



# CIVIC UNITY COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Monday, August 21, 2023

5:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Civic Unity Committee will hold a public meeting on Monday, August 21, 2023 from 5:00p.m. to 7:00p.m. to discuss and learn about a proposed 'Cambridge Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce' from local reparations activists.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### CIVIC UNITY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Simmons, Chair

Councillor Carlone

Vice Mayor Mallon

Councillor Toner

Councillor Zondervan

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Civic Unity Committee was held on Monday, August 21, 2023. The meeting was Called to Order at 5:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Simmons. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

**At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

**Councillor Simmons – Present/Remote**

**Councillor Carlone – Present/Remote**

**Vice Mayor Mallon – Absent**

**Councillor Toner – Absent**

**Councillor Zondervan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber**

**Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.**

The Chair, Councillor Simmons offered opening remarks (Attachment A) and noted that the call of the meeting was to discuss and learn about a proposed 'Cambridge Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce' from local reparations activists. Mayor Siddiqui, Brian Corr, Executive Director for the Peace Commission, and Deidre Brown, Chief of Equity and Inclusion, were also present at the meeting.

The Chair, Councillor Simmons introduced Saskia VannJames who gave a presentation titled “Truth and Reconciliation Policy Proposal Presentation” (Attachment B). The presentation offered an overview of identifying the problem that was being discussed during the meeting, understanding transitional and reparative justice, summary and review of reparations, proposed solutions, and immediate and long-term visions for action.

The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Councillor Carlone who thanked Saskia VannJames for the detailed and knowledgeable presentation. Councillor Carlone shared he would be in favor of moving a taskforce forward by the end of the current Council term and offered suggestions on ways to address and resolve issues that are in Cambridge.

The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Councillor Zondervan who thanked Saskia VannJames for all their hard work around the difficult and challenging topic that is being discussed. Councillor Zondervan asked Saskia VannJames to provide more information on transitional justice, reparative justice, and restorative justice. Saskia VannJames was available to respond and offered a more detailed explanation for Committee members and shared how all three are used when addressing American Freedmen and the immigrant communities.

The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Mayor Siddiqui who shared that she is moved by the work that has been done across the nation and offered her support to Saskia VannJames and others who are involved in this work.

**The Chair, Councillor Simmons opened public comment.**

Antonia Edwards, 6 Kenilworth, thanked Saskia VanJames for all their hard work and thanked the Committee members for being receptive to what Saskia was presenting as well as offered comments on the American Freedmen Lineage.

**The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Councillor Carlone who made a motion to close public comment.**

**Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.**

**Councillor Simmons – Yes**

**Councillor Carlone – Yes**

**Vice Mayor Mallon – Absent**

**Councillor Toner – Absent**

**Councillor Zondervan – No**

**Yes – 2, No – 1, Absent – 2. Motion passed.**

The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Councillor Zondervan who offered suggestions on how to move the proposed Policy Order forward, sharing that instead of using a taskforce to address the issues, it may be more beneficial to have it called a Commission, and to have that Commission be voted in Ordinance when establishing it. Councillor Zondervan noted that bringing a Commission and Policy Order to Ordinance would create a stronger way to stay on track with a reasonable timeline to be successful. Councillor Simmons agreed with comments made by Councillor Zondervan and shared that she would like to work with Committee members and Saskia VannJames to help modify the proposed Policy Order into language that can be

brought forward to the full Council and the Ordinance Committee. Councillor Zondervan and Mayor Siddiqui agreed it would be the best way to move forward.

The Chair, Councillor Simmons recognized Saskia VannJames who shared their excitement for the Chair's recommendation and noted that they look forward to working with Councillors on this topic.

**With no further business, The Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:35p.m.**

Attachment A – Opening statement from Councillor Simmons

Attachment B – Presentation titled “Truth and Reconciliation Policy Proposal Presentation”

**Clerk's Note:** The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record.

The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

[https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/560?view\\_id=1&redirect=true&h=2dd936215876ec144cf9a004a774c49e](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/560?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=2dd936215876ec144cf9a004a774c49e)

**A communication was received from Councillor Simmons, transmitting a proposed Policy Order regarding the Cambridge Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce.**

## **Opening Remarks for Civic Unity Committee Hearing** **August 21, 2023 at 5 pm**

**Zoom Link:** <https://cambridgema.zoom.us/j/97895847144>

**Call of the Meeting:** “The Civic Unity Committee shall meet to discuss and learn about a proposed 'Cambridge Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce' [from local reparations activists.](#)”

**Committee Members:** Simmons, Carlone, Mallon, Toner, Zondervan (*Toner has a conflict and will not be present*)

Good evening. With a quorum being present, I am going to call today’s Civic Unity Committee meeting to order. The call of today’s meeting is to discuss and learn about a proposed 'Cambridge Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce' from local reparations activists.

The first order of business is a roll call of members present.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation at meetings of the Cambridge City Council and its Committees.

In addition to having members of the Council participate remotely, we have also set up zoom teleconference for public comment.

Please be aware that zoom is primarily being used for public comment.

To watch the meeting, please tune into Channel 22 or visit the open meeting portal on the city’s website.

If you would like to provide public comment, please visit the City Council section of the city’s webpage. Instructions for how to sign up to speak are posted there. Once you have completed sign up procedure, you will receive a link to the zoom meeting. We will allow each speaker three minutes.

We will not allow any additional public comment sign up after 5:30p.m.

With that, all of today’s votes will be by roll call.

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Good evening,

I want to thank you all for joining us this evening as we seek to address a topic deeply woven into our national tapestry: the lasting effects of slavery and the exploration of reparations as a path towards

reconciliation, healing, and unity. This is part of a continuum of discussions happening in communities across the country, and it is something that this nation has been struggling to address for centuries.

It's essential to recognize that the history of slavery is not a closed chapter in a book, but a continuous narrative that has shaped, and continues to shape, the lives of many in our community. In acknowledging this painful legacy, we are taking a step forward, not just in recognition but also in action. Tonight, we are using our time to discuss what that “action” might look like in Cambridge. We are exploring the possibility of establishing a “reparations task force” that would be designed to meticulously explore the avenues and methods through which the City of Cambridge might provide reparations to those affected by the traumatic and long-lasting effects of slavery.

As with any monumental endeavor, dialogue is pivotal. Tonight, we will not just be discussing a policy order in isolation but understanding the larger narrative and how it intertwines with the stories of real people in Cambridge today, their ancestors, and their hopes for the future. Our goal today is to listen, to learn, and to lay the groundwork for future decisions. It is critical that we all understand that tonight it just the beginning of a much longer, much larger discussion, and – in acknowledgement of the fact that this City Council term is starting to wind down – we must recognize that the work we are starting tonight is laying the foundations for what must come during the opening of the next Council session.

And we must also acknowledge that history isn't just about the past; it shapes our present and molds our future. The story of slavery still resonates, echoing in social inequities, systemic barriers, and personal narratives. Recognizing its impact is essential, and the City of Cambridge stands on the cusp of making a significant step in this direction.

This is why tonight, we shall be hearing from Saskia VannJames, a trailblazer in our community's reparations conversation. Saskia is a queer Black woman of American Freedmen and Honduran descent that is a longtime Cambridge resident and parent of a CRLS student. Their rich advocacy history includes teaching a reparations mini-workshop at the Shabazz Center in NYC for Malcolm X's 98th birthday, teaching several reparatory justice workshops at the Massachusetts Recreational Consumer Council as their Policy Director, and serving as a featured reparations speaker at Harvard Black Policy conference, Harvard Black Health Matters conference, Harvard FXB Center fall '22 symposium, and Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) conference. Saskia's reparations advocacy history led the city of Cambridge to pass two racial justice policies in 2022, which helped spark the city of Boston to pass policy for a reparations taskforce.

Tonight, I have asked Saskia to come and discuss a proposed policy order that they have infused with their blood, sweat, and tears in crafting, and which we hope can be the basis for our City's further discussions around what a Reparations Task Force in Cambridge might look like. I will stress that this proposed policy order is making its first appearance before members of the Council tonight; this is not yet in front of the full Council, but tonight marks the opening of what I anticipate will be, and SHOULD be, a much longer, more in-depth conversation. And I thank Saskia for bringing this to us, and educating us on their goals for what should be happening as we move this forward.

For clarity on the flow of tonight's meeting:

1. After my opening remarks conclude, we will transition to Saskia's presentation.
2. This will be followed by a Q&A segment among our Civic Unity Committee members and City Staff.
3. We'll then open the floor for Public Comment

4. After Public Comment concludes, Committee members will be given another opportunity to speak and ask questions
5. After that second round of questions, I shall offer closing remarks and we shall adjourn

With our path for the evening charted, let us now turn our attention to Saskia VannJames and the work they have been engaged in. Saskia, the floor is yours.

*City of Cambridge*

# TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION POLICY PROPOSAL PRESENTATION

AUGUST 21, 2023



# AGENDA

1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM
2. UNDERSTAND TRANSITIONAL AND  
REPARATIVE JUSTICE
3. SUMMARY OF REPARATIONS
4. DETAILED OVERVIEW OF REPARATIONS
5. PROPOSED SOLUTION
6. IMMEDIATE VISION FOR ACTION
7. LONGTERM VISION FOR ACTION



AUGUST 21, 2023



# CAMBRIDGE WE HAVE A PROBLEM

“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.



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL AND REPARATIVE JUSTICE?

“ADEQUATE, EFFECTIVE AND  
PROMPT REPARATION IS INTENDED  
TO PROMOTE JUSTICE BY  
REDRESSING GROSS VIOLATIONS OF  
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS  
LAW OR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF  
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN  
LAW.”

- UNITED NATIONS



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL AND REPARATIVE JUSTICE?

"REPARATION SHOULD BE PROPORTIONAL TO THE GRAVITY OF THE VIOLATIONS AND THE HARM SUFFERED. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS DOMESTIC LAWS AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL OBLIGATIONS, A STATE SHALL PROVIDE REPARATION TO VICTIMS FOR ACTS OR OMISSIONS WHICH CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE STATE AND CONSTITUTE GROSS VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW OR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW. IN CASES WHERE A PERSON, A LEGAL PERSON, OR OTHER ENTITY IS FOUND LIABLE FOR REPARATION TO A VICTIM, SUCH PARTY SHOULD PROVIDE REPARATION TO THE VICTIM OR COMPENSATE THE STATE IF THE STATE HAS ALREADY PROVIDED REPARATION TO THE VICTIM."

- UNITED NATIONS



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS REPARATIONS?

REPARATIONS IS A PROCESS THAT INVOLVES FIVE STEPS ACCORDING TO INTERNATIONAL LAW VIA UNITED NATIONS. THESE FIVE STEPS INCLUDE:

1. CESSATION, ASSURANCES AND GUARANTEES OF NON-REPETITION
2. RESTITUTION AND REPATRIATION
3. COMPENSATION
4. REHABILITATION
5. SATISFACTION



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS CESSATION, ASSURANCES AND GUARANTEES OF NON- REPETITION?

## MEANING/DEFINITION:

UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, A STATE RESPONSIBLE FOR WRONGFULLY INJURING A PEOPLE “IS UNDER AN OBLIGATION TO A) “CEASE THE ACT IF IT IS CONTINUING, AND, B) OFFER APPROPRIATE ASSURANCES AND GUARANTEES OF NON-REPETITION...”

## EXAMPLE:

THERE ARE OVER 15 CARIBBEAN ISLANDS THAT ARE RECOGNIZED AS SOVEREIGN NATIONS WITH FULL INTERNATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY INCLUDING ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, BAHAMAS, BARBADOS, BELIZE, CUBA, DOMINICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, GRENADA, GUYANA, HAITI, JAMAICA, SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS, SAINT LUCIA, SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES, SURINAME, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



AUGUST 21, 2023



# WHAT IS RESTITUTION AND REPATRIATION?

## MEANING/DEFINITION:

RESTITUTION MEANS TO

"RE-ESTABLISH THE SITUATION WHICH EXISTED BEFORE THE WRONGFUL ACT WAS COMMITTED."

REPATRIATION IS "THE PROCESS OF RETURNING ANCESTRAL REMAINS, SACRED OBJECTS, OR CULTURAL PROPERTY TAKEN WITHOUT CONSENT OR THROUGH COERCIVE MEANS TO THEIR ORIGINAL OR RIGHTFUL COMMUNITIES AS A WAY TO RECTIFY PAST WRONGS AND PROMOTE JUSTICE."

## EXAMPLE:

THE NATIVE AMERICAN GRAVES PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION ACT (NAGPRA), ENACTED IN 1990



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS COMPENSATION?

## MEANING/DEFINITION:

FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL RESTITUTION TO INDIVIDUALS OR COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE SUFFERED HARM DUE TO PAST INJUSTICES OR VIOLATIONS OF THEIR RIGHTS INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO MONETARY RESTITUTION, PROPERTY RESTITUTION, LOST OPPORTUNITIES, PENSIONS OR SUPPORT, COLLECTIVE COMPENSATION, AND REPARATION PROGRAMS

## EXAMPLE:

CALIFORNIA TASKFORCE RECOMMENDS DIRECT CASH PAYMENTS AS COMPENSATION FOR BLACK AMERICAN DESCENDANTS OF CHATTEL SLAVERY IN U.S.



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS REHABILITATION?

## MEANING/DEFINITION:

PROCESS AIMED AT RESTORING THE DIGNITY, RIGHTS, AND WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS OR COMMUNITIES WHO HAVE SUFFERED HARM DUE TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, CONFLICT, OR OTHER FORMS OF INJUSTICE. THIS INCLUDES MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE, EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT, VOCATIONAL TRAINING, SOCIAL SERVICES, COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION, ECONOMIC SUPPORT, ACCESS TO JUSTICE, ASSISTANCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## EXAMPLE:

JEWISH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL AND REHABILITATION CENTER IN ROXBURY, MA



AUGUST 21, 2023



# WHAT IS SATISFACTION?

## MEANING/DEFINITION:

SATISFACTION IS PART OF FULL REPARATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW FOR MORAL DAMAGE, SUCH AS "EMOTIONAL INJURY, MENTAL SUFFERING, AND INJURY TO REPUTATION." IN SOME INSTANCES WHERE CESSATION, RESTITUTION, AND COMPENSATION DO NOT BRING FULL REPAIR, SATISFACTION IS ALSO NEEDED. APOLOGY FALLS UNDER THE REPARATIVE CATEGORY OF SATISFACTION.

## EXAMPLE:

CITY OF BOSTON ISSUED A FORMAL APOLOGY TO BLACK AMERICANS THAT ARE DESCENDANTS OF CHATTEL SLAVERY WITHIN THE U.S.



AUGUST 21, 2023

# WHAT IS THE PROPOSED SOLUTION?

MOVE FORWARD TO TAKE STEPS TO  
DISMANTLE INSTITUTIONAL RACISM BY:

1. ACKNOWLEDGE AMERICAN  
FREEDMEN VIA TRUTH AND  
RECONCILIATION POLICY PROPOSAL
2. ACKNOWLEDGE BLACK IS NOT A  
MONOLITH

EXAMPLE:

FREEDMENS BUREAU ACT OF 1865  
FREEDMENS SAVINGS BANK OF 1865



AUGUST 21, 2023

# IMMEDIATE VISION: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

1. PASS TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION TASKFORCE POLICY PROPOSAL BEFORE END OF SEPTEMBER
2. IMPLEMENT TASKFORCE BEFORE ELECTIONS
3. IMMEDIATELY START BUDGET CONVERSATIONS FOR POLICY PROPOSAL
4. BUILD COMMUNITY BY SUPPORTING SAFE LEARNING SPACES ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE



AUGUST 21, 2023



# IMMEDIATE VISION: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

**FREEDMEN  
REUNION**

*Block Party*

**SUNDAY  
SEPTEMBER 3RD  
TIME: 1PM**

*free bbq*

**REGISTER:  
BIT.LY/FRBLOCKPARTY**

**WHO: ALL AGES**  
**REGISTER FOR FREE BBQ (VEGAN OPTIONS AVAILABLE)**  
**ACTIVITIES: DOUBLE DUTCH, CARD GAMES, LINE DANCING, ETC**

**I ♥ RÉUNION**



## GROWING FOOD IS A HUMAN RIGHT

**ARE YOU A BLACK PERSON AND**

- ☐ WANT TO LEARN HOW TO GROW
- ☐ LACK ACCESS TO SAFE GROW SPACE
- ☐ CANT AFFORD ORGANIC FOOD?

**OR**

- ☐ KNOW ORGANIC GROW PRACTICES
- ☐ WILLING TO MENTOR SOMEONE
- ☐ AVAILABLE ONCE A MONTH

**IF SO JOIN OUR BLACK GROWER CIRCLE AT:  
GROWTOCONSUME.ORG**



QUESTIONS?  
CONTACT US AT  
GROWTOCONSUME@GMAIL.COM

BLACK, WOMEN, QUEER  
FOUNDED ORGANIZATION



AUGUST 21, 2023

# IMMEDIATE VISION: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

1. CITY WIDE TRAINING ON TRANSITIONAL AND  
REPARATIVE JUSTICE

2. JOIN STATE CONVERSATIONS FOR  
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN MASSACHUSETTS  
BILL, H.3921, DEVELOPED WITH NATIONAL  
REPARATIONS ADVOCACY GROUP,  
SOLIDARITY, FOUNDER ANTONIA EDWARDS



AUGUST 21, 2023



# LONGTERM VISION: NORMALIZE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

- PERMANENT RECOGNITION OF AMERICAN FREEDMEN BY FEDERALLY LEGAL NAME AND NOT BY RACE.
- REPARATIONS IS A PROCESS. THE TRUE COST IS BEYOND OUR CITY BUDGET.
- PROVIDE REPAIR SERVICES TO AMERICAN FREEDMEN THROUGH OFFICE OF FREEDMEN AFFAIRS.



AUGUST 21, 2023

# LONGTERM VISION: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

- NORMALIZE CULTURE OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE FOR CAMBRIDGE
- ALL CITY COUNCILORS AND MAYOR ARE TO JOIN STATE AND NATIONAL CONVERSATIONS OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN ADVOCACY OF ENDING RACE BASED IDEOLOGY WITHIN OUR GOVERNMENT.



AUGUST 21, 2023

*City of Cambridge:  
Truth and Reconciliation Policy Proposal Presentation*

# SUPPORT TRANSITIONAL AND REPARATIVE JUSTICE IN CAMBRIDGE

CONTACT ME:  
GROWTOCONSUME@GMAIL.COM



AUGUST 21, 2023