

Council Votes to Remove Cross Memorial, City Votes to Remove Council Members



KNOXVILLE, Iowa

By Heather Clark

Members of a city council in Iowa voted Monday to remove a veterans memorial that included a cross from a local park, and in turn, members of the community voted on Tuesday to remove the council members from office.

"We warned them multiple times if they let our town down they would be voted out," Allison Schmitz of Stop the Insanity posted online this week. "They didn't listen, and look, the people have spoken!"

As previously reported, the display features the silhouette of a soldier bending down on one knee before a cross-shaped grave marker, and was reportedly placed in Young's Park by a local veteran. The individual had not sought permission from the city, but the city saw no issue with the memorial since it was understood to honor veterans.

In August, Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) sent a letter to officials with the Iowa Department of Parks and Recreation to seek the removal of the memorial after it said that it received a complaint about its presence on government property.

"The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits government bodies from promoting religion on public land, including through the display of Latin crosses?" "the preeminent symbol of Christianity," the letter read. "Please remove the Latin cross from government property."

The demand resulted in an uprising within the community, including a rally in support of the monument. But on Monday, council members voted 3-2 to have the memorial relocated to private property across the street and replaced with another display. April Verwers, Carolyn Formanek and David Roozeboom all voted against the memorial, while Dawn Allspach-Kline and Tim Pitt voted in favor of it.

In turn, on Election Day Tuesday, residents voted for Verwers and Formanek's opponents, booting them from office. Roozeboom did not seek re-election.

"I think they needed to listen to the constituents along with the rallies," newly-elected council member Rick Kingery told local television station KCCI. "The people put out 2,000 wooden crosses across town. That is a huge number. People wanted their voices heard, and they were not listened to."

Mayor Brian Hatch defended the city council to reporters, stating that none really wanted to move the memorial, but that in the best

interest of the city, some voted to do so in order to avoid a lawsuit.

?I hope it brings some closure to it,? he said. ?I hope we can kind of achieve the best of both worlds. We avoid a costly lawsuit and at the same time we still have the silhouette memorial up honoring the veterans, right across the road hopefully, on private property.?

But the Liberty Institute, which is representing the veteran who initially placed the monument, is now considering the available legal options, as it believes removal of the monument is unconstitutional.