LAST MAN STANDING
As N.O. prepares to bring down Lee
Nungesser seeks task of relocation

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With the all-night process of removing the statue of Confederate Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard from its pedestal at the entrance to City Park complete, New Orleans officials can now turn their attention to the last, most prominent and potentially most difficult to remove of the four Confederate monuments to be taken down: that of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Sitting atop a 65-foot pedestal in a busy traffic circle on St. Charles Avenue, the 160-ton, 7,000-pound representation of Lee poses various potential challenges as the city nears the completion of the monuments' removal, a process that began almost two years ago.

While city officials have refused to discuss specifics of the removal, as they have for the previous three statues, the location and height of the Lee monument -- as well as the passion its removal inspires --

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likely to draw from those seeking to keep it standing -- could create special logistical and security issues.

Meanwhile, a new possibility has opened up for the ultimate destination of Lee, as well as the monuments to Beauregard and Confederate President Jefferson Davis that were removed earlier: a state park or historic site.

Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser has reached out to Mayor Mitch Landrieu asking that the city work with his office, which oversees the state Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, "to find a location in Louisiana that serves as a historic and cultural landmark," according to an email sent last week.

The removal of the Beauregard monument took more than seven hours before the figure of the Confederate general on his horse was finally lifted off its pedestal last Wednesday morning and carted away to a gated city storage yard, along with at least some parts of the other monuments that have been removed.

Crews then removed the front of the pedestal, inscribed with Beauregard's name and his years of birth, death and service in the Confederate Army, before launching the rest of the base in place.

The long process played out in front of a crowd of about 100 protesters, both for and against the removal, who watched and shouted from behind police barricades as more onlookers watched from the banks of Bayou St. John.

A brass band arrived at 11:55 a.m. with its leader singing, "Take 'em down!"

Despite taunts across the metal dividing lines, the protest remained largely peaceful. Police detained three people after a pile of flags was set on fire.

The wedding day that had begun to rot. A newspaper account of the removal at the time did not specify how long it took to set up the crane that took down the statue, but it described the removal itself as a relatively quick affair.

Much of the time taken with the previous removals this year was consumed with preparations moving protesters away, getting cranes and fork lifts into position and readying for the lift. That was particularly true Tuesday night, as efforts to attach and reattach straps and harnesses to the huge equestrian statue stretched on for hours.

The prominence of the Lee statue may draw larger crowds of protesters, though the city was able to handle the presence of competing groups of demonstrators there earlier this month without any major issues.

On Wednesday, Nungesser spokesman Buddy Boo confirmed that "as it became a reality and it was evident the monuments were coming down," the lieutenant governor reached out to Landrieu to see if his department could put the Lee, Davis and Beauregard statues in state parks.

Nungesser, who remains opposed to the removal of the monuments, wants the statues to be preserved by the state, Boo said.

"Our overall mission is historic preservation, historic site management, promoting the culture of Louisiana and its history regardless of how unique and colorful that history might be," he said.

Expert consultants would be brought in to figure out how to put the statues in the proper historical and artistic context, Boo said.

No specific sites have been selected, though he said the plan would be to put them in parks or historic sites directly under the lieutenant governor's control.

That would exclude City Park, which is controlled by an independent board.

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ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO
Monument supporters collect their flags in front of the Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard before the removal of the statue Tuesday.

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