



Agenda Report

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, February 9, 2021

TO: City Council

FROM: Parks & Community Services

SUBJECT: LOCATION OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BUST

STATEMENT OF ISSUES:

The City Council must determine the future location of the George Washington bust in the City Plaza, following significant community input advocating the bust be removed and significant community input advocating the bust remain.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

In accordance with feedback received from community members, it is recommended that the Council adopt a resolution directing staff to:

1. Keep the George Washington bust in its current location in the City Plaza
2. Add a bilingual plaque on the podium of the bust that describes a broad historical perspective about George Washington

DISCUSSION:

Background

On May 25, 1999, the Council adopted Resolution No. 151-99 (CM) (with a 6-0 vote) accepting \$100,000 from the Estate of Lloyd F. Alaga, to pay a sculptor to create a bust of George Washington as an original work of art, a pedestal for the bust and placing the bust in the City Plaza and use any excess funds to refurbish the historic fountain, also in the City Plaza. This donation represented five percent of the net residue of the Alaga Estate. During the same meeting, the Council also accepted approximately \$200,000 (10% of the net residue of the Estate) from the Alaga Estate to pay to acquire reference works of general interest. Mr. Lloyd F. Alaga passed away on June 7, 1997.

The Last Will and Testament of Lloyd F. Alaga reads, in part:

The remainder of my estate I bequeath and devise as follows:

Ten percent of its value to the Watsonville Public Library, which I have used much of my life, for the acquisition of solid reference works of general interest and use, to be inscribed as the "Gift of Lloyd F. Alaga.

Five percent of its value to the City of Watsonville, which in this testator's opinion suffers from a dearth of public statuary, for the purpose of acquiring a bust of George

Washington made by a sculptor of reputation in the style called representational or realistic, to be placed in the City Plaza on a plinth or block, if possible made of the characteristic granite from the Aromas Granite Rock Quarry, with a plaque or carved inscription reading: "George Washington, 1732-1799, Father of His Country" and the old saying "First In War, First In Peace, First In The Hearts Of His Countrymen", and a discreet inscription at the side or back that the monument is the "Gift of Lloyd F. Alaga".

In his will, Lloyd F. Alaga also stated, "I am unmarried, and have never married, and have no children or close living relatives. I am a resident of Watsonville, Santa Cruz County, California." Following the death of his brother in 1996, Mr. Alaga appointed local attorney P.W. (Bill) Bachan as the executor of his will.

Upon receiving the funds from the Alaga Estate, the City released a Request for Qualifications for the design and creation of a bust of George Washington. A selection committee chose Michelle Armitage of Armitage Designs in Santa Cruz as the finalist. The City entered into an agreement with Ms. Armitage in the amount of \$70,000 to create, as stated in her proposal, "a slightly larger than life size (32-36 inches high) bust of George Washington, rendered in bronze, and mounted on a rectangular pedestal (approx. 54 inches high), of concrete and granite; extracted from the 'Granite Rock Quarry' at Aromas." The bust was "cast using a technique called 'Lost Wax,' a process that dates back for centuries. The original sculpture is molded in clay. A mold is taken from the clay sculpture to cast a wax edition. Through the 'lost wax' process, the 'wax' (becomes) the finished bronze sculpture." All Ms. Armitage's work was done at her studio in the Statewide Industrial Park on Lee Road.

The project was completed in early 2001 and an unveiling ceremony was held in the Plaza on February 19, 2001, featuring the artist and members of the Alaga family.

The remainder of the funds that were gifted to the Parks Department we used to clean, reseal, paint and rewire the fountain on the East Beach side of the Plaza.

The Bust was installed after the City Plaza's inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places (1982) and has not been added as a feature of the Plaza's designation.

Recent Discussion

In July 2020, City staff were made aware that a petition had been created on the website change.org by a group known as Revolunas, calling for the removal of the "George Washington Statue from Watsonville Plaza."

A second petition on change.org was initiated by a community member, calling to "Save the George Washington Statue in our downtown park."

A third petition on go petition.com was initiated by a community member, titled "Save Watsonville George Washington Statue."

Revolunas hosted a sit in on July 17, 2020 in front of the George Washington bust that was attended by community members both in support of and against its removal. Another group

organized a sit in to save the bust on July 31, 2020. The Council, City Manager, City Clerk and Parks and Community Services Director have received many emails regarding this matter.

Staff has been in contact with a known descendent of Lloyd F. Alaga, who has requested the bust be moved to a safe location, should it be removed from the Plaza. The descendent is also attempting to contact other family members.

During its meeting on August 3, 2020, the Parks and Recreation Commission held a study session concerning the George Washington bust that was attended by over 190 people. During this study session, staff presented a report providing background information on the bust. Commissioners and members of the public then had the opportunity to ask questions and voice their opinions.

Following this meeting, staff solicited input from the groups that authored the two larger petitions regarding next steps. Staff then developed a survey to solicit broader community input to address several concerns expressed by community members, including that:

- Many of the opinions expressed through petitions and other correspondence were from non-residents
- Duplicate responses from individuals may be counted in the petitions and other correspondence
- There was not enough time for many community members to learn about the discussion and weigh in on it

The survey allowed staff to gather community input with greater ability to:

- Account for City residency
- Control for duplicate responses
- Gather broader community input from a widely advertised, neutral source. The survey link was advertised in the City's monthly newsletter, on social media, on the City's website, was emailed to the Parks and Community Services database of over 2,000 emails and was mentioned in an article and op-ed regarding this topic in the Register Pajaronian.

The survey tool was created using language from the petitions and doubled as an educational tool on the topic.

The survey was open from September 1-30, 2020. The respondents were asked:

- about their opinion on the placement of the bust
- how strongly they felt in their opinion of the bust remaining or being removed from the City Plaza
- about reasons for their feelings
- about actions they would support
- for their name and address (for verification of City residency)

Survey Results

A total of 1,231 survey responses were received. Using street addresses submitted by survey respondents, City Geographical Information System (GIS) staff determined that

498 (40%) responses were from City residents.

Survey respondents were asked their opinion on the placement of the bust and if they desired to see the bust remain in place, be removed or if they were indifferent. Regarding opinions on the placement of the bust, the survey yielded the following results:

	Residents	%	All	%
Remain	294	59%	733	59%
Remove	180	36%	427	35%
Indifferent	24	5%	71	6%
TOTALS	498	100%	1,231	100%

As demonstrated by the above figures, controlling for residency does not significantly change the percentage of respondents that wish the bust to remain in place, be removed or are indifferent.

Survey respondents were then asked “On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you feel that the bust should be removed from/remain in the City Plaza (1 being the least strong and 5 being the strongest)?” The average response from respondents who said they would like the bust to remain was 4.74. Likewise, the average response from respondents who said they would like the bust removed was also 4.74. Respondents felt equally strong in their opinions on the placement of the bust.

Respondents were then asked about reasons they felt the bust should remain in place or be removed and support for possible actions regarding the placement of the bust. Reasons listed in the survey were generated from language included in the petitions.

A summary of the survey results is attached to this report.

Community Generated Options

A virtual Town Hall meeting was held on October 20, 2020 and was attended by 94 individuals. The purpose of the meeting was “To explore constructive ideas/options for the George Washington Bust to present to the Parks and Recreation Commission that align with the spirit of the feedback received by Watsonville residents.” The intent of the meeting was to focus on the future, work together towards solutions and learn from each other.

During this meeting, survey results were shared and a discussion was held regarding possible actions and next steps, with the goal of generating options to be presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission for action.

Based on the results of the survey, the following options were presented to start the discussion:

1. Remain - Take no action. Keep the bust where it is and do nothing else.
2. Remain with Plaque - Keep the bust where it is and add a plaque that tells a broader history of GW

3. Relocate – Relocate the bust for display elsewhere (potentially City Hall, Library, PV Arts). Could also add a plaque.
4. Remove - Remove the bust and do not display anywhere (could be returned to the Alaga Family or kept by the City for safekeeping).

Individuals present during the meeting indicated support for each of these options, with more attendees supportive of the bust remaining with a plaque or relocating it. Some attendees suggested that more time and community outreach should be conducted prior to making a decision.

It has been suggested that should the bust be relocated, it should be to the Pajaro Valley Historical Association's Historic Center. Staff has discussed this with the Association's President and this option has been deemed not feasible, as it would compromise the site's designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

It has also been suggested that a second statue or bust representing a historical figure of significance be added to the City Plaza. This would require funds to support such action. The cost to procure and install the existing George Washington bust in today's dollars is estimated at over \$100,000.

During the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on November 2, 2020, staff presented the survey results and a summary of the Town Hall meeting. In accordance with feedback received from Watsonville residents through a community survey and further input collected during a Town Hall meeting, it was recommended that the Parks and Recreation Commission make a recommendation to the Council:

1. That the George Washington Bust remain in the City Plaza, and
2. That a bilingual plaque that outlines a broad historical perspective about George Washington be added to the bust.

Parks and Recreation Commission recommended (by a 4-2 vote) that the Council's policy decision be to:

1. Move the George Washington bust to an alternative location, and
2. Add a bilingual plaque that outlines a broad historical perspective about George Washington.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

05-Community Engagement & Well-Being – Discussion regarding the location of the George Washington bust has involved a significant amount of community engagement and input. In addition to the volume of letters, emails and phone calls received, hundreds of individuals have also signed petitions, completed the community survey and attended Parks and Recreation Commission and Town Hall meetings. Community members have also commented on how the bust positively and negatively affects their sense and feelings of inclusion, value and equity in the community.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The financial impact of adding a bilingual plaque that outlines a broad historical perspective about George Washington is estimated at approximately \$2,000 for consulting fees and fabrication. If the Council decides to relocate or remove the bust from the Plaza, there will also be costs associated with the removal and reinstallation that are unknown at this time.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

The Council could direct staff to take alternative action. Based on survey results and community input, options include:

1. Take no action and keep the bust where it is.
2. Move the bust to be displayed in another location. Could also add a plaque.
3. Remove the bust and do not display anywhere (could be returned to the Alaga Family or kept by the City for safekeeping).
4. Take no action at this time and determine what other information needs to be gathered before deciding on next steps.

The financial impact associated with alternative actions may be significant. Should additional funds be required to implement the Council's direction, staff will return to Council to request an appropriation, once costs are determined.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):

- 1) Summary of Community Survey Results
- 2) Correspondence to Parks & Recreation Commission

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