



City of Elroy, Alabama

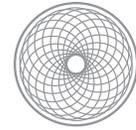
# Council Proposal

Prepared for: Elroy City Council

Prepared by: George Burrell Walters, City Council member

October 3, 2016

Proposal number: 813



# Council Proposal

October 3, 2016	File Number: 813	<i>Proposed by: George Walters</i>
Subject A: Rename Zane Park & Signs	Subject B: Zane Library Stipulation	Subject C: Elroy Town Precedence

## Subject A: Rename Zane Park & Signs

### It is proposed that:

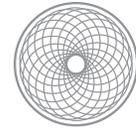
1. The City Council officially renames Zane Park to a new name to be determined by popular vote in local polls.
2. The City Council authorizes the City Manager to initiate a street name change for the adjacent streets, currently called Zane Avenue East and Zane Avenue South, to be revised according to the results of the poll in part 1, (ex: a sufficient number of votes for “Justice Park” will result in streets name “Justice Avenue East” and “Justice Avenue South”).

### Discussion:

Adjudication of the dispute between the citizens of Elroy and the Elroy Parks and Recreation Department authorizes the City Manager to rename Zane Park and the surrounding streets on the basis of peaceful assembly. The public institution, subject to the whims of the popular community, alienated a significant portion of the population of Elroy. The name became a source of contention for the community and caused distress to a sufficient number of citizens, thus failing to receive consent of the governed. The lack of consent prescribes that an alternate name be adopted for the park through general ballot. The park is a cultural center, perpetually hosting communal events, and as such it is wholly inappropriate that the name be a source of resentment or hostility. The name of the park can easily be changed to something that does not bother such a large fraction of the community.

Over a quarter of the population of Elroy spoke out against the commemoration of Alfred Zane in an exercise of their First Amendment right to free speech and assembly. While it is important to recognize our local history and not suppress the memories of even our most regrettable predecessors, it is a worse crime to upset the local population. A sizable fraction of Elroy sufficiently loud enough requested that the name of Zane Park be changed, and their cry was heard. Thus, the designation of the new name will be determined in the local polls in voting booths this coming November. Selecting the new name by popular vote will ensure that the park can represent the whole community.

The streets “Zane Avenue East” and “Zane Avenue South” will be renamed according to the results of the November polls. The name of the park will determine the name of the streets (ex: a sufficient number of votes for “Justice Park” will result in streets named “Justice Avenue East” and “Justice Avenue South”). The polls will be moderated by the City Council in conjunction with Elroy Police Department to protect the vote from profane answers as well as rigging.



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## **Subject B: Zane Library Stipulation**

It is proposed that:

1. The City Council does **not** authorize the City Manager to demand that Zane Public Library change to another name.

2. The City Council authorizes the City Treasurer to accommodate the Elroy Historical Society in creating a commemorative plaque to the Zane family and similar historical memorials. The plaque serves to expose the dishonorable aspects of the past while celebrating the generosity of the family and their support of the local library.

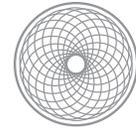
### **Discussion:**

Zane Public Library is funded in part by the Zane family endowment. To condemn their family after generations of support all for the decisions of a deceased relative would only discourage future benefactors from supporting public institutions. Condemning historical figures for their outdated ethics remains illogical and impractical as societal morals continue to warp and change. Rather than hide the past, the City Council has authorized the Elroy Historical Society to install commemorative plaques to use our local landmarks as an opportunity to objectively learn about our town roots. The plaques serve a purpose to educate the citizens of Elroy as well as visitors and must therefore not shy away from inconvenient truths. Full disclosure of points of both pride and shame leads to a more truthful historical narrative which best prepares us to learn from our mistakes as a society, and understand our ancestors from this slice of Alabama.

The Zane Public Library cannot be renamed because of the precedent that it would set, creating fragile titles for public institutions. It is dangerous to outlaw the memorialization of historic figures that stray from present-day morals because it is impossible to compare and measure the moral frameworks of every namesake, or predict how morals will adapt throughout our lifetimes and beyond. The Zane Public Library is but one of an overabundance of public institutions named after individuals with questionable pasts. To change the name of the library would be to embark on an endless quest to purify the town's history which is incontrovertibly built upon slavery and exploitation. Modern Elroy citizens did not select Alfred Zane as their hero, but that does not mean that we should disrespect the history of our 19th century ancestors that celebrated the Zane family as legends. We can thank the Zane family for their good deeds both past and present, while still condemning and learning from their dishonorable mistakes. The family history need not determine how we view their ancestors. Recognition of the past is necessary, though we must be wary not to assign blame.

The Zane family has come a long way from its discriminatory history. As the town of Elroy has grown increasingly diverse demographically, so too has the Zane family. Arpana Zane, a local pharmacist, has roots from Canada as well as India. She should be celebrated as the united blending of cultures typical to the American experience, rather than punished for her family's deep connections to the KKK. While it is great to recognize history and to try to learn from the mistakes of our ancestors, there is nothing to gain from needlessly vilifying the descendants of malefactors.

The Zane Public Library must remain as named unless a similar petition as in Subject A forces a public vote to interfere on the basis of modified consent. Only when the controversy is brought to adjudication may the selection take place via popular vote. Historical plaques will in the meantime allow us to begin to come to terms with our troubled past.



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## **Subject C: Elroy Town Precedence**

### **It is proposed that:**

1. Elroy City Council upholds the name Elroy, on the basis that the local population has moved on and established a significant history as Elroy distinct from the city's namesake.
2. Elroy City Council establishes a criterion for granting Elroy Historical Society with the necessary funds to accurately inform about the figures whose names appear on public landmarks, streets, buildings, and parks.

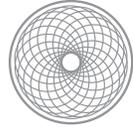
### **Discussion:**

Ulysses Elroy was a slave owner when slavery was common practice in Alabama. Though the City Council condemns his slave-owning past, the Council opts to refrain from renaming the city to something other than Elroy. This is because the Council finds it necessary to establish an acceptable precedent when it comes to approaching local history. Such a precedent would necessarily weigh the relative histories against one another in order to determine a historical narrative, thus we ought to ask ourselves what sort of history should be remembered and what should be celebrated.

The town of Elroy was named after Ulysses Elroy, but the attachment need not extend further than a namesake. Ulysses had no idea in 1820 what his name would one day label, and indeed his disreputable family history is negligible compared to the 200 years of change and triumph this section of Alabama has met since then. Instead of changing the town's name and disrespecting those 200 years of history as Elroy, the City Council has opted to fund the Elroy Historical Society in order to educate about Elroy's past. By understanding how the slave-fueled cotton market was a central force in colonizing and economizing Elroy, one can begin to understand the long road that Elroy has traveled toward civil rights for all. By accepting our past, and educating ourselves as well as visitors, we might reforge our reputation so that highly-qualified applicants of color do not continue to decline jobs in Elroy for fear of being underrepresented or excluded.

Acknowledging the mistakes of the past need not be an admission of personal guilt but instead a comment on our community origins. It is dangerous to band together to condemn Elroy the individual, lest we minimize the systemic inequity of 19th century Alabama in favor of demonizing a scapegoat. After all, Ulysses Elroy was but a drop of sinful blood in a historic crimson tide of organized abuse. The City Council trusts that, by subsidizing the Elroy Historical Society, we might explore our community origins in a way that allows the town to positively deconstruct its tense history. The precedent of inquiring about rather than revising our history should catalyze a healthy discussion about civil rights and the consequences of our forefathers' actions. In order for all citizens to feel welcome in Elroy, no topic may be taboo.

US history - and indeed Elroy history - is filled with regrettable decisions, backward public opinions, and legal inequity. We cannot conceivably root out all of the landmarks memorializing "heroes" who have committed one heinous crime or another, and it would be self-deception to say that these figures are not foundational roots in Elroy history just by revoking their memorialization. However, we can educate where there are stories to tell. We can celebrate the history of the city apart from the history of Ulysses Elroy, and enjoy the community without the guilt of wrongful origins. We can dedicate ourselves to leading inspirational lives so that our generation produces heroes worth commemorating.



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**Legality Clause:**

The Elroy City Legal Council finds that this proposal is legitimate and within the authority of the City Council.

**Fiscal Comment:**

The Elroy City Financial Office finds that a sufficient popular demand merits the allocation of public funds for the one-time fee of renaming the park and neighboring signs in accordance with subject A. Additional public funds will be allocated to the Elroy Historical Society for use in education and commemoration in accordance with subjects B&C.

**City Manager's Statement:**

The Elroy City Manager approves of this proposal.

Proposed By:

George Burrell Walters  
**City Council Member**