

# Fairfax County Confederate Names Task Force

Meeting Minutes for  
November 8, 2021, at 7:00 pm

## Attendance:

- Myers, Robins, Sheppard, Glakas, Kovach Shuman, Leckert, Lindner, Thompson, Repetti, Wenzel, and Wilkerson.
- Twelve people participated remotely: (Ginwright, Onks, Crowell, Walton, Floyd, Woods, Bryant, Champness, Park Tsui, Correia, Henderson, and Powell).

Meeting minutes: As a result of there not being a quorum, approval of the minutes will occur at the next meeting.

Mr. Floyd will abstain.

- Lindner: A comment was brought up at the last meeting regarding renaming the roadway to Kerny or Stephens. Takin' aback by the response. There was another person, Pat Tilman, who went to Iraq and was killed by friendly fire. There is something different when representing the U.S. There's an honor that we need to give them. It's important to understand that war is messy.

Motion: To move the meeting to November 22.

- Mr. Myers has a conflict.
- My Floyd might also have a conflict.
- Chair Spain asked Mr. Myers to share a date that works for him.
- Dr. Shed suggested the first week in December.
- Marvin Powell: Inaudible.
- Chair Spain will follow up with Chairman McKay.
- Chair Spain will look into appointing a Vice-Chair, also would like Taskforce members to submit alternate dates.
- DoT Director stated he would verify dates the meeting room is available and provide those dates to the TF for consideration.

Presentation: Preliminary Public Input Summary - County staff briefed the Taskforce on preliminary data responses from the public outreach campaign. Taskforce members had the following questions/comments.

- Thompson: Have you isolated business responses: Response: No, County staff has not done any analysis on that information
- Lindner: Do we know how many businesses are on those highways? Response: No, we don't have that information.
- Wenzel: It was my understanding that businesses along the corridor would be contacted. Response: Staff does not recall having that conversation. There will be an effort to work with the Economic Development Office to reach out to the business community. County staff is still doing outreach to businesses.
- Robins: It's important to provide some feedback to the Task Force, even though the survey is not scientific.
- Lindner: Conducted an informal survey at the libraries: Fairfax had the best when you walked in. Burke library did not have any surveys out front. At the Chantilly library, they had foreign

language surveys. At the Reston library, they didn't put anything out until the postcard arrived on November 3. At Vienna... Regarding the postcard, it was not delivered until November 2. Response: Staff provided a timeline of postcard delivery. Further, the delay could have been caused by the paper shortage.

- Lindner: The delay was unfortunate because many people didn't have the information. Response: The postcard wasn't the only way people were informed. We sent out over 400,000 postcards; there were several news outlets that picked it up on television and paper publication. Response: Further, and the Supervisors advertised the Taskforce through their constituent networks.
- Henderson: The survey is not scientific. Our decisions are not based on this survey.
- Myers: We were operating under a constrained timeline. Within 30 days we had to develop and execute an outreach strategy – some would call that insanity. Looking at the data we received; I realize it is coming from a small portion of the 450,000 population, but that's the input we have. The recommendation is not driven by responses, but the input received should certainly be a consideration in determining TF recommendations – the input is what we asked for, and it's what we got.
- Kovach Shuman: Given the time responses we had, we still needed to reach out to the public and get this information.
- Wenzel: If this issue had been on the ballot, this issue would already be decided. It's beyond me why they didn't put it on the ballot.
- Ginwright: (Inaudible) Our task is not to recommend putting anything on the ballot. Maybe that could be done by the Board to put it on the ballot if they decide to do so.
- Henderson: Agree with Mr. Wenzel. It would have been nice if it was on the ballot, but it wasn't. It's interesting that every jurisdiction is ahead of Fairfax County regarding this decision. Our task is to recommend to change the names. This Taskforce is belaboring this point of trying to keep these confederate names.
- Dooley: The purpose of the Taskforce is to decide if the names should change; the second is to recommend.
- Leckert: Breakdown of responses/arguments we've received thus far. First, history. Second is cost; 1 to 4 million. That's a big number, but in the scheme of things, it's not a big percentage of the County's overall budget. Third, it was what about changing the names of other roads or the County. Our task is to decide on these two roads. Everything else is beyond our purview. The fourth is it's like Russia; this doesn't apply. The question is, are Lee and Jackson the people we want to commemorate.
- Pastor Sheppard: Erasing history; in this case, we are not erasing history.
- Glakas: On social media, changing history does not erase history. It shows that Fairfax County is learning from history. This does not end the public input; the Board will have public hearing. When we do make our recommendations, we should forward the information we got to the Board.
- Repetti: Struck by the number of people concerned about erasing history. We should recommend to the Board that they hire a professional to inform about the history of these two roadways.
- Powell: It makes a difference (inaudible). We need to be considerate of every single citizen. We have to understand ... inaudible... We can end that... We should care about every citizen today. If we change these names, we do so in a manner that will not cause anybody any kind of emotion or personal angst (inaudible).

- Floyd: I feel and truly listen and understand the passion of Mr. Powell. I've lived in Fairfax for a number of years, and I've never experienced any negativity that if we keep Lee highway, it will bring malice to anybody. I don't believe that. We should take one step back and let everyone know that we're a welcoming, warm community. The second thing is one of the pieces of information is that a friend of mine was fairly outraged when he saw an article stating that Chairman McKay had already decided on the name change. If it's a done deal, I'm outraged. Why are we here? What's the context of the reporter's article. Response: We haven't taken the time to go over every article Taskforce members submit, and we're not going to take time to discuss what a reporter wrote in an article.
- Walton: Ecstatic about the responses. It's important to get all the feedback. When these roads were named, people of color nor women were allowed to participate in the naming process. The way the names came about was from a homogeneous group, and that's not where we are now.
- Woods: Ecstatic about the comments received thus far. I'm appreciative that people are elevating their voices, and it's helpful. Regarding the article, you have to be mindful that reporters write what they want to write. After reading the article, I didn't get an indication that the Board has made a decision. So, we still have a job to do. Regarding history, this is beyond the scope of what we've been charged to do. It's taking away from the duty we have before us, and we should think about the focus we've been charged with.

Shedd: I want to know where people are in the group regarding whether the names should be changed.

- Woods: In favor of changing the names.
- Champness: I've been giving this a great deal of thought. We have our charge here, so what we do has nothing to do with what Chairman McKay may have said or not said. Regarding Lee and Jackson, this is not a referendum on them. We have a number of citizens who believe that these names are very bothersome. We can change things. I'm not wedded to the names. It's about our citizens who are very passionate about changing the names. Out of respect for our citizens who are passionate, this is about taking a relatively small step. I have no problem with changing the names. I hope that the names we choose, if we decide to, don't offend anybody.
- Bryant: Regarding Chairman McKay, he's speaking for himself and not for us. Our charge is from the Board, not the Chairman. Regarding the question about bringing up history, we do so in part because of the people who bring up this topic. That history is not our history. There are people who try to justify Lee as a hero, but it's all irrelevant because if you were enslaved, you had no opinion about Lee. He failed. That's the starting point. Let's not erase the enslavement part. Let's not do that. We can be more inclusive. When I read through the comments on social media, I saw name-calling. I didn't like to read it. I'm in favor of changing the names, and I have some thoughts about what they should be. The main thing is that we want to make a statement about what our County represents.
- Onks: I'm not opposed to changing the names. I don't understand why this came about. I have a unique position because I've been a Supervisor staff member for 20 years. It has not been a huge issue. I'm not opposed to changing the street names. If it's hurting people, then we should change it.
- Ginwright: I would vote for changing the name. It goes back several years ago when the students came to the NAACP to change the names of their school after receiving the history about the names. We're not trying to change history. We're trying to include the whole history of the road names. The enslaved people were erased from history.

- Crowell: Represents the Fairfax County Parks Authority. I'm an archeologist and historian. I'm leaning towards changing the names of the roadways.
- Henderson: I don't believe that having strong feelings regarding this subject is emotional. These names were a way of embedding the symbols of white supremacy in this society. Therefore, I'm voting to change the names.
- Correia: On the fence. I can't help to admit that reading all the comments is swaying. Especially the comments that say you're wasting taxpayer money and leave the names alone. Besides that, I appreciate the diversity of the Taskforce and the spectrum of ideas that have been brought forward. I'm leaning towards changing the names.
- Park Tsui: This is an issue that's painful to a lot of people in the community. In my neighborhood, people voted to take down images of confederate names because the images do not feel welcoming or inclusive. If it was on the ballot, then I think changing the names would pass.
- Walton: I land on changing the name. Not a fan of changing the name to another name, but I'm for changing the name.
- Floyd: I grew up in the south. I have an African American brother, and I have another brother who is homosexual and married to a Hispanic. I don't believe that Fairfax County is a racist place. I think when you see that the reason for keeping the names is erasing history, you can't ignore that. If put to a vote right now, I'm going to say don't change the names.
- Powell: In favor of changing the names.
- Glakas: I'm in favor of changing the names.
- Wilkerson: This is a recommendation. The Board will make the ultimate decision. I'm in favor of changing the names.
- Leckert: In favor of changing the names. Regarding the article, I didn't see anywhere where Chair McKay made a decision.
- Spain: Fairfax County is focused on diversity, inclusion, and equity. In favor of changing the names.
- Lindner: Regarding the article, Chairman McKay's comments, it was very clear what he wants to do. His comments were a step in the wrong direction. In Prince William, they're going to spend 4 million on an African American Trail. I'd much rather spend money on that. The name change is so consequential, and the return is so little. I want to be inclusive, but I don't think this is the path to do it. I'm not for changing the name.
- Wenzel: That statement from McKay, his intention was clear. Nine of ten Supervisors would change the name. My reaction when this Taskforce was formed is that they formed that Taskforce for political cover for the Supervisors. That said, I would like to make a couple of points, changing the street names would not erase history. The reason Route 50 is named Lee Jackson Memorial Highway, in 1922, that year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war. I come down as a history-type person. I want to see names that give you a sense of place. People get a sense of place when they see Lee Jackson highway.
- Robins: I respect history; we are at a pivotal point in the County's history where we are at a crucial point when we're promoting inclusiveness. I'm leaning towards changing the names.
- Repetti: Sue and I represent the Fairfax County History Commission, and the Commission supports changing the names.
- Sheppard: As an African American, this is about doing what's right. The name change should have been done yesterday/last year. I'm for changing the names.
- Myers: I am in favor of not changing the names. There is no public outcry or support for changing the names, and it is a divisive issue that will drive people into separate camps.

Whatever recommendation we make, it ought to have a valid, fact-based rationale for that recommendation. Regarding history, the County should look to ways to close the gaps in our recorded history, such as Prince William County and the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation are doing with their African American History Trails, not use actions that are divisive and do not enhance the desired characteristics identified by this TF . One of the tasks we were tasked with was to look at the implications of changing the names. We have not done that. In making a recommendation, it's incumbent on us to know what the implications will be.

- Kovach Shuman: The history commission debated this, and it was voted that the names have to be changed.
- Thompson: I'm on the fence. I came in with an open mind. I'm an At-Large person in the County, and I've received an earful. If the name is changed, we should steer away from having a common person's name on the roadway.

Shedd: The plan is that we will be taking a public vote at the next meeting. It's important that we achieve a quorum at the next meeting.

Spain: There is no divisiveness in my heart towards anyone to disagree. I apologize for the inconvenience of the next meeting. I hope we can all agree upon a date where we can all be present to have our voices heard.

Biesiadny: County staff will send out a handful of dates for the next meeting.

Spain: By the close of business on Wednesday, we should have all responses on the availability for the next meeting.