

# **EXECUTIVE BRIEF REGULAR MEETING**

**AGENDA DATE:** July 7, 2020

**DEPARTMENT:** City Commission

## **TITLE:**

Resolution No. 23-2020 – urging the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners to rename “Dixie Highway”

## **SUMMARY:**

That one of the first highways in the South, and one the first highways in Florida, was named “Dixie” was not an accident, but a purposeful assertion of white supremacy at a time when Black people struggled to assert their humanity and dignity and equality during the Jim Crow era. Commissioner Hardy therefore asks this body to approve a resolution urging the County Commission to rename the highway from the south county line to the north county line, except for the portion of it that runs through the City of Riviera Beach, which was recently renamed after President Barack Obama, America’s first Black president.

## **BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:**

The word “Dixie” is freighted with racist associations ranging from Southern slave owners and the Confederacy to the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacy more broadly. Though it is of obscure origin, the word has served as a term of endearment for the “South” by the Confederacy and its supporters from at least 1861 to today.

The song “Dixie” was known as the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy, and it boasts a line reminiscent of slavery, stating, “I wish I was in the land of the cotton/ Old times there are not forgotten.” Indeed, those old times are not forgotten whenever one sees or hears the word, “Dixie.” The writer of the original “Dixie” song, Daniel Decatur Emmet, often performed the song in blackface, a racist caricature of African-Americans.

In 2015, the City of Riviera Beach, in its jurisdiction, renamed “Dixie Highway” to “President Barack Obama Highway,” recognizing its painful history as the dividing line between segregated black and white neighborhoods in Riviera Beach. Then Riviera Beach Mayor, Thomas Masters, said of the decision, “It was an insult to have a street named Old Dixie in the heart of an African-American community. Old Dixie represented hatred and racism, evil and bigotry, segregation and the Ku Klux Klan.” Mayor Masters did not err when he described what Old Dixie represented, and the associations that he attributed to “Dixie,” those of hatred, racism, evil, bigotry, segregation, and the Ku Klux Klan, persist today.

In 2017 the City of Hollywood was next in the national movement to take down Confederate monuments and voted to remove and change the outdated and offensive street names “Forrest,” “Lee,” and “Hood,” all of which were painful reminders of Confederate generals and founders of the Ku Klux Klan. The City adopted new names for these streets, names that reflected the City’s commitment to America’s core aspirations - “Freedom,” “Hope,” and “Liberty.”

In 2019, the Miami Dade County Board of County Commissioners began discussing the possibility of renaming “Dixie Highway” in Miami-Dade County, and in February 2020, the Board voted unanimously to rename it.

In February 2020, the Broward County Board of County Commissioners agreed that “Dixie Highway” should be renamed, and committed to working with the cities through which the highway runs to rename it.

Commissioner Hardy contends that the name “Dixie Highway” is indefensible and that people of good will, especially the elected representatives of a diverse community, should be able to agree that the highway bisecting the City of Lake Worth Beach should bear a different name. He believes that the name should reflect the City’s commitment to restorative justice, to righting the wrongs committed against marginalized communities. Hence, Commissioner Hardy supports naming the highway after either the indigenous Jaega people, on whose land we live today, or Fannie and Sam James, the two former slaves who settled here in 1885 and are generally understood to be the City’s founders. He maintains an open mind to names other than those mentioned here and in the attached resolution.

Moreover, Commissioner Hardy feels that it is not enough to rename the stretch of “Dixie Highway” that runs through Lake Worth Beach. He feels that the highway should be renamed everywhere. He therefore asks the Lake Worth City Commission to approve a resolution urging the County Commission to rename “Dixie Highway” from the south county line to the north county line, except for the portion of it that runs through the City of Riviera Beach, which was recently renamed after President Barack Obama, America’s first Black president.

**MOTION:**

Move to approve/disapprove Resolution 23-2020 urging the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners to rename “Dixie Highway”.

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

Fiscal Impact Analysis- N/A  
Resolution 23-2020