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To: City Commission

From: Peggy Merriss, City Manager

Date: September 16, 2017

Re: Multi-phase initiative for the Courthouse Square to recognize and acknowledge the African American experience leading up to and following the Civil War

The purpose of this memorandum is to recommend approval for a multi-phase initiative to recognize and acknowledge on the Courthouse Square the African American experience leading up to and following the Civil War and to authorize the City Manager to execute an agreement for services to immediately initiate Phase 1 and commit to starting Phase 2 in early 2018.

Multi-phase Initiative

Since 1908, the Confederate Memorial obelisk has been located on the Courthouse Square. Over the past month, the City Commission has been petitioned to act to remove, or to act to support the removal of the obelisk from its current public location. At this time, the City Commission does not have the authority to remove the obelisk because it belongs to DeKalb County and we are of the current opinion that Georgia Code § O.C.G.A. 50-3-1 (b)(1), prohibits the removal of the obelisk. However, we do not believe that additional displays that provide educational information are prohibited and recommend the following multi-phase initiative to recognize and acknowledge the African American experience.

Phase 1

The purpose of Phase 1 of the initiative is to begin immediately to provide a semi-permanent outdoor exhibit that reflects the story, conditions and experiences of African Americans in the south leading up to and following the Civil War. We would expect this exhibit to be installed for at least a three to four year period as Phase 2 is developed and implemented. There would be limited public comment in this phase. Local officials from the City of Decatur and DeKalb County, a designated local community steering committee and local experts and historians would be involved to inform the content development and exhibit design. The goal is to have the exhibit unveiled on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 15, 2018.

Parallel to these efforts, the Decatur Art Alliance will be rotating the Decatur Artway Sculptures on the Square. The sculptures that were placed in 2015 will be replaced with a new set of sculptures in October, 2017. They will remain in place for the next two years. One of the pieces that was selected on August 5, 2017 is "Sister" by artist Charlie Newton. A picture of the sculptures and the full artist statement will be provided on Monday evening at the City Commission meeting but in part the artist says, "Sister represents the unheard voices of the African-American community all over this nation. She is an angel and specter, a spirit and a shadow. She is both sculpture and drawing; she is quiet and yet screams silently, visually, to be seen." It will replace Scott Garrard's "Teapot 50" (also known as the blue teapot) currently located on the Square.

Phase 2

The purpose of Phase 2 is to define, determine, select and fundraise for a placement of a permanent piece that recognizes that the experience and history of African Americans in the south is unlike that of white people and memorializes that perspective.

During this phase there would be an organized and extensive facilitated community wide input process that included conversations and workshops to develop a recommended pro forma for an artistic representation for permanent placement on the Square.

There would then be a process developed to solicit from artists and designers proposals that would be responsive to the pro forma and an additional procedure to make the final selection.

It is expected that this phase would take nine to twelve months.

Phase 3

This phase would involve creating a fundraising committee to solicit funding to commission and install the selected piece. Opportunities for possible grant funding that could assist with project costs would be pursued.

It is hard to estimate the time period for this phase as it is very dependent on the robustness of the fundraising efforts. It could easily take 2-3 years (or more) from the beginning of fundraising efforts until the piece is installed and dedicated.

Proposal

A proposal was solicited from Lord Cultural Resources for consulting services for Phases 1 and 2. The City has used Lord Cultural Resources for multiple projects including development of the City's Cultural Arts Master Plan; community input and development, design and installation of the Beacon Community exhibits at the Beacon Municipal Complex; and, the community input and design selection process for the MARTA mural project over West Trinity Place. The lead on the project would be Joy Bailey Bryant who has been the lead with each of the three projects listed above. Their work has been outstanding and we think they have the background, experience and knowledge to facilitate the process and to begin Phase 1 immediately and provide a smooth transition to Phase 2. A copy of the proposal follows. The cost for both phases including content development, fabrication and installation of the Phase 1 exhibit, is very reasonable. It is recommended that funds from the General Fund balance be transferred to cover the cost.

Conclusion

The decision to remove or relocate the Confederate Memorial obelisk is not currently within the purview of the City Commission and while there appear to be efforts to have the Georgia General Assembly amend Georgia Code § O.C.G.A. 50-3-1 (b)(1) to allow local governments to make decisions about local monuments, that could be a long and challenging political process. In cooperation with DeKalb County officials, the local community and resident experts, the proposed multi-phased approach offers the chance move both quickly and in the long-term to provide an educational and contextual opportunity to recognize and acknowledge that there is a different African American perspective on events leading up to and following the Civil War.