

## Irma Glidden

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**From:** Drew Dara-Abrams <dda@dara-abrams.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 18, 2021 3:01 PM  
**To:** Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft; John Knox White; Malia Vella; Trish Spencer; Tony Daysog  
**Cc:** City Clerk  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comment on Item 7-C: draft renaming policy

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Councilmembers,

I am writing to encourage you to adopt the new renaming policy for city facilities. At the same time as adopting this policy, please also trigger the start of the name-reconsideration process, to follow this new process, for Calhoun Street, Jackson Street, and Godfrey Park. Local residents have worked together over the last 2+ years to identify these places and to start robust community conversations about what US senator John C. Calhoun, US president Andrew Jackson, and Alameda mayor Milton Godfrey mean here in Alameda today. We believe the best next steps are a combination of this new policy representing what worked so well about the Chochenyo Park renaming *and* acknowledging the community's work to-date by starting the process for this small but meaningful set of two streets and one park.

### Re the proposed policy:

Thanks to city staff, HAB members, and Planning Board members for working on this proposed policy over the past few months. It captures what worked well about the Chochenyo Park renaming process: multiple opportunities for community members to participate, steps that broaden the conversation and set of participants, and steps that ensure the process stays within a timeline and accomplishes concrete goals by its end.

In the course of preparing this policy and refining it at the HAB and PB meetings, we appreciate that staff and board members have taken feedback on making sure that all Alameda residents can participate — both residents who own property and residents who rent. Even if the overall goals are to welcome as many as possible from Alameda into a renaming process, it's the specific mechanics that will actually decide whether that happens.

### Re Calhoun Street, Jackson Street, and Godfrey Park:

Over the past 2 years, we believe we have met the requirements for qualifying to start the renaming process in the spirit of this policy and in all, or most all, of its specifics:

- This [online petition to rename Calhoun Street](#) collected 760 e-signature in 2020. My neighbors and I emailed it into the Planning Board and staff contacts in 2020 (as the old/current naming policy said was the appropriate contact for street names) but never heard a response. (This was after also emailing the City Manager's office in 2019 for guidance on street renaming process and also receiving no response.) We did succeed in having front page coverage in the Alameda Sun, multiple letters to the editor, multiple threads on Nextdoor, Facebook, Reddit, and other online forums (all pleasantly civil). The question of whether to rename Calhoun Street is well known enough that it's been used as a [question at City Council election debates](#).

- This [online petition to rename Godfrey Park](#) has 1,079 e-signature. The [East Bay Times has written about renaming Godfrey Park](#), and councilmembers have spoken during meetings about it.

- Finally, while I'm not aware of a petition for renaming Jackson Street, the Jackson Park renaming process identified this as a historical figure that our city does not want to honor in the 21st century. The conversation has been started and continuing it for this street seems fitting.

Next steps:

There is a groundswell of support for using the names of our parks and streets to represent our present-day values. The renaming of Chochenyo Park (and also of Love Elementary School before it) helped channel these positive values and provide opportunities for both symbolic and substantive community discussions. (That was a great event for the naming of Chochenyo Park!) It's worth continuing to use these opportunities. Not to rename anything and everything — no one wants needless confusion, or to sap energy from other important city efforts — but to selectively continue to bring together Alameda residents to discuss the names on display in our city.

We think the most meaningful next step would be the combination of adopting this new policy and starting the process for a select handful of locations. This is not meant as a means to "skip a step" or to "speed up" the process — rather, we think this would be a means for City Council to take both abstract and concrete action on this topic. This would put in place a standard process for the future *and* it would acknowledge the community's work to-date. It would also acknowledge that the city has been less than responsive to residents trying, in good faith, to act on the current/old policy on the books. It would set of a collaborative relationship between residents, elected leaders, and city staff to reconsider a small but meaningful set of names here, and to make sure all opinions and practical concerns can be heard and considered.

Please take the next steps on facility names in Alameda by adopting this new policy and starting the process for Calhoun Street, Godfrey Park, and Jackson Street.

Thanks for your time,  
Drew Dara-Abrams  
resident of Calhoun Street

**From:** [Josh Geyer](#)  
**To:** [Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft](#); [John Knox White](#); [Malia Vella](#); [Trish Spencer](#); [Tony Daysog](#)  
**Cc:** [City Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comment on Item 7-C: draft renaming policy  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 12, 2021 2:55:45 PM

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Mayor, Council Members,

I'm writing today to comment on item 7-C on today's agenda, the draft city facility renaming policy. I was encouraged to see that the planning board has forwarded a draft policy to you that ends the requirement for a majority of a street's residents to assent to have their street undergo a renaming. As with the successful renaming of Jackson Park earlier this year, the circle of concern about names that are harmful and adverse to the city's values goes well beyond just nearby residents and encompasses the entire community. It was right and necessary to rename Jackson Park because the name is not consistent with values of equity and inclusion we hold as a city. Although I was heartened to hear that the change was ultimately embraced by residents fortunate enough to live on Park Avenue, they were not granted veto power over the change by virtue of their proximity to the park. Because facility names are a community-wide concern, those residents have the same rights and responsibilities as any other member of the community, and the same will go for residents of streets subject to renaming efforts going forward.

That said, while there are merits to considering taking a more proactive approach to renaming city facilities named after offensive public figures than waiting for individual petitioners. Jackson Street is an obvious example of a facility that the city should be proactively renaming since the city has already determined that Andrew Jackson is an inappropriate and offensive figure to be honoring on public facilities. But there are other public facilities, including Calhoun Street and Godfrey Park, that have already been recognized as being named after public figures whose words and actions we decry as incompatible with Alameda's values. Having these figures honored on public facilities is a continued affront to members of the community; we know this to be the case without a petition being circulated.

The most efficient and systematic approach would be to establish a group in the mold of New Orleans' City Council Street Renaming Commission with the mandate to evaluate facility names and identify those that cause continued harm so they can be renamed all at once. A committee or commission of this kind could be circumscribed as necessary (for instance by limiting the number of facilities it could recommend for renaming during its first session) in order to ensure that priority is given to renaming facilities named after the most offensive figures.

If this is not immediately feasible, though, I ask that you use your prerogative to direct the Planning Board and the Rec and Parks Commission to initiate renaming processes for Jackson and Calhoun Street and Godfrey Park respectively. We don't need 500 more petitioners to tell us that Jackson was a genocidaire and an enslaver, nor do we need them to tell us that John C. Calhoun was a champion of slavery and a traitor or that former Mayor Godfrey was an unabashed racist committed to excluding Black families from settling in Alameda even during the War effort.

Either way, I urge you to take immediate action to move forward with striking these names from our public spaces so that we as a community can stop paying tribute to historical figures whose harms persist today and who deserve none of our respect.

Thank you,  
Josh Geyer