



The Noquisiyi Mound (formerly known as Nikwasi), in Franklin, N.C., is shown in this photo taken on the afternoon of Monday, Jan. 5. Several hours after the photo was taken, the Franklin Town Council approved a resolution that paves the way for the Mound's deed to be transferred to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. (SCOTT MCKIE B.P./One Feather photos)

By SCOTT MCKIE B.P.

One Feather Asst. Editor

FRANKLIN, N.C. – The Franklin Town Council approved a resolution that paves the way for the deed of the Noquisiyi (formerly known as Nikwasi) Mound to be transferred from the Noquisi Initiative to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The Town Council approved the resolution unanimously during its regular monthly meeting at the Franklin Town Hall on Monday, Jan. 5.

Bob McCollum, Noquisi Initiative board co-chair, opened Monday's comments by stating, "80 years ago some of my relatives, some of your relatives, started this process and what I would like to see here tonight is a vote of good faith. Let's close the loop on this. Let's give this third-acre piece of property back to the people that should have it. And, set a gold standard here for other communities across the country that face similar things and don't

have a process, a guidepost, to go by if they want to do it. This community can be that and I look to each of you here tonight to help make that happen."

The resolution states, "The Town Council of the Town of Franklin recognizes, honors, and celebrates the deep historical and shared cultural significance of Noquisiyi and the Mound."

It continues, "The Town of Franklin held title to the real property of the Nikwasi Mound site from Oct. 7, 1946 until May 6, 2019, when it conveyed the site to Nikwasi Initiative, a North Carolina nonprofit formed for the express purpose of preservation of the site as required by N.C.G.S (North Carolina General Statute) 160A-266."

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Angelina Jumper, Noquisi Initiative board member, speaks to the Franklin Town Council during discussion on the resolution on Monday. Jumper is an EBCI tribal member and serves as the EBCI cultural resources supervisor.

Noquisiyi Mound is a site sacred to the EBCI and was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, being listed there as Nequasee.

Angelina Jumper, Noquisi Initiative board member, told the Town Council, "What you all are discussing and voting on tonight is really, really important for us as Cherokee people. It's amazing, and I'm almost speechless, that when we get land back that it means so much to us. But, particularly this site, Noquisiyi Mound. I just wanted to extend a thank you and say sgi for helping us steward this mound for the past hundreds of years that it's been in your possession. We've got thousands of years worth of history with this mound, but to know that your town has protected it and safeguarded it in the way that it has is just something I almost don't even have words for."

Jumper is an EBCI tribal member and serves as the EBCI cultural resources supervisor. She added, "A lot of our mound sites throughout western North Carolina have been plowed, they've had a lot of damage to them that's almost made them no longer mounds – you can hardly see them there. And, when you drive through the town of Franklin you can see that mound is still high and full of all of the history, ceremony, medicine, and love that not only we have put into it, but now we've had hundreds of years worth of your town putting that love into it as well."

Franklin Mayor Stacy Guffey submitted the resolution and fully supports a deed transfer. He stated, "I think this is something that's been a long time coming, and just in my individual opinion long overdue.

I talked to one of the ladies who was involved in that original effort last week. We had a long phone conversation and talked about this resolution to authorize the transfer of the mound and her comment was, 'Well, it's come full circle now because that's why we did it in the first place. Because it should go back to the Cherokee people. It's their mound'."

Elaine Eisenbraun, Noquisi Initiative executive director, commented, "Thank you for sitting here in this room on this day and hopefully completing the circle, bringing something home...it's not just people that can come home, it's places that can come home, too. And, that mound wants to come home to its people.

Our mission is really a bridge between Cherokee and non-indigenous people. And, that's what we're trying to build here is to make that bridge longer and stronger so that the mound resides with its family and yet the rest of us are interactive with it as well. That's what we want to do."

Amber Allen, an EBCI tribal member and Noquisi Initiative project coordinator, spoke Monday stating, "I'm happy to hopefully see this come to fruition. I've worked a little over a year with Noquisiyi Initiative and I've learned so much, not only just about the mound but the town of Franklin. Thinking about how the past was to how the future can be – about having this relationship with the EBCI, the continuation with Franklin and the things that we can do together."

Information from the Noquisi Initiative states, "Noquisiyi means star place and was a Cherokee town situated in present-day Franklin, N.C. Though its exact age remains unknown, Noquisiyi appears on maps as early as 1544, and British colonial records first mention it by name in 1718. At the heart of Noquisiyi on the banks of the Little Tennessee River, the town's meeting hall once towered over the landscape, built atop the mound which was formed by Cherokee women carrying baskets of soil to that location. Today, Noquisiyi Mound, the settlement's only surviving landmark, rises as the gateway to Franklin."

Jumper said she is excited to see the future of the collaboration. "That mound is one of the mounds that we really have out in the open public like that. A lot of our mounds are secluded, off the beaten path. This mound has two roads that go right around it so it makes it a perfect place for people to come and interpret what these mounds mean and really feel the meaning that they have all the way through them. I look forward to seeing how the Tribe collaborates with you guys in making that vision real and bringing the true essence of what the mound means to us as Cherokee people into something like an interpretive center, signage, or just continuing to grow the knowledge this town has and respect for the Cherokee people."

Now, the issue will have to come before EBCI leaders before an official deed transfer is completed. The One Feather will continue to follow this story as it develops.



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