



Legislation Text

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TITLE:

A Discussion about Reparations including the Disproportionality of Trees in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) Neighborhoods in Carrboro

PURPOSE: The purpose of this agenda item is for the Town Council to have an opportunity to discuss a topic that falls under the equity principle used in Carrboro's town governance - reparations including the disproportionality of trees in BIPOC neighborhoods.

DEPARTMENT: Town Management

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INFORMATION: Several community members asked the Town Council to discuss the topic of reparations including the disproportionality of trees in BIPOC neighborhoods.

In order to begin this discussion, it is important to have a common understanding of certain terms:

Racial equity - *The Center for Social Inclusion defines Racial Equity "As both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives."*

Reparations - *the making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged. Reparations are a means of addressing the wealth and opportunity gaps residents experience due to historical racism and discrimination.**

Racism - *the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another. Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.**

Structural racism - *Race Forward defines Structural racism as encompassing a history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color. Structural racism is racial bias among interlocking institutions and across society, causing cumulative and compounding effects that systematically advantage white people and disadvantage people of color.*

Systemic racism - *Racism resulting from the inherent biases and prejudices of the policies and practices of social and political organizations, groups, or institutions.**

Institutional racism - *GARE defines Institutional Racism as policies or practices that work better for White people than for people of color, often unintentionally or inadvertently.*

White Supremacy - *the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups, in particular Black or Jewish people.**

Note: * Definitions were taken from the dictionary if not sited.

Hopefully, the following information will also help in the discussion.

The topic of reparations is being considered and even unofficially discussed at all levels of government. Some cities are making a conscious effort to address racial injustice that continues to plague Black America. These cities are conducting research, engaging the community and providing recommendations that help frame local programs. Examples of ways in which jurisdictions plan to address this disparity includes creating funds, boosting opportunity in Black communities and establishing commissions/community groups with the sole purpose to partner with local government to narrow the racial disparity gap.

Reparations was recently discussed during an episode of “*United Shades of America*”. (A CNN documentary series in which the host W. Kamau Bell travels throughout America to explore race-based subcultures.) An editorial entitled, **Six Questions about Slavery Reparations, Answered** was also written by CNN staff on August 15, 2020. (See attached editorial - Attachment A.)

Based on some preliminary research, five jurisdictions recently confronted the difficult topic of reparations and developed a plan of action. Here is a summary of their stories:

Evanston, Illinois - 11/25/19 - The City Council approved the creation of a Reparation Fund that was adopted as part of the City’s 2020 budget. The City Council committed to utilize tax revenue collected from sales of recreational cannabis to support reparations in an effort to make amends to the Black population for historic wrongs traced to racial inequities. Residents can also contribute to the reparations fund. In June 2019 Evanston began the reparations planning process following the City Council’s adoption of a resolution <<https://www.cityofevanston.org/home/showdocument?id=49061>> affirming the City's commitment to end structural racism and achieve racial equity. In September, the Council accepted the Equity and Empowerment Commission's report and authorized the creation of a subcommittee to begin the planning process. (See Attachments B, C and D for additional background information and approved resolution.)

Chicago, Illinois - 6/17/20 - The City Council participated in reparations discussions in 2019. After all of the unrest in the beginning of 2020, the Council experienced a renewed sense of urgency for granting some form of reparations to descendants of African-American slaves. The resolution includes the establishment of the Chicago Descendants of Enslaved Africans Reparations Commission charged with the duty to engage the City of Chicago and its citizens of African descent in full reparations measures that includes non-repetition, restitution, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation. Examples include closing the racial equity gaps in homeownership, educational funding, health care, business ventures and government contracts. (See Attachment E for legislation details and approved resolution.)

Asheville, North Carolina - 7/14/20 - The City Council unanimously passed a resolution supporting community reparations for Black residents.

<<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WKialVISWzu72mhasyy9SslDbVGMSj5U/view>> The resolution acknowledges that systemic racism is present nationally and in the community. It also directs the City Manager

to establish a process to develop recommendations to specifically address the creation of generational wealth and to boost economic mobility and opportunity in the Black community. Next is an excerpt from an article written by an employee of Asheville's Office of Equity and Inclusion -

"It is reported that in 1860, that the bodies of enslaved Black people was valued at around \$3 billion. Black people were forced to build this country and jumpstart this country's economy for free. There has not been atonement for the price of slave labor or racist policies that resulted in a loss of equity, opportunity, and assets. Simply put, can we ever truly repay this debt? Can the United States fully address the historical and generational harms done to Black people in this country? Council's reparation resolution is a necessary start, but there is so much work that needs to be done." (See Attachments F and G for the complete article and approved resolution.)

Providence, Rhode Island - 7/16/20 - The Mayor signed an executive order to pursue a "reparations process" for African-Americans and indigenous people. The African American Ambassador Group, (an ADHOC committee), will work with and advise city government throughout a three part approach using truth, reconciliation and municipal reparations to benefit appropriate recipients and work to dismantle state and local laws that negatively impact Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color. (See Attachments H and I for additional information and approved resolution.)

Buncombe County, North Carolina - 8/4/20 - The County commissioners voted to support reparations for Black people in the county that included an apology and will appoint representatives to participate in the new Community Reparations Commission that the City of Asheville is creating. It also calls on organizations and institutions in the county to help advance racial equity, Congress to study and develop reparations proposals and the State to follow a parallel process. Staff is directed to address critical needs such as the educational achievement gap and health disparities. (See Attachments J and K for additional information and approved resolution.)

A specific topic under the umbrella of reparations is disproportionality of trees in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) Neighborhoods in Carrboro. Barbara Stenross, a community resident is interested in the Town taking a more active role in a Community Forestry Program. She stressed that trees are very beneficial in the community. For example, trees are important for reducing runoff, combating climate change, and providing a positive effect on physical health and psychological well-being. She also requested data from staff. Staff met with Ms. Stenross and others in February to discuss the Tree City Program, then COVID-19 hit.

As you know, Carrboro has a Tree City designation and a Tree Board that is a subcommittee of the Appearance Commission. The Town has recently planted trees in four parks, at Carrboro Elementary School and has replaced some trees along East Main. The contractor is responsible for replacing the trees that did not survive the construction of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park. Replacement planting will begin in the fall. Public Works is currently working with Planning on a tree management plan. Ms. Stenross also referenced an independent report about two Carrboro neighborhoods - Bolin Forest and Quarterpath Trace, who organized to support a Neighborhood Urban Forest Stewardship program. Here is the link to the report -

<http://www.townofcarrboro.org/DocumentCenter/View/2894/Urban-Forest-Stewardship-Report>. Ms. Stenross wondered if the town was involved in any of the work mentioned in the report. For this program, the Town partnered with the neighborhoods to support neighborhood stewardship.

FISCAL & STAFF IMPACT: Any fiscal impact will vary based on specified follow-up actions.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Town Council discuss reparations including the disproportionality of Trees in BIPOC neighborhoods and provide staff with future direction as a result of the discussion.