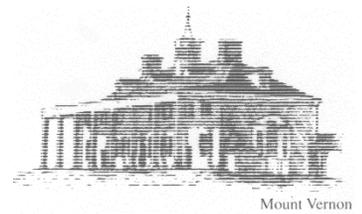




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Supervisor Dan Storck Jointly with Chairman Jeff McKay and Supervisor Rodney Lusk

Request for BOS to send History Commission Letter on Potential Re- Naming of Fort Belvoir to the Secretary of the Army

March 7, 2023

In May 2021, the National Defense Authorization Act considered military bases across the country for potential renaming. Fort Belvoir was added to the list of bases.

Subsequently, Supervisor Lusk, Chairman McKay, my office, Senator Surovell, and representatives of the Fairfax County History commission were invited to participate in a Fort Belvoir Renaming Stakeholders information meeting with the Army's Naming Commission in September 2021 to learn additional context around Fort Belvoir history and alternatives to renaming.

On March 2, 2022, the Fairfax County History Commission, unsure that primary source evidence on Belvoir's 1935 name change would be included in the Naming Commission's Report, voted to produce a supplementary report for the BoS and the Naming Commission.

Two weeks later, The Naming Commission determined that Fort Belvoir does not meet the criteria provided in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act for a renaming recommendation. The report recommended that the Army conduct their own investigations into the renaming. As a result, the Fairfax County History Commission paused efforts to produce a report.

The final Naming Commission report was then released in September 2022. The Naming Commission strongly encouraged the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Army to review these historical facts and consider

renaming Fort Belvoir based on existing protocols for the naming/renaming of installations and facilities.

According to the History Commission members who researched the history of the Fort Belvoir name, the findings regarding Fort Belvoir are limited with specific inaccuracies and omissions.

In addition, based on their letter sent to Chairman McKay and I on February 4, 2023, the Fairfax County History Commission believes that The Naming Commission's report does not reflect a full and accurate picture of the events that led to Belvoir's renaming. The presentation given at the February 1st History Commission meeting brings attention to two key inaccuracies:

- The Naming Commission report cites Andrew A Humphreys as the original namesake for the base. Based on the History Commission's research, the original name was actually Camp Belvoir from 1912 to 1917. It was only referred to as Camp Humphreys at the request of Colonel Parks, the commandant of the camp at that time.
- The Naming Commission report also argues that the name was changed back to Fort Belvoir in 1935 at the request of Virginia Congressman Howard Smith, a known segregationist. However, there is record of a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt that shows Congressman Smith only requested the name change on behalf of General Markham, the Chief of Engineers at that time.
- Furthermore, local research into the 1935 name change from Camp Humphreys to Fort Belvoir uncovers complex interactions with ties to road building, tourism, military planning, and historic preservation.

In their argument against the renaming, the History Commission also points out a key statement from the National Trust for Historic Preservation on the difference between symbolic monuments and historic sites:

“We differentiate symbolic monuments from historic sites that have developed over time, some of them places built by African Americans held in bondage. These historic sites today must serve as critical places to explore the legacies of slavery and discrimination, and as sites of conscience where the honest exploration of our shared history and reconciliation can occur.”

We fully support the recommendation made by the History Commission on the potential renaming. Any action taken by the Army to rename Fort Belvoir should be transparent, based on evidence and include the local community and stakeholders. Also, removing the name Belvoir may reduce the likelihood that these stories of the enslaved African Americans and the free black residents who lived on base will be told.

In addition, based on the findings from the History Commission's Confederate Names Inventory Report, Fort Belvoir has 4 streets named for Confederate Generals that are in need of renaming: Beauregard, Stuart, Johnston and Lee. These streets are all located on the North part of the post within a collection of streets named for U.S. Army Engineers from the Revolutionary war to the Twentieth Century.

Additionally, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act considering renaming of bases, it is our understanding there is a desire from Fort Belvoir Leadership to work with the History Commission and local historians to be consulted on renaming these streets. Any new proposed names should abide to the following criterion: 1) use names of prominent families in the historic African American community of Woodlawn. 2) use names of African American war heroes that were removed when the segregated housing area called Young's Village was demolished in the mid to late 60s.

Therefore, I move that the Board of Supervisors direct the Fairfax County History Commission to send their February 4, 2023 letter to the Secretary of the Army and the Naming Commission historian voicing their concerns on the potential renaming of Fort Belvoir, and ask in a letter that the Secretary of the Army address the following questions:

- What are the criteria for deciding whether to rename Belvoir? The Naming Commission concluded "that renaming Fort Belvoir falls outside the legislative language provided in the FY21 NDAA for making a recommendation to rename the base." Is there another policy or mechanism for changing the name, and will it be applied consistently across assets?

- The History Commission, has stated “We respect the effort undertaken by the Naming Commission historians but do not believe the interpretation of history presented in the Naming Commission report is a full and impartial weighing of historical evidence.” Will there be a fact checking of the Naming Commission report or re-evaluation of the evidence and if so, will it be transparent to the community?
- Does the Army plan to seek input from descendants of African American enslaved people in the community or any others?

I further move that the Board of Supervisors direct the History Commission to designate a small subcommittee to support any efforts by Fort Belvoir in renaming 4 streets on Fort Belvoir, currently named for Confederate Generals: Beauregard, Stuart, Johnston, and Lee. These efforts should be done in consultation with any descendants of the community of Woodlawn Village to consult on the renaming.



Fairfax County History Commission

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Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 530
Fairfax, VA 22035

February 4, 2023

Dan Storck, Mt. Vernon District Supervisor, Mt. Vernon Governmental Center
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Subject: Recommendations Regarding the Fort Belvoir Name

Dear Chairman McKay and Supervisor Storck,

The History Commission has been asked by Supervisor Storck to advise the Board of Supervisors regarding the potential renaming of Fort Belvoir. At this time the United States Department of Defense criteria for renaming locations remains somewhat undefined. The Commission does recommend, however, that a full and accurate analysis of research into the history of Fort Belvoir be conducted and the public be transparently engaged before a decision is made concerning any renaming of the post.

Fort Belvoir is both a historic site and a monument: its name as a military facility memorializes its historic past, while also identifying a military facility important to Fairfax county in the modern era. It is a military base and a place important to Fairfax County both historically and in the modern era. It is, in fact, the largest employer in Fairfax County. There is an inherent tension between the dual identities of Fort Belvoir that add to the complexity of evaluating its name. As a Commission we recognize that there are multiple points of view about its naming, but we unanimously agree that, as a site of enslavement, it is critically important that Fort Belvoir be more than a name. It is a site of conscience that demands a full and accurate telling of its history. A motion to this effect was unanimously passed at the monthly Fairfax County History Commission meeting on Wednesday, February 1, 2023 that reads:

“...that the Commission write a letter to the Board of Supervisors taking the position that a full and accurate analysis of research into the history of Fort Belvoir be conducted before a decision is made concerning renaming the Post.”

On September 9, 2017 the Fairfax County History Commission also voted unanimously to acknowledge the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s position: ***“We differentiate symbolic monuments from historic sites that have developed over time, some of them places built by African Americans held in bondage. These historic sites today must serve as critical places to explore the legacies of slavery and discrimination, and as sites of conscience where the honest exploration of our shared history and reconciliation can occur.”*** And , specifically noted is this statement, ***“We should always remember the past, but we do not necessarily need to revere it.”*** <https://savingplaces.org/press-center/media-resources/national-trust-statement-on-confederate-memorials-2017>

In a spirited discussion around the motion stated at the February 1st meeting, we touched upon a variety of topics and of utmost importance was information gleaned through our work on our recently revealed African American History Inventory (AAHI). This work identified four significant sites on the property where Fort Belvoir now sits, (1) The Belvoir Ruins—site of the Fairfax Manor house where at least 15 African Americans were enslaved (circa 1741-1783, (2) The Free Black community of Woodlawn (circa 1860-1941), (3) The Colored Civilian Conservation Corps Camp (circa 1935-1939) and (4) The site of Youngs Village, a racially segregated housing for African American Army personnel and their families (circa 1940- 1963). We believe these stories should be told.

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Chairperson McKay and Supervisor Stork
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And we also believe seeking insight from descendants of African American enslaved people from the Belvoir plantation, as well as surrounding communities to include the African American Community of Woodlawn, the League of Descendants of the Enslaved at Mount Vernon and members of present day Gum Springs is imperative.

In bringing this issue before you, we worked collegially with the Commission on the Naming of Items of the United States Department of Defense that Commemorate the Confederate States of America or Any Person Who Served Voluntarily with the Confederate States of America (hereafter the Naming Commission) from September 2021 until the issuance of their Final Report in September 2022. Concurrent with the Naming Commission, we conducted in-depth research on the history of Fort Belvoir and the 1935 name change; we would be pleased to provide our research findings to the Board of Supervisors and the United States Department of Defense. We respect the effort undertaken by the Naming Commission historians but do not believe the interpretation of history presented in the Naming Commission report is a full and impartial weighing of historical evidence.

As members of the Fairfax County History Commission and authors of the Confederate Names Inventory, we take seriously our responsibility to provide the Board of Supervisors and other decision makers information that is as accurate and objective as possible. In assembling the Confederate Names Inventory we had a clear goal to identify the names of roads and other places named for Confederates. The Naming Commission had a similar objective regarding United States military place names. It concluded that the Fort Belvoir name did not fall within the scope of its remit (“that renaming Fort Belvoir falls outside the legislative language provided in the FY21 NDAA for making a recommendation to rename the base”). The question then is, “What are the criteria for deciding whether to rename non-Confederate places such as Fort Belvoir?”

In summary, we suggest not only that additional research be done, but respectfully request that the United States Department of Defense clearly articulate any criteria for changing the Fort Belvoir name. Then with all suggested research complete and validated, we together will have been contributors to a history that allows us to “*...always remember the past, but [a past] we do not necessarily need to revere.*”

Thank you for your time, attention and support of this important and vital discussion for the future of the County of Fairfax in Virginia.

All good things,

***Lynne Garvey-Hodge
Chairperson, Fairfax County History Commission
and Commission Members***

cc: Fairfax County History Commission