



## CITY OF BANGOR

# Memo

**To:** Bangor City Council

**From:** Bangor Commission on Cultural Development

**Date:** October 8, 2020

**Re:** The Gomez Monument – Cultural Commission Recommendation on Deaccession

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

By City Council Order No. 20-239, the City Council directed the Commission on Cultural Development (the “Commission”) to consider a proposal for the deaccession of the Estevan Gomez Monument. Per the Council’s direction, the Commission has considered the proposal and recommends that the upper cross (not including the globe-shaped pedestal upon which the cross sits) be relocated to the Bangor Historical Society and that the rest of the monument, including the pedestal and patio-type area, be removed and destroyed/disposed of.

Below is a more detailed discussion of the Commission’s recommendation.

### **II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND PROCESS**

Our research included multiple attempts at avenues of outreach to the Bangor community, the town of New Bedford, and to a representative of the Portuguese government asking for commentary from the public on the monument. For example, the City placed notices in both the Bangor Daily News and the Standard Times in New Bedford, MA in addition to the direct communication with stakeholders.

The direct replies from the public were five in favor of deaccession/removal with two dissenting opinions stating that no removal or modification should occur. The rest of the public commentary was in favor of removal.

We individually contacted the town of New Bedford and the Portuguese consulate in Massachusetts. Beyond exploring and verifying the legality of possible deaccession, the town of New Bedford had no official opinion regarding the memorial and suggested we contact the Portuguese consulate as another possible stakeholder. The Portuguese consulate was only concerned that we had contacted the town of New Bedford for their opinion. Neither the Town of New Bedford nor the consulate expressed any concern as to a possible decision of deaccession.

Local stakeholders included Ambassador Maulian Dana (of the Penobscot Nation), Matt Bishop

(of the Bangor Historical Society), and Liam Riordan (whose class at the University of Maine is studying the process of possible deaccession). Ambassador Dana stated in no uncertain terms the disapproval of the Penobscot Nation for the monument. She further mentioned that the removal of the monument and replacing it with a permanent fixture acknowledging the Wabanaki peoples who were the original inhabitants of this land would be a meaningful act to show Bangor's solidarity with our Indigenous citizens and neighbors. Matt Bishop informed us that the Historical Society would be able to take the three-dimensional portion of the monument (the upright cross) for its exhibits, but would not be able to take the small plaza surrounding the cross. Beyond that, he remained neutral in the matter. Professor Riordan is of the opinion that removal of the monument should also include replacing it with something that acknowledges the Indigenous peoples of the Penobscot River area and provides context for the site which may include an acknowledgement of the Gomez expedition. We also spoke to the mayor of Athens, GA, which recently removed a Confederate memorial to inquire about their process for their decision to remove and the aftermath. They had vocal stakeholders that were descendants of the original group that paid for its erection. Due to laws in the state of Georgia, memorials may not be destroyed and must be moved to public display in an "appropriate" setting such as a cemetery. The mayor also let us know that there are more than one lawsuit pending regarding the statue's removal and that the statue remains in storage without any immediate plans for its relocation.

We also explored the history of Gomez. We learned that Gomez was a Portuguese explorer and sailed under the flag of Spain. He captured between 30 and 60 Indigenous people and brought them back to Spain with the idea that selling the captives into slavery might offset the cost of his exploratory journey. The King of Spain rejected the idea upon Gomez's return and the Indigenous people who survived the journey were freed. There is no word as to what happened to the Indigenous people once they were released, but we may assume that they were not returned to their home. Gomez's expedition explored the coast from Newfoundland to Bangor and on to Florida in or around 1525. He was a cartographer who was also the first European to set foot in what is now Bangor. The information he brought back from his voyage informed cartographers who were the first Europeans to map the region. He eventually died in modern day Brazil or Paraguay after an attack by the local Indigenous peoples in that area.

### **III. FINDINGS**

The rules governing deaccession begin on page seven of the City's Public Art and Monuments Policy.

Regarding relocation, the Council can order the relocation of a monument to "display it more appropriately." In the event of relocation, the Commission "will attempt to identify another appropriate site." Some special provisions apply when a work was designed for a specific site.

Regarding removal and deaccession, a work may be considered for such when "the work is judged to have little or no aesthetic and/or historical or cultural value." A four-step process is then outlined for the Commission to follow.

For those unfamiliar with the Gomez Monument, two photographs of it are attached hereto.

Based on the City’s Public Arts and Monuments Policy, the Commission makes the following findings:

A. THE UPPER CROSS

The Council may relocate a monument to display it more appropriately, and the Commission is to recommend and identify an appropriate site.

The Commission recommends both that the upper cross of the Gomez monument be moved and that it be moved to the Bangor Historical Society. This move is appropriate because the monument has a detrimental effect on Indigenous people and the descendants of said Indigenous people. The prominent display of the monument on the City’s waterfront only exacerbates and worsens that affect. Display of the upper cross of the Gomez Monument at the Bangor Historical Society will maintain any historical significance of the monument without causing affront to Indigenous nations and people. The Historical Society is also equipped for putting the monument in proper historical context so that Gomez’s role in indigenous oppression is acknowledged.

B. THE REMAINDER OF THE GOMEZ MONUMENT INCLUDING THE GLOBE PEDESTAL AND THE “PATIO” AREA

It is recommended that the remainder of the Gomez Monument undergo full deaccession and be destroyed. What follows is a full deaccession report as contemplated by the City’s Public Arts and Monuments Policy.

(i) Initial Finding

“A work may be considered for removal and deaccession from public display if . . . the work is judge to have little or no aesthetic and/or historical or cultural value.”

The Commission finds that the primary piece of the Gomez Monument that provides historical value is the upper cross and that the upper cross’s display at the Bangor Historical Society will maintain that value. The Commission further finds that the remainder of the monument including the pedestal and the “patio” have little or no aesthetic and/or historical or cultural value as their inclusion was simply as both physical and aesthetic support for the upper cross. Without the upper cross, the continued display of the pedestal and patio would be confusing, aesthetically displeasing, and illogical.

(ii) Deaccession Report

The entirety of this memorandum should be considered the Commission and Staff report that is contemplated by the Arts and Monuments Policy. However, for the purpose of comprehensiveness, the Commission includes the following.

- (a) Rationale: The Commission recommends the removal and deaccession of the pedestal and patio area in conjunction with moving the upper cross to the Bangor Historical Society. The combination preserves any value of the Gomez Monument and

acknowledges the legitimate harm that the monument can cause to Indigenous people. The deaccession of the pedestal and patio are recommended because such items offer no “aesthetic and/or historical or cultural value” absent the upper cross.

(b) Independent Appraisal: The Commission does not recommend an independent appraisal. The Gomez Monument was gifted to the City of Bangor. Though the value of the monument was not specifically researched, there is no indication that its value would be over \$10,000. Importantly, the primary portion of the monument – the upper cross – will remain the City’s and be displayed elsewhere.

(c) Related Professional Opinions: The Commission sought opinions as outlined in “II. Background Information and Process” as outlined above. No further opinions were deemed necessary.

(d) History: The attached newspaper article relates to the history of the Gomez Monument. In short, the Monument was gifted to the City of Bangor by New Bedford, Massachusetts.

(e) Options for Disposition: the Commission recommends removal of the pedestal and patio area. This will likely require destruction of said pedestal and patio. In any event, the pedestal and patio appear of no value and the Commission recommends removal and destruction/disposal.

(f) Replacement Costs: The Commission would be happy to review the area and recommend a new monument to be placed at the location. The current cost of replacement, without such review, is minimal or nonexistent as nothing is currently planned to be placed there. The Commission suggests that replacement be considered and include an acknowledgement of the Wabanaki peoples of the area, particularly our Penobscot Nation neighbors.

### (iii) Solicitor’s Opinion

The Assistant City Solicitor informed the Commission that the City’s Legal Department researched whether there were agreements or limitations on the removal and/or deaccession of the monument and found none. No contracts were found, and the monument was considered a gift and the sole property of the City. The Assistant City Solicitor, additionally, reached out the City Solicitor in New Bedford, Massachusetts who also found no contract or other restrictions.

### (iv) Commission Recommendation

This Memorandum constitutes the Commission’s recommendation.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

The Commission expended significant time considering the possible deaccession of the Gomez Monument and recommends that the upper cross of that monument be moved to the Bangor

Historical Society and that the remainder of the monuments be deaccessioned, removed, and destroyed and disposed of.