

**JOINT
STATE CAPITOL COMMITTEE
&
CAPITOL CAMPUS DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Remote Access Meeting**

**January 8, 2026
10:00 a.m.**

Draft Minutes

SCC MEMBERS PRESENT:

Beau Perschbacher, Chair, Governor Ferguson's
Designee
Randy Bolerjack (Designee for Secretary of State),
Vice Chair

Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck

EXCUSED

Katy Taylor, (Designee for Commissioner of Public
Lands Dave Upthegrove)

OTHERS PRESENT:

Rebecca Ann, Washington State Legislature
Tami "Jo" Aiken, Department of Enterprise Services
Chelsea Baker van Drood, City of Olympia

Cynthia Barrett, Department of Enterprise Services
Shani Bauer, Washington State Legislature
David Bremer, Washington State Legislature

Emilie Brown, Department of Enterprise Services
Wendy Brown, Washington State Legislature

George Carter, Department of Enterprise Services

Brent Chapman, Department of Enterprise Services
Jordon Corneliusen, Department of Enterprise
Services

Ashlee Delaney, Department of Enterprise Services

CCDAC MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jordan Kiel, Chair, Architect 2
Kristin Glandon, Vice Chair, Landscape
Architect
Randy Bolerjack, Designee for Secretary of
State
Wayne Carlson, Urban Planner
State Representative Beth Doglio
State Senator Phil Fortunato
Alex Rolluda, Architect 1

EXCUSED

Senator Mark Liias
Representative Stephanie McClintock

Aaron Luoma, HBB Landscape Architecture
Jimmy Martin, Department of Enterprise Svcs.
Jen Masterson, Office of Financial
Management
Patrick McDonald, Office of Secretary of State
Allen Miller, Kutak Rock
Kailee Moulton, Department of Enterprise
Svcs.
Colleen Pehar, Washington State Legislature
Brian Pickering, Department of Enterprise
Svcs
Kayla Quinn, Department of Enterprise
Services
Sarian Scott, Washington State Legislature
Kimberly Sockle, Department of Enterprise
Svcs
Katy Stark, Department of Enterprise Services

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Wendy Goldmark, Department of Enterprise Services	Emma Stone, HBB Landscape Architecture
Valerie Gow, Puget Sound Meeting Services	Ginny Streeter, Department of Enterprise Services
Greg Griffith, Olympia Historical Society	Ben Swanson, Department of Enterprise Services
Becky Guyer, Department of Enterprise Services	Mike Sweney, ArtsWA
Benjamin Helle, Office of Secretary of State	Hobbak Talebi, Department of Ecology
Adam Holdorf, Department of Enterprise Services	Shaina Thompson, Department of Enterprise Svcs.
Ashley Howard, Department of Enterprise Services	James Troyer, Washington State Legislature
Sidney Hunt, Department of Enterprise Services	Tony Trujillo Washington State Legislature
Rachelle Johnson, Department of Enterprise Services	Dick Van Wagenen, DES Volunteer
Matt Jones, Department of Enterprise Services	Kirti Vijay, Office of Financial Management
Wesley Kirkman, Department of Enterprise Svcs.	Neil Weaver, Department of Enterprise Services
Kara Klotz, Department of Enterprise Services	Oliver Wu, Department of Enterprise Services
Nouk Leap, Department of Enterprise Services	

Call Meeting to Order, General Announcements, and Approval of the Agenda - Action

Chair Beau Perschbacher called the joint State Capitol Committee (SCC) and Capitol Campus Design Advisory Committee (CCDAC) meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Chair Perschbacher welcomed SCC and CCDAC members, staff, and guests.

CCDAC Chair Jordon Kiel welcomed CCDAC members.

Members and staff provided self-introduction.

Chair Perschbacher reviewed the agenda to approve the Joint SCC/CCDAC November 13, 2025 meeting minutes, receive public comments, and receive updates on the Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project, Campus Tree Planting, Cal Anderson Memorial, Legislative Building Statuary Locations, Legislative Campus Modernization Project, and the Legislative Building Incident.

Approval of Joint SCC/CCDAC November 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes – SCC/CCDAC Action

Randy Bolerjack moved, seconded by Lt. Governor Denny Heck, to approve the Joint SCC/CCDAC meeting minutes of November 13, 2025 as published. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

Alex Rolluda moved, seconded by Wayne Carlson, to approve the Joint SCC/CCDAC meeting minutes of November 13, 2025 as published. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

Public Comment Period – Informational

Wendy Goldmark, Government Relations Program Specialist, DES, described the format for providing comments. No public comments were offered during the meeting. Two written comments received by the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) are included as attachments.

Campus Tree Planting – Informational

U.S. 250th Celebration

Dr. Brent Chapman, DES Horticulturist-Grounds Property Manager, said the proposal would add a commemorative tree on historic Capitol Campus in observation of the nation's 250th birthday. He introduced Kailee Moulton, DES Grounds Operations Specialist, to share details about the proposal.

Ms. Moulton reported staff reviewed the RCW for guidance on the proposal. Representative Hunter Abell is co-sponsoring the planting of the tree. The tree was donated by the George Washington Mount Vernon Estate in Virginia. The tree, a *Nyssa sylvatica* (black gum), was selected because of its tolerance of wet soils, beautiful habit and red foliage in the fall, and attractiveness to birds.

Staff identified a planting site along 11th Avenue across from the former GA Building; a favorable site because of an opening along the woodland edge bed enabling adequate space for the tree to mature to its full size up to 50 feet tall and 30 feet wide without obstructing security cameras or lines of sight from nearby memorials. The site supports the Olmstead Landscape Plan created over 100 years ago.

Staff plans to plant the small tree (18"- 24" tall) in spring or July in cooperation with Representative Abell.

Lt. Governor Heck shared that he is traveling with Representative Hunter Abell to British Columbia for a diplomatic visit. Representative Abell extends his appreciation to staff and the committees for their cooperation and collaboration with him to coordinate and complete the tree planting.

Kristin Glandon added that as a landscape architect, she supports the tree selection and planting location.

Alex Rolluda asked whether the graphic in the presentation depicts the approximate height of the tree and location of the drip line. Ms. Moulton replied that the caricature is only a depiction of the planting location as the tree can reach a height of 50 feet tall and 20-30 feet wide.

Legislative Building Statuary Locations – Informational

Kimberly Sockle, DES Assistant Director Facilities Professional Services, provided the update.

Currently, the state has two statues residing in the National Statutory Hall in Washington, D.C. The Marcus Whitman statue is scheduled for replacement with the Billy Frank Jr. statue

representing Washington State in Washington, D.C. State legislation was passed to add a Billy Frank Jr. statue within the Legislative Building to match statues in Washington, D.C. Prior studies identified six placement and cost options.

Staff studied a number of additional options for placement of the Billy Frank Jr. statue. Ms. Sockle reviewed and described the benefits and negatives of each option:

- Option 6: Located in the State Reception Room along the north wall in front of central entry door. The central entry door to the State Reception Room is located behind the Billy Frank Jr. statue.
- Option 7a: Located outside the State Reception Room central entry door in the Rotunda. The location is visible in the hallway and open to the public.
- Option 7b: Located between the two columns on the north side of the third floor. The location would be open to the public.
- Option 8: Located in the State Reception Room along the south wall in front of central window. Light through the windows could backlight the statue and create shadows. The room is closed to the public except during special events or tours.

Ms. Sockle reviewed two options for relocation of the Marcus Whitman statue:

- Option 9a: Located to the left of the entrance to the Senate Dining Room.
- Option 9b: Located to the right of the entrance to the Senate Dining Room.

Should relocation of the Marcus Whitman statue occur, the Billy Frank Jr. statue would be moved to the current location of the Whitman statue. Staff is studying the two options for relocation of the Whitman statue and will share results at the May 2026 meeting. Based on the joint committee decision and timing, the installation could be in September 2026 at the earliest.

Randy Bolerjack commented that the options for placement of the Billy Frank Jr. statue in the State Reception Room would preclude general public access. The room hosts many events with featured speakers located in front of the statue, which could be cumbersome at future events. He asked about any other statues that would need to be moved to accommodate the Billy Frank Jr. statue.

Ms. Sockle responded that a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. currently located in Option 7a would need to be moved if that option is selected. Option 7b currently houses the giant bronze George Washington bust, which would also require relocation if the 7b option is selected.

Senator Fortunato inquired about the relocation of the George Washington bust should Option 7b be selected. Ms. Sockle said selection of the option would require another decision as to a new location for the bust. Senator Fortunato pointed out that the location is accessible to the public and a prominent location of respect. He expressed support for Option 7b.

Lt. Governor Heck commented on the issue as each step taken forward has resulted in opposition by yet another group. Since there is no consensus at this point, it appears there are many different points of view by legislators as to the original intent. He recommends contacting the Legislature for guidance as the options are generating some sensitivities. Everyone has a different idea about the intent of the legislation passed by the Legislature, which did not address location. However, many legislators have indicated that the intent was to retain the Whitman statue in its current location while others claim the intent was to move the statue. The underlying legislation addresses replacing the Whitman statue in Statuary Hall in the nation's Capitol with the Billy Frank Jr. statue; however, the committee received no direction from the Legislature as to the location within the building that bears its name.

Chair Perschbacher agreed that the proposal has generated much interest, and it would be important to discuss options with the Legislature as it has been a decision both committees have been wrestling with for some time. It is also important to render a decision and move forward. He recommended scheduling a special meeting in July to vote on options that have been studied and are possible. The timing affords time for the committee to reach out to the Legislature.

Senator Fortunato said the issue is about respect for those of prominence as well as to everyone who has expressed concerns. Placement of the Billy Frank Jr. statue in Option 7b does not affect the Whitman statue and avoids any disagreements. The location affords the Billy Frank Jr. statue a prominent and accessible location providing more visual appeal rather than placement in the front entryway. The option represents a good solution. Rather than seeking input from the Legislature, the committee should convey its preferred option.

Wayne Carlson suggested that should guidance from the Legislature be pursued, some threshold questions should be identified, such as whether the two statues should be located in public spaces to help eliminate some of the options.

Chair Perschbacher called for scheduling a special meeting on Thursday, July 23, 2026 from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. for the purpose of a decisional item regarding statue locations within the Legislative Building. The May 7, 2026 meeting will be informational to review the results of the new feasibility studies.

Chair Kiel supported the recommendation to schedule a special meeting.

Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project Update – Informational

Bobbak Talebi, Southwest Regional Director, Department of Ecology (DOE), introduced members of the Ecology Project Team, reviewed progress on the project design process and schedule, and future engagement with the SCC and the CCDAC. Effective July 1, 2025, DOE assumed overall leadership and oversight of the Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project from DES following several years of technical support to the project.

The project team assigned to the project include Lynn Turner, Project Management Manager, Southeast & Olympic Region; Henry Bell, Project Management, Senior Coastal Planner; Fran

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Sant, Environmental Permitting/Senior Planner; and Shauna Hanisch-Kirkbride, Restoration, Vancouver Field Office Manager. Mr. Talebi serves as the Project Director.

The project has completed 60% design. Although the project includes many major components, the most important is removal of the 5th Avenue Dam and restoring the area to a natural estuary. Project benefits include replacing the 5th Avenue Bridge, dredging of the channel with dredge materials used to restore the historic channel and reestablish habitat areas along the shoreline, and adding a natural vegetative berm to help control the impacts of sea level rise to downtown Olympia and other areas. Dredged sediment will be reused rather than trucked off site to reduce costs and restore habitat areas.

Another component of the project is an interlocal agreement between local partners that are financially contributing to the project over the long term. The agreement has been signed and executed and outlines contributions by each partner for long-term maintenance including scheduled dredging activities.

The 60% design package has been delivered to DOE. The package is comprised of hundreds of pages of designs and schematics. The project team is currently reviewing the package. DOE received a budget proviso to oversee the project. The proviso dictates the importance of reviewing all cost savings while focusing on estuary restoration and developing a phased construction plan.

Some recreational elements are not included in the first phase of construction. The recreational components are included in the design to ensure construction when the Legislature funds those elements or DOE identifies other strategic sources of non-state funding.

The project team plans to review and evaluate the components over the next several months with a goal to distribute more information in late February or March. The project is undertaking informational briefings at this time with different agencies to ensure a thorough understanding of the project. The first evaluation will ensure the designs are accurate and can be implemented prior to distributing the information to the public, partners, and agencies.

Senator Fortunato commented that one of the original discussions involving the proposal was largely because the lake continually filled with sediment and dredging would be expensive and ongoing. Creation of the estuary was viewed as a way to reduce long-term costs. Based on his soil analysis conducted upstream, enhancement of upstream river shorelines would reduce sediment flows to the lake. Additionally, the estuary is subject to tidal action. He questioned whether tidal cycling in the estuary from the Sound would create the appearance of a swamp.

Mr. Talebi responded that with the creation of habitat, the area will resemble a natural estuary.

Senator Fortunato commented on the negative appearance of the system during tidal cycles.

Mr. Talebi cited the environmental benefits of tidal flats. Importantly, the project completed a full environmental evaluation prior to moving forward with the selected design.

Representative Doglio said she had the opportunity when the lake was drained to walk around the lake and view the amount of wildlife benefitting from the estuary-like environment. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and is subjective as one person finds something beautiful while another may not. She celebrates the aesthetics of an estuary for its scenic beauty and rich biodiversity it supports. The community supports the estuary and while it will be an initial expensive undertaking, it will ultimately save the state money because of issues associated with the location of the LOTT Wastewater Plant in downtown Olympia. The naturalness of the estuary will be quite beautiful as the tides cycle and the estuary constantly changes.

Mr. Bolerjack acknowledged the ongoing discussion surrounding the aesthetics of an estuary. Some visuals exist, such as TVW's documentary featuring a similar discussion.

Mr. Talebi added that other underlying major concerns caused by the lake are the presence of numerous invasive species and poor water quality in the lake and in Budd Inlet. The estuary project was deemed to lead to restoration of water quality in the South Sound, Puget Sound, and support salmon recovery. The project team is developing a short film for the 60% design milestone featuring interviews with some partners and an update on the project's importance.

Mr. Talebi reviewed the project schedule. Additional briefings are planned to review the evaluation of the 60% design package and costs for each project element. Many opportunities are available for the community to engage in the project, which will also include a tour of the project site. The Governor's proposed supplemental budget includes funding to attain 100% design by the end of the biennium. The package to be presented to the Governor's Office, Legislature, and Office of Financial Management includes a phased construction plan featuring different funding scenarios. The project team is pursuing non-state funding sources as well.

Campus Memorials – Informational

Cal Anderson Memorial

Aaron Luoma, HBB Landscape Architecture, presented information on Senator Cal Anderson's final memorial design.

Elements and goals of the conceptual design presented in 2024/2025 essentially are unchanged reflecting a memorial honoring Senator Anderson as a civil rights champion and Washington's first openly gay legislator. The memorial honors his service in the Vietnam War and reflects his character and legacy by creating a quiet and contemplative space that is inclusive and accessible for all users while complementing the historic west Capitol Campus.

Throughout the process, the project team worked with numerous stakeholders and the committees to receive feedback and address questions and comments to ensure a memorial design that signifies Cal Anderson's life and legacy. Stakeholders shared descriptive words that

were translated into images, colors, materials, textures, and words used to develop the memorial design.

The location of the memorial is east of the Sunken Garden. The memorial is classified as a ‘Minor Works’ memorial under guidelines in WAC 200-230.

Mr. Luoma shared five design concepts developed following numerous meetings with stakeholders in 2024. The stakeholders unanimously supported Concept D. The last update included a review of that conceptual design. The design is a round circular plaza space featuring a seat wall on the north side with an integrated berm to blend in with the historic campus and pastoral grounds. The memorial includes an iconic ornamental tree. Steps rise up from an existing pedestrian pathway on the east side providing opportunities for events. The main focal point of the memorial is a large boulder accented with lighting and low plantings. Lighting is also included beneath the bench.

The project team submitted the 60% design package to DES. A topographical survey was completed of the memorial space along with demolition, grading, lighting, paving, and irrigation plans. Notable changes are not significant in the new rendered plan; however, the proposal includes a small vertical mow strip or curb on the backside of the memorial as well as plantings behind the bench to enclose the space to reduce visibility of the backside of the bench. A proposed railing will match Legislative Building railings located along the north side of the building. Some pedestrian pavement along the pathway will be replaced to the east to ensure the memorial is ADA accessible. Some refinements to the planting design have been proposed as well.

Mr. Luoma reviewed the planting design. The ornamental tree is a Japanese snowbell selected through input from stakeholders and DES. Evergreen plants are included as foundational plantings comprised of native plants and flowering plants. Some areas are designated as spots for colorful entrances utilizing a blue/purple color scheme.

The bench design is an integral component of the memorial to provide a warm and welcoming space enabling several people to sit as well as those desiring a more solitary contemplative reflection experience. The precast concrete bench will match adjacent buildings in color. The architecture includes horizontal striations and drain holes to keep the bench dry to the extent possible. Mr. Luoma presented a 3-D illustration of the bench. The bench design includes rounded corners on the ends. The seat may be polished to ensure water wicks off during inclement weather.

Mr. Luoma displayed illustrations of the two locations with lighting. The first location is under the bench with the second location being up lights for the boulder. The lights will be vandal resistant and weatherproof.

The boulder will be approximately 6’ x 6’ wide and 4’ tall with a flat base for stability. Several bands will swoop from left to right and polished for engraving text messages. Messaging on the

boulder is guided by parameters in WAC 200-230. The size of text and space for the message will be of suitable size for readability of approximately 30" x 7". Stakeholders were provided with some parameters based on the space available for the messaging. The project team explored the placement of text along the swooping bands. Appropriate placement of the text will be determined after consensus on the message is attained. The stakeholders supported a black font to provide a contrast.

The schedule includes another update to the SCC and CCDAC at its May meeting with 90% design scheduled for presentation in addition to any stakeholder feedback. A decisional meeting is scheduled at the September meeting. At that time the design will be completed with the project ready to release for bids. Several meetings are planned with the stakeholders. Construction is anticipated to be completed in early 2027 with a ribbon cutting scheduled in June 2027 following maturity of the plantings and blooming of flowers.

The 2024 conceptual cost estimate was \$312,715 versus the updated cost of \$376,344 (60% design). The increase in cost is attributed to the boulder, bronze railing, additional sidewalk paving, and market escalation during 2027.

Mr. Bolerjack commented favorably on the design as the concept speaks to contemplative and meditative space as well as the opportunity for the site to host speeches to capture Senator Anderson's work in the Legislature and in the community.

Ms. Glandon thanked Mr. Luoma for the thorough process of designing the memorial.

Legislative Campus Modernization Update – Informational

Wesley Kirkman, LCM Project Director, reported on recent LCM project accomplishments:

Joel Pritchard Building

- Envelope construction underway through February
- Preparations for elevator installation began in December
- Framing and rough in underway on all floors
- Mechanical yard equipment and transformer installed
- 15th Avenue SW surface repair completed and reopened before legislative session
- Substantial completion expected August 2026

Irving R. Newhouse Building

- All warranty items completed
- Received AIA WA Civic Design Award

John L. O'Brien Building

- Move-out: Mid-March
- Construction: March –December
- Move-in: prior to 2027 legislative session

Mr. Kirkman shared several photographs reflecting construction progress and building interiors of the Joel Pritchard Building. Other photographs of the sites can be accessed on the DES project page.

Legislative Building Incident Update – Informational

Jo Aiken, DES Deputy Director – Chief Operations Officer

DES is moving forward on a study to determine the level of work left to complete the repairs. Approved repairs are either underway or will be completed following the legislative session. The repairs include the George Washington bronze bust and pedestal that were knocked over and damaged. The Martin Luther King Jr. bronze bust and wood pedestal suffered minor chip and crack damage. The piano damage (burn damage) is currently in repair. The piano bench has been replaced with a bench from storage. Fire scorched areas on the marble floor stairs facing the south doors have been repaired. Scorching on the teak floor was repaired leaving three darker marks but no structural damage to the floor.

The major repair is the rug in the Reception Room. Cost estimates to repair the rug range from \$689,000 to \$964,000 to include shipment of the rug to the repair vendor in New York. The repair would entail a full restoration of the rug. Another option is resizing the rug at a cost of \$37,000 with wear and tear areas removed from the rug.

Pending action is dependent upon insurance coverage of the damage. Once information has been received on insurance coverage, DES will be able to identify options moving forward. In the interim, approved items for repair are moving forward.

Pending repairs include the drapes in the Reception Room. Several repair options were identified. The rug has been rolled to slow the progression of biological damage caused by moisture.

Ms. Aiken advised that notification of the insurance coverage is typically a 90-day process. Staff is working closely with the insurance representatives.

Senator Fortunato asked about the possibility of receiving pictures of the damaged areas/items. Ms. Aiken affirmed she would forward pictures via email.

Future Announcements and Adjournment of Meeting – Action

Chair Perschbacher advised that Information on future meetings for CCDAC and SCC is published on the DES website with meeting information, meeting dates, and meeting times. DES posts all meeting agendas, minutes, and meeting packets as they become available. The next SCC and CCDAC joint meeting is scheduled on Thursday, May 7, 2026 at 10 a.m. Future SCC and CCDAC meetings will be held via hybrid and remotely.

Chair Perschbacher recommended members meet in-person at the July 23 special meeting to afford the committees an opportunity to visit the different sites for placement of the statues.

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With there being no further business, Chair Perschbacher adjourned the meeting at 11:28 a.m.

Attachments:

Written correspondence from Senator Phil Fortunato

Written correspondence from Emmett O'Connell

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Puget Sound Meeting Services, psmsoly@earthlink.net

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Attachment 1:

From: Fortunato, Sen. Phil

To: Goldmark, Wendy (DES)

Cc: Heck, Denny (LTGOV)

Subject: Addition comments for the SCC-CCDAC minutes

Date: Thursday, November 13, 2025 2:51:50 PM

Attachments: [Comments on Billy Frank statue placement 11-13-25 SCC and CDAC.pdf](#)

I was genuinely surprised by the resistance to keeping the Marcus Whitman statue in the Capitol's entryway alongside the new Billy Frank Jr. statue. Whitman's likeness has stood there for more than 70 years. The idea that the presence of one somehow diminishes the legacy of the other misunderstands what these statues represent. Honoring Billy Frank Jr., a prominent figure in Washington's civil rights and environmental history, does not require removing or sidelining other figures who played defining roles in our state's early story.

Many historical figures were far from perfect. If Marcus Whitman or Billy Frank were running for office today, both would undoubtedly face their share of criticism and political attacks. Statues are not endorsements of perfection; they are acknowledgments of impact. Rather than rewriting or sanitizing the history of frontier era figures, we should recognize their contributions as they were understood in their time.

If the situation were reversed, and a proposal were made to replace a Billy Frank statue with Marcus Whitman and supporters insisted that Frank's image not be allowed in the same room, how would that be perceived? Would we consider that a fair treatment of his legacy, or a divisive gesture that undermines the very recognition we say we want to preserve?

A proposed 5e proposal would place the two historical figures of Marcus Whitman and Mother Joseph on one side of the entry and Billy Frank Jr. alone on the other, giving Frank a distinct place of honor. The physical layout of the space naturally separates the two areas; visitors cannot view both sides simultaneously. Functionally, there are two different visual rooms. This arrangement respects history and elevates Billy Frank's legacy without demeaning anyone else's.

What we don't need is to spend more than \$200,000 of taxpayer capital-budget dollars to relocate a 1,000-pound statue across floors or into new entryways. There is a better, more thoughtful, and more unifying way to honor our past.

Washington's Capitol is big enough for Marcus Whitman, Mother Joseph, and Billy Frank Jr. to stand together preserving history, celebrating contribution, and promoting unity instead of division.

I'm asking for support for Mother Joseph and Marcus Whitman on one side and Billy Frank on the other by the reception desk.

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Attachment 2:

From: Emmett O'Connell

To: Goldmark, Wendy (DES)

Subject Letter to State Capitol Committee members

Date Saturday, November 15, 2025 6:58:03 AM

Dear Members of the State Capitol Committee,

I am writing regarding the ongoing deliberations over the future of the Marcus Whitman statue currently located in the north portico of the Washington State Capitol. After following your discussions over the past year and reviewing the latest reporting, I want to offer a perspective that has so far not been included in the range of options before you: Washington should consider retiring the statue entirely, rather than relocating it.

I recognize the complexity of the task before you. The statue's immense weight presents serious structural challenges. Relocating it inside the building requires costly engineering analysis. Placing it outdoors would expose it to weather and vandalism. Keeping it in its current location is no longer feasible, especially with the forthcoming installation of the Billy Frank Jr. statue.

But all of these discussions rest on an assumption that has not yet been re-examined: that the Whitman statue must be preserved somewhere on the Capitol Campus.

The Legislature made its intent clear in 2021 when it voted to replace Washington's two Whitman statues with representations of Billy Frank Jr. That decision acknowledged, implicitly but firmly, that Whitman is no longer an appropriate symbolic representative of the state. His historical reputation, rooted in the discredited "Whitman Saved Oregon" myth, has been thoroughly debunked by historians. The myth itself was constructed and promoted to justify white settlement and diminish Indigenous sovereignty. The Whitman statue in Olympia was installed to reinforce that narrative, not to provide an objective account of the past.

A statue is not a textbook. It is a choice about what and whom we elevate in our civic spaces. Removing a statue does not erase history; in many cases, it corrects it. Retaining monuments built to promote false or exclusionary narratives keeps those narratives alive, even if we tell ourselves otherwise.

I understand that there is no formal, codified process for the removal of monuments on the Capitol Campus. Efforts to create such a process, including legislation proposed in 2022, have not yet succeeded. In the absence of that framework, you are left in the difficult position of navigating a symbolic, cultural, and logistical problem without clear precedent.

This is precisely why the Committee should consider a broader range of options.

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Relocation is not the only responsible path. Retiring the statue from public display is an option that deserves consideration. That could include donating it to an institution willing to preserve and contextualize it, archiving specific elements, or otherwise ensuring the object no longer functions as a monument on state grounds.

The recent reporting indicates that six possible relocation scenarios have been on the table, none of which fully satisfy the cultural, physical, or financial constraints you must balance. Before investing in costly structural studies or continuing to search for a suitable location, it is worth asking whether relocation is necessary at all.

The state is preparing to welcome a statue of Billy Frank Jr.; a leader whose legacy reflects the values and history Washington aspires to honor. Members of his family have been clear that placing his statue in the same room as Whitman's would be inappropriate. More importantly, it would undermine the very purpose of the Legislature's decision to replace Whitman in the first place.

We should not repeat the mistakes we have made with other outdated monuments (such as the statue of Governor John Rogers in Sylvester Park) which remain standing simply because we lack a clear process for reevaluating their place in our civic landscape.

This moment offers Washington an opportunity to tell the truth about its past and to choose symbols that reflect our present values. That may mean letting the Whitman statue go.

I urge the Committee to formally consider the option of retiring, rather than relocating, the statue. This would mean potentially dismantling and discarding the statues altogether. Doing so would honor the Legislature's intent, respect the cultural concerns expressed by tribal leaders, and avoid unnecessary expenditure on preserving an object whose symbolic purpose no longer aligns with the state's commitment to an accurate and inclusive historical narrative.

Thank you for your thoughtful stewardship of the Capitol Campus and for your consideration of this viewpoint.

Sincerely,
Emmett O'Connell

<https://mas.to/@emmettoconnell> olympiatime.co