

# Mayor's Commemorative Landscape Task Force

## RECOMMENDATION

### **Guiding Principles**

- 1. Commemorative objects should align with our community's highest aspirations, including as these relate to truthfulness, equity, and inclusion.*
- 2. When considering existing or proposed commemorative objects, the City of Clayton should seek to honestly and productively engage history, and never to erase it.*
- 3. When considering inherited and new commemorative objects, both past and present contributions and impacts of the representation must be given careful consideration.*

### **Evaluation Criteria**

- 1. Is the principal legacy of the namesake and/or is the subject depicted fundamentally at odds with current community values? If yes, please explain.*
- 2. What was the context at the time and is that something we want to continue to honor and embrace?*
- 3. Does the place name or commemorative object celebrate a part of history that we believe is fundamental to who we are and what we value?*
- 4. Does the place name or commemorative object make a nuanced, complex history accessible to the public, or provide an opportunity to educate the public?*
- 5. Does the place name or commemorative object restore histories that have been erased or not adequately represented, or provide an opportunity to educate the public?*

### **Summary**

The Mayor's Commemorative Landscape Task Force recommends that the portrait of Ralph Clayton be relocated from the Aldermanic Chamber in City Hall to the Clayton CCF History Center at the Center of Clayton. City Hall is a public space unparalleled in its representation of the values of the city. Whereas Ralph Clayton's wealth and power were derived in part through the exploitation of enslaved people, and those values are at extreme odds with the contemporary City of Clayton's commitments to equity and inclusion, he should not be honored in Council Chambers at City Hall. It is recommended that the portrait initially be a part of an educational display created in collaboration with Clayton Community Foundation at the Center of Clayton, where the

whole and truthful story of this important historical figure can be told. After the display period, we recommend a suitable place for the portrait could be found in City Hall.

Below we provide more detail on this commemorative object and this recommendation with reference to our evaluation criteria.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

**1. Is the principal legacy of the namesake and/or is the subject depicted fundamentally at odds with current community values? If yes, please explain.**

- a. *Ralph Clayton's principal legacy is that of a large landowner who, in exchange for donating land that became the City of Clayton, became the city's namesake. Born in Virginia, Clayton migrated to Missouri by 1850 and owned 600 or 700 acres of land in what was then known as the central township. He bought the land from John McKnight who bought it from Charles Gratiot who had originally acquired the land through a Spanish land grant.*
- b. *After the 'great divorce' of St. Louis City & County in 1879, Ralph's Clayton's "third proposition" was chosen out of six propositions vying to become the new county seat. In return for the town bearing his name, Mr. Clayton, whose son William D. Clayton, was the new county clerk and recorder of deeds, agreed to donate 100 acres, which together with an additional four acres from the Hanley estate became the new county seat. In addition, what was formerly Smith Road became Clayton Road from the new city limits west to Conway Road. Ralph Clayton died in 1883 at the age of 95.*
- c. *Ralph Clayton's wealth and power, and thus this donation of land, were derived in part through the exploitation of enslaved people. Census records indicate that Ralph Clayton owned at least one enslaved person in 1860, and he was likely implicated in the enslavement of others through subleases and related arrangements common in urban contexts.*
- d. *Whereas Ralph Clayton's wealth and power were derived in part through the exploitation of enslaved people, and those values are at extreme odds with the contemporary City of Clayton's commitments to equity and inclusion, he should not be honored in City Hall.*

**2. What was the context at the time and is that something we want to continue to honor and embrace?**

- a. *The portrait of Ralph Clayton was commissioned in 1931, after the opening of the new City Hall in 1930.*
- b. *Considering its incongruity with values of equity and inclusion, the decision to commemorate Ralph Clayton in City Hall is troubling in retrospect and remains so today.*

**3. Does the place name or commemorative object celebrate a part of history that we believe is fundamental to who we are and what we value?**

- a. *Ralph Clayton undeniably is a part of Clayton's history. His wealth enabled him to donate land and thus acquire naming rights to both our city and main thoroughfare. And his portrait should be represented as part of that history, thus the recommendation that it be part of a display where the story of the donation of his property can be put in its historical context.*
- b. *However, as an enslaver, Ralph Clayton does not have the moral authority to preside over the space where our city government meets to "foster a diverse and inclusive community with a vital balance of neighborhoods, businesses, commercial and government centers, educational institutions and a healthy natural environment through an open equitable, accessible and fiscally responsible government."*

**4. Does the place name or commemorative object make a nuanced, complex history accessible to the public, or provide an opportunity to educate the public?**

- a. *The portrait does not presently offer a nuanced historical account and the setting is unlikely to accommodate a more complex and publicly accessible representation.*
- b. *By including the portrait in the context of an historical display, with accompanying interpretive material, Clayton's founding story can be told honestly and fully in accordance with the guiding principle "to productively engage history and never to erase it."*

**5. Does the place name or commemorative object restore histories that have been erased or not adequately represented, or provide an opportunity to educate the public?**

- a. *Ralph Clayton was a generous benefactor of the City of Clayton but there is no indication that he contributed to the development of a fair and just government, or that he is otherwise appropriate to honor in the chambers of our city government. Thus while his portrait rightfully has a place in our City Hall, that place should not be on the wall of the chamber that*

*represents “our community’s highest aspirations, including as these relate to truthfulness, equity, and inclusion.”*