

March 9, 2022

The Honorable Mayor and Honorable Members of City Council  
Municipal Center  
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

RE: Unexpected Deaths in the City

Dear Mayor Dyer and Members of City Council:

There is nothing more tragic than the unexpected death of an individual. When parents suffer the loss of one of their children, especially as the result of an accident or the criminal act of another, the loss can be even more crushing. I cannot imagine that pain and sense of loss, and I doubt that anyone who has not suffered such a loss can either. Regrettably, unexpected deaths due to accidents and intentional and/or negligent actions of others are all too common. While the City is perennially one of the safest cities in the Nation, and usually THE safest city of its size, this is an empty and meaningless statistic in the eyes of the surviving families of those who have died at the hands of another.

Recently Councilwoman Wooten (who has served on Council since November 20, 2018), along with a community activist, proposed that Council consider having a permanent plaque installed to memorialize the life of one such victim. There is no question that this untimely death was tragic, nor is there any question that the victim's family is now facing a future that will forever be interrupted by deep feelings of loss and pain. I join the rest of the community in extending my sincere sympathy to the family for the senseless loss of their loved one. However, the proposal for the City to individually memorialize a single victim's life by having a plaque installed in a public place is problematic and raises serious questions. For example:

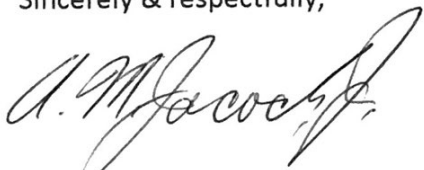
- Have the proponents of this idea given thought to how the families of all the other victims will feel about their deceased loved one not being memorialized in this manner? How will Council respond to those family members when they ask "What about our loved one?" Between November 20, 2018 and March 4, 2022, there were 39 homicide victims (including the one in question) in the City for whom there is no indication that they were involved in criminal conduct that precipitated their death. Why has there been no proposal to individually memorialize the lives of each of these victims? Of these victims, 28 were under the age of 40, and thus were likely to have left behind parents as well as other family members who feel the pain of their loss. Six of these victims were 18 or younger, with two of them less than one year old. Where are the proposals to individually memorialize the lives of each these children? Why is only the one victim referenced above singled out? Are the lives of the other 38 victims somehow less worthy of being remembered?

- Between November 20, 2018 and March 4, 2022, there were 10 deaths in alcohol related motor vehicle crashes in the City where the deceased were not the at-fault driver. During the same period, there were 14 deaths in non-alcohol related motor vehicle crashes in the City where the deceased were not the at-fault driver. Where are the proposals to individually memorialize each these 24 innocent victims?
- In the past 10 years (2012-2021), there have been a total of 179 homicide victims and 224 motor vehicle crash fatalities. Both of these figures are staggering in the context of having occurred in the safest city in the Nation. Where are the proposals to individually memorialize each of these 403 victims?

It is obviously impractical for the City to individually memorialize the victim of every homicide and fatal motor vehicle crash. Once you start down this road, you can't stop. Additionally, how many years back would you go? More so, it is both impractical and inappropriate to choose just one victim to memorialize. I offer the following non-exhaustive list of alternatives for your consideration:

- Family & friends can organize an annual walk, 5K, or other event in their loved one's name, with proceeds donated to a local charity in memory of the deceased;
- Family & friends can establish a memorial scholarship in their loved one's name, thus benefitting local students, perhaps in the field the victim worked in;
- Family and friends, working with a local non-profit organization could start a campaign to raise funds for a memorial honoring all crime victims in the City. The City could contribute land for the memorial. Perhaps a site adjacent to the City's courthouse would be the most appropriate place. It would make for a perfect setting to celebrate National Crime Victim's Rights Week each April.

Sincerely & respectfully,



A.M. Jacocks, Jr.

NOTE: I did not include the 12 victims of the Building 2 shooting in the numbers provided above. The aftermath and healing from such a large-scale tragedy is, and should be treated differently, and I am aware that a memorial for those victims is appropriately in the process of being developed.