

SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

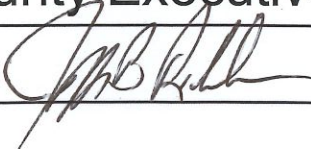
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Albemarle County
Program Title: Court Square Community Conversation / At Ready Confederate Statue Removal
Program Category: Community and Economic Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Title: County Executive
Signature: 

VACO Achievement Awards

Court Square Community Conversation / *At Ready* Confederate Statue Removal Albemarle County, VA

Executive Summary

The elements within a public space articulate how the space should be used and the markers and monuments tell a story about a community's identity and what the community values. The most prominent public space in Albemarle County is Court Square, including the historic Courthouse and surrounding grounds, located in the center of the City of Charlottesville. Court Square is a public space, a public good intended to be accessible and available to any member of our community. In 1909, the *At Ready* statue was installed in front of the Courthouse, at the head of road leading from the downtown business district. *At Ready* is a bronze statue of a generic Confederate soldier holding a rifle, flanked by two Napoleon cannons. In Virginia, prior to July 1, 2020, localities were prohibited from removing, relocating, covering, or contextualizing war memorials. A state code change in 2020 articulated a process that any locality seeking to remove or move a memorial or monument must take.

Staff identified a few areas of focus – a community engagement process that allowed the Board to hear from a cross-section of the community about their desires for *At Ready*, a strong logistics plan for removing and/or relocating the statue, and a coordinated public safety framework. A cross-functional team including leadership from the Police Department, Fire Rescue Department, Facilities/Public Works, Attorney's Office, Communications/Public Engagement, Equity & Inclusion, and the Executive's Office actively participated in all meetings to ensure active communication and alignment.

The community engagement process focused on five areas:

1. Transparency
2. Empower Community Voices & Leverage Partnerships
3. Elevate Primary Documents to Develop a Shared Understanding
4. Acknowledging the Role of Government
5. Create Inclusive and Welcoming Opportunities to Engage

In Albemarle County, our process of creating community partnerships and empowering community members resulted in a removal event with no incidents. While everyone was not happy with the outcome, there was a shared understanding of how it was arrived at. That the engagement and the removal remained peaceful was widely acknowledged to be due to the strong planning by Albemarle County Local Government. The lasting impact of the trust built with partners is evident as we move into other community-based work.

Brief Overview

The elements within a public space articulate how the space should be used and the markers and monuments tell a story about a community's identity and what the community values. The most prominent public space in Albemarle County is Court Square, including the historic Courthouse and surrounding grounds, located in the center of the City of Charlottesville. Court Square is a public space, a public good intended to be accessible and available to any member of our community. In 1909, the At Ready statue was installed in front of the Courthouse, at the head of road leading from the downtown business district. At Ready is a bronze statue of a generic Confederate soldier holding a rifle, flanked by two Napoleon cannons. In Virginia, prior to July 1, 2020, localities were prohibited from removing, relocating, covering, or contextualizing war memorials. A state code change in 2020 articulated a process that any locality seeking to remove or move a memorial or monument must take.

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Narrative

Introduction

The elements within a public space articulate how the space should be used and the markers and monuments tell a story about a community's identity and what the community values. National interest in revisiting what and who is represented in public spaces grew beginning in 2015, following the murder of 9 Black parishioners at a church in Charleston, SC. The attack in Charlottesville in 2017 that resulted in the murder of Heather Heyer and the deaths of two State Troopers, Jay Cullen and Berke Bates, shook our community deeply. Following that, our community began to look at our own public spaces, beginning by documenting all of the memorials and monuments in public spaces.

The most prominent public space in Albemarle County is Court Square, including the historic Courthouse and surrounding grounds, located in the center of the City of Charlottesville. The Courthouse remains in use today as the Circuit Court. Albemarle County's Court Square is a public space, a public good intended to be accessible and available to any member of our community. In 1909, the At Ready statue was installed in front of the Courthouse, at the head of road leading from the downtown business district. At Ready is a bronze statue of a generic Confederate soldier holding a rifle, flanked by two Napoleon cannons.

In Virginia, prior to July 1, 2020, localities in Virginia were prohibited from removing, relocating, covering, or contextualizing war memorials. Beginning in 2018, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors began advocating our state-elected officials for a change to the state code to allow localities that authority. In the 2020 legislative session of the General Assembly, both the House and Senate passed bills with this enabling authority for localities. On April 12, 2020, Governor Northam signed the bill into law. The state code change took effect July 1, 2020, and articulated a process that any locality seeking to remove or move a memorial or monument must take.

- A local governing body could direct that a public hearing be advertised, with 30 days notice.
- Once the public hearing is held, if the governing body took action on the memorials, they are required to offer the memorials for 30-days to a battlefield, historic society, museum, or other party.
- After the 30-day period, the memorial can be relocated.

Despite several years of bills not making it through the committee process, following the 2019 elections, it appeared likely that there would be interest in moving forward with legislation to provide localities with the enabling authority to take action on memorials and monuments. In December 2019, staff met to discuss what steps would be needed to prepare for the local authority long-sought by the Board of Supervisors. Staff identified a few areas of focus – a community engagement process that allowed the Board to hear from a cross-section of the community about their desires for At Ready, a strong logistics plan for removing and/or relocating the statue, and a coordinated public safety framework. More importantly, staff established a common purpose:

- Engage directly with community members and leaders to understand their values relative to the community's history, current story, and future narrative.
- Provide for the wellbeing of community members, visitors, and staff while safeguarding the right to the expression of ideas and beliefs.

- Collaborate with the City of Charlottesville, UVA, and other organizations to plan and coordinate events and actions together whenever possible.

This clarity of purpose guided all of our discussions, which were held on a regular cycle throughout the process. At first, biweekly, then weekly, then twice per week in the lead-up to what became the removal. Leadership from the Police Department, Fire Rescue Department, Facilities/Public Works, Attorney's Office, Communications/Public Engagement, Equity & Inclusion, and the Executive's Office actively participated in all meetings to ensure active communication and alignment.

Community Engagement Process

In January, staff presented an engagement framework to the Board of Supervisors – to develop a shared understanding of the inclusive history of Court Square and the At Ready Monument and to create varied opportunities for honest conversations about public space broadly and the monument specifically. In February, the project launched. In March, the project paused, as much of the world paused due to COVID-19. In June, the project resumed in full-force, with a pivot to virtual engagement.

Transparency

The most important principle applied to this process was transparency. Staff communicated continuously with the community through our various channels what the process timeline was, who the decision-makers were, and what we did not yet know. Proactive pushing of information was critical to keep the community aligned and to help prevent rumors from detracting from the process.

When we approached the removal, we maintained this posture. We shared the data and time of the removal. We shared the locations for public access to the site. We arranged for a livestream of the removal, so that, due to gathering restrictions associated with COVID-19, anyone could watch safely from home.

We invited community activists to meet with the project manager and our public safety team to understand the removal timeline, the construction barrier placement, and high-level planning for security in order to have a dialogue about where and why access was restricted, and identify any modifications that could achieve a mutual benefit.

Empower Community Voices & Leverage Partnerships

Albemarle County's role in the engagement process was that of a convener – to reserve the date and (virtual/physical) space, to send open invitations, and to set the table for inclusive and welcoming conversations. Our community partners supported the effort by sharing their technical knowledge and personal experience. We worked with subject matter experts in history, architecture, architectural history, cultural landscapes, and civil war history, as well as community experts in community history. We started all of our conversations with an acknowledgement that everyone has something valuable to contribute to the conversation. We worked with non-profits to support listening sessions so that we could have small group conversations guided by someone with strong facilitation and mediation skills who could help navigate difficult conversations with opposing viewpoints.

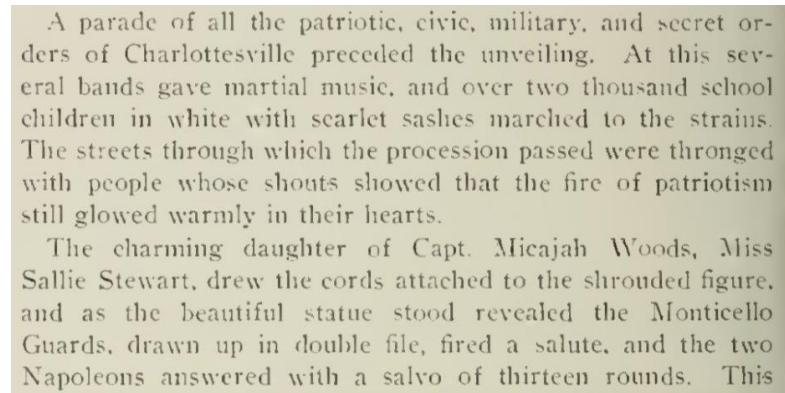
As part of the public hearing for the Board of Supervisors, a community work group, comprised of individuals representing a cross-section of opinions, drafted the community input summary, working together to identify themes and acknowledge differences. A member of this work group presented the

input summary to the Board of Supervisors. It was important that the community felt this summary represented their perspectives, not filtered through staff.

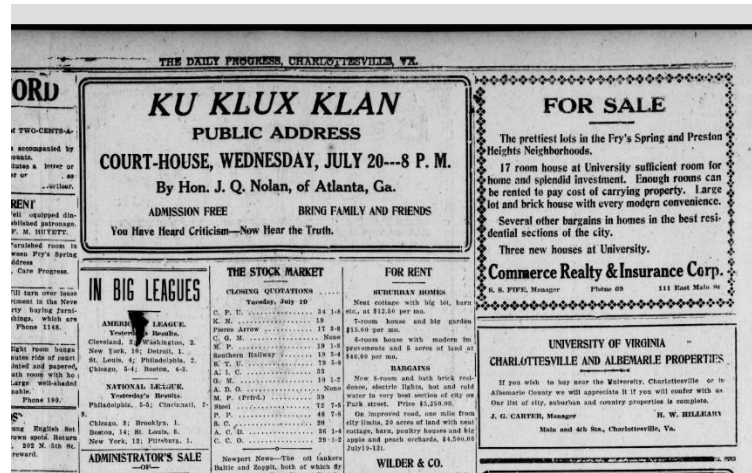
During the removal livestream, we also streamed interviews with our partners and with community members to share the history, to share their experiences, to broaden the context for the removal event.

Elevate Primary Documents to Develop a Shared Understanding

Albemarle County has focused in recent years on elevating a more inclusive history. In advance of the public engagement process, the County worked with our partners and conducted our own historic research on Court Square, the statue, and its installation. These primary documents were presented using screenshots and photographs, or read aloud, in their original form, and allowed community members to react to them and interpret them themselves.



This newspaper clipping from May 5, 1909, shares the tone of the unveiling.



This newspaper clipping with an announcement of a Ku Klux Klan meeting adds to our shared understanding of the types of activities that took place at the Courthouse. More popularly known are weekend religious services and market days.

Acknowledging the Role of Government

Vulnerability is key to difficult conversations and it was important in this process to acknowledge the role of Albemarle County Local Government in the evolution of the Courthouse and its Grounds. For example, a public park adjacent to the Courthouse was once a vibrant center of commerce of

predominantly Black-owned businesses. That land was transferred to by the County of Albemarle to the City of Charlottesville for the purpose of demolition to build a school – while the transfer and demolition occurred, the school was never built. While the statue erection effort was led by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Albemarle County provided the land for the statue and levied a special tax on its residents to help pay for the statue and its installation.



The land on which McKee Row (pictured) sat was transferred from the County of Albemarle to the City of Charlottesville for demolition in 1914.

Create Inclusive and Welcoming Opportunities to Engage

Creating an inclusive and welcoming engagement process means creating different environments in which to engage. A walking tour of the Court Square site grounded everyone in the same information and history of Court Square and allowed for a place-based discussion of all the memorials and markers that sit there. Panel discussions leveraged our community partners knowledge and experiences to deepen our collective understanding of the history of memorials, the role of public space, and how other communities and organizations have worked through developing a more inclusive history. The listening sessions required the County to sit back and hear community members' experiences and reflections, and for community members to hear and learn from each other. There was also a robust online space for people to respond and reflect online, anytime. This allowed the most people to participate in the way that was comfortable and convenient for them.

Coordinated Logistics Planning Framework

Using the Incident Management Team structure, regular meetings with the project players ensured all parts of the project were aligned and that each team member had real-time information and understood not only the decisions that had been made, but the rationale behind them. Public safety personnel worked alongside with project management to ensure the construction timeline and the construction access was optimized for maintaining public safety.

The goal for the logistics planning effort was to plan ahead for various outcomes so that as the decision by the Board came, resources were mobilized to respond as expeditiously as possible. Government moves slowly and that is with purpose – procurement laws intentionally assure the stewardship the public funds. At the outset, staff identified that navigating the procurement process to remove the statue would be an area that could drive the schedule for the removal, if directed by the Board. The County Executive's Office provided clarity that this project was an organizational priority and that staff were expected to work across functional areas to ensure the project is successful.

Operationally, staff pre-prepared several different bid packages so that as a decision was made, documents could be posted as immediately to move forward. Reviews and meetings were pre-

scheduled to ensure as soon as one mandated timeline elapsed, the next stage of the process could proceed. Staff did not let internal processes hold up the larger project – while ensuring that mandates, policies, and procedures were all followed. The cross-departmental coordination and collaboration to achieve this was key.

Costs

The engagement project operated on a tight budget, with just expenses related to printed materials. Community partnerships provided their time in-kind. The removal itself totaled approximately \$69,000. The event livestream and photography totaled \$15,000 and was viewed as a public safety expense, due to the pandemic.

Reflections

The Court Square Community Conversations and At Ready Removal was very successful. In cities across the country, statue removals can become public safety incidents. In Albemarle County, our process of creating community partnerships and empowering community members resulted in a removal event with no incidents. While everyone was not happy with the outcome, there was a shared understanding of how it was arrived at. That the engagement and the removal remained peaceful was widely acknowledged to be due to the strong planning by Albemarle County Local Government. The lasting impact of the trust built with partners is evident as we move into other community-based work.