

From your perspective, what happened to Russell City, why do you think it happened, and how did it affect your family?

In the 1960s, the residents of Russell City were illegally and in many cases brutally removed from their land and homes. There are different versions regarding the explanation the City of Hayward gave. Some were told the removal was to make way for a park and thus by eminent domain rights their property was being legally confiscated. Others were told that the area had been designated as "blighted." Home owners were given no choice about moving and were offered a paltry amount of money in an humiliating take-it-or-leave-it deal. Some tried to contest the decision but their efforts were unsuccessful.

Mysterious fires began to occur, burning many homes to the ground, and resulting in several deaths. Years later, the City did in fact build a park - an industrial park.

People who once owned property were suddenly forced to seek refuge wherever they could, and mostly now as tenants. And because these were times when redlining and redirecting was still the norm, there were few options. Many settled in urban areas where white flight was already occurring, meaning resources and opportunities for a safe and healthy lifestyle would be slim.

This property theft occurred due to long-standing governmental racist practices which were in line with City leaders' decisions to benefit corporations, and which routinely abused people of color and others who are economically disadvantaged.

I am married to a former Russell City resident who watched his parents lose their property and grieve for years to come. I met my husband in 1973 and he started sharing the story of his family's devastation from nearly the first day I met him, at 19 years old - almost a decade after the incident. He told me how his family grieved, and how his father was never the same afterwards. My father-in-law never drank until after Russell City but unfortunately became an alcoholic and ultimately drank himself to death. My husband said that before Russell City, his father was a devout Believer and a Bible scholar.

My husband has been sharing stories, both good and bad, about Russell City for nearly five decades now. I almost feel like his experience was also my own.



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE REBECCA HILL-LONG

The affects? The potential and likely benefits of the property owned by my husbands family is virtually unquantifiable. Losses that readily come to mind, though, are: the shattering sense of loss - an intangible thing that can't be fully restored; their history, and their economic inheritance. I think about what the equity of that property could have helped finance over the years: education, businesses, means to purchase additional properties. The list goes on.

What is your connection to the Russell City Community?

I am married to a former resident of Russell City. My husband, Arthur Long, was well-known as the paper boy, who delivered the Daily Review and Oakland Tribune in that community from ages 8 to 11, when his family was relocated to East Oakland. Arthur was also a very popular sandlot baseball player who earned the nickname "stretch" because of his far-reaching skills at catching fly balls. We have no proof but are convinced that he is the ball player whose likeness is depicted on the Russell City mural.

What is your background? What meaningful value or expertise can you bring to the committee?

As a trained reference librarian with more than three decades of experience providing research assistance to the public I can bring my research skills to this project. I briefly served as a Library Administrator with the Stockton San Joaquin County Library System and have managed several library branches in San Joaquin County, Arizona, and the Bay Area. This experience - as well as other jobs and responsibilities - has afforded me extensive experience in the areas of management, leadership and people skills. Additionally, I have experience designing and implemented programs. I am a goal-oriented servant-leader who has worked with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. I have experience participating on committees and also working with people through goal setting processes and completing projects, start to finish. I am committed to volunteerism. I bring a strong passion for the importance of this work. I see it as something that will both help both the families and descendants to heal. I would be honored to be part of an effort that will help position the City of Hayward (the city where I was raised) as one of the forerunners of civic restorative justice.

Rebecca Hill-Long

Do you have any additional or unique qualifications you would like to share? If so, please list them below.

I have grant-writing experience and a passion for social justice. I am an information junkie who loves to match people with the information that seek. And, I make a mean peach cobbler!!

Tell us about your experience working in a team or community-based process.

Libraries do everything through a team and/or community-based process. I have extensive experience working with - and even leading - teams. One of the key components of my job as a library manager was the strategic planning process. This involved integrating the library into the City-wide planning. Strategic plans normally spanned five years. Evidenced based planning was a common project management method in my experience. I've attended several workshops on this type of process work and have some familiarity with it.

What is your purpose for being here? As a member of the committee, what do you want to achieve? At the end of the day, what would you want to see happen and what are you willing to do to get us there?

It would be my honor to participate with this group whose work is so critical. This work will have long lasting implications not only in terms of the positive impact it will have on family members and their descendants who are alive today but also for future generations. I can't speak from an entirely educated point of view in terms of what specifically should happen, until I learn during the process, more about the possibilities within the scope of City resources. Generally speaking, however, I'm aware that land stolen from African Americans in Southern California was restored for families/descendants who suffered a similar fate, so obviously a similar outcome is likely feasible for former residents of Russell City and their descendants. Other ideas? Land restoration. No cost land development and business management assistance. One or more major City installments to commemorate Russell City. For example, reestablish the name Russell City to the area, and/or Build a Russell City Community Center. Establish a special library collection and library annex to include books, artifacts, articles and emerging technologies that reflect the history of Russell City and other cities in the Bay Area that have suffered a similar fate. I would like to see a timeline and some type of formal covenant from the City of Hayward to ensure that this work continues beyond the terms of current City leaders, if necessary. I am willing to bring the same passion, skills and abilities to this project which is actually just my nature.

Rebecca Hill-Long