lone public recognition to Confederate veterans in Alexandria. A much copied statute by a significant sculptor of the time, it was erected by the veterans organization with money raised locally and on land provided by the city. It is owned and maintained by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Unlike similar statues elsewhere in the former Confederacy, the location was chosen for its own significance: It marks the site from which the 17th Virginia Regiment mustered to withdraw from the city prior to Union occupation in 1861, and the names inscribed on it are of local residents who fell during the war. As such, its creation and positioning not only have a significant historical context for the City, but also reflect the national experience of the war. In addition, the artwork itself was designed and positioned specifically for the site. *Appomattox* has been a local landmark since its erection, and is one of the few surviving authentic memorials connected to the war. It also is unusual in that it is protected by statute: The statue cannot be moved without action and approval by the state legislature. These are each important considerations.

Overall, the city of Alexandria has relatively few “real” visual connections to the Civil War, which was an important and devastating event in our history – if not the most important event. Even familiar places connected to the conflict such as Fort Ward have been largely reconstructed long after the war ended. Given that what sets apart Alexandria regionally (and as a historical tourism destination) is its declared dedication to preserving and retrieving its fragile and endangered historic fabric, any decision to review the *Appomattox* statue must be understood in that context as well. The removal of the statue would be a deliberate act to remove a piece of Alexandria’s history and cultural heritage and must be treated seriously.

However, the statue should not be singled out as a lone element, focus, or solitary perspective of Alexandria's Civil War experience or contemporary conscience either. Instead it should be treated as part of a complex story as one of many historical assets we offer as a witness to the American experience. In fact, we have far more Federal memorials and interpretations of slavery here than we do any Confederate relics, and we already share more perspectives regarding the experience of the war than most places can. These assets include the Union Fort Ward (to include the post war era we are struggling to interpret), the National Cemetery (which includes not only white Federal soldiers but the African American troops), the Contraband and Freeman's Cemetery, the Edmondson Sisters memorial, and Freedom House, the site of a former slave dealer and slave pen complex. In these terms, *Appomattox* shows only aspect of the War, and we must acknowledge that the city has not been neglecting broadening the story in recent decades. City museums are inclusive here (we have a Black History Museum, and we will be linked to the new museum in Washington), and virtually all interpretive signage we have added reflects inclusiveness.

For these reasons, we think it important that we follow a principle of preserving authentic historical fabric of the statue where it is, but to enhance it with a better effort to offer the inclusive "why" of the context of the war and take an "additive" instead of "subtractive" approach to interpreting our city's history and experience. We do (and have done so as a city) a poor job making the Civil War explicable beyond pointing at a spark and obvious open wound. The war was and is an important thread in our ongoing local and national history, and we must understand it through treating it in the entirety of our national story. This, in turn, requires we preserve the few authentic assets we have, yet amplify the complete story better than we have.

- 2) In the 1930s, the state of Virginia designated US Route 1 within the state as "Jefferson Davis Highway" to honor the President of the Confederacy. In practice, however, the name does not run the full length of the course of US Route 1 in Alexandria. Within the older section of the city, and prior to the designation of US Route 1, there were and remain Patrick and Henry Streets, which were simply parallel streets in the grid but which connected to the historic Alexandria Pike to the north, and to what was the Richmond highway to the south. Even today, the designation of Jefferson Davis Highway is only reflected on signs starting where Patrick and Henry merge as one road on the north end of Old Town at the turn off for Fayette street and continuing on up to the border with Arlington – which retains the Jefferson Davis Highway designation for Route 1. The name "Jefferson Davis Highway" seems never to have been in local use for the Old Town section, even where the two streets become one for a short distance at the south end. At the same time, it was the de facto address for buildings at the north section

of the road. In some cases, “Route 1” and “Jefferson Davis Highway” are used interchangeably by residents when referring to the north section.

For these reasons, and because of the odd street configuration, changing the name of the “Jefferson Davis” section of Route 1 in the city may be more feasible and less controversial than renaming other City streets. There will however, be significant costs to local businesses and residents in terms of deeds and other legal changes, as well as in switching over other records and advertising using the current name.

- 3) There are a large number of streets in the city that may be connected with Confederate figures. The exact number, and verification, would take a great deal of research. The origin and context of the decision to give the streets those names may also vary: some may date to the commemoration of the centennial of the Civil War, when the City also decided to reconstruct Fort Ward. Some may date much earlier with specific reasons for naming associated with that time. In many cases, the names reflect Alexandrians who served during the war some capacity. There is no existing signage explaining the names, so for the most part these names are simply passive markers.

However, changing the names of such a large number of streets is a daunting task, even should the City make that choice. Not only are there the considerable costs to the City, but every address and every individual or business and account connected to those addresses will be affected – meaning thousands of city residents and business would be forced to suddenly deal with the equivalent of an involuntary “move.” There will be in turn a ripple effect economically, as residents and businesses will be forced to change not only all the daily address references for bills, accounts, etc., but also they will have to pay for the legal aspects, such as deeds and mortgages. Thus there would be significant cost to the City to identify and verify the names, then to physically change the street signs and alter all day to day City records, and additionally, and far more significantly the cost to local residents and businesses.

The City has already stopped naming additional streets for Confederate figures and has adopted a policy to redress naming in new opportunities (Potomac Yards and over on the West end are examples). City Council can certainly adopt a resolution affirming that fact. However, as the interests and input of affected residents loom large in renaming such a wide swath of streets (no one has specifically asked their opinion, street by street), it is impractical to take a wholesale approach to names. Instead, the Advisory Group points out that Sec. 5-2-66 of the City Code gives City Council the authority to rename a street.. We suggest that if individual objects to the name of a specific street, he or she may bring that concern to City Council at any time. The City may wish to make this process better known to the community, through information on its website or by other means.

- 4) The question of a “flag policy” for public property seems somewhat unnecessary beyond ensuring that an institutional procedure provides for the flying of certain flags in association with appropriate events and occasions. The Alexandria City Council has already voted to cease flying the Confederate flag specifically, and that question need not be reopened by the Committee. The City has either tacitly or explicitly approved the display of flags other than the national, state, and city flags in connection with parades and festivals, although the procedures followed in those cases is not clear. It is also not clear at what times the flags of other nations have been displayed beyond the Irish flag associated with the annual Saint Patrick’s Day Parade. For example the Advisory Group would not encourage the City to adopt a stringent restriction regarding flying flags honoring a sister city day, or a visit by a foreign dignitary. At the same time, we would also not encourage opening the floodgates to a plethora of weekly or daily displays.

The sense of the Advisory Group is that the City should ensure that a predictable application process exists for City staff, festival or event organizers, or even residents wishing to ask the City to commemorate a special day to ask that a flag be flown. This process should be handled by staff, with an oversight and appeals process. At the same time, the Committee suggests that the City differentiate between city or community events (such as annual holidays, parades, festivals, or sister cities opportunities) and one-time events, and set time limits for displays, with perhaps a week limit for annual events, and two days for other markings. For those events not sponsored by the City, costs associated with the procurement, posting and removal of such flags should be borne by the private organizers. The committee also suggests that the city identify specific areas, streets or locations that may be used for such displays.

The committee recommends that the City review and fine tune the existing flag policy and procedures, perhaps with an eye on how to better capitalize on the use flag displays in conjunction with city celebrations and national events.