

Russell City Reparative Justice Project Retreat Minutes

Saturday, June 24, 2023 (9:00 AM-5:30 PM)

Location: San Leandro Marina Inn

Russell City Reparative Justice Project (RCRJP) Committee Members in Attendance:

Elizabeth Sanchez, Priscilla Figueroa, Francesca Thomas, Michael D. Johnson, Aiyana Knowles, Carolyn Johnson, Gloria Moore, Cindy Torres, Michael V. Johnson, Cathy Rodriguez, Toni Wynn, Marian Johnson, Velda Goe, Deborah Harris, Aisha Knowles

Facilitators in Attendance: Dr. Kerby Lynch and Aisha Canfield, Ceres Policy Research

1. Breakfast and Networking (9:00 AM-10:00 AM)

2. Welcome and Introductions (10:00 AM-10:30 AM)

3. Identifying Key Issues and Themes (10:30 AM-11:00 AM)

RCRJP Committee Members participated in a group discussion to brainstorm themes and key issues they would like to see included in the final summary report submitted to the Hayward City Council prior to the end of the year.

4. Gallery Walk & Recommendations (11:00 AM-12:30 PM)

RCRJP Committee Members were divided into small groups. Each group was given a potential recommendation to discuss and brainstorm additional recommendations to report out to the rest of the larger group and solicit input.

5. Lunch Break (12:30 PM-1:30 PM)

6. Community Engagement Planning, Action Planning & Assigning Tasks (1:30 PM-4:30 PM)

The following sections provide a summary of the key discussions and highlights from the retreat group exercises:

Establishing Committee Structure:

Participants engaged in a discussion regarding the steering committee structure and their meeting experience thus far—the importance of ensuring accurate information about Russell City is communicated and governmental accountability. The committee stressed the significance of maintaining records, creating bylaws, identifying a committee leadership structure, and documenting meeting actions for future reference.

Eligibility Criteria:

Eligibility criteria for participation in the RCRJP were extensively deliberated. Participants agreed that direct descendants and bloodline descendants of former residents should be considered eligible for reparations, with special consideration given to elders who could verify their residency. The inclusion of renters, homeowners, business owners, and their respective descendants was also deemed important to capture the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the Russell City community.

Restitution and Compensation:

Restitution and compensation were identified as key objectives for the RCRJP Committee Members. Participants emphasized the need to restore the lost property and generational wealth that was affected by the historical injustices faced by the Russell City community. The importance of following the United Nations definition of human rights and ensuring the restoration of property as a form of compensation was highlighted. Additionally, participants sought recognition for the harm caused by the denial of public infrastructure, loss of community base, and property.

Rectifying Perception and Accountability:

Throughout the retreat, participants expressed their commitment to rectifying the inaccurate perception and stigma surrounding Russell City. They stressed the necessity of telling a different narrative of Russell City that reflected their personal experiences and those of their family members, and ensuring its inclusion in local historical records, textbooks, and educational curricula. The participants also emphasized the importance of accountability, both from elected officials and other communities that denied low-income and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) a place to reside. The RCRJP Committee Members aimed to create a cohesive community, bring justice to the affected families, and prevent such injustices from recurring.

Action Planning and Next Steps:

Drafting an action plan was discussed to guide the next steps in creating a RCRJP final recommendation report for the Hayward City Council, and to serve as a resource in implementing community engagement strategies. Specific tasks, responsibilities, and timelines were also discussed for each participant to ensure clarity and alignment on assigned tasks and expectations. It was recommended that consistent communication and progress updates be shared among committee members to maintain momentum and achieve the project's goals.

7. Closing Remarks, Retreat Wrap Up and Q&A (4:30 PM-5:30 PM)