



**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH**  
*Office of the Mayor*

**John L. Rowe, Jr.**  
Mayor

**STATEMENT ON THE JUNE 10, 2020 EVENT IN PORTSMOUTH**

**Monuments Can Be Replaced-Lives Cannot**

We all mourn the horrific death of George Floyd, by police officers in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. His death has re-awakened not only our nation, our state, our city – but also the whole world to the injustices of racism. We must change as a nation, a state and City – we must all work together to eliminate all aspects of racism.

We are in the 18<sup>th</sup> day of a nation-wide movement that started with Mr. Floyd's death, a movement that I hope will change our nation, our state, and our City for the better. We have watched this movement unfold and develop in city after city, and for the most part, these demonstrations have been peaceful. Each city with a demonstration provides us with an opportunity to learn. What is an abundantly clear "lesson learned" is not to over-react with force – whether with the deployment of police or the National Guard. In city after city, we have seen examples of the excess use of police force leads to an escalation of damages to lives and to property. The damages to lives includes injuries and even some additional deaths. The damages to property include buildings being burned and looted. We can repair property; we cannot bring back a life that is lost in these demonstrations.

On October 10, 2017, the Portsmouth City Council adopted a resolution to move the Confederate Monument on Court Street to a cemetery as soon as the governing laws clearly permitted its relocation. That resolution remains in effect, and it has not been revoked by City Council.

The Virginia General Assembly, in its passage of House Bill 1537 in 2020 Session, gave local government the authority and specified the process of moving such monuments as ours. The process as prescribed by the General Assembly requires the local governing body to conduct a public hearing on the matter, and the local governing body must give a thirty day notice of the date of the public hearing.

In our June 10, 2020 meeting, City Council set the date for our public hearing for July 28, 2020.

Downtown Portsmouth consists of more than 80 blocks of commercial, retail, and residential buildings, and the event that occurred at the Confederate Monument was contained to only one portion of the 80 block area. It was the goal of the City's Public Safety leadership and personnel to keep the activity contained to that one area. Yes, some of those participating in last evening's protest vandalized the Confederate Monument; however, not one pane of glass was broken out, not one fire set, not one building looted outside of this one portion of the 400 block of Court Street. Our Public Safety – police and fire – were successful in containing this piece of public property. No private property was damaged.

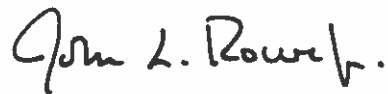
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P. O. Box 820 • Portsmouth, VA 23705-0820 • (757) 393-8746 • Fax: (757) 393-5378 • [mayor@portsmouthva.gov](mailto:mayor@portsmouthva.gov)

The natural question for one to ask is “why didn’t our Police take action to stop and arrest those who were vandalizing the monument.” The answer is simple – such action would have required force which would have escalated the event and spread the vandalism to other blocks of our downtown with more injuries. Our Police Department made the right choice – confine the vandalism to this one piece of public property so as to protect the remaining private property and lives.

We can repair the monument, but an injured body carries that scar for life. We can repair the monument, but we cannot bring back a life – if one was lost because of our escalating the event by the use of force.

Please do not misinterpret this as condoning vandalism; vandalism is illegal. However, given the choice between containing vandalism to only a small footprint of public property or protecting private property and lives by not escalating the event – the choice is clear – and simple. Our Police made the right choice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Rowe, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John L. Rowe, Jr.  
Mayor