

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 10, 2023
TO: MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MAYOR JUSTIN M. WILSON
SUBJECT: STREET RENAMING PROCESS

Early in the morning of August 21, 1863, William Quantrill led a Confederate guerilla group to attack Lawrence, Kansas. After looting most of the businesses in the town, the guerilla group then executed nearly 200 men and boys in the town. Today, Quantrell Avenue on our West End is named in his honor.

On March 6, 1857, Chief Justice Roger Taney wrote that African-Americans “are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race...” These words were included in the majority opinion in the Dred Scott v. Sandford case before the United States Supreme Court. Today, Taney Avenue is named in his honor, also on our West End.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Confederate veterans came together to form the Ku Klux Klan, to perpetuate racial terror and “The Lost Cause.” Chosen as the first “Grand Wizard” of this racial terror group was former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Today, Forrest Street is named in his honor in Del Ray.

Unfortunately, these three examples are replicated throughout our City. Our predecessors used street naming policies as a form of permanent protest against the burgeoning civil rights movement and growing political power for African-Americans. As a symbol, these honors persist today, honoring virulent racists, many of whom took up arms against our nation. These honors are not defensible and should be removed.

In August of 2016, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names presented its final report to the City Council¹. This report recommended that the City proceed with a renaming of Jefferson Davis Highway² and allow the typical City renaming process to handle renaming of other streets in our City.

Last year, the City Council approved an updated Street Renaming procedure³ to allow for the submission of petitions for these renaming efforts.

During the FY23 budget process, our OMB staff provided a detailing of the budgetary impacts that would accompany street renaming efforts and detailed a more methodical approach⁴.

While it is important to remove these inappropriate honors, it is also important to consider practical concerns as thousands of Alexandria residents live on these streets, numerous businesses operate on these streets and residents and visitors use these existing street names to navigate our community. As such, I believe a reasonable, yet deliberate pace of renaming these streets over time should be embarked upon.

I would propose the following:

- 1) The Historic Alexandria Resources Commission (HARC) will be requested to develop a list, with the support of the Office of Historic Alexandria, of individuals and locations, worthy of honor by the City. The Commission is requested to pay special attention to inclusion of women and minorities (as well as events and locations significant to women and minorities throughout our history), who have frequently been overlooked through history. Additionally, the Commission is

¹ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/boards-and-commissions/ad-hoc-advisory-group-on-confederate-memorials-and-street-names>

² <https://alexandria.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3529427&GUID=95FCD56B-00AF-431A-AB90-04AD1F019287>

³ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/FY%2023%20094%20Attachment%201%20Confederate%20Street%20Renaming%20Policy%20August%202021.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/budget-memos/fy-23-budget-qa-094how-many-streets-are-named-after-confederate-generals-soldiers-or>

requested to consider street names that had been retired previously⁵.

- 2) The City Naming Committee will be requested to create a schedule of 3 street renamings per year, beginning in 2023. The Committee will consult with the Office of Historic Alexandria, draw on previous City research and incorporate public engagement to develop the schedule. The Committee will assign new names for streets they have selected, drawing from the names recommended by HARC.

As the Committee commences this new process, they should develop a mission statement, as well as high-level guidelines to provide a framework for the community.

Upon recommendation by the Committee, new street names will be considered by City Council as ordinances on an annual basis, pursuant to Section 5-2-62 of the City Code⁶.

- 3) Funding to support this renaming effort will be included by the City Manager in his proposed annual budget.

Cc: James Parajon, City Manager; Members, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission; Members, Alexandria Planning Commission

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[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIITHCOGEOR_TIT5TR
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ENSE_CH2STSI_ARTCSTNA_S5-2-62CHNA)

⁶ IBID