



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Commonwealth Transportation Board

W. Sheppard Miller, III
Chairperson

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Richmond, Virginia 23219

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Agenda item # 2

RESOLUTION OF THE COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD

March 15, 2022

MOTION

Made By: Ms. Hynes **Seconded By:** Mr. Rucker
Action: Motion carried, unanimously

Title: Highway Naming: Renaming State Route 7 (Harry Byrd Highway) to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike” in the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County

WHEREAS, the Town of Purcellville seeks to and has requested that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) rename the portion of State Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, located within the corporate limits of the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County from “Harry Byrd Highway” to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with § 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*, by resolution dated January 11, 2022, the Town of Purcellville, through its Town Council, has expressed its intent and requested that the CTB rename the portion of State Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, located within the corporate limits of the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County, to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”; and

WHEREAS, § 33.2-213 provides that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) shall place and maintain appropriate signs indicating the names of highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities named by the CTB and requires that the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining such signs shall be paid by the localities in which they are located or by the private entity whose name is attached to the transportation facility so named; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Purcellville, in their resolution of January 11, 2022, has agreed, in collaboration with Loudoun County and pursuant to § 33.2-213, to pay the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining the signs calling attention to this naming.

Resolution of the Board
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NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to § 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*, the CTB hereby renames the portion of State Route 7, that is within the corporate limites of the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County, from “Harry Byrd Highway” to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VDOT is directed to produce, place, and maintain the signs calling attention to this naming as funding is made available by the locality, and to secure payment from the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County for these costs as required by law.

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CTB Decision Brief

Highway Naming: Renaming Portion of State Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike” in the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County

Issue: Approval of the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) is sought for the renaming of a portion of State Route 7, located within the corporate limits of the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County, from “Harry Byrd Highway” to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”, as requested by the Town of Purcellville, pursuant to § 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*.

Facts: The Town of Purcellville Town Council enacted a resolution on January 11, 2022 requesting that the CTB rename the portion of State Route 7 located within the Town of Purcellville to “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”.

According to that resolution, William Joseph Pierce was an African American choreographer, dancer and dance studio owner who has been credited with the invention of the Black Bottom dance that became a national craze in the mid-1920’s.

Billy Pierce was born in Purcellville, Virginia on June 14, 1890. He attended Storer College and Howard University. He served in World War I with the 8th Infantry Regiment of the Illinois National Guard.

He started out as a journalist eventually writing for the Chicago Defender, the premier African American newspaper of its time. He wrote about the arts but eventually left his typewriter for the theater. He began as a dancer and trombonist in vaudeville and performed as a banjoist in Dr. Diamond Dick’s Kickapoo Medicine Show on the Theater Owners Booking Association circuit of black vaudeville theaters, which took him to New York City.

He opened a dance studio with Leonard Harper in one room on the top floor of the Navex building where he doubled as an elevator operator. By 1929, his studio was the largest of its kind. Oscar-winning actor Clifton Webb honed his dancing skills at Pierce’s studio where Mr. Pierce developed the “Moaning Low” dance routine for Mr. Webb and Libby Holman for The Little Show in 1931.

Along with Benny Rubin he did the choreography for the 1927 musical Half a Widow. He also created the “Sugar Foot Strut” dance for the hit musical Rio Rita in 1927 and developed a show-stopping routine for Norma Terris in the 1927 production of Show Boat and its 1932 revival. He also choreographed the dances in the 1932 musical revue Walk a Little Faster.

Billy Pierce married Nona Stovall in 1927 and they had two children. His career was cut short when passed away from mastoiditis in 1933 at the age of 42.

Pursuant to § 33.2-213, the CTB has the power and duty to give suitable names to state highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities and change the names of any highways, bridges, interchanges, or other transportation facilities forming a part of the systems of

state highways, provided that, in a case such as this, the governing body within which the portion of the facility is located has passed a resolution requesting such naming. Pursuant to the statute, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) shall place and maintain appropriate signs indicating the names of highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities named by the CTB, while the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining these signs shall be paid by the localities in which they are located.

Recommendations: VDOT recommends this request be approved.

Action Required by CTB: The *Code of Virginia*, § 33.2-213, requires a majority of the CTB members to approve a resolution naming a highway or bridge, as appropriate. A resolution will be provided for the CTB's consideration.

Result if Approved: The portion of State Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, within the corporate limits of the Town of Purcellville, Loudoun County, will be renamed to "Billy Pierce Memorial Pike", as requested by the Town of Purcellville. The Town of Purcellville, in their January 11, 2022 resolution, has agreed to bear the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining the signs calling attention to this naming.

Options: Approve, Deny, or Defer.

Public Comments/Reactions: VDOT is not aware of any opposition to this proposal.

Mayor

Kwasi A. Fraser

Town Manager

David A. Mekarski

Council

Christopher Bertaut
Joel D. Grewe
Stanley J. Milan, Sr.
Erin Rayner
Tip Stinnette
Mary Jane Williams



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**TOWN OF PURCELLVILLE
IN
LOUDOUN COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

RESOLUTION NO. 22-01-01

PRESENTED: JANUARY 11, 2022

ADOPTED: JANUARY 11, 2022

A RESOLUTION: A RESOLUTION TO RENAME HARRY BYRD HIGHWAY (ROUTE 7) WITHIN THE TOWN OF PURCELLVILLE CORPORATE LIMITS TO BILLY PIERCE MEMORIAL PIKE

*(Highway Naming of Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, from East to West - Exit Ramp to Berlin Turnpike North Bound at Harry Byrd Highway West Bound (GIS Coordinates = X: 11,713,169 Y: 7,100,975) to where Purcellville Western Border intersects Harry Byrd Highway at Hillsboro Road (GIS Coordinates = X: 11,702,648 Y: 7,101,066) in Purcellville as the **Billy Pierce Memorial Pike**, and from West to East - Where Purcellville Western Border intersects Harry Byrd Highway (GIS Coordinates = X: 11,702,178 Y: 7,101,001) to Berlin Turnpike North Bound On Ramp at Harry Byrd Highway East Bound (GIS Coordinates = X: 11,713,166 Y: 7,100,875) in Purcellville as the **Billy Pierce Memorial Pike**.)*

WHEREAS, William Joseph Pierce (aka Billy Pierce) was an African American choreographer, dancer and dance studio owner who has been credited with the invention of the Black Bottom dance that became a national craze in the mid-1920s; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce was born on June 14, 1890 to Dennis and Nellie Pierce in Purcellville, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce matriculated first at Storer College, a historically black college in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, that operated from 1867 to 1955. Storer College was a national icon for Black Americans, in the town where the end of American slavery began, as Frederick Douglass famously put it. Billy Pierce later attended Howard University; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce served in World War I with the 8th Infantry Regiment of the Illinois National Guard, an all-black unit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Otis B. Duncan, the highest ranking black officer in the United States Army during the War to End All Wars; and

A RESOLUTION:

**A RESOLUTION TO RENAME HARRY BYRD HIGHWAY (ROUTE 7) WITHIN THE TOWN OF
PURCELLVILLE CORPORATE LIMITS TO BILLY PIERCE MEMORIAL PIKE**

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce started out as a journalist, eventually moving to Chicago to write for the Chicago Defender, the premier African American newspaper of its time; and

WHEREAS, as a journalist, Billy Pierce wrote about the arts, but eventually left his typewriter for a life in the theater. Starting in Chicago, he made his bones as a dancer and trombonist in [vaudeville](#) and performed as a banjoist in Dr. Diamond Dick's Kickapoo Medicine Show on the [Theater Owners Booking Association](#) circuit of black vaudeville theaters, which took him to New York City; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce conceived the idea of a dance studio along with Leonard Harper, and Pierce brought their idea to fruition when he opened a dance studio in one room on the top floor of the Navex building on 46th Street west of Broadway where he doubled as an elevator operator; and

WHEREAS, as choreographer and originator of dances broadly popular during the Jazz Age, Billy Pierce bridged America's racial divide decades before the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, the Billy Pierce Dance Studio at 223 West 46th Street in New York flourished and became one of the incubators for the cultural flowering known to posterity as the [Harlem Renaissance](#). By 1929, Pierce's studio—the "largest of its kind" according to the [Afro American](#) newspaper—occupied five rooms in the bottom two floors of the building; and

WHEREAS, before he became an Oscar-winning character actor, Clifton Webb honed his dancing skills at Pierce's studio. Billy Pierce developed the "Moaning Low" dance routine for "Cliff" Webb, as he was then known, and Libby Holman for The Little Show in 1931; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce, along with Benny Rubin, did the choreography for the 1927 musical Half a Widow, one of the few Broadway shows for which he received credit. Billy Pierce also created "The Sugar Foot Strut" dance for the smash hit musical Rio Rita (1927) and developed a show-stopping routine for Norma Terris, who played Magnolia in the original 1927 production of Show Boat and its 1932 revival. Billy Pierce also received credit for choreographing the dances in the 1932 musical revue Walk a Little Faster; and

WHEREAS, Billy Pierce married Nona Stovall in 1927, and they had two children, Billy Jr. (1928) and Denise (1930). His career was cut short when he died from [mastoiditis](#) in 1933 at age 42.

WHEREAS, Section 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia* authorizes the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to give suitable names to state highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities and change the names of any highways, bridges, interchanges, or other transportation facilities forming a part of the systems of state highways; and

A RESOLUTION:


A RESOLUTION TO RENAME HARRY BYRD HIGHWAY (ROUTE 7) WITHIN THE TOWN OF PURCELLVILLE CORPORATE LIMITS TO BILLY PIERCE MEMORIAL PIKE

WHEREAS, Section 33.2-213 provides that the Virginia Department of Transportation shall place and maintain appropriate signs indicating the names of highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities named by the CTB and requires that the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining such signs shall be paid by the localities in which they are located.


NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Purcellville, in accordance with Section 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*, does hereby request that the CTB name the highway on Route 7, Harry Byrd Highway, from “boundary, intersection or landmark” to “boundary, intersection or landmark” in “Purcellville” as the “Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Purcellville in collaboration with Loudoun County agrees to pay the costs of producing, placing and maintaining the signs calling attention to this naming.

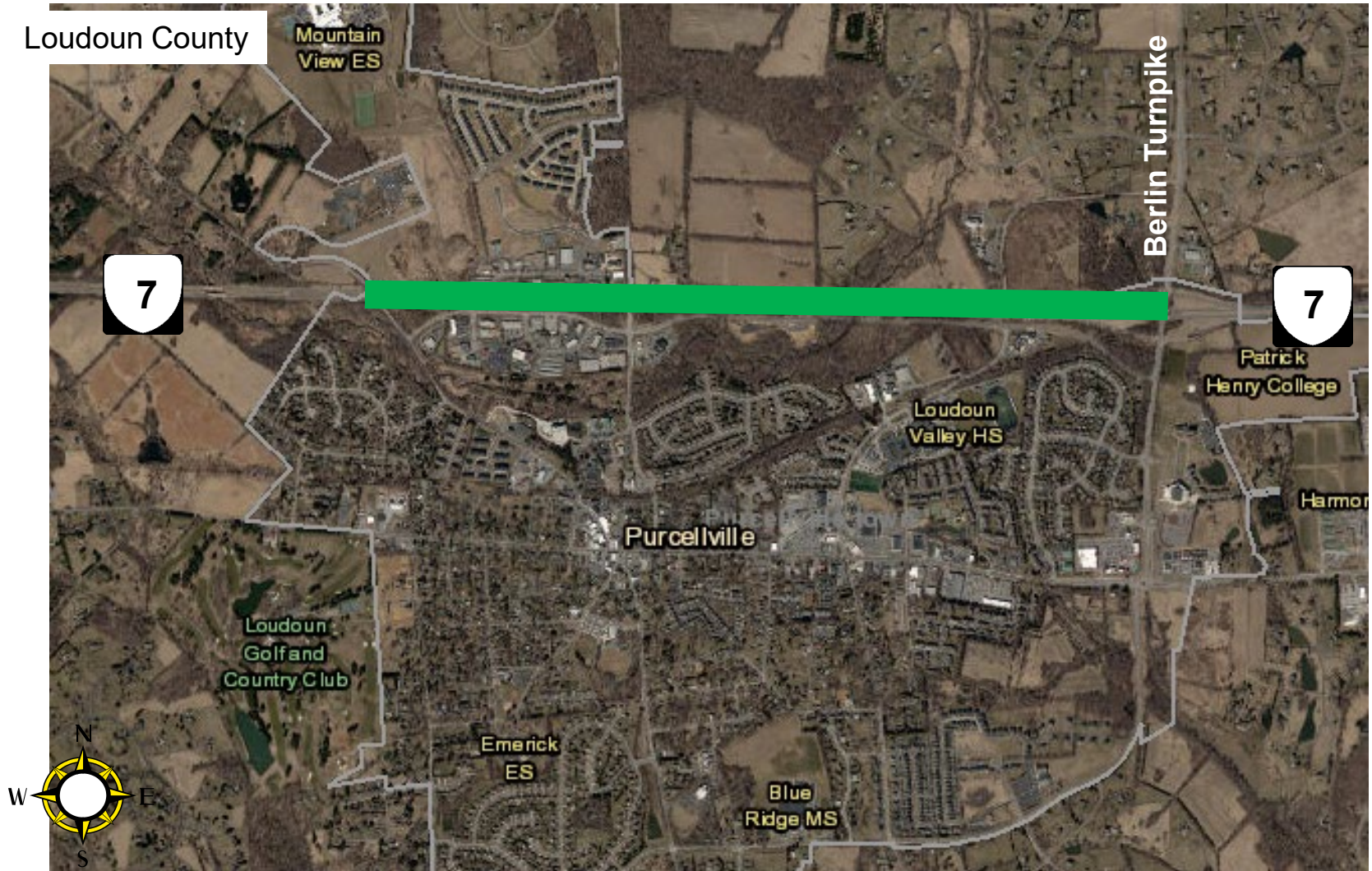
PASSED THIS 11th DAY OF JANUARY, 2022.


Kwasi A. Fraser, Mayor
Town of Purcellville

ATTEST:


Diana Hays, Town Clerk

Loudoun County




Maintenance Division

CTB MEETING: March 15, 2022

Town of Purcellville

Proposed Highway Segment Naming:
“Billy Pierce Memorial Pike”

 Proposed Highway Naming