



# OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

BEN WALSH, MAYOR

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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CONTACT:

Tajuana Cerutti-Brown

Phone: 315-448-8458

Email: [press@syrgov.net](mailto:press@syrgov.net)

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## PRESS RELEASE

### MAYOR WALSH ANNOUNCES PATH FORWARD FOR COLUMBUS CIRCLE

**Walsh says fountain and monument will be used for permanent memorial to Italian Americans;  
Columbus statue will be moved to a private site to be determined**

**Year-round education and learning site will address the consequences of colonialism while celebrating the contributions of the Onondagas, Black and Brown Americans, immigrants to America and New Americans**

**Syracuse, N.Y.** – Following decades of controversy and calls for the removal of the Christopher Columbus statue in Syracuse and other U.S. cities, Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh announced a path forward for Columbus Circle in downtown Syracuse. Mayor Walsh said the City of Syracuse will move forward with the steps in local and state law to remove the Columbus statue, the heads of Indigenous peoples of the Plains and the bas relief plaques and seek to have them moved to a private site. Continuing a tradition in place for nearly 90 years, Mayor Walsh said Italian Americans will remain the focus of honor of the fountain and obelisk monument at the center of the Circle.

Following through on a proposal made this summer to create a year-round education and learning site, Walsh proposed that historical information be added at the Circle regarding the impacts of colonialism. He said the site will recognize the Onondaga Nation, one of the oldest continuous democratic governments in the world and on whose ancestral land the City of Syracuse sits. The Mayor called for the site to highlight the contributions of others who have and are experiencing oppression, including Black and Brown Americans, Italians and other immigrants to America and, more recently, New Americans.

“This space should be both a tribute to Italian Americans and a place of healing at which we celebrate our shared accomplishments,” said Mayor Walsh. “This decision is based on the fact that we can honor our Italian American community without focusing on a statue that has become the source of division over decades and overshadowed the original intent of the monument.”

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The City is required to follow specific provisions in local and state law in making changes to Columbus Circle. Plans must be reviewed and approved by the Syracuse Public Art Commission and the Syracuse Landmark Preservation Board. At the last major restoration of the Circle in the early 1990s, a special amendment to the City's Preservation Ordinance was added that requires the Landmark Preservation Board to approve a "Certificate of Appropriateness" for any changes made. Because the Circle is part of an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places, review by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of modifications will also be required.

Walsh said he will appoint a commission to begin the process of designing the specific changes that will occur at the Circle, including the name of the site. He will instruct the commission to engage diverse input and expertise in completing its work. The group will be charged with identifying a location to accept and preserve the Columbus statue.

Walsh said he expects the process to unfold in the coming months. He said the City will use a combination of private dollars and public funds designated for maintenance and capital improvement.

Walsh, who had promised the status quo at Columbus Circle would not continue, said he consulted members of the Italian American community, including the Columbus Monument Corporation, and leaders of the Onondaga Nation. He also met twice with members of the [Columbus Circle Action Committee](#) he appointed to make recommendations regarding the education and learning site at the Circle. The group, which was facilitated by Interfaith Works, a Syracuse non-profit experienced in deliberative democracy and community engagement to encourage understanding about racial, ethnic and religious differences, issued its [final report](#) on Friday.

"Interfaith Works and 25 volunteers representing a diverse spectrum of stakeholders accepted my request to participate on the Action Committee. They worked over the past eight weeks in a process that was, at times, challenging and emotional," said Mayor Walsh. "I deeply appreciate the contributions of the Action Committee. I did not expect the group to reach a single recommendation, but I did want a process that would inform my decision and that would ensure the voices of many stakeholders were heard. I also want to acknowledge all those who participated in the three prior Dialogue Circles on this difficult issue."

Over the years, the area known as Columbus Circle has been through several changes. Plans from the late 1800s show the Circle drawn as a triangle. In 1895, the Syracuse Common Council officially designated the site as Library Circle. The name was changed again in 1901 when it was renamed St. Mary's Circle, which remains its official name today. The site became popularly known as Columbus Circle after the installation of the Columbus monument in 1934.

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