



BUCKMAN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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Commissioner Amanda Fritz
City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Avenue, Room 220
Portland, OR 97204

September 24, 2020

RE: Name Change Proposal for Colonel Summers Park
FROM: Buckman Community Association

Dear Commissioner Fritz:

Names matter. Originally named Belmont Park until 1938, Colonel Summers Park, with its current namesake, represents a symbol of oppression, honors violent and racist conquest, colonialism and the militarization of Oregon's society.

Names of monuments, mountains, rivers, streets, schools -- and our parks -- reflect the values of those who hold power in a society, and they teach subsequent generations the lesson of who is in control. When European Americans invaded the Pacific Northwest, they changed the name of Loowit to Mount St. Helens. The Sahaptin word for the great river that divides Oregon and Washington is Nich'I-Wana. The Chinook people call it Wimahi. When Captain Robert Gray sailed his ship, Columbia Rediva, up the river, the name was changed to Columbia. In a democratic society, these names should reflect the values and ideals of a society as a whole, including diversity and equity and justice.

In light of recent protests against police brutality and our long overdue conversation about systemic racism, we need to reassess the names of our prized places here in Portland. Of concern to us at the Buckman Community Association is our beloved park named Colonel Summers Park.

It is our collective responsibility as citizens to recognize symbols of oppression, to be honest regarding our history and true to democratic values. We must be compassionate and understanding and inclusive of all cultures within our community. We are proposing that we embrace this moment and acknowledge that times are changing, and there is something that we can do about it right now. This park anchors our inclusive community. It must be a safe and welcoming place where all people are comfortable on a day to day basis, as well as in the event of a disaster. The park serves our city's resilience plan as one of 50 BEECN (Basic Emergency Communication Node) locations in the event of a major earthquake or other disaster.

Now is the appropriate time to rename and reclaim this park. In 2020, we as a nation continue to wage an endless war in Afghanistan, 19 years and counting. Our police, outfitted in military garb and funded by the military industrial complex, assault protesting residents with tear gas banned by international treaty. Our names reflect our values, and at present our park honors a man, Colonel Owen Summers, who was instrumental in militarizing Oregon through the creation of Oregon's National Guard without any acknowledgment of his participation in shameful racist colonial campaigns against both Native Americans and Filipinos. Summers participated in military colonization of the Sioux Nation as part of the Illinois Cavalry in the 1860s, and again as a commanding officer in the Oregon National Guard in the 1890s, violently suppressing the Filipino Independence movement against Spain and the United States.

Our Park, in the heart of our neighborhood, honors U.S. militarization, past and present. The park's plaque today names the United States' campaign in the Philippines as the Philippine Insurrection, a disrespectful portrayal of the Filipinos, who were seeking self-determination in their fight against Spanish and then U.S. colonial rule. (Notably, in March 1998, the Library of Congress changed its "Philippine Insurrection" categories to "Philippine Revolution 1896-1898" and "Philippine-American War 1899-1902") Collectively we need to demilitarize and seek justice and reconciliation. We believe that renaming Colonel Summers Park, and removing his plaque from the park, would be a small but substantive step towards decolonizing and promoting a more just society.

We look forward to working with you to explore a new name for this park that anchors the Buckman community. In doing so, we hope to honor the Portland Parks and Recreation Department's equity statement, "We recognize, understand, and encourage celebration of the differences that surround us. Diversity and equity are vital to Portland Parks and Recreation's ideals and values."

In the interest of progress and justice,

On behalf of The Buckman Community Association Board,

Nick Olson - BCA Treasurer