

**IDEA Meeting-April 8, 2021**

All participants present via Zoom Webinar

IDEA Committee Leaders: Dr. Lisa White, Courtnee Carrigan, Mayor Spalding, Council Member Brisk

IDEA City Representatives: Vida Farwana, LaVerne Fudge-Williamson, Ofra Eliav Greenshtein, Mohit Gupta, Abe Jacob, Shohba Painter, Anita Patel, Tiana Samuels

IDEA Stakeholder Representatives: Dr. Nwando Olayiwola, Jennie Wilson, Renee Shumate, Kimberly Lee Minor, Benjamin Reid, Ben Collins,

Public: Council Member Matt Shull, Evan Mitelman, Karina Sammons

City Staff: Administrative Services Director Adrienne Joly, Planner Chris Christian, Human Resource Officer Lindsay Rasey, Clerk of Council Jennifer Mason

**Meeting was called to order at 4:03 P.M.**

After Mayor Spalding provided a brief introduction, roll call was conducted. He then discussed how the concerns about the street signs have been discussed among community members. A person from the community initially brought it to their attention. And, after some research they were surprised to learn that the street sign had been named after a plantation in Virginia. The city did some research on their own to determine how widespread the issue was. He requested that the IDEA committee come back with some recommendations that he could provide to the council members regarding how to address it. He hoped to make some progress because members of the community would like to hear of action plan.

Adrienne Joly provided the group with an update. Originally, the research into the New Albany street signs started in February. At that time they were looking at 315 street names. Most of the research was conducted by Chris Christian and an intern. They were able to narrow the search to 258 unique street names within the city. The research started with an internet search. Of the 258 names, there were 77 with a direct connection to a plantation which was surprising. We decided to categorize the street names into red, yellow, and green. Red with having good evidence and reliable documentation that the name was tied to a plantation, green with little information about ties to plantations, and yellow was somewhat in between. Of the 77 names, 32 were in the red category, 37 were in the yellow, and there were 8 in the green category. If we just focus on the red and the red and the yellow, those streets represent 27% of the city. There are 751 homes in those two categories. Going back to the red category, 12 of the street names are in the Planter’s Grove neighborhood. And, the name Planter’s Grove is a reference to the plantations along the James River in Virginia. There are 112 homes that are located on the streets in Planter’s Grove, and every street in the neighborhood has a connection to the plantations. Others may not be as clear cut, they may also be referencing places located in England. Mayor Spalding noted how helpful it was to have this information leading into the discussion.

Marlene Brisk stated that the ask of the both she and the mayor was that them with what the city can do that will be meaningful to address the issue. We would like to walk away with 2 or three ideas that would educate the community and communicate about what this means. What can we learn from it. We would love to have your guidance.

Courtnee added by asking questions around if everyone was clear about what was being asked. We want to use your brilliance to start to think through some of these community issues. How do we address them in an inclusive and equitable way? They have done the work to investigate. Now the request is recommendations.

Mo asked where else has the issue been discussed. The mayor answered by saying they first learned of through a social media exchange. Ben noted that he saw that it was picked up by Columbus Business First. Kim asked were there recommendations based on the categories or are the categories there to give points of reference. Adrienne answered by saying that these were just points of reference. During the research they found that Hollywood Florida has been dealing with this issue for many years because of streets that were named after confederate officials. New Orleans commissioned a street renaming committee. There may be hundreds of names that are connected to plantations there. Courtnee added that Phoenix had a street that was named after Robert E Lee. Their research found that renaming would effect 150 properties. The city reimbursed them and she can send the article to members of the IDEA committee if they are interested. In Sydney Australia, they created a task force that came up with a campaign. Tiana asked if the builder or who would be the responsible parties in particularly the Planter’s Grove community. Adrienne confirmed that the developers usually name the streets. Marlene did not want to give recommendations but provided options based on things she has heard. She said maybe we need a historical marker that talks about this history and educates the community around the context of how the street signs came about. Maybe we need to change the name of the Planter’s Grove neighborhood. One article she found was about Hilton Head. They voted to keep the name plantation in their name.

The general consensus was to focus on the Planter’s Grove neighborhood, but to also acknowledge that from a historical context there are other streets in which their names derived from plantations.

Laverne- Create and an experience that does not necessarily have to be within the Planter’s Grove neighborhood. There is a walking path where markers could be created to educate the community. They could use their cell phones to scan the marker and receive educational information. You could also build marble markers that provide information about multicultural residents who made important contributions, and educate the community about their heritage. (Adrienne- this idea reminds her of the freedom trail in Boston) If you change the street names it’s almost like you are sweeping it under the rug. It’s more important to keep an open dialogue in a progressive way. I wouldn’t even change Planter’s Grove’s name for that reason. It’s a part of the bigger picture that we are trying to present. Educating the community that this is not the way that we want New Albany to be portrayed. We are going to continue to think forward and progressively on this issue.

Kim-I think this is a great idea. I wouldn’t want it to be in reaction to what we found regarding the street signs. Inclusion is something that we should be committed to in general. I would like to see a marker that draws attention to the heritage and what it means to society. Why was it used to name the street signs? What does the plantation mean to American history? One of our pillars is dedication to lifelong learning. Associate it with the dedication of that pillar during a town hall so that people understand why we are bring it up and calling it to their attention. I wouldn’t recommend changing the names; they exist. We could change Planter’s Grove’s name. What are the naming policies. Changing the street names would not be a good recommendation because then the residents are inconvenienced because of the expense. But when you think about the name Planter’s Grove and 1619, James River, and what it symbolizes, that is the most trouble some part because it is where slavery started.

Mo-I agree with Kim. The naming of the neighborhood matters a lot. If I was to have my way with this I think that changing the street signs would be a sign of progressive community action when done in the right context. But just changing it wouldn’t be enough. We would need to show that the city is not just being reactive, I think adding to what Laverne says having something experiential would be meaningful. Find local heroes or people even within the Columbus community to recognize as shepherds of the diversity.

Jennie-I agree with Kim. There’s the expense, but it also becomes a slippery slope because you could probably find fault with other street names. We need to acknowledge that we as a city do have names that are from plantations. We should address and educate and create markers of some sort. We should acknowledge that in hindsight we should not have named the streets after the plantations. It shouldn’t have been done, but you can’t rewrite history. Move forward in a positive way where you celebrate the different traditions and cultures. Let’s involve some of our high school students in the effort. They are so passionate and we want everyone to be included so that they feel like their voices are heard. We are focusing on Planter’s Grove, but I think it has to come from a bigger context. The specificity is there because of Planter’s Grove, but the focus will be to bring attention to a larger issue and to educate. There are lots of different reasons for why street names are named what they are. We want to have historical context.

Abe-Use the research to understand why this happened and being 100% sure that this is what the street names where called. This is why I appreciate the groups being broken down to the red, yellow, and green. But is there more to the story. Some street names are clear as day, but it gets more ambiguous in the other categories. We shouldn’t change the street names unless we are 100% sure that there is a history of plantations behind the naming of the street.

Benjamin Reid-I think the Planter’s Grove neighborhood is the most significant. History is important because we can’t erase that part of our story. There’s a difference between acknowledging history and giving it honorary status and being nostalgic of that time. I think as a community we can be very clear that we are not going to uplift parts of our past. I probably don’t agree that we should change those names, but we should think about what are our next opportunities for development. We have communities all over Franklin county that we did not keep the history of, that we ran our highways through and that we erased. New Albany was not part of that at that time because it was an agricultural farm community. Perhaps there are ways that we can look at history as a way to tell a story. (Adrienne responds-There was one street in the Everington neighborhood. It’s a newer neighborhood that has a street named after Mr. Hanby who ran a stop on the underground railroad. I think there is more context to that story in Ohio than there is to James River or the plantations. To me the story is how did these street names come to be. It’s because the creators all had similar backgrounds and perspectives. Because they were not diverse, they were able to ignore every other aspect that goes along with naming the streets after plantations. That’s why you need different perspectives when you are making decisions. It seems to me that we should name things after abolitionists in Ohio.) This project has the potential to be part of the larger goals of the IDEA committee, by taking this community concern and creating education around it.

Anita-I don’t think that the people who created the neighborhoods were thinking who cares if these are plantations. But the younger generations are much more woke about these issues. People are much more likely to do research before randomly picking names. I agree that we shouldn’t change it as a reactionary response. Everyone has lovely sentiments of how to memorialize it. Many of my white colleagues would not have thought about it, is that their fault? We may think who in their right mind would think Planter’s Grove, well they weren’t thinking and that’s the point. People didn’t go out and seek these names. I’ve lived on the Dean Farm and I knew it was their land. I never thought to look up information to find out if it was a plantation. I’m going through this with my parents you have to change all kinds of documents when you change addresses. Then you may have to change your address but then your neighbor who is on a different street doesn’t have to. I think it would cause major chaos. This could be an assignment or a senior seminar for the high school students as a part of their history class. We could also do a memorial where we talk about the significance and acknowledge how this took place.

Renee-I’m thinking about what’s going on in the world and you’ve got people who are calling things cancel culture and they are using the word “woke” with racist undertones to it. I’m pretty sure that New Albany would not want people to be in an uproar. They would think we are trying to change the name and “cancelling” New Albany. Because that is what you would get. It would blow up and be in the news so I do like the idea of not changing the street names. It would be beneficial to recognize that this did happen. We recognize that it’s not going to happen again. You can’t change everybody’s street because I would be very upset if I was living somewhere 20 years and you change the name of my street.

Ofra-I have to admit in the beginning I thought that we should change the names, but now I have to agree that not changing the names would be the right thing to do. I think we have to acknowledge it and speak about it very openly. Just speak the truth. Put a stone with some history below the street names. Acknowledge it and then reverse it and use it for education for future generations. People come to New Albany from all over the world so it would be important for education.

Adrienne-Historical museums of plantations if you look at their websites are hopefully doing a better job of telling the whole story. (Kim-so-so, I’ve been on some of those tours). We could do a good educational campaign if we have enough information about those specific names. We could also make it personal by talking about the enslaved people who were there. (Kim responds again-I think that’s an awesome idea. I’m involved in the school and there is a divide between the minority children don’t feel like they are a part of the history. When they want to talk about their heritage, it’s not talked about which becomes an issue. This is an opportunity to be a part of something in New Albany that is educational and inclusive. It’s not finger pointing, it’s positive and it’s an opportunity to bring everyone together. Dr. Hussan Jefferies from Ohio State is professor of African American history and is working with the New Albany-Plain School District. He may be willing to help us kick it off. Maybe this could be a part of Peace Week). I like Kimberly’s idea of a town hall. We could do a broader campaign, by introducing the ideas and thoughts and historical context to the residents.

**Breakout De-Brief Lisa’s Group**

Courtnee invited the spokespersons to speak on behalf of each group to talk what came out of the discussions. We want to hear your ideas and recommendations:

Kim-We had a robust and thoughtful conversation. Everyone was a part of the conversation. What we came up with was leaning in on the learning opportunity in a positive and empathetic way. We decided to think about creating a legacy of learning for the community and future members of the community. In the essence of learning, creating some sort of town hall where we would communicate and introduce the IDEA committee and talk about our purpose and give and overview of what we have done so far. People will understand this is not a knee jerk reaction; this is within the scope of what the IDEA committee would be working on. We are working on initiatives that will enhance the quality of life for New Albany residents and neighbors in the community. The next step under that umbrella would be creating a learning opportunity. We didn’t get into the detail of what that would be yet. The ideas were possibly partnering with the library system, Dr. Hussan Jeffries from OSU, the school district, and the high school students. We would make it an outreach project or part of senior seminar. Making it a learning experience. Not to change the names of the streets and to acknowledge that the streets with plantation names are spread out throughout New Albany. But to put the focus on Planter’s Grove. We agreed that we did not want the street names to be changed, but there is an opportunity to change Planter’s Grove. Because Planter’s Grove is representative of plantations associated with James River back in 1619 which is the formation of slavery in the United States. So, we could change the name and create a marker which educates about the historical significance of the street names for educational purposes.

Chris-The first thing we talked about was the changing of the street names and the impact that would have on the residents. The idea of creating historical markers was also brought up in our group. We focused most on the importance of communication, not only to the residents on those streets but also the community as a whole. Who gets a say as to whether the names actually do get changed. Tiana-We used a lot of us, we, together verbiage to discuss how we can absorb the impact of any changes we make as a community. If it is the Planter’s Grove community that is feeling the focus that they are not the only ones impacted. There was a counter to the concept of historical recognition. I’ll admit it was me. Nothing historical took place in that area which could be used as an excuse to keep that name and amplify recognition of something horrible. Just another perspective to throw in the pot. But, we recognized that we would all be affected as a community, and whatever we do is a statement itself not just the articles that will be written. We need to be prepared for whatever perception there will be. To quote Lindsay it will also impact the future of the community. It’s not just about us in our present state.

Kim-I just want to add to that. We did talk about what’s next. What’s next is as we build out future communities we have the opportunity to ensure that this doesn’t happen again. Ohio has a history of abolitionists. We could be doing more with that history.

Jennie-We did talk a lot about acknowledgement, communication, and education. It’s a journey right? It’s a good idea to introduce the IDEA committee to the larger community because otherwise it does just look like a complaint. There’s just a broader thing that’s happening in our world today. The journey is much overdue, but it’s a good journey. We don’t need to apologize for being on that journey. We may not have it all figured out as to what’s next, but there is a next. We can open it up to the community to give their thoughts and ideas. There have been missteps along the way that weren’t intentional. But they were made all the same.

Abe-I was just thinking from an outreach standpoint, while we all have a responsibility to engage with our neighbors. There is an opportunity within the city’s website under the IDEA Board they have an avenue to put their thoughts on the topic.

Courtnee-We need to communicate and send a letter that outlined everything that we learned from Adrienne and Chris’s presentation and where we are now. And then, offer some ideas and recommendations from our two groups right now. Then using your other vehicles of communication to inform the broader community and allow them to offer their thoughts. There’s some synergy around communicating and making this open and inclusive. Is there a few of you that once we put that list together, who would raise their hand and say I don’t mind being a part of that subgroup? I asking a subset of you to take all this good stuff and narrow it down.

Ben-Are these ideas that would go to council? (Courtnee-Yes)

Mayor Spalding-Courtnee, I think that’s perfect. Let this group digest what we have talked about and then come up with concrete recommendations to council. It’s all our obligations to engage the community. I’ve talked to many people on this issue and it runs the gamut of all the things we have talked about today. It’s one of those things that as soon as you hear the story it’s like how did that happen? More importantly, how do we fix it going forward. Once we have presented this to council we can decide what to do next if we need more engagement with the community.

Tiana-Should we add a risk benefit analysis to the recommendations when the subgroup meets? (Courtnee-That’s not a bad idea)

Courtnee-Fredrick Douglas has a famous quote, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” This is very much our work. It’s so nice to have these conversations. But at some point the rubber meets the road and we have work to do. I applaud you for what you did today because this work is hard.

**In the News**

Adrienne-The next Chamber of Commerce training session is next Thursday on April 15th. If you are interested in attending that you can register on the website. I want to give a plug for the conversation that the library led on the color of law. It was fantastic! If you would like the link email me it’s worth everyone listening to. The New Albany food pantry has a program that offers services to immigrants to get connected. Next month we will get back into the working group. More work on brainstorming.

**Meeting was adjourned at 5:35 P.M.**