



City Council Referral Request

Tracking Number 2024 - 55 Date of Referral 8/13/2024 Requester Mayor Payne
(Provided by Susan)

Referral To ☐ Study Session ☐ Work Session
☒ Staff ☐ Ad Hoc Committee on Public Safety
☐ General Government Committee ☐ Finance Committee
☐ Land Use & Environment Committee ☐ Advisory Committee Choose from Dropdown

Problem Statement

A clear concise description of the issue(s) that need(s) to be addressed.

Black and African Americans continue to be denied rights of self-determination, inheritance, and full participation in the United States government and society. The laws and practices in the United States continue to treat Black and African American people in a manner similar to slavery – maintaining dual systems with varying degrees of disparities in virtually every area of life including punishment, health care, education, wealth, and many other areas. Much of the reason these disparities persist in today's society is because the United States government has not truly reckoned with the long-term consequences of chattel slavery.

Reparations is a process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions and families. Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries that which they need to repair and heal themselves. Such rights to obtain include but are not limited to direct cash payments, land, housing, college education, and healthcare. Examples of groups that have obtained reparations include Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust; Japanese Americans interned in concentration camps in the United States during World War II; Alaska Natives for land, labor, and resources taken; victims of the massacre in Rosewood, Florida and their descendants, Native Americans as a remedy for violations of treaty rights, and political dissenters in Argentina and their descendants.

Chattel slavery is said to have lasted officially from 1619 to June 19th, 1865, thus creating the holiday known today as Juneteenth. Although, some scholars say the institution of chattel slavery began earlier than 1619. In 1565, for example, the Spanish brought free and enslaved Africans to present-day St. Augustine, Florida. Slavery was followed by 100 years of government led and supported denial of equal and humane treatment including Black Codes, convict leasing, sharecropping, peonage, and Jim Crow practices of separate and unequal accommodations. This is all followed by several years of mass incarceration and a growing wealth gap between white and black generations. In 2008, the United States Congress passed resolutions via House Bill 194 apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African Americans, followed by Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 in 2009, apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African Americans. However, our country has not yet made reparations for these harms, which have now passed through generations of Black Americans resulting in many systemic inequities impacting the Black residents of our community today.

Request

What is being requested to assist in addressing the issue described in the problem statement?

This referral is asking the staff to draft a resolution calling on the state Legislature, Governor, Congress, and the Office of the President of the United States to create state and federal taskforces/commissions to study reparations for the descendants of enslaved African people. The resolution should also encourage other Washington municipalities to join the City of Olympia in making a similar request of our state and federal governments.

This referral also directs City of Olympia staff to research possible city-scale actions and continue to explore ways the city government can support efforts to petition our state and federal governments to study this issue and implement findings. Meanwhile, connecting our own Olympia Strong initiatives, Affordable Homeownership Study findings, Comprehensive Plan, Fair Housing Assessment, Capital Facilities, and non-government and governmental partnerships to our city's actions and research other cities that have taken similar action.

Relationship to City Business or Proposed City Business/Services

Describe how this will enhance what is already offered and/or what it will provide that is not currently available. Why is this the City's issue to address? How will this create a more adaptive and resilient organization? How will this enhance the City's work to further equity, climate, and social justice?

The City of Olympia has committed itself to diversity, equity and, inclusion with a statement, which commits to becoming an anti-racist city, which encompasses not only the removal of barriers that impact Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), but also repairing the harm that has been done. In Thurston County, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) households are more likely to be renters with approximately 42% of BIPOC households renting compared to 31% of white households. Homeownership is the primary means for wealth building in the United States. The average homeowner's net worth is forty times that of a typical renter according to the Federal Reserve. Data from the 2022 Assessment of Fair Housing indicates that individuals participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program or on the waitlist for housing assistance from the Housing Authority of Thurston County are more likely to be Black, Indigenous and people of color, people with disabilities, and other members of protected classes. For example, Black households comprised 11% of the Housing Choice Voucher Program participants in the City of Olympia, compared to 2.8% of the general population, and 20% of applicants on the waiting list for assistance from the Housing Authority of Thurston County identified as Black or African American.

According to the National League of Cities, municipalities across the country are committed to increasing the upward economic mobility of residents and reducing the racial wealth gap. By allocating funds to address these goals, the municipalities can also lessen the impact of coming downturns on families and their municipal budget. One unique opportunity to do both is to improve the ability of communities of color to become homeowners, which is work the City of Olympia has prioritized. A lack of equitable access to homeownership has consistently been a key driver of the racial wealth divide. Homeownership offers a consistent, predictable housing payment that can serve as a buffer against

rising housing costs, the chance to build equity, and a potential asset that can be passed down to future generations.

For most families in the United States, owning a home represents the most significant potential for transferring wealth between generations and a meaningful step toward economic stability and upward mobility. Municipalities are utilizing many strategies to increase homeownership and housing affordability. However, to impact racial wealth inequities, it is crucial to consider the root causes of homeownership inequities. Some city leaders are considering how they can address historical injustice—specifically, righting the denied payment of wages to enslaved Black people for their labor, acknowledging local governments’ role in this practice, and acting to change institutions and restore justice to individuals harmed. These practices are often known as reparations and can be connected to a city’s homeownership strategy and can address some of the key findings in the Olympia and Thurston County 2023-2027 Assessment of Fair Housing. The City of Olympia has already completed its work on an Affordable Homeownership Study, which prioritizes the need to increase homeownership for Black residents.

Connection to Comprehensive Plan

Choose all that apply.

This is a city-wide importance. Black and African American members of our community live in our downtown, partake in our economy, rely on our environment, and are critical to our community neighborhoods.

- ☒ **Community, Safety and Health**
Inclusive, respectful, civic participation; a safe & prepared community; health and wellness; adequate food and shelter; a quality education
- ☒ **Downtown**
Vibrant, attractive urban destination; a safe and welcoming downtown for all; a mix of urban housing options; a variety of businesses; connections to our cultural & historic fabric; engaging arts & entertainment experience
- ☒ **Economy**
Abundant local products and services; a thriving arts and entertainment industry; sustainable quality infrastructure; a stable thriving economy
- ☒ **Environment**
Clean water & air; a daily connection to nature; preserved quality natural areas; a toxin-free community; a waste free culture
- ☒ **Neighborhoods**
Distinctive places & gathering spaces; nearby goods & services; neighborhoods that are engaged in community decision making; safe and welcoming places to live

Options

Describe proposed options for moving the idea or issue forward for the meeting body to consider.

Draft a City Council resolution that acknowledges the history of slavery and its lasting effects of the descendants of enslaved African people in our country, including those in Olympia, Washington.

Encourage the Regional Housing Council and Thurston County to sign the pledge to join the Black Homeownership Initiative with King and Pierce County and recommend that Thurston County and the City of Olympia establish clear goals for Black and African American homeownership.

Timing

Is this issue time sensitive, are there other timing factors to consider?

This resolution can be brought forward at any time. There is a preference for it to be completed prior to the start of 2025 state legislative session and the start of the new Congress in January 2025.

Supporting Documentation (Work Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Parks Plan, etc)

Are there documents that support your request or that should be considered?

Councilmember Signatures

Two Councilmembers must support the request including the Chair of the Committee of referral. (Cannot be a committee quorum unless discussed at an open public meeting of the committee.)

Dontae Payne, Mayor
Sponsoring Councilmember

1. Yến Huỳnh
Councilmember
2. Robert Vanderpool
Councilmember

Staff Supplement

Staff will review the request to generate administrative impacts to be considered as part of proposal (staff to initial after their review):

Budget Impacts: Click or tap here to enter text.

Legal Review (to include regulatory authority): Click or tap here to enter text.

Policy implications: Click or tap here to enter text.

Implementation Considerations: Click or tap here to enter text.

Staff Liaison: Click or tap here to enter text.