

Briefing and Discussion on Reparations for the Descendants of Enslaved African People

City Council Study Session

June 24, 2025



What are we trying to solve?

The Legacy of Charles Mitchell

- Charles Mitchell was born enslaved in Maryland in 1847 and forcibly relocated to Washington Territory in 1855 by his owner James Tilton
- Charles Mitchell lived in Olympia, residing in the Tilton home, now 1009 Columbia St SW
- In 1857, the US Supreme Court rendered slavery legal in territories like Washington, but was illegal in the British Empire, including Victoria
- African-Canadians from Victoria encouraged 13-year-old, Charles Mitchell to escape from slavery in Olympia to freedom in Victoria
- On September 24, 1860, Charles Mitchell, seeking life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness escaped as a stow away on an international mail steamer headed for Victoria, aided by African-Canadians James Allen and William Davis

Pioneer and Democrat.

OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON TERRITORY,
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1860.

EDWARD FURSTE, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

'Truth crush'd to earth will rise again,
The eternal years of God are here.'

Fugitive Slave Case.

The people of Victoria, especially the black element and their sympathizers, have been greatly exhilarated at the escape of a boy from this side, who it appears was sworn to by some negroes, who knew nothing of the facts, as being a slave of Gen. Tilton, Surveyor-General of this Territory. Not deeming it necessary to enter into a lengthy detail of the causes which led to the escape of the negro boy Charley, we will endeavor in as brief a manner as possible, to present the circumstances and influences by which the boy was surrounded, and the arguments used to wean his affections from those who have been to him a father and mother, rather than master or mistress, as stated in the affidavit of the Victoria blacks,

What are Reparations?

- 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.



Problem Statement

- Black residents that are descendants of enslaved African people continue to experience the lasting effects of slavery, systemic racism and policies that have denied them access to wealth building opportunities, particularly homeownership.



Racially Restricted Covenants

- Restrictive covenants, played a significant role in shaping the history of housing in Olympia and Thurston County.
- These were clauses written into property deeds that restricted the sale or occupancy of homes based on race or religion, contributing to racial segregation and exclusion.
- Currently Thurston County is undertaking efforts to identify and remove racially restrictive covenants from property records, acknowledging their historical significance while working to mitigate their negative consequences. Property owners can file for a restrictive covenant modification to remove these clauses at no cost.

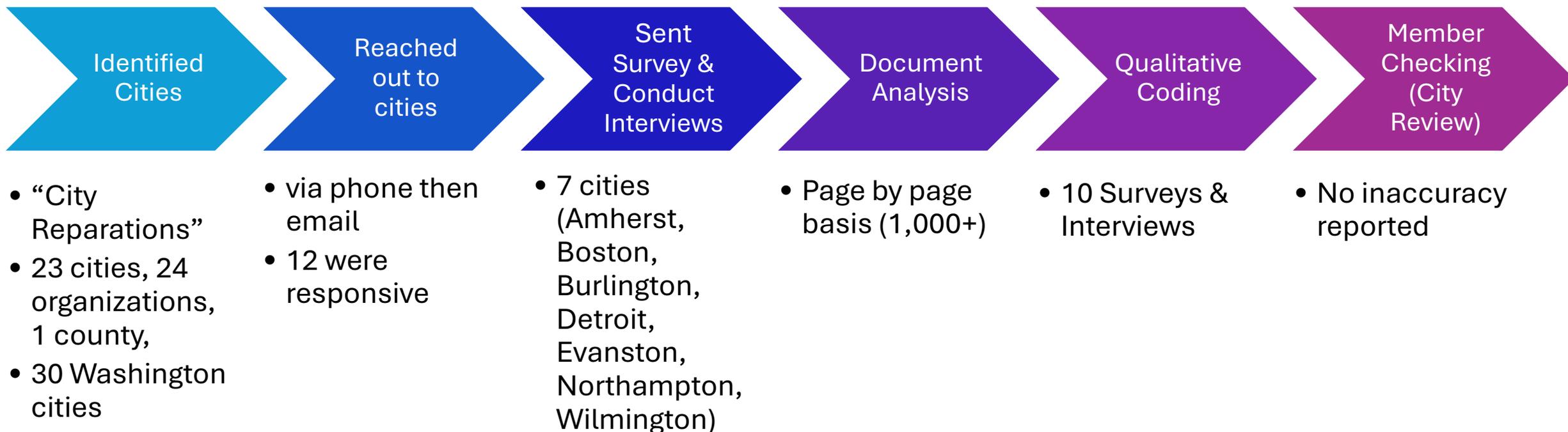


Research

Olympia Reparations Process



Research Methodology “The Process”



Feedback from other Cities



- “Thank you for sharing this draft. It is equally impressive and informative!”
- “I think this is an excellent report and you capture the context in Burlington very well. Is this a private report? I ask only because I would love to share the final version with our city council and mayor’s office if not.”
- “It is heartening to hear reparations work is happening in Olympia and thank you for the work that you do.”
- “It’s very informative and helpful to hear what other cities are doing. We need to help each other on a national basis.”



Considerations from Social Justice and Equity Commission

Concepts SJEC identified as worth exploring for Reparations

- Establishment of a Business Operations Guaranty Fund
 - Creating a business microloan program for small community-based businesses, start-ups, and sole proprietorships
 - Provide grants/funds and other capacity-building to businesses
 - Provide monetary reparations
 - Create a home ownership down payment assistance program
 - Establish a “loan pool” that can support homeownership and affordable housing construction
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Considerations from Social Justice and Equity Commission

Concepts SJEC identified as worth exploring beyond Reparations

- “Ban the box” ordinance to prohibit landlords from asking questions of potential renters about criminal system history
 - Review hiring practices in City departments to dismantle systemic barriers to hiring and promoting qualified minority candidates
 - Provide additional mental health supports for BIPOC youth
 - Legal vouchers
 - Suggest considering the whole Discussion Guide section in education for whole community in general
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The Path Forward

The City's Repair Work

- In 2023 the City partnered with Truclusion to study experiences of discrimination in Olympia as part of our equity work
 - Establishment of Rebecca Howard Park
 - Formal commitment to participate in the Black Home Initiative's efforts to address housing disparities.
 - Commitment to Equity
 - Becoming an Anti-Racist City
 - Social Justice and Equity Commission
 - Reimagining Public Safety
 - Fair Housing Initiatives
 - Tenant protections
 - Internal Diversity Equity & Inclusion work
 - Use of Equity framework
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State Level Reparations

- During the 2025 Legislative Session, through a budget proviso of \$300,000, the State has funded the Charles Mitchell and George Washington Bush Study on Reparative Action for Washington State.
 - The study take place from 2025 – 2027 and will produce detailed policy proposals and a roadmap for implementation.
 - The study will:
 - Analyze the lasting impact of slavery and state policies on direct descendants of enslaved African people.
 - Explore reparative remedies – like direct payments, education investment, economic opportunity programs, and criminal justice reform.
- The City will share its study with the State to help inform their work.



Next Steps

- Facilitated conversations with staff to determine connections to plans: Olympia Strong; Comprehensive Plan; Fair Housing Assessment; Capital Facilities Plan and non-government and governmental partnerships to our city's plans.
- Taking City Council feedback based on discussions today to move forward specific City-scale actions related to reparations and repair.
- Continued collaboration with the State, County and other partners related to reparations and repair.

