

Thursday, June 4, 2020

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# Memorandum

To: Director, Terry Rynard, Fellow Commissioners & KCMO Parks Staff

From: Commissioner, Christopher E. Goode

CC: KCMO Mayor's Office

I write this memo with my heart and mind deeply pained at what I've personally witnessed over the last several weeks in Georgia and Minnesota with the senseless killings of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd. To then find myself living in the epicenter of our city's reaction of outrage and exhaustion has given me a vantage point unable to be painted by the media or social media. These tragedies were birthed from the ruthless disregard for black human life by racist individuals. Having seen our beloved Mill Creek Park become the backdrop for the reactionary protests and visual displays of pain and frustration, I, as a Parks and Rec Commissioner find myself compelled to act.

I have personally spoken to each member of the board prior to this memo and hope that the sincerity of my words is felt. I now intend to follow those words with action. In that action, I will bring your attention to JC Nichols Memorial Fountain & JC Nichols Parkway. Being that this site has become the prime location for our community to consistently express outrage and seek equality on any range of issues, giving it our attention becomes dutiful of our commitment to our fellow Kansas Citians.

The history of Kansas City developer Jesse Clyde Nichols requires very little education for this group. His accumulation of wealth in part by the creation of some of our city's most treasured real estate including the country club plaza, serve as a very painful truth in our city's history. The fountain named in his

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honor, as well as the adjoining parkway allow racism to take center stage in our most photographed, valued and visited destination in Kansas City. It says to the diverse tax payers of our community, along with visitors from throughout the country in very obvious terms; racism is a norm we are not ready to truly eradicate. I have inserted an excerpt from a globally reaching 2018 issue of Vogue magazine that paints a clear picture from a visitor's perspective.

***“Institutionalized racism has cast a long shadow there; the prominent real estate developer Jesse Clyde “J. C.” Nichols, recognized for devising entire Kansas City neighborhoods (and inspiring many more throughout the country), patently promoted racial segregation. (That his name adorns buildings and street signs citywide has become a hot-button issue.)”***

This excerpt represents one of many that have been published highlighting the acceptance of racial inequities created by JC Nichols. Yet, none of this national or local attention over the years on this topic has been enough to inspire real change. These practices that were generated right from the borders of our coveted city promote division and hate at its very core.

We have reached an impasse that is being realized around the entire globe. While I can truly see the difficulty, and pain this topic may uproot, and even the emotions evoked to read/write these words about our city; they are truth. The time has come for us to stop turning a blind eye towards racism of past and present. There is no immediate resolution to racism, that of which has been deeply embedded for over 400 years into the fabric of this country. We can however make a collective decision to simply do the right thing, now.

As appointed commissioners of the KCMO parks board we must take a very swift and decisive stand to rename the JC Nichols Memorial Fountain, along with JC Nichols Parkway. It is my desire to see the fountain renamed; “DREAM FOUNTAIN” should it be a consensus. In my very humble opinion, this allows the opportunity for Kansas Citians of all races and classes to see their dreams reflected on one of our city's true treasures.

Moreover, it is my request to begin the process of renaming JC Nichols Parkway to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. Dr. King stood for all people in the face of hatred and paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country. His purpose

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of peace & unity should be celebrated and more accurately represents the true heart of this city.

This step will allow our city a better chance at beginning the process toward being a more equitable, progressive and welcoming city. We are the heart of this country and the bridge between our neighbors at all directions. The decisions we make today will impact the trajectory of our city forever.

I look forward to implementing this very long overdue gesture with you all at my side, while genuinely representing the entire population of citizens we serve. It is with my utmost gratitude and sincerity that these words have been written. I intend for this initiative to be seen to completion albeit transparently and equitably. Please accept this memorandum as the official first step towards the renaming process of the aforementioned assets.

*“Without change in the heart, the body will never have a shot at true progress.”-*  
*-Chris Goode*

