



DOMINICK PANGALLO
MAYOR

**CITY OF SALEM
RACE EQUITY COMMISSION**

98 WASHINGTON STREET
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS 01970
978.745-9595 x. 41505

REGINA ZARAGOZA FREY, CHAIR
ALPHONSE WRIGHT, VICE CHAIR

**FINAL – Approved March 7, 2024
MINUTES OF THE RACE EQUITY COMMISSION
February 1, 2024**

A meeting of the Salem Race Equity Commission (REC) was held on February 1, 2024, at 5:30 pm via ZOOM, an online video conference call system in accordance with Chapter 107 of the Act of 2022.

1. Roll Call

Present on the call were: Regina Zaragoza Frey (Chair), Alphonse Wright (Vice Chair), Rosa Alvarado, Paola Miranda, Tara Dhanraj Roden, Alexandra Ramos, Kenzie Chin, Chief of Police Lucas Miller, City of Salem Human Resources Director Lisa Cammarata, and Salem Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Stephen Zrike.

Absent were: Shantel Alix, Rosa Alvarado, Nicole McLaughlin, and City Council Liaison Jeff Cohen.

Other meeting attendees include: Judith Reilly, Nathan Thomas (SATV), Rene Marchando, and Veronica Miranda.

2. Approve previous meeting minutes.

a. January 4, 2024

Chair Zaragoza entertained a motion to approve the previous meetings' minutes for January 4, 2024. Motion was made by Vice Chair Wright, seconded by Paola Miranda, and the motion was carried unanimously

3. Public Comment.

Chair Zaragoza made a call for public comment. There was no public comment made live during the meeting. However, Chair Zaragoza did receive an email on 2/1/24 from Saskia Vann James to be included as public comment during the meeting. This email was forwarded to REC members and read aloud during the meeting by Chair Zaragoza:



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“ At the last Race Equity Commission Vice Chair Alphonse Wright made comments that he is afraid to acknowledge people by ethnicity because it will create a new racial caste system. Based upon his fear I conducted research and was able to conclude that identifying people by ethnicity is already being employed across the state of Massachusetts as well in other states as a method to deal with racial inequities. Failure to recognize American Freedmen by their federal legal name is perpetuating institutional harm that has been ongoing since the civil war and dismantling of the federal Freedmens Bureau. Below are a few examples. (If more is needed I encourage the Race Equity Commission to prioritize researching further.):

- The city of Boston has already started to desegregate services based upon ethnic identities and has formed an [Office for Latino and Caribbean Advancement](#). The city of Boston also has an office for Native Americans and an Office for Immigrants, leaving behind the American Freedmen community from receiving services from their city.
- [There are mayors across the state of Massachusetts, and across the country organizing to support a state office for New Americans](#). New York has already implemented their office for New Americans.
- Massachusetts already has a state office for Native Americans and Office for Immigrants. With a nationwide push for an Office for New Americans that only leaves behind a state Office for Freedmen Affairs to support inequity facing the American Freedmen community.
- The city of Cambridge has formed an American Freedmen Commission and will be moving forward to desegregate data collection by ethnic identity as part of developing a new equity model to address the racial wealth gap where there is \$8 per American Freedmen, 12,000 per Caribbean, and 247k per white resident in metro Boston (Boston, Cambridge, Newton) per the Color of Wealth report from FedBoston. The city of Cambridge has the definition of American Freedmen on municipal law which means this definition is now recognized by the state of Massachusetts. You can read the definition of American Freedmen through the commission ordinance [here](#).
- The state of California has set precedence and has officially moved forward to desegregate data and shift away from race and into lineage based for all groups of people. You can read [more here](#) as well [as here](#).
- Final Conclusion: Failure to recognize American Freedmen by their ethnicity means the city of Salem is complicit in upholding multi-generational ethnic erasure and reinforcing a racial caste system. It also makes Salem a city that continues to carry the stain of slavery through institutional and systemic harm through race based ideology born from white supremacy.



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Why identifying people by race fails to repair harm from institutional and systemic racism:

- Race is a social construct born out of white supremacy. By identifying by race the governments are further reinforcing a racial caste system that is perpetuating a racial wealth gap that was born from chattel slavery within the U.S.
- What oppresses us will not liberate us. This statement means that there is no solution in upholding white supremacist rhetoric within our government. In fact the U.S. government must be challenged to stop enforcing race based ideology that was developed by white supremacists as a way to justify slavery.
- Race based terms in the United States are considered racial slurs by different ethnic groups. Example: being called 'colored' is considered a racial slur by the American Freedmen community. The 1960s was a period in time where elders fought to stop being identified as colored. Today with the influx of new immigrants there is an indoctrination into a racial caste system within the United State through the normalizing of racial slurs as many immigrants do not share the same history as American Freedmen. This is due to the fact that there were less than 1% of Black immigrants in the United State prior to the 1980s. Today there is about 10% and is forecasted to increase up to 30% within the next few decades.
- The Supreme Court, in their recent overturning of race being used as a factor as part of affirmative action for college admissions gave the following statement within their notes from their ruling. This statement gives insight that the Supreme Court will not support race based ideology and acknowledges that the term Black does not mean/describe the same group of people today as it did 50 years ago.
 - *“BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN COVERS EVERYONE FROM A DESCENDANT OF ENSLAVED PERSONS WHO GREW UP POOR IN THE RURAL SOUTH, TO A FIRST-GENERATION CHILD OF WEALTHY NIGERIAN IMMIGRANTS, TO A BLACK- IDENTIFYING APPLICANT WITH MULTIRACIAL ANCESTRY WHOSE FAMILY LIVES IN A TYPICAL AMERICAN SUBURB.” -SUPREME COURT JUSTICE GORSUCH DURING RECENT SUPREME COURT RULING THAT ENDED RACE-BASED AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.*
 - Conclusion: Based upon the Supreme Courts recent statement on race it appears the United States is ready to step away from race based ideology as a tool to measure equity. Therefore I am recommending ethnic identity be used for everyone has an ethnic identity.



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- The United Nations recently declared that the United States has issues pertaining to race and has recommended data to become further desegregated as a means to help quantify and identify gaps producing inequity and reinforcing institutional and systemic harm. There are many nonprofits across the country that has been conducting research to support desegregation of data including PolicyLink
- Why race based reparations doesn't work and only perpetuates further harm through a racial caste system:
 - Precedence has already been set for race based reparations by the state of Rhode Island. ***The outcome was that white people received reparations as well.*** This is due to the fact that anything that is race based is dependent upon civil rights which in the constitution states for "federal funding to be equal to whites". Meaning it can not be exclusive to any race. [You can read more here.](#)
 - Race based reparations causes ethnic erasure for American Freedmen. Many American Freedmen are multi-racial. Example: Creole people are just as much french as they are african indigenous. To have our creole community identity only through their african heritage erases their ethnic french identity and upholds the racist 'one drop rule' that was developed by white supremacists in the United States.
 - The United States had breeding farms where enslavers were creating 'products' by violently raping man, women, and child as a means to increase enslaved people they can sell. The United States actually had the least amount of african slaves brought over via slave ships versus central and south america.
 - Many American Freedmen know they are a multiethnic group and essentially are global citizens. Their lineage doesn't fit neatly into a one drop race based test. We need to acknowledge this group of people by their ethnic identity and not continue to perpetuate racism as their primary identity.
- Final Recommendations for the Race Equity Commission:
 - The state of Massachusetts is pushing lineage based reparations. There is a state bill H.3921 by Rep.Brandy Fluker Oakley, you can [read more on it here.](#) This bill will create a reparations commission. The city of Salem must work in tandem with the future Massachusetts state reparations commission as this bill is moving out of committee and into next steps to be passed as a bill in 2024. This means supporting lineage based/ethnic identities for everyone experiencing harm by the racial caste system.
 - **Immediately** take steps to desegregate data by ethnic identity for the city of Salem
 - Work with local grassroots organizations to conduct community outreach & engagement so that these conversations are being victim led. ***Victim led***



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engagement is part of the definition of transitional justice processes for reparations. The city must engage directly with grassroots organizers as part of public education on data desegregation. This includes providing grassroots organizers with the tools they need to support the city during this transition period.

Again I extend my deepest apologies for not being able to attend this evening due to another commitment. I will watch the recording to catch up on comments and next steps the Race Equity Commission will be doing. I hope my recommendations are taken seriously and justice for those who have been historically harmed and have for generations have had ethnic identities completely erased is served. The atrocities the American Freedmen community has faced is unlike no other. Imagine Jewish people no longer knowing they are Jewish! I weep for the American Freedmen community. Please support transitional justice, support ending cycles of harm and help your city transition into cycles of repair. Our children need a future that doesn't perpetuate race.

in solidarity,

Saskia Vann James (she/they)

Co-Founder, Grow to Consume ”

- 4. Follow up discussion regarding January's meeting regarding the creation of an American Freedmen Commission in the City of Salem. Any vote regarding this matter is expected to be delayed.**

Tara Dhanraj Roden began discussion by requesting Chair Zaragoza review the options for actions the REC can take regarding this item. Chair Zaragoza clarified that it is up to the REC how they would like to proceed and she shared some of the options that had been discussed at last month's meeting.

1. Advise Mayor Pangallo to create an American Freedmen Commission, or not to create one.
2. Table the discussion until more information is received. No vote needs to be taken today so it can just be delayed to a future meeting.
3. Write a letter of support for the state bill.

Alphonse Wright expressed concern with the mischaracterization of what he had said at the last meeting and requested this be officially entered into the record. He said the way the concern was construed in the public comment was not at all what he said. Even in the last meeting, the response from the guest [Saskia Van James] was not in line with the concerns. However the information provided in the public comment is important and there



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is a lot there to review. Lucas Miller agreed with Vice Chair Wright that the public comment was a mischaracterization of what he said.

Lisa Cammarata recommended tabling this matter so then it becomes old business for the next meeting. Lisa Cammarata made a motion to table this matter and take it up at the next meeting, Dr. Stephen Zrike seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously in a roll call vote.

Tara Dhanraj Roden	Y
Alexandra Ramos	Y
Alphonse Wright	Y
Dr. Stephen Zrike	Y
Lisa Cammarata	Y
Paola Miranda	Y
Kenzie Chin	Y

5. Black History Month events with the Salem Human Rights Coalition – Alphonse Wright.

Vice Chair Wright shared that the Human Rights Coalition will be organizing the City of Salem’s Black History Month events this year and likely moving forward. He shared the following events and encouraged REC members to attend.

Saturday, February 3: Black History Month Community Celebration & Flag Raising

2:30pm at Old Town Hall – Artist Ai Qui Hopen of Humanity Memorial will be on site, seeking feedback from the community on her Charlotte Forten Memorial design. The community is invited to connect with the artist to provide feedback on details for the commissioned Charlotte Forten Memorial sculpture such as Charlotte’s expression and likeness, which of her writings to include, and where they should adorn the statue.

3:00pm at Old Town Hall – An engaging speaking program led by the City of Salem Human Rights Coalition and including a variety of Salem residents and local Black-centered organizational leaders will formally kick off Black History Month in Salem.

4:00pm at Riley Plaza – Guests are invited to join the City of Salem Human Rights Coalition outdoors in Riley Plaza for a formal Flag Raising.



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February 19-29: Salem Public Schools Charlotte Forten Display at Old Town Hall

There will be 'idea boards' and other projects from a variety of Salem Public School classrooms on the theme of Charlotte Forten's life and legacy. Along with this display will be a brief history of Charlotte Forten and her connections to Salem, an overview timeline of her life, a small family tree, images of what the finished sculpture will look like, and project updates.

February 24: There will be some additional programming on this day that Vice Chair Wright and the Human Rights Coalition are still finalizing the plans for.

Chair Zaragoza recognized the hard work of Vice Chair Wright in leading the Black History Month events for the City of Salem. She encouraged everyone to attend the upcoming events, especially this Saturday to provide feedback to Artist Ai Qui Hopen about the Charlotte Forten Memorial and to attend the flag raising. Chair Zaragoza also highlighted the involvement of Salem Public Schools in many of the month's programs.

6. New business.

Tara Dhanraj Roden shared that she has been reflecting on what the REC has been working on so far and had ideas for moving forward. She requested that they go back to the Race Equity Task Force Report to review the recommendations and pick a few to focus on. She recommended Chair Zaragoza to provide a short list to the REC members of the items from the report that are most attainable or most important. Another idea she shared was having all REC members look at the report before the next meeting and come with ideas of which they want to work on based on importance. This will be a helpful blueprint for what to work on and discuss in upcoming meetings. Dhanraj recognized the accomplishment of developing the reporting form which was one of the recommendations.

Chair Zaragoza agreed that it is time to identify the REC's next 1-3 big projects and will add it onto the agenda for the next meeting. Regarding the reporting form, Chair Zaragoza shared that approximately 9 forms have been submitted. At the next meeting she will provide a more in depth update while still maintaining confidentiality. She recommended all REC members review the Task Force report before the next meeting.

Chair Zaragoza made a comment recognizing Vice Chair Wright's commitment to race equity work and pointed out the fact that he has never missed a single meeting of the REC and attended all events related to the Commission. Lisa Cammarata echoed Chair



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Zaragoza's comment recognizing Vice Chair Wright's hard work and dedication to the REC and this work in the City of Salem.

7. Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn was made by Vice Chair Wright, seconded by Lisa Cammarata, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Giffen
Race Equity Commission Minute Taker