



Reparations Committee

Thursday, June 1, 2023

Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, G300 9:00 AM, Hybrid

COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT:

Krissie Harris, Councilmember, Chair Robin Rue Simmons, Committee Member, Carlis Sutton, Committee Member, Bonnie Lockhart, Committee Member,

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

Devon Reid, Councilmember, Bobby Burns, Councilmember, and Claire McFarland Barber, Committee Member

STAFF PRESENT:

Tasheik Kerr, Assistant to City Manager, Nicholas Cummings Counsel, Audrey Thompson, Director, Parks and Recreation Department

1. CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

The meeting was called to order by Chair Simmons. No declaration of quorum thus, action items will not be addressed at this meeting.

A Ancestral Acknowledgement

Councilmember Harris read the Ancestral Acknowledgement.

B TESTIMONIALS

Anthony Swope - They are honored to speak on behalf of their deceased wife. Mr. Anthony was the one who talked their spouse into signing up for reparations. She initially did not want any handouts but he explained it's not "no 40 acres and a mule" but it is a start. When he grew up he had black high school, grammar schools, teachers, entertainment centers, bars, clubs, and nightclubs. He did not have a Black bank and shared a hospital. When his wife visited his home town she was amazed. He said the white community was ashamed to let the Black community have something equal to what they had. When he and his wife came to Evanston he was confused as to why he could not really get involved with the youth, open up centers, and a restaurant. He wanted a place where the youth could dine, eat, listen to music, and be entertained. Overall, he feels honored to be in the presence of original Black Evanstonians. He expressed the gratitude he has for this accomplishment and strength to go forward. He is thankful whichever way it goes if he as a spouse for his deceased wife could qualify for the reparations benefits or if not.

Bennet Johnson - When he was 6 years his father had a job at 57 Milburn as a chauffeur for a garden before one of the executives of the company. Mr. Johnson had a school a couple blocks away from his house but he was not allowed to go to the Orrington school and attended the Noyes school along with his two sisters. Sometimes he would pass white kids going to Orrington and he would get angry. His first thought was if he was white it would be alright, then he said no that's not right because they don't know who they are. Mr. Johnson wanted to teach people about Paul Robinson, Marion Anderson, and Joe Lewis. He also has a concept called the Freedom Plan that he would like to discuss at some point. Which illustrates how reparations can be disbursed and not be a one night stand but set up capitalist institutions to not only grow but last for a long time. One is a Real Estate investment trust and the other one is a venture capitalist group. It also has a fund for education welfare where people can do anything with the money. His experience is that he was the first minority owned real estate investment trust. He was also involved in the largest small business investment corporation (SBIC). Mr. Johnson states in the acknowledgements the committee forgets to mention that Black people were not only terrorized but killed. He specifically mentions lynching and states that should be addressed in the acknowledgements.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. **Approval of the March 16, 2023 Special Reparations Committee Meeting Minutes**
Will be completed at a future meeting due to there being no quorum
- B. **Approval of the April 6, 2023 Special Reparations Committee Meeting Minutes**
Will be completed at a future meeting there being no quorum

3. DISCUSSION

A. Update on Funding Disbursement

Nicholas Cummings Corporation Counsel shares the City Council voted to have a cash option for recipients and since then research has been done to avoid any hurdles. They are fairly confident based on advice given by a tax attorney, that the definition of income would exclude payments considered as restitution. They are confident that the IRS will not consider these payments as income. Now the question is if the state will consider it as income. According to the definition set out by the public aid code there is some concern. The tax attorney did not give them definitive advice, the state could view the benefits as income. This could possibly put in danger those who are recipients of SNAP, TANF, Medicaid and those sorts of entitlement benefits if they reach a certain income threshold they would no longer be eligible for those benefits. The state shared they use the same definition of income as the federal government and if that is the case restitution payments should be excluded. However, after a conversation with Governor's Pritzker's office he assured that SNAP benefits would be no issue but Medicaid is a different story.

There is some concern over recipients losing eligibility if they are a recipient of a lump sum of \$25,000. Counsel Cummings has requested for writing that definitively says yes or no restitution payment will be excluded. If it's no, not excluded, there has already been discussion with Mayor Biss as well as someone who works for Governor Pritzker about

getting legislation passed that would exempt these sort of payments from the state when it comes to the Illinois Public Aid Code. The concern is not strong on income tax for the state but more on losing entitlement benefits. Counsel Cummings believes the income tax for the state would be the same as the federal government. The form has been revised. Staff will still do interviews with folks and get their selection but the form has been updated to inform the public of this risk. As of right now, Cummings does not have a definitive answer when it comes to state entitlement benefits.

Chair Simmons asks if there is a threshold in terms of breaking up their benefits to not interfere with recipient's benefits. Mr. Cummings responds that the threshold depends on the size of the household. For independents that live alone and have no dependents the threshold is 200% of the state's "poverty line" which equates to a little over \$36,000 in annual income. An individual like that would need to have ten to eleven thousand dollars max they were already getting before giving them a lump sum of \$25,000. The city could disperse it over time, if there is not a definitive answer from the state or the answer is no. The recommendation from staff is to disperse it over time so income requirements for entitlement benefits would not be at risk.

Councilmember Harris, although it can not be voted on at this meeting, asks if it's possible to do 2 annual disbursements of the sum if that would help people not run into that issue. Mr. Cummings states some issues would arise that were not administratively prepared for. One, staff would need to start collecting this income information, the sources of their income and what types of benefits they are receiving, in order for them to disperse in a smart way to put them at risk. Two, depending on the income they have it may take more than 2 years. This would need for greater administration, which is one of the things CPAH was engaged to help with. The administrative capacity has not yet been tackled if there was a need for long term recurring smaller payments.

Mr. Sutton asks if the benefit could be given out as a loan that does not need to be repaid. Mr. Cummings states this is something they can consider but research would need to be done on how that could work for individuals.

Committee member Lockhart explains that requesting recipients' incomes may be invasive and reminds the committee that it's the recipient's choice if they want to do a cash option. Chair Simmons agrees.

Mr. Sutton asks if there is a way to categorize the funds as unclaimed funds with the State of Illinois for individuals and is that taxed. Mr. Cummings states he would like to avoid that. The reparation intake forms were updated to include a power of attorney so it does not go into unclaimed funds. If the person who passed away did not fill out the designation form. Probate law would take control, by default spouse gets half children gets the other half. The proof needed is the marriage license and death certificate.

For clarification: Medicaid is a state program, medicare is a federal program. Medicaid is the one at risk, medicare is a non-issue because social security is not affected by the payment.

Chair Simmons asks if it is possible to disperse cash to those recipients without complications and have gone through the intake process. There is an order of recipients to go through, it is possible to disperse as recipients with seamless cases can receive however, there may be issues regarding fairness. Councilmember Harris then brings up the question: will recipients be asked their option now that cash handouts could be the fastest option? Mr. Cummings responds that it is up to the committee. Staff Audrey, when doing intakes, has asked thus far which option recipients would want their benefit in. Staff Audrey then asks the committee if there is a remainder after doing a different option can the recipient receive the left over in cash? Chair Simmons states to her memory the options were always allowed to be broken up so she doesn't see why they can't break it up with the fourth cash option as well. Staff Audrey clarifies she is asking specifically for the first 16 recipients who have received reparations and still have left over. Chair Simmons states she believes the same thing applies but if there is committee discussion then she may be missing something. However, no decision can be made at this meeting as there is no quorum. Committee member Lockhart states that both mortgage repayment and cash options can be done immediately so those should be rolled out.

For Action: Accept and Place on File - No action, no quorum
[Update on Funding Disbursement - Attachment - Pdf](#)

B. Overview of Reparations Intake Process

Staff Audrey says there are more intakes scheduled and two other individuals have been brought on to expedite the process. The process takes a long time because all of the paperwork line by line is reviewed. If inaccurate income information will have more dire consequences in regard to Medicare then recipients would need to be notified.

C. Reparations Committee Working groups

Approval of the Reparations Committee Working group members

The housing working group will have their meeting in person. The next meeting will be June 22nd. All applicants were invited to the first meeting and then the select 7 will be chosen after the first introductory meeting.

Other working group committees are still waiting to add some members so that will be added to the agenda for the next meeting, when those groups are finalized.

Mr. Sutton and Council Member Harris, chairs of the education working group, have not yet set a date but are working with the committee to set a date. Chair Simmons says if someone from STEM school Evanston has not signed up, reach out to Henry Wilkens. If not him, someone from his organization.

D. Community Engagement

[Community Events List](#)

Hopefully more committee members will sign up to be at community events. Committee member McFarland Barber and Chair Simmons were at the Arts Market and had a positive experience. They had community members sign up for notices from the reparations

committee and others who signed up for working groups. They were able to share accurate information.

If a community member is having an event that they want a Reparations committee member at for any type of Q&A and tabling, reach out to the committee.

E. Acknowledgment Dinner - July 10

Monday, July 10 will be when the acknowledgment dinner will be held at the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, so save the date. If you want to be involved in the planning of the dinner please work directly with Staff Tasheik.

Councilmember Harris raises concern due to the fact 3 committee members and the Mayor will have a robust set of city council meetings on July 10. Chair Simmons says the time the dinner will take consideration of the city council meetings. Member Harris explains she would not like to miss the dinner and another day should be considered. Chair Simmons explains that if time is a concern, speak with Tasheik to coordinate.

Committee member Lockhart suggests moving the dinner to a later date because summer is a busy time and July 10 is coming soon. She suggested a day in August or September. Chair Simmons requested more urgency to honor the next recipients pass the first 16. Additionally, if hard dates and deadlines can be set and worked towards. Further discussion will be had to determine a better time for all committee members.

4. CONSIDERATION

No discussion

5. COMMUNICATION

A. Update on 2nd Cannabis Dispensary

There is a new dispensary coming to Evanston in the 8th ward. Mr. Paul Zalmezak shares that the new dispensary will be located on the first floor of a residential building on Howard and Chicago Ave. where Clark meets Howard. The place used to be a city owned parking lot. The building is an affordable housing unit restricted to individuals earning no more than 80% of AMI, meaning a 1 person household can earn no more than \$67,000. The base of the building is approximately 5,000 sq ft. Half of the retail space will be used for the dispensary and the other half used for a bakery. An individual must be 21 or older to enter the dispensary. Access to the dispensary is through the bakery and will open in September. Once they start accepting payment, after about 30 days the 3% municipal tax should start. Mr. Zalmezak's estimate is they will see payment starting November 1.

B. Minority, Local, Disadvantaged, and Women-Owned Business Contracting Fair Contracting Fair MWDEBE Contracting Fair Flyer

The Reparations committee talked about partnering with the MWDEBE to attract contractors for the Reparations program. On June 13 the business is holding a contracting fair and will be held at Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center.

C. **WE ARE HIRING!**

[Apply](#)

[Reparations Program Construction Administrator Job posting](#)

This is the job posting working full time to work with the Reparations committee to accelerate the process of home improvements. This position did not cost the committee, nor did it come from the Reparations or City of Evanston fund. This is funded by a grant by the Chicago Community Trust.

D. **Reparations Financial Report**

[Reparations Financial Report - Attachment - Pdf](#)

As of June 1, 2023 the City has received \$43,077 in donations to the Reparations fund. As for the Real Estate Transfer tax the City has received \$1,128,460 This tax alone is 45 recipients.

Chair Simmons requested Ms. Kerr to add an ongoing report on how many additional benefits we have dispersed starting next month (July).

E. **Upcoming Meetings**

Thurs. July 6 - Listening Session

Thurs. August 6

Thurs. September 7

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Tina Paden - Ms Paden claims she is here to speak for the ancestors. All the time spent on dinners, stall tactics, showboating, canceling meetings, and time with the media instead of what is really important, which is giving their \$25,0000 to the elders who are one step closer to the grave as they continue on. It appears the committee is waiting for people to die. She claims that all sorts of, mostly white people, have received grants money in this city without penalty, retail, restaurant, or millions of dollars. She also states the committee is not the IRS, gives people their money, and they do not need to know how much people's income is. Ms. Tina claims Black people are being victimized all over again by the reparations committee. Spending time in front of cameras but not paying Black people their money. People got stimulus money from the government without being taxed. The Committee can find a way to do the same thing. She wants the money to be in a Black bank in an interest bearing account, and income reports expenses reported quarterly while a third party should oversee the money. She also says the committee found a way for cash payments for \$3.4 million to the City approved for ancestors and to stop pretending there is no money in the fund and pay people their money now.

Mr. Johnson - After hearing MS. Tina speak, Mr. Johnson claims there is no way that the committee can pay Black folks in the city. The money is not so much desired but insulting. But it's okay because it's a good gesture, and if it's done correctly, it will be an example for the entire country. Also, it should be recognized that Black folks in this town have been insulted, disgraced and hurt.

Vanessa - Ms. Vannesa thanks the committee for the opportunity to show. She watched the 1619 project on channel 7 and the city of Evanston was mentioned and they wanted to

encourage the committee. They said it was National Say Something Nice Day, so they want to thank the committee and the staff and anyone who has played a part in getting where reparations have gotten today. She states It is is making a difference

Nick Murphy - Mr. Murphy begins by extending the utmost gratitude to the members of the committee for the work that has already been done. However, systems of oppression and mechanisms of inequality are alive today. In Feb, 23, 2023 Mr. Murphy shouldered the burden when he claimed he was maliciously and illegally terminated from his employment and evicted from the company due to a white coworker from another state lying in effort to seize his job and livelihood for themselves. It was for that reason and other distractions Mr. Murphy did not receive an invitation to join a reparation committee workgroup. Mr. Murphy's appeal today, if possible, is if the workgroup application be extended so that he and other members of the community can participate in the reparation committee work groups. The deadline was previously extended for two weeks. Mr. Murphy is interested in the educational working group and someone will touch base with him.

Priscilla Giles - She believes that reparations should be for all of Black people in Evanston. She says there is not enough money to give reparations to everyone who has been discriminated against. People have left the city because they could not afford to stay here after discrimination. She states that even the dates that were put there for reparations should not exist because redlining and discrimination happened before 1912 and still continue today. Even if there is not enough money, there should be an institution that would benefit all of the Black people in Evanston. She does not see how there can be an application for people to apply for something like this when there are so many people. They got a telephone call from someone from Bangladesh who thought it was a foolish thing to have a few people when it should be for everyone. Overall, Priscilla is disappointed.

7. **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Simmons adjourns the meeting.