

**MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR WORKSHOP
TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2020
PUTNAM COUNTY, FLORIDA**

The Putnam County Board of County Commissioners Regular Workshop met in scheduled session on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, at 2:00 p.m. via virtual Zoom meeting.

Present were: Commissioner Bill Pickens, District 1; Commissioner Jeff Rawls, District 2; Commissioner Terry Turner, District 3; Commissioner Larry Harvey, District 4 and Commissioner Buddy Goddard, District 5.

Also present: Terry Suggs, County Administrator; Rich Komando, Interim County Attorney; Tim Smith, Clerk of Court; Julianne Young, General Services Director; Colonel Joseph Wells, Sheriff's Office; Laura Parsons, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator; Quin Romay, Fire/EMS Chief; Jim Troiano, Executive Director of Planning; Jacob Herbein, IT Department and Deputy Clerk, Sarah Herbein.

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Turner called the Board of County Commissioners Regular Workshop Meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Invocation was offered by Commissioner Harvey and Commissioner Pickens led the Pledge of Allegiance.

REARRANGEMENT OF AGENDA

Commissioner Turner announced that the presentation by Common Ground would take place prior to public comment in the event the public wished to make comments specific to the presentation.

Commissioner Harvey also suggested that all Commissioners voice their opinion on the subject before the Board prior to making any formal motions.

CONFEDERATE STATUE

**PRESENTATION BY COMMON GROUND – IN FAVOR OF RELOCATING
CONFEDERATE STATUE**

President Joe Pickens, St. Johns River State College, gave a presentation in support of relocating the confederate statue on the Courthouse lawn and discussed the goal of Common Ground in general.

He noted that for some, the statue is perceived in a negative light and that its current location at the Courthouse entrance may be offensive to a portion of the population.

Additionally, President Pickens also discussed concerns for new incoming students at St. Johns River State College in light of local protests and counter protests concerning the statue.

Reverend Karl N. Flagg, continued the presentation pointing out that the matter at hand is not about destruction of the statue nor erasure of history. He clarified that the goal of Common Ground is focused upon preservation and relocation of the statue.

He noted that Common Ground's intent was to be part of a solution rather than inflaming the issue further. He added that all people and their perspectives are important.

Reverend Flagg concluded the presentation by reading an excerpt from a letter written by his daughter and expressing his hopes of the community coming together on the matter at hand.

President Pickens clarified that he believed the decision regarding the statue should be made by the Board of County Commissioners. He did not believe that adding the item to the ballot as a referendum protected the rights and interests of the minority population.

He also added that he believed the statue should be relocated to a space where it can be revered for those that wish.

CONFEDERATE STATUE – COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Turner advised he'd given the matter much consideration. He suggested consideration be given to the possibility of relocating the confederate statue to Veteran's Park in East Palatka where he believed the monument could be upheld with honor.

He added that he believed the citizens pushing for the statue's relocation should be responsible for raising the funds to do so to ensure that relocation is not a burden on the taxpayers.

Commissioner Goddard supported keeping the statue to on the Courthouse property which is County owned and recommended moving it away from the main walkway into the Courthouse. He did not believe the statue needed to be removed completely and spoke of the need to honor those that died appropriately.

Commissioner Rawls questioned the members involved in the Common Ground group.

President Joe Pickens read aloud the list of Common Ground members as follows which was also submitted to Laura Parsons:

- Robert Mills
- Karl Flagg
- Breck Sloan
- Ben Bates
- Don Holmes
- Joe Pickens
- Carol Pickens
- Jim McCool
- Susan McCool
- Dan Martinez
- Gilbert Evans
- Melissa Miller
- Kelley Smith
- Karen Hughes
- C.L. Overturf
- Cynthia Asia
- John L. Williams
- James Vickers

Commissioner Rawls expressed concerns regarding a possible overlap of the same individuals being involved in Common Ground as well as the Chamber of Commerce and the Putnam County Bar Association.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following public comment statements represent a summary of each statement made and are not necessarily a verbatim record.

The floor was opened for public comment at 2:36 p.m.

RICHARD SEGALL

Mr. Segall advised he previously provided the Board of County Commissioners with a copy of a resolution passed by the Putnam County Democratic Executive Committee confirming their position with regard to the confederate statue located on the Courthouse lawn. The Deputy Clerk was not provided a copy for the record.

Mr. Segall discussed some points separate from the resolution advising that the confederacy had a constitution which explicitly advocated for slavery including the perpetuation and expansion of it.

He did not have issue with the soldiers as they fought for their Country, however, did take issue with their cause which is referred to on the statue's inscription. He believed this to be inappropriate.

Therefore, Mr. Segall called for the removal of the confederate statue from County property and suggested that the statue be donated to an organization.

SEBER NEWSOME III

Mr. Newsome confirmed he did not reside in Putnam County, however, noted he visits often. He expressed concerns regarding the ability of citizens to participate in meetings in virtual format.

Mr. Newsome supported the item being placed on the ballot as a referendum. He believed this to be the only fair way to gain input from local citizens.

He also added that he did not oppose Commissioner Goddard's recommendation to keep the statue on the Courthouse lawn, however, relocate it away from the main entrance.

AMY CUTRER

Ms. Cutrer confirmed she was born and raised in Putnam County, however, is not currently a resident.

She spoke in favor of relocating the statue to the Westview Cemetery or to Veteran's Park as suggested by Commissioner Turner.

Ms. Cutrer spoke of the need to make amends and heal as a community as she believed the race war is still ongoing today. She spoke at length regarding black history and of her vision for a more inclusive future.

She also suggested the removal of the Maltby Oak Tree and the potential to have the roots studied scientifically.

TEVEL ADAMS

Mr. Adams thanked the Board for placing the item on the agenda for discussion and encouraged the Board to bring the Community closer by discussing a compromise on the relocation of the confederate statue.

JOSHUA MAST

Mr. Mast supported the relocation of the confederate statue and spoke of the need for the Community to move forward with healing and learning empathy for our neighbors. He also spoke of the importance of doing the right thing as it will be reflected upon in the future.

Mr. Mast believed the Board should make the determination rather than it being placed on the ballot. He urged the Board to consider the proposal put forth by Gavin

Thomas as he is a third party willing to contribute to the costs of the statue's relocation.

Mr. Mast referenced death threats which Mr. Adams and Ms. Leonard received.

He also questioned the Board regarding the recent whistleblower complaint regarding a health department employee and whether the Board would be calling for the resignations of Mary Garcia or Kena Foster (Department of Health).

Commissioner Rawls advised he would be looking into the whistleblower complaint, however, noted that Ms. Garcia and Ms. Foster are employees of the State.

HEATHER JONES

Ms. Jones spoke in favor of relocating the confederate statue from the Courthouse grounds. She did not have an opinion regarding the relocation site.

Ms. Jones discussed the cause for which the confederacy fought for. She also referenced the inscription on the confederacy statue noting she could understand why some may feel offended.

She stressed the importance of taking pride in your heritage, however, believed compassion for others should be placed above pride or history. She urged the Board to do the right thing versus the popular thing.

ALLEGRA KITCHENS

Ms. Kitchens did not believe relocating the statue would assuage the protests and urged the Board to place the item on the ballot as a referendum.

Ms. Kitchens reviewed some posts made on Facebook by Ms. Leonard which were inflammatory toward the Caucasian race. She noted that Ms. Leonard has since apologized, however, believes these comments reflect her true feelings.

Ms. Kitchens added that she believed groups such as Common Ground are naïve on the subject.

MELISSA MCADAMS

Ms. Adams advised she was a part of Defend Putnam and Defend St. Augustine. She spoke of protests which have remained peaceful and urged the Board to place the matter on the ballot as a referendum.

She did not believe the relocation of the statue would solve the current issues.

MALLORY KRUEGER

Ms. Krueger discussed confederate history and believed the confederate statue to have been installed with the intent of intimidation. She spoke at length regarding the

confederacy and believed the foundation of the Civil War was to maintain slavery ownership.

Ms. Krueger did not agree with the matter being placed on the ballot and did not understand how the statue's relocation was offensive. She noted that the cost of the statue relocation, if approved, should be the responsibility of those who are required to maintain the statue.

ALAINA PARUM

Ms. Parum advised she was not a Putnam County resident. She believed the item should be placed on the ballot as a referendum and referenced votes taken in adjacent counties which were in favor of retaining the statues in their current locations.

Ms. Parum also questioned the Chamber of Commerce's position as they may not necessarily represent the majority of businesses.

TRAVIS ROBERTS

Mr. Roberts questioned the involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in the matter as they are funded by the tax payers. He did not believe it to appropriate that the Chamber would have an opinion pertaining to this item.

Mr. Roberts also discussed racism as it relates to Putnam County and noted that he did not believe relocating the statue would improve the current racial tension within the Community.

He added that he believed the item should be added to the ballot as a referendum and spoke of vandalism concerns should the statue be relocated to the Westview Cemetery.

JUDY LUCIA

Ms. Lucia provided her name and address for the record, however, no comments were made due to technical difficulties on her end.

MS. MARTINEZ

Ms. Martinez spoke of the memorials on the Courthouse lawn representing justice. She did not believe the confederate statue represented justice and expressed support toward the statue's relocation.

She also requested that the reopening of local libraries be placed on a future agenda for discussion as the homeless population is lacking internet access to perform employment searches.

Commissioner Turner was under the impression that libraries were open on an appointment only basis.

Julianne Young, General Services Director, advised she would look into the matter to confirm.

TOMMY RODGERS

Mr. Rodgers expressed his belief that disparities exist within the African American Community as a result of slavery and slave mentality. He believed that the residual effects of slavery are still alive in today's society and stressed the importance of looking at the aggrieved and practicing empathy with regard to the subject at hand.

He did not believe relocating the statue would harm anyone and called for empathy for those that are hurt as a result of its presence on the Courthouse lawn.

Mr. Rodgers also noted that in his opinion, he did not believe it was appropriate to take Facebook posts into consideration made by a minor as discussed earlier in the meeting by Allegra Kitchens.

Following additional comments, Mr. Rodgers stated that he did not support the item being placed on the ballot as a referendum.

RECESS/ RECONVENE

The Board of County Commissioners Regular Workshop was recessed at 3:35 p.m. and reconvened at 3:41 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT (CONTINUED)

MERI REES

Ms. Rees thanked the Board for their efforts in examining all aspects stemming from the request to relocate the statue.

She stated that after conducting research, she does not support the relocation of the confederate statue.

Ms. Rees discussed statistics regarding slave ownership in Putnam County and requested that the Board fully review the issue prior to making any determination.

BRANDON LYON

Mr. Lyon stated that he currently resides in Duval County, however, prior to this was a long time Putnam County resident. He also clarified that his statements made on the record are in no way associated with his employment.

He rejected the notion that the conversations surrounding the confederate statue are a new issue. He referenced news articles on the subject dating back to 2017.

Mr. Lyon discussed the history of the statue as well as items within the constitution in detail.

He fully supported the relocation of the confederate statue as he believed that the monument remaining on the Courthouse grounds would be harmful to the Community.

TY PHIL SENIOR

No comments were made by Ty Phil Senior due to technical difficulties on his end. Commissioner Turner clarified that this would be revisited should he join re-enter the virtual meeting.

MARGARET ELLINGTON

Ms. Ellington advised she was in favor of relocating the confederate statue from the Courthouse lawn.

DONNA CROWE

Ms. Crowe was not offended by the confederate statue's current location and briefly discussed history concerning William Ivers.

She suggested erecting new statues honoring African American soldiers, however, supported keeping the confederate statue at its current location on the Courthouse lawn.

Ms. Crowe asked for the Board to consider this or alternately place the item on the ballot as a referendum.

JULIE THAYER

Ms. Thayer questioned the importance of keeping the statue at its current location if this is causing pain for some.

She expressed support toward the relocation of the confederate statue and called for civility and love within the Community.

ANGIE WRIGHT

Ms. Wright opposed anyone giving opinions on the matter who are not current residents of Putnam County.

She referenced her husband's service in the Military and spoke of the importance of leaving the statue at its current location for the sake of history and as a tool to teach what has occurred in the past.

Ms. Wright requested that the item be placed on the ballot as a referendum.

CRAIG SHERAR

Mr. Sherar spoke on the subject of African American lives in the Community and stated he believed both races reside in deplorable conditions equally in some areas within the County. He did not believe this was related to race.

He opposed the relocation of the confederate statue as he believed it to be hypocritical and spoke in detail on the subject.

Mr. Sherar suggested replacing the plaque located on the confederate statue with a new inscription which specifies that the Country is no longer what it was when the statue was originally erected.

He spoke at length regarding his political views and reiterated that the statue should be kept at its current location and be rededicated to what we are as a Country today.

TY PHIL SENIOR

Ty Phil Senior believed the decision regarding the statue's potential relocation should be made by the Board as they were elected for the purpose of making decisions such as these.

He did not believe it should be placed on the ballot as a referendum as he did not believe there was ever a vote taken regarding the erection of the statue. He also questioned whether taxpayer money was utilized to erect the statue.

JESSIE SPIVEY

Jessie Spivey did not support the relocation of the confederate monument and requested that it be placed on the ballot as a referendum.

DAVID PRICE

Mr. Price discussed his knowledge of genealogy as well as his own lineage in detail. He supported placing the item on the ballot as a referendum.

MISTI RAE

Ms. Rae supported the relocation and preservation of the statue at a more appropriate location. She did not support placing the item on the ballot and urged the Board to make the determination. Ms. Rae was also in agreeance with relocation to either Westview Cemetery or Veterans Park.

KEVON HANCOCK

Mr. Hancock supported placing the item on the ballot as a referendum.

LORRAINE CARR

Ms. Carr questioned the Common Ground group and whether they would fund the monument's possible relocation. She specified that the confederate monument was

in no way responsible for the downturn of business in the downtown area on St. Johns Avenue.

She discussed the erection of the monument and its history. She urged the Board to consider the history of the monument when deliberating on the matter.

There being no further comments, public comment was closed at 4:29 p.m.

COMMISSIONER REQUESTS/ COMMENTS

Commissioner Harvey stated his original position on the matter was to place the item on the ballot as a referendum, however, he expressed concerns regarding this option due to the disparity between the minority and majority voters.

Commissioner Harvey expressed his wish to promote Putnam County rather than contribute to divisiveness and recounted the alternatives suggested during the meeting.

Ultimately, Commissioner Harvey did not oppose relocating the statue but did not believe taxpayer funds should be used to do so. He believed that if relocated, the monument should be kept on County owned property.

He noted that while the confederacy's cause has been tainted in modern times, that the men who served our Country served with honor. He suggested that rather than removing the inscription affixed to the monument, one should be added illuminating how far we've come and serving as a reminder of our history.

Commissioner Goddard discussed the Citizen input he's received on the subject. He noted that a revolutionary war occurred which some are proud of and some are ashamed of. He felt it to be important that the war still be recognized.

Commissioner Goddard expressed concerns regarding placing the item on the ballot as it may disenfranchise smaller groups.

He believed the Board of County Commissioners were elected to represent the people and believed placing the item on the ballot would be doing Citizens an injustice.

Commissioner Goddard added that a majority of the input he received from Citizens wished for the statue to remain on the Courthouse grounds but expressed the importance of reaching a compromise.

Commissioner Pickens thanked all who provided input on the subject.

He expressed disappointment with the way certain aspects of the issue have been handled including media coverage and the idea that the Board has taken too much time to consider the decision.

Commissioner Pickens expressed concern for the statue itself and noted that out of all the input he's received, one constant has been that Citizens do not want to erase history.

He clarified for the record that the Board has never at any point discussed or proposed destruction of the monument.

Commissioner Pickens did not support placing the matter on the ballot. He believed that members of the Board of County Commissioners are elected to make tough decisions such as this for all of Putnam County including the majority and minority Citizens within the County.

He did specify that if relocated, he did not support Westview Cemetery as the relocation destination.

Commissioner Pickens went on to express frustrations with the idea that the Board has not made an expeditious decision regarding the issue. He spoke of the pressures on the Board which may have included negative influences outside of the County and State based on current events. He believed making a fast decision based on these influences may have resulted in further division.

He expressed appreciation for the Commissioners taking their time to review the matter carefully and added that he believed it was time for the Board to vote on the matter.

Commissioner Rawls advised that regardless of the end result, not all citizens will be satisfied with the outcome.

He expressed his firm belief that the matter was a social issue which needs to be decided by the taxpayers by placing the item on the ballot as a referendum. He added that majority of the input he's received from Citizens have requested this.

Commissioner Rawls also stated that holding virtual meetings creates a sterile environment and believes in person meetings should resume. He added he had spoken to the Interim County Attorney on the subject.

Commissioner Turner referenced current CDC guidelines and requested that Commissioner Rawls remain on topic.

Commissioner Rawls expressed concerns on the subject of propriety concerning Common Ground whose list of members he stated contained many members of the Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Rawls questioned how the Common Ground group was able to make the primary presentation on this matter as Commissioner Pickens had already requested that the statue discussion be placed upon the agenda.

Commissioner Rawls was strongly in favor of placing the issue on the ballot or to vote in support of leaving the monument on the Courthouse grounds.

Commissioner Turner disagreed and did not believe the item should be placed on the ballot. He believed the decision should be made by the Board of County Commissioners and further suggested the relocation of the statue to Veteran's Park where the monument could be preserved with honor and distinction. He suggested raising private funds for its relocation as utilizing taxpayer funds would not be appropriate.

He also spoke of the financial burden on the County associated with law enforcement's coverage of protests at the monument's current location to protect the Courthouse and nearby businesses. He believed this would be alleviated by the monument's relocation to Veteran's Park.

Commissioner Harvey suggested looking into Veteran's Park further as well as discussing relocating the monument to a different area on the Courthouse grounds.

Commissioner Rawls suggested initiating discussions regarding the possible relocation of the Courthouse due to the condition of the building itself. This would allow the site to serve as a memorial and would not be offensive as Citizens would not be visiting the location seeking justice.

Commissioner Rawls also expressed support toward placing the relocation of the monument on the ballot as a referendum to allow the Citizens to decide.

Commissioner Goddard concurred that the Courthouse needs repairs, however, did not support its relocation.

He believed the smartest option would be to relocate the monument from its current location to a place on the Courthouse grounds which is away from the walkway and Courthouse itself. He also supported the relocation to Veteran's Park as discussed.

Commissioner Goddard believed the decision should be made by the Board at the September 8, 2020 to allow the Board to gather additional input from Citizens. He added that Citizens are reaching out to their Commissioners to voice their opinions.

Commissioner Turner clarified that if the agenda item is moved to that date, placing the matter on the ballot as a referendum will no longer be an option.

Commissioner Pickens reconfirmed that the County should not fund the monument's relocation if approved. He believed that those calling for its relocation should raise the funds to do so.

Commissioner Pickens did not support the Westview Cemetery as a potential relocation location and noted he would need to see a plan before supporting an official relocation to Veteran's Park.

A discussion ensued regarding the potential location should the monument be kept on the Courthouse grounds but moved out of the walkway.

Commissioner Harvey was in favor of having drawings made to explore both potential relocation options prior to making an official decision (alternate location on Courthouse grounds and Veteran's Park).

Following additional discussion, Commissioner Rawls made a motion to place the item on the ballot in November to allow the public to decide.

The motion died for lack of a second.

Commissioner Harvey made a motion to evaluate the relocation of the confederate monument to Veteran's Park in East Palatka with the use of private funding.

Commissioner Pickens seconded the motion.

Commissioner Pickens expressed concerns regarding further division among citizens if nothing is done. He suggested further discussion on the subject at the next regularly scheduled workshop.

He also noted that if Veteran's Park was chosen for the monument's relocation, the park must be upgraded.

Commissioner Goddard preferred that the motion not specify a relocation destination to allow the Board to explore this further via input from Citizens.

Commissioner Rawls suggested the formation of a committee to determine the relocation destination for the confederate monument.

Commissioner Harvey amended his previously made motion to exclude an official destination for the relocation of the statue as this is yet to be determined.

Commissioner Pickens amended his second accordingly as well.

Further discussion and amendment of the motion on the floor ensued.

Commissioner Harvey spoke on the subject of the Committee proposed by Commissioner Rawls and believed each Commissioner should appoint two individuals while the Chairman may appoint three.

Commissioner Harvey's amended motion was to support the relocation of the confederate monument utilizing private funds and to approve the formation of a Citizen Committee to make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners regarding the monument's relocation destination.

Commissioner Pickens amended his second accordingly.

The motion passed 4-1 with Commissioner Rawls opposing.

COUNTY ATTORNEY COMMENTS

Rich Komando, Interim County Attorney, had no remarks.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Terry Suggs, County Administrator, had no remarks.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the Board of County Commissioners Regular Workshop was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PUTNAM COUNTY, FLORIDA**

ATTEST:

BY: Terry L. Turner, Chairman

Tim Smith, Clerk of Courts

Minutes By: Deputy Clerk, Sarah Herbein.