



Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

**Public Hearing and Recommendation for
Proposed Park Naming for 911 Adams St SE -
Rebecca Howard Park for Peace and Healing**

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Title

Public Hearing and Recommendation for Proposed Park Naming for 911 Adams St SE - Rebecca Howard Park for Peace and Healing

Recommended Action

Hold a public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council to approve the proposed name "Rebecca Howard Park for Peace and Healing" for the 911 Adams St SE park property.

Report Issue:

This is an opportunity for PRAC to hear from the public and consider the suggested park name of "Rebecca Howard Park for Peace and Healing" for the 0.34-acre parcel located at 911 Adams St. SE in Olympia. Shawna Hawk, the founder of The Women of Color in Leadership Movement and the Director of Media Island International, a cultural center located near the park, has suggested this name.

Staff Contact:

Paul Simmons, Parks, Arts, and Recreation Director

Background and Analysis:

The 0.34-acre parcel located at 911 Adams St. SE in Olympia was purchased as a park in 2021. Current community discussions have focused on the site for a future park centered on peace and healing around race and equity. As our community addresses the issues of equity and social justice, a "Peace and Healing Park" has the potential for being a space of community gathering and healing. More specifically, our hope is to create a space that honors and recognizes the accomplishments, contributions, and history of some of our African American community members.

Over the last year and half, a group of community stakeholders began meeting to discuss development proposals and a vision for the future park. The stakeholder group is working to identify three different concepts that will be shared as part of a full public process that will work to narrow them down into a single vision for the property. This broader public process is anticipated to begin in early 2022.

Five goals that have been identified for the future park -

- To celebrate, honor, and recognize the local history and contributions of our African American community members.

- To provide a safe place for peace and healing, that honors representation and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- To promote equity, respect, and learning as we build community together.
- To find common ground with each other through storytelling, performance and art. Especially stories, performances, art from, or promoted by and led by our African American community members.
- To build strong connections with the surrounding neighbors and organizations.

Shawna Hawk is one of the project stakeholders and the founder of The Women of Color in Leadership Movement and the Director of Media Island International, a cultural center located near the park. She has suggested the future park be named after Rebecca Howard. Rebecca Howard was an accomplished black woman who owned and operated the Pacific House Hotel on what is now Capitol Way from the late 1850's to the 1870's, renowned for service and hospitality. Rebecca managed the hotel and kitchen, making a reputation for herself as a savvy businesswoman, a fine hostess, and avid community booster.

Below is a small excerpt from Shawna Hawk's letter recommending to name the park after Rebecca Howard (the full letter is attached to the staff report).

Naming the park that is across from our cultural center after such an amazing pioneer, and acknowledging an African American woman such as Rebecca Howard, would mean so much to women of color, especially Black women in this community and beyond. It could set the tone for growth, acknowledgement, and respect for the Black community as a whole. It shows that there are community members in Olympia that understand the importance of representation, especially positive true representation of Our Black community members. Representation of our contributions, accomplishments, and resiliency. They also see the importance of not just bringing Black issues and people to the forefront only during times of trauma, pain and loss.

Having a park that is dedicated to our Black community members, both past and present could also challenge some of our community members who can only see Black people as victims, needing to be saved. Community members who only feel comfortable interacting with Black people whom they view as less than and other. This Park, as well as naming the park after this amazing Black woman, could help educate those community members and the rest of us on the incredible achievements of African Americans in this region.

While naming this park after Rebecca Howard is a significant acknowledgement, we also acknowledge that there were several other notable African American community members who have also contributed greatly to Olympia. Recently staff met with an informal group of local historical advisors who have researched the Howard Family and other Olympia Area Black Pioneers (see attached brochure). Current design proposals call for infusing art, interpretation, and recognition for all of these identified Olympia Area Black Pioneers throughout the park.

At the Public Hearing on October 21st, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) will receive a brief presentation about Rebecca Howard and the recommended park naming proposal of "Rebecca Howard Park for Peace and Healing". They will also provide an opportunity for the public to comment and provide feedback. Following the Public Hearing, PRAC will then make a recommendation to the City Council regarding the naming of this property.

Attachments:

- Letter from Shawna Hawk regarding Rebecca Howard Park Naming
- Olympia Area Black Pioneers

Article Links about Rebecca Howard's life -

- [Rebecca Groundage Howard \(1827-1881\) \(blackpast.org\) <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/howard-rebecca-groundage-1827-1881/>](https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/howard-rebecca-groundage-1827-1881/)
- [Rebecca Howard | Reflections \(wordpress.com\) <https://florencelincereflections.wordpress.com/tag/rebecca-howard/>](https://florencelincereflections.wordpress.com/tag/rebecca-howard/)
- [Rebecca Howard: An African-American Businesswoman in Early Olympia - ThurstonTalk <https://www.thurstontalk.com/2015/01/15/olympia-history/>](https://www.thurstontalk.com/2015/01/15/olympia-history/)
- [Rebecca G. Howard - Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebecca_G._Howard>](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebecca_G._Howard)