

**CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING
300 WEST CROWELL STREET
MONROE, NORTH CAROLINA 28112
MARCH 3, 2020 - 4:00 P.M.
AGENDA
www.monroenc.org**

1. Dowd Center Theatre African American Entrance Recognition



STAFF REPORT

TO: City Council

VIA: E.L. Faison, City Manager

DATE: March 3, 2020

FROM: Peter Hovanec, Communications and Tourism Officer

SUBJECT: Dowd Center Theatre African American Entrance Recognition

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Dowd Center Theatre is close to opening for both city programming and community use. The theatre once had a dedicated entrance for African Americans. The entrance, which led directly to the balcony seating has been renovated and is now a large glass panel. Staff felt it was important to designate/recognize the former entrance with a symbolic plaque that acknowledges the prior use of the space, but also shows the progress made. Staff developed preliminary language for the plaque as a starting point, reached out to the local chapter of the NAACP for input and then posted the draft wording to the City's sSocial Media to solicit input from the community.

Below is the preliminary language shared on Social Media and with Council and department heads:

Gateway of Change

**This space was once the required entrance for people of color.
Now, it is a unified and inclusive space for all. In humble remembrance
of the past and with an optimistic view of the future, the City of Monroe welcomes all
people to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.**

***Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. Maya Angelou
Supported by the Union County NAACP***

The social media post reached 4,694 people with 1,448 engagements. There were 117 "likes" to the post, 18 shares and 55 comments. There were a few emails sent directly to Pete Hovanec with suggestions and the condensed recap of the comments are attached.

REVIEW

Staff is working on developing the finishing touches to the theatre and one aspect that staff determined was significant and in need of addressing is the former African American Entrance. Staff is offering an illustration for messaging to develop a public narrative to recognize the space. Through comments from staff, city leadership and the public the following configurations have been assembled.

Option 1 (the original message):

Gateway of Change

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of the past and with an optimistic view of the future, the City of Monroe welcomes all
people to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.**

*Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. Maya Angelou
Supported by the Union County NAACP*

Option 2:

Gateway of Change

**This space was once sanctioned as the entrance for people of color.
Now, it is a unified and inclusive space for all. In humble remembrance
of the segregated past and with an optimistic view of the future, the City of Monroe
welcomes people of all ethnicities to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center
Theatre.**

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only
love can do that. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
(Insights offered by Councilman McGee)*

Option 3:

Gateway of Change

**This space was once designated as the only entrance for people of color.
It is now an inclusive space for all. With awareness and remembrance of the segregated
past, we optimistically view the future. The City of Monroe welcomes all people to enjoy
the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.**

*Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. Maya Angelou
(Insights offered by Councilwoman Anthony)*

Option 4:

Gateway of Change

This space was once the designated entrance for people of color. Now, it is a unified and inclusive space for all. In humble remembrance of the past and with an optimistic view of the future, the City of Monroe welcomes all people to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.

The progress of the world will call for the best that all of us have to give. Mary McLeod Bethune
(Insights offered by members of the general public)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff is seeking direction regarding the wording and asks council to determine the content to be used to recognize the former African American entrance space.

Gateway of Change

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Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. – Maya Angelou

Supported by the Union County NAACP

Council Member Franco McGee

- This space was once sanctioned as the entrance for people of color. Now, it is a unified and inclusive space for all. In humble remembrance of the segregated past and with an optimistic view of the future, the City of Monroe welcomes people of all ethnicities to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.
- “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Council Member Surluta Anthony

- This space was once designated as the only entrance for people of color
- It is now an inclusive space for all
- With awareness and remembrance of the segregated past, we optimistically view the future

Shannon Little

- “The progress of the world will call for the best that all of us have to give.” (Mary Jane McLeod Bethune)

Facebook Tammy Natasha

- These Doors Still Talk: An entrance once used for Colored Only is now an all-inclusive door for everyone. We shall never forget our past as we enter the change for a better future. The City of Monroe welcomes all residents and beyond to enjoy the arts and entertainment in the Dowd Center Theatre.

Facebook Judy G. Morrison

- Likes it as is because it acknowledges history while being positive about present and future

Facebook Ashanti Huey

- Thinks the word “required” should stay and likes the acknowledgement that we are still not where we should be but are “optimistic” that it will improve.

Facebook Cindy Scoggins Atwell

- Thinks the Angelou quote is perfect

Facebook Jennifer Benson Benton

- Don't change it; it's great as is

Facebook Debbie Montgomery

- Likes anything that shines a light or brings attention to the past of people of color. If it helps bring positive energy to people, it is good.

Facebook Jim Rabon

- Does not believe the last paragraph (???) is necessary.

Facebook Robert Heath

- Change "required" to "designated"
- Jenn Starnes agrees
- Patricia Poland agrees
- Emily Howard Belcher disagrees, saying it was actually required (consequences if POC didn't use); "designated" seems suggested

Facebook Lorayn DeLuca

- Loves Angelou quote

Facebook Jenn Starnes

- Suggests adding the year the change was made

Facebook general reception

- In addition to specific comments/suggestions above, 10 people made general comments in favor of the piece as written (I like it, Well done, Great idea, Thank you, etc.)
- Brent Anthony objected to the inclusion of the NAACP in the creation of the first draft because the NAACP doesn't speak for everyone and felt that the City is not being transparent.

Full version of FB Comments:

- **Ty M Carolina** I truly love the Gateway of Change and the plaque reading. Thank you for ensuring the history is still a part of our future and remember the people who stood there first is extremely moving.



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Brent Anthony We need to come together as a community and at least voice our opinion and not let a few decide for the masses



○

Brent Anthony Monroe North Carolina they dont speak for the masses only their organization. There should have been a public forum. When dealing with race, you cant do it in a manner that isn't open and transparent. Monroe has a history of doing things on the sly or backdoor(no pun intended). In my opinion things were done the wrong way!



Tammy Natasha Brent Anthony

Name it;
These doors still talk!



Brent Anthony Tammy Natasha they just going about business as usual. The good ole boy way! SMH



Cynthia Cahoon Brent Anthony they literally asked for input from the public.



Brent Anthony Then how do they have what will be on it.



Cynthia Cahoon Brent Anthony they are showing what they came up with, and asking your opinion on it. If you think the wording should be changed then tell them. They had to start somewhere. They did, and now they are giving you a chance to speak.



Cynthia Cahoon Brent Anthony

Delete, hide or report this





Brent Anthony Cynthia Cahoon I understand but with the racial history of this city, I think that it was done incorrectly.



Cynthia Cahoon Brent Anthony and you have every right to think that. In your opinion, how do you feel it could have been handled better?



Brent Anthony I am literate I read it. First of all I dont even know why you cant understand, that the process used was flawed. Do you know the history of your city. If you do then you k ow why this is inappropriate and if you dont then go read



Brent Anthony Just make it known what your intentions are but when the citizens get to see the post you have already come up with proposed wording. That's not transparent



Cynthia Cahoon Brent Anthony then suggest the change.



Brent Anthony You're missing the point. Blessings to you have a nice day



Active Now

Cecilia Rueda-Dessingue They asked the local NAACP to start, now are asking for anyone else, like you, to help find the right words. This is a starting point. Be a part of the change you want to see in the world. The City is growing and changing, despite its past, this is a positive move to be inclusive.



Emily Howard Belcher Cecilia Rueda-Dessingue exactly. That's a blueprint. They're asking for input.



Lisa Tiller Brent Anthony If they had left it wide open with nothing as a starting ground they would have had 1000 different ways of saying it. It is much easier for a smaller group of people to put together a foundation and then let people change and tweak and agree or disagree. Towns have committees for things for a reason. If you want to be on this committee to get things like this started in the future, apply or sign up!



Brent Anthony That's not how I think it should be done. The NAACP doesn't speak for everyone, I never heard of this chapter speaking for anyone. Was just wondering why, it was introduced in this manner. I think it's a first.



Monroe North Carolina Mr. Anthony, that is exactly what are trying to do. The Union County NAACP was approached initially and we have the wording above. We are reaching out to the community through our elected leaders, city leaders and through our social media platform to garner those opinions you speak of. In the end the Monroe City Council will decide as they are the governing elected body for our city. We welcome any and all input and ask that you share and help in this process.



Tammy Natasha These Doors Still Talk

An entrance once used for Colored Only is now an all inclusive door for everyone....[See More](#)

Cecilia Rueda-Dessingue [Tammy Natasha](#) love that..



Cynthia Cahoon [Tammy Natasha](#) love it, but change welcome to welcomes maybe.



Tammy Natasha [Cynthia Cahoon](#) agree



Cindy Jordan [Tammy Natasha](#)

Thank you for your beautiful entry. I can tell that you put a lot of thought into it. I agree with Ms. Judy Morrison, her reply is absolutely right. I stand with your entry.



Judy G. Morrison I like what you have written. It acknowledges our history while being very positive about our



Ashanti Huey I definitely think the word required should stay. I appreciate the quote and the acknowledgement that we as a country are not where we should be but are "optimistic" in that it will improve.

Is there a list of organizations that have already been reached out to? Any nontraditional stakeholders, such as



Angela McAuley Thanks, Monroe, for giving opportunity for feedback and investment of voice. I don't feel like I have a right to say what goes there, but it seems eloquent.



Jenna Womack "...the City of Monroe welcomes..."
Singular subject, add an "s" to the verb.



Lisa Tiller Jenna Womack agreed!



Cynthia Cahoon Jenna Womack yes!!



Cindy Scoggins Atwell The quote from Maya Angelou is perfect!



Cheryl Medlin Ross Thanks for sharing



Margaret D. Desio A job well done!!!

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Lisa Johnson Will the refurbished theater still have a balcony? I know that it used to only be for people of color, but I used to love to sit up there.

○



Cynthia Cahoon Lisa Johnson yes it does. The space is beautiful and has many characteristics were kept and incorporated from the original design. Some areas bring me right back to my childhood, just different color paint.

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Active Now

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Theresa R Eaman LOVE it. Well done

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Carol Williams Perfect!

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Carol Ferguson Great idea.

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Margi Mead Sowden Very nice.

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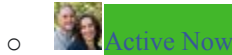


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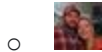
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Robert Heath I am suggesting that you change the word required to designated in the first sentence .



Pete Hovanec Robert Heath thank you sir.



Jenn Starnes Robert Heath agreed. Required should be changed to designated. I also think the year of the change would be nice for future generations to have a reference point.



Emily Howard Belcher Robert Heath but it was required. There would be consequences if they didn't use it. Designated seems suggested.



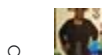
Patricia Poland I agree with Robert Heath. And thank you, City of Monroe, for doing this!



Jim Rabon I do not believe the last paragraph is necessary



Danelle Segers Debbie Montgomery You are one of the smartest people I know...What are your thoughts?



Debbie Montgomery **Danelle Segers** I can buy into anything that shines a light, and or brings attention to the past of people of color. We need to always remember our past so that it's never repeated. If this so called Gateway of Change helps bring a positive energy to people I'm good.



Dorrem Green Fine Doreen Green



Elaine White Mcmanus I like it.



Lorayn DeLuca It will bring pain and make some uncomfortable but like the Holocaust, we must never forget so it is not repeated for anyone. It is part of our history, staying silent is not an option.

I love what is written here in Gateway of Change and especially the Maya quote 🌱🙏



Eddie Helms I like it! I'm so glad you reached out and thank you for that!