

**From:** Mercer, Clark <clark.mercer@governor.virginia.gov>  
**Sent:** Saturday, June 19, 2021 12:17 PM  
**To:** Ebinger, Matthew J. - PDR  
**Cc:** Alexander Nyerges; Rita Davis  
**Subject:** Monument Avenue/ Monuments and pedestals, planning process

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Mr. Ebinger,

I hope all is well, and if you would permit me, I would like to share with you and your commission members some efforts at the state level re: monuments and pedestals, and our strong desire to coordinate and plan alongside you and your colleagues, and stakeholders across the board over the next year re: the future of Monument Avenue.

I have Alex Nyerges, the Director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Rita Davis, Counsel to Governor Northam, on this email as well. First and foremost, I applaud the City's leadership in having several of the Confederate monuments removed last year. As you know, the Lee statue is left, and its disposition is currently being considered before Virginia's Supreme Court. I am confident we will be able to move forward with its removal.

Governor Northam and our Administration plan to keep the pedestal on which General Lee and his horse, Traveller, sit in place until a planning process can be completed that considers this pedestal, and all of the others along the avenue, as part of a bigger discussion. In fact, this coming week, Governor Northam will announce that the time capsule that sits in this pedestal will be removed when General Lee and Traveller are taken down, and in its place will be put a new time capsule that is more reflective of Virginia and the United States than what sits in the pedestal now. Ultimately, should this pedestal be removed at the Lee Circle, the time capsule would be reinterred somewhere on that site.

Over the last year, having many discussions with various stakeholders, including City leadership, it was agreed that we needed to bring all stakeholders to the table in a sincere and thorough way to re envision Monument Avenue. Whether all the pedestals or some are kept or removed, and whatever might be eventually planned for Monument Avenue, it needed to be driven by residents, planning and art experts, and not decided by the Governor's office or just elected leadership. Alex and his team at VMFA agreed to convene this process, though in no way be the leader at the head of the table---- that is most certainly the City of Richmond and its residents.

Very strong arguments have been made as to why the pedestals should remain; they have artistic value in and of themselves, though also are important symbols that help us tell the story of what has happened in these spaces. Perhaps at the end of the planning process it will be decided that the pedestals should be removed, though once they are removed there is really very little

practical chance that they would be returned to the avenue. I would ask that the Commission please consider letting this planning process take place before making any decisions related to the disposition of these pedestals.

Counsel Davis is on this email and can answer any questions, though the state code section related to local monuments does not apply to the City of Richmond because its monuments being discussed were all installed before 1997. Even if the code section were to apply, we see no requirement that the pedestals have to be treated in the same way as the monuments that sit on top of them. The City did pass an ordinance last summer calling on a phased process to remove the statues, and then the pedestals and bases, but there is great discretion as to when this occurs. There is no time requirement in this ordinance, and I would think, should the planning process result in some or all pedestals remaining, that Council would easily be able to revisit the ordinance passed last summer and amend it.

Please reach out with any questions or to follow up and discuss. It is a very exciting time as we all work to reimagine Monument Avenue, and we are grateful for all you and your Commission members do.

Thanks,

Clark

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Clark Mercer  
Chief of Staff  
Governor Ralph Northam