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Ninety thousand unique individuals make up the ethnically and racially diverse population of Elroy, Alabama. As a truly a progressive city, we are taking strides to improve upon issues of social equity and inclusion. However, Elroy still faces challenges regarding its dark past of overt racism, white supremacy, hate crimes, and segregation. Often, I pass through Alfred Zane Park at the heart of our city and I am quickly reminded of this very past. Racism is at its core. Our foundation was built on the backs of slaves—my ancestors— whose hearts had no choice but to beat for a country that did not even value them as human beings. Too many members of our community experience feelings parallel to my own. Zane Park serves as a visible nod at the racism embedded into our city’s history. These sentiments are not reflective of this city. But at the center of Elroy, Alabama, Zane Park still actively fuels discomfort and uneasiness through members of our community. The park itself is a stark sign of need for the long strides still necessary in order to move towards the ultimate goal of inclusion and diversity.

Diversity is an important factor within our communities. Without it, we cannot achieve social equity. The presence of individuals from distinct backgrounds has a greater potential to reveal obstacles that the unconscious bias often blinds the majority from— hindering them from promoting equality alone. Diversity presents us with the opportunity to learn from others and grow. Yet, we cannot aim to increase diversity unless we also strive for inclusion. Every person living in Elroy, Alabama deserves to feel integrated and supported by the community. We must address diverse issues impacting our city or we cannot foster a racially and ethnically diverse population and choose to push issues of diversity and inclusion to

the background. As city council members, we have the responsibility of addressing the issues of what is acceptable and conducive to developing an all-embracing community in which we can all benefit from. The question is, how are we to progress as a community if we are not willing to look deeper into the issues of our neighbor and the greater public?

An endless list of signatures speaks to the issue of inclusion, but we— especially as a city council— must first take the initiative to listen to these voices. Zane Park sits in the center of *our* city. Our city, Elroy, Alabama, belongs to each one of us. *We* are Elroy. Thus, each citizen's voice must be heard. Alfred Zane's name is at the forefront of 25,000 or more minds and it is unmasking the structural racism that presides in our city. As a city council member, my goal is to remove this discomfort and entrenched discrimination, but I do not believe we can effectively do so without hearing what is racing through the mind and heart of our community. In discussing further action on the issues indicated in the petition, I stress the importance of reaching out to the voices of the community. What will make you comfortable in your city? It may seem as though this is an issue that does not affect our entire community; however, what threatens the well being of any member of our community will in turn affect the greater climate of our entire community. The degree of comfort that a person of a different race or ethnicity is privileged to experience in certain circumstances cannot discredit or reduce the feelings of another. The feeling of belonging and being at ease should be reflected in the feelings of all, even minorities.

By speaking out against exclusivity, like in Zane Park, our community takes steps toward the call for inclusion. A response of opposition towards these precedents is long overdue; the time for action is imminent. The petition of Zane Park has given Elroy, Alabama an opportunity to address issues of the past in order to move forward as a community and a city. It is difficult to justify this park as an inclusive space due to Zane's participation in the Ku Klux Klan and segregationist causes. In actuality, it is a hostile environment merely because of its name and the history that corresponds to the park. As a public space, the park should be welcoming to all individuals of Elroy, Alabama, yet it is inherently exclusive due to the history behind its name. Contrary to what Alfred Zane desired, the park should exist as a convivial space. As a space in the heart of our city, the park should reinforce the ideals of Elroy. Yet the park casts a shadow on Elroy, like the darkness veiling the history and two-sided character of Mr. Zane. Perhaps, the actions of Alfred Zane in the hotel fire of 1909 were commendable and heroic, but his overall character does not reflect well upon our city. His segregationist ideals are not representative of the diversity, progress, and strength of our city. Zane's support for white supremacy groups and segregationist causes do not align with the values that our city pursues today. The park does not now, nor will it be representative of our city, diversity, or who we are as a people. Therefore, it is up to this generation to rename it and to reflect the growth of our city. In changing the name, this centralized park will be a welcoming and inclusive area within the core of Elroy.

In response to this petition, our city council must work to best address the amendment of Zane Park while incorporating the perspectives of the community. As

one of the few members of color on our city council, I know the import of receiving feedback from the community at large for proper representation. We must first allocate funds for the removal of Alfred Zane's name from the premises of the park. Then, we should look to the community to begin working on an appropriate alternative name. After addressing the issue of Zane Park, we need to promote engagement and discussion about issues of diversity in Elroy, Alabama. It is then necessary to begin evaluating further options with the community in future action on names of other buildings and streets that might present themselves as problematic as well. Moving forward, it is essential for Elroy, Alabama to shift its focus to initiatives of diversity— promoting engagement and discussion surrounding these issues.

While I do believe in the need for action in changing the name of Zane Park, I believe we must evaluate the names of streets and buildings of similar stature around our city before advancing. Socially, we have a duty to our people, but there are also the financial implications of further name changes for the city to assess. The community of Elroy specifically spoke out against Zane Park and thus, I believe we should address this issue of the park first and foremost. The changing of these names surpasses the issue of one man or park or building; it is much more. The history that follows these names is the important factor in confronting these concerns. There is a necessity for the spread of awareness and transparency about the individuals glorified in the naming buildings or streets of our city. It is problematic that Alfred Zane is revered as an outstanding and heroic man with complete disregard of his shortcomings. We need to work to be transparent by

providing historic landmark plaques denouncing the full history of every celebrated individual. Here, the issue is due to a lack of transparency. I believe the use of credible historic landmark plaques should be used to begin to address and improve upon the ambiguity and call for authenticity. Every aspect of history is relevant—the good and the bad. Both must be recognized properly to progress forward and reduce the chance of repeating the downfalls of the past. Education of the community on these people revered in this city in generations before in order to show how far we have come. It is important to keep these landmarks to commemorate various individuals, but it is essential to note both their contributions and downfalls. By removing each of these names, it may lead to the erasure of history though these histories that can neither be undone, nor forgotten. The names of past remind us of these troubling pasts— holding us accountable in the present and future. These are names we can learn from.

The acknowledgement of controversial landmarks of celebrated individuals with dark pasts is long overdue. For a long time, there has been a need to challenge how issues of diversity are addressed and now the beginnings of change are arising. At the University of Texas at Austin, the issue of glorification rather than spread of history became problematic as well. In August of 2015, the statue of Jefferson Davis was removed at University of Texas and it made a point. A point that acknowledges that students of color matter, just like people of color in Elroy, Alabama matter— furthering my argument of removing the name of Alfred Zane from the park. In ridding of these vexing symbols, the goal is not erasure or disregard for past faults, but instead to differentiate between glorification and history. The feelings of the

students at the University of Texas are practically emulated by the emotions stirring up about the Zane Park among the community of Elroy, Alabama. But these strong emotions are what lead to action. For it is impossible for our city to reach its utmost potential of inclusivity without assertions to speak out against the visible veneration of problematic histories.

Finally, as a city that has struggled with diversity and inclusion in the past, I believe wholeheartedly that the removal of Alfred Zane's name is vital to the contribution of city's growth. How we address the issue of Zane Park will set a precedent for years to come as we continue to work on social equity in Elroy, Alabama. It will be the first tangible stride forward towards change and progress in relation to social equity and justice. The effects of these efforts and support of our community at large by way of renaming of the park will also be a historic beginning in the accomplishment of social equity in Elroy, Alabama. We hope that change and minority representation will come about with these changes in the near future as well— resulting in not only demographic, but also leadership diversity in our city. These strides for diversity not only have the potential to bring in more diversity and encourage highly qualified applicants of color, but it also will contribute to the betterment of our community climate. The feeling of inclusivity among especially minorities in areas of overrepresentations of white leadership is important in strengthening the community. Diversity is an aspect that Elroy strives for because of its impact. In more ways than one, diversity can lead to greater things: new ways of thought, discussions, distinct leadership, and overall progress in our city. By not addressing the issue of the Zane Park and changing the name, it could lead to

hindrance of further diversity. This time for action is Elroy's opportunity to show our authentic commitment to diversity and inclusion.

I believe we must continue to work towards healing the deep gashes left by the legacy of slavery and racism in our community. The issue of the naming of these parks and streets and buildings is much greater. It determines how we handle matters of diversity and surmise the effects of our tainted history. We must remember that although our history can be daunting and difficult to look back on, this reflection offers an opportunity to bring new beginnings from the lessons we have learned.