

## Checklist for the Removal of Monuments From Their Original Location

**Background:** The 2020 General Assembly Session passed [HB1537](#) that “provides that a locality may remove, relocate, contextualize, or cover any monument or memorial for war veterans on the locality's public property, not including a monument or memorial located in a publicly owned cemetery, regardless of when the monument or memorial was erected.” The legislation directs the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) to create regulations about adding **contextualization**. However, the legislation **does not** provide or direct DHR to prepare guidance for localities about considerations of **removing** a monument safely or the implications of removal on local, state, and federal designations.

An interracial working group of Virginia preservation practitioners and scholars with varied backgrounds in history museums, university teaching, community and historic site consulting, and public service met virtually to discuss the preservation/conservation issues related to monument removal. The group included emerging thought and practice leaders, as well as preservation professionals with research and practice experience in Virginia.

*The group agreed that decisions to remove, contextualize, or take other steps to reveal the histories of monuments designed and installed during the Jim Crow and the mid-century Civil Rights Era in twentieth-century Virginia could be an important step in community truth, reconciliation, and healing.*

The following checklist is offered to provide guidance to localities considering removal of war monuments and memorials. Not all items will be applicable to a particular situation, nor is this a comprehensive list of considerations. It is offered as a starting point to help each locality consider its individual circumstances and its communities' values and aspirations.

### **Researching Ownership, Reviews, and Restrictions of the Monument and/or Memorial**

Knowing the unique history of each monument and memorial is a critical first step. In most cases, these statues, pedestals, and plaques were erected a century or more ago. Issues of ownership have come up in various communities.

1. Does the locality own the land beneath the monument? In some localities, the local government transferred ownership of the land (even when located in the middle of a courthouse green or other municipal property) to the organization sponsoring the installation of the monument. You can verify ownership by researching:
  - a. County or city deed and land records
  - b. Period newspapers and periodicals
  - c. General Assembly proceedings
2. If land was deeded to a third party:
  - a. Does the entity still exist?
  - b. If not, is there a successor to the original entity?
3. Is the monument owned by the organization that sponsored installation of the monument?

- a. Consult with the locality's attorney to investigate provisions under the new legislation to guide removal.
4. Are there ownership or location reversion clauses or stipulations?
5. If there are ownership issues or other restrictions, is there a possible process to reach an outcome that will reduce harm and promote healing?
6. Who currently maintains the monument?
7. Is the monument a Contributing Resource within a locally designated historic district or located on a locally designated property that is subject to review by an architectural review board or similar elected or appointed body?
8. Is the monument listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and/or the National Register of Historic Places?
  - a. Without prior consultation with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, a listed monument will automatically be delisted upon removal from its historic site.
  - b. In cases where a monument is being moved to a new location, rather than to storage, consult with the Department of Historic Resources on appropriate site selection and possible retention of listing status.

### **Documenting History**

Within our communities, there have been decades-long struggles to address and correct the racial injustice that many of these monuments convey. Understating the history of these monuments can help communities to understand, acknowledge, and document their effects for more than a century on people who see the monuments and memorials as creating a false sense of history and racial supremacy that is disturbing and threatening to them.

1. Who sponsored the monument?
  - a. What was their mission and primary membership?
  - b. Does the organization exist today?
  - c. Was the monument sponsored by an individual or individuals? Are there descendants alive today?
2. How was the creation and installation funded?
  - a. By a single organization or a combination of groups? What was their mission and primary membership?
  - b. Through subscription?
  - c. Primarily by one or more individuals?
  - d. By the locality?
  - e. Through a special tax?
3. Is the monument associated with a particular individual, historical event, or military unit?
  - a. Is there a historical association to the monument's location?
4. When was the monument dedicated?
  - a. Are there news accounts or other accounts that documents who attended?
  - b. Who spoke at the dedication and what was the content of the speeches?
5. Was there any public opposition when the monument was installed?

- a. Was there an African-American newspaper or other publication that reported on the creation, installation, or dedication; were there editorials or published letters?
  - b. Was there formal or informal opposition?
6. What activities have occurred at the monument since it was installed?
- a. Regular gatherings and/or events of the organizing entity?
  - b. Opposition gatherings by individuals or organizations--rallies, events?
  - c. Have perceptions of the monument changed? Has that affected the uses and activities in the vicinity of the monument?
  - d. How will removal impact the historical narrative? Will that be addressed or not?
  - e. Reach out to lineage groups, family associations, as well as communities of color through churches, NAACP, local African American organizations, and school groups and ask for their opinion about what the monument means. Meet groups where they are; do not reinforce supremacy by holding meetings in places that might have uncomfortable associations.

### **Documenting Design**

Some monuments were individually commissioned and may be of scholarly interest because they may reveal past attitudes of our society toward power and influence; are part of a body of work of a particular designer, artist, period, or style; or exhibit details of work, material, and/or site arrangement and organization that may be significant in the study of art, design, and or planning. Contemporary artists and theorists may wish to study and re-evaluate monument design as artists create and install new works of art. Historians and theorists are also likely to conduct new research related to these monumental sculptural works in public spaces and the human responses to their presence over time.

- 1. Was the monument an individual work of art or part of a series of other installations in nearby or other community locations?
- 2. Who was the artist or manufacturer?
  - a. Are there other known works by the same artist or manufacturer?
  - b. Is the statue one that was mass produced?
  - c. Could the monument be part of a body of work that may warrant professional evaluation before or as part of the removal and relocation process? Would a professional evaluation influence the removal process and the location to which the monument will be moved?
- 3. Was the monument's placement part of an intentional landscape design, or simply placed without significant regard to the surroundings?
- 4. Was there a landscape designer associated with the design of the site?
- 5. Have elements been added over time?
- 6. Is there graffiti or other evidence of protest and resistance to the presence of the monument?

7. Take photographs of the monument and document the design, dimensions and material. Note its current condition and include any graffiti or graffiti traces that have been added as well as any intentional chipping or incisions.
  - a. Map the location including GPS coordinates; and record with a diagram the landscaped site with its plans and measurements and any auxiliary features such as plaques, signs, walkways, paving, plantings and/or fencing.

### **Collateral Materials and Pedestals**

Monuments do not exist in a vacuum. As part of both a goal to emulate the grand plazas of Europe and reinforce repression, additional memorials and plaques often have been located in close proximity to monuments. Streets and buildings also may have names that reinforce messages of racial supremacy.

1. Document the design, dimensions, and material of the pedestal. Examine the inscription of the pedestal. Some simply contain a name. Others contain phrases and symbols that reinforce racial dominance.
  - a. [The legislation](#) arguably requires that pedestals that are retained once a statue has been removed will be subject to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources review as part of their contextualization responsibility.
  - b. Document the names, imagery, and symbols that are inscribed/applied on the pedestal.
2. Take an inventory of any memorials, plaques, and associated street and building names.
  - a. Research the placement and history of the plaques, etc.
  - b. Consider removal, adding context or renaming

### **Oral Histories**

Oral histories are an important opportunity to capture the voices of people and their reflections of history embodied by the monument.

1. Enlist local libraries, historical societies, churches, and other organizations to help film and collect the recollections.
2. Ensure participation of a broad spectrum of people in the community.
3. Identify a repository for the oral histories and consider ways to share them with consent of those recorded or interviewed.

### **Planning For Removal**

Careful and thoughtful planning is needed in order to safely remove any monument and prepare for the future use and appearance of the site.

1. Consider how the monument site and related spaces will be treated following removal.
  - a. Consider how the monument will be moved.
    - i. Is it metal or stone?
    - ii. How many pieces make up the construction?
  - b. Will it remain a commemorative space or will it be repurposed?
  - c. Will there be an interim period before a more permanent decision is made?

- d. Will the monument remain accessible to the public or will it be concealed or shielded?
  - e. If encased, fenced or otherwise kept inaccessible to the public as a way to mitigate possible damage, how will the community be allowed to continue to register its reactions to the monument?
  - f. How will the site be treated during the period immediately following removal?
  - g. Identify a process for making decisions for more long-term uses, planning, and design.
2. Find original plans of the monument to determine how the statue, pedestal, and any other elements were constructed.
  3. Consider consultation with an art conservator or other professional for assistance in planning the removal process.
  4. Identify riggers who have experience and expertise in moving large statues.
  5. What kind of security is necessary for the removal?
    - a. How will spectators be managed for human safety? Do you anticipate that a large number of people might gather to witness the removal? How will you plan for an assembly?
    - b. How will transportation and utilities be managed? Will streets need to be closed temporarily? Will parking need to be restricted during preparation and removal? Will any utilities or other services need to be disconnected or temporarily disrupted? If so, remember to post public informational signage and to notify those likely to be affected.
    - c. How will the monument be transferred?
  6. Find appropriate storage for the monument and its associated parts.
    - a. Identify a new site or storage facility prior to removing.
    - b. Is the facility secure?
    - c. Will the storage be temporary or permanent?
  7. Determine whether the monument needs conservation.
  8. Will the pedestal be retained and repurposed?
    - a. Will divisive language or images be removed, covered, reinterpreted? If so, how?
    - b. Evaluate design significance before repurposing and consider how significant features integral to the overall pedestal design might be incorporated as new inscriptions or other features are added.
  9. Determine full costs for removal and/or relocation.

### **After the Monument is Removed**

Stewardship responsibilities for the monument do not end with removal. Once the monument has been removed:

1. Plan to re-evaluate historic designation documents
  - a. Do local, state or federal designations need to be revised to reflect the removal? Does the National Register Nomination need to be updated?

- b. Is this an opportunity to revise the documents to reflect the communities' current values?
- 2. Will the monument be moved to another location within the control of the locality?
  - a. If so, how will the monument be interpreted?
  - b. Consult with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources for regulations to guide contextualization and interpretation.
- 3. Will the monument be transferred to another organization? [HB1537](#) provides that the monument may be transferred to a museum, historical society, government, cemetery, or military battlefield.
  - a. Is the museum or historical society established?
  - b. Does it have a history of and the capacity to care for artifacts of this type?
  - c. Does the institution have a record or mission statement and vision of equitable interpretation?

### **Addressing the Site after a Monument is Removed**

Once a monument has been removed, consider the site where it was located.

- 1. Identify individuals who have different perspectives who can advise, help plan, or help to decide whether the removed monument will be addressed through site interpretation, how the site will be addressed--whether and how it will be paved or planted or whether new sculptural or other elements will be located on or near the site of the removed monument.
- 2. Enlist the assistance of landscape architects and others who can help assess and plan for how the site can be made a place where all can feel welcome.

### **New Monuments**

Have an inclusive and equitable process to consider new monuments.

- 1. Enlist the assistance of local museums, historical societies, humanities organizations, and educational institutions.
- 2. Identify individuals who have different perspectives who might serve on a committee.
- 3. Develop inclusive ways to survey the community for how and whether new monuments or other features will be added in the future.

**Resources**--Search for recommendations regarding memorials on these sites

[Department of Historic Resources](#)

[Preservation Virginia](#)

[Virginia Humanities](#)

[Monument Lab](#)

[FiveThirtyEight](#)

[American Association of State and Local History](#)

[Society for Architectural Historians](#)

[National Register of Historic Places--Contact](#)

[Transforming Community Spaces](#)