



Asheville-Buncombe County

Community Reparations Commission Report

2025





COMMUNITY REPARATIONS COMMISSION MEMBERS

Dewana Little, CRC Chair (2024-25)

Bobbette Mays, CRC Vice Chair

Dr. Dwight Mullen, CRC Chair (2022-2024)

City of Asheville Council Liaisons

Esther Manheimer, Mayor

Antanette Mosley, Vice Mayor (2025)

Sheneika Smith, Council Member

Member	Impact Focus Area	Appointee
Aleesha Ballard	Education	AHA Communities Neighborhood
DeWayne Barton	Economic Development	Burton Street Neighborhood
Norma Baynes	Healthcare	Shiloh Neighborhood
Renata Conyers	Healthcare	Heart of Chestnut/Northside Neighborhood
Christopher Gordon	Education	County
Roy Harris	Criminal Justice	Southside Neighborhood
Joyce Harrison	Housing	City
Shaunda Jackson	Education	AHA Communities Neighborhood
Kimberly Jones	Economic Development	Stumptown Neighborhood
Dewanna Little	Criminal Justice	City
Tamarie Macon	Healthcare	City
Bobbette Mays	Housing	Shiloh Neighborhood
Glenda McDowell	Economic Development	East End/Valley Street Neighborhood
Dwight Mullen	Economic Development	City
Mildred Nance	Housing	Southside Neighborhood
Bernard Oliphant	Economic Development	Heart of Chestnut/Northside Neighborhood
Thomas Priester	Education	Stumptown Neighborhood
Kelsey Simmons	Housing	County
Shantelle Simpson	Healthcare	County
Raynetta Waters	Economic Development	County
Cici Weston	Education	City
Dee Williams	Criminal Justice	County
MZ Yehudah	Criminal Justice	Burton Street Neighborhood
Angela Young	Housing	AHA Communities Neighborhood
Keith Young	Housing	East End/Valley Street Neighborhood
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Shekiki Jiles-Baten	Criminal Justice	Shiloh Neighborhood
Stephanie Lee	Economic Development	County
Osondu McPeters	Education	City
Dwayne Richardson	Economic Development	County
Dee Burrus	Housing	Southside Neighborhood

IN MEMORIAM

During the work of the Community Reparations Commission, two participants were lost whose commitment to justice and change helped propel this reparations process forward.

Mr. Bernard Vernon Oliphant

Mr. Oliphant served as a Community Reparations Commissioner and was a member of the Economic Development Impact Focus Area. A veteran and community advocate, he was deeply dedicated to this work and expressed his hope that the Commission's efforts would have long-lasting, positive effects for the Black community. Mr. Oliphant passed away on November 2, 2023.

Ms. Dionne Greenlee

Ms. Greenlee served as the Health and Wellness Impact Focus Area Facilitator for the Commission. Throughout her life, she worked to educate others on local history, expand wellness opportunities for those in need, and preserve Black culture and history in Western North Carolina. As Senior Director of Innovation and Equity Development at Asheville-based Impact Health, she pioneered a national model of public-private partnerships to increase access to health care services for North Carolinians. Ms. Greenlee carried this passion and leadership into her role with the Community Reparations Commission, where she guided the work of the Health and Wellness focus area.

The Community Reparations Commission deeply values and appreciates the commitment, time, effort, ideas, and contributions of Mr. Oliphant and Ms. Greenlee. Their presence, leadership, and dedication will be profoundly missed.

CITY & COUNTY LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION



City of Asheville Council

Esther Manheimer, Mayor

Sandra Kilgore, Vice Mayor

Antanette Mosley, Vice Mayor (2025)

Sheneika Smith, Council Member

Kim Roney, Council Member

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Brad Branham, City Attorney

Maggie Burleson, City Clerk

Equity Officers

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Brenda Mills, Former Director of Equity and Inclusion

Buncombe County Commissioners

Brownie Newman, Chair (2020-2024)

Amanda Edwards, Chair (2025)

Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, County Commissioner

Parker Sloan, County Commissioner

Terri Wells, County Commissioner

Al Whitesides, County Commissioner

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Community Reparations Commission extends its deepest gratitude to the individuals and organizations whose tireless efforts, leadership, and commitment have guided and supported this historic work. The contributions of many have allowed the Commission to carry forward its charge to address historic harm, advance racial equity, and build pathways toward justice and generational opportunity for the Black community of Asheville and Buncombe County.

The Commission recognizes the valuable participation of community members, stakeholders, and all who contributed their voices, perspectives, and lived experiences to inform this important work. The leadership, transparency, and courage of the Asheville and Buncombe County communities serve as the foundation for this ongoing work toward justice, equity, healing, and repair.

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FOREWORD

The work of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) cannot be fully captured in a final report. The references, links, archived materials at Pack Library, meeting minutes, and presentations hold much of the depth. Yet, to truly appreciate what follows, one must hear the voices of the people themselves. The City and County's joint decision to appoint a community-based commission reflects this vital truth.

The work that unfolded in the months ahead was at times messy and reasonable, contentious and harmonious, complex and necessary. In other words, it functioned exactly as democracy should.

Reparations, however, are not ordinary work. Without exaggeration, the CRC sought to achieve what has little precedent in this nation. Only during Reconstruction did the United States attempt to correct the deliberate imbalances imposed on African Americans by enslavement and Black Codes after the Civil War. For most of the 20th century, institutionalized racial discrimination continued through various forms of segregation, both formal and informal, across public and private sectors. The CRC willingly accepted the challenge of identifying present-day discriminatory outcomes rooted in these histories. In turn, for the betterment of the entire community, it offers recommendations that directly address these harms.

It remains difficult to think and act beyond the shadow of segregation. The language of a society free from racism is still evolving. The CRC and its Impact Focus Areas (IFAs) proceeded with the belief that their recommendations would improve Education, Health & Wellness, Housing, Economic Development, and Justice—not only for African Americans but for all residents. This report intentionally addresses the adverse outcomes historically experienced by African Americans while creating pathways for positive outcomes that extend to everyone. Segregation was explicitly designed to harm African Americans; reparations exist to make amends for those damages.

The City and County now have an opportunity to correct these injustices boldly. Public acceptance and commitment to implementing this final report mark an essential beginning. Yet much work remains. Enslavement, lynching, mass incarceration, and other atrocities acknowledged in the resolutions passed by the City Council and County Commission have not yet been fully addressed. This report does not foreclose future considerations but offers practical responses to current conditions.

The ongoing challenge lies in resourcing and implementing the recommendations. Although the areas addressed fall squarely within the daily functions of government, precise planning and unwavering accountability are required to achieve racially just outcomes. Timeframes and measurable results must guide each recommendation.

It has been over 60 years since the publication of Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Even then, activists working to end segregation were met with criticism. Many self-identified allies

questioned whether the time was right, urging patience as African Americans struggled to realize full humanity in public and private life. In that era, “law and order” was often violently invoked to preserve an unjust status quo, as local officials cited state authority to perpetuate inequities.

It is rarely convenient—and often dangerous—to do what is right. Confronting racial injustice today remains as difficult as it has always been in this country. There are real reasons why it has taken this long for reparations to be seriously considered. The easy path for City and County leaders would be to follow national and state authorities while defensively upholding racial disparities. But precedent-setting action requires meeting the needs of our neighbors with resolve, ending harmful past practices, and adopting new, just approaches. Our children, the sick, the poorly housed, and the impoverished deserve better than what past policies have delivered.

Working alongside friends and neighbors in this historic effort has been an honor. I hope that reparations have been well served.

With commitment,

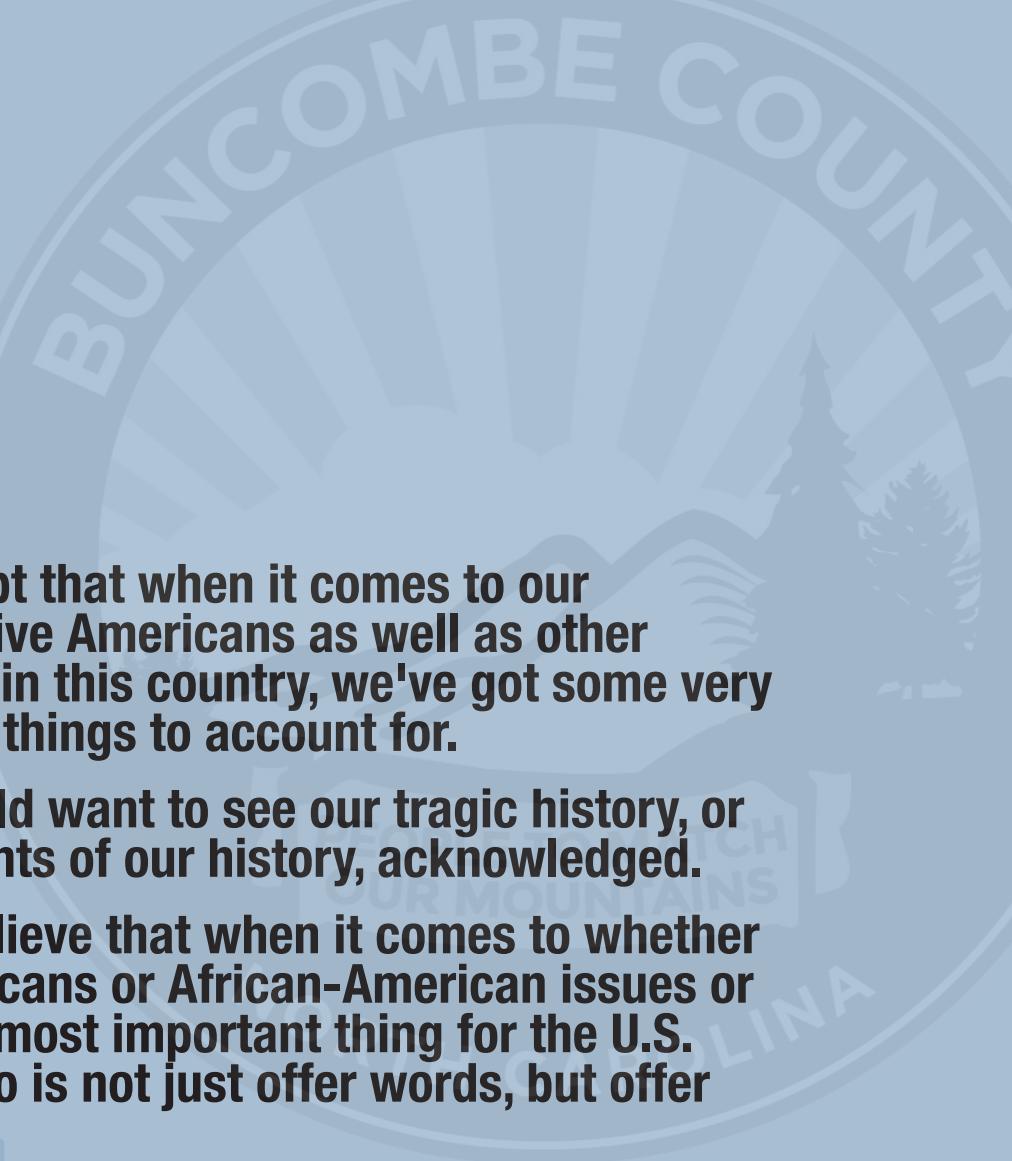


Dr. Dwight B. Mullen
Chair (2022-24)
Community Reparations Commission
City of Asheville and Buncombe County

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A circular seal for Buncombe County, North Carolina. The outer ring contains the text "BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA". Inside the ring, there is a stylized illustration of a landscape with mountains, a river, and a sunburst. The center of the seal features a shield with a tree and a river.

"There's no doubt that when it comes to our treatment of Native Americans as well as other persons of color in this country, we've got some very sad and difficult things to account for.

I personally would want to see our tragic history, or the tragic elements of our history, acknowledged.

I consistently believe that when it comes to whether it's Native Americans or African-American issues or reparations, the most important thing for the U.S. government to do is not just offer words, but offer deeds."

President Barack Obama

44th President of the United States: 2009 - 2017

Remarks at a Question and Answer Session with Minority Journalists at the Unity '08 Convention in Chicago

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the City of Asheville and Buncombe County took a historic step by passing resolutions to launch a Community Reparations process addressing the enduring harms of systemic racism. This bold action positioned the region as a national leader in local reparative justice, aiming to develop policy recommendations to repair generations of harm experienced by Black residents across five key areas: criminal justice, education, housing, economic development, and health & wellness.

At the heart of this process was the formation of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), a Black-led, community-driven body comprised of representatives from historically impacted neighborhoods and institutions. Between 2021 and 2025, the CRC convened more than 40 public meetings, engaged hundreds of community members, and collaborated with subject-matter experts to examine historical injustices and current disparities.

A cornerstone of this work was the *Cease the Harm Audit*, completed in 2024 by Carter Development Group, LLC. This comprehensive analysis documented the institutional policies and practices that inflicted and perpetuated harm upon Asheville's Black community, identifying patterns of displacement, economic exclusion, criminalization, and systemic neglect. These findings helped form the evidentiary foundation for the CRC's recommendations.

The CRC's work culminated in 39 policy recommendations for systemic repair across the five focus areas. Examples of these recommendations include establishing a Black wealth-building fund, creating community land trusts, expanding access to culturally responsive healthcare, reimagining school curricula to reflect Black history, and transforming public safety systems. The recommendations also call for ongoing accountability through a permanent reparations oversight body. An initial recommendation to conduct a comprehensive harm audit of City and County services helped to inform these additional recommendations. Below is a detailed list of the recommendations by Impact Focus Areas (IFAs):

Criminal Justice IFA Recommendations

1. Stop the Harm: Eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline.
2. Racial Disparities: Evaluate, create, and implement policies and procedures that effectively address the racial disparities within the criminal justice system. Including working with legislatures (state and federal).
3. Training: Require mandatory annual periodic or ad hoc training of public servants in the field of criminal justice.
4. Funding for Community-Based Support Services: Allocate funding to community-based organizations to support Black people who have been involved in the criminal justice system.
5. Recruitment: Strengthen recruitment efforts.
6. Accountability: Create an accountability council to hold APD and BC Sheriff's Office accountable.

Economic Development IFA Recommendations

1. Create an Economic Development Center for Black Asheville that includes small business services, job training, financial education, access to grants, and a Black led financial institution.
2. Establish Business Corridors with commercial space for Black owned businesses and community services in close proximity to Black neighborhoods, rebuilding cohesive communities for Black Asheville.

3. Provide grants to legacy neighborhoods and public housing communities to fund neighborhood priorities, including those that have been outlined in community plans.
4. Provide grants to Black owned businesses who have not had access to the same funding and resources.
5. Establish a private fund for reparations.
6. Provide direct cash payments to individuals harmed by racial discrimination.

Education IFA Recommendations

1. Community Based Education: Community wide Afrocentric engagement and enrichment programs.
2. In school educational programming: Teaching inclusive, historically accurate, diverse education within schools.
3. Help, Educate, Employ, Develop (HEED): Internship and mentorship program with the goal of professional development and job placement for Black Youth.
4. Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Recruit and retain more Black educators in Asheville and Buncombe County.
5. Education Accountability Taskforce: Community based oversight group that reviews policies and data to hold school systems and education organizations accountable.
6. Community Resource Campus: Centrally located building with programs and services for Black people. Including personalized supports and resources for individuals and families that address education, housing, economic development, criminal justice, health and wellness.
7. Early Childhood Education: Free, high quality early childhood education (childcare) for all Black children.
8. Post-secondary education opportunities: Providing job training, education support, workforce development, and support service for Black people after high school.
9. Global Accountability: Review board agency that will hold the city and county accountable to implementing ALL reparations recommendations. The agency will monitor the progress and outcomes of recommendations.
10. Disproportionate Suspensions: Improving teacher education, training, and building accountability systems to reduce Black student suspensions.
11. Urban Renewal: Cash payments for property value lost to families and businesses impacted by urban renewal.
12. Wrap Around Services (captured in campus): Personalized supports and resources for individuals and families that address education, housing, economic development, criminal justice, health and wellness.

Health & Wellness IFA Recommendations

1. Establish Health Care Subsidy Fund to provide comprehensive multigenerational direct primary care access.
2. Recruit, retain, and provide systematic support for African American health professionals of all disciplines to improve health outcomes.
3. Meet the holistic health needs of African American Elders to support their ability to age in place as

long as possible with comprehensive community support.

- Establish a Resiliency Sabbatical Fund to address toxic stress, trauma and chronic illnesses for individuals and families.
- Develop and fund an Asheville Black Mental Health Network to systematically address toxic stress and trauma.
- Establish a Black Joy Fund to create multidimensional, joy filled experiences and spaces that cultivate a healthy community.
- Hold institutions accountable to address harms and create policies that are restorative.
- Create an environmental justice plan to correct past and ongoing environmental injustices and set standards to prevent the continuation of environmental racism.
- Create Black Healing and Birthing Centers to reduce and remedy harms against Black birthing people and infants.

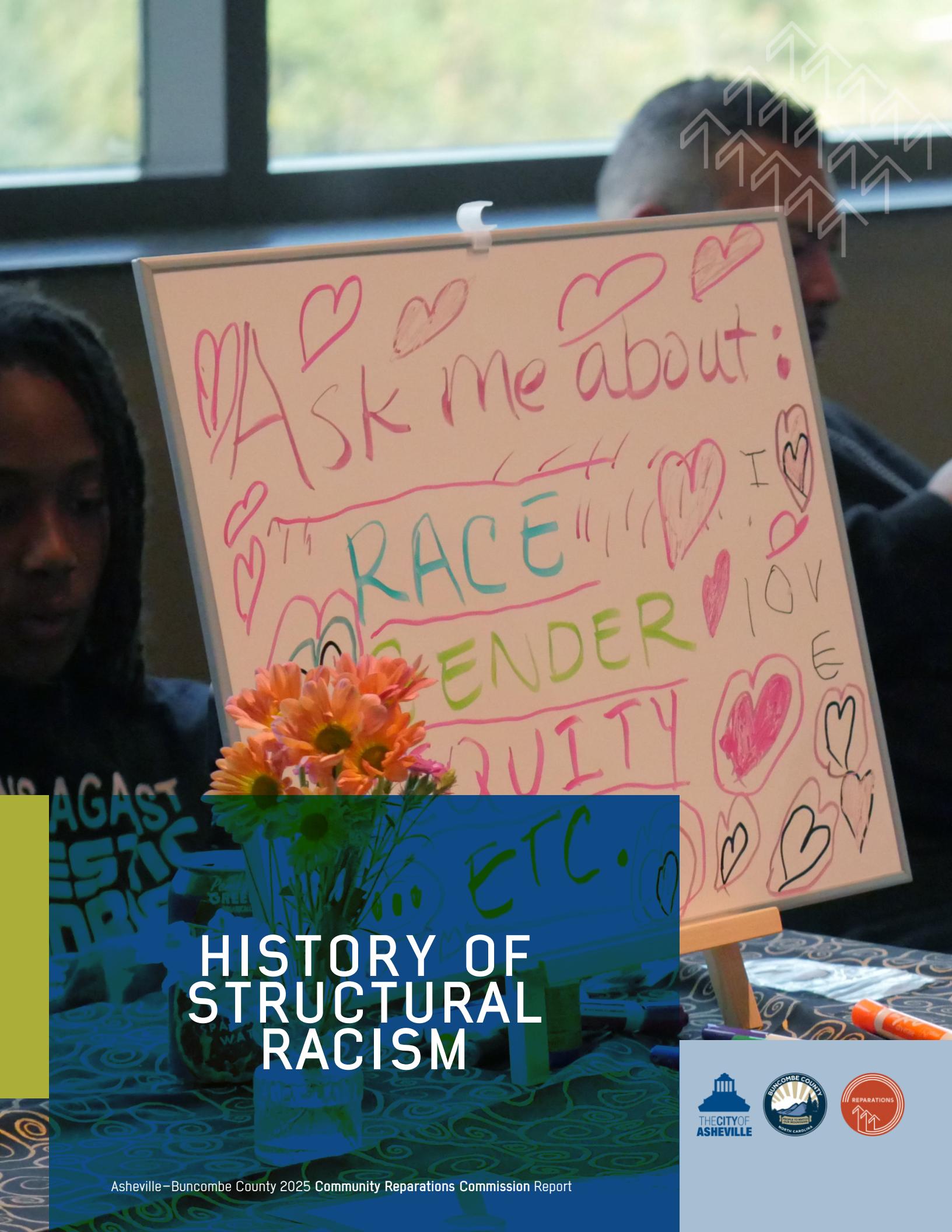
Housing IFA Recommendations

- Plan and develop complete communities on reparations land by creating a Black Economic Development Center, Neighborhood Hubs and Business Corridors.
- Educate and set in motion a massive campaign to get every resident/interested party of public housing (In or out of public housing) into homeownership utilizing their Housing choice vouchers to pay their mortgages in homes they own.
- Create a land acquisition program for future development beyond urban renewal
- Create a new dollar lot program where parcels of reparations land are set aside for a bid process for aspiring black homeowners.
- Acquire the South Charlotte Street Corridor City-owned property.

The CRC was composed of 25 commissioners: 13 nominated by historically impacted Black neighborhoods and 12 appointed by the Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commissioners across the five impact focus areas. This structure intentionally ensured that lived experience and subject-matter expertise informed all deliberations. Over 24 months, the CRC engaged in an iterative process of data collection, policy analysis, community engagement, and consensus-building to develop actionable recommendations. Each IFA workgroup developed detailed short-, medium-, and long-term strategies addressing longstanding racial disparities. Broad community involvement remained central to the process. The CRC sponsored summits, hosted speaker series, and conducted extensive public outreach through neighborhood canvassing, listening sessions, and community surveys to ensure that recommendations reflected the broader Black community's needs.

Despite staffing transitions and challenges such as Tropical Storm Helene, the Commission remained committed to its work. A pivotal retreat in March 2025 resulted in final consensus around the path forward, including a proposal to establish a permanent community-based nonprofit (501c3) to support long-term implementation and oversight.

The CRC's efforts represent a historic, community-driven approach to reparations, combining data-informed recommendations with the lived experiences of Black Asheville and Buncombe County residents. The Commission's finalized recommendations provide a clear and actionable roadmap for systemic repair, equity investment, and long-term healing.



Introduction

Structural racism in the United States has deep roots, beginning with the colonization of Indigenous lands and the transatlantic slave trade. Enslaved Africans were foundational to the country's economic development, particularly in the South. After Emancipation, systems such as Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, redlining, and segregated education perpetuated racial inequity. Federal policies like the GI Bill and urban renewal disproportionately excluded Black Americans from homeownership, wealth-building, and quality education.

In Asheville, North Carolina, and Buncombe County, structural racism mirrored national patterns. During the early twentieth century, urban renewal initiatives displaced hundreds of Black families and businesses from neighborhoods like East End and Southside under the guise of modernization. These projects decimated generational wealth and fractured thriving Black communities. Redlining and discriminatory lending practices denied Black residents access to homeownership, particularly in neighborhoods later deemed "blighted" by city officials.

The education system in Buncombe County remained segregated until court-ordered integration in the 1960s, with Black students often receiving inferior resources. Disparities in school discipline, achievement, and funding persisted. Racial disparities also existed in local policing, health outcomes, and economic mobility.

Today, the impacts of these historic policies remain evident in gaps in wealth, education, housing, and health. Asheville became one of the first Southern cities to adopt a [reparations resolution in 2020](#), acknowledging its role in systemic racism and committing to address its compounding harms. While this marks progress, ongoing community-driven efforts remain

necessary to dismantle the enduring legacies of structural racism in the region.

Reparations on a Global Scale

Globally, reparations have been pursued to address historical injustices, particularly those rooted in slavery, colonization, and genocide. Germany's payments to Holocaust survivors and their descendants remain one of the most cited examples. Similarly, post-apartheid South Africa established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which included financial and symbolic reparations. Caribbean nations, through the CARICOM Reparations Commission, have demanded reparatory justice from former colonial powers for the transatlantic slave trade.

The conversation around reparations has deepened in recent decades across the United States. The enduring legacy of slavery, segregation, discriminatory housing policies, and mass incarceration has contributed to persistent racial wealth and opportunity gaps. Proposals for reparations take many forms, including direct payments, housing grants, education funding, and institutional investments in Black communities. At the national level, H.R. 40, a bill to study and develop reparations proposals, has been introduced repeatedly in Congress since 1989 but has yet to pass.

Several U.S. cities and institutions have begun implementing reparations independently. Evanston, Illinois, launched a program focused on housing equity, while universities such as Georgetown and Princeton Theological Seminary have initiated efforts to acknowledge and address their historical ties to slavery. These local and institutional models offer practical frameworks to inform broader national reparations efforts.

Although critics often point to political and logistical challenges, growing public support and sustained advocacy are elevating reparations as

both moral and economic obligations. Across the United States and worldwide, reparations are increasingly recognized as compensation for past harms and as a pathway to equity, healing, and structural transformation.

HISTORY OF HARMS AGAINST BLACK PEOPLE IN ASHEVILLE AND BUNCOMBE COUNTY

Era of Enslavement

From the early years of European colonial settlement, Blackness became a legal marker in what would become the United States. The racialized chattel slavery system that developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was first established in the British colony of Virginia. In 1662, the Virginia legislature resolved that chattel slavery would be an inheritable condition based on the status of the mother. By tying personal liberty to the mother's status, enslavers ensured that all children born to Black women they enslaved would themselves be enslaved, regardless of the father's status, thus guaranteeing an endless supply of free labor in perpetuity.

Throughout the eighteenth century, slavery became increasingly common, regulated, and central to the economic development of the British colonies and, eventually, the United States.

The brutality of slavery permeated through nearly every aspect of the lives of Black people, enslaved and free.

After the War of Independence, chattel slavery and the official, systematic dehumanization of Black people became the law of the land. During

the Constitutional Convention, Southern aristocrats secured disproportionate power in the legislature and Electoral College while reinforcing racial subordination by lobbying for the Three-Fifths Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Clause. Although the Constitution never directly used the word "slave," it nevertheless legitimized the practice in the new nation.

The North Carolina legislature created Buncombe County in 1792. As in much of the United States at the time, chattel slavery was legal and common in North Carolina, and both formal and informal systems of power upheld this brutal and exploitative economic and caste system.

Among the first acts of the Buncombe County government was the approval of a bill of sale for an enslaved woman, Else, and her infant son. Chattel slavery laid the foundation for economic prosperity in Buncombe County, enriching the wealthiest and most powerful white slaveholders while inflicting profound harm on Black people collectively and individually.

The social, political, and economic tensions resulting from the nation's reliance on chattel slavery eventually erupted into a four-year Civil War. The Southern states, most dependent on slavery, declared independence from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. The Vice President of the Confederate States, Alexander Stephens, described the philosophical foundation of the new nation, stating:

"[The Confederate States'] corner-stone rests upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition."

The Confederate States ultimately failed to secure their independence and preserve the system of forced labor. In 1865, the Civil War ended in Union victory and marked the end of chattel slavery in the United States.

Reconstruction and Jim Crow

At the end of the Civil War, the social and economic landscape of the former Confederate States was upended entirely. The ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery and officially granted the full rights of citizenship to Black men. For the first time, formerly enslaved people began to realize political and economic power.

To address the impacts of the war, the United States government implemented several Reconstruction plans. These policies had two primary purposes: to aid in the Emancipation of formerly enslaved people and to ensure the reunification of the states. Between 1868 and 1877, Republicans, who had supported the Union, controlled the North Carolina legislature and governor's office and made modest progress toward improving conditions and codifying protections for Black people. Despite these improvements, communities throughout the South struggled to recover from the Civil War, and formerly enslaved people bore the brunt of the consequences.

Reconstruction ultimately failed. By 1868, President Andrew Johnson had pardoned nearly all former Confederate leaders, forgiving their treason against the United States and restoring their political rights. Republicans lost power within a few election cycles due in part to a violent voter suppression campaign led by the white supremacist paramilitary group known as the Red Shirts. Following the Red Shirts' campaign, Democrats, who had supported secession, regained control of the state government, reelecting Buncombe County native Zebulon Vance to the governor's office.

These Democratic victories quickly reversed the social, economic, and political gains made by Black people after Emancipation. The Democratic Party, made up primarily of former Confederates, maintained political leadership for nearly two

decades, implementing Jim Crow laws and policies that undermined Emancipation and the constitutional rights of Black citizens.

The Democrats' white supremacist platform was further solidified by the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld "equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races," allowing for the reinstatement of racist restrictions in state, local, and federal law. Historian C. Vann Woodward described the transition from Reconstruction to Jim Crow as "the giving up of the attempt to guarantee the freedman his civil and political equality, and the acquiescence of the rest of the country in the South's demand that the whole problem be left to the disposition of the dominant Southern white people." Woodward further emphasized that, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "the determination of the Negro's 'place' took shape gradually under the influence of economic and political conflicts among divided white people—conflicts that were eventually resolved at the expense of the Negro."

In North Carolina, this conflict took the form of a brief revival of oppositional leadership through a biracial coalition of Republicans and Populists, known as the Fusionists. During the 1894 election, Fusionists mounted a highly successful statewide campaign. When the alliance entered office in 1895, they quickly liberalized access to the ballot, especially for Black voters, decentralized local government, increased taxes for education, and reduced the legal interest rate on specific contracts to six percent per year. Critically, the Fusionists returned local governments to a home rule system, allowing local and county offices, previously appointed by the state legislature, to be determined by local voters.

In response, North Carolina Democrats launched a reactionary, self-described White Supremacy Campaign reminiscent of their violent retaliation against Reconstruction leaders in the 1870s.

In Wilmington, this campaign culminated in a coup d'état led by defeated white supremacist Democrats. On November 10, 1898, a mob of approximately 400 whites descended on the offices of Wilmington's Black newspaper, the *Daily Record*, and burned the building to the ground. A murderous rampage followed, with the mob killing eleven Black citizens and injuring more than twenty-five. In the days that followed, hundreds of Black residents fled. With the blessing of Democratic leader Alfred Waddell, white supremacists took control of most city offices and government functions. The Wilmington Massacre demonstrated the determination of white supremacists to regain control over local and state government by any means, including lethal violence.

In stark contrast to the efforts of Reconstruction, the White Supremacy Campaign was successful. Historian Richard Paschall noted that the campaign "dramatically changed white attitudes in such a way that the operation of the law changed dramatically, as well." With the Fusionist movement defeated both politically and socially, North Carolina's legislative agenda once again focused on the systematic disenfranchisement and oppression of Black people.

The built environment of the South also reflected this backlash against Reconstruction. Across the state, from Asheville to Wilmington, Confederate veterans' reunions served to romanticize and glorify the South's lost cause. Monuments to the Confederacy and Confederate soldiers became widespread, symbolizing both the past and the enforcement of racist policies. The peak period of Confederate monument construction coincided with the disenfranchisement of millions of African Americans, the entrenchment of Jim Crow segregation, and the widespread adoption of school textbooks promoting white supremacy and the inferiority of African Americans to both white and Black children throughout the South.

Scholar John J. Wineberry noted in 1983 how monuments came to define the southern

landscape, especially after 1895, visually, and how their presence in courthouse squares symbolized legal and political power. Asheville's Vance Monument was no exception. Erected in Pack Square in 1898, just months before the Wilmington Massacre, the obelisk loomed over the center of town as a memorial to the former Confederate leader and as a symbol of the ongoing White Supremacy Campaign.

While the Wilmington Massacre made national headlines, this period was also marked by widespread but often underreported racial terror violence across the state, including in Asheville and Buncombe County. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, which reorganized at a meeting at Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1915 after several decades of relative inactivity, held a strong presence in Asheville. Many of its members occupied powerful positions throughout the community and maintained close relationships with local law enforcement.

Amid these political and social conflicts, completing the Western North Carolina railroad ushered in a new era of economic prosperity for Buncombe County. Affluent outsiders with significant purchasing power arrived at the turn of the twentieth century and solidified the "Land of the Sky" as a desirable destination for tourists and investors. Among the most notable were George W. Pack and George W. Vanderbilt, who amassed extensive real estate holdings and quickly injected their influence into Asheville's civic affairs and economy.

The influx of wealth and people into Asheville and Buncombe County led to rapid urban growth and infrastructure development. This included newly paved roads for automobiles, a public streetcar system, and modern high-rise buildings. In 1923, Asheville began professional city planning, a decision that would significantly affect Black communities and businesses. The plan, crafted by renowned city planner John Nolen, had three primary goals. Historian Steven Nickoloff described them as follows:

The first dealt with land acquisition for public space and presented its use as a viable and justified approach to obtaining the city's goals. The second illustrated the economic possibilities of tourism and the movement to create Asheville as a major tourist destination. The third stressed the importance of the physical separation of Black and white citizens.

Although Asheville and Buncombe County experienced significant growth following the arrival of passenger rail service, primarily built through Black men's forced labor, Black residents struggled to secure an economic foothold. Limited career opportunities, low wages, and discriminatory local, state, and federal policies worked together to restrict Black families' ability to build and sustain intergenerational wealth.

These racist policies were enforced by an expanding criminal justice system and reinforced by ideologies rooted in scientific racism. On local, state, and federal levels, systems that benefited from white supremacy used so-called scientific methods to justify racial inequality. Pseudoscientific claims of white biological superiority and flawed social studies asserting inherent racial characteristics had been employed since the beginning of western chattel slavery. Still, they gained further traction with the rise of professionalized social sciences. These beliefs permeated nearly all aspects of life, influencing the criminal justice system and healthcare, education, city planning, and more.

Racist applications of social science pathologized Blackness, while the white supremacist foundations of policing and law enforcement criminalized Blackness and extended the conditions of enslavement for Black people. Although these fields adopted the language of progress, they ultimately codified racist ideologies into public policy and law.

For nearly a century following the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth

Amendments, Black people continued to face both legally codified and de facto segregation and oppression. Despite the efforts of Black community leaders and activists, the Plessy decision remained the law of the land, and the struggle for racial equality stagnated for decades, especially throughout the South.

Local Civil Rights Activism and Asheville's Veneer of Progress

In the wake of World War II, the United States entered a dramatic social, political, and economic change. Black people and their allies had been calling for advancing civil rights since before the Civil War. Still, after decades of slow-moving progress, the movement gained significant momentum in the second half of the twentieth century.

The beginning of what historians call the "classical period" of the Civil Rights Movement is often associated with the return of Black soldiers from Europe after World War II. While abroad, these soldiers, especially those from the South, experienced largely desegregated and relatively racially progressive societies for the first time. Their experiences overseas stood in stark contrast to the systemic racism they faced at home, inspiring a renewed season of action and change. A Black-owned Pittsburgh newspaper, the *Courier*, launched the "Double V Campaign," a nationwide pro-civil rights effort. The Double V Campaign, standing for victory abroad and victory at home, encouraged Black soldiers to demand equal rights as citizens who had fought for their country.

One of the first official steps toward nationwide desegregation came in 1948 when President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order to desegregate the armed forces. That same year, the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer*

that restrictive covenants intended to preserve all-white neighborhoods were unenforceable and unconstitutional, overturning its earlier decision in *Corrigan v. Buckley*.

Seven years later, in 1954, the Supreme Court issued what is perhaps the most consequential civil rights decision of the twentieth century, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Brown ruling overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Although the case focused on public education, the decision required any institution receiving federal funds to provide equal, desegregated services to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or national origin.

In the years that followed, several pieces of civil rights legislation were enacted, codifying protections for minorities. These included the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. Historians generally regard these early laws as limited in impact, but they sought to improve minority voting protections. It was not until President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that significant steps toward integration and equality were made across the United States.

These victories did not come without substantial struggle and public activism. Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Black Americans organized against discrimination across the country, particularly in the South. Guided by the principles of civil disobedience, popularized by Indian activist Mahatma Gandhi and adopted by civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Black people and their allies engaged in direct action that ultimately brought about legal and societal change.

North Carolina was one of the central arenas of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the movement's most effective and highly publicized actions began with four college students in Greensboro who staged a series of sit-ins to protest segregated lunch counters. In many ways, civil rights activism in North Carolina and its

associated violence was less conspicuous than in other Southern states. Historian William H. Chafe described North Carolina's approach as a "progressive mystique," a set of ground rules that supported the state's image as more civilized, enlightened, and tolerant than the rest of the Old Confederacy. As Chafe noted, this progressive mystique served as an effective tool of social control.

Historian Darin Waters made a similar observation in his study of Asheville's Black community from 1792 to 1900. Waters argued that Asheville city leaders constructed a "veneer of racial harmony" that projected an image of peace and progress despite significant racial tensions. White city leaders deliberately maintained this veneer to protect Asheville's growing tourism economy from the negative publicity that open racial conflict might generate.

This veneer of racial harmony persisted throughout the twentieth century and was not lost on Asheville and Buncombe County activists. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) became a leader in advancing civil rights in post-World War II Asheville. In 1963, the organization's Public Affairs Committee hosted a series of workshops addressing integration, posing the question: "How can we improve this situation?" Notes from the committee's planning meetings reflected both Waters' veneer of racial harmony and Chafe's progressive mystique, stating, "The climate on integration in the community, while superficially calm, was actually disturbed." Local civil rights leader William Roland similarly remarked, "We have used a salve, not removed a splinter."

More than 250 Black and white residents attended the YWCA's workshops. A report submitted to the community following the events called for the immediate integration of the schools and the appointment of African Americans to city government. The city council did not act on these specific requests but did

issue a proclamation ending segregation in all public places.

In addition to the YWCA, students from Stephens-Lee High School founded the Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (ASCORE). Inspired by the sit-in movement in Greensboro, the students used civil disobedience tactics to push for change. They successfully integrated lunch counters, grocery stores, and the public library.

ASCORE and the YWCA strategically leveraged Asheville's veneer of racial harmony to accelerate progress. For example, ASCORE students picketed the local Winn-Dixie supermarket for refusing to hire Black teenagers. After months of inaction, the YWCA joined the students and launched a letter-writing campaign to both city officials and Winn-Dixie management, warning that the store's refusal to act risked escalating protests and damaging Asheville's public image. Eventually, Winn-Dixie yielded to public pressure. Similarly, activists protested a local A&W drive-through until the restaurant lost so much business that it was forced to close permanently.

One former ASCORE member, Willette Burton, reflected, "Asheville was a tourist town. The business community had decided we could not afford to do this. If it is found out that we are having this hoopla, then no one will come here. That was the sword we held."

and orderly process. Much of this effort was coordinated through the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, which began encouraging its members to integrate. Matthew Bacoate, the only Black employee at the Chamber, played an essential role during this process. Bacoate recalled, "It started with the four major hotels. The manager of the Battery Park Hotel was asked where they stood on it, and he stood up and said, 'I tell you what, my father-in-law (who owned the Battery Park) will never let a n***** sleep in our hotel,' and then he walked out. They went down the line to each business. It took several years before the Chamber got through the whole process."

Although desegregation of public spaces and businesses occurred with little public disruption, school integration proved far more challenging. The YWCA Public Affairs Committee observed in 1963, "For seven years after the Supreme Court decision (*Brown v. Board*), no action was taken, then only ungraciously."

Public schools remained segregated throughout the 1960s despite the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board* and North Carolina's *Pearsall Plan*. Under this plan, Asheville City Schools drafted a five-year integration timeline in 1961. Elementary schools opened first to Black students who voluntarily chose to transfer. By 1966, Black high school students could choose to attend Lee Edwards High School, the all-white high school. However, this plan failed to meet the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requirements, placing Asheville's schools at risk of losing federal funding. Full integration of Asheville City Schools was not achieved until 1969. The process remained tense and ultimately culminated in a peaceful protest that escalated into a riot at Asheville High School, which had been renamed from Lee Edwards following integration.

While activists advanced the cause of equality for Black people during the Civil Rights Era, significant inequities persisted and were often exacerbated by Urban Renewal and similar

The Limits of Progress: Urban Renewal, Displacement, and the Struggle for Equity

Under increasing pressure and a desire to maintain appearances, Asheville's business community began taking small steps toward integration in the early 1960s, aiming for a quiet

policies. In the 1970s, Asheville and Buncombe County faced severe economic challenges. Asheville was one of the few cities that did not default on its Depression-era debts, resulting in minimal city budgets. Buildings throughout downtown Asheville fell into disrepair.

The once vibrant East End, Southside, Stumptown, and Burton Street communities were financially devastated as residents lost homes and businesses under the banner of Urban Renewal. While the programs were designed to improve housing and stimulate the local economy, they instead triggered a housing crisis, closed dozens of Black-owned businesses, and sharply reduced Black homeownership and the Black population in Asheville and Buncombe County.

In 1976, Asheville finally paid off its Depression-era debts and returned its focus to tourism to rebuild the local economy. Over the following three decades, Asheville became a desirable tourist destination again and developed a reputation as the "San Francisco of the South." Downtown Asheville revived as new businesses re-occupied historic buildings, and newcomers flocked to the area. However, Black residents did not benefit equally from this revival. Despite the improving economy, Black homeownership remained low, Black-owned businesses continued to decline, and historically Black neighborhoods

were frequently overlooked in revitalization efforts that supported other districts.

Although the Civil Rights Movement brought many essential victories, Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County remained consistently marginalized throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and into the twenty-first century. Generations of discrimination, oppression, and segregation continued to produce lasting harm.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Asheville's Black community faced the long aftermath of desegregation and the damaging effects of Urban Renewal. The closure of Stephens-Lee High School in 1965, the city's only Black high school, left a cultural void and disrupted a center of Black leadership and pride. As many Black families were displaced from neighborhoods like East End and Southside, they faced limited housing options, weakened social networks, and reduced political representation. Although Asheville's public schools were technically integrated, resegregation occurred through tracking systems, discipline disparities, and the placement of Black students in under-resourced classrooms. Community activism continued through churches, fraternal organizations, and neighborhood associations, but systemic disinvestment made sustained progress difficult.

By the 1990s, Asheville's reputation as a progressive, arts-focused mountain town grew. However, this progress rarely translated into equity for the Black community. Tourism and development brought economic expansion but also fueled gentrification in historically Black neighborhoods, pushing many residents from their homes due to rising property taxes and housing costs. Black-owned businesses struggled to survive as outside investors and shifting demographics transformed the local market. Academic achievement, discipline, and representation disparities remained largely unaddressed in public schools. Although local government initiatives often claimed to promote inclusivity, they rarely delivered measurable

improvements for Black residents. Despite these setbacks, grassroots leaders, educators, and advocates laid the groundwork for future reparative efforts by speaking out, organizing, and documenting the persistent inequities facing Asheville's Black population.

In the 2010s, a new phase of the Civil Rights movement emerged as Americans increasingly spoke out against racist violence targeting Black people, particularly young men. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager from Miami Springs, Florida, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, a civilian, was acquitted of murder under Florida's "stand your ground" law. Two years later, Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager from St. Louis, was shot and killed by police. Brown's death sparked nationwide protests and launched the Black Lives Matter movement.

In 2015, the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, nine congregants of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered during a Bible study by a young white supremacist. In the aftermath, citizens across the country called for the removal of Confederate symbols, including the Confederate flag and monuments to Confederate politicians and soldiers.

Residents of Asheville joined these protests, demanding reforms in governance and the public landscape. In 2015, community members called for the removal of the Vance Monument. Instead of being removed, the monument was restored. Five years later, in June 2020, following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, protests reignited, leading to the formation of the local movement for reparations and racial equity known as Black Asheville Demands.

That Summer, the Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commission voted to approve the creation of a community task force to explore removing the Vance Monument. They passed a historic resolution that apologized for past harms

and authorized the creation of a Community Reparations Commission.

Sixty years after the YWCA published its report on integration, the Community Reparations Commission ordered an audit of ongoing racist practices in Asheville and Buncombe County. The Cease the Harm audit, prepared by the Carter Development Group, "unveiled racially disparate practices harming African American residents within various sectors," identified that "the lack of data-driven practices in key government functions" continues to harm Black residents, and concluded that "the report presents a profound opportunity for the Buncombe County and City of Asheville governments to engage in transformative initiatives toward equity and justice."

The theme of the *Cease the Harm* audit, as presented by the Carter Development Group, is simple: "It is not the problem that counts. It's the solution." The work of the Community Reparations Commission, after years of community-centered effort, offers these solutions as an opportunity for Asheville and Buncombe County to make significant changes in governance and budgeting to repair longstanding and ongoing harms against Black residents.

*"It is not the problem that counts.
It's the solution."*

- Sociologist Deryl G. Hunt, Ph.D.

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KIMBERLY JONES
CRC Member

DWAYNE RICHARDSON
CRC Member

COMMUNITY REPARATIONS COMMISSION

Asheville–Buncombe County 2025 Community Reparations Commission Report



Reparations Resolution

On July 14, 2020, the [Asheville City Council](#) passed a resolution supporting community reparations for Black Asheville, acknowledging the historical harm caused by discriminatory practices and aiming to address the creation of generational wealth and economic mobility within the Black community. This resolution, along with a similar one from Buncombe County, included a commitment to concrete actions beyond statements of solidarity, focusing on dismantling systemic barriers. The initiative has involved establishing a Reparations Commission, which has proposed recommendations for budget and program priorities in areas like homeownership, business ownership, wealth building, and addressing disparities in healthcare, education, and criminal justice. The City Manager and staff “established a process within the next year to develop short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations to address the creation of generational wealth specifically and to boost economic mobility and opportunity in the Black community.”

To repair the harm done by decades of discrimination, the city manager and city staff recommended a three-phase process that included:

- **Information Sharing and Truth-Telling**
- **Forming the Reparations Commission**
- **Finalizing and Presenting the Report**

Buncombe County joined the City of Asheville in formally supporting reparations for Black residents. On August 4, 2020, the [Buncombe County Commission](#) adopted a resolution endorsing community reparations for Black residents of Buncombe County. This historic resolution acknowledged the county's direct and systemic role in perpetuating slavery, segregation, urban renewal displacement, and other racially discriminatory practices that had hindered the well-being and generational progress of Black communities. The resolution issued a formal apology to the Black community, including descendants of enslaved people in Buncombe County, and outlined actionable steps to make amends. The Resolution also listed the following urgent priority areas for Black residents of Buncombe County:

- Expanding access to quality early childhood education
- Reducing the opportunity and achievement gap in the local public school systems
- Increasing Black home ownership, business ownership, and other strategies to support upward mobility and build generational wealth within the Black community
- Reducing health disparities, including infant mortality
- Reducing racial disparities in the justice system

Information and Truth-Telling Series

Following the passage of the July 2020 resolutions supporting community reparations for Black Asheville, the City of Asheville launched the Information Sharing and Truth-Telling Speaker Series to educate the community on reparations policies and efforts underway across the nation.

The events were held in person at Harrah's Cherokee Center in downtown Asheville. The programs were free to the public, though RSVPs were required. To ensure accessibility for those unable to attend in

person, the events were also live-streamed. The series was widely publicized through local media outlets, including the local ABC affiliate WLOS, print media, and industry publications.

The Information Sharing and Truth-Telling Speaker Series marked the first phase of the City of Asheville's process to deliver community reparations for Black Asheville. The series highlighted local and national speakers who shared insights on historical policies, current trends and disparities, and future initiatives. Opportunities for community participation were incorporated throughout the series. The series brought together speakers and community members to engage in meaningful discussions designed to:

- Provide a deeper understanding of policy impacts and where those impacts occurred.
- Identify and analyze current disparities and areas in need of focused attention.
- Examine barriers that hinder the accumulation and preservation of generational wealth.
- Inspire the community to pursue collaborative opportunities that foster a more equitable Asheville.

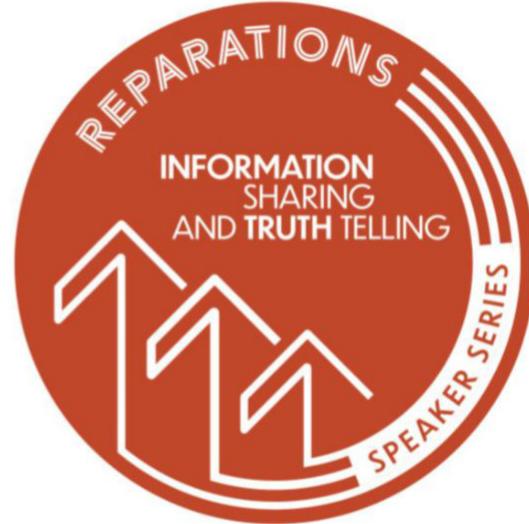
Information Sharing and Truth-Telling Speaker Series June 3, 10, and 17, 2021 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville Thomas Wolfe Auditorium 87 Haywood Street, Asheville, NC 28801	
PAST POLICIES & PRACTICES Thursday, June 3, 2021 6 – 8 p.m.	 Transcription  Video
Panelists: Dr. William Turner , Co-author of the book <i>Blacks in Appalachia</i> ; former Chair, Dept. of Social Sciences, Winston Salem State University James E. Ferguson II , Civil Rights Attorney Sasha Mitchell , Family and Community Historian	 Transcription  Video
PRESENT TRENDS & DISPARITIES Thursday, June 10, 2021 6 – 8 p.m.	 Transcription  Video
Panelists: Rinku Sen , Executive Director of the Narrative Initiative Dr. Dwight Mullen , Professor Emeriti, UNC Asheville Jorge Redmond , Assistant District Attorney, Buncombe County Dr. Marcus Harvey , Associate Professor of Religious Studies, UNC Asheville	 Transcription  Video
FUTURE INITIATIVES Thursday, June 17, 2021 6 – 8 p.m.	 Transcription  Video

Community Reflections on Reparations Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series

I Am Brilliant Presents

Community Reflections on Reparations Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series

Report of voices and themes illuminating from AVL Residents participating in Reparations Speaker Series and Journey w/ City of Asheville



Video & Community Engagement Sessions
Co-facilitated by AVL Community Champions & I Am Brilliant



Shemekka Ebony
I Am Brilliant
Facilitator & Coach

MEET OUR ENGAGEMENT TEAM OF AVL COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



Mr. Bernard V. Olyphant
US Veteran, Church & Community Leader



Empress Nnweyna Smith
Business Owner & Community Leader



Tyshaun Johnson
Community Organizer,
TNC Consulting



Community Voices:

We Asked Reparations Speaker Series Attendees To Record Pre and Post Video Reflections To The Following Questions:

Over 31 Residents Participated w/ Over 80 Video Responses



Pre Questions

- **What Makes You Brilliant?**
- **As we begin this reparations journey, what is important for you to learn/share?**

Post Questions

- **What, if anything, resonated with you most during the phase one reparations speaker series?**
- **What next steps are important for you? What is your role in the next steps?**

Resident Reflections Highlights

Dates and Speaker Themes

June 3rd Past

Pre Speaker Session
What Makes You Brilliant?

The ability to reflect from segregation to integration to urban renewal to reparations.

Pre Speaker Session
As we begin this reparations journey, what is important for you to learn/share?

What does reparations really mean for people in Asheville? I have talked to several descendants of slaves in Asheville and they often have a different definition than Merriam Webster.

Post-Speaker Session
What, if anything, resonated with you most during the phase one reparations speaker series?

There were not enough African American people here.

Post Speaker Session
What next steps are important for you? What is your role in the next steps?

We need to have more Blacks involved. Let our Black communities and Black churches know about this, then we can have more Black people involved.

June 10th Present

As a Black Woman, I have managed to stay alive in this America.

How will they distribute the \$\$ they have in the African American community? I want to learn how the money will be distributed among black individuals and businesses.

We can't be doing truth telling while causing harm; while healing.

I'd like to share my ability to use data to arrive at economic development solutions and leverage funds to make finances available so folks that have been left out of social economic development get a chance.

June 17th Future

I Just Am. I was told that I am Black, I am Beautiful, and I am Brilliant. Therefore, I Am Black, I am Beautiful, and I am Brilliant.

I need a clear definition as to what is our Black community? We no longer have Black communities within our community since so many have been gentrified.

As an African American that has been born and raised in this city. I have seen good and bad change. Throughout the years, I have experienced numerous injustices.

I would like to know what it was like when a vibrant Black community existed. I would like to share. I am a former professor with research skills and I can jump in at some point and help.

Video Reflection Questions

#BrilliantAsheville

#RepAVL2021



Follow the City of Asheville Reparations Journey at www.ashevillenc.gov/reparations



#IAMBRILLIANT

THANKS FOR YOUR VIDEO REFLECTION SUBMISSIONS

NORMA BAYNES

RONALD CHAMBERS

JOHN HUIE

NICOLE JONES

DEWAYNE MCAFEE

DEE WILLIAMS

BERNARD V. OLIPHANT

BRIE CAPONE

JAQUELL HINES

CASSANDRA INGRAM

RAY MAPP

DR. DOLLY MULLEN

JOSE WHELAN

JOYCE OLIPHANT

ROBERT CARRINGTON

PAUL HOWELL

TYSHAUN JOHNSON

BRANDON MAYS

SAMUEL QUICK, JR.

BETTY PATTERSON

The Work and Mission of the Community Reparations Commission

The formation of the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission was unique among reparations commissions because it was composed primarily of community members rather than solely subject matter experts. The Commission included a total of 25 members. Fifteen commissioners were nominated by historically impacted neighborhoods, including historically Black neighborhoods affected by Urban Renewal, gentrification, and public housing policies. The Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commission appointed the remaining ten members to represent the Commission's five Impact Focus Areas. The members of the Community Reparations Commission were officially appointed by the Asheville City Council on March 8, 2022, and by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners on March 15, 2022. The Commission began meeting in April 2022.

The Commission was tasked with developing short-, medium- and long-term recommendations to specifically address the creation of generational wealth and to boost economic mobility and opportunity in the black community.





The intent of the reparations process, as defined by the Commission, was to significantly improve the quality of life for Black residents by systematically dismantling and reforming policies and institutional barriers that have perpetuated harm. The Commission was committed to avoiding the creation of new or additional harms through its recommendations. Central to this work were strong efforts to eliminate racial wealth disparities by increasing access to homeownership, land ownership, business ventures, and equitable financial restitution. These efforts were designed to deliver enduring benefits across generations, with particular emphasis on empowering Black youth through education that promotes economic advancement.

The Commission defined reparations as a long-term, comprehensive commitment to:

- **Restoring dignity to Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County.**
- **Restoring voice to Black residents who have been historically silenced or excluded.**
- **Restoring what was taken from Black residents through historical and ongoing harms.**

In doing so, the Commission articulated reparations as follows:

1. A continuous financial investment to address and prevent the harms experienced by generations of Black residents in Asheville and Buncombe County, including historical harms stemming from enslavement.
2. Enhancing and improving Black residents' well-being by reversing policies and dismantling systemic barriers that have caused and continue to perpetuate harm. These changes must not, and shall not, create new or additional harms.
3. Closing the racial wealth gap through strong efforts to expand access to homeownership, land acquisition, business development opportunities, and direct financial compensation that creates intergenerational wealth. This includes substantial investments in Black youth education that foster long-term economic mobility.
4. A formal public acknowledgment and apology from the City, County, and other institutions and organizations that have historically benefited from harm and racial injustices inflicted upon Black residents.
5. Ongoing accountability through oversight led by Black residents and descendants of those harmed, maintained through a continued Reparations Commission responsible for monitoring implementation.



Accountability for the reparative actions recommended by the Commission will rest with a permanent Reparations Commission, guided and evaluated by Black residents and their descendants. This ensures that reparations measures remain responsive to the needs and experiences of the individuals and communities the process is intended to serve.

The Asheville City Council's 2020 resolution tasked the Reparations Commission with recommending both short- and long-term budgetary and programmatic priorities for the following core areas:

- Increasing minority homeownership and access to affordable housing
- Expanding minority business ownership and career opportunities
- Developing strategies to build equity and generational wealth
- Closing gaps in healthcare, education, employment, wages, neighborhood safety, and fairness within the criminal justice system

In addition to full Commission meetings held monthly, Commission members served on at least one of five Impact Focus Area (IFA) workgroups, each aligned with the priorities identified by the City Council's resolution:

- Criminal Justice
- Economic Development
- Education
- Health and Wellness
- Housing



Impact Focus Areas (IFAs)

The charge of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) was to propose recommendations that would make significant progress toward repairing the harm caused by public and private systemic racism in Asheville's Black community. The research and drafting of these recommendations were carried out through the work of the Commission's Impact Focus Areas (IFAs).

The IFAs were smaller workgroups established to develop specific strategies addressing disparities across five key areas:



Criminal Justice



Economic Development



Education



Health & Wellness



Housing

Each IFA workgroup was composed of Commission members, City and County subject matter experts, and community members who came together to discuss the harms occurring within their respective areas and to develop recommendations in the form of policies, projects, and programs to address those harms.

City and County staff supported this work through the Reparations Commission Data Support Group, which met regularly to assist the IFAs in developing evidence-based policy recommendations. This group created a formal process for IFAs to request data held by City, County, or external agencies, ensuring that each workgroup had access to the information necessary to make informed decisions.

This data request process helped streamline operations and provided the IFAs with the essential data and analysis needed to develop well-informed recommendations.

Each Commission member served on at least one of the five IFAs as defined by the City Council's resolution. The workgroups were responsible for analyzing detailed information within their assigned focus area and reporting key findings to the full Commission. Each group was composed of fewer than 13 voting members, and Commission members were permitted to serve on more than one workgroup.

Community Engagement

Throughout the Community Reparations Commission process, community members were welcomed and encouraged to actively participate. Residents were invited to attend CRC and Impact Focus Area (IFA) meetings, share feedback at the Reparations Summit, and engage directly with CRC members to offer ideas, concerns, and perspectives.

As each IFA moved closer to finalizing its recommendations and the process neared completion, CRC members recognized the need to conduct a focused community engagement effort. The goal was to ensure that the recommendations being developed aligned with the needs and priorities of the broader Black community in Asheville and Buncombe County. To lead this critical phase, Ms. Dewana Little, current Chair of the Commission, guided the Community Engagement Committee in organizing an intentional and inclusive outreach campaign. The City's Equity Office, other City staff, and facilitator Vernisha Crawford provided important support throughout the process.

The Community Engagement Committee carried out extensive efforts to gather input from a wide cross-section of the community. Committee members knocked on doors, attended neighborhood meetings, and hosted multiple listening sessions to present the draft recommendations, answer questions, and solicit additional feedback. Outreach was conducted in historically Black neighborhoods, faith-based institutions, and civic organizations, and extended through partnerships with local community leaders to ensure the process reflected a wide range of voices and experiences from the Black community.

In addition to in-person engagement, digital and print materials were distributed to inform community members of the work underway. Local media outlets, including WLOS and area newspapers, helped publicize the engagement opportunities. A dedicated online portal was also made available for residents to review draft recommendations and submit written feedback directly to the Commission.

Special attention was given to reaching communities that had been historically underrepresented in local policy-making processes. The committee prioritized accessibility by offering engagement opportunities at varying times, locations, and formats to accommodate work schedules, childcare needs, transportation barriers, and health concerns.

The feedback gathered through these efforts directly informed final refinements to the Commission's recommendations, ensuring they reflected the lived experiences, needs, and priorities of Black residents across generations. This broad-based engagement strengthened the legitimacy of the recommendations and honored the Commission's commitment to a community-driven reparations process.



MARTIN MOORE
Buncombe County
Commissioner

AL WHITESIDES
Buncombe County
Commissioner

DEWAYNE MCAFEE
CRC Member



RACIAL ACTION EQUITY PLAN

CEASE HARM AUDIT



Resolution to Conduct Cease Harm Study

Building on its landmark resolution supporting community reparations for Black residents, and formally apologizing for the County's historic role in slavery, segregation, and urban renewal policies that harmed Black communities, Buncombe County adopted a [second resolution](#) on February 7, 2023, endorsing the Commission's urgent recommendation to cease further harm to the African American community. This included a directive to develop a scope of work for an official audit, led by an independent third party, to ensure compliance with laws, regulations, and equitable practices. The County also committed to strengthening efforts to build trust, establish truth-seeking processes, and uphold accountability in delivering reparative measures.

Purpose of the Audit

The recommendation to conduct the Cease the Harm Audit represented a critical step in identifying how local government policies and practices have caused and continue to cause harm to Black and African American residents in Asheville and Buncombe County. The audit was designed as a resource to document existing harm and serve as a guide for the cessation of harm through actionable, data-driven recommendations.

Audit Process and Team Structure

In response to the Community Reparations Commission's request, the City of Asheville and Buncombe County jointly issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify a qualified consulting firm to conduct the audit. Following a thorough review process by City and County staff and CRC representatives, the Carter Development Group (CDG), led by Dr. Adrian N. Carter, was selected.

CDG Team Members

- Project Lead: Dr. Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.
- Project Manager: Dr. La'Shana Wiggs, DBA
- Research Assistant: Dejanna Lang, Ph.D. and Jonathan Moses
- Criminal Justice IFA: Walter McDaniels, Ph.D. and Ricky Lebrun, M.S., M. Fin
- Economic Development IFA: Dr. La'Shana Wiggs, DBA and Adrienne Hibbert, MS
- Education IFA: Jennifer Felton, M.S. and Desmond Williams, M.A.
- Health & Wellness IFA: Guillenne Smith, MSN-FNP and Ashley Carter, M.S., RD, LDN
- Housing IFA: Beverly Cooper and Ashley Jamieson, Esq., MPA, LLM
- Equity, Inclusion, & Human Rights IFA: Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.
- Internal Workforce IFA: Dr. Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D.

Impact Focus Areas Assessed

- Criminal Justice
- Economic Development
- Education
- Health Care and Wellness
- Housing
- Equity
- Internal Workforce (Human Resources)

Assessment Metrics

Focus Area	Primary Factors	Data Sources	
Criminal Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law Enforcement Recruitment, Onboarding, and Training Procedures Racial Disparities in Arrest and Sentencing Recidivism Rates Access to Alternative Sentencing Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NC Justice Data Portal NC State Bureau of Investigation NC Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice National Crime Information Center Bureau of Justice Statistics 	
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small Business Ownership Workforce Development Access to Financing Government Procurement and Contracting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venture Asheville Asheville-Buncombe Tech CC Mountain BizWorks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asheville Score US Census NC Secretary State City of Asheville CAPER
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement Gap Disciplinary Actions and Suspension Rates Teacher Effectiveness & Professional Development Culturally relevant pedagogy curriculum & high-quality instruction Early Childhood education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asheville City Schools policy on Fair and Consistent Discipline Administration NC Constitution Article IX, Section2 NC General Statute Chapter 115C Elementary Education Secondary Act 	
Healthcare & Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing Access & Health Disparities Needle and Syringe Programs Mental Health Care Food Deserts & Healthy Food Access Maternal Health Care & Health Ed & Literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buncombe County Vital Records Department Buncombe Health Department NC Division of Health Service Regulation-Licensed Facilities in Buncombe County; NC Institute of Medicine, NC State Center for Health Statistics, and NC Healthcare Association WNC Health Network 	
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeownership Rates Rental Housing Housing Discrimination Home Value Appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> US Census USAFacts.org City of Asheville Econ Dev Dept Buncombe Co Property Assessment 	25

Benchmarks	Federal, State, Local Laws	Comparative Data
Criminal Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NC Racial Justice Act NC Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 Second Chance Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boulder, CO Santa Fe, NM Athens, GA State & National averages
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SBA's Minority Enterprise Development Program Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 NC General Statutes Chapter 143B-434.04 – Comprehensive Strategic Economic Development Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Santa Fe, NM Athens, GA State & National averages
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NC General Statutes (NCGS) Chapter 115C; NC North Carolina Constitution; NC Racial Equity Report Cards Every Student Succeeds Act Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rutherford County Schools, NC Haywood County Schools, NC McDowell County Schools, NC Murray County School District, GA Coweta County School District, GA
Healthcare & Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities And Substance Abuse Services Policies And Procedure Affordable Care Act (ACA) NC General Statutes: Maternal and Child Health and Women's Health and the NC Administrative Code Maternal Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redding, CA Raleigh, NC State averages State & National averages
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair Housing Act (FHA) of 1968; Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA); Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 NC Fair Housing Act; Tenant Security Deposit Act; Residential Rental Agreements Act City of Asheville's Community and Economic Development Department; City of Asheville's Department of Planning and Urban Design; Buncombe County Equity and Human Rights Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deltona, FL Fayetteville, AR, Greenville, NC Roanoke, VA State & National averages

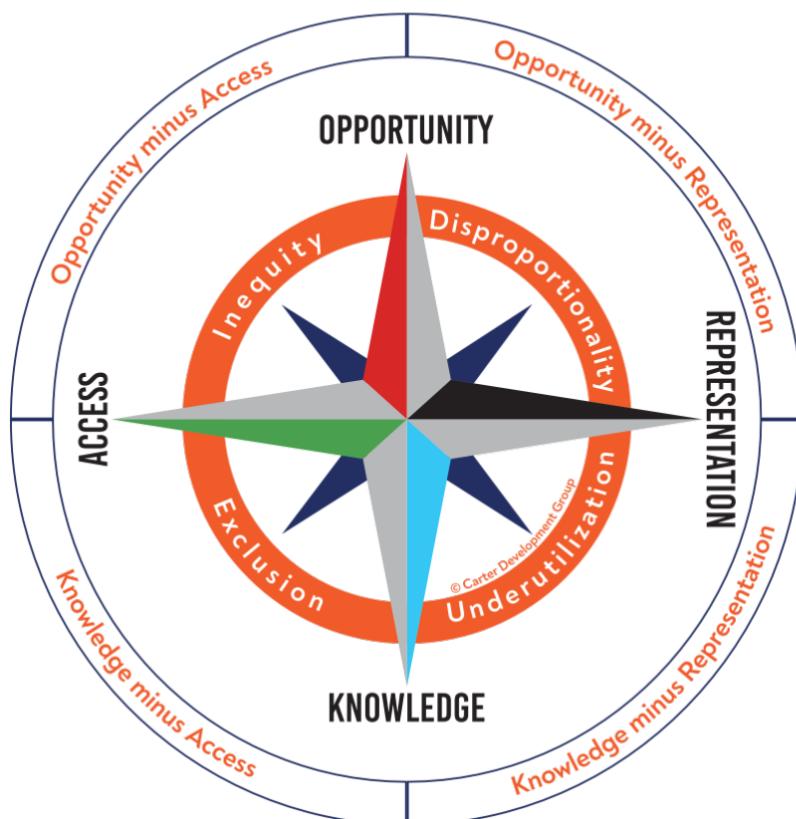
Methodology

As part of the Cease the Harm Audit, CDG conducted a comprehensive assessment across seven Impact Focus Areas (IFAs), using a total of 35 individual metrics designed to evaluate existing harm and potential areas for reparative action. Each of the 35 metrics was further analyzed through CDG's proprietary tools, including the OKRA Racial Harm Assessment Compass®, the Harm Assessment Scale, and several validated racial equity frameworks to evaluate the levels of Opportunity, Knowledge, Representation, and Access (OKRA).

Invested in the CRC's work, Dr. Adrian Carter, Dr. La'Shana Wiggs, and Ms. Adriene Hibbert presented the audit timeline, plan, and tools at the July 2023 reparations meeting. The audit officially began in August 2023 with CDG's 13-member team divided into pairs assigned to each Impact Focus Area. From August 2023 through April 2024, the CDG team led a comprehensive process to support the Commission's analysis and recommendations. Activities included:

- Reviewing and synthesizing collected data
- Facilitating focus groups and cohort meetings with key stakeholders and subject matter experts
- Analyzing racial and gender disparities using an intersectional lens
- Referencing national, state, and local data sources for comparative insights
- Conducting follow-up meetings as needed to validate findings and gather additional input
- Developing both preliminary and final reports
- Presenting findings and high-level recommendations to City and County officials

O.K.R.A. RACIAL EQUITY HARM ASSESSMENT COMPASS®



The OKRA Racial Harm Assessment Compass®

The CDG Cease Harm research team utilized the Racial Equity Harm Assessment Compass®, also known as the OKRA Compass. Developed by Adrian N. Carter, Ph.D., the compass was employed to assess the *opportunity, knowledge, representation, and access* within government operations and services provided to citizens to systematically identify disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity throughout City and County services.

- **Opportunity** assesses the quantity and quality of programs, services, pathways, and resources available to enhance residents' quality of life.
- **Knowledge** examines the effectiveness of outreach and awareness efforts related to these programs and services.
- **Representation** evaluates who benefits from these programs by reviewing racial and ethnic demographics to identify overrepresentation or underrepresentation.
- **Access** reviews the mechanisms that determine participation, including policies and procedures that may enable or limit access.

In addition to the OKRA Compass®, the team incorporated The Ellison Model Community Building Framework, Racial Equity and Policy (REAP) Framework for Health Policy, and tools from the [Government Alliance for Racial Equity](#) (GARE) to support a multi-layered, data-informed analysis. The audit produced findings and recommendations across seven Impact Focus Areas: Criminal Justice, Economic Development, Education, Health Care and Wellness, Housing, Equity (Equity & Human Rights Offices), and Internal Workforce (Human Resources).

Harm Assessment Scale			
IFA	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent or infrequent effects were consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization.	Frequent effects consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization. Compounding effects of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization caused by the lack of data.	Considerable and notable effects are consistent with disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, inequity, or marginalization with outcomes resulting in a tremendously diminished quality of opportunities, knowledge, representation, or access.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		

Harm Assessment Scale

The findings from the OKRA Compass were evaluated using the Harm Assessment Scale—a three-tier framework developed by Dr. La'Shana Wiggs to measure the severity of harm present in government policies and practices. To ensure accuracy and contextual relevance, customized Harm Assessment Scales were created for each of the five Impact Focus Areas (IFAs), such as Economic Development, to reflect how harm may appear differently across various sectors and communities. These tailored scales enabled a more precise analysis of equity, access, opportunity, and representation within each IFA.

By combining the OKRA Compass with the Harm Assessment Scale, the team conducted a comprehensive, intersectional review of government systems to determine whether policies, procedures, outcomes, and legal compliance had effectively reduced or eliminated harm within Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. The final report presented 108 recommendations across seven research areas, offering both a current assessment of harm and a baseline for ongoing monitoring to track progress toward the cessation of harm.

To ensure accuracy and relevance, unique Harm Assessment Scales were developed for each of the five Impact Focus Areas (IFAs), such as Economic Development, reflecting the specific ways harm may appear across different sectors and communities. These tailored scales supported a more precise evaluation of equity, access, opportunity, and representation within each IFA.

Economic Development Harm Assessment Scale			
Economic Development	1	2	3
	No Apparent Harm or Slight Harm	Prevalent or Compounded Harm	Significant Harm
OKRA Compass	High opportunity High knowledge High representation High access	Moderate opportunity Moderate knowledge Moderate representation Moderate access	Low opportunity Low knowledge Low representation Low access
Definitions	No apparent to slight racial disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and programs that aim to facilitate equal access and promote growth and market diversification. Some manageable challenges may include limited publicity, scope, or complexity in application processes.	Frequent barriers exist limiting opportunities, access to capital, mismatch between skills and employer demand of minority residents hindering personal and professional growth, development, and minority firm market presence. Lack of comprehensive data that may compound the systemic racial disproportionality in economic development policies and practices.	Significant constraints by lack of representation and limited growth prospects which create economic stagnation and reduced competition. Inequitable restrictions from government procurement. Limited access to financing or means to invest in expansion or innovation. Minority residents are significantly hampered by unemployment and underemployment due to lack of adequate workforce development opportunities.
Key Harm Indicators	Signs of disproportionality, underutilization, exclusion, and inequity.		



SHERIFF QUENTIN E. MILLER
Buncombe County Sheriff's Office

CRC RECOMMENDATIONS



The Community Reparations Commission (CRC) made significant progress in developing short-, medium-, and long-term goals to address both historical and ongoing generational harm experienced by Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County. Initial recommendations were developed within each Impact Focus Area (IFA) and subsequently reviewed and refined through full Commission discussions and community engagement.

Prioritized Recommendation List

In April 2024, The Carter Development Group presented its final *Cease the Harm Audit* to the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), the City of Asheville, and Buncombe County. This audit, delivering on a key CRC recommendation, offered detailed data that validated the lived experiences and long-standing concerns voiced by both CRC members and the broader community. A preliminary version of the report, released in February 2024, allowed the CRC to begin reviewing its initial recommendations in light of the audit's early findings.

Following the audit's release, a collaborative process was launched to prioritize its recommendations. The City of Asheville, Buncombe County, and the CRC jointly reviewed existing proposals, evaluating them through the lenses of feasibility, legal and policy risk, implementation timelines, and agency responsibility. Review teams from the City and County included representatives from legal departments, assistant city and county managers, equity officers, and subject matter experts aligned with each Impact Focus Area (IFA).

Once reviewed, the recommendations were returned to each IFA group with feedback for further refinement. CRC members incorporated this input, revised their proposals as needed, and prepared the versions they wished to advance for CRC consideration. This iterative process included two formal review rounds, ensuring that all submitted recommendations received thorough evaluation before finalization.

From February to May 2024, IFA groups presented their finalized recommendations to the CRC for discussion and formal voting. By the end of May, all presentations were complete, and the full slate of prioritized recommendations had been finalized.

The Cease Harm Audit was the first recommendation made by the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) and set the foundation for its work. The audit looked at City and County policies, services, programs, and outcomes to identify ways they may have caused harm to Black communities. It resulted in 108 recommendations across key areas of impact for both City and County governments. These recommendations helped shape the CRC's additional 38 recommendations.

Below are summaries of the recommendations developed by each Impact Focus Area (IFA).



Criminal Justice IFA Recommendations

The Criminal Justice IFA focused on addressing and rectifying the inequities faced by Black residents within the justice system. This included a thorough examination of law enforcement practices, judicial proceedings, and correctional policies to ensure equitable treatment for all. The goal was to create a justice system that not only avoids disproportionately targeting Black individuals, but also actively works to dismantle the legacy of racial bias.

1. Stop the Harm: Eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline

Restorative Justice and School Resource Officer Engagement:

An increased focus on youth restorative justice programs can play a critical role in decreasing the school-to-prison pipeline. These programs provide students with alternative methods for expressing anger or concerns, ultimately fostering healthier school environments and emotional development.

In addition, strengthening communication between school resource officers, administrators, and parents can help reduce the number of students referred to court-focused programs. It is essential that school resource officers are informed of the wide range of community-based services available through the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, ensuring they can make appropriate, supportive referrals when addressing student needs.

2. Racial Disparities: Evaluate, create, and implement policies and procedures that effectively address the racial disparities within the criminal justice system. Including working with legislatures (state and federal).

Restorative Justice: Advancing Equity and Cultural Competency:

To eliminate racism and increase cultural competency within the justice system, it is essential to implement restorative justice practices across law enforcement and related entities. These efforts will have a significant, positive impact on Black residents seeking employment with Buncombe County and the City of Asheville, as well as on Black individuals navigating the adjudication process.

This recommendation is designed to have a lasting, multi-generational impact, contributing to long-term systemic change. Implementation should occur within Buncombe County's Justice Services Department, the court system, and all associated judicial processes.

3. Training: Require mandatory annual periodic or ad hoc training of public servants in the field of criminal justice.

Law Enforcement and an Effective Court System: Building Trust and Reducing Incarceration:

Law enforcement alone cannot effectively solve complex crime and disorder issues; meaningful stakeholder engagement is essential to achieving lasting solutions. One critical strategy for fostering trust and effective community engagement is the implementation of high-quality, interactive training for law enforcement

personnel. Training that emphasizes tolerance, anti-bias principles, diversity, and cultural awareness can significantly improve police-community interactions, increase trust, and support collaborative problem-solving efforts (COPS Office, U.S. Department of Justice).

In parallel, strengthening the effectiveness of the court system requires a commitment to creating alternatives to incarceration. Reducing jail populations is vital, as families and communities of color disproportionately bear the burden of America's overreliance on incarceration (Brennan Center for Justice). Although data shows a decrease in traffic stops involving Black individuals by staff of the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department, further improvement in law enforcement practices is needed.

The Criminal Justice Impact Focus Area recommends a shift toward a comprehensive, community-based approach that is trauma-informed and focused on crime deterrence. This strategy should be adopted across all law enforcement agencies to advance equity, reduce harm, and promote public safety through more just and effective policing and judicial practices.

4. Funding for Community-Based Support Services: Allocate funding to community-based organizations to support Black people who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Support for restorative justice initiatives, coupled with efforts to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, creates vital opportunities to rethink the juvenile justice system. This approach prioritizes accountability and growth over punishment, allowing youth to learn from their mistakes without being permanently penalized for actions made during their formative years. By embracing restorative practices, communities can foster healthier development and expand future opportunities for young people.

5. Recruitment: Strengthening Recruitment Practices

Emphasize the need to improve equity and support for Black youth and families through education, economic development, and criminal justice reform. Strengthening recruitment practices is a key component, along with investing in culturally relevant life skills training programs for both Black teens and adults. These programs should include stipends to incentivize participation, ensuring accessibility and impact.

There is a call for strict limitations on the involvement of School Resource Officers (SROs) in school discipline, permitting their intervention only in cases where the immediate safety of students or staff is at risk. Additionally, families must be better informed about their rights, with clear communication provided through school system Codes of Conduct. This includes guidance on the 16 Reportable Criminal Offenses outlined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, as well as resources for parents navigating situations involving law enforcement. Finally, integrated wraparound services are recommended to provide holistic support to students and caregivers, bridging gaps between education, justice, and social services.

6. Accountability: Focusing in Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Equity

A transparent reporting system should be created for law enforcement to track community engagement efforts, such as participation in events, neighborhood visits, and relationship-building activities. This system would include clear performance metrics, data-driven outcomes, and quarterly audits, including evaluations of police interactions with Black residents.

In addition, performance assessments for court, legal, and law enforcement personnel should be developed and implemented, with psychological evaluations included as necessary. Legal teams handling reparations-

related matters must be adequately funded and protected against potential legal challenges. Independent reviews of policies and practices within the courts and law enforcement should occur bi-annually or quarterly and should inform mandatory training programs.

There is also a need for consistent evaluation of publicly funded organizations—particularly those working with Black communities on re-entry, violence prevention, and youth engagement—to ensure programs are delivering results. Furthermore, the removal of restrictive state statutes is recommended to allow for greater public access to badge-based arrest data. Finally, a formal process should be established to organize and codify judicial records to improve transparency and access.



Economic Development IFA Recommendations

Economic empowerment served as the foundation of the Economic Development IFA. This group worked to dismantle barriers to financial prosperity by expanding access to capital for Black-owned businesses, promoting entrepreneurship, and ensuring equitable opportunities within the local job market. The objective was to create sustainable wealth generation and economic security for Black residents and businesses.

1. Create an Economic Development Center for Black Asheville that includes small business services, job training, financial education, access to grants, and a Black led financial institution.

To advance Black-led economic development in Asheville and Buncombe County, a centrally located Economic Development Center—or multiple centers—should be established specifically for Black residents. These centers would provide commercial space for entrepreneurs, job training services, financial education, and house a financial institution that is designed for and led by Black community members. The centers should support key industries such as restaurants and food trucks, childcare, real estate, construction, and legal services, creating a foundation for sustainable economic growth.

Together, the Economic Development Center and Black business corridors would form a comprehensive ecosystem for Black economic advancement in Asheville. To support this initiative, city- and county-owned land acquired during Urban Renewal—as well as additional land of equivalent acreage and value—should be returned and allocated through the reparations process. This land transfer should align with the recommendations of all Impact Focus Areas (IFAs) and be coordinated with the Housing IFA's land acquisition strategy.

2. Establish Business Corridors with commercial space for Black owned businesses and community services in close proximity to Black neighborhoods, rebuilding cohesive communities for Black Asheville.

Black business corridors should be developed in close proximity to historically Black residential neighborhoods and cultural institutions. Proposed locations include Charlotte Street, Asheland Avenue,

Southside, and Valley Street. These corridors would help rebuild cohesive communities and serve as vibrant hubs for commerce, culture, and connection.

3. Provide grants to legacy neighborhoods and public housing communities to fund neighborhood priorities, including those that have been outlined in community plans.

To support historically African American neighborhoods and public housing communities in Buncombe County, grants should be provided to fund community-identified priorities, with a minimum initial investment of \$250,000 per community and commitments for ongoing, multi-year funding. The determination of how these funds are used must be guided by the vision and leadership of Black residents within each neighborhood, ensuring that investments reflect the needs, aspirations, and cultural legacy of those communities.

Many of these neighborhoods already have detailed, resident-developed plans that address critical areas such as education, health, economic development, and community infrastructure. These community-driven plans, created by residents of legacy neighborhoods and Housing Authority of the City of Asheville communities, offer a clear roadmap for strategic investments that can be replicated in similar areas across the county.

For example, in the Burton Street Community, several initiatives demonstrate this vision. The Burton Street Music and Arts Center (2013) was created to engage youth in life and career skill-building through arts and community participation, incorporating training in real estate, construction, and legal services. The Burton Street Neighborhood Plan (2009) outlines comprehensive improvements responding to the I-26 expansion, addressing the needs of residents across generations, and proposing infrastructure such as a community technology center and green spaces.

Complementing this vision is the Burton Street Community Technology Center, designed to improve educational and technological access for youth and adults through a recording studio, computer lab, makerspace, media lab, and workshop space. Further expanding this effort is the proposed E.W. Pearson Center for Community Innovation, which would transform the existing community building into a multifunctional hub for entrepreneurship and social development. The center would focus on four key areas—economic development, education and training, health enhancement, and infrastructure—and would physically link the neighborhood with the proposed Smith Creek Greenway.

In the Hillcrest community, the Development and Training of the Housing Authority “Corps” (2009) outlines a resident-led workforce development model. Participants would be paid to perform maintenance and beautification work across Housing Authority properties, including pressure washing, litter clean-up, recycling, and lawn care. In addition to hands-on work, corps members would receive job readiness training, GED assistance, and financial literacy education. The plan also envisions the creation of a community-run greenhouse and landscaping business to serve Housing Authority sites citywide.

These location-based initiatives serve as strong models for investment in legacy Black communities and public housing neighborhoods throughout Buncombe County. By grounding funding in existing community plans and centering Black leadership, this approach honors historical resilience while creating pathways for sustainable growth and self-determined development.

4. Provide grants to Black owned businesses who have not had access to the same funding and resources.

To strengthen Black-owned businesses and promote equitable economic development, increased funding and capacity-building support should be prioritized. This support may include grants of up to \$100,000, with the option for multi-year funding to provide sustained impact. Black-owned businesses are often located in predominantly Black neighborhoods that face critical needs for infrastructure investment and economic revitalization. Despite their potential, these businesses continue to face significant barriers in accessing capital through traditional banking institutions.

By partnering with a Black-owned business services provider—such as the proposed Economic Development Center—entrepreneurs can receive tailored support to assess their capital needs. Based on this review, businesses may be awarded grants to support operating costs, purchase equipment, expand services, or complete renovations. This approach provides both financial resources and strategic guidance, helping Black-owned businesses grow and thrive within their communities.

5. Establish a private fund for reparations.

A private, independent fund for reparations should be established to ensure sustained and adequate funding for the recommendations adopted by the Community Reparations Commission. This entity would have the flexibility to advance reparations goals and accept contributions from sources that the City and County may be unable to engage directly. Potential funders include banks that historically participated in redlining—who can now contribute through mechanisms such as the Community Reinvestment Act—as well as private corporations, philanthropic foundations, and individual donors committed to racial equity and justice.

6. Provide direct cash payments to individuals harmed by racial discrimination.

A guaranteed income program should be funded as a means of ensuring that basic needs are met for individuals with low incomes and limited assets. By joining more than 100 other cities—including Durham, North Carolina—Asheville and Buncombe County can provide direct, monthly cash payments to residents who face economic hardship. According to Mayors for Guaranteed Income, such programs offer unconditional payments with no work requirements, designed to supplement the existing social safety net. Guaranteed income serves as a powerful tool to promote racial and gender equity.

The parameters of this program should be developed collaboratively by the reparations accountability entity in partnership with the City and County. The program should specifically support individuals who have been harmed by historical, systemic, and ongoing wage and employment discrimination. Priority populations might include residents of public housing, individuals and families living below the poverty line, reentering citizens, and single mothers—all of whom have been shown to benefit from similar pilot programs across the country.



Education IFA Recommendations

The Education IFA was committed to eliminating educational disparities that have historically limited opportunities for Black students. This included addressing the racial achievement gap, ensuring equitable allocation of educational resources, and promoting representation and inclusion within academic institutions. The focus remained on creating educational environments where Black youth can thrive, achieve, and reach their full potential.

1. Community Based Education: Community wide Afrocentric engagement and enrichment programs.

The following recommendations address reparations programming designed to be implemented within schools, focusing on educational opportunities for Black youth in Asheville and Buncombe County. The overarching goal is the affirmative development of all students, ensuring that educational environments are inclusive, culturally affirming, and supportive of Black students' academic and social success.

Curriculum and Instruction

The curriculum must be decolonized through a comprehensive review of its diversity, inclusivity, and representation of the Black world. This includes integrating the work of Black scholars and ensuring that Black history and contributions are not relegated to specific months or limited to sports and entertainment figures. Instead, the curriculum should reflect the full scope of American society, with Black stories woven across all subjects throughout the year. Local Black historical and contemporary figures should be highlighted to affirm cultural identity and community pride.

Instruction must be culturally relevant, avoiding the stereotyping or pathologizing of Black children, and instead recognizing the unique context and needs of each learner. All educators must be equipped to effectively teach all students. A formal process should be established to review, repair, and correct classroom assignments, content, pedagogy, or management practices that cause harm.

Black students must be actively recruited, retained, and supported in higher-level academic tracks, including Honors, AP, dual enrollment, and job training programs. Vocational and skills-based opportunities should be expanded and aligned with future labor market demands and Black student interests. These efforts should include partnerships with community colleges and private industry to provide relevant and accessible career pathways.

Healing-Centered Education

Educational spaces must also foster emotional and cultural healing. Black Student Union groups should be supported with protected time for meetings and opportunities to build community among Black students and staff. Mental health, mindfulness, and self-regulation supports must be available to all Black school stakeholders, utilizing both traditional and non-traditional modalities such as sound healing, music therapy, and equine therapy.

Discipline and conflict resolution practices should shift toward restorative justice and healing-centered approaches. Schools must provide on-site physical health care services and emotional reset spaces, creating environments that affirm wellness and dignity for Black students.

Equity Audits and Student Voice

Each school must conduct and publish a bi-annual equity audit examining the racial and gender distribution of students in specialized programs such as Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG), Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, and job training programs. These distributions should reflect the broader demographics of the student body. Additional tutoring and academic support must be made available to students participating in advanced coursework to ensure equitable success.

Student voice must be centered in equity efforts. Schools should implement ongoing student feedback projects throughout the academic year to understand student needs and lived experiences. Findings from these efforts should be shared with community partners and used to drive responsive programming and system-level improvements.

Mandatory Professional Development

All staff should receive ongoing professional development that includes training on implicit bias, stereotype threat, behavior management, and culturally affirming teaching practices. Educator toolkits should offer creative approaches to instruction, highlight the impact of microaggressions in educational settings, and support differentiated instruction to meet diverse learning needs.

Class Size Reduction

Finally, small class sizes must be prioritized across all grades, with a particular focus on middle and high school levels, where students often experience increased academic and social challenges. Reducing class size will allow for more personalized instruction, deeper relationships between students and educators, and more supportive learning environments for all students—especially Black youth.

2. In school educational programming: Teaching inclusive, historically accurate, diverse education within schools.

This recommendation falls under recommendation #1. Please refer to that recommendation above for more information.

3. Help, Educate, Employ, Develop (HEED): Internship and mentorship program with the goal of professional development and job placement for Black Youth.

The HEED Program—an acronym for Help, Educate, Employ, and Develop—is a comprehensive, community-rooted initiative designed to bridge education and employment for local African American students in Asheville and Buncombe County. The program integrates student interest, mentorship, professional development, and long-term support with the ultimate goal of securing stable, non-service sector, vocational, and professional employment, followed by pathways to homeownership and generational wealth building.

Program Overview

The central mission of the HEED Program is to promote education and employment for African American youth by aligning academic development with vocational and professional career pathways. Beginning in 8th grade, students are identified and supported through a tailored process that fosters individual growth and career readiness.

HELP: Students are identified early—starting in 8th grade—and their professional or vocational interests are assessed to guide their educational and career trajectory.

EDUCATE: Educational pathways are customized to align with each student's career interests. By the sophomore year of high school, students are placed in paid internships or apprenticeships with local companies or organizations. These placements continue through the completion of their education, whether that be a vocational certification, associate degree, or bachelor's degree.

EMPLOY: Upon completing their education, students are mentored to prepare for and pass any required licensing or certification exams. Partner companies are expected to transition these individuals from interns/apprentices into full-time employees.

DEVELOP: Once employed, individuals are paired with a personal banker to begin building financial literacy and relationships in preparation for homeownership. Special home-purchase incentives are made available. After two years of employment, the participant is connected with a real estate agent to begin the homebuying process. At this stage, an education or school counselor is also assigned to the participant's family to serve as an ongoing mentor and resource, particularly for younger children—thereby initiating a multi-generational cycle of education, employment, and homeownership.

Governance and Oversight

The HEED Program is governed by a 14-member Advisory Board composed of representatives from key sectors:

- Asheville City and Buncombe County Governments
- Asheville City and Buncombe County Boards of Education
- Community representatives from both city and county
- Private employers and the local Chamber of Commerce

Financial and banking sector professionals

Student representatives (one each from the City and County)

Funding

Funding will come from a combination of public and private sources, including:

- Asheville City Government
- Buncombe County Government
- Private company sponsorships

Each of the four primary public entities—Asheville City Government, Buncombe County Government, Asheville City Board of Education, and Buncombe County Board of Education—will fund three dedicated staff positions for the program:

- Program Coordinator
- Program Assistant
- Administrative/Clerical Support
- Monitoring and Reporting

The Advisory Board will meet at least twice per academic year to provide strategic guidance and community accountability. The Program Coordinator will be responsible for submitting progress reports to the respective Boards of Education four times per school year. These reports will be shared publicly to encourage transparency and solicit community input.

By combining early intervention, structured mentorship, job placement, financial guidance, and family engagement, the HEED Program offers a holistic and sustainable model to address racial disparities in education, employment, and wealth within Asheville and Buncombe County's Black communities.

4. Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Recruit and retain more Black educators in Asheville and Buncombe County.

To build a thriving, equitable, and sustainable educational system in Asheville and Buncombe County, a Comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Package for Black Educators must be developed and implemented. This package should offer robust social, financial, professional, and housing support across all levels of education—from early childhood to higher education—while ensuring ongoing, competitive compensation for all educators.

A Racially Diverse and Representative Educational Workforce

The foundation of this initiative is the creation of a racially and ethnically diverse workforce in every school, ensuring all students benefit from being taught by educators with varied cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Research confirms that a diverse teaching staff enhances educational outcomes for all students. Currently, Buncombe County has one of the nation's largest opportunity gaps, a disparity that mirrors the lack of diversity in its educator workforce.

A Restored Black Educator Presence

The presence of Black educators is directly linked to improved academic and social outcomes for Black students. Black students who have even one Black teacher in elementary school are more likely to graduate and pursue higher education—with significantly better outcomes if they have more than one. To that end, every K–5 student should graduate having been taught by at least one Black teacher. Similarly, middle school students (grades 6–8) should be taught by a Black educator in at least one core subject area (math, English, or science), and the same standard should apply through high school (grades 9–12). Furthermore, every school should have at least one administrator of color in a leadership role.

A Vibrant and Engaged Black Educator Community

Creating a strong, supported Black educator community across early childhood, K–12, and higher education systems is essential. This includes initiatives to build community and belonging, such as peer-to-peer onboarding (“Onboarding into AVL”), dedicated advocacy staff, and the establishment of a Black Educators Association. This association would serve as a formal advocacy and representation body—connected to the Education Reparations Accountability Taskforce—and offer a collective voice at school board meetings. The association would maintain a comprehensive, accessible resource guide to support all staff and amplify existing community-based assets.

Restoration of Neighborhood Schools and Communities

Research shows that when teachers and staff live in the neighborhoods where they work, engagement increases, and relationships between schools and families are strengthened. This recommendation calls for reinvestment in neighborhood schools and incentives that support educators living in the communities they serve.

Reparative Compensation for the Toll of Integration

The integration of schools placed a heavy emotional and psychological burden on Black educators who were often the first or only Black professionals in their environments, facing overt racism, exclusion, and daily micro- and macroaggressions. These historical and ongoing harms must be acknowledged through reparations stipends for all Black staff currently employed in Asheville City and Buncombe County school districts, across all roles and levels.

Recruitment and Retention Incentives

The Black Educator Recruitment and Retention Package should include a range of financial supports:

- Housing Assistance: Annual housing allowances aligned with the cost of living within a 10-mile radius of the school; down payment and foreclosure assistance; homeownership rebate programs.
- Monetary Compensation: Annual stipends for professional development and continuing education; signing bonuses; full relocation coverage; reparations bonuses; annual retention and experience bonuses.
- Equity and Financial Health: Annual salary and resource reviews; financial literacy education; savings and retirement planning support; clear benefit overviews with individualized assistance
- Additional funding avenues should be explored at the state level and through external partnerships such as RSAA (Reparations Stakeholder Accountability Alliance) to supplement compensation efforts.

Culturally Aligned Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment efforts should prioritize alignment with Asheville’s cultural identity, focusing on candidates who value wellness, nature, and community connection. This includes supporting Black outdoor educator programs and wellness-based recruiting strategies that resonate with the lived experiences of Black professionals.

5. Education Accountability Taskforce: Community based oversight group that reviews policies and data to hold school systems and education organizations accountable.

Please refer to recommendation #1 for more details.

6. Community Resource Campus: Centrally located building with programs and services for Black people. Including personalized support and resources for individuals and families that address education, housing, economic development, criminal justice, health and wellness.

The goal of this recommendation is to directly benefit past, present, and future Black residents of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County by addressing the generational harm caused by systemic racism and discriminatory policies. The intended beneficiaries include descendants of enslaved Africans; current and former residents of legacy and historically Black neighborhoods in Buncombe County; individuals who have lived in government housing; and those displaced by redlining, the War on Drugs, and urban renewal. It also includes victims of institutional racism and discriminatory practices such as Jim Crow laws, school segregation and desegregation policies, and other racially biased systems.

As a form of restitution, this proposal recommends the reclamation of city-owned property as compensation for Black-owned properties taken during urban renewal. These properties will be used to construct and develop a citywide network of community-owned and operated education and support centers dedicated to serving Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County. These centers will be staffed and managed by Black professionals wherever possible, and overseen by a board of experts representing each focus area to ensure accountability and community alignment.

The services offered at these centers will be comprehensive, culturally affirming, and free of charge to eligible Black residents, encompassing the full spectrum of human development—from prenatal care to eldercare. The centers will function as collaborative community hubs, designed to leverage the collective knowledge, resources, and strengths within the Black community.

Initial and ongoing financial support is expected to come from both city and county governments, supplemented by additional funding through grants, philanthropic gifts, and fundraising efforts. These hubs will not only deliver direct services but also serve as gathering places for healing, empowerment, and strategic action, offering a long-overdue response to the deep trauma and lost opportunities caused by decades of systemically racist policies enacted by public institutions.

7. Early Childhood Education: Free, high quality early childhood education (childcare) for all Black children.

Accessible Childcare for All: A Reparative Approach to Early Childhood Support in Asheville and Buncombe County

This recommendation envisions the establishment of an accessible, equitable, and reparative early childhood system that specifically benefits Black residents—past, present, and future—of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County. Intended beneficiaries include descendants of enslaved Africans; current and former residents of historically Black neighborhoods and government housing; those displaced due to redlining, the War on Drugs, and urban renewal; and individuals harmed by institutionalized racism including segregation, desegregation, and other discriminatory policies.

Universal Early Childhood Education

Every child in Asheville and Buncombe County, regardless of income, should have access to free early childhood education from birth to pre-kindergarten. This system would close the affordability gap by ensuring that early childcare centers are fully reimbursed for accepting state vouchers and by covering the full cost of care for families who do not qualify for subsidized assistance. After-hours childcare, including care between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., must also be made available, with a needs assessment conducted to determine the demand for overnight care. Feasibility studies should assess the need for reliable transportation to and from childcare and after-hours programs.

Developmental and Academic Standards

To ensure quality and equity, all early childhood care providers receiving city or county funding must adopt consistent developmental and academic standards. A universal assessment tool will be implemented to measure early childhood growth and development across all centers. Grant funding decisions should be tied to data outcomes, with providers required to report both quantitative and qualitative metrics on child progress, ensuring accountability and alignment with reparative outcomes.

Addressing Early Childhood Expulsions

Early care settings must become safe, inclusive, and trauma-informed environments. This includes providing educators with racial justice training, behavior and classroom management strategies, and ongoing professional development in child brain development. Parent support groups and educational opportunities should be available to empower families. A system for tracking expulsions and behavior-related removals will be created, supported by mental health services and additional resources for providers, children, and families.

Alignment with School Systems

Early childhood programs must work in greater synergy with pre-kindergarten and K-12 education systems. This includes reviewing early education data to prepare kindergarten teachers, improving communication between early care providers and public schools, and establishing mechanisms for tracking student preparedness across the educational pipeline. Transition planning will ensure that services follow students into kindergarten to support continuity and success.

Long-Term Planning and Wealth Building

As a forward-looking investment in educational equity, children enrolled in early childhood programs in Asheville and Buncombe County will be automatically enrolled in Baby Bonds or Child Savings Accounts. These accounts will follow children throughout their educational careers and support their post-secondary education or career training. Participation in extracurricular activities and academic performance may unlock additional contributions, incentivizing holistic development.

Family Empowerment

Supporting families is central to this vision. Comprehensive, community-based educational programming will prepare families for each stage of their child's educational journey. Trusted advocates from the community will provide coaching, advisement, and parenting resources. Families will also receive clear guidance on their rights and available resources through easily accessible materials and support systems.

Expanding and Supporting Childcare Providers

To meet the growing demand for high-quality childcare, the number of licensed childcare providers in the county must increase, with particular attention to underserved areas. This includes financial support for providers who accept subsidies, maintain low classroom ratios, and participate in quality enhancement programs. Early Head Start programs should be expanded and diversified through targeted outreach efforts.

Advocacy for Structural Change

A strong advocacy effort is needed to secure more state and federal funding for childcare operations and to support attainable education and certification pathways for childcare providers and educators. Additionally, the Head Start screening process must be redesigned to eliminate racial bias and ensure equitable access for children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

By investing in these comprehensive measures, Asheville and Buncombe County can lay the foundation for a just and equitable early childhood system that repairs past harms, supports Black families, and creates generational pathways to opportunity.

8. Post-secondary education opportunities: Providing job training, education support, workforce development, and support service for Black people after high school.

Post-Secondary Access, Retention, and Success for Black Residents of Asheville and Buncombe County

This recommendation is designed to specifically benefit past, present, and future Black residents of the City of Asheville and Buncombe County by addressing generational barriers to educational access and success. Beneficiaries include descendants of enslaved Africans; current and former residents of historically Black and legacy neighborhoods; individuals from government housing and those displaced by redlining and the War on Drugs; and victims of racist institutional policies such as urban renewal, Jim Crow laws, school segregation and desegregation, and other racially discriminatory practices.

The overarching aim is to level the playing field by expanding equitable educational and workforce opportunities, fostering awareness, providing ongoing support, and ensuring accountability. This strategy seeks to transform outcomes for Black youth through a structured combination of monitoring, mentorship, financial assistance, and culturally responsive academic programming.

Post-Secondary Advisement Council

A Post-Secondary Advisement Council should be established jointly by the City of Asheville and Buncombe County to monitor and support the progress of Black students throughout their post-secondary journeys, regardless of the college or university they attend. This council would serve as a trusted advisory group, offering consistent mentorship, guidance, and accountability. It would track college persistence, academic performance, and post-graduation transitions, while also advocating for systemic accountability across institutions to ensure that Black students receive the support needed to thrive.

Post-Secondary Retention and Financial Support

To ensure equitable access and sustained participation in post-secondary education, the City and County

should provide full financial support—including tuition, books, and room and board—to Black Buncombe County residents attending any institution within the North Carolina college system. Students enrolled in community colleges would receive guaranteed income in lieu of room and board. To support those pursuing alternative paths, apprenticeship and internship programs should be developed and funded for residents interested in the trades.

Scholarships must be made available for students pursuing degrees in education, from early childhood through higher education, and should continue through the completion of the degree. In addition, student loan forgiveness and repayment support should be prioritized, particularly for those returning to or completing their education later in life.

Justice-involved individuals should receive access to job training, educational support, and workforce development programs tailored to reentry and long-term success. Adult learners should be supported through cohort-based educational models that include GED preparation, community college coursework, and 2- to 4-year degree programs.

In the final two years of high school, comprehensive college readiness programs must be embedded into the student experience. These programs should provide direct support with college applications, entrance exam preparation, mentorship, and guidance to ensure students feel academically prepared and confident about their post-secondary options. Financial support should cover application fees, test prep courses, and standardized test costs.

Students of all ages should have access to adult guidance counselors or case managers who help navigate academic pathways, including major changes, career planning, and personal development. This support should include cohort-based programming, regular check-ins, and courses such as “How to Navigate Higher Education,” all aimed at increasing educational persistence and success.

Partnership with Local Colleges and Universities

Local colleges and universities must play an active role in the success of Black students by restructuring programs and policies to be inclusive, flexible, and accountable. This includes offering classes outside of traditional hours—such as evenings and weekends—to accommodate diverse schedules and life demands. Institutions must commit to hiring and retaining Black faculty, staff, administrators, and students, ensuring that Black representation is visible and impactful across campus.

Black studies programs should be expanded and credit hours in these courses incentivized. Schools must also provide culturally competent academic and mental health counselors dedicated to supporting Black students throughout their academic journeys.

Teacher education programs at local institutions must be revised to include classroom management and behavioral strategies, as well as comprehensive training in the history of education in Asheville and Buncombe County. All teacher candidates should receive racial justice and implicit bias education. Those who do not demonstrate competence in equity-based coursework should not be recommended for employment within local school districts, reinforcing a commitment to culturally competent education across the region.

By combining mentorship, institutional reform, financial investment, and culturally relevant programming, this recommendation provides a roadmap for transforming the educational landscape for Black residents in

Asheville and Buncombe County—ensuring that education is not only accessible, but empowering and reparative.

9. Global Accountability: Review board agency that will hold the city and county accountable to implementing ALL reparations recommendations. The agency will monitor the progress and outcomes of recommendations.

This recommendation focused on the establishment of an independent Reparations Accountability Council (RAC) by the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) to provide ongoing oversight of all CRC recommendations implemented by the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, and their affiliated contractors. The RAC will serve as a vital mechanism for ensuring transparency, accountability, and fidelity to the intent of the structural and systemic changes envisioned by the CRC.

The primary purpose of the RAC is to articulate and uphold the core principles of the Reparations process, ensure the integrity of implementation, monitor progress and measurable impact, and verify that both the city and county remain compliant with the Reparations resolutions each has formally adopted. Empowered by the CRC, the RAC will also represent the Commission publicly, serving as its voice in Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commission meetings.

Oversight and Responsibilities

The RAC will implement a continuous system of accountability and performance monitoring across all Impact Focus Areas (IFAs) of the CRC. This includes reviewing the development, execution, and outcomes of policies, programs, construction projects, and funding decisions that directly affect Black residents and communities in Asheville and Buncombe County.

The RAC will be tasked with the following:

- Monitoring Implementation: Track and assess city and county progress on CRC recommendations, ensuring full compliance and alignment with the original intent of each recommendation.
- Oversight and Input: Provide input and hold oversight authority on initiatives, infrastructure projects, and spending decisions that have a direct or indirect impact on Black communities.
- Preventing and Addressing Harm: Develop and implement a standardized review process to identify ongoing harms, as well as potential harms stemming from future policies and actions. The RAC will advocate for continuous harm assessment and mitigation efforts.
- Evaluating Partners: Assess the effectiveness and integrity of non-profit and for-profit organizations engaged by the city or county to help implement CRC recommendations.
- Funding Oversight: Monitor city and county efforts to secure funding from federal, state, and local sources intended to support Black economic and community development. The RAC will ensure that all funds earmarked for Reparations are used exclusively to fulfill the goals and commitments outlined by the Reparations Commission.

Structure and Representation

The RAC will be composed of the following members:

- Five representatives, each selected from one of the CRC's Impact Focus Areas (IFAs)

- One Executive Director, responsible for coordinating operations and strategic oversight
- One Attorney, who will provide legal guidance, help ensure compliance, and represent the RAC as needed

The RAC will collaborate closely with existing community groups to monitor the implementation and community impact of CRC recommendations. In addition, the RAC or its designated representative will hold a seat on relevant city and county boards and commissions whose work influences the quality of life, policy, and development in Black communities. This ensures meaningful and ongoing Black representation in decision-making processes.

Accountability and Metrics

Each Impact Focus Area (IFA) will be required to establish its own specific accountability framework, tied directly to its set of approved recommendations. These structures must include measurable outcomes and an assessment mechanism that allows the RAC to monitor progress, ensure compliance, and evaluate the effectiveness of each recommendation over time.

By institutionalizing accountability through the RAC, the Reparations process can move beyond symbolic gestures to measurable change—ensuring that the work of the CRC results in meaningful, lasting impact for Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County.

10. Disproportionate Suspensions: Improving teacher education, training, and building accountability systems to reduce Black student suspensions.

This is a joint recommendation with the Criminal Justice IFA. Please refer to the description provided under that section.

11. Urban Renewal: Cash payments for property value lost to families and businesses impacted by urban renewal.

This is a joint recommendation with the Criminal Justice IFA. Please refer to the description provided under that section.

12. Wrap Around Services: Personalized supports and resources for individuals and families that address education, housing, economic development, criminal justice, health and wellness.

This is a joint recommendation with the Criminal Justice IFA. Please refer to the description provided under that section.



Health & Wellness IFA Recommendations

The Health and Wellness IFA worked to close longstanding health disparities that disproportionately affect Black residents. This involved addressing the social determinants of health such as access to

quality healthcare, nutritious food, mental health services, and safe living environments. The Commission advocated for policies and programs that support a comprehensive, holistic approach to improving the overall well-being of the Black community.

1. Establish Health Care Subsidy Fund to provide comprehensive multigenerational direct primary care access.

Integrated Support for Aging and Preventive Health in Buncombe County

A comprehensive approach is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to support preventive health care, aging with dignity, and the well-being of older adults—particularly within Black communities and other historically marginalized groups in Buncombe County. This includes aligning local efforts with recent state and federal developments while creating tailored, community-centered solutions.

Local Commitment to Preventive Health

At the local level, Buncombe County should provide ongoing financial support to both established and emerging community organizations that focus on preventive care and clinic-based preventive services. Investing in these grassroots efforts will help reduce long-term health disparities and promote wellness across generations.

Statewide Aging Initiatives

On July 1, 2023, the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services released its comprehensive 2023–2027 State Aging Plan, fulfilling requirements of the federal Older Americans Act. Additionally, Governor Roy Cooper introduced “All Ages, All Stages NC: A Roadmap for Aging and Living Well,” a strategic vision emphasizing the need for inter-agency collaboration to implement structural policy changes. These state-level initiatives aim to improve services for aging residents, people with disabilities, and their caregivers—laying a foundation for more inclusive, responsive systems that benefit all North Carolinians.

Federal Support Through Medicaid Expansion

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in collaboration with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), has taken decisive steps to expand access to health care for aging populations. With North Carolina’s recent Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), an estimated 600,000 residents between the ages of 19 and 64 are now eligible for comprehensive health coverage. This expansion ensures greater access to critical services, including primary and preventive care, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, emergency services, and prescription medications.

For older adults, Aging and Adult Services programs are focused on promoting independence and dignity through a community-based system of benefits, protections, and opportunities. Long-term care access for seniors through Medicaid is contingent on meeting income and asset eligibility thresholds, and these programs serve as essential safety nets for many. North Carolinians can access aging-related resources and eligibility information through official state and county channels, including the Age-Friendly Buncombe County initiative.

Community-Based Requests and Future Planning

To further expand and personalize aging support services in Buncombe County, the following locally driven initiatives are recommended:

Partner with Parks and Recreation and other educational institutions to co-develop tailored, multigenerational health programming. These efforts should receive dedicated funding that is independent of the existing Parks and Recreation budget, ensuring sustainability and flexibility in addressing community-specific needs.

Establish a transportation service for older adults that operates independently of Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement systems. This would enhance access to medical appointments, community events, and social services for seniors who are not otherwise eligible for transportation support under federal programs.

Create a training program to build a workforce of in-home elder care providers, with the goal of helping seniors age in place. This initiative would include applying for grants to fund the creation and expansion of minority-owned home care businesses—supporting both elder care and economic development within underserved communities.

By aligning local programming with state and federal resources, and by centering community-driven solutions, Buncombe County can ensure a more equitable and effective system of preventive health and aging services—one that honors the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of all residents.

2. Recruit, retain, and provide systematic support for African American health professionals of all disciplines to improve health outcomes.

Improving Representation and Equity in the Healthcare Workforce for Asheville and Buncombe County

This recommendation aims to increase the presence, retention, and visibility of African American healthcare providers in Asheville and Buncombe County through a multi-level strategy that engages local, state, and federal partners. It emphasizes the importance of cultivating a diverse medical workforce to address health disparities, improve care outcomes, and build trust within historically underserved Black communities.

Local Actions

At the local level, efforts should focus on expanding educational access, building accountability structures, and enhancing outreach and recruitment. First, the number of scholarships available to students pursuing medical and allied health professions at local colleges and universities must be significantly increased. These scholarships should be specifically targeted to support Black and other BIPOC students, reducing financial barriers to entering the healthcare field.

Collaborative partnerships must also be deepened with institutions such as HCA, Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC), and UNC Health to support African American healthcare provider recruitment. This includes expanding participation in programs like the MAHEC Medical Mentoring Program (MMMP), which is designed to expose underrepresented students to medical careers through mentorship and structured guidance.

To ensure transparency and sustained effort, a community-led oversight entity should be established to meet monthly. This body will be responsible for monitoring the progress of recruitment and retention initiatives, holding local medical governing bodies accountable, and reporting regularly to the public on outcomes.

Outreach efforts must be expanded through collaboration with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the WNC Diversity Engagement Coalition to build inclusive pipelines for African American medical practitioners. In tandem, partnerships with BIPOC HR professionals and the Asheville Chamber of Commerce should be formed to assess and strengthen recruitment strategies with a focus on racial equity.

State-Level Collaboration

At the state level, Asheville and Buncombe County should partner with North Carolina's medical schools and MAHEC to promote the region as a welcoming and supportive destination for African American medical students. Additionally, collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS)—particularly through its State Office of Rural Health and Provider Placement Services—will support broader efforts to recruit and retain primary care, dental, and behavioral health providers in underserved areas like Buncombe County.

Federal Engagement

At the federal level, local leaders must engage with their legislative delegation to advocate for the inclusion of Buncombe County in any national public health initiatives focused on recruiting and retaining African American healthcare providers. These efforts should aim to channel federal resources toward local recruitment programs and highlight the needs of communities most affected by disparities in healthcare access.

Strategic Requests and Planning

To support the long-term success of this initiative, a referral network of African American healthcare practitioners should be created. This network will support both recruitment and professional integration for BIPOC practitioners across medical specialties. Simultaneously, local institutions such as HCA, MAHEC, and Appalachian Mountain Health must be requested to share current, disaggregated data on the percentage of African American providers by specialty and gender to establish a measurable baseline for evaluating future programs and policies.

Evidence-based models—such as the University of California's PRIME-LEAD-ABC programs, which focus on training healthcare providers to serve African American communities—should be researched and adapted to the Asheville-Buncombe context, with attention to the unique needs of local Black populations, including descendants of enslaved people.

A dedicated study workgroup should be formed to collaborate with legal experts, healthcare stakeholders, and community representatives to design a program that evaluates local recruitment and retention efforts. This workgroup would also be tasked with developing sustainable frameworks for accountability and equity.

Finally, a comprehensive directory of African American healthcare providers in the region—including physicians, nurse practitioners, doulas, midwives, and other allied health professionals—should be compiled and publicly disseminated. This resource will not only aid in recruitment efforts but also improve access for community members seeking culturally competent care.

Together, these recommendations provide a cohesive, actionable roadmap for building a more inclusive and equitable healthcare workforce that reflects and serves the diverse population of Asheville and Buncombe County.

3. Meet the holistic health needs of African American Elders to support their ability to age in place as long as possible with comprehensive community support.

Strengthening Preventive and Aging Care Systems Through Local, State, and Federal Alignment

To promote long-term health, independence, and dignity for aging residents—particularly those from historically underserved communities—this recommendation calls for a multi-level approach to enhancing preventive care services and support systems for older adults in Buncombe County.

Local Commitment

At the local level, Buncombe County should provide financial support to both established and emerging organizations that prioritize preventive health care. These organizations play a vital role in delivering clinic-based preventive services and health education that can reduce long-term costs and improve outcomes, particularly for Black and aging residents who often face barriers to timely care. Strengthening this network of providers supports equitable access to care and community-centered wellness strategies.

Statewide Policy Direction

At the state level, significant progress has been made to address the needs of North Carolina's aging population. On July 1, 2023, the State Division of Aging and Adult Services released its official 2023–2027 State Aging Plan, a federally mandated document under the Older Americans Act. Complementing this plan is Governor Roy Cooper's policy roadmap, "All Ages, All Stages NC: A Roadmap for Aging and Living Well." This vision document centers on policy reform and cross-agency collaboration to improve services and quality of life for a diverse population—including aging adults and individuals with disabilities.

These statewide efforts reflect a growing recognition that aging policy must be intersectional, coordinated, and community-informed. Buncombe County should align its local strategies with these broader initiatives to amplify impact and secure additional state support where available.

Federal Advancements

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in collaboration with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), has taken major steps to improve health access for individuals aged 60 and above. One of the most impactful recent developments is North Carolina's expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This expansion makes an estimated 600,000 residents between the ages of 19 and 64 eligible for comprehensive health coverage—including essential services such as primary and preventive care, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, emergency care, and prescription medications.

For seniors in need of long-term care, Medicaid eligibility in North Carolina is based on income and asset thresholds. Programs administered at both state and federal levels offer coordinated resources and protections through Aging and Adult Services. These services support aging residents, people with disabilities, and their families in maintaining independence and accessing care through a community-based model.

Buncombe County's Role

Locally, Age-Friendly Buncombe County is a platform through which the county continues to invest in the well-being of older adults. As part of this effort, the county can deepen its commitment by expanding partnerships, increasing financial investment in preventive services, and helping residents access Medicaid and other supports through clear, accessible communication and assistance.

Together, these local, state, and federal efforts form a cohesive foundation for ensuring that all residents—regardless of age, race, or income—can access the care and support they need to live with dignity, health, and independence throughout every stage of life.

4. Establish a Resiliency Sabbatical Fund to address toxic stress, trauma and chronic illnesses for individuals and families.

Expanding Access to Black Physicians Through Direct Primary Care and Healthcare Subsidies

To address disparities in health outcomes and increase access to culturally responsive care, this recommendation proposes expanding access to Black primary care physicians through the Direct Primary Care (DPC) model in Asheville and Buncombe County. This approach prioritizes preventive care, patient trust, and long-term wellness by eliminating traditional insurance barriers and fostering strong provider-patient relationships.

Research by Dr. Owen Garrick, CEO and President of Bridge Clinical Research, underscores the critical role that physician race plays in health outcomes for Black patients. His study found that Black patients were significantly more likely to request and receive preventive services—such as cholesterol and diabetes screenings—when treated by Black doctors. The findings not only confirm that representation matters, but also highlight that Black physicians are more likely to serve in primary care, a field essential to addressing chronic disease and preventing medical crises in underserved communities.

Currently, two Black-owned practices in Asheville offer Direct Primary Care, a healthcare model that allows patients to pay a flat monthly fee for comprehensive care, bypassing insurance systems that often limit access and flexibility. However, many community members—particularly those who are uninsured or underinsured—cannot afford even modest out-of-pocket expenses for this care.

To address this, the plan recommends establishing a Health Care Subsidy Fund specifically designed to cover or offset the cost of Direct Primary Care for residents who lack adequate health insurance. This fund would allow Black residents to access consistent, culturally competent care from Black physicians without the financial barriers that often prevent preventive treatment and early intervention.

In exploring models for implementation, policymakers and community stakeholders can look to international systems like Canada's provincial healthcare structure for ideas on delivering subsidized or free care at the regional level. Lessons from such models can inform how Buncombe County might sustainably fund and expand equitable healthcare access locally.

By supporting Direct Primary Care through targeted subsidies and prioritizing access to Black physicians, this initiative offers a tangible step toward reducing health disparities, improving trust in the healthcare system, and ensuring that Black residents receive high-quality, culturally attuned preventive care.

5. Develop and fund an Asheville Black Mental Health Network to systematically address toxic stress and trauma.

Establishing the Asheville Black Mental Health Network (ABMHN) for Community-Based Wellness and Advocacy

To address the urgent mental health needs of Black residents in Asheville and Buncombe County, this recommendation proposes the creation of a community-led Asheville Black Mental Health Network (ABMHN). The network would serve as a centralized, grassroots initiative aimed at improving access, coordination, education, and advocacy related to Black mental health care across the local, state, and federal levels.

Local Action and Network Formation

At the local level, community members should collaborate to formally establish the ABMHN. The first steps include convening interested individuals, identifying and contacting Black therapists and mental health professionals in the area, and compiling a directory of culturally competent providers. This directory can be widely shared with community organizations, schools, places of worship, and local health institutions to increase access and visibility.

The network would also play a critical role in hosting mental health information sessions in community spaces such as churches, community centers, and schools—creating trusted, accessible environments for learning and healing. These sessions could cover topics ranging from stress and trauma to navigating mental health systems and understanding therapeutic options.

Additionally, ABMHN would collaborate with existing nonprofits already working in this space, such as A Therapist Like Me (ATLM). The network could help secure financial support for ATLM's voucher program or make formal recommendations for funding allocations from local reparations or community health funds, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to care.

State-Level Expansion and Collaboration

Once the ABMHN has established a stable organizational structure, it should seek to connect with similar groups and agencies across North Carolina. These partnerships could form a broader statewide network working toward the common goal of consistent, culturally competent mental health support for Black individuals and families. Through shared resources, policy alignment, and collective action, this larger coalition can help amplify impact and accelerate systemic change.

Federal-Level Advocacy and Training

On the state and federal level, the ABMHN should invite professionals with expertise in policy advocacy, government relations, and lobbying to train network members. These trainings would focus on how to write effective policy briefs, advocate for mental health funding, organize legislative outreach, and ensure that resources earmarked for Black mental health remain protected and prioritized.

This advocacy work is essential to institutionalizing long-term funding and ensuring equitable mental health infrastructure at every level of government.

Operational Considerations

- As the network evolves, the community must consider the structure and sustainability of ABMHN. Key questions include:
- Who will be involved in founding and managing the network?
- How often will members meet, and what governance model is most appropriate (e.g., council, board of directors)?
- Should the network operate as a nonprofit, for-profit, or community-based initiative?

A formal organizational structure will ensure long-term sustainability and help secure grants, contracts, and public-private partnerships. Whether housed within an existing entity or established as an independent organization, the ABMHN would serve as a vital hub for culturally affirming mental health care, education, and advocacy for Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County.

By grounding this work in community collaboration, resource sharing, and systems-level advocacy, the Asheville Black Mental Health Network has the potential to become a transformative force for mental wellness and equity.

6. Establish a Black Joy Fund to create multidimensional, joy filled experiences and spaces that cultivate a healthy community.

Restoring Community Spaces and Celebrating Black Joy Through Reparative Investment

This recommendation calls for sustained local, state, and federal actions to restore historically Black spaces, celebrate cultural resilience, and advance reparative justice through community-centered programming and policy change. Central to this vision is the need to fund multigenerational Black joy programming that fosters healing, cultural pride, and social well-being for Black residents in Asheville and Buncombe County.

Local Restoration and Investment

Locally, governments must commit to returning community assets that were unjustly taken from Black neighborhoods—most notably former Black schools—as culturally safe spaces for communal gathering, education, and wellness. A key example is Shiloh Elementary School, which should be rebuilt or restored using grant funding and maintained within the annual budgets of Buncombe County and the City of Asheville. These spaces would serve as anchors for community programming, offering a sense of belonging, intergenerational connection, and opportunity.

These efforts should build upon existing local initiatives that preserve and honor Black history, such as the African American Experience Project, which documents and shares the stories of Black communities in and around the Smoky Mountains. Similarly, the Buncombe County Remembrance Project, in partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative, seeks to memorialize victims of racial violence from 1877 to 1950. The African American Historic Markers Project, created by the City of Asheville in collaboration with historically Black neighborhoods and Buncombe County, further exemplifies the importance of reclaiming cultural narratives and public memory.

State-Level Policy Advocacy

At the state level, North Carolina must formally recognize the contributions of African Americans across its educational systems. This includes the integration of Black history and achievements into statewide curricula, teacher training, and public scholarship.

In a more transformative step, the state should grant African Americans access to 40 acres of land, using parcels of undeveloped or foreclosed properties, provided tax-free and without cost, as a modern-day reparation for historical land theft and systemic exclusion from property ownership. Such a policy would mark a concrete and symbolic return of wealth and opportunity.

Federal Commitment

At the federal level, the United States government must take responsibility for rectifying long-standing racial disparities by creating policies and directing dedicated funding to each state for reparations implementation. This should include the development of programs that explicitly address the intergenerational harms done to African Americans through slavery, segregation, redlining, and systemic discrimination.

Crucially, the federal government must also allocate funds for culturally responsive mental health services, recognizing the deep emotional and psychological trauma inflicted upon Black communities over centuries of injustice. These services must be accessible, community-based, and rooted in the values of cultural affirmation and collective healing.

Together, these local, state, and federal actions represent a powerful opportunity to restore what has been lost, to honor what has endured, and to invest in what can thrive. By funding Black joy, reclaiming physical and cultural space, and embedding reparative policies into law, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, and the nation can begin to truly fulfill the promise of justice and equity for Black Americans.

7. Hold institutions accountable to address harms and create policies that are restorative.

Advancing Anti-Discrimination and Harm Reduction Practices in Health and Community Services

This recommendation advocates for the development and implementation of strong local and state measures to prevent ongoing harm and discrimination—particularly in healthcare and public service systems—and to promote trust, accountability, and equity for historically marginalized communities, especially Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County.

Local Action and Policy Development

Locally, there is a critical need to establish formal policies and practices that train staff, administrators, and service providers on how to prevent and reduce harm. These policies should include an annual review process, with built-in accountability measures and clearly defined consequences for continued harm or non-compliance. This approach prioritizes prevention, addresses systemic inequities, and establishes a culture of transparency and responsibility across institutions.

Partnerships should be formed with organizations such as the WNC Health Policy Initiative to elevate this work as a regional priority. These collaborations will help inform policy, align goals, and support the creation of inclusive, equitable environments.

As part of this work, it is important to study historical efforts made by the State of North Carolina to acknowledge and repair harm. One significant example is the state's decision to provide reparations to victims of its eugenics program beginning in 2013—becoming one of the first states to compensate individuals harmed by state-sanctioned injustice. Understanding how such efforts were implemented can serve as a guide for developing new frameworks for harm cessation and accountability.

Community-led efforts must also be supported in advocating for policy improvements at Mission Health and other health institutions, particularly through collaboration with HCA Healthcare. These demands should include specific “cease harm” policies aimed at reducing disparities and ensuring that healthcare delivery is safe, just, and culturally competent. Simultaneously, the City of Asheville’s legal department should monitor changes in Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging (EDIJB) legislation to ensure local practices are aligned with evolving legal standards and anti-discrimination laws.

To rebuild trust in healthcare systems and public services, it is essential to support and elevate the work of medical practitioners and interns of color, particularly in designated community HUBs such as local schools, clinics, and neighborhood centers. These trusted spaces can serve as access points for care, information, and connection—bringing culturally affirming health services directly into communities most impacted by systemic harm.

State-Level Alignment

At the state level, a thorough review of existing anti-discrimination and harm-prevention policies must be conducted. This includes identifying what protections and enforcement mechanisms are currently in place and assessing how effectively they are implemented. State policies must be linked to clear, actionable steps with defined outcomes and accountability systems to ensure that efforts to prevent harm are not merely symbolic but result in measurable change.

Together, these actions will help establish a foundation for systemic accountability, promote healing, and build a more equitable future for all residents—particularly those who have endured generations of harm and exclusion in healthcare and public institutions.

8. Create an environmental justice plan to correct past and ongoing environmental injustices and set standards to prevent the continuation of environmental racism.

Advancing Energy Justice and Environmental Equity in Asheville and Buncombe County

This recommendation calls for a firm commitment to advancing energy justice by ensuring equitable access to energy-efficient housing, sustainable transportation, and clean energy infrastructure for all residents—particularly Black and historically marginalized communities. The aim is to correct past and ongoing environmental harms through the strategic use of local, state, and federal resources, while advocating for policies that center the health and well-being of impacted communities.

To achieve this, it is essential to leverage the expertise and authority of various governmental entities tasked with environmental oversight. At the federal level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plays a key role in evaluating public health risks, conducting environmental research, and developing regulations that protect air, water, and land. At the state level, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) is responsible for enforcing environmental regulations and preserving the state’s natural resources.

Locally, Asheville and Buncombe County must go beyond compliance and actively promote environmental justice. This includes educating community members about environmental racism, its historical roots, and its current impacts on low-income and Black communities—such as disproportionate exposure to pollution, lack of access to green spaces, and inadequate infrastructure.

Governments at the city, county, and state levels must be held accountable to ensure that all communities are environmentally safe, free from contamination, and equitably provided with parks, trees, and other green spaces. A clear expectation must be set that these governments not only uphold environmental protections but also proactively work to remediate environmental injustice.

To support these goals, Asheville and Buncombe County should actively pursue Environmental Justice funding opportunities and secure matching funds from public and private sources. These funds can be used to develop community-based projects, improve infrastructure in historically neglected neighborhoods, and ensure that residents have a voice in shaping environmental policies that impact their lives.

By prioritizing education, policy reform, accountability, and funding, this recommendation lays the groundwork for a more sustainable, equitable, and healthy future for all residents—especially those who have borne the brunt of environmental neglect and injustice.

9. Create Black Healing and Birthing Centers to reduce and remedy harms against Black birthing people and infants.

Expanding Doula Access to Improve Black Maternal Health in Buncombe County

This recommendation focuses on increasing access to community-based doulas in Buncombe County as a strategy to improve maternal and infant health outcomes, particularly among African American families. The initiative recognizes the importance of culturally competent, community-rooted care in addressing the national Black maternal health crisis and seeks to align local, state, and federal efforts toward that goal.

Local Efforts

Buncombe County should prioritize increasing the number of African American doulas, with a strategic goal of maintaining at least three certified doulas in each quadrant of the county—North, South, East, and West. This geographic distribution will help ensure equitable access to doula support for birthing people across all communities, particularly in areas where medical care is harder to access or trust in the healthcare system may be lower due to historical disparities.

Local funding should be sought through organizations such as the Dogwood Health Trust, and partnerships with the Buncombe County Health Department should be leveraged to both research and secure additional funding opportunities. These collaborations will support the recruitment, training, certification, and long-term employment of doulas.

An important step in this plan is the identification and designation of public sites throughout Buncombe County where doulas can be stationed or embedded. These locations—such as community centers, clinics, or public health facilities—would serve as accessible hubs for providing prenatal, birthing, and postpartum support services.

State-Level Partnerships

At the state level, the initiative should seek funding through the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). Additionally, forming strategic partnerships with other doula organizations across the state could increase the reach and impact of this work. A statewide network of doulas would allow for shared resources, best practices, and improved maternal outcomes across North Carolina, including in the western region.

Federal Alignment

On the federal level, the initiative should align with national efforts to combat maternal mortality and morbidity, especially within Black communities. For example, in April 2022, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), announced \$4.5 million in funding to hire, train, certify, and compensate community-based doulas in areas with high rates of adverse maternal and infant health outcomes. This funding reflects the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to addressing the Black maternal health crisis and provides a tangible opportunity for Buncombe County to secure federal support for its local doula expansion efforts.

By integrating local resources, state partnerships, and federal funding opportunities, Buncombe County can build a sustainable and community-driven doula program. This initiative will not only enhance maternal care but also promote birth equity, reduce health disparities, and strengthen trust in the healthcare system for Black families across the region.



Housing IFA Recommendations

The Housing IFA focused on confronting both historical and ongoing injustices in housing policies and practices that have harmed Black residents. The group advocated for affordable housing, worked to combat gentrification, and promoted nondiscriminatory practices within the real estate market. The goal was to ensure that all Black residents have access to safe, stable, and secure housing as a foundation for long-term community prosperity.

1. Plan and develop complete communities on reparations land by creating a Black Economic Development Center, Neighborhood Hubs and Business Corridors.

Return of Moratorium Land and Equitable Development for the Black Community

There is land currently held in moratorium by the City of Asheville, much of which includes parcels originally taken from Black residents during Urban Renewal. This recommendation calls for the immediate return of that land to the Black community, with the amount of acreage restored equaling or exceeding the acreage taken during Urban Renewal. The return of this land must prioritize Black ownership, Black-led development, Black-controlled businesses, and Black-centered decision-making in its future use and stewardship.

Purpose and Duration

The return and repurposing of this land must not be symbolic—it must lead to tangible, generational outcomes that repair the historic economic and social harm caused by government action. The duration of access and control over these lands should be directly tied to the lifespan of similar city and county initiatives—such as those related to land acquisition and affordable housing grants. In other words, as long as the City of Asheville and Buncombe County continue to administer programs that promote land and housing development, the Black community must have an equal and permanent stake in those opportunities.

Program Alignment

This recommendation aligns with existing programs already managed by the City and County. For example, the Land Use Incentive Grant (LUIG) Program, launched in 2011 by the City of Asheville, provides developers with incentives to include affordable housing in new projects. These incentives include property tax abatements and fee rebates. This program is designed to encourage inclusive development and should explicitly include Black developers and community-led projects as prioritized participants.

LUIG Program Info/LUIG Policy Document

The Affordable Housing Services Program, administered by Buncombe County, provides funding to support the development of affordable housing through grants and technical assistance. The program should allocate a proportion of funding specifically for Black-led housing initiatives and development on returned land.

Affordable Housing Services Program – Buncombe County

Geographic Scope

This recommendation applies to land located within both the City of Asheville and Buncombe County. The return of land and the allocation of development resources must reflect the geographic distribution of the harm caused by Urban Renewal and ensure that historically Black neighborhoods are the primary beneficiaries of this restorative action.

The return of land held in moratorium is a foundational act of reparative justice. It offers a path toward economic restoration, cultural empowerment, and community self-determination. Ensuring that Black residents, Black developers, and Black-led institutions are at the center of this process is not only a matter of equity but of moral and historical responsibility.

2. Educate and set in motion a massive campaign to get every resident/interested party of public housing (In or out of public housing) into homeownership utilizing their Housing choice vouchers to pay their mortgages in homes they own.

Black Homeownership Financial Literacy and Action Campaign

This recommendation proposes the launch of a large-scale, community-driven Black Homeownership Financial Literacy and Action Campaign designed to transform renters—particularly public housing residents and other low-income Black individuals—into homeowners. The campaign will combine education, financial empowerment, and reparative investment to create long-term housing stability, wealth-building, and community ownership for Black residents in Asheville and Buncombe County.

Homeownership Through Housing Choice

A key pillar of this campaign is to educate and mobilize residents of public housing—both current and former—on how to use their Housing Choice Vouchers toward homeownership. Under this plan, eligible participants would use their vouchers to pay a mortgage on a home they own, rather than continuing as renters. Alternatively, participants may also use their vouchers to rent from Black homeowners or Black developers, ensuring that housing assistance dollars remain within the Black community and support intergenerational wealth.

This campaign will incorporate collaboration across several reparations focus areas, including Education (EDU), Health & Wellness (H&W), Criminal Justice (CJ), and Economic Development (ECON DEV).

Financial Literacy and Self-Sufficiency

Participants will be enrolled in robust financial literacy training and supported in joining the Housing Authority's Self-Sufficiency Program, which prepares individuals for financial independence and homeownership. To deepen the impact of this work, a reparations financial match should be provided to those who complete the program and purchase a home. An additional financial match or grant should be awarded to participants who choose to purchase a home from Black homeowners, Black-led developers, or within planned Black communities—further strengthening economic circulation within the community.

Supporting Seniors and Aging in Place

The campaign must also address the specific housing needs of Black seniors, ensuring access to affordable, safe, and age-friendly housing that allows older adults to age in place with dignity. This includes grants or forgivable loans for essential home repairs, especially for homes that have fallen into disrepair due to historical underinvestment or intergenerational poverty. Cross-sector collaboration with Education, Health & Wellness, and Criminal Justice partners will ensure that these solutions are comprehensive and holistic.

Expanding Access to Capital

Recognizing the barriers Black residents face when seeking traditional financing, the campaign will establish partnerships with community-based financial institutions such as Self-Help Credit Union, the State Employees' Credit Union, and local credit unions. These institutions will provide affordable, accessible loan products for participants in the campaign, creating alternatives to predatory lending and discriminatory banking practices.

- Self-Help Credit Union (Asheville branch): <https://www.self-help.org/locations/asheville-branch>
- State Employees' Credit Union (membership required)
- Other regional credit unions committed to financial equity

Reparations Matching and Affordability

A reparations-based funding mechanism will be developed to offer down payment assistance and closing cost support, particularly for individuals earning below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). These reparative financial tools will go beyond what is currently offered through traditional Housing Authority channels, acknowledging the disproportionate housing harm endured by Black residents and offering material support for reversing those outcomes.

This campaign represents a bold, intersectional approach to reparative housing justice. By educating residents, aligning public resources, investing in community ownership, and expanding access to ethical financing, Asheville and Buncombe County can create a new pathway to Black homeownership, wealth-building, and community stability—rooted in justice, equity, and long-overdue restitution.

3. Create a land acquisition program for future development beyond urban renewal.

Reparations Land Acquisition Program to Redress the Harm of Urban Renewal, Redlining, and Gentrification

This recommendation calls for the establishment of a dedicated Land Acquisition Program as part of the Community Reparations process in Asheville and Buncombe County. In addition to reclaiming land taken during Urban Renewal and placing it into a reparations land trust or designated land pool, the city and county must create a formal, sustained program specifically set aside for reparations-focused land acquisition. This program would serve as a foundation for community-driven development, economic restoration, and long-term housing and land stability for Black residents.

Harm Addressed

The Land Acquisition Program directly addresses the longstanding harms caused by racist land use policies, discriminatory housing practices, and government-sanctioned disinvestment that devastated Black communities in Asheville and Buncombe County. These include:

Urban Renewal, which led to the forced displacement of Black residents, the destruction of Black-owned businesses, homes, and schools, and the loss of intergenerational wealth through land dispossession. Properties were often condemned, labeled “blighted,” or deemed “beyond repair,” stripping Black families of ownership under false pretenses and offering no viable pathways for return or restitution. Labor from those same communities was frequently used to “clean up” the very areas they were forced to vacate.

Redlining, where financial institutions systematically refused to lend to Black residents or invest in neighborhoods deemed undesirable—most often Black and low-income communities. These designations made it nearly impossible for Black families to secure home loans or access capital for necessary home repairs, leading to intentional decay, condemnation, and removal of properties that were labeled as “neglected.” Many property owners were unfairly branded as “slumlords,” despite lacking access to financing or support.

Gentrification, which followed the era of disinvestment, further disenfranchised Black residents by pricing them out of neighborhoods they had historically occupied. Without the resources to buy back into these areas, Black residents were again excluded from homeownership, neighborhood revitalization efforts, and the economic development of the communities they helped build. This includes the loss of vital economic and cultural spaces like “The Block,” a historically Black business and cultural district.

Educational Displacement, as a ripple effect of all these policies, schools serving Black students were closed, underfunded, or destabilized, leading to generational impacts on educational equity and community cohesion.

Purpose and Impact

The Reparations Land Acquisition Program will directly confront and repair the economic and cultural harms outlined above by:

- Returning land to the Black community in an amount equivalent to what was taken during Urban Renewal.
- Securing additional land for Black-led development, including affordable housing, Black-owned businesses, cultural institutions, and schools.
- Ensuring land is controlled and developed by Black residents, Black developers, and Black-led organizations, restoring the right to self-determination in community planning and neighborhood revitalization.
- Providing financial and technical assistance for redevelopment, including access to credit, down payment support, and home repair funds.

This program must be designed in consultation with impacted community members and grounded in accountability, equity, and restitution. By addressing past land theft and modern barriers to land access, Asheville and Buncombe County can take meaningful action toward repairing historical harms and laying the groundwork for equitable Black land ownership and community sovereignty.

4. Create a new dollar lot program where parcels of reparations land are set aside for a bid process for aspiring black homeowners.

Reparations-Based Dollar Lot Program for Black Land and Homeownership Access

This recommendation proposes the reestablishment of a Dollar Lot Program specifically tied to land acquired through the Reparations Land Acquisition Program. This program would allow eligible Black residents to purchase designated lots for a nominal fee—typically one dollar—with the intent to support homeownership, business development, and intergenerational wealth building in historically Black neighborhoods across Asheville and Buncombe County.

Unlike past versions of this program, this initiative would be exclusively reserved for reparations purposes, using land acquired or returned as part of reparative efforts to redress historical and ongoing harms. It offers a direct, community-centered pathway to restore access to land and ownership opportunities that were systematically stripped from Black residents due to discriminatory policies and practices.

Harm Addressed

The Dollar Lot Program is designed to respond to several interconnected harms:

- Urban Renewal: The program directly addresses the mass displacement and destruction of Black-owned homes, businesses, and schools caused by urban renewal initiatives. These government-led actions resulted in the loss of land and generational wealth, without meaningful compensation or opportunities to return and rebuild.
- Redlining: Historically, Black residents were denied access to loans and capital due to redlining practices that marked Black neighborhoods as "blighted" and unworthy of investment. Homeowners could not obtain funds to repair their properties, and many were condemned or labeled as "neglected," further devaluing Black-owned assets. The Dollar Lot Program offers a corrective

measure by providing land for ownership and investment with equitable terms and intentional support.

- Gentrification: The displacement caused by gentrification has made it nearly impossible for many Black families to buy back into neighborhoods they once called home. As property values and costs rise, so do barriers to entry. This program ensures that land once unjustly taken or made inaccessible is now prioritized for Black ownership and Black-led development, making reinvestment into historically Black areas both possible and sustainable.

Loss of Black Business Hubs: The program also acknowledges the economic displacement of vibrant Black business districts, such as “The Block”, which were targeted and dismantled through urban renewal and subsequent gentrification. By making land accessible at minimal cost, the program can support the reestablishment of Black commercial and cultural spaces.

Program Impact

The Dollar Lot Program would:

- Prioritize reparations-eligible Black residents and descendants of those impacted by urban renewal, redlining, and displacement.
- Allocate newly acquired or returned lots through a community-driven selection and planning process.
- Include development guidelines that promote homeownership, cooperative housing, community-owned businesses, and culturally significant projects.
- Provide wraparound support, including technical assistance, access to capital, and home repair or construction grants to ensure successful use of the land.
- Partner with Black developers, credit unions, and nonprofit housing organizations to facilitate land transfer, planning, and sustainable development.
- By reviving and reimagining the Dollar Lot Program through a reparative lens, Asheville and Buncombe County have the opportunity to return land, restore ownership, and rebuild trust in Black communities—correcting a legacy of harm through tangible, community-led solutions.

5. Acquire the South Charlotte Street Corridor City-owned property.

Charlotte Street Acquisition: Mixed-Use, Mixed-Income Development for Reparative Justice

This recommendation proposes the acquisition and development of land along Charlotte Street as a mixed-use, mixed-income project designed to address the historical and systemic harms inflicted upon Black residents of Asheville and Buncombe County. This site would serve as a key location for reparations-based development, prioritizing Black ownership, affordable housing, and commercial opportunities for Black entrepreneurs.

The vision for this development includes a combination of residential units—both market-rate and deeply affordable—alongside retail, cultural, and community spaces designed to meet the needs of displaced and economically marginalized Black residents. The goal is to create a vibrant, inclusive, and economically sustainable environment that returns access, ownership, and opportunity to communities who have been historically excluded from development processes.

Harm Addressed

The Charlotte Street acquisition project directly responds to multiple forms of harm caused by discriminatory housing and land use policies:

Urban Renewal: The displacement of Black families, closure of Black-owned businesses, and the erasure of historically Black neighborhoods as a result of mid-20th century urban renewal efforts continue to have ripple effects today. Many Black residents were forcibly removed from properties without fair compensation or pathways to return. This development seeks to reclaim and restore opportunities that were lost.

Redlining: For decades, banks and federal programs refused to invest in so-called "blighted" Black neighborhoods. Homeowners were unable to access loans for home improvement or purchase, causing property deterioration and eventual condemnation. This development reverses that narrative by intentionally investing in land with Black leadership, control, and benefit at its core.

Gentrification: Modern gentrification has led to rising housing costs, property taxes, and the loss of cultural identity in historically Black communities. As neighborhoods have been revitalized, Black residents have been systematically priced out. The Charlotte Street acquisition ensures that Black residents are not only included in revitalization efforts, but lead them.

Zoning Inequities: Historically, zoning laws have been used to segregate communities and block the development of affordable housing or commercial spaces in areas deemed "exclusive." By acquiring land for a mixed-use, mixed-income purpose, this project challenges exclusionary zoning and offers a model for inclusive and equitable development.

Loss of "The Block" and Black Business Districts: The decline of Asheville's historic Black business corridor, particularly "The Block," represents the broader economic marginalization of Black entrepreneurs. This development will include commercial space specifically reserved for Black-owned businesses, supporting economic revitalization through reparative action.

Purpose and Impact

The Charlotte Street acquisition project represents a reparative land use model that:

- Returns ownership, investment, and development opportunities to the Black community.
- Prioritizes Black families, renters, and first-time homebuyers in access to affordable housing.
- Reserves commercial space for Black-owned businesses and community-serving organizations.
- Creates a visible, lasting symbol of economic justice and cultural restoration.
- Sets a precedent for equitable development in Asheville that is community-driven and reparations-centered.

This project not only reclaims land but reclaims dignity, visibility, and economic self-determination for Black residents who were systemically excluded from growth. It is a tangible step toward reversing harm and creating a future rooted in justice, inclusion, and equity.

Extension and Final Phase of the Commission's Work



TIFFANY DE'BELLOTT
CRC Member

As the CRC approached its original end date of June 30, 2024, the City of Asheville agreed to continue full support for the Commission and its community engagement efforts during a six-month extension. Buncombe County agreed to extend support through the Equity and Human Rights Office while concluding staff support from departments such as CAPE, Data, Special Collections, and subject matter experts at the end of June 2024.

The six-month extension was granted but delayed slightly due to the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene. With a renewed sense of urgency in the storm's aftermath, the Commission held a productive retreat on March 22, 2025, to determine its final steps.

During the retreat, CRC members reviewed the goals included in their extension request and reached consensus on two final actions:

1. Vote to create a 501(c)(3) organization to sustain reparations work after the conclusion of the formal Commission.
2. Complete final community engagement to gather additional feedback on what may need to be added to existing recommendations to support the long-term recovery and well-being of the Black community.

Additionally, CRC members committed to continuing their involvement in local governance by joining City and County boards and commissions. This will allow them to remain engaged in policy discussions and maintain an active role in the work beyond the formal CRC process.



Community members at the
2023 Reparations Summit

CRC FORMATION & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Asheville–Buncombe County 2025 Community Reparations Commission Report



TEQuity, LLC, a minority, woman-owned management consulting firm, served as the lead project management partner for the Commission. TEQuity specializes in equity advancement through project management, strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, community engagement, and economic development. TEQuity submitted its TEQ Reparations Proposal on August 5, 2021, outlining a structured plan to manage Asheville's reparations project with the goal of addressing historical inequities and building generational wealth for Black residents.

To provide comprehensive research and policy analysis, TEQuity partnered with RTI International, an independent research institute that contributed multidisciplinary research support, economic impact analysis, and policy evaluation.

The Community Reparations Commission (CRC) formation and project management process was designed to ensure strong operational support, community-centered leadership, and professional expertise throughout the reparations work.

Commissioner Selection and Onboarding

TEQuity developed the selection framework for CRC commissioners in close collaboration with City and County leaders to ensure broad community representation. The Commission was composed of 25 members: 15 were nominated by historically impacted neighborhoods, and 10 were appointed by the Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Commission to represent the five Impact Focus Areas.

Following appointment, TEQuity led the onboarding process through a day-long, retreat-style session. Commission members and alternates received a comprehensive onboarding guide that covered:

- The charge, scope, and expectations of the Commission
- Membership composition and structure
- Stipend policies
- Commitment, conduct, and ethical behavior guidelines
- Residency requirements
- Selection process for Chair and Vice Chair
- Roles and responsibilities for Commission members

Residency Requirement

To be appointed and maintain a seat on the Community Reparations Commission, members were required to have their primary residence within the City of Asheville or Buncombe County. If a member relocated outside of Buncombe County, they were required to notify the Chair of the Commission and/or the City of Asheville.

Nomination and Selection Process

The appointment process involved neighborhood nominations, council reviews, interviews, and final selections, conducted between October 18, 2021, and January 2022. All Commission seats were filled by March 2022.

Impact Focus Area Appointments

Twelve (12) members were selected based on expertise in one of the critical Impact Focus Areas (IFA) identified by the City Council's resolution including Criminal Justice, Economic Development, Education, Health and Wellness, and Housing.

- Six (6) were appointed by Asheville City Council
- Six (6) were appointed by Buncombe County Commissioners

Neighborhood Appointments

Fifteen (15) members were nominated by historically impacted neighborhoods, including historically Black neighborhoods affected by Urban Renewal, gentrification, and public housing policies.

Selection of Commission Chair and Vice Chair

At the Commission's initial meeting, nominations were solicited for Chair and Vice Chair through the following process:

- Any member could nominate another member or themselves.
- Nominees verbally accepted the nomination.
- More than one nomination was allowed.
- A public vote was conducted, with each member casting one vote (via hand-raise or polling).
- The candidate receiving the most votes was elected Chair.
- The candidate receiving the second-highest number of votes was elected Vice Chair.

Roles and Responsibilities

Commission Members

- Come prepared and review materials prior to meetings.
- Attend meetings with an open mind and listen respectfully to fellow members.
- Serve on at least one Impact Focus Area (IFA) workgroup.
- Vote on all matters unless formally recused due to a conflict of interest.

Chair

- Preside over all meetings and ensure the work of the Commission progresses.
- Collaborate with facilitators to maintain productive, focused discussions and minimize irrelevant or repetitive dialogue.
- Ensure that all viewpoints are heard and considered in a fair and impartial manner.
- Co-present recommendations and reports to Asheville City Council and Buncombe County Board of Commissioners.
- Perform additional duties as necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of the office.

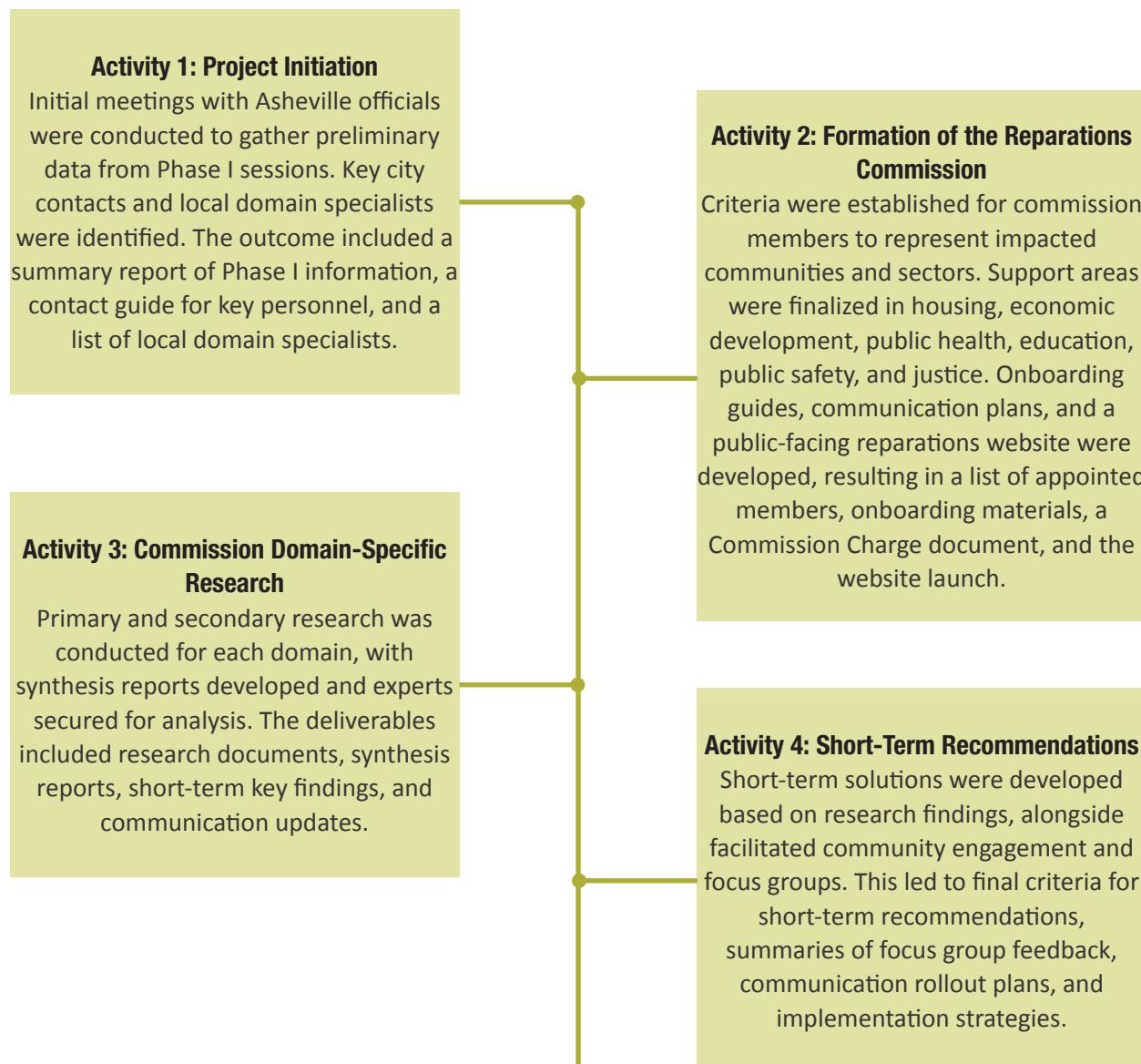
Vice Chair

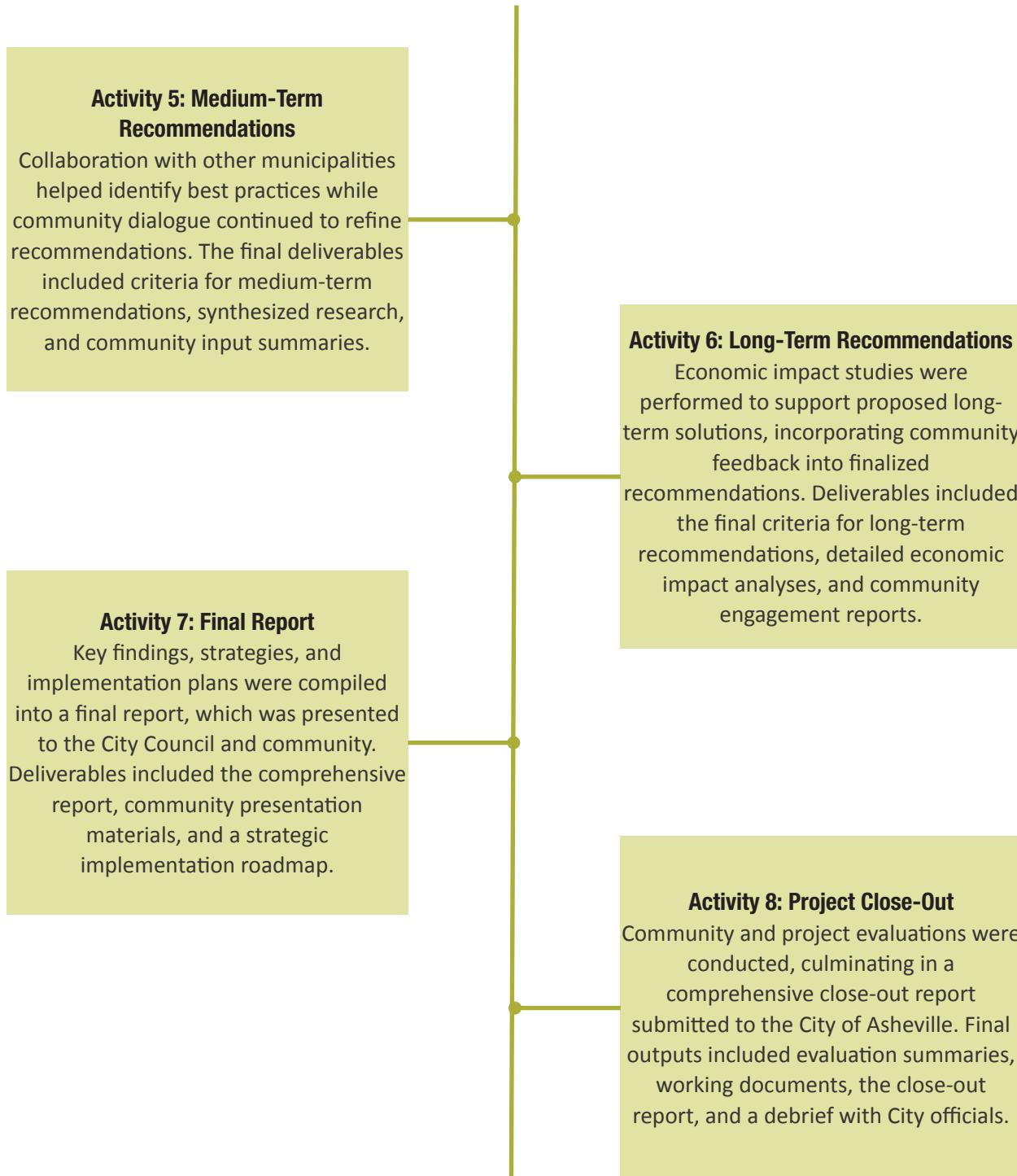
- Serve as Chair in the Chair's absence.
- Collaborate with the Chair and facilitators to develop meeting agendas and set expectations for meetings.

Alternates

- Required to attend all meetings but do not participate in deliberations or voting.
- May be appointed to fill a vacancy if a Commission member is unable to fulfill their duties.
- In the event of a vacancy, alternates are selected based on the number of votes their initial application received from City Council, County Commissioners, or neighborhood nominating bodies.

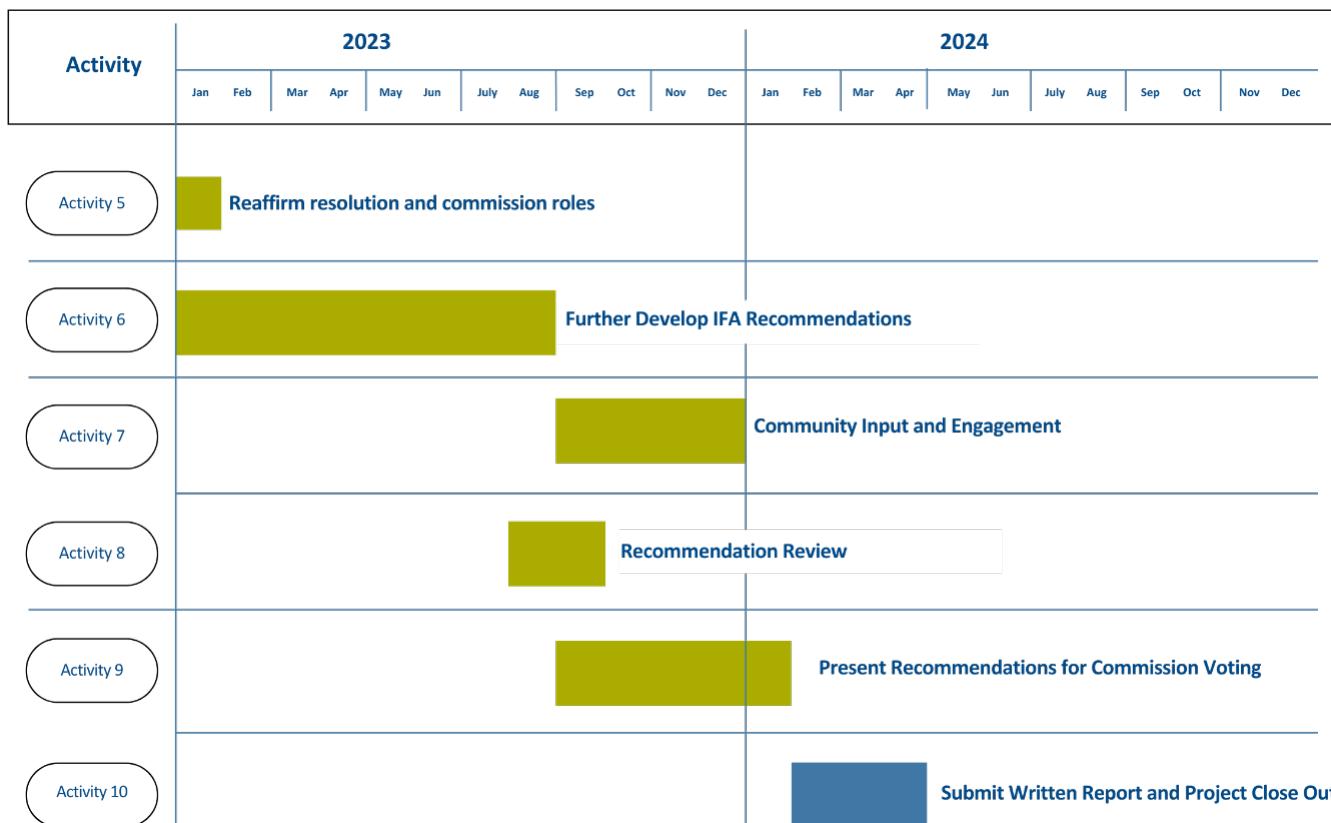
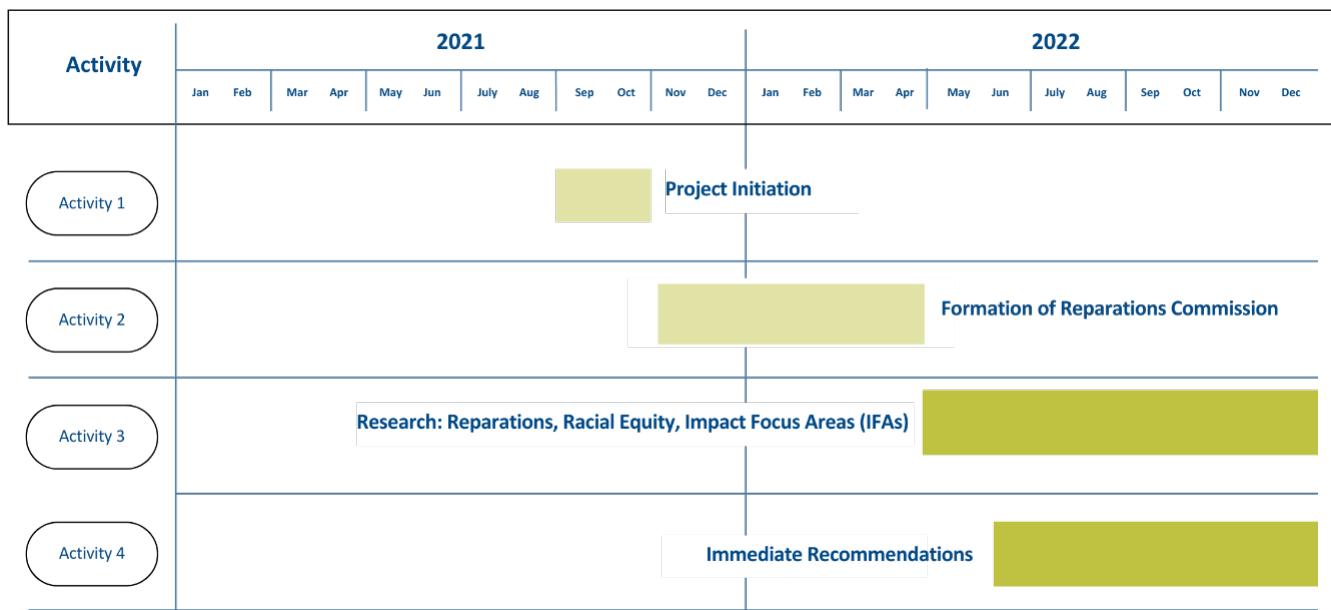
TEQuity developed the following eight key activities designed to progress Asheville's reparative justice goals effectively and transparently.





Project Timeline

The initial project timeline was developed by TEQuity, LLC and slated to span 20 months, from September 1, 2021, to April 28, 2023. This timeline outlined detailed implementation phases and strategically scheduled key activities to align with community needs and Asheville's broader equity goals. As the project evolved, the timeline required adjustments to accommodate real-time learning, emergent priorities, and community engagement feedback. Later in the process, the project timeline was revisited and updated by Vernisha Crawford, CEO of Trauma Informed Care.



Ongoing Support and Operational Structure

The Community Reparations Project Team, led by TEQuity, provided ongoing operational and technical support to the Commission throughout its work. The support structure included the project manager, Impact Focus Area (IFA) facilitators, and community-based partnerships. The team provided critical services, including:

- Establishing a project management structure to support the Commission in producing deliverables
- Building a research infrastructure to inform policy development
- Facilitating full Commission meetings and IFA workgroups
- Coordinating with community-based organizations to strengthen engagement
- Sharing information with the public
- Institutionalizing knowledge to support long-term implementation

Role of the Facilitator

The Commission was supported by a project team consisting of a project manager and the impact focus area (IFA) facilitators. The facilitator played a critical role in supporting the work of the Community Reparations Commission by guiding discussions and ensuring productive, focused meetings throughout the Commission's tenure.

The primary responsibilities of the facilitator included:

- Leading discussions during Commission meetings by asking guiding questions to advance conversation and promote meaningful dialogue.
- Keeping the Commission on task and maintaining focus on agenda topics during all sessions.
- Supporting the Commission in reaching consensus while ensuring that all perspectives and opinions of members were heard, respected, and preserved.
- Collaborating with Commission members to determine the frequency and duration of meetings, which were recommended by the facilitator and approved by the Commission.

Throughout the 24-month project period, the facilitator led all full Commission meetings as well as Impact Focus Area (IFA) workgroup sessions. In these sessions, IFA facilitators played an essential role in guiding deliberations within each focus area, helping the workgroups explore complex topics, analyze data, and formulate informed policy recommendations.

- Project Lead: Debra Clark Jones (TEQuity President)
- Research and Economic Analysis: RTI International
- Domain Facilitation: TEQuity and local Asheville specialists
- Deputy Project Manager and Criminal Justice Impact Focus Area Facilitator: Sala Menaya-Merritt
- Economic Development Impact Focus Area Facilitator: Tara Brown
- Health and Wellness Impact Focus Area Facilitator: Dionne Greenlee-Jones and Jewana Grier-McEachin
- Housing Impact Focus Area Facilitator: Tyshaun Johnson and Sala Menaya
- Education Impact Focus Area Facilitator: Amieris Lavender

The City contracted with Stella Stellar Network to provide on-site childcare services for all in-person Commission meetings. These services were available to Commission members, facilitators, and participants who required childcare to fully participate in the Commission's work.

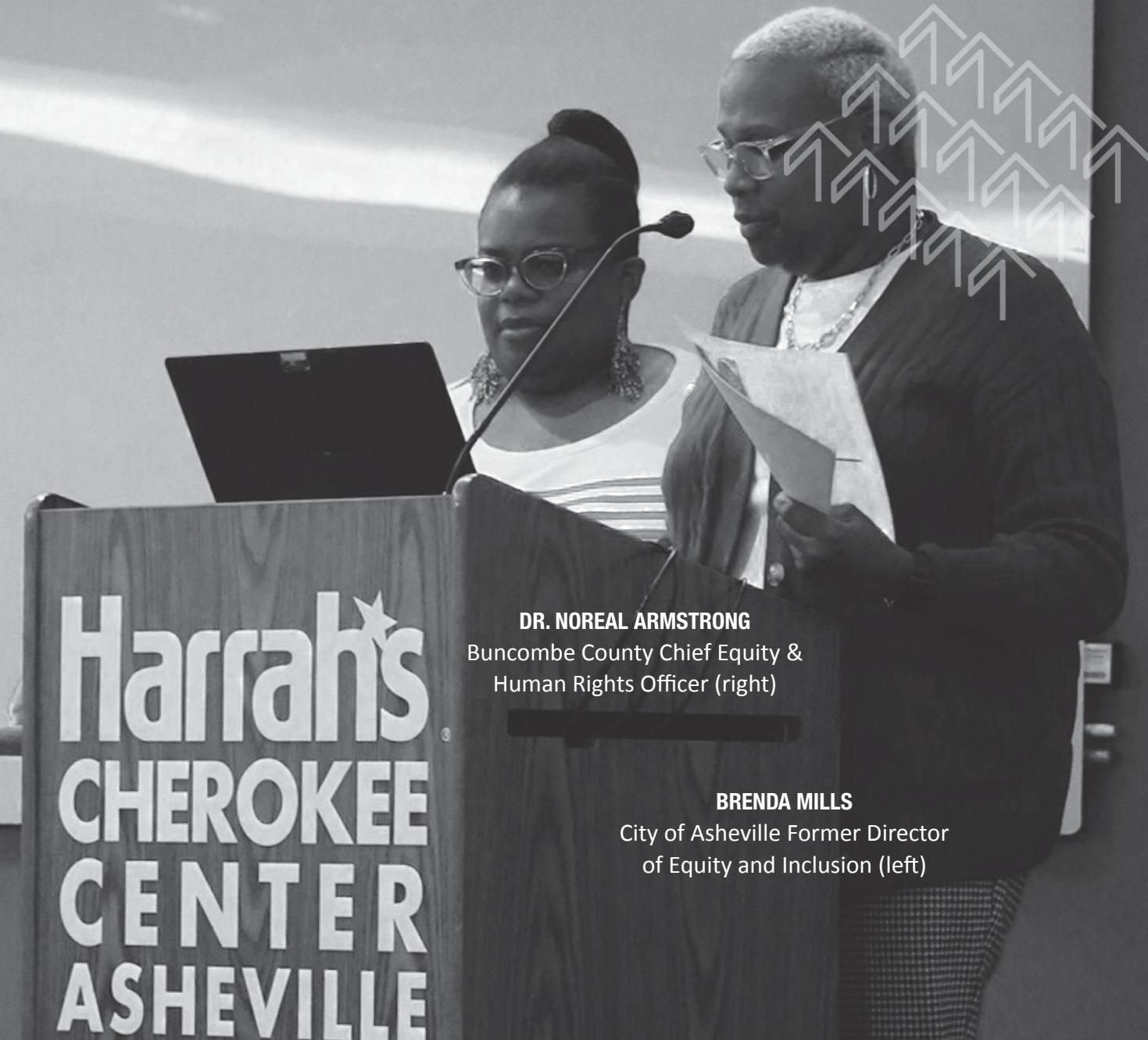
To accommodate Commission members attending meetings directly from work and other commitments, the City partnered with several local food establishments to provide meals during in-person Commission meetings. This ensured that members were supported and able to fully engage in Commission discussions without additional burden.

In 2023, the Community Reparations Commission experienced a transition in project management leadership. Debra Clark-Jones of TEQuity, LLC stepped down from her role as Project Manager. Christine Edwards of Civility Localized, LLC was subsequently selected to serve as the new Project Manager.

Under Ms. Edwards' leadership, Civility Localized and her team developed a structured process for recommendation development to support the Commission's continued work. The team also provided an updated overview of roles and responsibilities to guide the Commission's work under this new phase of leadership. This framework helped ensure clarity, accountability, and consistency as the Commission moved into the final stages of developing actionable policy recommendations.

Later in 2023, a second leadership transition occurred with the introduction of Vernisha Crawford of Trauma Informed Care, LLC as the new Facilitator and Project Manager. With the Commission having worked diligently for more than two years, Ms. Crawford acknowledged and addressed emerging symptoms of fatigue and frustration among members. To help re-energize the group and honor the work accomplished, she presented a progress timeline to the Commission, highlighting their collective impact and achievements to date.

Together, these transitions in project management and facilitation provided renewed structure, motivation, and support to ensure the Commission remained focused and effective as it entered the final phase of recommendation development.



Harrah's CHEROKEE CENTER ASHEVILLE

DR. NOREAL ARMSTRONG
Buncombe County Chief Equity &
Human Rights Officer (right)

BRENDA MILLS
City of Asheville Former Director
of Equity and Inclusion (left)

INTERNAL CITY- COUNTY STAFF SUPPORT & OPERATIONS

The formation and operation of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) was made possible through extensive collaboration between the City of Asheville and Buncombe County governments. Throughout the Commission's tenure, both entities provided ongoing administrative, technical, communication, legal, data, and public engagement support to ensure the Commission could carry out its work effectively.

City of Asheville Equity Leadership

The Community Reparations Commission, a City-appointed body, underwent several important leadership transitions throughout its tenure. At the outset, Ms. Brenda Mills served as the lead coordinator, offering critical guidance and structure to the Commission's operations until her retirement in January 2024.

Following her retirement, Ms. Sala Menaya Merritt was appointed as the City's new Director of Equity and Inclusion and assumed the role of project lead for the reparations initiative. Ms. Merritt had already been deeply involved in the process, having served as Deputy Project Manager earlier in the initiative and as the original facilitator for the Criminal Justice Impact Focus Area (IFA). In addition, she later stepped in to lead the Housing IFA after the resignation of its initial facilitator. Her broad involvement and steady leadership provided both continuity and strategic oversight during a pivotal phase of the CRC's work. Under her leadership, City responsibilities included:

- Working directly with the facilitator on presentations for meetings.
- Assisted with the Community Jamboree.
- Met regularly with the Chair and Vice-Chair to discuss agenda items and upcoming meetings.
- Created and posted Commission meeting agendas.
- Ensured meetings were live-streamed for public access.
- Posted IFA meeting schedules for public notice.
- Prepared and distributed information packets documenting CRC work and progress.



SALA MENAYA MERRITT

City of Asheville Director of Equity and Inclusion

Buncombe County Equity Leadership

Dr. Noreal Armstrong, Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer for Buncombe County, served as the County's project lead. She participated in bi-monthly Health and Wellness Impact Focus Area meetings, organized and analyzed data to help formulate recommendations, and assisted with planning both the CRC retreat and the Reparations Summit. Dr. Armstrong also managed the Cease the Harm audit process, provided regular updates to County subject matter experts, delivered quarterly reports to the Board of County Commissioners, and engaged with community groups to share progress on the work of the Community Reparations Commission.

General Staff Support

City and County staff liaisons were assigned to assist the Commission across multiple functions. These staff members held significant responsibilities related to the Commission's work but were not supervised or directed by the Commission itself.

Core responsibilities included:

- Serving as resources on City and County policies, procedures, and information
- Ensuring administrative requirements were met
- Notifying the Clerk's Office and the public of Commission meetings
- Notifying Commission members of upcoming meetings and developments
- Posting meeting materials to the project webpage
- Providing technical expertise as appropriate
- Coordinating virtual meeting production

City of Asheville IFA Subject Matter Experts (Data Liaisons)

- Mike Lamb (Criminal Justice)
- Rachel Taylor (Economic Development)
- Sasha Vrtunski (Housing)

Buncombe County IFA Subject Matter Experts

- Tiffany Iheanacho (Criminal Justice)
- Terry Bellamy (Criminal Justice/Housing)
- Elizabeth Odderstol (Economic Development)
- Ron Venturella (Economic Development)
- Tim Love (Economic Development)
- Rachael Sawyer (Education)
- Ginger Clough (Health and Wellness)
- Khadiya Ross (Health and Wellness)
- Matthew Cable (Housing)
- Nancy Wilson (Housing)
- Jonathon Jones (Housing)



Asheville-Buncombe community agencies and members interacting at the Reparations Summit.

As the work progressed, the Commission requested increasing levels of staff support to meet the growing needs of the process.

Buncombe County Community and Public Engagement (CAPE) Team

The Buncombe County CAPE team provided extensive communications and logistical support throughout the Commission's work. Communications support included advertising CRC meetings, streaming meetings on the Buncombe County Facebook page, supporting and documenting community engagement activities. Our internally hosted radio show Tapped In featured the CRC impact focus areas through a series of interviews on WRES, Urban Sounds of Asheville, whose goal is to empower their listeners with skills and knowledge.

Logistical support at meetings included hosting commission members and the public, helping to create a welcoming atmosphere, providing quarterly updates to County leadership on reparations progress, and an active role in updating community groups and associations on CRC progress.

The CAPE team took the helm on organizing, planning, and implementation of the October 2023 Reparations Summit. The Summit served as a community engagement opportunity, to bring the CRC's work to the public sphere, and created a forum to highlight and share local Black entrepreneurs and organizations to attendees.

A key element of the County's approach was the intentional documentation of the reparations process. In partnership with the Artéria Collective and Project Manager Liz Garland, a team of young local artists of color was convened to document the Commission's work through written features, podcasts, videos, and photography. In 2023, the project transitioned to Slay the Mic (STM) Multimedia under the leadership of Liz Garland. The Slay the Mic team of youth media makers produced interviews, written content, and videos, while also creating leadership development opportunities for participating youth. A digital library of their reparations video content can be found [here](#).



ELIZABETH LASHAY GARLAND
STM Multimedia Founder and CEO



EDEN MOSLEY
Slay the Mic | STM Multimedia Interviewer



Slay the Mic | STM Multimedia Youth Participants



Slay the Mic | STM Multimedia Youth Participants

City of Asheville Communication and Public Engagement (CAPE) Department

The City CAPE team also provided extensive communication and engagement support throughout the project. Their work included coordinating the Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series, assisting with the consultant selection processes, producing clear, inclusive, and consistent messaging across all phases of the project, and ensuring accessibility for all residents through translated materials, livestreams, and digital content.

Digital Communication Tools

- Two dedicated reparations webpages:
 - City website within Board and Commission infrastructure
 - PublicInput engagement hub (streaming meetings, surveys, updates, videos, and project timeline)
- 26 email campaigns distributed between May 2021 and March 2024, reaching up to 2,433 people with an average open rate of 62.78%.
- Social media management to promote events, share updates, and cross-promote content from Buncombe County.
- Grassroots outreach via QR codes, printed palm cards, facility slides, and community partner distribution.

Event & Media Support

- Assisted in the planning and execution of the October 7, 2023 Reparations Summit.
- Managed numerous local and national media inquiries, provided press releases and accurate reporting updates after Commission meetings.

Data and Research Support

In 2022, the CRC Data & Research Team was launched as a joint City-County initiative to manage information requests from the Commission and its Impact Focus Areas (IFAs). The team processed data requests both from internal City/County departments and external agencies such as the State of North Carolina.

Between November 2, 2022, and July 26, 2023:

- 92 total data requests were submitted
- 87 (95%) were fulfilled in full or in part
- 5 requests were unfulfilled due to data limitations or non-existence of records

All data and research products were made publicly available via a web-based dashboard and the Buncombe County Special Collections CRC Research Archive.

CRC Data & Research Team Membership

- County Lead: Matthew Baker (BC)
- City Lead: Eric Jackson (CoA)
- Lee Crayton (BC)

- Cameron Henshaw (CoA; Lead for ODAP)
- Burnett Walz (BC)
- Natalie Bailey (CoA)
- Katherine Cutshall (BC)
- Brenda Mills (CoA)
- Rafael Baptista (BC)

Reparations Data Request Process Summary

1. Project Manager updated SmartSheet with new data requests.
2. ODAP reviewed requests and confirmed City data ownership.
3. For City-owned data, ODAP coordinated with IFA facilitators to confirm scope, availability, priority, and timeline.
4. ODAP provided bi-weekly status updates to Project Manager and Director of Equity and Inclusion.
5. Additional data resources were identified and provided as discovered.

Legal Support

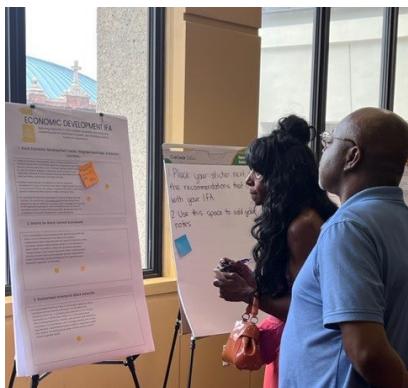
The legal teams were committed to supporting the process, ensuring that the Commission's work adhered to proper legal procedures while helping translate policy goals into actionable and sustainable recommendations. The City and County legal departments provided vital counsel throughout the Commission's work, including:

- Advising on local government spending authority
- Reviewing applicability of State and Federal laws to proposed programs
- Ensuring compliance with the North Carolina Open Meetings Law, Public Records Act, and locally adopted resolutions
- Assisting in crafting legally sound recommendations
- Identifying potential legal risks associated with proposed reparations policies

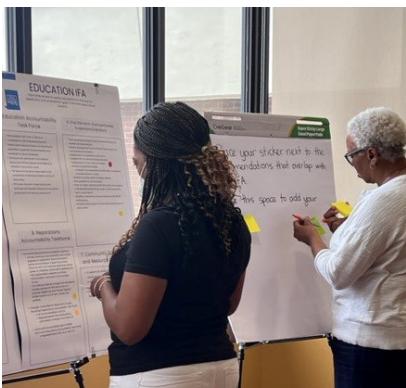
CRC RETREAT

Since the formation of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), commissioners had engaged in long hours of work, deep discussions, data analysis, and extensive deliberations while navigating the natural ebbs and flows of this complex process. By May 2023, it was determined that holding a retreat would provide the Commission with the opportunity to review progress, share cross-cutting work from each Impact Focus Area (IFA), provide feedback, refine overlapping recommendations, and chart the path forward.

On July 29, 2023, the CRC convened for a half-day retreat at Harrah's Cherokee Banquet Hall. During this gathering, commissioners had the opportunity to meet and collaborate with the new CRC facilitator, Ms. Vernisha Crawford. The retreat also provided space for commissioners to openly share and process frustrations, concerns, and challenges that had emerged during their work. The Commission reviewed the recommendations developed by each IFA, identifying areas of overlap and opportunities for consolidation.



DEE WILLIAMS AND DR. DWIGHT MULLEN
CRC Members



TIFFANY DE'BELLOTT & BOBBETTE MAYS
CRC Members



ROY HARRIS & GLENDA McDOWELL
CRC Members



Education IFA members L to R: Dr. Tamarie Macon, Dewayne McAfee, Dr. Ameris Lavendar, Dewana Little, Thomas Priester, Roy Harris, Osondu McPeters, Christopher Gordon, Dee Williams, and Terry Bellamy.



Criminal Justice and Health and Wellness IFA members discuss cross cutting recommendations.



CRC Facilitator Vernisha Crawford and CRC members work on summarizing key lessons from the day.



GEORGE FATHEREE

Fintech founder, social impact
entrepreneur, and history-making attorney

JACQUELYN HALLUM, MBA, MHA, CDP

Retired Director of Health Careers
and Diversity Education

COMMUNITY REPARATIONS SUMMIT



The Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission, in partnership with the City of Asheville, Buncombe County Government, and UNC Asheville's Africana Studies Department, hosted the Community Reparations Summit on Saturday, October 7, 2023, at the Wilma M. Sherrill Center on the UNC Asheville campus. The event took place from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM and featured keynote speaker Mr. George Fatheree III.

The Summit was fully booked, drawing strong participation from the community. Childcare services were provided, and attendees had the opportunity to visit more than 40 vendors and community agencies that tabled at the event to share information about their work in the Asheville and Buncombe County community.

Lead-Up Educational Events

In preparation for the Summit, two public educational events were held:

- **October 2, 2023:** Community members gathered at the Mullen & James Humanities Hall to view *Black in Asheville*, a documentary followed by a Q&A session with filmmaker Todd Gragg.
- **October 5, 2023:** Attendees viewed *The Big Payback*, a documentary directed by Erika Alexander and Whitney Dow, which follows the story of the first tax-funded reparations initiative for Black Americans, led by a rookie alderwoman in Evanston, Illinois.

Both screenings began at 6:30 PM, with guests invited to arrive early and enjoy food provided by two local Black-owned food trucks.



DR. DWIGHT MULLEN
CRC Chair (2022-2024)



Summit Program and Keynote

The Summit opened with breakfast and music by local group Peculiar People, led by Terry Letman. Former CRC Chair Dr. Dwight Mullen and Chair of Education Professor Tiece Ruffin welcomed attendees, shared the Commission's mission, and introduced keynote speaker Mr. George Fatheree III.

Mr. Fatheree, a Los Angeles-based attorney, made national headlines for his legal work supporting the Bruce family in the return of [Bruce's Beach](#), a property that had been seized from their ancestors in the 1920s through eminent domain. His groundbreaking work has become a national example of reparative policy addressing historical land dispossession.

Community Feedback and Engagement

Following his keynote, Buncombe County Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer Dr. Noreal Armstrong remarked, "I really enjoyed hearing from Mr. Fatheree. He shared valuable information that I plan to utilize as we continue this process. He has reignited this process."

After the keynote address, CRC members representing each Impact Focus Area (IFA) presented the recommendations developed to that point. The purpose was to inform the community of emerging proposals and invite public feedback to help refine and strengthen the Commission's recommendations.

The Summit provided an important opportunity for the community to hear from national and local leaders on how reparations are shaping policy and impacting communities across the nation, and particularly for Black Asheville and Buncombe County. Attendees also learned that as the Cease the Harm Audit reached its conclusion, findings from the audit would be incorporated into the CRC's final recommendations.

With essential communication and logistical support from the Buncombe County CAPE Team, the Summit successfully provided a space for public education, engagement, and meaningful dialogue, while expanding awareness of the work and progress of the Community Reparations Commission.



Asheville-Buncombe community agencies and members interacting at the Reparations Summit.



Community members listen as George Fatheree shares his work with Bruce Beach.



Community members listen as George Fatheree shares his work with Bruce Beach.



Attendees were able to fill up on good food and get their fill of reparation updates.



ROBERT GRANT JR.
Staff member at Christine W. Avery Learning Center



Residents of all ages took part in the Summit.



DAWA HITCH
CAPE Director, COA

TORRE WHITE
Reparations Stakeholder
Authority of Asheville



DEE WILLIAMS
CRC Member



COUNCILWOMAN SANDRA KILGORE
City of Asheville **DIONNE GREENLEE-JONES**
Health and Wellness IFA Facilitator



CHORAL GROUP
PECULIAR PEOPLE LED BY TERRY LETMAN

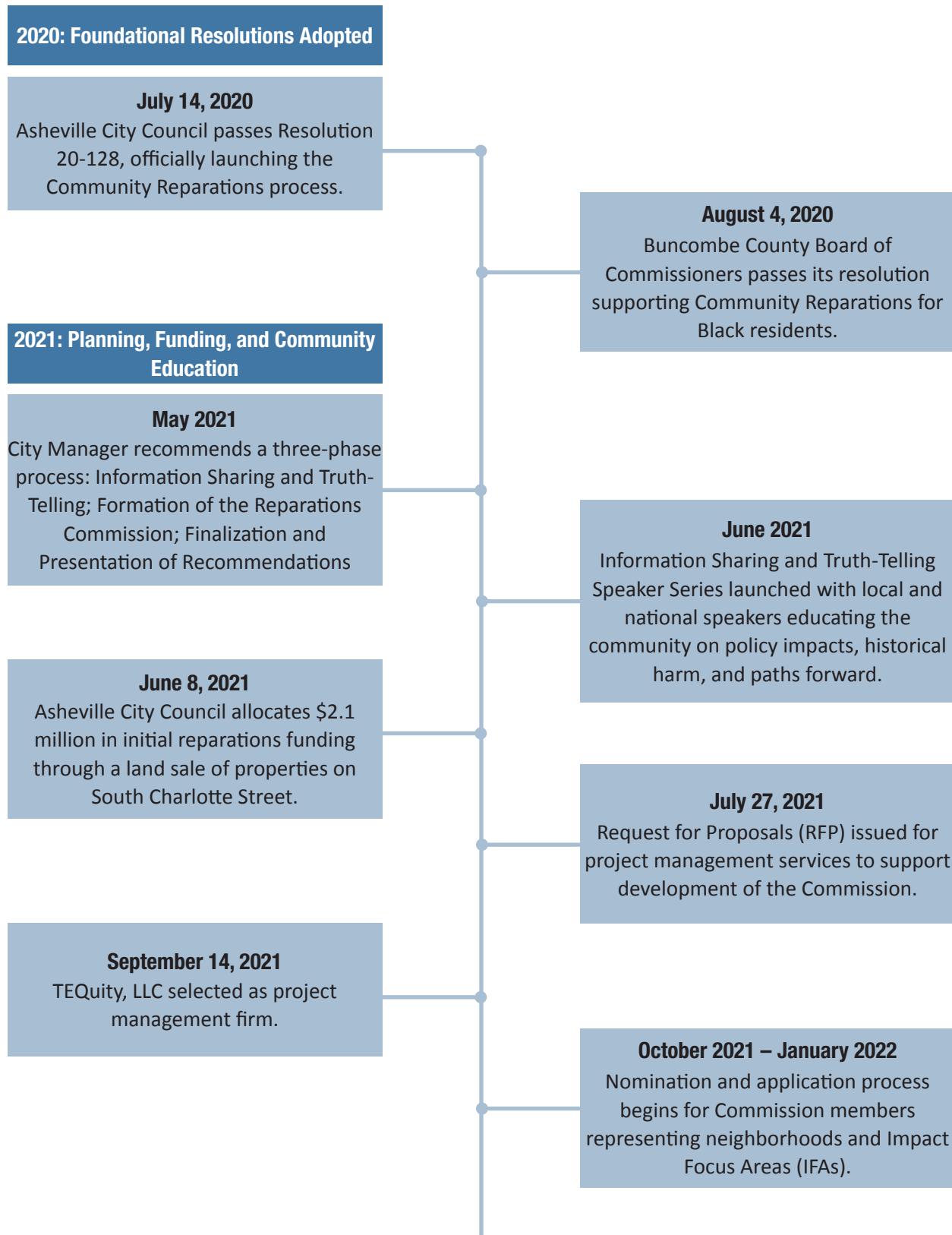


NORMA BAYNES
CRC Member

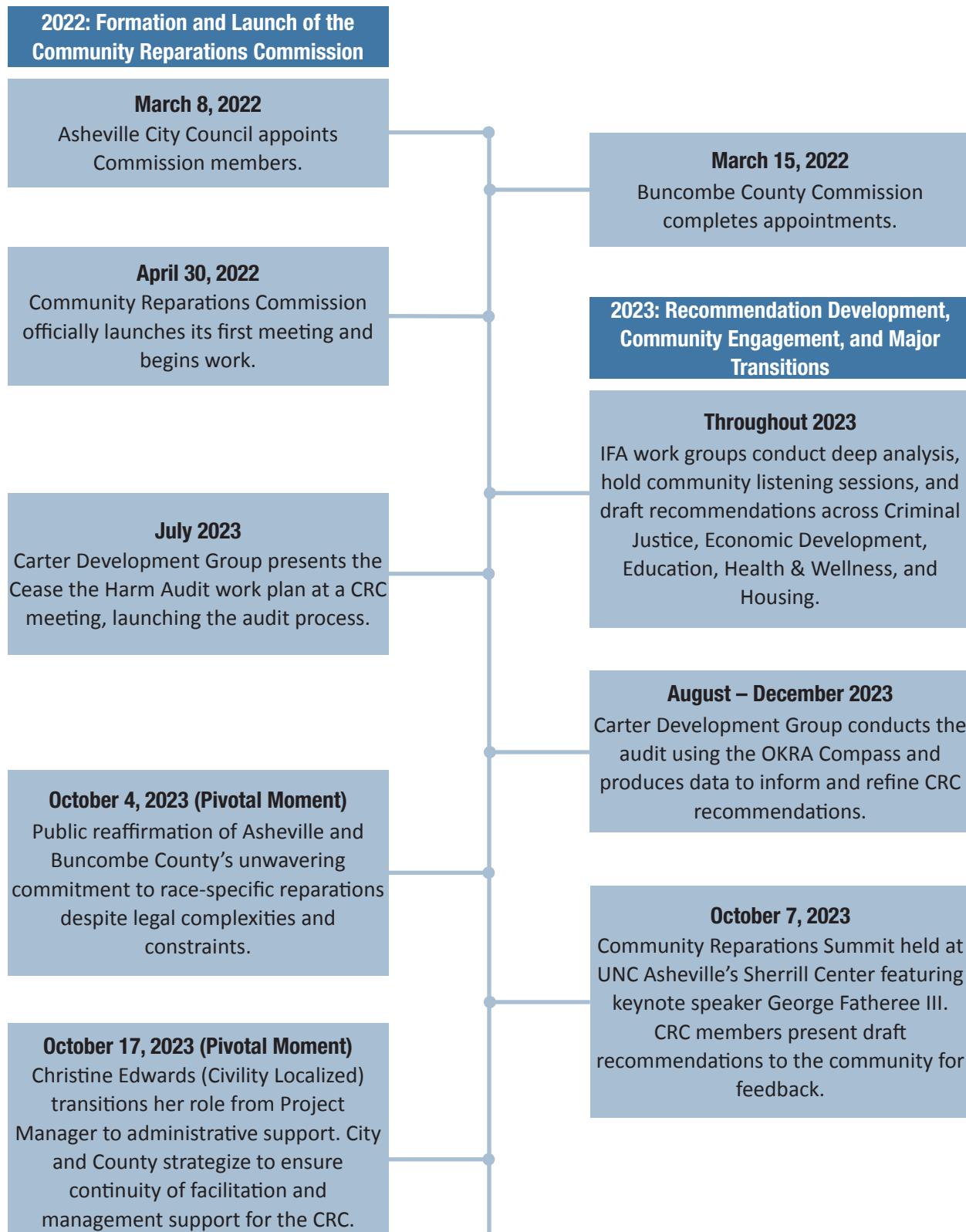


RENATA CONYERS
CRC Member

COMPREHENSIVE REPARATIONS PROCESS TIMELINE



Comprehensive Reparations Process Timeline



Comprehensive Reparations Process Timeline

2024: Audit Completion and Prioritization of Final Recommendations

February 2024

Preliminary *Cease Harm Audit* report delivered to CRC for review and initial alignment with drafted recommendations.

April 2024

Final *Cease Harm Audit* report delivered by Carter Development Group, confirming community and Commission experiences with data-driven findings across seven focus areas.

February – May 2024

City and County legal, equity, and management staff review recommendations for feasibility, legality, and implementation. Two full review rounds occur.

May 2024

All IFA groups finalize recommendations, which are formally presented and voted upon by the full Commission.

June 2024

CRC reaches original deadline but receives a six-month extension to complete final work and community engagement.

September 27, 2024

Tropical Storm Helene strikes Western North Carolina. The storm causes significant damage and interrupts Commission activities, temporarily suspending all boards and commissions.

2025: Final Retreat and Closure Planning

March 22, 2025 (Pivotal Moment)

CRC holds a final retreat to clarify remaining work. Two key final actions are agreed upon: Establishing a 501(c)(3) to continue reparations work; Completing final community engagement to assess additional needs before closure.

April – May 2025

CRC holds virtual "special meetings" to continue progress following the storm.



DR. AMIERIS LAVENDER

Education Policy Expert, Education Impact Focus Area (IFA) Facilitator, Founder of LoveJoyLiberation Community Relations Firm

REFLECTIONS FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS: THE CRC MEMBER EXPERIENCE

As the Community Reparations Commission neared completion of its work, the City and County conducted a series of structured interviews with Commission members between March and August 2024. Staff interviewed 12 members of the CRC, the former Equity and Inclusion Director, both Project Managers, and one IFA Facilitator to gain insights into their motivations for participating, expectations entering the process, desired outcomes, lessons learned, and overall experiences serving on the Commission. These interviews provided a valuable qualitative perspective, complementing the Commission's extensive policy work, and offering a deeper understanding of the personal commitment, challenges, and growth experienced by those who dedicated themselves to this historic process.

Interview with Renata Conyers (CRC Member)

Title: "It's About We": Collaboration, Conflict, and the Fight for Health Equity

Renata Conyers, a Community Reparations Commission (CRC) member with a professional background in healthcare and community outreach, shared a candid reflection on her experience within the commission and its broader purpose. Initially unfamiliar with the commission's structure and expectations, she joined at the request of a colleague and gradually assumed responsibilities as both a commissioner and co-facilitator for the Health & Wellness Impact Focus Area (IFA).

Throughout the interview, Conyers expressed both deep commitment and significant frustration. She noted the high turnover among commissioners, with more than half of the original 25 members rarely attending or eventually leaving the process. This, along with frequent delays and a tendency to postpone agenda items, made the work feel inefficient and emotionally draining at times.

Despite these challenges, Conyers remained dedicated to the mission. She emphasized the critical importance of health equity for African American communities, particularly the need for improved maternal care and access to doula services. Drawing from her outreach work, she spoke passionately about the need for culturally competent care and greater healthcare advocacy for Black women in Asheville.

Conyers also reflected on the group's size and dynamics. She felt that a smaller, more cohesive commission would have led to more effective collaboration, deeper listening, and stronger outcomes. While she acknowledged the value of diverse opinions and geographic representation, she strongly believed that the lived experience and insights of community members were more valuable than detached professional expertise.

Looking to the future, Conyers hoped that the CRC's work would serve as a foundation for real, measurable progress, especially in health and wellness, within five years. More importantly, she wanted the effort to inspire future generations to continue the fight for justice and repair.

"I don't want to say just me, because it's not about me, it's about we. This is what we worked for... This is what we fought for."

— Renata Conyers

Interview with Norma Baynes (CRC Member)

Title: “We Are Beautiful Like We Are”: Norma Baynes on Memory, Maternal Health, and the Moral Urgency of Reparations

Baynes, a retired registered nurse born and raised in Asheville, North Carolina, brought a powerful blend of personal history, professional insight, and community advocacy to her role on the Community Reparations Commission. Having started her nursing career in a segregated hospital and raised by a grandmother who was a midwife, Baynes spoke with deep clarity about the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by systemic racism—particularly in healthcare. She reflected on treating Black patients during an era when care was unequal and facilities were divided by race, and she recalled her own childhood experience having surgery in an Afro-American hospital that no longer exists.

Her voice on the Commission was grounded in her dual perspective as both a healthcare provider and a member of a community directly impacted by historic harm. She described how maternal health disparities, and the absence of accessible healthcare remain ongoing issues in Asheville’s Black community, and she called for a greater understanding of Afro-American genetic predispositions and healthcare needs. These concerns were not theoretical for Baynes; they were drawn from firsthand knowledge and embodied concern for future generations.

Baynes also highlighted the shock of returning to Asheville after 40 years away and finding her neighborhood, Shiloh, dramatically changed by urban renewal. Where once it had been a vibrant Black community full of gardens and generational homes, she now found it “disturbing” that only about 25% of residents remained Black. Still, she expressed hope that her children—raised in Maryland—might one day come back to Shiloh and contribute to its renewal.

Among her most poignant frustrations was the Commission’s struggle with language: the inability to explicitly use terms like “Black” or “Afro-American” in written recommendations felt like a denial of truth. She criticized this constraint for diluting the clarity needed to address racially specific harms and insisted that policy must reflect both the history and reality of the communities most affected. She saw this lack of clarity in language as symbolic of a broader societal resistance to naming and undoing structural racism.

Baynes praised the value of community input over abstract academic expertise, emphasizing that those who lived through segregation, redlining, and displacement offer a kind of wisdom no subject-matter expert can replicate. She described her health and wellness working group as small but essential and found meaning in the relationships formed through their shared goals. Her testimony revealed both the necessity and challenge of balancing inclusivity with a clear, targeted agenda for reparative justice.

“...we are all these different flowers. So we are beautiful, and we, as Black people, must realize we are beautiful, we are smart and we have something to say, and we are very strong people, and don’t let anybody, anybody tell you who you are.”

— Norma Baynes

Interview with Dee Williams (CRC Member)

Title: “Talk is Cheap”: Disruption, Honesty, and the Fight for Tangible Change

Dee Williams, a long-standing Asheville native and Community Reparations Commission (CRC) member, shared a candid and deeply informed perspective on the process, challenges, and impact of the reparations work. Entering the CRC with extensive experience in community development and subject matter expertise, Williams described the process as “eye-opening” and at times “frightening,” particularly considering the lack of logic and understanding among some participants. They expressed concern that the process may harm the most vulnerable if it fails, citing the rejection of practical, preventative initiatives like a job training program that could have addressed root causes of incarceration among Black men. Despite strong backing from the police chief, the initiative was withdrawn after pushback from within the IFA process, illustrating what Williams viewed as a broader pattern of bureaucratic obstruction and sidelining of subject matter experts.

Williams discussed how they ultimately took these ideas, along with a home repair program, to external agencies and non-profits, indicating a commitment to community impact even outside the CRC framework. The experience was marked by disappointment that meaningful work could not be advanced within the commission due to internal politics, lack of data-driven decision-making, and limited understanding of local government systems. Williams also recounted personal and family losses due to urban renewal in Asheville, underscoring the economic trauma inflicted on Black communities and the lack of reparative responses. They emphasized that historical harms were only addressed “tangentially” and that a Truth and Reconciliation approach, incorporating qualitative data from those most affected, was noticeably absent.

Williams identified the most rewarding outcome as the formulation of funding proformas designed to support long-overdue investments in Asheville’s Black legacy neighborhoods. This effort, they noted, has the potential to disrupt cycles of underinvestment and empower communities with the tools to implement city plans that have languished for over a decade. While critical of the commission’s large size and internal dynamics, described as cliquish and at times unaccountable, they remained committed to the work and to honoring their appointment.

Ultimately, Williams challenged the notion that talk alone could advance reparations, insisting on measurable outcomes and truth-telling as essential components. Their reflections made clear that credibility, honesty, and deep knowledge of local history and governance are indispensable to any reparative effort, and that in the absence of tangible results, the work risks becoming just another failed commission.

“... talk is cheap. And unless... something tangible comes out of it, this whole process will be swept away with the other useless studies and commissions... Faith without works is dead.”

— Dee Williams

Interview with Jesse Ray (CRC Member)

Title: “Education Is the Engine”: A Pragmatic Vision for Reparations and Generational Wealth

Jesse Ray, a native of Asheville and lifelong educator, brought to the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) a perspective rooted in lived experience, economic insight, and an unwavering belief in the power of education. Having come of age during the Jim Crow era and educated in Asheville’s segregated schools, Ray approached the work with both historical awareness and practical expectations. While he initially joined the CRC as an alternate, his decision to fully engage in the process was driven by his conviction that reparations must focus on sustainable, generational outcomes.

Ray acknowledged the challenges of working within a large commission, emphasizing the patience and respectful listening required to manage such a diverse group. He also voiced concern about the feasibility of individual financial reparations, citing the political and administrative complexities of determining eligibility and securing adequate funding. Instead, he championed structural investments, particularly in education, as a realistic and effective path to reparative justice.

Central to his contribution was the HEED initiative (Help Educate, Employ, and Develop), a program he developed as part of the Educational Impact Focus Area. The initiative proposes identifying eighth-grade students who show potential and providing them with long-term academic, mentorship, and career development support. For Ray, HEED is more than a program, it is a vehicle to create generational wealth, economic empowerment, and a culture of expectation among Black youth. The initiative was successfully incorporated into the commission’s final recommendations.

“You can’t have generational wealth without education—it’s the engine. Without that, we’re not going anywhere.”

— Jesse Ray

While Ray found the process occasionally slow and fraught with disagreement, he remained focused on outcomes. He suggested that the commission would have benefited from a dedicated legal consultant and more subject matter expertise to clarify and strengthen its recommendations. Importantly, he advocated for ongoing accountability, proposing a standing committee, composed in part of non-CRC members, to monitor the implementation of the commission’s recommendations by the City of Asheville and Buncombe County.

Ray ultimately considered the finalization of recommendations to be the most impactful and rewarding aspect of the process. While he maintained a critical lens on the CRC’s internal dynamics, he emphasized the importance of having clear, actionable proposals as a starting point for future efforts. For him, the success of the reparations process would not be measured by its intentions alone, but by the results it produces for historically harmed communities.

Interview with Dr. Dwight Mullen (CRC Member)

Title: "From Research to Repair": Data, Policy, and the Moral Urgency of Accountability

Dr. Dwight Mullen, professor emeritus of political science at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and founding chair of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), brought to the commission a uniquely data-driven and policy-centered approach grounded in decades of academic and civic engagement. Best known locally for spearheading the State of Black Asheville project, —a 10-year undergraduate research initiative that tracked disparities in education, housing, health, and justice—Dr. Mullen entered the CRC process with deep institutional knowledge and a long-standing commitment to illuminating the effects of systemic policy on Black residents of Buncombe County.

In his interview, Dr. Mullen spoke with clarity and candor about the commission's challenges, particularly around bureaucratic constraints and political sensitivities. He emphasized the tension between transparency and effectiveness, explaining how attempts to protect the process from external political pressure sometimes came at the cost of visibility. Nevertheless, he regarded the open recording and documentation of the CRC's work, including interviews like his own, as vital for accountability and public understanding. He stressed the importance of letting people hear the "truth in our own voices," even amid procedural friction.

Reflecting on the work of the commission, Dr. Mullen noted that some participants lacked a grounding in governance and public policy, which made the early stages of deliberation difficult. Still, he underscored the necessity of public participation in democratic processes, even when messy or slow. His primary concern was ensuring the commission's recommendations would be more than symbolic. He called for institutional follow-through and the creation of durable accountability structures to ensure that reparative actions are implemented, and remain so, beyond the life of the commission.

Dr. Mullen also expressed a commitment to intergenerational justice, acknowledging the emotional toll that this work takes on elders and those who have long labored in silence. He emphasized that reparations are not just about redress, they are also about building systems that prevent further harm. As chair, he saw his role not as an authority figure, but as a steward of process and principle, responsible for making space for other voices while holding the commission to its original mandate.

"We need institutions that don't forget—because when institutions forget, harm repeats. If there's no accountability, then we're just apologizing into the wind."

— Dr. Dwight Mullen

Interview with Bobbette Mays (CRC Member)

Title: “We Were a Community”: Memory, Displacement, and the Fight for Recognition

Bobbette Mays, Vice Chair of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC), served as both a representative of the Shiloh Community Association and a voice for the displaced residents of Stumptown, a once-vibrant Black neighborhood erased by urban renewal. Drawing from her own lived experience, Mays shared a powerful testimony of community, disruption, and the long arc of advocacy. She described Stumptown as a deeply interconnected place, where families supported one another, local businesses thrived, and Black children could walk safely and proudly in their own neighborhood. The loss of that community, not just its homes, but its cultural identity, remains a source of pain and motivation for her continued work.

Mays joined the commission to speak on behalf of those who experienced the harms of the 1950s through 1970s firsthand. She expressed concern that the CRC process initially lacked grounding in Asheville’s unique racial history and leaned too heavily on generalized national data. She was particularly disappointed that younger participants were not more engaged in understanding the lived experiences of older generations. Through the process, however, she deepened her own understanding of the housing crisis, particularly how urban renewal continues to impact elderly residents who now live in substandard housing with few options for upward mobility.

Although Mays valued the diversity of the commission, she found its size unwieldy and believed the group would have benefited from earlier retreats and trust-building exercises. She cited poor communication between subcommittees as a missed opportunity, particularly when critical intersections between housing, education, and economics were not explored collaboratively. Still, she identified key moments of progress, especially a retreat at UNC Asheville and a final session that allowed members to visualize the collective scope of their work, as turning points that brought cohesion and purpose.

Looking toward the future, Mays called for a tangible form of recognition, proposing a commemorative plaque listing the CRC members’ names be placed in city or county buildings. For her, remembrance is essential: a physical marker to show future generations that this group of people stood up, spoke out, and tried to make a difference. Her vision is one of continued progress, rooted in history, lifted by legacy, and made visible through action.

“I want my great-grandchildren to come to Asheville and say, ‘Oh, I see her name is up here. She did something.’”

— Bobbette Mays

Interview with Keith Young (CRC Member)

Title: “This Should Have Been the Beginning”: Truth, Politics, and the Push for Permanence

Keith Young, a former Asheville City Council member, community organizer, and criminal justice professional, entered the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) with a firm understanding of public policy and a deep personal connection to the legacy of harm in Asheville. He described his role as foundational, a “cornerstone” presence on the commission, participating at the request of community members rather than by personal ambition. From the outset, Young envisioned the CRC process as a long-term Truth and Reconciliation effort, where healing would begin through shared stories, public acknowledgment, and structural commitment. However, he quickly realized that the groundwork for such a process had not been laid.

Young was sharply critical of the local government's failure to prepare for the commission's work. What should have taken place before the commission, deep community engagement, institutional readiness, and political infrastructure, was instead offloaded onto its members. As a result, the first two years were, in his view, spent catching up on foundational issues that should have been resolved in advance. The absence of a formal Truth and Reconciliation process not only slowed momentum but, according to Young, compromised the trust-building necessary for systemic repair.

Political resistance further complicated the commission's trajectory. Young described how financial commitments were withdrawn, government actors disengaged, and opportunities for institutional support, such as the creation of a separate legal entity, were missed or ignored. He was candid about the lack of support from local white leadership and the burden placed on Black CRC members to persist under pressure. Despite these challenges, he praised the perseverance of his fellow commissioners, noting their integrity, hard work, and collective determination to make the process meaningful.

Young's vision for reparations extended beyond policy recommendations. He emphasized the need for continuity, a commission or department embedded permanently within the city structure, much like housing or sanitation services. Reparations, to him, are not a one-time act, but an ongoing relationship between government and community. While he believed the commission made historic progress, he remained concerned that without permanent structures and public accountability, the work would be vulnerable to political tides.

In reflecting on the commission's legacy, Young underscored its historical importance, particularly in the context of Black leadership in Asheville and Buncombe County. Though disappointed in many missed opportunities, he remained hopeful about the CRC's future impact and advocated for a process grounded not only in recommendations but in truth, permanence, and the moral will to act.

“We never did the truth part of Truth and Reconciliation. And if you don't do truth first, reconciliation is just paperwork.”

— Keith Young

Interview with Dewayne McAfee (CRC Member)

Title: “You Don’t Need Data to Know We’ve Been Harmed”: Urgency, Truth, and the Push for Action

Dewayne McAfee, a retired elevator mechanic and lifelong Asheville resident, brought raw honesty and unfiltered urgency to his role on the Community Reparations Commission (CRC). Speaking from personal experience, both as a former inmate in the juvenile justice system and as a product of a racially segregated and economically unequal city, McAfee was unwavering in his belief that the commission’s process lacked the immediate action the community needed. He criticized what he saw as an overemphasis on data collection and bureaucratic deliberation, arguing that the harms facing Asheville’s Black community were already well-documented in daily lived experience.

For McAfee, the failure to address historical harms upfront was a critical misstep. He questioned why basic needs like education, healthcare, and housing weren’t prioritized from the outset. While he acknowledged that some data can be useful, he was adamant that the constant push to “prove” racism or inequity through studies and statistics was both insulting and unnecessary. In his words, the city needed to stop waiting for permission or validation and instead “do what’s right, right now.”

McAfee also expressed concerns about the size and structure of the CRC, noting that with so many members and divergent agendas, progress was slowed and meaningful dialogue diluted. He believed that a smaller, more focused group could have produced stronger outcomes. Despite his frustrations with the process, he remained deeply impressed by the dedication and intelligence of many individual participants. He reserved particular respect for those who stayed engaged in spite of roadblocks and disappointments.

Beyond the commission’s internal challenges, McAfee spoke passionately about the broader role of “white America” in the reparations process. He argued that until white institutions and individuals accept and confront the reality of systemic racism, not with performative gestures, but with structural change, true reparations cannot occur. McAfee’s perspective was deeply rooted in a desire for authentic change, not symbolic victories.

Though disillusioned with aspects of the CRC’s trajectory, McAfee’s commitment to his community remained firm. His message to future leaders was clear: stop deferring justice. Act. Invest in real solutions that people can see and feel now, not just in studies, but in schools, clinics, homes, and lives.

“We know what’s wrong—we’ve lived it. We don’t need to study it to death. We need to fix it.”

— Dewayne McAfee

Interview with Chris Gordon (CRC Member)

Title: “We Had the Ideas. The Question Is—Will They Be Used?”: Vision, Dissonance, and the Push for Community-Led Change

Chris Gordon, an educator and self-described “old Black man,” joined the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) driven by a passion for education and community impact. A relative newcomer to Asheville, Gordon saw the CRC as a meaningful way to serve the Black community. Although he did not personally know any fellow members at the outset, he brought years of classroom experience and a multigenerational legacy in education to the work, quickly focusing his energy on improving the education system for Black youth in Asheville.

From the beginning, Gordon anticipated deep, historically rooted conversations and the development of transformative solutions. Yet he was surprised by the slow pace of progress, particularly in the early months of the commission’s work. He found the depth of community trauma greater than he had imagined and quickly came to believe that a more trauma-informed and team-centered approach was necessary. Gordon emphasized the need to address interpersonal dissonance and community divisions at the outset of such a process, noting that unresolved tensions often stalled progress.

Gordon was particularly focused on the systemic failures of the local education system, especially the lack of preparedness among Black students entering high school and the disproportionate suspensions and expulsions they faced. While he supported attention to criminal justice, health disparities, and housing inequities, education remained his core concern. He felt that too much emphasis was placed on legacy neighborhoods to the exclusion of broader Black community concerns and that the commission could have benefited from greater independence from city and county agendas.

Though the commission was large and sometimes unwieldy, Gordon respected the dedication of its members. He credited facilitator Vernisha Crawford with bringing a measure of structure and efficiency to the process but argued that the CRC would have been better served from the beginning by a trauma-informed mediator, not someone from a traditional business background. He also voiced frustration that some participants allowed personal histories and old disagreements to hinder collective progress.

The most impactful aspect of Gordon’s experience was co-creating the CRC’s formal recommendations. He found great value in working with a thoughtful, collaborative team to analyze historical harms and generate actionable solutions. But he expressed significant concern about whether the city and county would implement the recommendations in a meaningful way. A piecemeal approach, he warned, would fail to produce real change due to the interconnected nature of the proposed reforms. Despite these reservations, Gordon remained proud of the work accomplished and the commitment shown by fellow commissioners.

“...you had 25 or 30 people, for the most part, who were dedicated to reparations or improving their community... They just had different ideas.”

— Chris Gordon

Interview with CiCi Weston (CRC Member)

Title: “We Laid the Groundwork”: Early Education, Community Roots, and the Next Generation

Cici Weston, a nonprofit leader and early childhood education advocate, brought a distinctive voice to the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission (CRC). As one of the few Black childcare center owners in the area and a native of Asheville, she joined the process deeply familiar with both the landscape of local harm and the people involved, she personally knew most of the other commissioners. Weston expected a more structured and autonomous process than what unfolded, finding the bureaucratic procedures slower and less cohesive than anticipated.

Drawing on her lived experience and professional background, she emphasized two major areas requiring reparative focus: education and housing. She recounted how urban renewal had erased her childhood neighborhood on Hill Street and noted the diminishing presence of Black educators since her mother’s time in the local school system. She advocated for increased support for Black teachers and affordable housing solutions for Black professionals, especially those priced out of Asheville.

Weston reflected critically on the composition and function of the commission. She described structural challenges such as dual appointments by the city and county, which she felt created conflicts of interest and blurred lines of accountability. She also expressed that the ability for members to work across multiple focus areas, while inclusive, often muddied outcomes and slowed progress. The tight-knit nature of the Black community in Asheville, while fostering familiarity and support, also sometimes inhibited open disagreement due to generational deference and interpersonal dynamics.

Key turning points for her included the departure of the commission’s initial facilitator, which shook group morale, and the discouragement caused by delays in approving and acting on CRC recommendations. Despite these challenges, Weston described the IFA (Impact Focus Area) meetings as a high point, where deep connections and a sense of family were forged. She praised the facilitator of those sessions and saw them as spaces where real, productive collaboration took place.

Looking ahead, Weston expressed a strong belief in the legacy of the CRC’s work. She sees the process as the necessary foundation for future reparative efforts and emphasized the importance of new, younger leadership continuing the work. Though personally unsure of her future involvement, she remains optimistic, stating that history will remember the CRC as a pivotal beginning, a launching pad for deeper systemic change.

“I feel like we laid the groundwork, now somebody else has to take the torch and move it forward.”

– CiCi Weston

Interview with Tiffany De'Bellott (CRC Member)

Title: “It Was a Journey to Reparations”: Tiffany De’Bellott on Healing, Autonomy, and Systemic Change in Asheville

Tiffany De’Bellott, Executive Director of the Center for Participatory Change and a long-time educator and social justice advocate, brought over two decades of experience to the Asheville Reparations Commission. Initially expecting tangible financial reparations and a global model for redress, she quickly realized that the commission’s role was limited to designing the conceptual framework for reparations rather than implementing them. This shift in expectation revealed the broader systemic barriers the group would face, not only the limitations set by the study design but also a pervasive lack of preparation in policy literacy and civic infrastructure.

As someone deeply embedded in Asheville’s community organizing landscape, Tiffany knew most of her fellow commissioners and was deeply affected by the interpersonal tensions and historical trauma that surfaced. These internal dynamics underscored the importance of healing, which she believes was as essential to the process as any policy outcome. She described moments of conflict as necessary catalysts for growth, pushing the group to confront mistrust and cultivate unity. The unexpected departure of early leadership and the emotional toll of slow progress became pivotal turning points, prompting the commission to rely more on one another and demand greater accountability from city and county leadership.

Tiffany criticized the commission’s reliance on oppressive government systems, noting that even with the title of “commissioners,” members often defaulted to seeking permission rather than asserting autonomy. She saw this as a systemic consequence of internalized disempowerment and called for external, trauma-informed facilitation in future efforts. Despite the challenges, Tiffany found deep pride in the commission’s legacy. She recounted moments like her granddaughter’s budding understanding of reparations as signs that the work would echo across generations. Although appointed late as a full voting member, she remained committed to shifting the narrative away from disappointment toward one of resilience, transformation, and systemic change.

“I anticipated cash payouts... I anticipated that everybody would get a house, including myself. But the reality is, it was just a study... So to me, this is not even really reparations. This is just a journey to reparations.”

— Tiffany De’Bellott

Interview with Osondu McPeters (CRC Member)

Title: Community Voice, Collective Change: Osondu McPeters' Reflections on Reparations Work in Asheville OR Bridging Generations Through Finance and Community: Osondu McPeters on Reparations in Asheville

Osondu McPeters, a financial manager and lending officer at the State Employees' Credit Union, joined the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission with a clear mission: to contribute a perspective rooted in financial literacy, generational awareness, and community-centered solutions. In his early 40s, McPeters saw himself as someone able to bridge the experiences of older and younger Black residents. Motivated by a personal and familial history shaped by urban renewal and redlining, she brought both lived experience and professional expertise to the commission. His commitment was grounded in a desire to fight for systemic change, particularly in the areas of education and economic empowerment, and to ensure Black children and families had equal access to resources and opportunities.

Though he knew several fellow commissioners before joining and was acquainted with many more from community work, McPeters was initially unprepared for the disorganization, interpersonal challenges, and lack of structure that defined the early stages of the commission's work. He noted that while the diversity of the group was a strength, it also introduced tensions that were difficult to manage without a unified game plan or early team-building. These frustrations were exacerbated by a lack of clarity about goals and procedures, as well as changes in facilitation that added to the sense of disconnection. However, McPeters highlighted the group's resilience and capacity to push forward, especially after a pivotal community engagement event at UNCA that helped rekindle energy, unity, and shared purpose.

"We all have a voice and a part to play in this—and we can't do it alone... in numbers, it's always more impactful than trying to battle this alone."

— Osondu McPeters

Throughout the process, McPeters returned frequently to two core themes: the need for practical, accessible financial literacy, and the importance of empowering community members with education about both historic harms and the mechanisms for redress. He emphasized the lasting damage of housing discrimination and predatory lending, while also advocating for new pathways to homeownership, support for Black businesses, and the creation of financial infrastructures that prioritize equity. He viewed the commission's work as only a beginning, and stressed that ongoing public education would be necessary to keep the momentum going and ensure the community could effectively hold city and county governments accountable.

Reflecting on the commission's structure, McPeters appreciated the mix of backgrounds and experiences but suggested that smaller, more focused groups could have been more effective in driving specific recommendations forward. Still, he underscored the value of relationship-building across difference and the personal growth that emerged from grappling with hard truths in community. For him, the most rewarding outcome was the connection with like-minded individuals—professionals, elders, and organizers—who shared her commitment to justice and progress.

Interview with Brenda Mills (Former Equity and Inclusion Director)

Title: Bridging Government and Community in Asheville's Reparations Process

Brenda Mills, who served as Director of Equity and Inclusion for the City of Asheville from July 2021 to January 2024, played a central administrative and strategic role in the Community Reparations Commission (CRC) process. Bringing nearly three decades of experience in Asheville city and county government, including work in economic development, neighborhood engagement, and equity initiatives, Mills acted as the primary liaison between city government and the commission. She oversaw the CRC's logistics, managed the project manager contracts, supported community engagement efforts, and co-managed the "Cease the Harm" report commissioned from Carter Development Group.

Mills describes her work as both facilitative and adaptive, responding to emerging needs through a rotating team of project managers who each brought specific expertise to the evolving process, from logistical setup and framework development to trauma-informed facilitation. Despite challenges, including a lack of clarity around the project's aims, internal tensions among CRC members, and limited public understanding of what reparations entailed, Mills highlights several successes: the eventual completion of community-driven recommendations, effective collaboration with external vendors, and sustained support from a dedicated subset of commission members.

Reflecting critically, Mills suggests that future reparations efforts would benefit from a more research-driven model, using subject matter experts to guide policy design and positioning community members as consultative advisors rather than task-focused workers. She advocates for substantial preparatory work, including deep historical research, community education, and role clarification for participants. While acknowledging the project's conceptual strengths, she underscores the need for clearer expectations, structured support, and honest recognition of institutional limitations and community trauma.

"The community never understood what this project was about. Calling it Reparations was not the best way to describe the project. It was not about land and money. The government opened the door for the naysayers and the grifters."

— Brenda Mills

Interview with Debra Clark-Jones (Project Manager)

Title: Laying the Groundwork for a Just Process

Debra Clark-Jones, who served as Project Manager through her firm TEQuity, played a foundational role in the early phases of the Community Reparations Commission (CRC). With a background in systems thinking, community outreach, and disparity initiatives, she brought a strategic lens to the design and launch of the CRC's structure. Her professional experience, combined with her identity as an African American woman with a deep commitment to equity, informed her efforts to ensure that the process reflected both diversity and rigor.

In her tenure, Clark-Jones facilitated focus groups, developed the member selection process, and secured national experts like Dr. William Darity to help ground the commission's efforts in reparations theory. She also built a team of consultants to lead the five impact focus areas. Although she ultimately stepped away due to the demands of a new executive role at Duke Health, Clark-Jones acknowledged that her dual responsibilities limited her community presence, which may have impacted trust-building.

She noted tensions in navigating the intermediary space between government and community, particularly a hesitance from city officials who feared the CRC might recommend policies they viewed as extreme. Nonetheless, Clark-Jones believed deeply in the capacity of the commission to create informed, balanced recommendations when given the appropriate tools and autonomy. Reflecting on her time, she emphasized the necessity of community-rooted leadership, relationship-building, and trust as prerequisites for any successful reparations process. Her groundwork helped establish the structure that allowed the CRC's work to continue after her departure.

"I have never shied away from doing what is right even in situations where I had to do it alone."

— Debra Clark-Jones

Interview with Christine Edwards (Project Manager)

Title: This Work is Personal, Not Just Professional

Christine Edwards served as the Project Manager and later as Project Administrator for the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission from November 2022 through April 2024. With extensive experience leading large-scale, community-led government initiatives, including a \$3 million participatory budgeting project in a county of over one million residents, Edwards brought expertise in civic engagement, strategic planning, and racial equity to the role. As a Black woman and independent consultant, she felt a deep civic responsibility to support the advancement of Black communities and believed this project aligned with her values and skills.

In her tenure, Edwards provided crucial infrastructure for the commission's work, developing templates, aligning tasks across Impact Focus Area (IFA) teams, ensuring stipends and administrative logistics were completed, and facilitating biweekly and monthly sessions. Her leadership helped transformed the process into a coordinated operation that generated 39 policy recommendations. Edwards' approach emphasized clear deliverables, data-backed needs assessments, and budget-conscious planning. However, she described burnout stemming from hostile dynamics, political interference, and lack of trust from institutional partners. She expressed frustration with overreach from City and County staff, whom she felt undermined the autonomy of the Commission and project management team.

Despite these challenges, Edwards highlighted several successes: timely completion of an Equity Audit, creation of replicable tools, and a smooth handoff to her successor. She also stressed key learnings for future efforts: maintaining a smaller, well-defined commission size; establishing trauma-informed supports; and ensuring stronger clarity from project owners about governance and implementation expectations. Edwards's impact extended beyond Asheville, she has since shared her insights with equity practitioners nationally and is slated to support the City of Kansas City's reparations process in 2025.

“Before my involvement, there were zero recommendations. After my involvement, there were 40+ across all Impact Focus Areas.”

— Christine Edwards

Interview with Dr. Amieris Lavender (IFA Facilitator)

Title: The Ultimate Goal of Reparations is Community Wholeness

Dr. Amieris Lavender, a Ph.D. in Education Policy with deep experience in urban education, served as the facilitator for the Education Impact Focus Area (IFA) in Asheville's Community Reparations Commission. Guided by her belief in justice, community healing, and policy accountability, she framed her leadership in the IFA with a bold, principled stance: reparations must address not only material harm but also the emotional, institutional, and spiritual damages endured by the Black community.

Lavender's work leaned on multiple frameworks, international human rights standards, the N'COBRA reparations platform, and scholarship from William Darity, Kamm Howard, and Dr. Onaje Jua-Osondu Abdul Muid. These frameworks shaped the IFA's guiding principle that the end goal of reparations is "community wholeness." Her team's work centered on harms including forced school desegregation, racialized discipline, and opportunity gaps. They identified these as modern enactments of historical crimes, plunder, genocide, and apartheid.

Lavender described her facilitation experience as both rewarding and deeply frustrating. She emphasized that facilitators were under-leveraged and that City-County coordination was inconsistent, sometimes obstructive. Despite these barriers, she forged a coherent process for her team, leading regular meetings, organizing with the school board, and facilitating public engagement at the YWCA. She highlighted the contributions of community members, including parents, educators, and youth, which she credited as essential to the depth and clarity of their recommendations.

Her facilitation also included managing tensions between government limitations and community expectations. When told education was largely "out of purview," Lavender rejected the notion that the government's lack of direct authority excused inaction. Instead, she adapted by identifying which governing bodies could receive which recommendations, insisting that failure to respond to local harm due to bureaucratic silos was itself a form of continued harm.

Personally, Dr. Lavender brought not only scholarly expertise but lived experience as a young, Black, queer, first-generation Ph.D. Her identity, shaped by the legacy of both Alabama and Detroit, informed a commitment to community voice, youth empowerment, and transformative justice. She closed the interview by honoring the late Dionne Greenlee Jones, reflecting on the physical and emotional toll this kind of justice work extracts from Black women leaders. Her words served as a call to build processes that restore, not deplete, Black lives in the pursuit of reparatory justice.

"Wrongs cannot remediate themselves without reparation. It is not possible. Wrongs are not made neutral by time."

— Dr. Amieris Lavender

CHALLENGES

Scope and Complexity of the Process

The resolution establishing the Community Reparations Commission was broad in both scope and scale, creating inherent challenges from the outset. Some of the recommendations developed by the Commission extended beyond the direct authority of City and County governments, requiring engagement with external entities. This led to delays in acquiring certain data from outside agencies, which at times impacted the ability of Impact Focus Area (IFA) groups to obtain necessary information for developing specific recommendations.

Commission Composition and Policy Development Experience

The Commission was composed of 25 members, all residents of the City of Asheville or Buncombe County, bringing a diverse range of lived experience, expertise, and subject matter knowledge related to the identified IFAs. However, many members did not have prior experience developing policy recommendations for local governments, which created an expected learning curve as they navigated the complexities of government processes. In contrast, the [California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans](#) included nine members, several of whom were attorneys, sitting elected officials, or had prior experience in policy development. While Asheville's larger, community-centered commission allowed for robust and thoughtful dialogue, it also presented occasional challenges in reaching consensus compared to smaller groups with more concentrated policymaking experience.

Staffing Limitations

The staffing resources available from both the City of Asheville and Buncombe County were limited when compared to other reparations processes at the state level. For example, the California Task Force received extensive support from the California Department of Justice, including executive staff, multiple divisions, writers, editors, and additional contributors. By comparison, Asheville and Buncombe County governments provided staff support within the limitations of smaller, local government capacities, which required balancing this effort alongside many other competing responsibilities.

Impact of Tropical Storm Helene

In September 2024, one month after receiving a six-month extension from Asheville City Council, Tropical Storm Helene made landfall in western North Carolina, causing significant disruption to the Asheville area. The storm required local government staff to shift their focus to urgent recovery and emergency management efforts. As a result, all advisory boards and commissions, including the Community Reparations Commission, were temporarily suspended. The Commission resumed its work by holding special virtual meetings, which were livestreamed, during April and May of 2025 to complete remaining business.



Candle light vigil in memory of those impacted by Hurricane Helene.



Hurricane Helene relief efforts for Asheville-Buncombe residents.



Hurricane Helene relief efforts for Asheville-Buncombe residents.

CONCLUSION

The Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission (CRC) had a mission to identify historical and current harm, engage the community, and develop generationally impactful short-, medium- and long-term recommendations to repair the harm experienced by the Black community. An abundance of effort was given by the Community Reparations Commission members, IFA facilitators, city and county staff, project managers and facilitators, and members of the community invested in seeing this project completed.

Embarking on such a task, garnered national notoriety. Asheville, North Carolina was the second local government jurisdiction in the nation to work towards reparations and first in the South. The work of the CRC required patience, planning, persistence, and promise to not stop until the process was done. Each CRC member brought their knowledge, skills, and lived experiences to the table and were open to learn more as the process evolved. This was a courageous undertaking and as expected several obstacles and challenges arose during this process. Through crucial conversations and dedication, the CRC completed its charge.

The more than three-year process included numerous meetings, analysis of data and research, community engagement and thoughtful deliberation to develop 39 recommendations for Asheville City and Buncombe County to consider. This included a recommendation and completion of the *Cease the Harm Audit*. Central to this work was the community education and engagement. During this timeframe CRC members participated in two retreats, hosted the Reparations Summit, and engaged the community with door knocking campaigns, community association meeting attendance and hosted a Reparations Community Engagement Jamboree.

The Jamboree event was uplifting for the community, invested in local talent and businesses, and expanded the opportunity for the community to learn more about CRC's work to repair harm, and to provide input. All the hard work has made a lasting impression on what can be accomplished when people come together for a common purpose and remain steadfast until its completion.

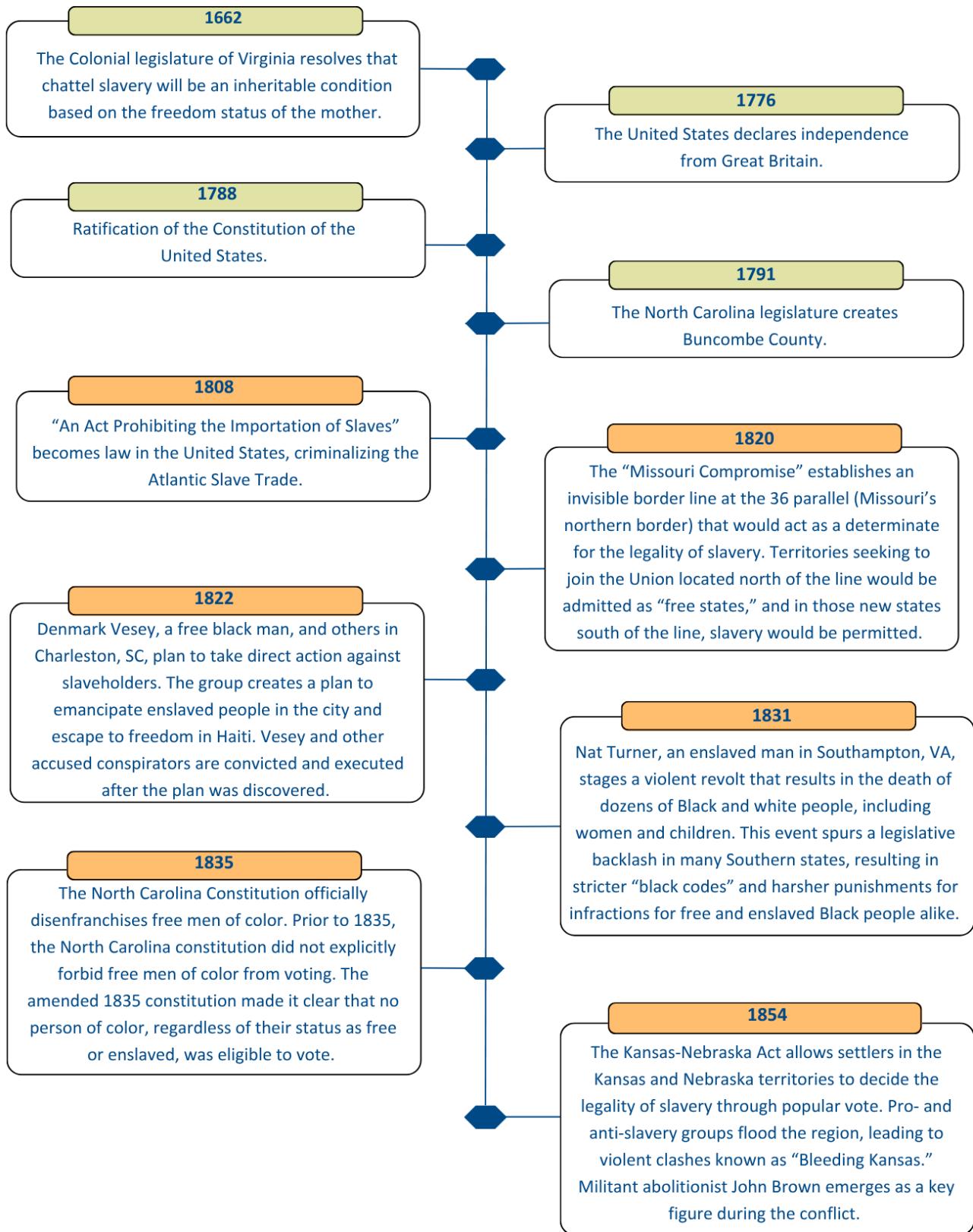


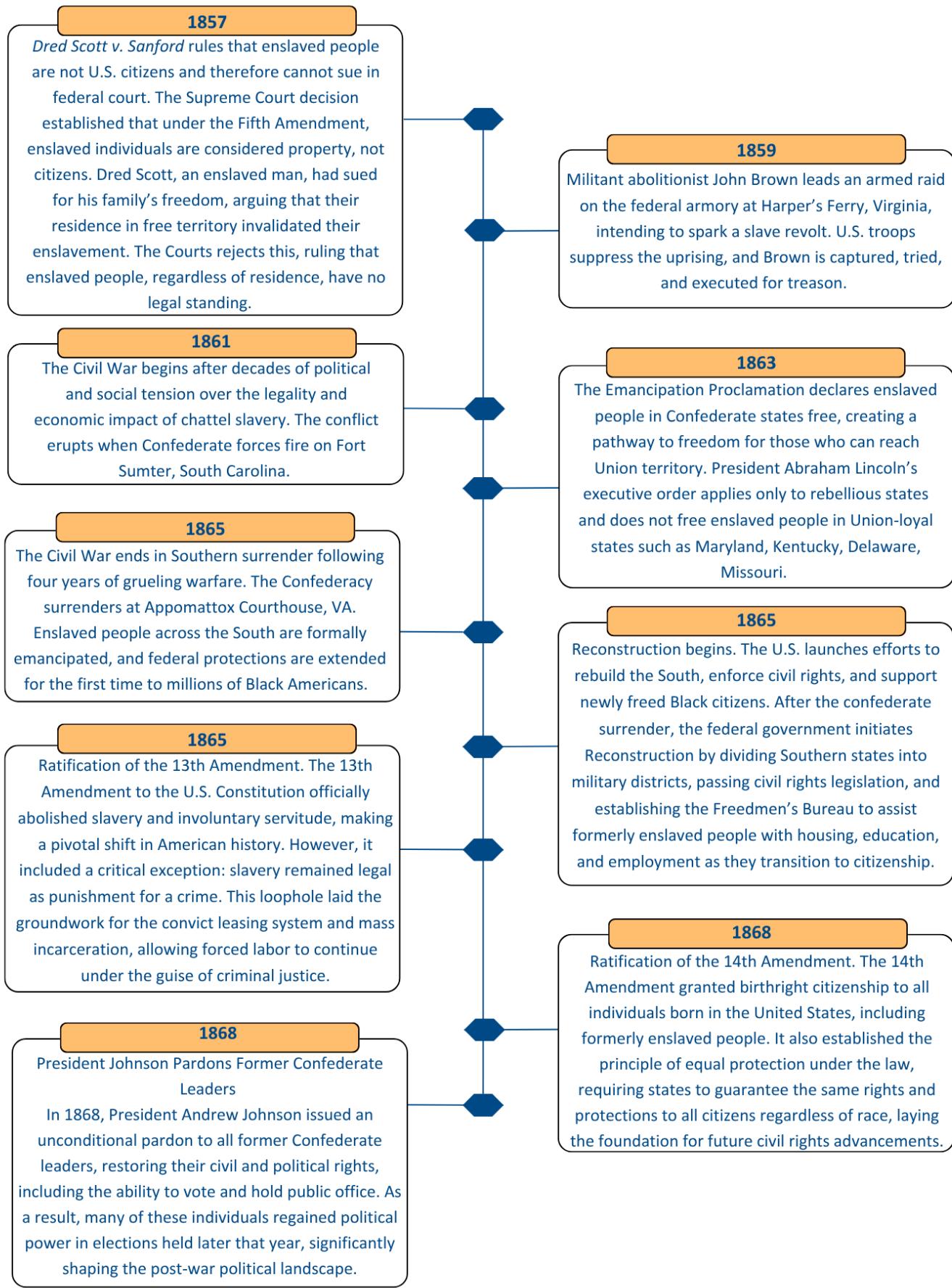
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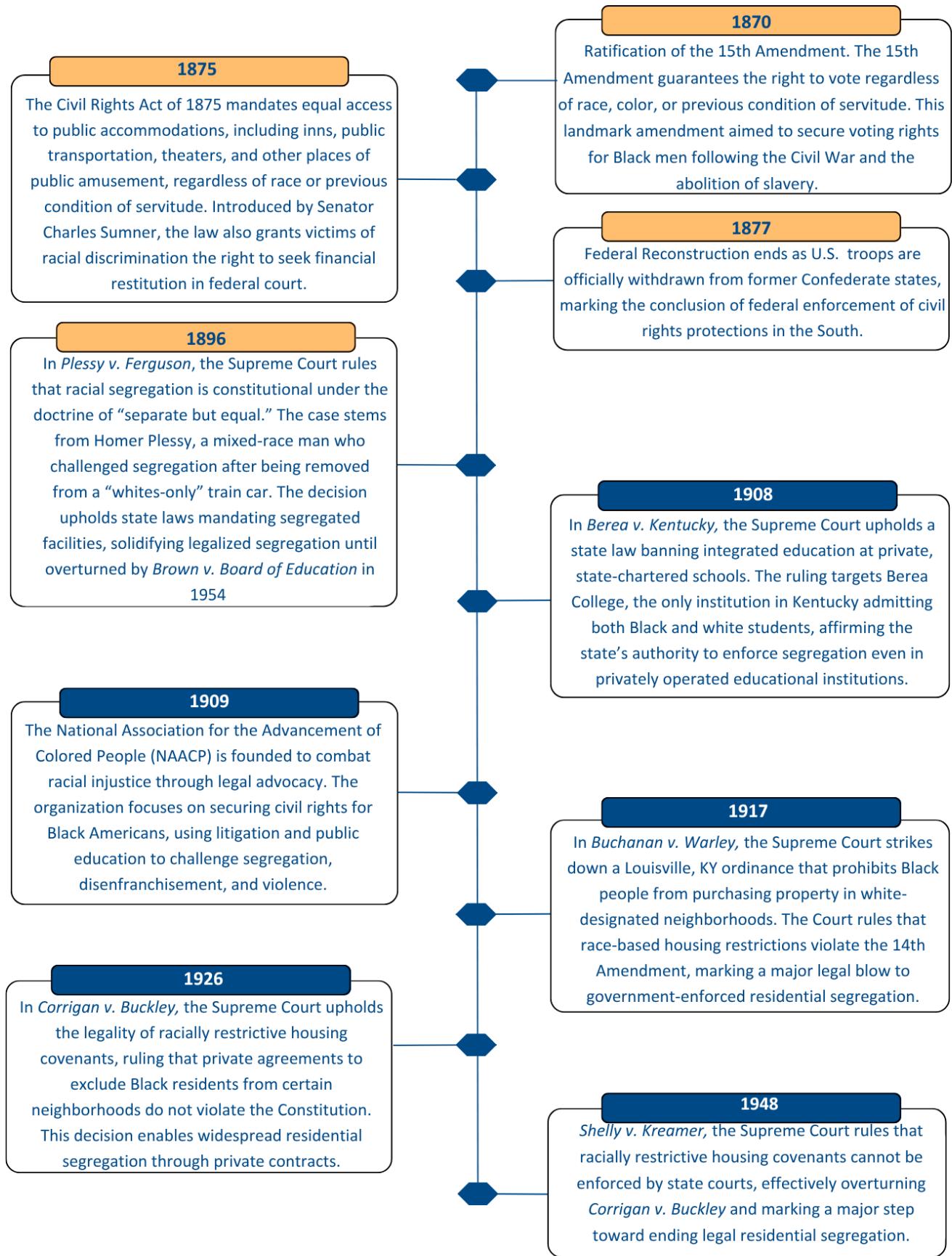
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Chair, Department of Education
University of North Carolina - Asheville

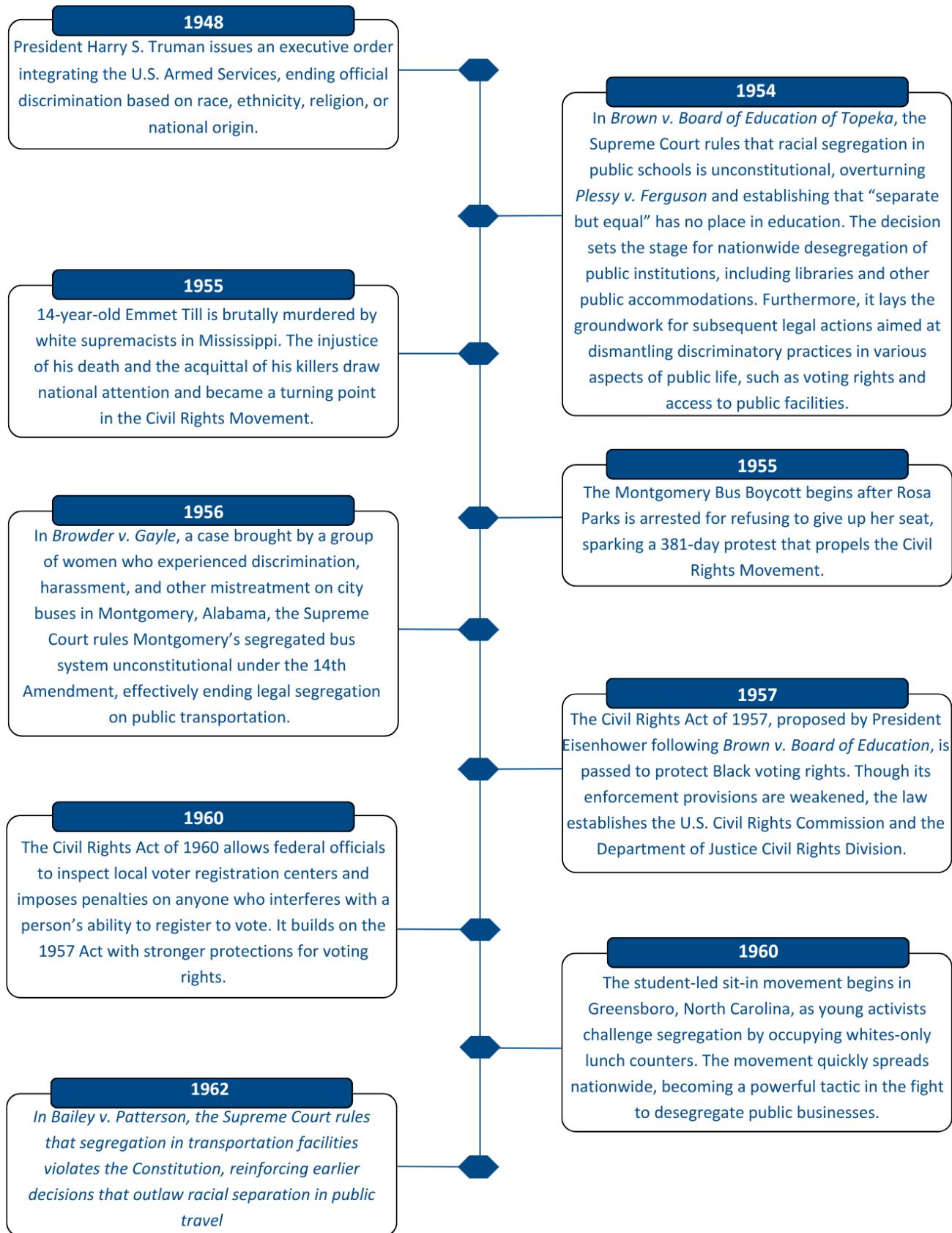
APPENDICES

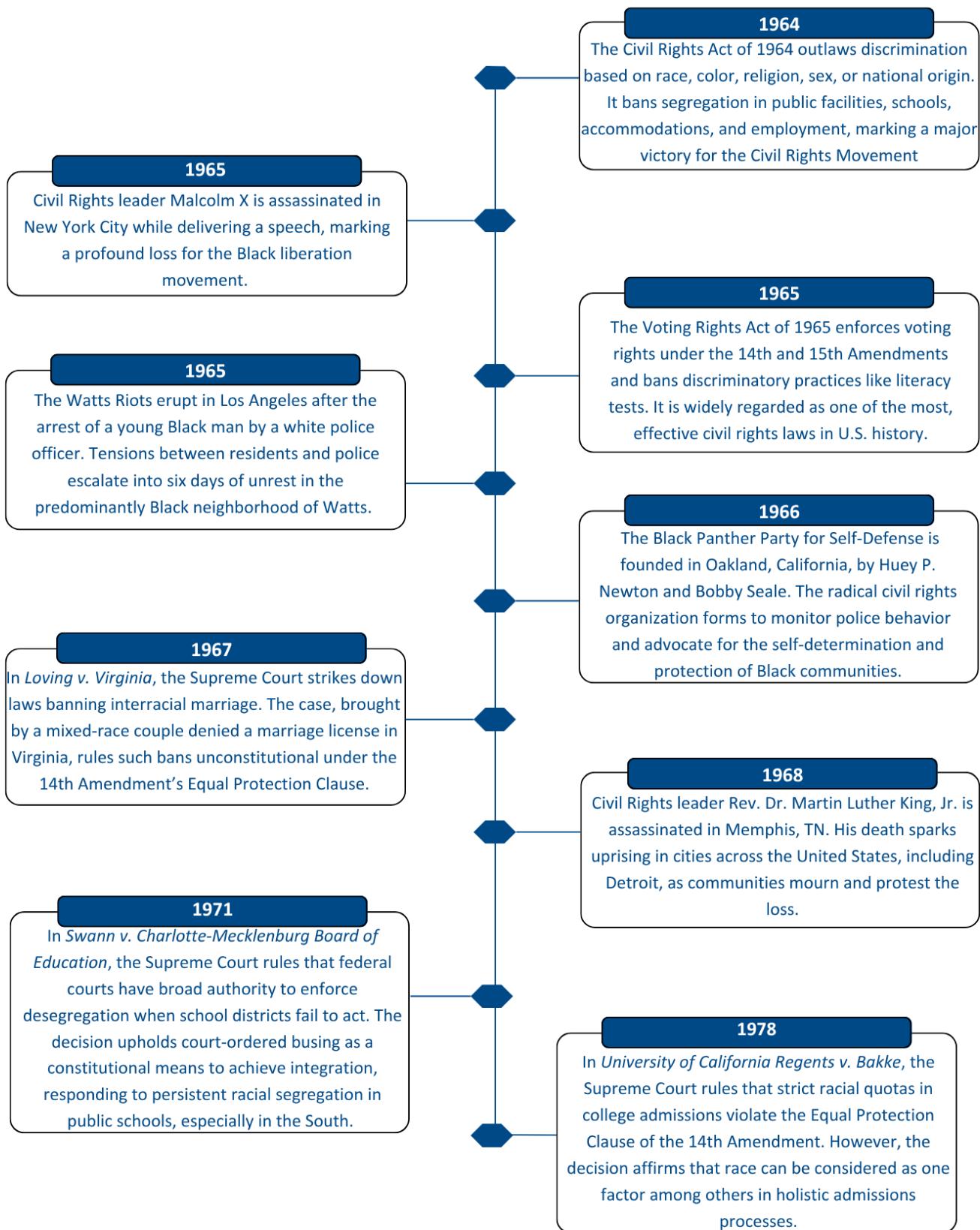
Appendix A: United States of America Historical Timeline

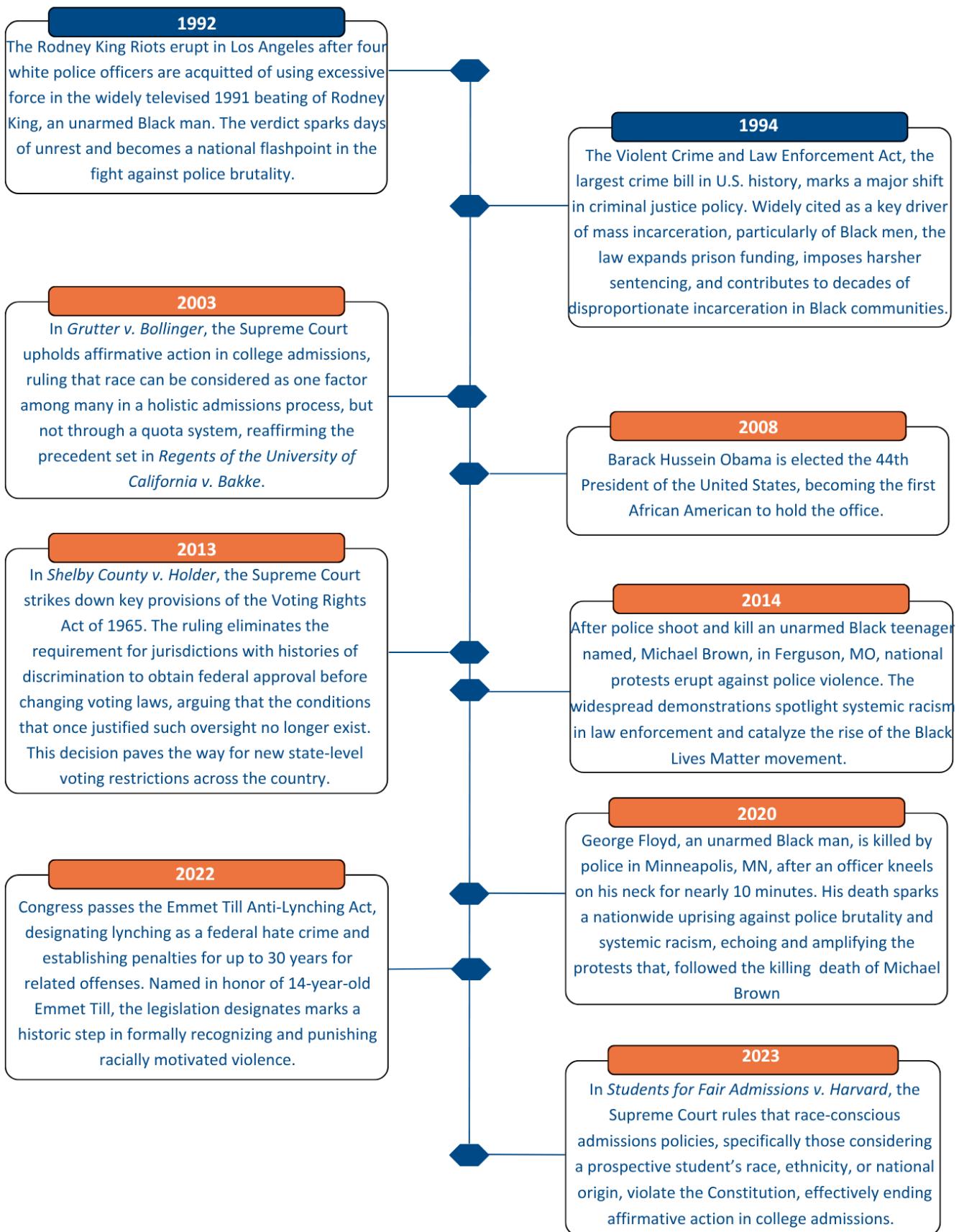












Appendix B: City of Asheville Reparations Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. 20- 128

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING COMMUNITY REPARATIONS FOR BLACK ASHEVILLE

WHEREAS, Black People have been unjustly Enslaved; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been unjustly Segregated; and

WHEREAS, Black people have been unjustly Incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been denied housing through racist practices in the private realty market, including redlining, steering, blockbusting, denial of mortgages, and gentrification; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been denied housing, displaced and inadequately housed by government housing policies that include discriminatory VA/FHA practices, Urban Renewal, and a variety of local and federal "affordable" housing programs; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been consistently and widely impoverished by discriminatory wages paid in every sector of the local economy regardless of credentials and experience; and

WHEREAS, Black People have experienced disproportionate unemployment rates and reduced opportunities to fully participate in the local job market; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been systematically excluded from historic and present private economic development and community investments and, therefore, black-owned businesses have not received the benefits of these investments; and

WHEREAS, Black people have been segregated from mainstream education and within present day school programs that include AG, AP, and Honors; and

WHEREAS, Black students have experienced the denial of education through admission, retention and graduation rates of every level of education in WNC and through discriminatory disciplinary practices; and

WHEREAS, Black People historically and presently receive inadequate, if not detrimental, health care as exemplified by disproportionate morbidities and mortality rates that result from the generational trauma of systemic racism, discriminatory treatment by medical professionals, and discriminatory medical practices such as involuntary sterilizations, denial of adequate testing, denial of preventative and curative procedures; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been unjustly targeted by law enforcement and criminal justice procedures, incarcerated at disproportionate rates and subsequently excluded from full participation in the benefits of citizenship that include voting, employment, housing and health care; and

WHEREAS, Black People have disproportionately been forced to reside in, adjacent to, or near Brown Zones and other toxic sites that negatively impact their health and property; and

WHEREAS, Black People have disproportionately been limited to the confined routes of travel provided by public transportation; and

WHEREAS, Black People have disproportionately suffered from the isolation of food deserts and childcare deserts;

WHEREAS, systemic racism was created over centuries and will take time to dismantle;

WHEREAS, state and federal governments have a responsibility to adopt programs, policies, and funding to address reparations;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE THAT:

The City Council of the City of Asheville:

(1) apologizes and makes amends for its participation in and sanctioning of the Enslavement of Black People;

(2) apologizes and makes amends for its enforcement of segregation and its accompanying discriminatory practices;

(3) apologizes and makes amends for carrying out an urban renewal program that destroyed multiple, successful black communities;

(4) calls on other organizations and institutions in Asheville that have advanced and benefitted from racial inequity to join the city in its apologies and invites them to address racism within their own structures and programs and to work with the city to more comprehensively address systemic racism;

(5) calls on the State of North Carolina and the federal government to initiate policymaking and provide funding for reparations at the state and national levels;

(6) directs the City Manager to establish a process within the next year to develop short, medium and long term recommendations to specifically address the creation of generational wealth and to boost economic mobility and opportunity in the black community;

(7) fully supports its equity department, staff and its work, and encourages the city manager to utilize their talents when forming policy and programs that will establish the creation of generational wealth and address reparations due in the black community as mentioned above;

(8) seeks to establish within the next year, a new commission empowered to make short, medium and long term recommendations that will make significant progress toward repairing the damage caused by public and private systemic Racism. Other local government community

organizations may also be invited to have representation on the Commission. The task of the Community Reparations Commission is to issue a report in a timely manner for consideration by the City and other participating community groups for incorporation into their respective short and long term priorities and plans. Accountability for achieving equity will be enforced in the appropriate offices. The report and the resulting budgetary and programmatic priorities may include but not be limited to increasing minority homeownership and access to other affordable housing, increasing minority business ownership and career opportunities, strategies to grow equity and generational wealth, closing the gaps in health care, education, employment and pay, neighborhood safety and fairness within criminal justice;

(9) calls on the city manager to give, at minimum, a bi-annual update to the city council on the progress of work performed pursuant to this resolution.

Read, approved and adopted this 14th day of July, 2020.

Magdalen Baulson
City Clerk

Eden M
Mayor

Approved as to form:


City Attorney

Appendix C: Buncombe County Reparations Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. 20-08-08

RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY REPARATIONS FOR BLACK PEOPLE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY

WHEREAS, between 1619 and 1865, an estimated 4,000,000 people were unjustly enslaved in the colonies and the United States;

WHEREAS, in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, there were an estimated 1,913 people enslaved in Buncombe County. At that time, 12,654 people lived in Buncombe County¹;

WHEREAS, slavery represented an irreconcilable contradiction in our nation's founding: a young democracy committed to the ideals of liberty and justice and yet actively perpetuating the degradation of Black people. This contradiction - what some have called our nation's original sin - has yet to be fully addressed and systemic racism continues to this day;

WHEREAS, the early American economy, including in North Carolina, was built with the labor of enslaved people who were denied the ability to generate wealth from their labor and who were instead subjected to brutal and inhumane abuses including violence, the forced separation of families, being denied access to education and voting, and death;

WHEREAS, even after slavery was abolished by the 13th Amendment, Black Americans in the South continued to be persecuted under the regime of Jim Crow laws and segregation;

WHEREAS, between 1877 and 1950, more than 4,084 Black people were lynched in the South, including three people who were lynched in Buncombe County²;

WHEREAS, many Black Americans could not effectively exercise the right to vote in the United States until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 due to racist state and local voter suppression laws;

WHEREAS, public schools in Buncombe County were not integrated until the 1966-67 school year, as a result of a district court ruling more than a decade after the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education³;

WHEREAS, even after the era of legal segregation ended, Black Americans continue to experience the harms of institutional and systemic racism;

¹ 1860 Slave Schedule; 1860 Census

² Equal Justice Institute: <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report>

³ <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/01/07/today-asheville-history-buncombe-school-integration-plan/78400878/>

WHEREAS, urban renewal in Buncombe County destroyed many homes and businesses owned by Black families and greatly harmed many traditional minority neighborhoods, displacing many people to live in public housing;

WHEREAS, despite decades of policy-level efforts and community and faith-based efforts to create racial justice, deep disparities persist for Black people in Buncombe County, including but not limited to the areas of infant mortality, home ownership, ownership of businesses, earnings, health, education, justice system involvement, incarceration, and life expectancy;

WHEREAS, in Buncombe County, only 41% of Black people own the home they live in compared with 65% for White people⁴;

WHEREAS, although Black people comprise 6.3% of the population of Buncombe County, less than 2% of businesses are owned by Black people⁵;

WHEREAS, Buncombe County has a leadership role in supporting economic development, public education and health care in our community and must assure this vital work is carried out so all people have an equal opportunity to thrive and that no part of our community is left behind;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress passed resolutions via House Bill 194 in 2008 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 in 2008, apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow, however our country has not yet made reparations for these harms, which have now passed through generations of Black Americans⁶;

WHEREAS, the United States has made reparations to other communities who have experienced human rights violations and systemic racism⁷, including Japanese Americans who were interned and their descendants; to Pueblo Native Americans in 1924; Navajo-Hopi Native Americans in 1950; Alaskan Native Americans in 1971; Seminole and Chippewa Native Americans in 1985; and Ottawa Native Americans all via acts of Congress supported by presidents Coolidge, Truman, Nixon, and Reagan, respectively. Reparations have also been made to descendants of survivors of racial terrorism and massacres targeting Black people in Rosewood, Florida, and Greenwood, Oklahoma, through acts of their state legislatures in 1994 and 2001;

WHEREAS, on July 14, 2020 the City of Asheville passed a resolution to create a local commission to make recommendations about how community reparations can be made and has invited other local governments to participate;

⁴ U.S. Census, 2018 American Community Survey

⁵ <https://www.stateofblackasheville.org/economics/>

⁶ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hres194/text>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/reparations-slavery.html>

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNTY COMMISSION OF BUNCOMBE COUNTY

The County Commission of Buncombe County:

- (1) apologizes to the Black community - including descendants of people who were enslaved in Buncombe County - and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's participation in and sanctioning of the enslavement of Black people;
- (2) apologizes to the Black community and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's enforcement of segregation and racist, discriminatory policies and practices during that era;
- (3) apologizes to the Black community and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's participation in an urban renewal program that harmed multiple, successful black communities;
- (4) will appoint representatives to and fully participate in the new Community Reparations Commission that the City of Asheville is creating;
- (5) calls on other organizations and institutions in our community that have advanced and benefitted from racial inequity to join in these steps;
- (6) calls on the U.S. Congress to pass H.R. 40, which would establish the federal Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans, which would examine the legacy of slavery and discrimination in the United States and make recommendations to Congress to address their lingering impacts⁸;
- (7) calls on the state government of North Carolina to complete a parallel process;
- (8) directs county staff, including the newly-formed Equity and Inclusion Workgroup, to continue prioritizing racial equity in the implementation of the Buncombe County Strategic plan, including but not limited to the following urgent priority areas for Black residents of Buncombe County:
 - Expanding access to quality early childhood education and taking other steps to reduce the opportunity and achievement gap in the local public school systems;
 - Increasing Black home ownership, business ownership and other strategies to support upward mobility and build generational wealth within the Black community;
 - Reducing health disparities, including infant mortality;

⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>

- Reducing racial disparities in the justice system.

(9) directs county staff to update content on www.buncombecounty.org about the history of Buncombe County to include references to enslaved people who lived in our community; and

(10) directs county staff to provide, at minimum, bi-annual updates to the County Commission on the impact of strategies being pursued through the Strategic Plan on reducing racial disparities in Buncombe County; and on the progress of the Community Reparations Commission.

Read, approved and adopted this 4th day of August, 2020.



Lamar Layne
COUNTY CLERK



Brown
COMMISSION CHAIR

Approved as to form:



Linda H. Trahan
COUNTY ATTORNEY

Appendix D: Resolution to Conduct Harm Audit

VOL: February 7, 2023

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RESOLUTION NO. 23-02-08

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING ADDITIONAL STAFF WORK TO DEVELOP A SCOPE OF
WORK FOR AN OFFICIAL AUDIT TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE
REGULATIONS, STATUTES, AND LOCAL REQUIREMENTS TO CEASE HARM IMPACTING
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

WHEREAS, there has been increased attention to Racial Equity by Buncombe County Government – including adoption of the Racial Equity Action Plan and declaration of racism as a public health and safety crisis; and

WHEREAS, on August 4, 2020, the Board of Commissioners of Buncombe County adopted a resolution supporting community reparations for Black People in Buncombe County, apologizing to the Black community - including descendants of people who were enslaved in Buncombe County - and seeking to make amends for Buncombe County's participation in and sanctioning of the enslavement of Black people; enforcement of segregation and racist, discriminatory policies and practices during that era; urban renewal program that harmed multiple, successful black communities; appoint representatives to and fully participate in the new Community Reparations Commission created by the City of Asheville; and

WHEREAS, that August 2020 Board resolution directed county staff, including the then newly-formed Equity and Inclusion Workgroup, to continue prioritizing racial equity in the implementation of the Buncombe County Strategic plan, including but not limited to the following urgent priority areas for Black residents of Buncombe County:

- Expanding access to quality early childhood education and taking other steps to reduce the opportunity and achievement gap in the local public school systems;
- Increasing Black home ownership, business ownership and other strategies to support upward mobility and build generational wealth within the Black community;
- Reducing health disparities, including infant mortality;
- Reducing racial disparities in the justice system.; and

WHEREAS, on December 5, 2022, the Community Reparations Commission, unanimously approved an immediate recommendation for the City of Asheville and Buncombe County to

stop further harm by ceasing the repetition of institutional processes that lead to racially disparate outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the immediate recommendation included conducting an official audit to ensure compliance with federal and state laws, regulatory bodies, codes of conduct, court orders, and consent decrees to allow for the acceptance of guarantees that the City and County have ceased to inflict further harm on the African American community; and

WHEREAS, the City and County acknowledges compliance does not, in full, eliminate negative impacts to the African American Community and the City and County have implemented measures intended to cease further harm on the African American community to include the creation of the Equity & Inclusion Department and Equity and Human Rights Office, respectively; and utilization of equity analysis tools to evaluate policies, procedures and decisions; and

WHEREAS, the magnitude of the effort and the intent from the Community Reparations Commission, an independent third-party firm (s) will need to be selected to conduct the audit as described by the immediate recommendation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners as follows:

1. The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners commits and provides assurances that it will take necessary and reasonable action to address harm due to intentional and unintentional policies, programs, practices and procedures that produce disparities as well as racially and gender-based discriminate outcomes in Education, Health Care, Housing, Economic Development and Justice as identified or discovered from the audit or during the process.

2. Buncombe County Board of Commissioners also commits to take measures to create and/or strengthen the following:

- Confidence building between government and African Americans;
- Truth seeking mechanisms and processes; and
- Timely accountability of the dispensation of the Community Reparations Commission's immediate recommendations.

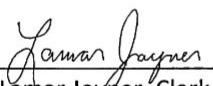
3. The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners directs the County Manager to work collaboratively with City of Asheville and the Community Reparations Commission to develop a solicitation that includes a formal scope of work to implement the immediate recommendation approved by the Community Reparations Commission at its December 5, 2022 meeting. The

scope of work should include a financial assessment and policy assessment for programmatic areas related to governmental operations.

4. Upon audit completion, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners directs the County Manager to review the findings and evaluate and prioritize remediation opportunities.

This the 7th day of February 2023.

ATTEST



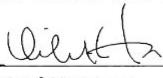
Lamar Joyner, Clerk

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR THE
COUNTY OF BUNCOMBE

BY: 

Brownie Newman, Chairman

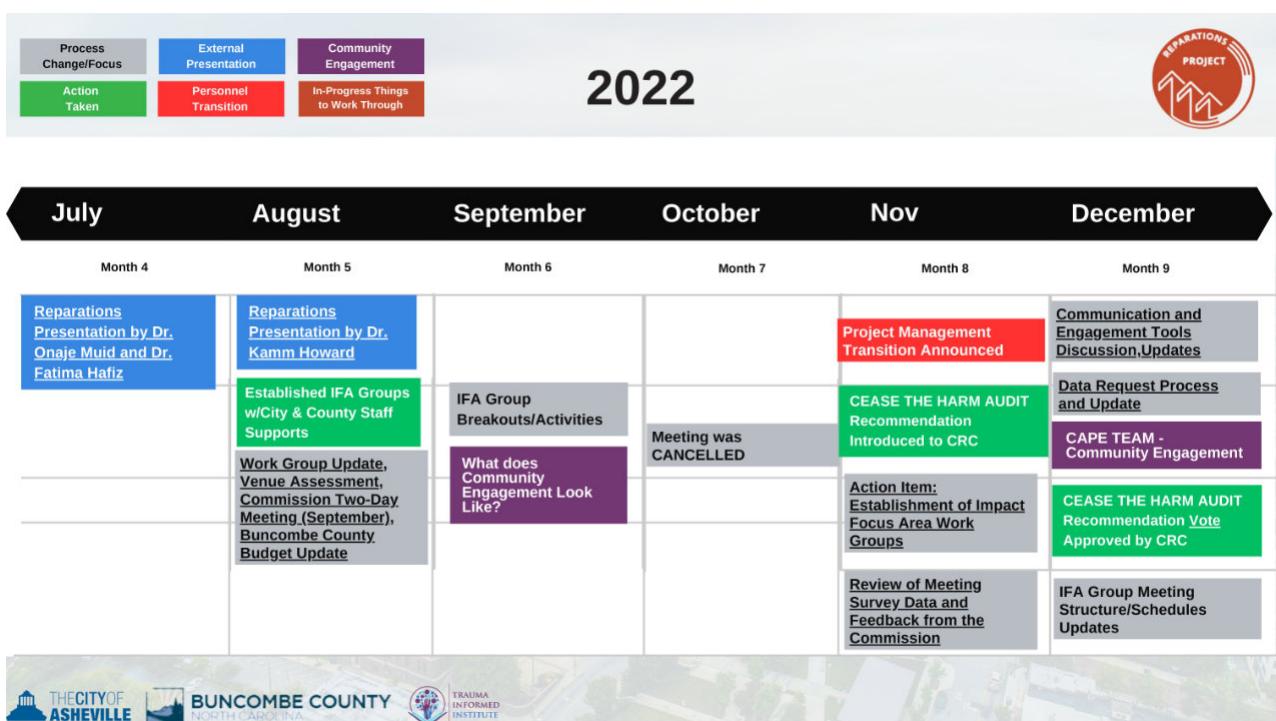
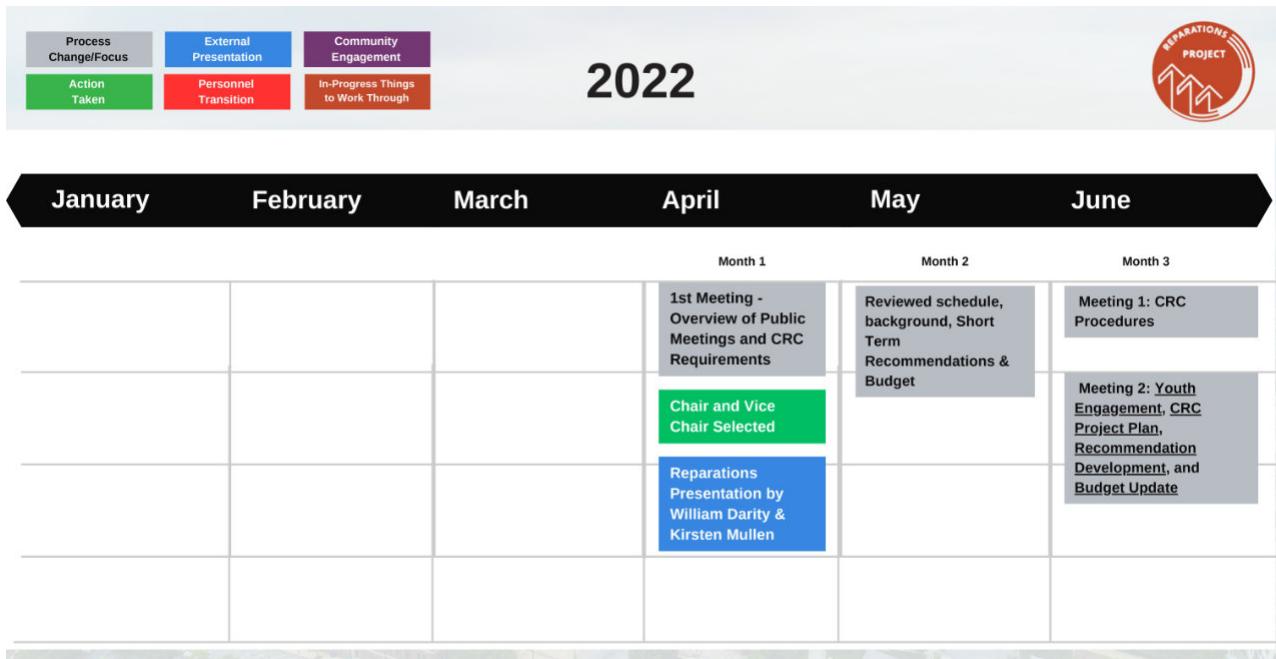
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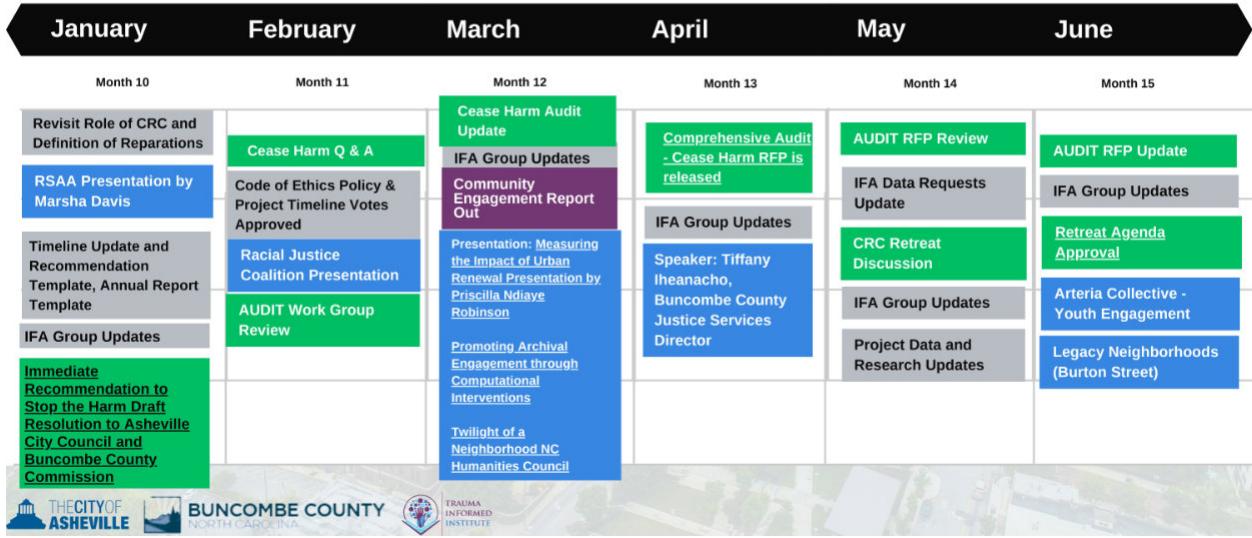


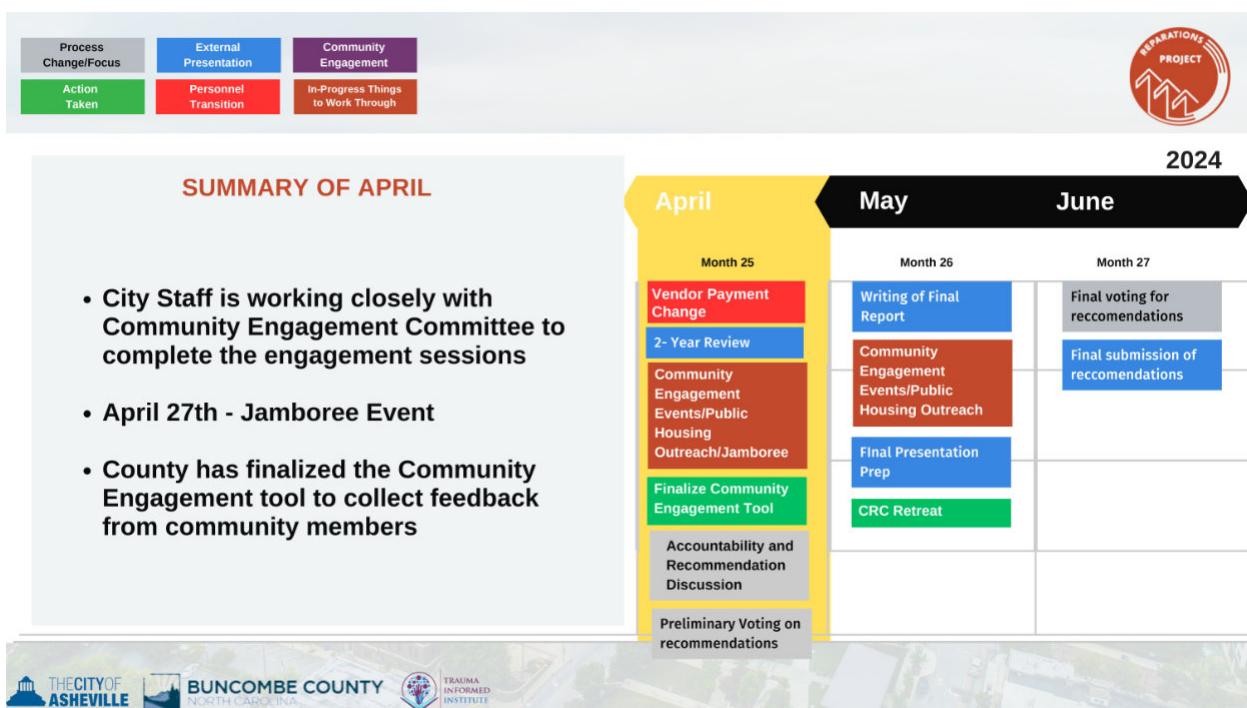
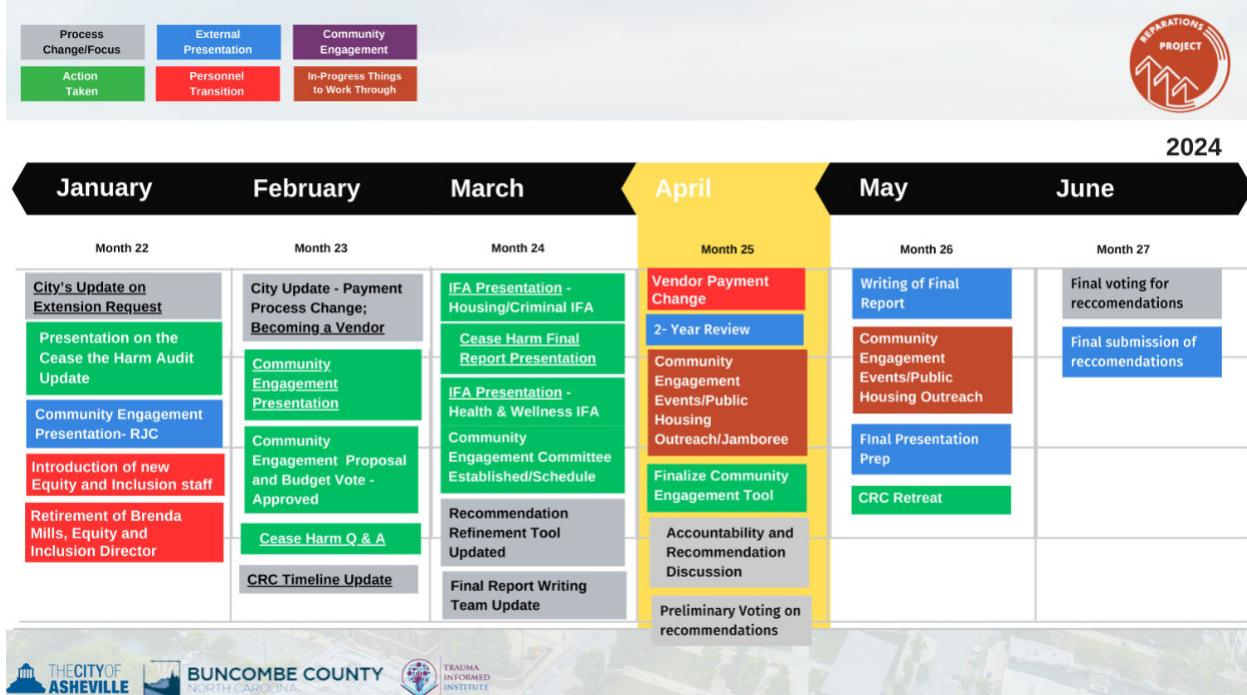
County Attorney

Appendix E: CRC Project Timeline

*Timeline updated by Vernisha Crawford with Trauma Informed Care.







SUMMARY OF MAY

- City has developed a working group for Commission Members to assist Natalie with finalizing the written final report
- Community Engagement Events will continue
- CRC Retreat - June 1st

April	May	June
Month 25	Month 26	Month 27
Vendor Payment Change	Writing of Final Report	Final voting for recommendations
2- Year Review	Community Engagement Events/Public Housing Outreach	Final submission of recommendations
Community Engagement Events/Public Housing Outreach/Jamboree	Final Presentation Prep	
Finalize Community Engagement Tool	CRC Retreat	
Accountability and Recommendation Discussion		
Preliminary Voting on recommendations		







2024

SUMMARY OF JUNE

- Vote on Final Recommendations
- Submit recommendations and final report to City Council and County Commission by June 30th
- Present recommendations to City/County

April	May	June
Month 25	Month 26	Month 27
Vendor Payment Change	Writing of Final Report	Final voting for recommendations
2- Year Review	Community Engagement Events/Public Housing Outreach	Final submission of recommendations
Community Engagement Events/Public Housing Outreach/Jamboree	Final Presentation Prep	
Finalize Community Engagement Tool	CRC Retreat	
Accountability and Recommendation Discussion		
Preliminary Voting on recommendations		







2024

*Recommendation Development Template created by Christine Edwards with Civility Localized.

Recommendations Development Template

IFA Facilitators will develop and organize their work group's draft recommendations for the CRC process by using the following guiding questions and accompanying spreadsheet.

Number	Give each recommendation an identifying number
Recommendation	Name the recommendation, program or initiative
Description	Describe the recommendation, initiative or program in detail. Who will it serve and for what duration? Is this recommendation location- based? If so, list the location in Buncombe County where this recommendation will take effect.
Harm Addressed	List the harmful policy or action that will be addressed by passing this recommendation, program or initiative through the Community Reparations Commission. What harm caused by racism, discrimination or unfair practices or policies to Black people will specifically be addressed?
Community Impact	Describe the community impact that will be felt both in the short term and long term if this recommendation, program or initiative is passed through the Community Reparations Commission. Will it impact the wider Buncombe County community or a small subsection of the community?
Impact Level	Describe the impact level based on community need and impact (High Impact = high urgency, Medium Impact, Low Impact)

5

Recommendations Development Template

Examples/ Resource Links	List examples of this recommendation, program or initiative in practice or the resources to make it feasible.
Corresponding Data Resource	List the Data Resources either needed or obtained through the data request process needed to complete research or further vet this recommendation.
Recommendation Cost (Not Required)	
To be completed by City and County Staff	
Recommendation Type & Responsibility	Policy, Program, Project, Partnership, Which Department or Organization is Responsible for Implementation
Recommendation Cost	Estimate the dollar amount needed to deliver this service, project or initiative
Feasibility Level	Describe the feasibility level based on whether the recommendation can be easily implemented, already occurring and/or low cost or lower legal barriers (High Feasibility = easy to implement and low cost, Medium Feasibility, Low Feasibility)

6

2023 Project Timeline

Commission Members, IFA Facilitators will follow the project process according to the organize their work group's draft recommendations for the CRC process by using the following activities

Activity	Project Timeline	Deliverable
Activity 5: Reaffirm resolution and commission roles	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Reaffirm the 2020 Resolution and commission roles.▪ Define Reparations for Asheville and Buncombe County.
Activity 6: Further Develop IFA Recommendations	January - August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ IFA Facilitators will lead their work groups in the development and organization of recommendations using the recommendations development template and report to CRC monthly, and Project Manager Bi-Monthly.▪ All recommendations should be submitted for consideration by May 31, 2023.
Activity 7: Community Input and Engagement	September - December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ IFA Facilitators will host meetings with the intention of opening the process up to community members to listen, observe and participate.▪ Additionally, the City and County and CRC Members will support partnership events where the community can learn about the Reparations recommendations process and provide input.
Activity 8: Recommendation Review	August - September 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Project Manager will create a feedback process for reviewing legal backing and guidance to create highly feasible recommendations to guide prioritization.▪ City and County staff subject matter experts, budget team members and legal team members will review draft recommendations for feasibility under the local government purview and provide estimated cost.▪ Review period: August 11 to September 15.
Activity 9: Present Recommendations for Commission Voting	September 2023 - January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Commission will vote to pass recommendations in rounds.▪ The vote will be conducted via majority vote.▪ The recommendations that "pass" will then be sent to the governing bodies for their approval and adoption.
Activity 10: Submit Written Report and Project Close Out	February 2024- April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recommendations passed by the CRC will be compiled and presented to the City and County governing bodies and shared with the wider public.▪ The Project Manager will lead the development of the Reparations Action Plan.

Appendix F: Cease Harm Audit Timeline

Activity	Project Timeline	Deliverable
Project Design	July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Finalize project goals, objectives, and timeline▪ Develop communication plan
Data Collection	August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Develop data collection matrix for each IFA▪ Conduct preliminary analysis▪ Host department cohort meetings to clarify data
Research & Analysis	September - November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Analyze IFA data▪ Host follow-up cohort meetings
Draft Summary & Findings	December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Draft summary report of initial findings
Preliminary Presentation	January-February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Develop presentation on preliminary findings▪ Present to City and County officials▪ Present to CRC
Final Presentation	April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Present final report with findings and recommendations▪ Present to City and County officials▪ Present to CRC

