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PORTLAND SETS MONUMENT REVIEW PROCESS



The Thomas Jefferson statue in front of Jefferson High School in NE Portland was toppled the night of June 14, 2020.

City Council unanimously votes to create policy for questioning public monuments, now classified as separate from public art.

By Saundra Sorenson

Five statues toppled or damaged in 2020 remain in storage as the city of Portland decides their fate. Recognizing that not all public art has aged well, the City Council voted unanimously last week to establish a public monuments policy and review criteria regarding the nearly 170 outdoor sculptures owned by the city and county.

The policy was drafted by Commissioner Dan Ryan and his team.

“This policy is about creating a public process for Portlanders to be able to engage with the city when they have a complaint about a monument, or believe a monument should be removed,” Ryan said. “This policy does not decide which monuments should be returned or not. At its core this policy establishes a transparent and accessible platform for Portlanders to voice their concerns or opinions regarding city monuments.”

Darion Jones, senior policy director of arts and culture in Ryan’s office, presented a draft of the policy during the Feb. 28

city council meeting.

“In 2020, the city of Portland – like many other cities across the country – participated in a national conversation focused on the re-evaluation of historical monuments and declaring a call from the public for greater introspection about who and what is memorialized in public space,” Jones said.

Nationally, such conversation has focused largely on Confederate symbols. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported that in 2020, amid the George Floyd protests, 94 Confederate monuments were removed nationwide, although the movement was arguably amplified earlier in 2015 when activist and filmmaker Bree Newsome climbed a flagpole at the statehouse in Columbia, SC, to remove the Confederate flag that flew there.

The monuments that have been questioned locally are of historical figures many see as having driven or having profited from White supremacy. The toppled five include statues of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and Oregonian publisher Har-

vey Scott, who many denounce for his 40-year tenure of accepting and promoting racist language in the pages of the newspaper. Another statue, The Promised Land, depicts a family of three White settlers; it was damaged and put into storage.

Also in 2020, protesters took down a statue of Thomas Jefferson at his namesake high school, which has the highest percentage of Black students in Oregon.

“The events of 2020 only underscore the city’s need for a more structured approach to how we manage and respond to concerns about public monuments,” Ryan said.

Ryan explained the new policy changes city code to differentiate between public monuments and public

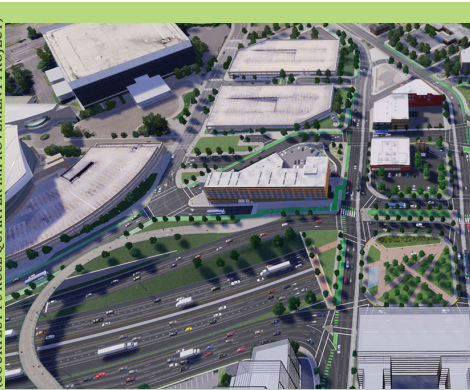


Clifford Walker, historian for the Humboldt Neighborhood Association, sits on the toppled Thomas Jefferson statue in front of Jefferson High School. “It was an honor to be invited to sit on the statue,” the Jefferson alum told The Skanner.

art. The policy also outlines criteria that makes a public monument eligible for review, including “sustained and significant adverse public reaction or reasonable large-scale community opposition.”

Finally, the policy creates a process for public complaint and formal review. A monument that meets some of the criteria would then be detailed in a report with recommendations the

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The funding will go toward the construction of a highway cover over a portion of I-5, reconnecting the Lower Albina neighborhood

Blumenauer, Wyden, Merkley Announce Nearly Half a Billion for Albina Vision

Infrastructure projects awarded federal funding

The Skanner News

On March 8 Congressman Earl Blumenauer, Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced the Department of Transportation is awarding \$450,000,000 in federal funding for the I-5 Rose Quarter improvement project. The funding will go toward the construction of a highway cover over a portion of I-5, reconnecting the Lower Albina neighborhood. In addition, the Department of Transportation is awarding \$38,394,000 to the Portland Bureau of Transportation for the redesign of N/NE Broadway and Weidler Streets in Lower Albina.

“For years, I’ve worked to build support among local leaders, governors, and most recently, the Secretary of Transportation in support of reconnecting and revitalizing Lower Albina.

“Lower Albina was the historic heart of Portland’s Black community before decades of racist and discriminatory policy tore apart and displaced the community. This funding is transformative not just for Portland but to as a national model to heal communities torn apart by destructive federal projects. We are showing how to do it right with this investment” said Blumenauer, the

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VP Harris Announces Landmark Childcare Reforms to Alleviate Financial Strain page 3