

Reparations Commission

SUMMARY/ACTION MINUTES

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

6:00 p.m.

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

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Debra Gore Mann at 6:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Members present:

1. Artavia Berry
2. Jesse Burleson
3. Alan Dones
4. Phillip S. Gardiner
5. Debra Gore Mann
6. Carolyn Johnson
7. Larry McClendon
8. Brandon Sass
9. Shadrick Small
10. Tiega Varlack

Excused: Leo Bazile, Shenita Hurskin, James Knowles, Natasha Tripplett

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

Chair Gore-Mann introduced Josephine Ayankoya, the newly appointed Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Alameda County, with her official start date being March 30, 2025. She is an Oakland native with extensive experience in DEI roles across San Francisco's Behavioral Health Services, Transit Department, and most recently the City of Hayward, where she worked on the Russell City Reparative Justice Project.

IV. Approval of Minutes - Action Item

Minutes of April 9, 2025

A motion was made by Commissioner Gardiner and seconded by Commissioner Berry, to approve the minutes of April 9, 2025, as submitted.

Ayes: Berry, Gardiner, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Sass, Small, Varlack

Noes: None

Excused: Bazile, Burleson, Dones, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain:

Motion passed 8/0

V. Listening Sessions

The Listening Sessions Working Group presented a draft presentation and logo for the listening session at Allen Temple Church in Oakland, scheduled for Saturday, May 17, 2025. This would be a pilot for future sessions and an opportunity to gather input.

A logo was presented, designed originally by a commissioner and finalized by a designer. It featured red, black, and green colors, broken chains and the continent of Africa. The Listening Sessions Working Group noted their top choice of three options.

The PowerPoint presentation included: 1) Historical context of slavery and systemic racism; 2) Current disparities in Alameda County; 3) Definitions of reparations (from the UN); 4) Discussion questions for community input and 5) A plan to gather feedback via surveys (digital and paper).

There was discussion about the logo and its use for the pilot listening session or for the Reparations Commission logo. Some commissioners expressed that this is very short notice for selecting a logo and voting on content for listening sessions.

Chair Gore-Mann expressed that the Listening Sessions Working Groups efforts are appreciated, however there was a lack of communication and transparency in the Listening Sessions Working Groups actions. It is important to adhere to the Brown Act and county procedures that require full commission approval for any public-facing materials or events.

Going forward it is noted that working groups are advisory only and cannot act on behalf of the Commission without formal votes.

It was the consensus of the Commission that the May 17th Listening Session at Allen Temple Church proceed without a Reparations Commission logo or official affiliation and instead frame it as a community-led event.

The Reparations Commission agreed to hold a special meeting on May 27, 2025, with a facilitator to organize the future listening sessions.

Logo review and approval – Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Varlack and seconded by Commissioner Sass to table the vote on the logo until the next Reparations Commission meeting, to allow sufficient time for more research.

Ayes: Berry, Burleson, Dones, Gardiner, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Sass, Small, Varlack

Noes: None

Excused: Bazile, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain:

Motion passed 10/0

The Listening Session PowerPoint Deck – Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Dones and seconded by Commissioner Sass to table the vote on the Listening Session PowerPoint presentation.

Ayes: Berry, Burleson, Dones, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Sass, Varlack

Noes: None

Excused: Bazile, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain: Gardiner, Small

Motion passed 8/0

Talking points that were added to the One pager – Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Dones and seconded by Commissioner Varlack to table the vote on the Talking points added to the one pager.

Ayes: Berry, Burleson, Dones, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Sass, Varlack

Noes: None

Excused: Bazile, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain: Gardiner, Small

Motion passed 8/0

Pilot Session May 17th – Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Johnson and seconded by Commissioner Varlack that the May 17th Pilot Listening Session be a community led session and not affiliated with the Alameda County Reparations Commission.

Ayes: Berry, Burleson, Dones, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Sass, Varlack

Noes: None

Excused: Bazile, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain: Gardiner, Small

Motion passed 8/0

Hayward Listening Session August 16th - Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Sass and seconded by Commissioner Berry to hold a Listening Session in Hayward on August 16th, 2025.

Ayes: Gardiner

Noes: Dones, Gore-Mann, Johnson, McClendon, Varlack

Excused: Bazile, Hurskin, Knowles, Tripplett

Abstain: Berry, Burleson, Sass, Small

Motion failed 1/5

VI. Judicial Watch on Reparations - Informational

<https://www.judicialwatch.org/court-hearing-reparations-program/>

Commissioner Varlack reported on legal challenges to reparations efforts.

In the United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois, the case is Flynn v. City of Evanston, and a motion to dismiss was heard recently by Judge John Ness. The case was brought by a special interest group challenging Evanston's reparations program. The challenge claims that the program violates the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution by limiting eligibility based on race, specifically to individuals of Black or African American descent.

The program is financed through cannabis sales tax revenue, initially totaling \$20 million, with \$5 million already disbursed.

Eligibility criteria include "Ancestors", Black residents born in Evanston between 1919 and 1969, direct descendants of such residents, post-1969 Black residents who experienced discrimination. Eligible recipients receive \$25,000 cash payments, which can be used for various purposes including tuition or personal expenses.

The case questions the legality of race-based reparations programs and highlights the need for narrowly tailored justifications when using race as a basis for government programs. The outcome could set a precedent on whether race-based harm without individual proof is constitutionally permissible. The judge has taken the motion to dismiss under submission; there is no timeline for a decision.

AB 7 from California Assembly Member Bryan is a state bill that proposes college admissions considerations based on involuntary servitude lineage rather than race. This strategy is to navigate around the repeal of Prop 209, which prohibited the use of race in public university admissions in California.

VII. Website and IT Update

Deb Sica, County Librarian, gave an update on the Reparations Commission website.

The website project is underway, and the proposal for it has been vetted and approved. Funding is being provided by the library. Information Technology Department (ITD) will be involved in the development process.

Nancy Barron, Administrative Support for the library will reach out to schedule meetings with ITD for all the Website Working Group members: Commissioners McClendon and Berry. A SharePoint site has been set up, and members involved in the development have been added. A draft document containing website content has been uploaded to SharePoint. This includes proposed pages, text, and Commissioner bios. Provide feedback or edits directly on the document. The document will be brought forward as an action item in next month's meeting for discussion and voting.

VIII. Working Groups Report Out - Informational Item

Chair Gore-Mann

- Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
- Allies/Partnership Agreements
- Website up and Live
- Progressive movement report
- Data gathering and data analysis
- Budget/Resources

IX. Update on Harms Report Capstone Project Presentation

Chair Gore-Mann reported that multiple departments in Alameda County participated in the UC Berkeley Goldman School MPP, MPA and MDP Capstone Projects projects, including Social Services, Alameda County Health, Human Resources, Emergency Management Services, and the County Administrator's Office.

Elycia Knight, a participant in the Capstone titled "A Journey to Repair: Guidelines to an Effective Harm Report." She did not provide full harms report; however, it provides an 80-page framework and template with steps such as data collection and community listening. Elycia will present the full report in June.

Partnership: Goldman School/Alameda County Capstone Showcase on Monday May 12, 2025, at the Goldman School in Berkeley, Goldman School of Public Policy, 1893 Leroy Avenue, Room 250 2nd Floor, Berkeley CA 94720. 12-2pm Capstone Presentations.

X. Discussion regarding engagement with national and other reparations movement efforts

A day-long conference titled Reparations, Power, Healing and Convening is scheduled for Thursday at the Oakland Marriott. A celebration event will take place the following Friday evening. These events are supported by groups like the Brotherhood of Elders and the San Francisco Foundation.

A virtual event was hosted on April 15th by the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC). The 4-hour video presents a comprehensive overview of reparations work at the national and global levels. It includes detailed discussions on reparations frameworks and movement strategies across states and the diaspora.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m. on May 14, 2025.

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