7-29-20 issue

Citizens speak up at public hearing over Confederate monument

William Seidel

Smith Mountain Eagle

Many residents spoke up at a public hearing concerning a Confederate monument in front of the Franklin County courthouse in Rocky Mount at the Franklin County Board of Supervisors meeting July 21.

Both sides on the issue made their voices and opinions heard, including 10-year old Mariah Moore.

“I am 10 years old, and I will be 11 in two weeks,” Moore said. “I am older than the statue. It isn’t history, and it needs to be moved. I’m 10 years old, and like many people of your generation, I don’t agree with participation trophies. So, let’s move that big one from in front of our courthouse.”

A replica of the statue was rededicated at the site in 2010 after the one erected in 1910 was destroyed in 2007 from a vehicle accident.

There were more citizens who had the same opinion as Moore. One of them was Bridgette Craighead, who challenged the board to “vote to do the right thing for African-American citizens in this community” and promised she will not rest until the statue is removed from the front of the courthouse and Rocky Mount “steps into the future,” which features equal justice and opportunities for all its citizens, not just the majority.

“The Civil War was fought for states’ right to own slaves, and the Confederate statues were built years later to glorify white supremacy,” Craighead said. “Many people make themselves feel better about glorifying and admiring these statues by saying they stand for the pride and their heritage. But that does not change their true meaning.”

Henry Turnage was another citizen who voiced his opinion about moving the statue and told the board that it’s “in their hands.”

“It’s time to open Franklin County up,” Turnage said. “As soon as you hit that county line right there, you are smacked with racism. So, what a privilege it is to say we have good race relations.”

That comment appears to refer to Dr. Francis Amos’ remark that there have been “wonderful race relations” in Franklin County.

Amos was one of the citizens who voiced an opinion to have the statue stay in place. He also was one of the people who spoke at the dedication ceremony for the replica statue in 2010.

“To justify the removal of Confederate statues, it’s claimed they represent hate and an attempt defaults to white supremacy; this statue does not represent either,” Amos said. “It was erected solely for the purpose to memorialize in the memory of family members who served in the Confederacy. Yes, slavery, which we regret, was a prominent issue in the Civil War, but that issue was settled by the war.”

Another citizen who voiced his opinion to keep the confederate statues in front of the courthouse was the Rev. Jim Walls, who questioned if the statue comes down, will it stop there or continue.

“I think the statue needs to stay,” Walls said. “In this country we have freedoms. Not all our history is glorious; we have spots and blemishes on history, and that’s to be acknowledged. However, that doesn’t mean that every vestige of our history should be done away with.”

In a 6-1 vote, the Franklin County Board of Supervisors approved to have the issue of the confederate monument, which is located at the courthouse, to be settled on a referendum.

The only one who opposed the referendum vote was Blackwater District Supervisor Ronald Mitchell, who says he doesn’t want the statue to be moved but to have good dialogue.

“Statue stays right where it’s at; I want to make sure I am clear on that, but I’ve heard everyone that has spoken tonight; their voices deserve to be heard on what we can do for equality,” Mitchell said. “A referendum does not give us equality in Franklin County.”

Mike Carter of the Rocky Mount District believes the referendum is the right move.

“I just think the referendum is a good way to hear the voice of all the citizens of Franklin County,” he said.

The board will still have the final decision even after the referendum. The referendum vote will take part on this coming Election Day in November. The question, which will be a simple yes or no answer, will ask whether or not “to relocate the monument from the county courthouse property to a location of appropriate historical significance.”

11-25-20 issue

FCBOS votes to keep confederate statue, met with backlash

William Seidel

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The Franklin County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted Tuesday, Nov. 17, to keep the confederate statue on the front yard of the Franklin County Courthouse after the public voted to keep it there.

A referendum asking if the statue should remain or be moved was voted on by the citizens of Franklin County earlier in the month, with 70 percent voting to not move it. However, the final decision would come from the board members.

The board members followed with what the public voted for, but there were some talks in the meeting that they can’t forget about the 30 percent who voted for the statue to be removed.

There was discussion on why some board members feel it’s important to keep the statue for the sake of preserving history.

Union Hall representative Tommy Cundiff said, “With the generations coming forward, if we destroy all of our history, then how are they going to know anything about this country?”

Rocky Mount District representative Mike Carter said he believes the referendum helped the board hear the will of the people in the county.

“By putting it on the referendum — America is a democracy, everyone has a voice, each one of us had a voice to vote,” Carter said. “Personally, as an elected official, I’m elected to do the duties of the voters. And at 2-1 odds, there’s winners and there’s losers, as Mr. Trump, I think, is finding out. I’m elected to do what my constituents want, and that’s the way America works.”

The decision by the board was met with lots of backlash from the public, mainly from the same citizens who have voiced their opinions on the controversial statue.

Henry Turnage, an avid speaker at the board of supervisors meetings the past few months, again showed up to speak.

“I come to you guys with a moral issue. I know when I walk through that door, if I place a oral issue in front of anybody, and you have to out me on a referendum, that says something about you,” he said. “The difference between me and you, when my children come back and watch these videos, my kids are actually going to be proud of me.”

Kimberly Johnson also voiced her displeasure.

“I am so angry, I have been here talking with you all for how long now? And I find out today that you voted 7 to 0? To keep that statue there?” she said. “You’re the leaders of this community. You’re behavior is modeling. You’re modeling behavior for people in this community.”

The explosive comments didn’t stop there for the board members.

“Good evening. After what I saw today — good evening, Confederates,” said Glenna Moore.

“People of color should not have to walk by these ugly cement statues that remind them of racist symbols,” said Bernadette Lark. “You know, the people in the communities all over Virginia have spoken; Virginia turned blue. Thank God Almighty there’s a wave of change that’s coming through, and you won’t be able to stop it. So you need to stop with your wicked ways, take down the racist symbols, and get your souls right. You need to be delivered. One day, we will be free from your bloodshed, wicked, evil hands. You’re sick, like you don’t hear the people. All of us matter, and until then, you actually don’t matter. You will be voted out, or change will come with or without you. You should be delivered.”

Turnage assured the board that one day, the statue will be removed from the courthouse.

“That statue is going to come down one day, and this county is going to be better for it,” he said.

12-2-20 issue

Bedford County Board of Supervisors vote against adding “No Shutdown Resolution” to agenda

William Seidel

Smith Mountain Eagle

The Bedford County Board of Supervisors voted at the Monday, Nov. 23, meeting to not add the “No Shutdown Resolution” to the agenda.

Dozens of citizens attended the meeting despite Gov. Ralph Northam’s restrictions on gatherings and advocated for the resolution provided by Virginia Constitutional Conservatives.

Bedford County was one of multiple counties in Southern Virginia that reportedly were considering the resolution in response to Northam’s recent executive order limited indoor and outdoor gatherings to 25 people.

District 6 representative Bob Davis asked chairman John Sharp to amend the current agenda and consider the resolution that would “nullify Governor Ralph Northam’s unconstitutional and illegal decree, which violates the constitutionally protected God given rights of the citizens of Bedford County to assemble peacefully.”

Sharp noted that in order to amend the agenda on the day of the meeting, it has to be unanimous. Multiple members voted against it though, so the motion was ultimately shot down.

The resolution would have required the sheriff to arrest and detain state agents or officials who try to enforce Northam’s order and require the Commonwealth’s attorney not to prosecute those who gather, in which failure to do so would result in county funding being removed, according to the resolution.

Sharp addressed and apologized to the crowd before the citizen comment period, stating that they were misled, and the resolution was never on the agenda as some originally thought.

“I understand you’re all patriots and you want to see us do something because you’re sick and tired of Northam trying to shove stuff down our throat,” Sharp said. “Well I can assure you that this board stands with you right there, because we are tired of it, too.”

Regardless, some citizens of the community still decided to give their input during the comment period.

“Fear is continually being used to threaten our gun rights and today, fear is being used to threaten your ability to peacefully assemble, infringing our First Amendment rights and costing Virginians their livelihoods,” said Isaiah Knight.

Jared Seltzer said, “It’s an embarrassment that this state has government officials that defy the law of the land of our constitutional republic. Chief Justice Marshall Marbury vs. Madison said that all laws which are repugnant to the Constitution are null and void. Distinguished council members, each of you have sworn allegiance to upholding the Constitution of the United States. Therefore, it is your duty and your obligation, not only to represent the will of us your constituent Americans, but to pass only legislation that is in agreement with the Constitution and slash any legislation in defiance of it.”

“The reality of it is, there should have been legislation pushed forward from every single county in this state months ago in regard to his mandates,” said Kurt Santini. “That’s why we’re here tonight, because it hasn’t been done yet. We elected you to represent us. We elected you to protect our rights, protect our families, protect our freedoms.”

District 5 representative Tommy Scott said during the board comments that the board does need to work on a resolution for the First Amendment. He also said he will defend the Constitution, but there are ways to do things and do them right.