



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 6, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration and endorsement of the planning process for Alexandria's participation in the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI).

ISSUE: As part of a new, nationally-acclaimed memorial, the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, has created steel pillar monuments to mark each of the more than 800 cities and counties in which 4,743 reported racial terror lynchings took place between 1882 and 1968. Alexandria's pillar is engraved with the names of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thompson, who were murdered in the late 1890s and lynched on lamp posts in Old Town. The Equal Justice Initiative has invited jurisdictions to claim their monuments.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Endorse the Equal Justice Initiative engagement process as outlined in this memorandum;
- (2) Request that the City Manager seek recommendations from the proposed ad hoc committee and then provide a recommendation to City Council for the placement of Alexandria's Equal Justice Initiative pillar and markers; and
- (3) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents that may be required as part of the Equal Justice Initiative process.

BACKGROUND: The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) is a private, nonprofit organization that challenges poverty and racial injustice, advocates for equal treatment in the criminal justice system, and creates hope for marginalized communities. EJI opened [The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration](https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum) <<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>> and [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial) <<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>> in Montgomery, Alabama in 2018.

The Equal Justice Initiative published [Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror](https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/) <<https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>> in 2015, documenting thousands of racial terror lynchings in twelve states. Additional research documented lynchings in states outside the Deep South is ongoing. EJI is "working to memorialize this history by visiting hundreds of lynching sites, collecting soil, and erecting public markers, to reshape the cultural landscape with monuments and memorials that more truthfully and accurately reflect our history."

The EJI Community Remembrance Project

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice includes over 800 steel monuments, or pillars, one for each county or independent City in the United States where a racial terror lynching took place, with the names of the lynching victims engraved on the pillars. A field of identical monuments is in a park adjacent to the memorial. EJI's [Community Remembrance Project <https://eji.org/community-remembrance-project>](https://eji.org/community-remembrance-project) has invited counties and independent cities across the country to eventually claim their monuments and install them in the jurisdictions where the lynchings took place.

Alexandria Lynchings

Between 1882 and 1968, 100 Virginians, including at least 11 in Northern Virginia, were lynched. These lynchings were among 4,743 reported nationwide during the same period.

In Alexandria, there is documentation for the lynching of two individuals:

Joseph McCoy: April 23, 1897, lynched on a lamp post at Lee and Cameron Streets

Benjamin Thompson: August 8, 1899, lynched on a lamp post at Fairfax Street near King Street

EJI is working with individual communities to create awareness of EJI and active participation in the reconciliation process. We hope that Alexandria will be one of the first communities to claim and install their lynching pillar.

DISCUSSION:

Proposed EJI Engagement Process for Alexandria:

- An ad hoc planning committee would be established by the City Manager and staffed by the Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Director of the Alexandria Black History Museum.

Composition: Members of the Alexandria faith community along with representatives from the Human Rights Commission, NAACP, Northern Virginia Urban League, Society for the Preservation of Black History, Alexandria City Public Schools, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, and Alexandria Public Library.

Action items:

1. Seek public input, and then provide a formal recommendation to the City Manager on location of the Alexandria Pillar.
 2. Provide support and advice for the development plans and programs as required by EJI to claim the Alexandria Pillar.
- Maintain a dedicated web page with information on the initiative and a way to sign up to be a part of the community process.
 - Hold a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss the project and gather community input and build community support.
 - Develop and hold a series of public programs related to EJI.
 - Research descendants of Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.
 - Hold a public ceremony to collect soil from near the location of the two lynchings as part of the EJI Community Remembrance Soil Collections program.
 - Hold a marker dedication at the site of the lynchings.
 - Plan and implement a public pilgrimage to the *Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration* and *National Memorial for Peace and Justice* in Montgomery, Alabama to claim the pillar and donate the collected soil.
 - Hold a public ceremony in Alexandria to install the pillar.

FISCAL IMPACT: Funds (\$20,000) are included in the FY 2020 Proposed Capital Improvement Program to acquire and install Alexandria's pillar and interpretive markers.

ATTACHMENT: Presentation.

STAFF:

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Gretchen M. Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria