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## Confederate monument removals

2 messages

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**Cory Vaillancourt** <cory@smokymountainnews.com>

Wed, Jun 10, 2020 at 1:43 PM

To: brianmcmahan@jacksonnc.org, boycedeit@jacksonnc.org, ronmau@jacksonnc.org, gaylewoody@jacksonnc.org, mickeyluker@jacksonnc.org

As you've no doubt heard, last night the Asheville City Council voted unanimously to remove two confederate monuments (the "Robert E. Lee Dixie Highway, Colonel John Connally Marker" adjacent to the Vance Monument, and a Battle of Chickamauga monument located next to the county courthouse) and to form a study group to determine the future of the Vance monument.

The Buncombe County commission will consider a similar resolution on June 16.

There's currently a petition on [Change.org](https://www.change.org/p/remove-confederate-monuments-in-jackson-county) asking for the removal of the confederate monuments in Jackson County.

You may also remember this expansive story I did back in August, 2017, in the wake of the Charlottesville protests. It described the situation as it existed at that time, but of course now things are different.

<https://www.smokymountainnews.com/archives/item/20606-a-monumental-issue>

Of course, North Carolina General Statute 100-2.1 says that "objects of remembrance on public property" cannot be removed or relocated without permission from the NC Historical Commission.

We have begun to see other municipalities in other states removing their statues, and in some cases, they have been removed by protestors.

With all that being said, I have the following questions for you, for a story I'm working on for Wednesday, June 17.

I understand that this is still a developing situation, but much like my stories on recreational marijuana and Second Amendment sanctuaries, I believe voters are going to start asking you these uncomfortable questions very soon, so here's your chance to get out ahead of the mob and state your opinion in a measured way.

I would appreciate it if you could email me your responses before this Sunday, June 14.

1. In light of the current state of protest across this country, do you think it's time to remove these monuments in Jackson County? Why or why not?

2. Some across the country have suggested that Confederate monuments remain, but also feature some other sort of monument or explanation putting slavery and discrimination into context. For example, the marker at the county courthouse could see an additional monument placed next to it, or some signage presenting the other side of the story. Would you favor this?

3. What are your feelings on the state commission appointed by the Governor (the NC Historical Commission) being empowered to tell counties and municipalities what to do with their monuments?

4. If you're advocating for removal of Confederate monuments and imagery, would you appeal to the NC Historical Commission for permission, or simply remove the monuments and take whatever comes from that?

Please don't hesitate to call or text me (912-508-5640) if you'd like to discuss this on or off the record, however I must insist that your official response come in email form, so I can be sure that I'm accurately quoting you.

Thanks again for all you do.

C

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**Gayle Woody - Commissioner** <gaylewoody@jacksonnc.org>  
To: Cory Vaillancourt <cory@smokymountainnews.com>

Sun, Jun 14, 2020 at 4:43 PM

Dear Mr.Vallancort,

First, thank you for reaching out to us. I always appreciate press coming to us and not just reporting what they "heard" from others about what we think or feel.

By the way, looking at your email now, you say the deadline for written response is before Sunday, June 14, today. I wanted to wait until after the protest in Sylva yesterday, then I forgot to write this response last night. I apologize and hope this is not too late.

As you can imagine, I have received many messages from citizens on both sides, and those sides vary from one extreme to another with feelings and stated solutions all in between. It is a difficult issue, and even saying that draws reaction because folks from each position think their side is clear and obvious.

"Just take it down"  
"Just leave it there"

There is no "just". How does an elected official seek "justice for all" when faced with this situation?

So, here is my response to your questions.

#1. Do I think it is time to remove the monument in Jackson County?

I would like to see a task force formed with a very specific mandated action and time deadline, led by our Board Chairman, Brian McMahan. This would be made up of long time residents of Jackson County. Black citizens, Sons of the Confederacy members, the Historical Society, and others as identified. These individuals would decide on a path forward, which answers question #2. Commissioner McMahan has deep family roots in this community, is a student of history, loves this community, and is respectful of ALL citizens. He leads by example. His leadership is essential at this time.

I represent ALL the citizens of Jackson County and their voices should be heard, if shared respectfully, whether I agree with them or not. That is why I am suggesting the task force so the divergent voices can be heard. I believe the time to do something about the monument is now. It has become a flashpoint for controversy and a safety issue. ALL citizens and visitors to Jackson County need to feel safe and RESPECTED here. I have two family members who work at the Jackson County Public Library and one told me patrons are scared to come. That is not acceptable in Jackson County.

#2. Some of the suggestions offered by citizens include

- A. Adding a monument honoring a black citizen with context
- B. Adding an explanation, additional context on the Confederacy and presenting the story of a path to reconciliation (which we are still on)
- C. A statue of a Cherokee elder, whose presence was here long before white settlers, our communities' history and heritage
- D. Removal and no replacement.
- E. Removal and something representing a timeline of our county history from Native Cherokee to now.

I would favor the solution a task force decides is the best resolution after hearing many voices.

#3. I feel the state commission formed by then Governor McCrory was a political move which goes contrary to the often touted goal of Republicans to decentralize government. This move was the opposite. I do believe communities should have authority locally over their monuments.

#4. I took an oath of office to uphold the laws of the United States Constitution, the laws of the State of North Carolina, and our local ordinances. I take that oath seriously. If I sense one of these laws are unjust, I, as any citizen can work to change them. I therefore would not advocate removal without following the law.

I hope these answer your questions. Please call me if anything is unclear.

About the protest yesterday. The march was very peaceful and respectful. Our law enforcement did an excellent job. They were present, but in the background and supportive. I talked to the organizers and they appreciated our law enforcement and the help they received. I saw several of my former students and we were pleased to see each other and our support for the protest. I talked to many citizens and asked their thoughts on the monument. I received many different suggestions. This verified my request for a task force.

I participated last Tuesday as well. I am so proud of our local citizens, who with a few exceptions, were peaceful and respectful.

Thank you again for reaching out.

Sincerely,  
Gayle

Sent from my iPad

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