

## NEWS

# Momentum building toward resolution in Pueblo Columbus statue dispute

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Significant momentum toward a solution over the Christopher Columbus statue dispute is building between both sides of the issue.

A plan imagined by City Council President Dennis Flores that would see an outdoor museum created where the statue sits in the Mesa Junction that would present a broader scope of history has been agreed upon by both sides of the issue during mediation sessions that have been held, according to Flores and Fred Galves, the mediator who has overseen those sessions.

And while there is still plenty of work left to be done to see the plan come to fruition, officials are optimistic about the progress that has been made in getting an agreement on a permanent solution to the saga.

Flores' plan includes the addition of two additional statues by the Columbus statue in the Mesa Junction across the street from the Rawlings Library.

The Columbus statue would stay put, and either the existing Martin Luther King Jr. statue in Pueblo or a newly commissioned one of him, as well as a statue conceived and approved by those in opposition to the Columbus statue would be added to form a newly named plaza.

Flores said members of Pueblo's African-American community will be further consulted on the idea for the inclusion of the Martin Luther King Jr. statue.

The two new statues would serve to show a more complete history of the nation rather than tearing down history, Flores said.

And while Flores acknowledged there are many more meetings that need to take place and work that needs to be done for this plan to become reality, he said the two sides have agreed

to this plan as a long-term resolution and that is the most positive step that has come from mediation.

As for what happens until the plaza is constructed, the sides have hit a snag.

Those in opposition to the Columbus statue want the statue bust covered until the other statues are added to the site, and the pro-statue group would not concede to that, according to Flores. The opposition side said they'd stop their weekly Sunday protests if the other side agreed to cover the statue until the new plaza is designed and constructed.

Still, Flores said that short-term issue shouldn't take away from the fact that the mediation has been successful in securing an agreement as to a permanent solution to this dispute and work is still ongoing on a temporary resolution.

Earlier this week City Council unanimously voted down a measure that would have sent a question to voters this November asking whether the statue should stay up or come down.

"Had it gone onto the ballot or had City Council voted to take it down or leave it up, it would have really divided the community," Flores said. "If my idea works, it's bringing the community together versus dividing the community. That's kind of the way I'm looking at it from a big picture perspective."

Galves agreed that this solution is preferable to what's happening elsewhere in the country with controversial statues and monuments.

"Most cities are not dealing with this problem this way," Galves said. "They're either tearing it down or keeping it up and ignoring them, or they're just having police come in and arrest people. None of them are really solving the problem. They just don't know what to do."

The next step in the process will be Flores drafting an ordinance that would establish a commission to set forth the design and specific implementation of the new plaza.

He said there will be many important symbolic issues as well as logistical planning issues and funding that will need to be addressed.

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