

## Proclamation

### Commemorating the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Olympia's Stand Against Anti-Chinese Violence

Whereas, by the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Puget Sound region received an influx of settlers from around the world, among them were southeast Chinese immigrants, who provided a much-needed labor force in constructing new towns in the region, including Olympia; and

Whereas, before the arrival of Chinese immigrants, most of Olympia's streets existed only on paper, but after being hired by the town as contract laborers, the men built bridges, cleared stumps, and graded streets in and around what is now downtown, while also working in homes of wealthy white community members, local manufacturing businesses and lumber camps, were widely employed in the local oystering industry, served as crew members on early steamships, and played a significant role in strengthening and sustaining Olympia's economy; and

Whereas, the Olympia Chinese population significantly grew between the 1850s-1880s; their cultural celebrations received regular mention in the local press; their small businesses, including laundries and restaurants, formed a Chinatown near the waterfront; and many early Chinese residents shared the Locke surname, leading some to refer to Olympia as "Locke Town"; and

Whereas, in the winter of 1886, anti-Chinese Violence swept the Pacific Northwest amid racial prejudice and economic scapegoating, as white laborers, feeling threatened by low-wage competition, joined unions like the Knights of Labor and the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), which organized the harassment, expulsion, and even murder of Chinese people throughout the West, leading to widespread destruction in many communities; and

Whereas, federal law at the time affirmed that Chinese residents lawfully had the right to remain in the United States, yet mobs sought to override those protections, making such expulsions acts of lawlessness and racial exclusion; and

Whereas, in February 1886, an organized attempt was made to expel Olympia's Chinese residents and burn their homes and businesses, echoing violence elsewhere in the region; and

Whereas, Olympia Mayor Andsworth Chambers, Sheriff William Billings, and City Marshal Fred Guyot acted swiftly, working together to uphold the rule of law by maneuvering the mob and quickly deputizing residents to form a protective barrier that prevented bloodshed and destruction, arresting mob leaders and IWA members John

Hetzel, Louis Bales, and Ernest Gooding, demonstrating that community responsibility can prevail even in times of deep division; and

Whereas, federal courts secured convictions against some organizers, a rare act of accountability during an era when racial violence often went unpunished; and

Whereas, we acknowledge that anti-Chinese sentiment existed locally, that interventions came only when violence was imminent, and that systemic racism persisted long after, such as giving Chinese community members lower earning statuses, exclusion from local cemetery records and restrictive immigration laws that limited new arrivals of Chinese immigrants; and

Whereas, we honor the resilience of Olympia's Chinese community, whose contributions are an important part of our shared history, including the development of transportation infrastructure through railroads, later generations went on to accomplish great things in the community and beyond, even becoming Washington Governor, and forming the Olympia Area Chinese Association that exists today to preserve and share Chinese culture; and

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the Olympia City Council does hereby recognize February 2026 as the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of

#### Olympia's Stand Against Anti-Chinese Violence

In the city of Olympia and encourages all residents to remember both the courage shown and the injustice that made such courage necessary, to learn about and honor the contributions of Chinese community members past and present, and to reaffirm our commitment to equity and inclusion for all, and the importance of knowing our rights and protecting our neighbors – then and now.

SIGNED IN THE CITY OF OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON THIS 3<sup>rd</sup> Day of March 2026

Olympia City Council

Dontae Payne

Mayor