



Anchorage Sister Cities Commission

Municipality of Anchorage



Anchorage Mayor's Office

632 W. 6th Avenue, Suite 840 Anchorage, Alaska 99501 (907) 343-7100

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Ethan Berkowitz
Mayor of Anchorage
632 W 6th Avenue, Suite 840
Anchorage, AK 99501

Sent via email: Ethan.Berkowitz@anchorageak.gov

Dear Mayor Berkowitz,

We, the members of the Anchorage Sister Cities Commission, are writing to you regarding a number of recent social media posts calling for the removal of the Captain James Cook statue located at Resolution Park in Downtown Anchorage. Since the onset of city, statewide, and national protests opposing racial injustice and calling for equality, there appears to be a segment of the community who feel that the statue should be taken down.

The statue was a gift from BP as part of the American Bicentennial Celebration in 1976. It is a replica of the Cook statue in Whitby, Yorkshire, England, where Captain Cook learned to sail. Anchorage and Whitby became Sister Cities in 1978, 200 years after Cook's third voyage and entry into what is now Cook Inlet.

In 2018 the Commission held an event commemorating the 40th anniversary of Anchorage and Whitby becoming Sister Cities. Jim Barnett, a Cook historian, and Aaron Leggett, a Director of Eklutna, both spoke at the event. Aaron now serves on the Sister Cities Commission. These speakers were able to talk about the history of Cook's third voyage and the history of the Dena'ina people, thus providing the Anchorage community a more complete history of, and reverence for, this pristine area of Southcentral Alaska.

The Commission recognizes that the statue alone excludes the history of the indigenous people in what is now Anchorage. Rather than remove the statue, the Commission feels this situation can be instrumental as an opportunity to support a positive dialogue between us and our Sister City Whitby, as well as continued conversation and education among Anchorage's diverse population.

Our two Commissioners for Whitby, Yeon Min and Alexandra Post, have a meeting this week with their counterparts in Whitby. They plan on discussing this topic with them and getting their thoughts and insight. We will provide an update after that happens.

Whitby's Town Council posted this statement to their website on Friday June 12, 2020:

Captain James Cook and the Bark Endeavour are synonymous with Whitby. Cook was a navigator and an explorer who brought the world closer together in the Eighteenth Century and bound Whitby forever to communities across the globe. He charted the southern oceans and expanded scientific knowledge through his voyages. Whitby is proud of James Cook and proud of its maritime history. It is by recognising that our past was an imperfect time that we can tackle today's inequalities and work to build a better future together. Whitby celebrates James Cook because he will always belong here.

The Commission would like to propose a round table event where the issue can be discussed with the appropriate stakeholders and members of the community. The Commission feels that adding indigenous history to Resolution Park will provide a more complete historical picture, and also preserve a gift that shows another important part of our history. Whitby recently gifted us a pair of replacement dividers that Cook is holding in the statue. The original ones went missing some time ago.

History is often complicated and messy, but it is important we not ignore or forget it. As the plaque on the statue reads:

James Cook, a farm hand's son who became a Captain in the Royal Navy and gold medalist of the Royal Society, lives in history as the greatest explorer-navigator the world has known. His real memorial is on the map of the world.

The Commission looks forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you,

Anchorage Siter Cities Commission

Jeff Landfield, Chair

Erin Kirkland, Vice Chair

Alexandra Post, Secretary

Alliana Salanguit, Treasurer

Yeon Min

Ruth Kvernplassen

Hiroko Harada

Jin Chen

James Gaddis

Nan Ha

Aaron Leggett

Lo Crawford

Robin Brooks

Yohyon Pharr

CC Anchorage Assembly
