

Back to the Drawing Board

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After meeting for nearly four hours, Putnam County Statue Relocation Selection Committee members made no final choices Friday regarding the county's Confederate monument relocation.

The Board of County Commissioners formed the committee and tasked it with recommending a place to move the Confederate statue that currently sits on the Putnam County Courthouse lawn.

Six ideas to move the statue were presented by the 11-member committee members: leaving the statue in place or moving it to John Theobald Sports Complex in Palatka, Veterans Park in East Palatka, the Putnam County Government Complex in Palatka, the courthouse annex or Melrose Heritage Park.

More options can be presented at the next meeting Thursday or final recommendations could be made that day. The committee voted 10-1 in favor of only recommending options within Putnam County with Palatka resident and committee member LaToya Robinson dissenting.

Earlier in the meeting, Robinson's spot as a member was questioned because she is the mother of Tevel Adams, who co-organized the June 4 PEACE IN THE STREETS and Aug. 8 Your Vote Is Your Voice protests in Palatka calling for the relocation of the monument.

Palatka resident David Wade, a committee member appointed by County Commissioner Larry Harvey, said Robinson's opinions and input were "tainted."

"In my opinion, this group of 11 is being compromised by one of its own members being the mother of one of the leaders of the (Black Lives Matter) movement," Wade said. "And Ms. Robinson, who is (Adams') mother, is an active participant in that group."

Moderator Jim Troiano said neither he nor the committee had the power to remove a member.

Residents are allowed to attend the meetings in person at the Putnam County Government Complex, 2509 Crill Ave., Suite 100, in Palatka. The committee voted unanimously to accept comments made during the meeting and those emailed prior.

Sheila Beck, one of two members of the public who attended the meeting, told committee members although she has not been a lifelong county resident, she is active in county matters.

Beck was against the relocation of the Confederate monument and said the protest organizers in favor of removing of the statue are still children who were taught what to believe. She said the statue has stood for decades with no complaints before now.

"Now, all of a sudden, the Black community is offended by walking up the courthouse stairs," Beck said. "I'm sorry, y'all. Keep yourself out of trouble and you ain't got to walk past it."

Wade suggested several times the committee come up with three options Friday and present them to the board as soon as possible. Ultimately, nine other committee members decided to hear more options and resident opinions and research other options before reaching a decision.

Committee member Danny Burns left early and was not present for the remaining hour and 20 minutes of the meeting.

“ This is an extremely important position, our decision, that affects this county in ways that we may not even be considering. Ideas came up today that I had not personally thought of that is opening my mind,” said Putnam County Sheriff’s Office Col. Joe Wells, who is also a member of the committee. “I propose that we slow this down just a bit. Let’s not make any rash decisions here. But let’s do focus on wrapping this up.”

The committee will meet Thursday, but no time has been set. The members’ only job is to recommend three options to the Board of County Commissioners. The board will make the final decision where the statue will be moved, but there will be no relocation until private funds are secured to do so.

Residents who wish to comment at committee meetings can email BOCCmeetingcomments@putnam-fl.com if they do not want to attend in person. Masks are not required to be worn during the meeting but are available and encouraged.

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