

AGENDA # 2

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PRESENTED: 7/23/18

TITLE: 1 Speedway Rd - Exterior Alteration to a Designated Madison Landmark Site (Forest Hill Cemetery); 13th Ald. Dist.

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Amy Scanlon, Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: 7/27/18

ID NUMBER: 52415

Members present were: Stuart Levitan, Marsha Rummel, Lon Hill, and Katie Kaliszewski. Excused were: Anna Andrzejewski, Richard Arnesen, and David McLean.

SUMMARY:

Ulrike Dieterle, registering neither in support nor in opposition, and wishing to speak.

Thomas Garver, registering neither in support nor in opposition, and wishing to speak.

Kentin Peters, registering in opposition and wishing to speak.

David Blaska, registering neither in support nor in opposition, and wishing to speak.

Levitan noted that the staff report was completed appropriately, with the application of facts to law and had nothing to do with personal opinions on underlying political or social issues.

Dieterle stated that any disregard of history is unacceptable, and if a matter is deemed shameful in history, it's our duty to deal with that shame and use it in an educational forum. She noted that we need to make things more transparent, not just remove something or change it drastically from what history has produced. She went on to say that keeping history accurate is important; pieces that are there now should stay and be used as an educational tool. She pointed out that other countries have dealt with their shameful incidents and opened them up, and described examples of Normandy and the Holocaust Museum as things we don't approve of that are now used for educational purposes.

Garver apologized for the tenor of the first letter he submitted, but not its content. He stated that this is a perfect example of ridiculous liberal overkill, and is an issue of respect for the dead. He pointed out that it is not a towering figure of Lee on a horse, it is a grave marker in a historic cemetery, placed to permanently recognize the names of men who died while in Union custody. He noted that there are no permanent markers other than this monolith because the headstones are deteriorating and illegible. If the marker is taken away, it would obliterate the identities of some men. He described this as a warm tale of Alice Whiting Waterman caring for the men when no one else did. He voiced his support for the 1906 monolith to be left in place and accompanied by an interpretive sign identifying the significance and stories to be told, noting that they need a sign similar to the nearby Union plot. He asked Commissioners if they were ready to obliterate this history unique to Madison simply for the reason that it doesn't look right. He stated that those concerns can be addressed by the interpretive sign, and that this is misplaced liberal zeal. Levitan asked Garver if he thought that a descendant of a slave would find it offensive to have such a large marble monolithic structure in a city cemetery. Garver responded that two wrongs don't make a right, and the graves remain unidentified. He noted that to take it away is to obliterate more history rather than interpreting and explaining it, and emphasized that it is not justifying it.

Peters stated that he opposes changing anything on the site, including adding an interpretive sign. He said that his understanding of the reason for removal of the marker is that it supported the Confederate side of having slaves. He noted that while this is true, the war was also fought because the Confederate states declared they were a separate country. He asked what the purpose is for removing it, and questioned what the removal would accomplish; is it an objection to the war that these brave soldiers fought? He stated that they fought for a cause—for the country they had established, and if that is the real issue, this is inconsistent and hypocritical. He noted that there are other wars fought by this country that most everyone condemned, but people aren't discussing the Vietnam War and their objection to it. He asked if it would be appropriate to go to Washington, D.C. and remove the Vietnam memorial because those soldiers fought for a cause that some thought was a vicious, unnecessary, and racist war. He again asked the Commission what the purpose is and what they hope to achieve. He described it as hypocritical grandstanding and noted that because we don't support slavery, they want to move the marker and not let anyone see where those brave soldiers fell. He pointed out that none of us support slavery, but the Confederate soldiers were fighting for their cause.

Blaska asked if we are going to tear a photo of the stone marker out of every history book, expunge it from the Historical Society website, and remove it from collective memory. He noted that Levitan described the marker as too large, and argued that he has never heard of size being used as historical criterion. He pointed out that there are 140 names inscribed, which requires a large stone. He stated that the stone is not celebratory, it names 140 dead people and was paid for by many of their survivors; it is a grave marker that we are desecrating. He described how money for the stone was raised in the South and sent to Capt. Frank Oakley and Alice Whiting Waterman, and stated that the stone is just as much a celebration of Alice. He said that Madison should mark the graves of slaves, and they are already doing this at Monticello. He noted that the Grand Army of the Republic held a ceremony to dedicate the stone in 1906. He stated that people fought and bled to save this country and end slavery, and today we have even higher consciousness than they did. He ended by saying that we should know better, and this is the height of arrogance.

Levitan noted that we have a clear statement from Common Council that it believes the large marker should be removed, and also have a persuasive analysis by the City Preservation Planner applying the facts to the law, which indicates that it does not meet the standards for removal. He then brought the focus to the small plaque, which the Mayor had removed about one year ago. Staff referenced the staff report and noted that the small plaque does not have historic significance.

A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by Kaliszewski, to approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness to remove the small plaque. The motion passed by voice vote.

Levitan stated that he has changed his mind as to the underlying merits of the removal of the large marker. Listening to the Common Council debate changed his perspective, and he now understands why the presence of such a large piece of marble commemorating the death of Confederate soldiers is inherently offensive. He noted that the Commission will need to find a way to honor the Common Council's directive, while not causing undue damage to the ordinance as analyzed by staff. He suggested that this request for a Certificate of Appropriateness be used as the basis for the installation of an interpretive sign to explain not only the history of Confederate Rest, but also the history of Native American burial mounds. He noted that during the Common Council debate, there was discussion about the mounds, which are thousands of years old and unrecognized. He thought this would be a way to respect the dead and honor the Native American mound builders, as well as to abide by the directives of Common Council. He said they could avoid causing damage to the ordinance by including a condition of approval that the Board of Parks Commissioners agrees to accept and place at appropriate locations interpretive signs recounting the history of Confederate Rest and the events of 2017-2018 and of the Native American mounds, which the Landmarks Commission shall create in consultation with appropriate authorities and interested parties. He said that this would also fulfill the mission of ordinance 33.19, which directs the Commission to engage and educate the public regarding our historic resources.

Rummel stated that she is certainly sympathetic to an interpretive sign, but further discussion is needed. She said that all gravestones do not need to be reviewed, and isn't sure that this is something that falls within the

Commission's authority of reviewing historic materials. She noted that there is also a sign ordinance, so at some point Common Council is going to have to review the sign. She expressed her appreciation for members of the public who came to the meeting to speak. She stated that she does not think it is disregarding history if the marker is removed. She pointed out that if it frustrates the public interest to keep the marker, that is something the Commission has authority over. She noted that there is public interest today to take action and offer reparations because of the history of dispossession and enslavement; there is a debt that is hundreds of years old. She pointed out that this is a small piece of it, but this marker was installed during the Jim Crow era, a reactionary time after emancipation when supporters of slavery tried to rewrite history by installing monuments like this across the country. She emphasized that she respects the dead, and while removing this marker would take a lot of work because of its weight, it would not disturb any of the individuals buried there, nor harm the site itself. She again noted that this not about disregarding history or disrespecting the dead, it is about considering what is in the public interest for our ordinance.

Hill mentioned that he agreed with some of Rummel's comments, but he believes that the removal of something historical that is not praising the actions of the Confederate soldiers should not happen. He stated that he agrees with removing the small marker that has no historical value, but doesn't see anything in this large marker that conflicts with the ordinance over which the Commission has authority. He stated that the public interest changes all the time, and could change again in the near future as the country becomes something new. He then asked if the Commission has the authority to use the argument of public interest with something this historical, noting that the public interest is excited by other events. He ended by saying that he would vote to leave the marker there.

Kaliszewski voiced agreement with Hill, pointing out that they have had at least three public hearings, and the majority of the public wants the marker to remain. She stated that as a member of the Landmarks Commission and representative of the City of Madison, it makes her uncomfortable to be messing with people's grave markers and does not think they should be doing it. She noted that a lot of the gravestones are illegible, and no matter what they died for, this marker is there to tell us where they are buried. She stated that she disagrees with Rummel and doesn't think this is a war against the states trying to make it about the sad story of the Confederacy, it simply says who is buried there. She noted her agreement with the removal of the small plaque because it provided a false narrative of history and did not follow current standards, so it was in the interest of the public to be removed. She stated that the current marker follows their standards and is a grave marker. She reiterated that it makes her uncomfortable that we would remove these individuals' grave marker simply because we don't like who they were or what they were fighting for.

Levitan noted that we have a master list of the individuals interred there, and asked if that makes Kaliszewski feel differently. Kaliszewski responded that it does not; while she understands that those names will be recorded forever, they should be listed in the cemetery. She stated that someone placed that marker with their names there in order to remember them. No matter what they fought for, cemeteries are sacred and we should not mess around with that.

Hill stated that even if the sentiment changes over time, the historic elements of the site should not be changed.

A motion was made by Rummel to approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness to remove the marker. The motion failed for lack of a second.

A motion was made by Rummel to approve the request for the Certificate of Appropriateness to remove the marker and include interpretive signage as described by the Chair. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Kaliszewski agreed that an interpretive sign should be added to the site.

Hill asked what would happen if the approval for the Certificate of Appropriateness does not pass at this meeting. Levitan stated that either the applicant, which is the Parks Department, or the alder of the district in

which the project is located, Alder Bidar-Sielaff, can take an appeal to the Common Council for this decision to be reversed.

Levitan asked whether the commissioners were comfortable making this decision with three commissioners missing, or if they would prefer to wait and make the decision with more members present. Hill commended Rummel for always asking for the thoughts of fellow commissioners, and noted that he would like to hear the arguments of the rest of the Commission. Kaliszewski agreed.

A motion was made by Rummel, seconded by Hill, to refer discussion of the marker to the August 27, 2018 meeting. The motion passed by voice vote.

Levitan asked Lisa Laschinger, City of Madison Parks Department, about the timetable for the project and whether a referral would impact their schedule. Laschinger stated that it would not significantly impact their operations.

Hill asked about the approval process if they were to include the condition to install an interpretive sign. Levitan stated that the Parks Department itself doesn't review it, and the Board of Parks Commissioners would make the decision on whether to accept it.

Rummel asked what the process is for maintaining gravestones. Laschinger stated that the Parks Department does not accept ownership of individual markers, and the family is responsible for maintaining the stone.

ACTION:

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