

## **GUIDELINES FOR MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT PUBLIC HISTORIC MONUMENTS, PLAQUES, AND PLACE NAMES IN BOLTON HILL**

### **BHCA Review Committee on Public Historic Markers February 2022**

In light of the nationwide protests of systemic racism in the summer of 2020, BHCA embarked on an effort to better understand the history behind the public names, plaques, and monuments in Bolton Hill. BHCA solicited the Bolton Hill community for information, ideas, opinions, and volunteers to help with the effort. A steering committee composed of neighborhood residents assembled a review committee in the fall of 2020.

The review committee compiled existing research on Bolton Hill's public historic markers and conducted additional research where necessary. It will formulate draft recommendations and elicit public comments about how the community should handle the public historic markers under review. The BHCA board of directors will then vote on the recommendations for each marker. In turn, BHCA would share its recommendations with the City, and the City would have to act where action is called for since the markers are public property.

The review committee shall explain its rationale for its recommendations. Some recommendations to retain or even to remove public historic markers may be uncontroversial. Where there are differing points of view, the committee is committed to considering comments both from those who believe strongly that a particular marker or name should be removed and those who believe strongly that an existing name or marker should be preserved.

The review committee developed a set of guidelines to produce its recommendations about retaining, contextualizing, redressing, removing, or renaming public historic monuments, plaques, and place names in Bolton Hill. The guidelines were based upon six university reports, including a draft report from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore City's Special Commission report on confederate monuments, and other ancillary documents. These reports contain detailed rationales for the criteria, and the committee commends them to readers who have the time to read some or all of them.

The review committee's guidelines are in the form of seven guiding questions:

- 1) What is the primary reason that person or group was originally honored with a monument, plaque, or place name? Would BHCA and the residents of Bolton Hill and adjacent communities still today honor the person, group, or event for the same reason as did the original commemorators?** Where there is a discrepancy, we should give "weight" to "*both past intention and present effect*" (Duke, 2017, p. 2) when making decisions.
- 2) If known, what process was followed to select and erect the name, monument, or other marker? Which groups participated in that process, and which did not?** These questions are especially pertinent to Bolton Hill, an historically racially segregated community, and to the City of Baltimore, where many significant monuments were erected solely by white leadership.
- 3) What is the principal legacy or conduct of the person or group honored (whether or not that conduct is what was honored by the marker or monument)? Does the principal legacy or conduct**

**align with or contradict the main mission of BHCA<sup>1</sup> or the beliefs and interests of its members, Bolton Hill residents, and neighbors in adjacent communities (Yale 2016, 19-20)? When there is a contradiction, is it so direct and egregious as to overshadow the reason the person or group is honored?** In addressing these questions, the committee should assess the significance of the principal legacy or conduct in historical contexts as well as the present:

- Was the conduct that is morally objectionable by today's standards the subject of significant debate in the "time and place" in which the person or group lived (Yale 2016, p. 20; UVA, 2020)?
- People and groups "who actively promoted" or "dedicated much of their lives to upholding" policies, practices and principles we now repudiate should be distinguished between those whose relationship to them was more casual or "unexceptional" (Yale 2016, p. 20).
- Carefully consider whether retaining the name or marker creates "moral injury" to members of our community, by making them feel unwelcome in our neighborhood (JHU 2021, p. 5). Moral injury can be understood as an act of betrayal of the fundamental dignity of community members and the resultant distress caused by that act. If it does create moral injury, is contextualization sufficient to ameliorate the injury?

**4) Is the place name, monument, or marker explicit about the rationale for its creation? If not, does it warrant greater contextualization through additional signage or other means?**

- When re-assessing what we honor and why, contextualization may be required even when we decide to retain a marker. Contextualization may be needed even in non-controversial cases. "The absence of interpretive information—of context—at the site of a name [or marker] is a missed opportunity to teach all those who pass by it" (JHU, p. 6). In the case of Bolton Hill, contextualization applies to the neighborhood's past history and who and what is chosen to be honored in its public spaces.
- Removal or renaming is a serious step and ought to be an "exceptional event" (Yale 2016, p. 18). Yet, removal may be warranted now or in the future. In these cases, too, contextualization is a powerful tool. Additional plaquing or other means to record the rationale for removal can be done as part of the ongoing history of Bolton Hill and the way its built environment communicates what is and has been important to its residents.
- Contextualization can be more than descriptive and indeed can become its own new work of art. BHCA welcomes creativity in any effort to provide greater contextualization.

**5) Where relevant and known, what was on the site before it was named or the marker erected? Did the naming or erection of a marker overlook prior historically significant usages?** We may not know the history of a site, but it is worth assessing whether the marker fully represents what is known about the site's history.

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<sup>1</sup> BHCA's mission statement current as of the review: "The object of this Association shall be to seek to preserve and enhance the quality of life in the Bolton Hill community, and to continue to make it a safe, green, and socially conscious community, which embraces and promotes diversity in all of its activities and membership."

**6) What is the cultural/artistic value of the monument or marker?** Markers often have significant cultural or artistic value independent of the person or group commemorated or the reasons for which it was erected, in which case it is appropriate to consider that value when making recommendations to retain, recontextualize, or remove or rename.

**7) Does the person or group honored by a place name, monument, or other marker have special significance to Bolton Hill or the City of Baltimore?** The closer the connection, the more reason to retain a marker, name, or monument and provide contextualization, all other things being equal. If the person is a central figure in Bolton Hill history for troubling reasons, simply removing the marker might prevent an honest reckoning with history. Creative reinterpretation may be more appropriate. When, however, removal is warranted, it should not be silent and should have a publicly accessible explanation.

**RECOMMENDATION OPTIONS** (to be accompanied by a rationale based on the committee guidelines):

- Retain
- Retain with contextualization (additional signage, detailed explanation on the BHCA website, other means of redress of community harm, etc.)
- Remove or rename, with contextualization or explanation

## REFERENCES

The George Washington University. "[Naming Task Force Renaming Framework.](#)" June, 2020.

Brooks, Corey M. "Sculpting Memories of the Slavery Conflict: Commemorating Roger Taney in Washington, D.C, Annapolis and Baltimore, 1864-1888." *Maryland Historical Magazine*, v. 112, #1 (Spring/Summer 2017), 6-35.

Duke University Commission on Memory and History. "[Executive Summary](#)" and "[Report.](#)" November 2017.

[Harvard] Committee. "[Recommendation to the President and Fellows of Harvard College](#) on the Shield Approved for the Law School" and "[A Different View.](#)" March, 2016

Johns Hopkins Committee to Establish Principles on Naming. "[Draft Report of the Committee](#) to Establish Principles on Naming." April 2021.

Special Commission to Review Baltimore's Public Confederate Monuments. "[Report to Mayor Rawlings-Blake.](#)" August, 2016.

(University of Virginia) President's Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation, "[Memorialization and Mission at UVA.](#)" March, 2020.

[Yale] Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming. "[Report of the Committee](#) to Establish Principles on Renaming." November 2016.

