

Reparations Commission

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

6:00 p.m.

Location: Alameda County Training & Education Center
Oakland Room
125 – 12th Street, 4th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607

SUMMARY/ACTION MINUTES

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Debra Gore at 6:07 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Members present:

1. Leo Bazile
2. Artavia Berry – noted present at 6:15 p.m.
3. Alan Dones – noted present at 6:20 p.m.
4. Debra Gore
5. Phillip Gardiner
6. Shenita Hurskin
7. James Knowles
8. Larry McClendon
9. Brandon Sass
10. Shadrick Small – noted present at 6:10 p.m.
11. Tiega Varlack

Eight (8) members present at Roll Call

Excused: Jesse Burlison, Natasha Tripplett

III. Public Comment (items not listed on the agenda)

Chair Gore introduced Jennifer Gayden, the newest Reparations Commissioner. Ms. Gayden is a resident of District 4, and serves as Director of Operations for the San Francisco African American Arts and Cultural District in San Francisco, CA. She is also a licensed real estate agent and has experience helping people navigate the real estate process.

Chair Gore announced the Oakland Asian Cultural center is hosting a film screening on reparations by filmmaker Jon Osaki, on January 25, 2026, 2:00p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Commissioners were encouraged to support and help promote the event publicly.

IV. Approval of Minutes - Action Item

Minutes of November 12, 2025

Minutes of December 10, 2025

A motion was made by Commissioner McClendon and seconded by Commissioner Hurskin to approve the minutes of November 12, 2025, as corrected.

Ayes: Berry, Gore, Gardiner, Hurskin, Knowles, McClendon, Sass, Varlack

Noes: Small

Excused: Burlison, Tripplett

Abstain: Bazile, Dones

Motion passed 8/1

A motion was made by Commissioner Gardiner and seconded by Commissioner Hurskin to approve the minutes of December 10, 2025, as corrected.

Ayes: Berry, Gore, Gardiner, Hurskin, Knowles, McClendon, Sass, Small, Varlack

Noes:

Excused: Burleson, Tripplett

Abstain: Bazile, Dones

Motion passed 9/0

V. Russell City Willow Tree Removal – Informational Item

Commissioner Berry reported on the removal of the historic Russell City Willow Tree in Hayward, CA.

The Willow tree was planted in the early 1960s by Bernice Patterson, a former Russell City resident, as a marker of family land taken through eminent domain. It was the last living physical marker of Russell City, featured in museums, films, and academic research. Commissioner Berry reported that the tree was on privately owned property and not removed by the City of Hayward. The City of Hayward is investigating but has not yet received a response from the property owner.

The tree had held intergenerational significance for elders who regularly visited there. The tree was healthy, not diseased, and was cut down and ground to the root, indicating intent to erase it permanently. The Johnson family, descendants of Bernice Patterson, learned of the tree removal recently; it likely occurred between July 2025 and January 2026.

The Johnson family requested to know who authorized the tree removal, and if it was a violation of the City of Hayward's Tree Ordinance. In addition, the family requested public accountability and transparency.

Supervisor Elisa Márquez's office expressed concern and support and a willingness to assist once facts are confirmed. Hayward City Councilmember Angela Andrews is researching property ownership and permitting history.

The Reparations Commission discussed proposed Commission actions, including:

- Draft a formal letter to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and the City of Hayward
- Request a Board of Supervisors agenda item on the Russell City tree removal
- Hold a special public meeting focused on Russell City and the tree
- Media outreach
- Work with the Johnson family to define clear memorial and reparations recommendations for the Russell City Willow Tree.

Speakers

Marian Johnson, Carolyn Johnson, Michael V. Johnson, CJ and Christian Johnson commented on this item.

Five (5) speakers commented on this item.

This item was informational only and required no Commission action.

VI. Pop-Up Sessions – Action Item

Chair Gore requested Commissioners to report on upcoming pop sessions and the need for a hard cutoff on in-person pop-up/community engagement so the Commission can begin report writing.

The Reparations Commission has conducted four (4) of the six (6) formal listening sessions and has held one (1) pop-up session. There are two (2) listening sessions remaining.

Commissioners agreed to create a shared calendar and process, so the public and support partners know when a pop-up is happening, which commissioner is organizing, and whether staff/support is needed for staffing, outreach materials, and logistics.

Planned pop-ups / outreach

- Commissioner Brandon Sass – Tri-City AA Cultural & Historical Society event (informational outreach, not a pop-up) – 50th Anniversary Black History Month celebration on Saturday, February 14, 2026, from 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. at the Newark Zillman Center. Commission can host a Reparations Commission table; library will provide materials.
- Commissioner Berry - Exploring sessions at Juvenile Hall and Camp Sweeney for justice-involved youth. She is also exploring opportunities at Santa Rita and with community based organization partners. No date has been confirmed.
- Vice Chair McClendon - Black Joy Parade partnership, working to secure a booth at the parade (pending approval; partnering with Oakland Public Library and Alameda County Library support), vendor/business orientation at Everett & Jones (February 17, 2026) and volunteer orientation (Feb 21 at noon) (potentially hosted in the Commission’s building, near parade route).
- Commissioner Sass – East Oakland Youth Development Center youth session – Wednesday, January 28, 2026, from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- Criminal justice pop-up(s) with UC Berkeley LSPC, Underground Scholars, CSU East Bay are being explored
- Creative arts/cultural space pop-up with Randolph Bell (related to the I-980 work. Educational partnership with Berkeley Unified and partners for grades 8–12.
- Commissioner Varlack - Chabot College event, March 14, 2026, or March 21, 2026 - 12:00p.m. – 2:00p.m., hoping Supervisor Marquez can attend. Potential partners include 100 Black Men/100 Black Women, Divine Nine, Chabot students, legal partners.

This item was informational only and required no Commission action.

VII. Set Agenda for Year-End Retreat – Newark Library, 37055 Newark Blvd. Newark CA 94560, Saturday January 31, 2026, 12noon-5pm

Chair Gore and Letitia Henderson, ECC, reported that there will be a Closed Session item on the agenda for the Reparations Retreat, a session facilitated by Amy Coppola Sickles, focused on strengthening group functioning, in addition to a structured work session to finalize recommendations. Commissioners are to come prepared with draft ideas for the final recommendations.

This was listed as an action item however no action was taken.

VIII. Exceptional Community Connections (ECC) Project Management Timeline – Informational Item

Letitia Henderson, ECC, reported on key milestones and final deliverable of the Reparations Commission.

Key Milestones

- January 31, 2026 – Commission retreat to develop draft recommendations
- February 18, 2026 – Draft recommendations due
- February 27, 2026 – Final recommendations submitted to Informing Change
- March 18, 2026 – Rough draft report reviewed by Commission
- March 25–31, 2026 – Community review of draft recommendations
- April–May 2026– Revisions, ad hoc committee review, final approval
- June 2, 2026 – Board letter submitted
- June 23, 2026 – Formal presentation to Board of Supervisors

The report will combine community input and commissioner expertise, clearly state limitations and lessons learned, and offer both recommendations and implementation steps.

This item was informational only and required no Commission action.

IX. Data Collection: Online tools and distribution of comprehensive survey – Informational Item

Nothing new to report.

X. Informing Change update – Informational Item

Michael Arnold, consultant, Informing Change, reported on the proposed structure and process for the Reparations Action Report, focusing on how data, community input, and recommendations will be integrated.

The report structure will be action-oriented with:

- Introductory/context sections
- Core recommendations presented prominently and early
- A section detailing the Commission’s process, including constraints, challenges, and achievements
- Background on reparations, harms, and examples of effective reparative actions
- Recommendations organized by county domains/appropriation areas
- A linked action plan outlining short-, medium-, and long-term steps

Recommendations will be tied directly to survey and listening session findings where possible, rather than listing data separately.

- The timeline is tight, with recommendations ideally finalized by February 2026, followed by action-plan development.
- Multiple review rounds are planned between March and May 2026, with final submission due June 30, 2026.

The report outline and materials are available on SharePoint, and Commissioners are encouraged to add comments.

This item was informational only and required no Commission action.

XI. Website Request for Commissioner Headshot and Bio – Informational Item

This item was continued to a future meeting.

XII. Budget Updates & Vendor Approval Processes – Informational Item

Vice-Chair McClendon

Commissioner McClendon reported on the Reparations Commission budget and Vendor Approval Processes.

The remaining budget funds stand at \$288K. Some line-item adjustments are needed however funds remain available for surveys, pop-ups, food, photography, and videography through March 2026. Website costs are complete.

Vendor Approval Process

Each food vendor must go through a multi-step administrative process and there is an annual cap of \$3,000 per vendor. Vendors cannot be reused once the cap is reached, which requires the Commission to constantly find new vendors. The team is now bulk-requesting vendors for multiple events in advance to reduce last-minute scrambling. For upcoming listening sessions, gift cards will be used for food as they are smaller sessions.

This item was informational only and required no Commission action.

XIII. Subcommittee Updates:

- **Admin & Budget – Vice Chair McClendon** – reported in item XII
- **Listening Sessions – Commissioner Sass** – reported in item VI
- **Data Research, Action Plan Report – Commissioner Varlack** – nothing new to report

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m. on January 14, 2026.

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