

**Tyrone Town Council  
Meeting Minutes  
September 7, 2017**

Present:

Mayor Eric Dial

Mayor Pro Tem Gloria Furr

Council Member Ken Matthews

Council Member Ryan Housley

Council Member Linda Howard

Town Manager Jonathan Lynn

Police Chief Brandon Perkins

Planning & Development Coordinator Phillip Trocquet

Town Clerk Dee Baker

Mayor Dial called the meeting to order and gave the Invocation which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Dial opened the meeting and recognized Senator Marty Harbin, House Representative Derrick Jackson and former Tyrone Mayor, Don Rehwaldt.

Mayor Dial stated that he wanted to take a moment to provide some background so there would be no room for misunderstanding of the facts regarding the Tyrone Council Chambers' mural. At our last meeting, a citizen who represents this Town in the House of Representatives appeared before Council to respectfully request that Council replace the mural. Council made the decision to cover the mural while they made a determination for the future of what would appear behind us and the Planning Commissioners. He noted that Council Member Matthews was absent that night due to the passing of his mother. Mayor Dial added that another important thing to note was that the cemetery does not belong to the Town and is not maintained by the Town. Any input citizens have on that subject would be more appropriately directed to its owner. He continued to state that the mural was uncovered for the meeting with the expectation that it would be the subject matter of much discussion. For contextual purposes an artist was commissioned by Council in 1996 to paint a mural that depicted the early history of our community. It is simply that. From the early Irish settlers to the civil war soldier's reunions that took place at this very location for decades. Mayor Dial stated that he would like to take the opportunity to express condolences to the artist's family. She passed away two weeks ago today. Though I have done so privately, I again apologize to her husband and his family if this situation has added to their grief in any way. I am grateful for their being so gracious. He added that in the wake of our decision to cover the mural until we decide what to do permanently, we have heard from, and met with many of you. As always, we have attempted to make ourselves available to hear from anyone who desires to express his or her opinion, and that's what we plan to do.

He stated that as we do so, I wanted to remind you of how the process worked and make a personal request. First, if you want to speak, you need to have a form already completed and hand it to our Town Manager when you approach the podium if you have not already done so. You are then to state for the record your name and address and share your comments. He added that comments were limited to a single three minute period. It is very important that your comments are respectful of everyone in the room. We will not allow for any name-calling or other forms of disrespect. Additionally, this is not a time for questions directed to Council, staff, or other attendees. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to share your position. Any violation of these ground rules may call for you to be asked to leave the room.

Mayor Dial stated that on a personal level, Tyrone is a Town of over 7,000 people-each of which is important to this Council and each of which deserves to be appropriately represented by this Council. We ask that you consider the big picture. In addition to natural disasters that have brought millions to their knees, we have crises and chaos in our nation right now because people on both sides of various issues choose not to respect one another. That doesn't have to exist here in Tyrone. Mayor Dial stated that we have an opportunity to focus on the fact that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. That doesn't mean that we love certain neighbors. It means that we love all neighbors. Many of you may be passionate about what you share tonight, but please remember that everybody here is your neighbor, and God's commandment is that you love and respect Him and them. He ended by stating that additionally, we have high school students who are here with us tonight who are observing the discussion. I trust that we will act accordingly.

Mayor Dial directed attendees to the meeting agenda. At this time during the meeting, public comments are heard for items that were not on the agenda, which would be the topic of the mural.

### **Public Comments**

Don Rehwaldt, a Tyrone resident spoke and stated that as he looks at the mural, it seems to show diversity and the struggles different ethnic groups went through to build Tyrone. They were pioneers working together as one community, united in peace and harmony, to accomplish a future for their families and future relatives. People working together to feed and grow their families and creating the town that is enjoyed by so many today. He continued to say that, as we all know, we cannot erase history. We may not like it, but we must learn from it and move to the future. If we keep looking back to what happened in the past and realize that most of us have little to do with the past, we will never find our future. The Town of Tyrone was recently named one of the happiest cities in a survey. He ended by stating that we are growing and making room for new families and businesses. Why must we now be divided? Economic times are improving for all. Let's continue to improve and strive to avoid negative issues which further divide the citizens of Tyrone.

Mark Tippins, a Tyrone resident spoke next. He stated that he implores Mayor, Council and Tyrone citizens that the mural may not be taken down. He added that if you have been watching the news, this is just rabid socialism, communism and fascism. It is aimed to destroy our culture and history and our heritage. If the people of Tyrone do not put their foot down, they are already tearing down statues of Columbus, what are they going to do next? The mural represents the Town of Tyrone. I have lived here a quarter of a century of my life. I have never seen any racism in this town. I believe removing the mural would be a big mistake. We are just adding to the fuel for these people who wish to destroy this country. We need to take a stand.

Sydney Baker, a Tyrone resident spoke next. Ms. Baker stated that she would like to start by saying; I am thankful for the leaders here today. I know some of them personally and believe them to be Godly people that serve our community and do not have a political agenda. I am thankful for the privilege we all have tonight to speak about this matter. I grew up in Hapeville, Georgia near the airport, a now thriving and beautiful city, but not so much when I was growing up there. My family and I moved here to Tyrone for just that, a thriving community. I attended Tyrone Elementary, Flat Rock and graduated from Sandy Creek and went on to graduate in May from the University of West Georgia. I would like to begin with an article from the New York Times titled “What Robert E. Lee Wrote to The Times About Slavery in 1858”. The article goes on to talk about Lee’s history along with his insight into our future and what we are all here to discuss tonight. She quoted the article, “The General did, however, object to the idea of raising Confederate monuments, (writing in 1869) that it would be wiser not to keep open the sores of war but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife”. Lee was not fond of the idea of continuing in an era previous disposition and rather wanted to look onward, as to not reopen said wounds. We are not here to talk about Lee however nor should we be here to talk about the Confederacy. As adults, Americans, Tyrone citizens, and brothers and sisters in Christ I implore you today that we skip the history lesson and the emotions that could follow and instead do so in a mature manner, to discuss a solution. Covering up the mural is doable temporarily, but long term thinking, such as a fresh coat of paint over the mural will not solve anything either. I want to suggest that we paint a new mural; a mural that rightfully signifies where Tyrone is going and also where Tyrone has been. Our past is important as well. We are not erasing history, but instead properly representing history. Tyrone has more to offer than just this mural behind you. A mural should represent a Tyrone that is historically correct, and should show diversity, as our history has shown diversity. Diversity is not just black and white. Diversity entails teachers, parents, local business owners and those in the medical field; people that have changed this town for the better and have contributed to it. The mural at hand may have shaped Tyrone today but it is irrelevant to what is shaping Tyrone now. Yes these things may have gotten us here but they are not what is keeping us here, nor what will help us to grow and thrive. We should not misrepresent our ancestors, and again General Robert Edward Lee, a historical figure, stated even then that looking onward is the best route to peace.

Shannon Alexander, a Tyrone resident spoke next. Ms. Alexander stated that she had not seen the mural in a while, since the last time she voted. As I look upon it, it is beautiful; a lovely rendering. I guess everyone is upset about the soldier. Let's face it, that's what has everyone upset. When I look at the painting, I guess I disagree with the young lady that just spoke, because to me this is an American soldier. Like it or hate it, our American soldiers have been put into situations maybe they were not always proud of. Some of the things they had to do, I'm not always proud of. I look on this soldier and I'm not as proud of him for representation as I am of the portrait of Lieutenant Robert Collins. That is what being a soldier was all about; about the life, soul and sometimes limbs. Not every war is about one thing; I can't recall any war that has been about just one thing. Who is to say that any soldier went out there, was fighting for slavery. The soldier in my opinion was fighting for state's rights or for the rights and privilege for the people in their community. Regardless of whether you like it or not, I respect that this is an American soldier. Throughout the ages, we have had to welcome home the Vietnam soldiers. Some of the things that they went through were not prideful things; we can't really say. The American Calvary had to go through such things as perhaps they butchered the Indians. That is my heritage (Cherokee Indian). She added that the second thing about all this is that I am tired of being ashamed of my heritage, which is Southern. I am tired of trying to make excuses for, yes, I love going to see *Gone With The Wind* at the Fox Theatre. I am not a bigot or a racist just because I enjoy my heritage and I like to hear about history. That does not mean that I am a bigot or a racist; I enjoy history. The last thing that I would like to say about the mural is that this is historical. There are so many things that we could do that could be new and progressive. We could build a new center that could have something that reflected the diversity in the present. I don't understand why everything we have has to be destroyed because people are offended. I can understand that position, but there are people in this town that have a right to their heritage. I was just talking to the Farr family as I came in, the mural is their heritage. There are people that have chosen to live in this community for several generations because they are proud of their heritage. Why should the mural be destroyed because some people are offended? I am sorry that people are offended about this but I think that everyone's heritage should be respected.

Carl Schouw a Tyrone resident spoke next. I have been a resident of Tyrone for fourteen years and chose to live here because of its diversity and everything that is around here. I have raised a total of six kids that attended Tyrone Elementary, Flat Rock and Sandy Creek, two of which are now teachers. One of the things that I like about our Town besides the diversity is that we all get along. When we all attend a Sandy Creek Football game there is no race, we are all there as a Town. We all see each other every single day. This just doesn't seem like who we are, all of a sudden in our community and our country; these types of things have become politicized. It should not be this way. This community is more than that mural and more than the problems this country has. This community wants to be in our bubble. Let's not turn this into something that it should not be. This is history; if you forget history it will repeat itself. We don't want any of that; we want to be where we are now.

The young lady said, let's look forward, then why are we looking backwards. Let's look forward, let's paint another mural, but let's leave what is up there, up there.

Melissa Hill, a Tyrone resident spoke next. This is going to be short and sweet. If the mural was of a voting booth with only men, I would not want to cover it up. I would say this is the past and look how far we've come. Number two, when the mural was painted it showed what Tyrone was, not what we are now. Eventually, I am sure that we will obtain a new building, years down the road. Then you can place a new painting. For now, I believe we would be erasing history if it is removed.

Linda Bruneau, a Tyrone resident spoke next. My husband and I have been members of the Town since 2002 and collectively we have eighty-six years of service to the United States Army. My ancestry includes members of the Revolutionary War as well as family members that have served in most American wars and my husband is a Vietnam Veteran. To say that we are proud of our ancestry is an understatement. Tyrone's history should not be covered up or portions should not be attempted to be modified. This may not represent Tyrone today but it should remain in place as a sentiment of this Town and its Civil War Veterans. The covering up of the mural was not done out of respect for all Tyrone citizens. Public acts that are done in isolation will not heal differences but will only widen the divide. Those holding a position of trust for service to all should conduct business as such. Efforts to hide or modify American heritage to include tributes to veterans should always be met with resistance and not place in a Town like Tyrone which reveres its heritage and veterans. In honor of those who founded this Town and our veterans, I call for the curtain to be removed. I also recommend an additional mural to be added, which depicts the Tyrone of today. A committee should be established that is representative of the Town's ethnic make-up which will provide contents for the additional mural, and possibly a vote afterward.

Lillian Wimbish-Smith, a Tyrone resident spoke next. I don't oppose the mural itself, just the symbol of the Confederate flag. I think it is hateful, hurtful and insensitive to a large portion of our community. A lot of people that I have spoken with felt that it would be a waste of time, and concluded that we are not represented and would not be represented. I feel that it is hurtful to me because of the flag and the soldier that represents the people that enslaved my ancestors. I am a tax paying citizen, this is divisive and inflammatory. That was confirmed to me when I was standing in line and a very nice Christian lady told me to "go back to Africa". I didn't tell her to go back to Europe. A woman said from the audience, "I did not say that, I said, have you ever been to Africa." Ms. Wimbish-Smith added that this divides us; we need to move into the future. I thought we were moving into a very bright future with the things that are on the horizon. I don't think that we want to be represented to the people that will be coming here from all parts of the country as this. I am a Christian and I believe doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. If anything is hurtful to you, you should not treat others in that hurtful manner. If you all feel that this flag is what you want and that we are fairly representing, that is on you. You know it's wrong and I feel it's wrong.

Steven Chontos, a Tyrone resident spoke next. Mr. Chontos stated that his family has grown and lived in Tyrone for twenty-eight years. Recently, while watching the destruction of Hurricane Harvey, I'm struck by one thought; Cajuns have helped Texans, white men are helping black men and women, black men are helping Hispanic families gather personal belongings that are floating away. Asian women are crying and hugging white men. This is the real America. These are everyday people. The hate groups and media that are running from town to town creating a false sense of aversion and hate do not represent this country or this Town and they are not trying to better it. People are loading into boats, spending their money and traveling hundreds of miles to risk their lives for homes that they may never be able to afford, is a true picture of who we are. Why is it that we witness this kind of support amongst strangers over and over in disastrous situations; and still allow a small group of hate mongers to keep the divide alive that actually does not exist? In the recent Citizen newspaper, beside the article about our meeting was another article by someone I like to read; Walter E. Williams. Mr. Chontos recommended everyone read the article. Mr. Williams gives an excellent example of why we do not embrace history. Why do we allow a small group of people to demand inclusiveness and diversity while they do the opposite? This mural looks like a great representation of our Town. It perfectly represents our history as designed; I don't think any change is needed.

Roy Butts, a Tyrone citizen spoke next. He stated that he has been a resident for twenty-five years. It has been said that this mural does not reflect the Tyrone of today that is true, it reflects Tyrone's history. The Irish railroad workers, the Native Americans and the Confederate soldier are all a part of Tyrone's history. This movement to remove something that may offend somebody has gotten to the point of being ridiculous. We have recently been told that we can no longer place flags on our Confederate soldier's graves. Very soon there will be nothing left of our history for our grandkids to see. Tolerance should go both ways. I read in the paper yesterday that the Mayor was against covering up history. I've also seen where three of the Council Members feel the same way; I bet a majority of this town feels that way. I don't understand why our mural is being held hostage. I am asking you to do the right thing and keep our history.

Dr. James West spoke next. He thanked Mayor and Council for recognizing God and Country. I am sorry I could not meet the artist that painted the mural. I see one of my descending relatives as a part of mural, the one with two feathers on his head (American Indian). I am not a member of this city but when I eat I pay taxes, therefore I am a supporter. I drive through the city often to remind me of what the old south ambiance looks like. The Bible says, be careful of how you separate the wheat from the chaff. There are a lot of issues with the mural, leaving a question mark. There is a lot facing us as a Town and a country. Unfortunately as our President would say, with the fake part of the news, we have a lot of people fighting on both sides but the truth has yet to be told. I'm glad to be able to speak; I'm not trying to be different. For those who think that I am one of those Negros, Blacks or African Americans trying to make a difference, that's not the case, I'm not trying to showboat.

I'm going to find out pretty soon that one of my relatives, that have made a difference in my life, was a soldier in the Confederate Army and I'm proud of that. As we deal with these issues, the political side, financial pressures and political persuasions, this is why Council was elected. We cannot handle this, it is your job. I hope and pray that decisions will be made that will remind us of our past but give us a basis of moving forward to our future. I had an old friend that was a cocaine addict and had track marks. Someone asked him when he cleaned up, "What will he do about the track marks?" He said, "I will not have them removed, they are a reminder of how blessed I am and the life I used to live." Behind all the ugly of our past, there is a beauty to be celebrated. Yesterday is a cancelled check, today is negotiable, and tomorrow is a promissory note. I hope we stand on the promises that whatever has happened in the past, we will move forward for a better future and celebrate every aspect as we move forward to be better.

Nina Gomes, a Tyrone resident spoke next. Ms. Gomes stated that she was not born in this country. Her father brought her family here for a better life. He said, "From now on, you will only speak English." When I turned eighteen, he told me to stop by the post office to pick up my citizenship papers. I never forgot the day when I became a citizen, with a flag in my hand reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. He taught us how to be good American citizens and that this is our country. When I see the mural, I see nothing wrong with it. It shows us where we were, not where we are now. Every country has a history, a past that sometimes we don't like. By erasing history, we are not going to be further ahead. You have to remember your history and where you came from; if you don't, you'll fail.

Representative Derrick Jackson, a Tyrone resident spoke next. He stated that in 2004 he and his wife decided to retire from the United States Navy, after serving a combined forty-nine years. A few weeks ago I stood here to honor the request of my constituents, and yours too; regarding the mural behind you. The request was simple, could the request reflect the Tyrone of today. A mural that is more inclusive. Their request is not designed to be a political weapon that is your perception. It is more than a request, taxpayers are asking a question; especially as Tyrone continues to grow and become more diverse. Twenty-one years ago Tyrone's population was 3,744, today we have approximately 7,215, almost double. Also, twenty-one years ago, Georgia was the center of the Olympics; 1996, the most inclusive event in the world. Also in 1996 Tyrone's elected officials, not the community, commissioned this mural to memorialize what and whose history? Let me be absolutely clear, this is not about history. Comments about purging and erasing history are absolutely absurd and pointless because a time machine does not exist. For those that believe this is about history, let's let the depictions tell the whole story. When you talk about John Glenn, who orbited the earth three times, it would be impossible to have the discussion without including three brilliant African American women; Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson. You do not know about them because they are not in the text books. We need to reflect all history. This is not about history or heritage, this Town Hall is the people's chamber.

Regarding a citizen panel to decide the fate of the mural is perplexing because you all do not have a citizen panel that discusses all aspects of the Town's operations, or how you are invested in the citizen's dollars. Why would you consider a citizen's panel? Mayor and Council, let's continue to move Tyrone forward. You just signed off on a \$150,000,000 deal that will bring movies here. Let's move forward as we attract more multi-million dollar projects, businesses and citizens. Projections say within the next ten years, Tyrone's population will be near 10,000, adding 3,000 new diverse residents. Let them see the harmony and the inclusiveness that you all speak of.

Greg Pearson spoke next. He stated that he was a history major from the University of Georgia. People say that the mural represents the past but not the values of the future. Let's take a look at the mural; (*describing the mural*) we have an indigenous Native American welcoming newcomers to his land. There is a train representing industry and commerce, transportation and the future. Then we have a soldier representing an American soldier which will stand between those who want to invade your home and the families. It represents all soldiers for all times. The soldier is holding a Confederate battle flag. The battle flag represented the common soldier and the military he represented. The military code represented equal pay with equal benefits for all soldiers from all races. Many Southern units were integrated and promoted within. It promoted Indian General, Stand Watie and also Mr. C. Rodriguez. He also pointed out two men coming together, to move forward. This mural represents inclusiveness, diversity, industry, commerce and willingness to stand in the gap when the enemy comes to take your home. It also represents patriotism and coming together to accept what has happened to move forward into the future. Who would not be more inclusive, tolerant, diverse and moving forward into the future? The images may look like the past, the concepts represent the past and present but a community that people want belong to. We should be proud.

Amy Deull, a Tyrone resident spoke next. She quoted Richmond, Virginia Mayor, Levar Stoney. She stated that he is a black gentleman that took office last year. He spoke about the confederate monuments in Virginia. "I wish these monuments had never been built, but like it or not they are part of our history in the city, and removal will never wash away that stain." They should not be taken down, but instead should be supplemented with historical context about why they were built. She added that she is a member of the Little Big Horn Battlefield and Historical Association. For years there was a giant "white" monument on Last Stand Hill. The local Indians were not happy. The monument only spoke of the Calvary. Within the last ten years, there is now a sculpture mad of iron directly across the road depicting Indians riding on their horses. By adding another side, the story is complete. I like the mural; I hope the Council is challenged to relocate the mural to put something that could complete the picture.

John Harris, a Tyrone resident spoke. He stated that he enjoys Civil War history. I do not have heartburn about the Confederate soldier, I do however, have heartburn when people say that this is our history. If we are not going to erase history then let's tell all of history. That soldier did not carry an American flag, he carried a Confederate flag. The Trail of Tears is how we treated Native Americans. Let's show a picture of an African American hanging from a branch, that is part of our history. Think about how it makes you feel with the suggestions I just made. That's how I feel when I see this. This is not an accurate depiction. We should not misrepresent our history. This is what we'd like to think our history is. This is what gives us heartburn. I get that it's our history and heritage; I'm from the South. That soldier created treason; he is not an American soldier. We don't have pictures of Edward Snowden; we look at him as treasonous. Heritage and history, what are you talking about. We can agree that we came to blows over state's rights but we couldn't resolve slavery.

Eric T. Woods, a Tyrone resident spoke. Mr. Woods stated that the great-great grandson of Robert E. Lee, Robert Lee IV stated at the VMA awards stated that, symbols of racism bigotry and oppression such as my grandfather has been used and should be taken down. One thing that is missing is cultural awareness. I too served twenty-eight years in the military to support the American flag. The flag in the Town mural that people say "it's our heritage", I see racism, bigotry and oppression. I don't believe Tyrone is that way. Why would we have this as a symbol, for not just for African Americans but many races as a symbol of bigotry and racism to many other cultures? Every time the Battle Hymn of the Confederacy is displayed, something bad takes place. Funny thing about history, you can bend it and twist it, but you can't distort the facts. As the gentleman said before, the South seceded from the Union. We had a union under one flag. A group of states got together and said we don't want that anymore. We want slavery, we want cotton; we are going to start our own country. Ever since the Civil War, when that flag has flown, something bad happens. Let's recall a few historical figures. *Mr. Woods held up a picture of Dillon Roof to the crowd - not submitted.* Mr. Woods stated that this is a picture of Dillon Roof, who killed nine innocent people, when they wanted him to come in and worship with them. What is he displaying, the Rebel flag, the same flag that the gentleman is displaying behind me (mural). *Mr. Woods then displayed a picture of Ku Klux Klan to the crowd - not submitted*) This is a picture of a KKK rally at Stone Mountain, Georgia. This rally was gathered after two young African American men, who were not armed were killed. They were displaying the Rebel flag. This is cultural awareness, when my family sees this we see a totally different thing. We don't see love or inclusiveness. We see a symbol that reminds us that our forefathers were oppressed. My great-great grandfather was a slave. I'm only two generations removed from slavery. In closing I want to remind you that this is nothing new. *Mr. Woods held up a picture - not submitted*) He compared two photos. One of these is from 1948, one from March, 2016, both showing a Ku Klux Klan rally located at Stone Mountain Park. We can come together as Town's men and women and come up with a mural that is more inclusive for all of us. Not for us to have our children and our children's children look at a symbol of oppression.

Linda M. Conley a Tyrone resident spoke. Ms. Conley stated that she would normally have a prepared statement but that she was hosting a fourteen year old girl from Austria. I had the opportunity to explain to her about the American south. I explained that many black people came here and what the situation was and it is not that way anymore. While she was here, I received a copy of the Citizen newspaper of the mural covered with the curtain. To the left of the picture was a copy of the mural at the Planning Commission meeting with two African American Members. I think it shows that it is not the way it was. I had other thoughts of things in history that we can take offense to. Everyone can take offense to something in history; the Vietnam War and what happened in Nazi Germany. Sometimes I think that these things may be painful to look at but they also serve as a reminder of how it happened and how it cannot and should not happen again. People are taking offense to everything; we can all take offense to something, large or small. I take offense to the rude drivers on Interstate 285. We can take offense to our neighbors, our spouses, our ex-husbands or other religious groups. We need to stop taking offense and live with what we have and do the best we can and be the best people we can to our neighbors; no matter their religion or color.

Dan Flaherty, a Tyrone resident spoke next. He stated that he has been a resident for twenty-two years. He added that he was proud to sit in front of the mural as a past member of the Planning Commission. I am a Yankee; my heritage is not from the South. I have three children that I put through school here. All they know is Tyrone and I'm proud of that. The Confederate soldier is a Veteran. Congress declared one hundred years ago that Confederate soldiers had Veteran status. I am retired from the Army; twenty-two years. We should not be ashamed of any of our Veterans. We should not be ashamed to show them in any mural or public setting. The mural may not show complete diversity as we know it today, there are a few things missing. The woman earlier made a great suggestion. This mural will be our history and some day when we obtain a new Town Hall, when we get larger; other folks who are not represented can have a chance to contribute. That will be the time for a new mural. Our constitution does not give us the right not to be offended. It does not give us the right not to have our feelings hurt. If you want to divide this community, the divide will come when you decide to remove or replace the mural.

Terrence Williamson spoke next. Mr. Williamson stated that he was the President of the Fayette County, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He shared a letter on behalf of the NAACP which he wrote after an article was published in the newspaper from Mayor Dial. "Members of the NAACP share our collective appreciation of your decision to properly address concerns raised over the mural behind the dais. Temporarily covering the mural as you deliberate the best way to hear community concerns was unexpected but welcomed. Some may wish to portray this as an opportunity for divisiveness or a method to destroy history. But it is most assuredly not. To the contrary, a request for reviewing the appropriateness of the mural in today's environment was sincere, particularly as the community seeks to grow in harmony. Regardless of the ultimate decision, your quick response shows compassion for concerns raised and a willingness to look through the eyes of others.

This act, in and of itself speaks volumes and is very much appreciated. Your Letter to The Editor in a sense also reflects well with the Town and Fayette County. The Fayette County NAACP would be pleased to work and assist with your endeavor to address the issue with dignity, courage and respect for the opinions of others in any way that we can.”

Jonathan Satterfield spoke next. He stated that he came from Sharpsburg but his grandparents have lived in Tyrone for many years. I’d like to think that I represent a younger generation. I love my Southern heritage; I drove a pick-up truck to high school with my Confederate flag. I am a firm believer in what Martin Luther King Jr. said in his “I Have a Dream” speech. He said he had a dream that people would be judged by their character not the color of their skin. I don’t care who you are or the color of your skin, if you need help on the side of the road, I will help you. Again, I am proud of my Southern heritage and the Confederate flag; I do denounce the K.K.K and Dillon Roof and anyone else who uses that flag to commit heinous acts. I do not support that in any way, shape or form. To me, the flag is just a symbol of the past, a different time; a time that should not be shamed. Granted, there were dark times in said history. There were dark times in our U.S. history as well. I don’t believe that the relatively dark times around 1860-1864 should be representative of the right for state’s rights.

Judy I. Suiter, a Tyrone resident spoke next. She stated that she did not have a planned speech, nor did she plan on speaking. I have lived in Tyrone for seventeen years and within the County for forty. I am proud of the people that have spoken regarding that this is our past. Let’s move to the future. I definitely think that is the direction we need to go. If we were to have taken a picture of this room a month ago, there would not be as many people. The reason people came out was the controversy. I think we need to get beyond controversy in this country and this Town. I love everybody in this Town and I believe that most of us do, for the most part. I have been in this room numerous times and to be honest, I’ve never noticed the mural. There are probably many others that didn’t notice it as well or have taken a really strong look. So why do keep trying to find ways to divide us? Let’s look at ways to move forward.

Tim Dooling, a Tyrone resident spoke. Mr. Dooling stated that he would like to briefly discuss labels. We have a problem in this country giving ourselves labels. People call themselves Polish Americans, Irish Americans, African Americans, this divides us even further. We are American first. I am an American from Irish descent. I believe in America and don’t believe in any type of racism or bigotry. I have traveled all over the world in different countries; socialist, communist and republic. Every time I come back I thank God I’m an American. I’ve been to Germany, I’ve seen the wall. I’ve seen border guards pointing their rifles at people. I’ve seen stone buildings with blood on the sidewalks from people trying to jump to their freedom. Freedom is what we base our values on. It doesn’t matter who you are, where you come from, you are an American. I believe that this mural in this case could be changed to encompass everyone. I’m sure if we researched Tyrone, Irish Americans, Chinese Americans and African Americans probably built the railroad. They all came together to build this country. The war fought was an ugly war. In 1936 during the rise of Nazi Germany, no one was paying attention.

They started stopping free speech and starting going door to door to see if anyone was against the government. The Nazi's ascended to power in 1936 and took total control over the country. They clamped down on freedom of expression and freedom of speech. The Gestapo went into libraries and threw the books in the square and burned them so people would not remember history; to teach them a lesson to keep their mouths shut. I default to freedom, I'm sure we can all come together to make a mural that will be inclusive. I have some suggestions to submit to Council. For God's sake let's all come together, otherwise we will slowly lose all of our freedoms.

Travis Knowles spoke next. I did not prepare a speech but felt compelled to speak after hearing all of these testimonies. I attended Flat Rock and Sandy Creek; I have two kids at Burch Elementary. I am invested in the current state of Tyrone. My Uncle was J.H. Peek, who ran the feed store in the heart of Tyrone for decades. I know a lot about local heritage, but glorifying the Confederate flag, glorifying the acts of the treasonous movement and having that soldier stand over Council at the meetings, it's not right. It does not represent what Tyrone currently is or what Tyrone wants to be. Representative Jackson spoke of the bright future of Tyrone. We can remember our past, but the errors of our past, we do not have to glorify. I have two children attend Burch Elementary, soon to be three; who are the future citizens, voters and taxpayers of Tyrone and have nothing to do with this. The diversity in Tyrone schools is not represented up there. It's a joke, from where I come from to where we need to go as a country it is a good stance to take a step.

Sam Hyde spoke next. Mr. Hyde asked Council about the \$110,000,000 deal with the film industry. Mr. Hyde stated that he did not notice if the flag was a Confederate or American flag. I do not feel that this is in any way glorification. I am curious about the \$110,000,000 deal. We are a conservative Town in Georgia and it is outlandish to have happen. The mural is only a subterfuge to the benefits the County could gain from this deal. The conservative values of this Town are being sold out for the people that believe completely different things. I am not saying that we are an ethnocentric people; I'm saying that our conservative Christian values are being pushed aside for money. I'm curious to what end this will go for our Town. It's great that the Town has built up, but if we lose our history and values, we lose our culture and who we are as a people. We have a centralized believe regardless of our ethic background which would push us forward and keep our values and our society going. I'm concerned that we are going to be sold out to people that have nothing in common with us.

Edward C Ray a Tyrone resident spoke next. He stated that he too was in the Air Force for thirty years and has been associated with Tyrone since 1994 when his parents moved here. I was watching Channel 2 News today for ten seconds, they mentioned a mural. The whole country is in turmoil about statues that have sitting there for hundreds of years; this one (mural) for twenty-one. I wanted to come down and see the crowds, the yelling and screaming. I look at the mural for the first time.

With common sense, this beautiful mural depicts approximately one hundred years of American history. Many artists have created these beautiful pieces throughout the years. I find nothing wrong with this picture. Some people take offense to the Confederate soldier. I would tell those people that they should be thankful there were Confederate soldiers. You should be thankful the shots were fired at Fort Sumter. President Lincoln did not care if there was slavery or not, yes he was against it but he did not want to disrupt the Union. If it wasn't for the Civil War and soldiers on both sides to fight to free them from slavery, I say thank God there was one (war). What would it take, another fifty years or another hundred to abolish slavery? No, we did not do that, it ended in 1865 and that put an end to it. You should be thankful these people came to America instead of some other country and that America was the country that abolished slavery.

Melissa Martin a Tyrone resident spoke next. She stated that he has lived in Tyrone for forty-two years. Tonight you may not make any decisions that would affect me personally; however, it will affect how our Town is viewed. The mural does not represent our community today and it is not supposed to. It depicts the beginning of our Town. No one is proud of the Confederate flag, that is just our ancestors. If we allow this to be changed what is next, our cemetery? I have no hatred in my heart for people that are different from me; Gays, Lesbians, Blacks, Mexicans and others. I grew up in Tyrone and there was more racism evident back in the day. Today it is a very diverse community. I feel that anyone that is bringing attention to our Town, they are not doing it for the right reasons; they are trying to depict us as a Town with hate in our heart. I don't believe we do. There are people that have history and many people are not proud of it. People who have drug addicted family members and those who are child molesters and murderers. We do not judge others from what our ancestors have done; shame on anyone that is trying to make our community look like that.

Karen Lender (*no form submitted*). She stated that she was new to Tyrone and is a Veteran of twenty-one years and served in Iraq. I came to vote but the mural was covered up. I chose Tyrone to live; it seemed like a good place to raise my children. When I saw the news, I thought that this was something that I would like to be involved with. This is a government entity; this is not about history. When I come here to pay taxes or to vote I want to feel that it represents the United States of America; which I served my country for twenty-one years. I see the mural in a different way it doesn't represent why I believe in the United States. It may be history; it should belong in a museum not in a government entity. Then I could pick and choose. When I come to a government building I want to feel like this represents me.

Shanna Yates a Tyrone resident spoke next. She stated that she was seventeen years old and attended Flat Rock and Sandy Creek. I moved here from North Carolina and this Town has become a big part of my life. It has changed me. Everything about this Town is special including its history. When I look at the mural I don't see hatred, I see the past. I grew up in a generation where hatred was no longer there. In my school there were African American children and Hispanic children and White children, we all played together, because of this history. Because of the war, is why we're here today, united as one.

Because of the war I can sit in a class with other races, and I can date someone outside of my race. Because of this war is why we have the freedoms we do today. If it wasn't for the war we could still have slaves. Instead of erasing everything that happened, embrace it. History is what made who we are today and I see nothing wrong with that. This mural represents everything that happened, for a good reason. The Confederate soldiers didn't just fight because they wanted to keep slaves; that is not all what the war was about. It was about their land being burned and fighting for their community. It is what happened in Savannah, if you read history, you would know about that. I think it is sad that so many people want to see this mural destroyed when it represents a part of who I am. I see nothing wrong with it; because it is history, a part of who I am and our citizens are. It is because of struggles; not just from the Civil War, not just from Civil Rights, not just Women's Rights, but because of the struggles for Hispanics. Hispanics are getting kicked out of this country because of their skin color. Because of all that, that is why we are here right now. That's why in this room there are African Americans and Hispanics. That is why we are all here together is because of history. It may just be a mural right now, but who knows what's next? We start with the mural and then our statue and all of our history. If we destroy every bit of history we have, it is bound to repeat itself. I pledge that we come together as a Town and stop this and embrace it. No it doesn't show what Tyrone is today but it shows what happened and why we are what we are. I do believe another mural should be created to represent a Tyrone of today. Because today we are ethnic, we are diverse, but that doesn't mean we stop history and try to delete it.

Adrienne Brown a Tyrone resident spoke next. She stated that she has been a Tyrone resident for fourteen years and would like to echo sentiments that she heard. If we are going to depict history, let's depict the whole history. Modifying the mural would be a good step forward for unity. I think a lot of things are lip service we should be inclusive, no one is talking about destroying the mural. There is a proper place to memorialize these things, it's called a museum. History should not be erased. It can be properly displayed. I was not brought here willingly. People say I should be happy I was brought here. I was stolen and brought here. It saddens me to hear people say these things. I feel people really need a history lesson in cultural sensitivity. If you want to display history, let's display everyone's history correctly. Let's not leave out certain things, we go back and forth. Everyone can't be happy. If you want to make people happy, I believe a proper place for them would be a museum. The Confederate flag is not the flag this country stands for. People say it's just a flag, it's my heritage. Your heritage is based on hate. It is unfortunate when people say that they don't hate people but they still want to wave this flag. They really don't understand the meaning of the flag. Treason, hatred, murder, rape, pillage and ugly things we've all heard about; the ugly stain that can't be erased. If we could meet together and come up with a solution that would be a better way to unify the community instead of saying "that's my flag, that's my heritage". We need to understand what it really represents to other people. If we could come together for a better solution to be more inclusive that would be ideal. Let history stand for eternity in a museum.

Michael Thompson, a Tyrone resident spoke. He stated that he was new to Tyrone and a Youth Pastor. I grew up in west Georgia, our mascot was the Harrelson County Rebels. We had a Rebel flag painted on our gym. I grew up in a culture where that was ok. A mural on the wall is not your heritage; you keep that in your home and your heart. Growing up my parents were meth addicts. My wife did not paint a mural on my wall even though that is where I came from and part of who I am. I was raised where hatred and racism was ok. I was taught by other people that racism is not ok, but knowing your heritage and who you are is ok. I know my heritage and I know who I am. Now I am responsible for over one hundred and fifty students most of which are African American. As a Youth Pastor of a Church, I would not like to bring my students here and force them to see something that may or may not make them uncomfortable. This does not depict our heritage; this depicts a mural on a wall. If people are saying that this is an American soldier, then paint the flag an American flag. No mural should be responsible for reminding people of who they are. Their own heart and soul is who they are. If you are a Council and a team committed to the future of our Town, then we should depict things. If you force people to come in here and vote and this is where the Town's people must vote then I think it should be pleasing to people. It makes sense, you represent a Town. History says one thing, but you don't represent the history of this Town; you represent the future of this Town. I would think that you would take into consideration of a public place where people have to come. Have something that represents everyone that is here. The young man that said this is all harmony, African Americans picking cotton that does not look like harmony to me. I love this Town and I love my kids and I want to invest. I'm proud of who I am and I am proud of this Town. I hope you will consider changing this mural.

Council Member Housley stated that this is an issue that people on both sides are passionate about. As a Council we do represent everyone. Perhaps the best way to move forward would be to form a committee that creates a dialog with the community; to help establish a road map to move forward. We do not want to exclude anyone, we want to be inclusive. The young man said, "We represent the future." As a side-note we have meetings every Thursday, with issues of budget, millage rate and other things, we would love to have everyone back. The Council meets the first and third Thursday every month.

Council Member Howard stated that this is a very touchy subject. If anyone of you has followed me on Facebook, then you'll know part of what I'm going to say. One of the things that I have gotten from this; a lot of praying and searching and researching is, is it true? This mural is true. There are so many things that I have never seen until today. The artist did a beautiful job. Council Member Howard pointed out a plaque that tells about the couple that painted the mural. She echoed that the artist died two weeks ago but wished that they could have been there to tell how the mural came about. It was asked of the residents at the time, to turn in suggestions of what they wanted painted. It was not just the artists but a lot of people that lived in Tyrone in 1996 gave suggestions. It doesn't matter what color the faces are that are picking cotton; I picked cotton when I was young. I would be proud for them to put me up there.

We have to embrace who we are, this is who I am, and I love Tyrone. There is not anything up there that I am ashamed of or that I think is offensive. I'm sorry if it does you but it is our past, it's Tyrone. Wherever you came from, when you came here, you said I love Tyrone and that's it. This is what you came to. What you brought with you and what we will make in the future will be great. If you read the local history, the spot where Town Hall is located, is one of the most historical spots in Tyrone. In 1849, Hopewell United Methodist Church was believed to be the only church in the area at that time. The Baptist met here too before they started their own church. There was also a school located here. If you look at the mural, you'll see "old soldier's reunion". Out of all cities in the South, they chose to meet in Tyrone, Georgia. Soldiers started meeting here in 1884 through 1962. I have spoken with members of Hopewell United Methodist Church that were a part of the reunions. There would be children singing, drama's performed, and dinners. It was a wonderful time of celebrating life, and they met right here. Someone mentioned things like this belong in a museum, I agree. I don't believe that it should be disrupted in any way. We need to keep it and learn from it. If it means that Council Chambers will become a museum someday, I'm fine with that. We need something historical in Tyrone.

Council Member Furr stated that the mural depicts history of Tyrone years ago. It is true, very true but not Tyrone today. There are many things on the mural that remind me of my childhood. I had to pick cotton at a very young age and pull potatoes out of the ground making sure they weren't cut. It was things that we did. It was things my Dad did when he came home from the war all beat up. My Daddy was a share-cropper; we didn't have anything or own anything. We rented old houses and probably never paid the rent; we didn't have much money. I didn't grow up wealthy at all, barely had any money to help buy food. I was in the fields all the time at nine and ten years old. My Mother and Daddy worked their hands to the bone picking cotton while I sat in a cotton basket, trying to take care of my mentally retarded Sister. I am taking care of her today. It was always someone else's land and someone else's product we were trying to produce to make a living. I didn't understand how we picked cotton and corn all day and only go home with half a bucket full. My Daddy would tell me, we're share-cropping. I look at this quilt (*pictured in mural*) and it reminds me of sitting around with my Grandmother and Aunts quilting, only stopping long enough to fix a biscuit and something to go in it for everyone that was working in the fields all day. It is hard for me to realize that people want to destroy this mural. I have a quilt similar that my Great-Great Grandmother left to me. This mural has been here since 1996, to my knowledge no one has ever complained about the mural until a few weeks ago. I think this mural belongs to the citizens of this Town and that includes me. I respectfully would like for the mural to remain as it is.

Council Member Matthews stated that his story was not quite like Council Member Furr and Howards. I grew up on Tyrone Road. My family did not have that much money either, my Dad was a mechanic. He worked day and night, trying to put food on the table for everyone. Through the years, I went to Tyrone Elementary then Fayette County schools. I then served time in the Navy with Representative Jackson. I'm proud of my time in the service.

I was gone from Tyrone until 2002. I said, “I’m going to do something with this Town, it is where I grew up.” I started with Founders Day, and then I became a Planning Commission Member. I had some health issues then ran for Council, if it wasn’t for citizens of this Town, I would not be sitting here. I look at everyone as equal. When I came in 2002 all I noticed on the mural was the train. For the eight years I’ve been sitting up here, I’ve since noticed a few new things. It wasn’t until a couple of weeks ago, I noticed the soldier. I hadn’t noticed the squirrels or raccoons in the corner. To me, this is a piece of art, something for this community. I think it should stay at this point.

Mayor Dial stated that we all have our stories, none make us wrong, and they are our stories. Mine is one that places great importance on race relations and racial harmony. My parent stood firm on the side of equality and justice during the Civil Rights movement; and they raised me to do the same. I worship with a very diverse congregation and my children attend a very diverse school. One of the reasons we live here is because of the diversity; my wife and I choose to surround ourselves with that. As a result, I make it an effort to understand the challenge that others face, that I may not be able to understand. Although some protest the Confederate flag do so, in my opinion for political gain, I trust that many are offended by it. It is not my place to say that they are not. It may be that they are offended not so much because of its historical significance, but how some of us have hijacked that flag and have made it a symbol of hate and abused it today. That is the bigger issue; how it is used today. For that reason, it is my belief that the best way that we handle this is that we preserve the mural; which I believe, fairly accurately portrays this Town. We should relocate it where it is not a focal point of our local government. Regardless of what action we take tonight, I challenge all of us that have shown a lot of emotion about a painting and how we feel about these issues, to redirect those emotions. We should redirect that passion to bring together the residents of this Town and unite rather than be divided.

Council Member Howard made a motion that we keep the mural as it is uncovered where it is for the time being.

Council Member Furr seconded the motion. Motion was approved 3-1 with Council Member Housley in opposition.

### **Approval of Agenda**

Council Member Furr made a motion to approve the agenda.

Council Member Housley seconded the motion. Motion was approved 4-0.

**Consent Agenda:** *All matters listed under this item are considered to be routine by the Town Council and will be enacted by one motion. There will not be separate discussion of these items. If discussion is desired, that item will be removed from the consent agenda and will be considered separately.*

Approval of minutes, August 17, 2017, August 18, 2017, August 22, 2017 (9:00 am), August 22, 2017 (6:30 pm) and August 24, 2017.

Consideration to renew the Fertilization and Weed Control of Town Properties agreement. ***Billy Campbell, Public Works Supervisor.***

Council Member Matthews made a motion to approve the consent agenda.  
Council Member Howard seconded the motion. Motion was approved 4-0.

### **Staff Comments**

Mr. Lynn informed Council that he would not be able to attend the next Council meeting. He would be attending the Georgia City and County Management Association Conference. He added that if needed, Chief Perkins would attend the Council meeting.

### **Council Comments**

Council Member Furr stated that she would not be able to attend the next Council meeting due to her spouse's scheduled surgery.

Mayor Dial announced that there are opportunities to donate to the hurricane relief. Sandy Creek High School is collecting typical items at their next football game to be dropped off in the parking lot.

### **Adjournment**

Council Member Furr made a motion to adjourn. Motion was approved 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm.

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Eric Dial, Mayor

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Dee Baker, Town Clerk