



Legislation Text

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Fiscal Note

The proposed resolution calls on the Parks Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission to meet jointly to develop recommendations regarding Confederate monuments in the Forest Hills Cemetery. The proposed resolution does not have a fiscal impact; however, recommendations to remove the monuments or construct new monuments may require a budget amendment.

Title

Establishing a Plan for the Confederate Monuments in Forest Hill Cemetery.

Body

WHEREAS, the City of Madison opened Forest Hill Cemetery in 1857, and continues to own and operate the Cemetery today; and,

WHEREAS, in 1862, 140 prisoners of the Confederate States of America being housed at the Union Army stockade at Camp Randall died and were ultimately buried in Forest Hills Cemetery in what is now known as the "Confederate Rest Area"; and,

WHEREAS, the Confederate Rest Area remains City owned and the gravesites and monuments contained in and around the area are owned by, and maintained by, the City; and,

WHEREAS, following the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the abolition of slavery, the freed slaves, others persons of color and their descendants faced a whole new system of legal, economic and social oppression in the form of Black Codes, or Jim Crow Laws. These laws, enacted throughout the south, and to some degree in the north, were designed to keep intact the subjugation of blacks. Even fifty-three years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the impacts of these laws are still being felt in America; and,

WHEREAS, sometime in the early 1930s, the United Daughters of the Confederacy were allowed to donate and erect a stone monument in the Confederate Rest Area in honor of those buried there (the "UDC Monument"); and,

WHEREAS, the Southern Poverty Law Center lists the United Daughters of the Confederacy as a neo-Confederate group, and the group itself, through the erection of monuments throughout the United States, subscribes to the "Lost Cause" movement, which attempts to alter history to paint Confederate soldiers as heroic figures, rather than rebellious traitors on the wrong side of history and humanity. Moreover, the United Daughters of the Confederacy has aligned itself with white supremacists and racists in its effort to obfuscate the truth that the south fought the Civil War to preserve slavery and segregation; and,

WHEREAS, in 1982, the City allowed a small monument to be donated and erected just outside of the Confederate Rest Area that, while attempting to provide some history about the individuals buried there, perpetuates the Lost Cause myth that these Confederate soldiers were "valiant" and "unsung heroes", and makes no mention of the role slavery played in their rebellion and the tyranny and unjustness that they fought to preserve (the "CSA Plaque Monument"); and,

WHEREAS, following the slaying of nine African-Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charlestown, SC in 2015 by a white supremacist who idolized the Confederate battle flag, efforts were undertaken throughout the Country to reexamine the continued display of Confederate symbols. South Carolina, long a defender of the display of the battle flag, removed a confederate flag pole from its statehouse.

Madison itself reexamined its policies at Forest Hills Cemetery, removing the City-owned flag pole in the Confederate Rest Area and altering its graveside flag policy so that the display of the Confederate flag in the Cemetery was no longer allowed. In addition, states and municipalities began to question the display of other Lost Cause related statues and monuments, and the appropriateness of these representations of hate, tyranny and oppression; and,

WHEREAS, on August 12, 2017, white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, neo-Nazis and other far-right hate groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, for the Unite the Right Rally to protest the proposed removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee that was erected in a City park nearly 60 years after the end of the Civil War as part of the Lost Cause movement. During the event, in an act of domestic terrorism, counter protesters were viciously attacked by a neo-Nazi, leaving one dead and nineteen injured; and,

WHEREAS, following Charlestown and Charlottesville, attention has been directed to the Lost Cause monuments throughout the Country, including in Forest Hills Cemetery where the CSA Plaque Monument has been removed and is in storage,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, that the City of Madison does not support the efforts and messages of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, neo-Confederates and other Lost Cause propagandists to celebrate the Confederate States of America and its dead, such support being another part of the Black Codes and other efforts to perpetuate the economic, social and legal subjugation of African-Americans and other peoples of color in the United States; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that as the owners of Forest Hills Cemetery, the Confederate Rest Area, and the UDC and CSA Plaque Monuments, the City has an obligation to the visitors at Forest Hills Cemetery and the citizens of this City, to reexamine the continued display of these monuments and the message that these monuments convey and support; and,

BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Board of Parks Commissioners, through their authority under Madison General Ordinances Section 8.11, the Landmarks Commission, through its authority over Forest Hills Cemetery under Madison General Ordinances Chapter 41, and the Equal Opportunities Commission shall jointly meet to consider the following three options with regard to the two Lost Cause monuments in Forest Hill Cemetery: whether to take down and permanently remove the two Lost Cause monuments, whether to leave the monuments in place but alter the messages contained therein, and whether to leave one or both of the Lost Cause monuments in the Cemetery but erect a new monument providing detail of the false narrative of the Lost Cause and the role these monuments play in that effort.