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Saturday's protests to keep the Confederate monument or relocate it from the Putnam County Courthouse ended with tension, but no physical incidents, said the Putnam County Sheriff's Office.

The Palatka Police Department also said there were no reports of vandalism.

The two protests were originally scheduled to both be at the courthouse. On Thursday, the Your Vote Is Your Voice protest to advocate for the statue relocated changed its venue to avoid conflict with counterprotesters.

Organizers Tevel Adams and Dar'Nesha Leonard, two college students from Palatka, moved their protest to the Putnam County Government Complex and focused on the importance of getting out to vote in the November election.

"It certainly was not, in my opinion, entirely peaceful like the first event," Sheriff's Office Col. Joe Wells said of the dual protests. "But it certainly could have gone a lot worse."

Wells said no criminal cases were brought to the sheriff's office and no arrests were made Saturday in relation to the protests. Wells spent his time at the courthouse protest and said he noticed hateful language and one incident of intimidation, but no one was physically hurt.

He said most of the incidents stemmed from out-of-town and pro-monument protesters.

"There (were) instigators on both sides of the discussion, but the incidents we saw at the courthouse seemed to be more of the result of instigation by the pro-monument side of the argument," Wells said.

He said one person who favored keeping the monument had to be "ejected" from the government complex because they tried to grab a flag out of someone's hand who was in favor of relocating the statue.

Wells said he heard from protesters on both sides of the argument who said this event would not be their last in Putnam County.

About 200 people attended each event, which were held less than 2 miles apart.

"It had a whole different atmosphere and a whole different tempo than the first peaceful event by Mr. Adams and Miss Leonard," Wells said. "It was certainly an escalation from the first event."

The Putnam County Board of County Commissioners plans to discuss the statue further at an Aug. 25 workshop, with the stated desire to decide that day to relocate the monument or let it stay. None of the five commissioners attended either protest Saturday.

Commissioner Buddy Goddard said he was out of town but would probably not have gone so he would not be perceived as picking a side of the statue argument. He addressed Adams' comments made during the organizer's speech Saturday when he referenced comments Goddard made in July about him and Leonard.

Goddard suggested in July the organizers did not pledge their allegiance to the flag during a board meeting and called Adams "boy," which Adams said could have a derogatory meaning.

"If he pledges allegiance to the United States, then I was wrong," Goddard said. "Maybe he does. I didn't see it, but I'm not saying it's not happening."

Goddard said he is not racist as Adams' speech suggested and only called him "boy" to distinguish him from Leonard.

"I was making a difference between the girl and the boy," Goddard said.

Although no county commissioners were present, Palatka Mayor Terrill Hill made an appearance at the Your Vote Is Your Voice event. Hill said he thought the protest went well and was proud of Adams and Leonard for moving the protest to the government complex to avoid conflict. But he was disappointed in the community for the division this issue has brought.

"We've got a great community; and a great community of caring people of all different walks of life and all different demographics," Hill said. "To have depictions that look like the 1960s marches through the Civil Rights Movement is extremely disheartening."

Hill said hate is being masked as a heritage and the "gem of the St. Johns River" should never have its people divided over an object. He said he has been called a radical, left-wing mayor and a racist for advocating to relocate the monument.

"It's sad and it's embarrassing, because all across the country we see America having an awakening of social consciousness," Hill said, "and Putnam County and Baker County are the last two holdouts."

"(Not changing) just allows for outside sources to come into our county and further divide our people when the only thing we need to do is heal," he said.

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