



## Attachment B: Let's Talk Albemarle: Court Square Public Input Themes

Following direction from the Board of Supervisors at its January 8, 2020, meeting, staff representing the Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE) and Equity and Inclusion offices launched an effort to learn from County residents about their thoughts regarding the Court Square public space, markers, and memorials.

Opportunities for engagement began February with face to face offerings at Yancey School Community Center, Sutherland Middle School, and Lane Auditorium as well as a guided tour of the Court Square property. Staff resource was diverted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and engagement was temporarily paused, resuming in June with additional panel discussions and community conversations hosted virtually. An online public input platform was launched at the same time, soliciting community response to questions related to expectations and experience of the Court Square property, hosting a virtual tour, and offering video of the panel discussions. Attendance across all live engagement opportunities totaled around 540 individuals; there were over 3300 views of the online hub, and 709 posted comments.

Review of all online comments and notes from public discussions was completed by a group of County staff, representatives of the Historic Preservation Committee, and County residents who previously served on the Office of Equity and Inclusion's equity working group.

### **Frequently Used Terms and Prominent Themes**

Almost 26,000 words were submitted by community members to convey their thoughts and feelings on the Court Square property. There were several frequently used terms that seemed to suggest particular importance or emphasis, the review of which elevated a few prominent themes or ideas being shared by community members.

#### *History*

One of the most notable themes emerging from the public input was an emphasis on history. The importance of Court Square as a historical site was frequently expressed. Participants also expressed strong views on the necessity of sharing community history at Court Square, describing Court Square as a space for education and preservation of history. While there were some diverging opinions, overwhelmingly the public stressed the importance that Court Square tell an accurate and inclusive historical narrative. Some noted that the stories told through the markers and memorials currently at Court Square lacked a deliberate or cohesive story of history. There was considerable mention of the need to reorganize or plot out the space in a way that shared a consistent and balanced historical narrative.

#### *Community*

The idea of community was very prevalent in the engagement around Court Square. Of all of the broader themes displayed in the public input, it was the concept of who we are and what we share as a community that was most connected to all other considerations. There was a strong sense that Court Square should be designed for the community: a reflection of its values, a space to gather, and a site



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with a responsibility of justice for all. Specific desires around community space included making the site more park-like through use of green space, to install more seating area, and to provide more of a direct linkage to justice in our community.

### *Inclusion/Justice*

There were several comments that asserted Court Square as a space that they felt must reflect the community's values specifically around inclusion and justice. Many of these comments suggested that the current state was not inclusive and did not reflect community values around justice, attributing that to the presence of the Johnny Reb/At Ready monument. Several noted that the presence of At Ready does not represent the community's values of equity and justice and spoke of its placement at the entry way to the courthouse as inappropriate.

### *Safe/Welcoming*

Safety and a sense of welcome were both frequently mentioned and commonly tied together in perspectives shared. This sentiment was closely linked to the emphasis on community and expressed as a belief that the Court Square space should be safe and welcoming for all members of the community.

Safety and welcome were often mentioned as not currently achieved in the Court Square property and their lack was frequently attributed to the presence of the Johnny Reb/At Ready monument.

### *Charlottesville*

A point made clear in every discussion and engagement opportunity was the sense of both collective history and experience in our community as it relates to Court Square. Though this engagement process was geared towards Albemarle County, and regardless of the jurisdictional boundaries, there was much mention of the broader community's understanding of Court Square as a shared space. Several community members expressed a strong interest in seeing the City and the County consider the entire downtown courts district as one cohesive space.