



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 2, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Recommendation to Rename Portions of U.S. Route 1 in the City of Alexandria.

ISSUE: Consideration of a recommendation to rename portions of U.S. Route 1 in the City of Alexandria.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council take the following actions related to renaming portions of U.S. Route 1 in the City of Alexandria:

1. Receive the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Renaming Jefferson Davis Highway via the City Manager;
2. Docket the recommendation for Public Hearing on June 23, 2018;
3. Adopt the name “Richmond Highway” for the portion of U.S. Route 1 in the City of Alexandria currently named “Jefferson Davis Highway,” effective January 1, 2019.

BACKGROUND: U.S. Route 1 is named Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington County and in the Potomac Yard area of Alexandria. The road is named Patrick Street and Henry Street in Old Town, and Richmond Highway in Fairfax County. U.S. Route 1 in Virginia changes names at least 23 times between at least 19 different names as it winds through 18 localities between Arlington County and Mecklenburg County. Only four stretches of the road are named Jefferson Davis Highway.

On September 29, 2015, Alexandria City Council unanimously established an Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Confederate Memorials and Street Names. One of the functions of that body was to “develop recommendations on actions, if any, that it believes City Council should consider with respect to ... the name of Jefferson Davis Highway in the City of Alexandria.” On August 18, 2016, the body submitted its final report to City Council and included the recommendation that “the name of Jefferson Davis Highway in the City of Alexandria should

be changed.” For further background on this recommendation, see www.alexandriava.gov/Confederate <<http://www.alexandriava.gov/Confederate>>.

City Council received the report at its meeting on September 13, 2016, and considered the report as part of its public hearing meeting on September 17, 2016. After receiving public comment, City Council voted unanimously to direct the City Manager to begin the process of renaming Jefferson Davis Highway in Alexandria by creating a robust community engagement process that may include Arlington County.

On May 19, 2017, the City Manager announced the appointment of an Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Renaming Jefferson Davis Highway, to solicit public feedback and consider potential new names for a portion of U.S. Route 1. The members of the Advisory Group were Laurie MacNamara (Chair, Alexandria), Lynwood Campbell (Alexandria), Gerry Laporte (Arlington) and Elmer Lowe, Sr. (Arlington). While the Arlington County Board had not formally considered a name change, Arlington representatives were selected to provide input on potential new names for the continuous stretch of road in both localities.

The Advisory Group held its first meeting on June 15, 2017, which was focused solely on determining methods for public input. The Advisory Group agreed to launch an online survey and schedule two public hearings before meeting to discuss a recommendation. Since City Council had already voted to begin the renaming process, the Advisory Group did not consider whether the name should be changed.

On August 10, 2017, the Advisory Group launched an online survey, which was open through September 15, 2017. More than 1,000 different suggestions were received that fell within the scope of City Council's existing guidance on inclusiveness and the decision to rename Jefferson Davis Highway, and were submitted by respondents in Alexandria, Arlington, or Fairfax. The following names, listed in alphabetical order, were each suggested by at least 100 of these respondents:

- Abraham Lincoln
- Alexandria-Arlington
- Barack Obama
- Heather Heyer
- Mildred and Richard Loving
- Patrick Henry
- Richmond
- U.S. Route 1

The survey was not a vote, and the Advisory Group's consideration was not limited to these suggestions.

On August 17, 2017, the Arlington County Board Chair issued a public statement indicating that, unlike the City Alexandria, Arlington County did not have the authority to rename primary highways. The statement indicated that Arlington would seek authority from the General Assembly to rename Jefferson Davis Highway, and that the County “expect[s] that the name Alexandria selects will be suitable for our section of Jefferson Davis Highway as well.” (On January 31, 2018, the Senate Transportation Committee defeated the bill Arlington County requested [SB 185] to provide all localities with the general authority to rename primary highways named after 1965.)

The Advisory Group held a public hearing on September 25, 2017, for those who wished to provide feedback in person. Four speakers provided five additional suggestions.

DISCUSSION: The Advisory Group held its final meeting on October 16, 2017. After reviewing the public

input, each of the four members stated that “Richmond Highway” was his or her preferred name. The members pointed out that U.S. Route 1 is already named “Richmond Highway” in Fairfax County, and that the name would have historic and current significance without inherent controversy.

The members agreed that the street should not be named for an individual person, since public sentiment about any individual may change over time. The members also expressed specific concern about Patrick Henry, commenting that it would not be within the spirit of the name change to replace the name of one slaveholder with another. The Advisory Group did not suggest changing the name of Patrick Street or Henry Street on which Route 1 crosses Alexandria.

The members voted unanimously to recommend “Richmond Highway,” contingent on vetting the selection for any technical issues.

In response to the members’ desire to avoid confusion with other street names or any other technical issues, Alexandria and Arlington staff reviewed the recommended “Richmond Highway” name and concluded the name change is acceptable. Some staff had raised concerns that streets should have different names in different localities, to make clearer the locality from which a call for service is received. This ideal is not met by the current naming convention in Arlington and Alexandria, so using the same name in Alexandria, Fairfax County and potentially Arlington is not expected to be a significant change with regard to public safety. Using the same Richmond Highway name for contiguous stretches of road would be more understandable to motorists in terms of navigation and wayfinding. This is especially important in this instance as Jefferson Davis Highway is connected to two heavily traveled Interstate highways (I-66 and I-395).

The recommendation before City Council is to hold a public hearing on the name change on June 23, 2018, and adopt the change from Jefferson Davis Highway to Richmond Highway effective January 1, 2019. This will provide more than a month for residents and businesses to be notified of the public hearing and more than six months to make the necessary preparations for the change.

FISCAL IMPACT: Jefferson Davis Highway in Alexandria is currently labelled with 10 basic street signs at, one large street sign, and nine illuminated street signs. Replacing the same types of signs with a new name would cost \$27,150. Staff have not identified any other direct costs to the City involved with changing street names. Updates to applicable maps, databases, and other public records will be made as they are encountered, with nominal staff time involved.

A change in street name will primarily impact residents and businesses on Jefferson Davis Highway, who will likely need to replace stationery and marketing materials, update vendors with new contact information, and in some cases, replace signage. Staff has confirmed with the Clerk of Circuit Court that because deeds use legal descriptions to identify properties, it is not necessary for owners to update their deeds when street addresses change. Most physical address signage includes only the street number, which the recommendation does not suggest changing.

ATTACHMENT: Map of U.S. Route 1

STAFF:

Craig T. Fifer, Director, Communications and Public Information

