

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

June 13, 2023

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County Administration Building
1221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Board Members:

Subject: APPROVE A RESOLUTION TO FORMALLY RECOGNIZE AND APOLOGIZE FOR THE COUNTY OF ALAMEDA'S ROLE IN THE SEIZURE AND DESTRUCTION OF RUSSELL CITY AND THE HARM CAUSED TO IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Approve a resolution to formally recognize and apologize for the County of Alameda's role in the seizure and destruction of Russell City during the 1950s and 1960s and the harm caused to the individuals, families, and descendants impacted by the seizure and destruction of Russell City.

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY:

Over the last several years across our county and nationally, there have been increased conversations about the role of historic institutional racism and structural barriers that remain in our society and institutions. The County of Alameda has a tradition of engaging in these conversations and taking action. Most recently, on March 28, 2023, our Board approved the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee and Reparations Commission to continue this dialogue.

During this period, former residents and descendants of Russell City, a community formerly located in an unincorporated area of the County on the western shoreline of Hayward, began a project to share the history of their community. This project culminated in an impressive documentary, titled "The Apology," that is being finalized and submitted to film festivals before a broader public release in 2024.

The documentary provides a platform to share the history of a community that, like many during this era both locally and nationally, was ignored and eventually erased to make way for an industrial business park development. As an unincorporated community, the residents were dependent on municipal services from the County. Despite the lack of sewers, water, paved roads, a dedicated fire service, and other essential municipal services the residents of Russell City built a close-knit community where African Americans, Latinos, Caucasians, and other ethnicities all lived harmoniously. Russell City also had a vibrant music scene, attracting the likes of T-Bone Walker, Big Mama Thornton and Ray Charles.

It is recommended that your Board adopt the attached resolution acknowledging the County of Alameda's past role in the destruction of the unincorporated community of Russell City and formerly apologize to the individuals, families, and descendants who were impacted by that action.

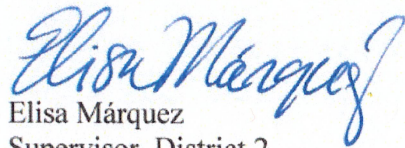
FINANCING:

There will be no impact to net County cost as a result of adopting this resolution.

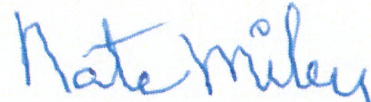
VISION 2026 GOAL:

Adoption of a resolution apologizing for the destruction of Russell City supports of our shared vision of a **Thriving and Resilient Population**.

Sincerely,



Elisa Márquez
Supervisor, District 2



Nate Miley, President
Supervisor, District 4

cc: Auditor-Controller
County Administrator
County Counsel

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF ALAMEDA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

RESOLUTION NUMBER: R-

A RESOLUTION TO FORMALLY RECOGNIZE AND APOLOGIZE FOR THE COUNTY OF ALAMEDA'S ROLE IN THE SEIZURE AND DESTRUCTION OF RUSSELL CITY AND THE HARM CAUSED TO IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

WHEREAS, on June 7, 2011, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. R-2011-177 to formally apologize for the enslavement and racial segregation of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, on October 6, 2020 the Alameda County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. R-2020-412 seeking community reparations for African Americans and pledged to address legislative, social, and economic inequities faced by African Americans; and

WHEREAS, on June 8, 2021 the Alameda County Board of Supervisors directed the County Administrator and Human Resource Services to review options for establishing Juneteenth as a paid County holiday, which as of June 19, 2023 is officially recognized by the County of Alameda as a paid holiday; and

WHEREAS, on March 28, 2023 the Alameda County Board of Supervisors established a Board of Supervisors' Ad Hoc Committee and Reparations Commission to create a draft action plan to address the legislative, social, and economic inequities faced by African Americans in Alameda County by facilitating listening sessions, report findings from formative research and focus groups; and

WHEREAS, each of these actions was taken as the Alameda County Board of Supervisors acknowledges the historic, institutional, and structural racism faced by African Americans since first Africans were sold as slaves near Point Comfort in the English colony of Virginia in 1619; and

WHEREAS, as noted in the United States National Archives the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) marked the end of the Mexican-American War, it also overnight changed the national home of thousands of Mexican citizens, including those in California, and Article VIII granted these Mexican citizens one-year to declare citizenship to the United States and those who stayed "shall be considered to have elected to become citizens of the United States" as well as protected the property rights of "[t]he present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract shall enjoy with respect to it guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States;"¹ and

WHEREAS, Article IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) granted at the "proper time" admittance of United States citizenship to those Mexican citizens, "to be judged of by the Congress of the United States[,]" "the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to

¹ United States National Archives (2023). *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)*. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo>

the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime, shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction;”² and

WHEREAS, beginning in the 1930s the practice of redlining neighborhoods led to government-sanctioned segregation of and discrimination against African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic minority groups; and

WHEREAS, the Second Great Migration occurred during the 1940s where African Americans migrated both north and west, with westward destinations including the San Francisco Bay Area and its booming jobs supporting World War II efforts in shipyards around the bay; and

WHEREAS, the United States Commission on Civil Rights found that between 1949 and 1973, governments used their powers of eminent domain in 2,532 projects in 992 cities, displacing one million people, two-thirds of whom were African American; with eminent domain use displacing African Americans five times more often than their representation in the nation’s population”³; and

WHEREAS, in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area real estate brokers and lenders encouraged and directed prospective minority homeowners toward purchasing property and homes in the unincorporated community of Russell City; and

WHEREAS, despite the lack of sewers, water, paved roads, a dedicated fire service, and other essential municipal services the residents of Russell City built a thriving community where African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, other ethnic minority groups, and Caucasians all lived harmoniously and was described by former residents and descendants as a tight knit community where people shared resources and looked out for each other. Russell City boasted a thriving music scene attracting performances from T-Bone Walker, Big Mama Thornton and Ray Charles among others; and

WHEREAS, as documented in a November 19, 1950 Oakland Tribune article, decades of requests from residents to the County of Alameda for municipal services went unattended: “[t]he Russell City Civic Club...urged the county to provide the means for a good water supply, proper drainage and sewage disposal, better streets, lighting and fire protection”⁴; and

WHEREAS, the November 19, 1950 articles goes on to detail county officials’ response: “Supervisor George Janssen, representing Eden Township, said that he had...notified them [the Russell City committee] that the county had no obligation to provide sanitation and water...’ The county cannot take money from its taxpayers’ and use it for the blighted area which has no special districts of its own”⁵; and

² United States National Archives (2023). *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)*. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo>

³ United States Commission on Civil Rights (2014). *The Civil Rights Implications of Eminent Domain Abuse*. Retrieved from https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/docs/FINAL_FY14_Eminent-Domain-Report.pdf at p. 7.

⁴ No Author (1950, November 19). Russell City Unit Asks County to Provide Services for Tract: 5-Point Improvement Program Set to County Supervisors. *Oakland Tribune*, 28-A.

⁵ No Author (1950, November 19). Russell City Unit Asks County to Provide Services for Tract: 5-Point Improvement Program Set to County Supervisors. *Oakland Tribune*, 28-A.

WHEREAS, without access to public utilities, some families and individuals living in unincorporated Russell City were eventually uprooted after decades of neglect and denial of basic services, like water and sewage, and pervasive fires; and

WHEREAS, in 1963, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors conducted three legally mandated hearings as the Redevelopment Agency of Alameda County to advance the Redevelopment Plan for the Russell City Redevelopment Project and the process of eminent domain of the residential properties and agricultural businesses of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic minority groups over generations in Russell City; and

WHEREAS, a transcript of the testimony during the January 15, 1963 hearing at the Hayward Veterans' Memorial Building with 300-400 people in attendance, included several individuals identified as Russell City property owners; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Tourchette, a property owner and resident in Russell City provided the following testimony on January 15, 1963: "I don't want to sell my property...I asked Mr. Carlson [county building official] for a permit and he denied me the right to put up a 10 x 12 steel building, modern. They denied me the right, the Building Inspector, and I - I don't want to sell my property" and in response to Supervisor Pursel's question that "You don't want to sell it, even though you know that you'd receive a fair price for the property?" Mrs. Tourchette responded "[t]hey won't give me a fair price...I don't believe you. I never got anything fair yet, I'll tell you that much"⁶; and

WHEREAS, additional testimony included Mr. Roberts, a representative of the Oakland Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: "[t]oo often we have witnessed programs conceived to accommodate residential or commercial redevelopment result in the uprooting of negroes and other minority groups and the transporting of them beyond the community of their choice....Urban redevelopment then becomes a useful and legal weapon to accomplish the unconscionable result of acquiring the land and removing the occupants....The N.A.A.C.P. can agree that Russell City is a blight area and that the idea of improving conditions therein is basically a sound one. However, we cannot overlook the fact that the conditions which exist there did not develop today, nor yesterday.... I feel that the common consensus of the population of that area would be, and I quote, 'Our Dear Supervisors: Why the belated concern about Russell City? Why have you failed to hear our feeble cry from the wilderness in the years we begged and pleaded for fire protection, water, sewage, gas, and mosquito abatement? Why was no concentrated effort ever made to assist in finding the solution for our common problems in a manner consistent with our continued residential development? Why was not the federal program exploited to ascertain whether or not by moral coercion the City of Hayward could annex this area and use federal funds which would be available for supplying the services needed?' We hope that you will be guided by human values, rather than the value of land"⁷; and

WHEREAS, despite these pleas the Board of Supervisors and County of Alameda continued down

⁶ County of Alameda (1963). Before the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda, Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency: Reporter's Transcript of Public Hearings on the Russell City Redevelopment Project at pp. 56-57.

⁷ County of Alameda (1963). Before the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda, Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency: Reporter's Transcript of Public Hearings on the Russell City Redevelopment Project at pp. 159-165.

the path of removing residents from their properties through the exercise of the County's eminent domain powers over the following years paying a total of \$2.85 million to clear Russell City of seven churches, thirteen business, and 205 family and 33 individual homes; and

WHEREAS, Alameda County sold the 200 acres of Russell City it seized to developer Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes for \$2.4 million⁸, with the land annexed by the City of Hayward in 1968 quickly leading to the development of sewer and water lines along with an industrial park development; and

WHEREAS, where records that have been researched from the seizure of land from its owners demonstrates large disparities in Alameda County paying "fair market value" to property owners with many African American, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic minority group property owners paid in the range of two thousand dollars for their life's investment and, as reported in the July 9, 1964 Daily Review article "Hog Ranch Sale Triggers Inquiry," in the case of one White property owner was paid over half a million dollars for their Russell City property⁹; and

WHEREAS, descendants from Russell City include many residents who still call Alameda County home; and

WHEREAS, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors cannot undo past actions that led to the destruction of Russell City and known and unknown harm to individuals and families who experienced disenfranchisement from their government; and

WHEREAS, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors can begin with an apology to the individuals and families of Russell City, in the spirit of recognizing each individual's value as a human being and to continue a dialogue that confronts our shared history; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda formally apologizes to the individuals, families, and descendants that endured and continue to experience the reverberations of the destruction of their unincorporated community of Russell City.

Adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda, State of California, on June 27, 2023 by the following called vote:

AYES:

NOES:

EXCUSED:

Nate Miley
President of the Board of Supervisors
County of Alameda, State of California


⁸ No Author (1967, November 29). \$2.4 Million Russell City Bid Made. *The Daily Review*.

⁹ No Author (1964, July 9). Hog Ranch Sale Triggers Inquiry: Pursel Asks for Hearing. *The Daily Review*.

ATTEST:
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors,
County of Alameda, State of California

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
Donna Ziegler, County Counsel

By: _____

DocuSigned by:

By: _____
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Raymond Lara, Senior Deputy County Counsel