

# Greenbelt Reparations Commission

## Report to the Greenbelt City Council

May 2024

### Overview

In December 2022 the Greenbelt City Council created a 21-member Greenbelt Reparations Commission (GRC) to review, discuss, and make recommendations related to local reparations for African American and Native American residents of Greenbelt. The referendum that motivated this action passed with 63% of voter support. (A list of the Commissioners is included at the end of this report in Appendix A.) No guidance or expectations were given to the Commission on how to operate, outside of a recommendation to participate in training on the Open Meetings Act - which several Commissioners completed. The Reparations Commission has met monthly since February 2023. The first progress report was presented to the City Council in September 2023. This is the second report.

The Commission meets on the third Tuesday of each month. All meetings are announced in the Greenbelt News Review one week in advance with a Zoom link and the agenda so that the public can attend the meetings either in person or online. Meeting minutes are taken, approved, and posted on the Reparations Commission's website for the public to access.

<https://www.greenbeltmd.gov/government/boards-committees/reparationscommission#:~:text=About,of%20Greenbelt%20and%20make%20recommendations>.

The Commission established the following governance structure and subcommittees prior to the March, 2024 Retreat with the consultant firm, ImPact.

- Chair/co-chair (formerly facilitator/co-facilitator) lead the meetings, schedule the executive committee meetings, and communicate the agendas. This role is currently filled by Adriane Harris and Chelsea Barnes with support from Denise Nadasen.
- Secretary/co-secretary keep and distribute minutes, record voting on specific motions, track attendance and prepare reports for the City Council. This role is currently filled by Denise Nadasen and James Williams, Jr., with support from Mark Miller.
- Librarian/co-librarian establish a process for storing literature and documents to support the subcommittee work, communicating documentation procedures to Commissioners. This role is currently being filled by Bob Rand and Sarah Wampler.
- Parliamentarian/co-parliamentarian provide information to the Commission on procedures on how to make decisions, as well as information on compliance with the Open Meetings Act. This role is currently being filled by Josh Hamlin (who recently resigned) and René Sewell-Raysor.

- Communication/co-communications leads address public inquiries on behalf of the Commission, communicate with the public and the media, and maintain content for the Commission website. This role is currently being filled by Shabnam Mojtahedi and Lois Rosado.
- The Executive Committee (EC) meets to draft an agenda, discuss administrative issues, and assure that the work of the GRC is on track.
- The Historic Research Subcommittee (HRS) is researching policies and practices that have affected African Americans, including those who were denied the opportunity to live in Greenbelt and is researching harms to indigenous people who lived on the lands that became Greenbelt.
- Reparations Policy Research Subcommittee (formerly the Education Subcommittee) is researching reparations commissions in other cities and towns to determine how they have identified their scope and to examine reports and recommendations to explore definitions, process, and outcomes.
- The Facilitation Subcommittee (FS) brought on a facilitator to help the Commission clarify its goals and develop a strategy and timeline to meet those goals.

The Commission has also planned and hosted several educational events for both the Commission and the public, virtually and in-person events, including the following:

- A webinar presented by Nkechi Taifa, Founder/Director of the Reparation Education Project, Inc. in October 2024
- A Black History Month event held in-person on February 24, 2024, at the Greenbelt Library with two presentations about the history in Prince George’s County and the history in Greenbelt

The **Executive Committee** (EC) is made up of individuals who serve in one of five roles (Chair, Secretary, Librarian, Parliamentarian, and Communications representative) as well as the chair of each subcommittee.

- The Executive Committee organized a report to update the Greenbelt City Council on the progress during the first six months of the Commission’s work.
- The Communications team, on behalf of the Commission, wrote an article for the GNR to update the public on the work of the GRC.

The **Facilitation Subcommittee** (FS) was made up of six individuals (Tom Adams, Denise Nadasen, James Williams, Jr., Rhema Bjorkland, Frank DeBernardo, and Sarah Wampler). The Commission needed to prioritize its work and develop a strategy on how to work together and to meet its goals. Through an RFP and selection process, the FS recommended a candidate who was approved by the full Commission, and then put on contract by the City of Greenbelt.

The Facilitation subcommittee was disbanded once the ImPact consultant firm was hired.

At ImPact’s first meeting, Commissioners shared their vision of the GRC. This work evolved into an exercise to brainstorm longer and shorter-term goals. Members of the Commission met

on March 9 at a 4-hour retreat to identify goals and create pathways tool to process tasks required to meet the goals identified.

At this retreat, the Commission agreed to create 3 subcommittees and a Strategic Planning Work group:

- 1) The Historical Research Subcommittee (HR) will do research on the harms caused to African Americans and Indigenous People on the land known as Greenbelt;
- 2) The Reparations Policy Research Subcommittee (RPR) (formerly the Education Committee) will examine how other communities across the country approached reparations;
- 3) The Community Education and Engagement Subcommittee (CEE) will share periodic updates of Commission progress with the public, develop a structure for community and commission communication and engagement, and meet people where they are in order to obtain community input and to gain community support.

The consultants are creating a synthesized document that will map out the pathways and tasks needed to meet the goals set forth by the Commission. This strategy document will guide the work of the Commission and is expected to be completed by Summer, 2024.

During the retreat, Commission members signed up for one of the subcommittees above. In addition, volunteers also signed up for a temporary working group- the Strategic Planning Working Group - which will generate ideas for a new governance structure and define the scope of the work.

After the retreat, the Consultants met with the Strategic working group to identify the next steps. The Consultants worked with the group to clarify the charge for each subcommittee.

As a result of this work, the Commission has:

- Created a space to discuss engaging the public,
- Clarified the purpose of each subcommittee,
- Created a working group to create structure and strategy for the work, and
- Prepared this report to update the Council.

The **Reparations Policy Research Subcommittee** (formerly the Education Subcommittee) was formed to examine reparations around the country and to inform and educate the Commission and the public about reparations and the reparations movement across the country. To accomplish this, they are researching reparations commissions in other communities to gather information about how other cities and towns have addressed reparations, identifying potential speakers who can speak about reparations. The Reparations Policy Research subcommittee is made up of seven commissioners (Chelsea Barnes, London McCloud, Chiquita Jackson, Yahshuah Ford, Denise Nadasen and Sarah Wampler.)

Below is a summary of the work completed by to date:

- Participated in a national Reparations Conference, sponsored by the 404 African American History Commission, headed by Lonnie Bunch, (Aug 2023)
- Hosted a webinar with Dr. Nkechi Taifa who spoke about the reparation movement across the country. (Nov 2023)
- Participated in a national symposium in Evanston, IL (Nov 2023)
- Hosted a talk on Restorative Justice by Commissioner Shabnam Mojtahedi (Sep 2023)
- Native American Reparation webinar was presented by Commissioner Sarah Wampler (March 2024)
- Reached out to several reparations commissions and organizations across the country.

According to [The National African-American Reparations Commission website](#) there are 13 commissions on reparations across the country.

- Asheville, NC
- Baltimore, MD
- Berkeley Unified School District, CA
- Boston, MA
- College Park, MD
- Evanston, IL
- Greenbelt, MD
- San Francisco, CA
- St. Louis, MO
- St. Paul, MN
- St. Petersburg, FL
- State of California
- Providence, Rhode Island
- Tullahassee, OK

The Reparations Policy Research Subcommittee is reaching out to each of the other local reparations initiatives to find out how and why they were formed, what their goals, timeline, and processes are, what challenges they face, and what lessons they have learned from their work to date. So far, the Reparations Policy Research committee has the following to share:

1. The San Francisco African American Reparations Advisory Committee has 15 individuals. They began their work in December 2020. Their goal was to chronicle the harms done to Black Americans and to determine appropriate redress and repair to address those harms. They released their [recommendations](#) in December 2023. The reparations plan included one-time payments of up to \$5 million to Black San Franciscans, alongside other programs that would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars, like forgiving student loans and new homeownership or rental opportunities. Unfortunately, in January 2024, the City of San Francisco has made a decision to stop funding the reparations office. On February 27, 2024, the San Francisco Council issued an apology to the African American Community, as a first step.
2. Evanston has seven individuals on their commission. It began its work in 2021 and has been learning about the history of harm in Evanston, Illinois. They have worked with

outside experts to identify specific harms within the community. The through a lottery system the City has distributed \$25,000 housing vouchers to residents who have proven harm as a result of government redlining policies and related practices. Over \$3 million has been distributed to date.

Resource organizations:

The following organizations provide valuable sharable information.

- First Repair is a non-profit working nationally to educate and equip leaders, stakeholders, and allies who are advancing local reparations policies that remedy historic and ongoing anti-Black practices. The East Region Strategy Session meets every 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday (4:30-5:30 pm EST).
- The African American Redress Network (AARN) is an innovative model for scholars and advocates to further groundbreaking work in activism and the humanities to promote racial redress for U.S. historical racial injustices by undertaking and facilitating interdisciplinary research, public education initiatives and capacity-building. They meet monthly.
- Evanston National Reparations Symposium 2023: 200 attendees representing 76 initiatives. A Greenbelt Commissioner attended and reported back the following.
  - Each community is grappling with its unique history of redlining, real estate covenants and predatory lending. Types of repairs include restitution, rehabilitation, compensation, and guarantee of non-repetition.
    - Redress includes:
      - Education—tuition, scholarships
      - Financial Compensation—to descendants
      - Community/Economic Dev—Economic Dev Zone
      - Housing—down payment assistance
      - Health & Wellness—seek/receive health care.
  - Descendants of St. Louis University, a Jesuits institution were active participants and beneficiaries of local, national, and global slavery since their origins in 1534.
  - African Americans in San Francisco were shaped by residential displacement, disparities in socioeconomic outcomes, and broken promises.
  - Shorefront Legacy Center is collecting documents, photographs, and ephemera to build a community-based archive.
  - Black Veterans Project is looking at racial disparities in the allocation of veterans’ benefits and potentially extending unused VA home loans to descendants.
  - In Rosewood, FL, property was taken by eminent domain/ urban renewal.
  - In the Lakeland Community Heritage Project (College Park, MD) the area flooded frequently. The federal government displaced people and *replaced* their communities with townhomes and apartments.
  - The Folded Map Project connected residents who live in homes at corresponding addresses on opposite sides of Chicago to examine how segregation impacted their lives.
  - CNN recently broke a story on a class-action lawsuit against Navy Federal Credit Union alleging racial disparities in its lending practices to equally qualified service personnel and denying loans based on race.

- HR 40--This bill was originally introduced in the U.S. Congress by Rep. John Conyers—who has since joined the ancestors--to establish the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, examining the history of slavery and discrimination through the present, and to recommend appropriate remedies.
- It must be noted that those that caused the harm cannot determine the repair, which is why it is essential for any decision about Greenbelt recommendations be informed by those who were harmed.

The Reparations Policy Research Subcommittee plans to continue this work in the following ways:

1. Continue research and interviews with other commissions across the country.
2. Summarize the work of reparations commissions in other parts of the country.
3. Host speakers on how to research harms within the historical and legal context of reparations. Potential speakers include:
  - a. Bilqis Wilkerson (Director, Thurgood Marshall Law Center)
  - b. Howard University Law Students
  - c. United Nations Racial Equity Speaker (Justin Hansford)
  - d. Rachel Swarns – Author of “272” - The enslaved who were sold to build Georgetown University.
4. Develop tours of local museums:
  - a. National Museum of the American Indian
  - b. National Museum of African American History and Culture

The **Historical Research Subcommittee** (HRS) is made up of seven individuals (Rhema Bjorkland, Lorena Ferdinand, Adriane Harris, Mark Miller, Robert Rand, Konrad Herling and Lois Rosado) and was formed to investigate the history of injustices and harms done to African Americans and Indigenous People in and around the land that is now the City of Greenbelt. To date the GHES has done the following to support the work of the Commission:

1. Organized tours for the Commission to explore the Greenbelt Museum
2. Met with the Maryland State Archives to ask for their guidance on how to conduct Reparations research.
3. Researched the archives of the Greenbelt News Review for relevant articles.
4. Gathered information from the Greenbelt Museum on the numerous structural inequities in Greenbelt.
5. Engaged a group of students at the University of Maryland to examine historical and racial inequities in Greenbelt.
6. Planned a public engagement event in February to highlight black history in Greenbelt and Prince George's County and provide the public with an introduction to the work of the Commission.
7. Created a 400-page Draft Notes document that compiles relevant historical research focused on African Americans and Indigenous People in the Greenbelt area.

The Draft Notes document is a work in progress and summarizes a range of archival records, hundreds of scholarly books, articles, interviews with historians and other experts, and

organizations such as the Greenbelt News Review archives, the Maryland State Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Prince George's County Historical Society Library, the Tugwell Room in the Greenbelt Library, and the Greenbelt Museum. The contents of the document include following.

1. The history of harms to the Piscataway Nation, Piscataway Conoy, and other Native Americans who originally populated this land.
2. The historical context of race-based enslavement in and around Greenbelt, focusing on enslavement at plantations such as the Turners' Wild Cat Plantation, the Walkers' Toaping Castle, Hamilton's Purchase, and Pindell's Chance.
3. A review of post-abolition discrimination as a legacy of the institution of slavery, especially as developed in Prince George's County and under the laws of Maryland.
4. The creation of Greenbelt as a New Deal project that excluded African Americans.

Further research is needed to better understand the history of segregation and discrimination and its impact for housing, education, employment, government benefits, public accommodations, recreation facilities, incarceration, law enforcement, and healthcare.

The Historical Research Subcommittee also planned and hosted a Black History Month Event (Feb 2024) at the Greenbelt Library featuring local historians, Megan Searing Young and Artura Jackson.

The **Community Engagement and Education Subcommittee** is a new committee. It is made up of seven commissioners: James Williams, Jr, Tom Adams, Gail Crichlow, Rene Sewell-Raysor, Mark Wilson and Frank DeBernardo. They are developing a structure to gain community input and to keep the community informed of the Commission's work. They are planning to connect with the Greenbelt community in order to solicit community perspectives about reparations. They will be hosting Town Halls and forums to educate the community about Restorative and Transitional Justice.

**The Strategic Planning Working Group** will develop a working definition of terms; determine the scope for an historic data collection time frame, as well as advance a time frame for the completion of the Commissions' work, identify demography/populations (stakeholders), create and distribute a survey to measure Commission members' knowledge and attitudes on reparations and governance, and establish a governance structure.

## **Next Steps**

Define the scope and process for our reparations work and create a glossary of terms. Interview African and Native Americans to collect stories and testimonials. Do research to identify harm that has been done to African American and Native Americans. Organize community meetings to gather feedback, to inform the public, and to share the work of the Commission. Develop a strategy to ensure that the voices of African Americans and Native Americans are incorporated in the final recommendations.

**Appendix A –City of Greenbelt Reparations Commissioners as of January 2024**

Tom Adams	Shabnam Mojtahedi
Chelsea Barnes	Denise Nadasen
Rhema Bjorkland	Robert Rand
Frank DeBernardo	Lois Rosado
Gail Crichlow	Rene Sewell-Raysor
Lorena Ferdinand	Jonathan Taylor
Yahshuah Ford	Sarah Wampler
Josh Hamlin (Resigned in April)	James Williams, Jr.
Adriane Harris	Mark Wilson
Chiquita Jackson	<b><u>Alternate:</u></b> Konrad Herling
London McCloud	<b><u>Staff Liaison:</u></b> Megan Searing Young
Mark Miller	