

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING COMMUNITY REPARATIONS FOR BLACK DETROIT

By Council President Pro Tem Mary Sheffield

WHEREAS, Detroit City Council acknowledges that Black People have been systematically, continually and unjustly enslaved, unjustly segregated, unjustly incarcerated, denied housing through racist practices in the public land use arena as well as private realty markets, including redlining, steering, blockbusting, denial of mortgages, and gentrification, displaced and inadequately housed by government housing policies including discriminatory VA/FHA practices, urban renewal (i.e. Black Bottom and Paradise Valley), and a variety of local and federal “affordable” housing programs; and

WHEREAS, Detroit City Council affirms mass outpouring of public opinion that in the wake of the police killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and others, recognizes that a worldwide paradigm shift in racial attitudes has occurred. This prefigures a historic national reckoning around structural racism and related forms of systemic injustices that have shaped American history. These momentous events should call forth new forms of reparations for the centuries of human enslavement and post-emancipation systemic discrimination and racism that constitute United States history; and

WHEREAS, Black People have been consistently and widely impoverished by discriminatory wages paid in every sector of the economy, regardless of credentials and experience, based on property, income and wealth advantages of white supremacy rewarding white Americans for being white, and punishing black Americans descended from enslaved ancestors and devalued by many forms of rampant structural and systemic violence against Blacks, such as police misconduct and abuses continuing in the present day, among other unjust racial policies; and

WHEREAS, Detroit City Council on its own behalf, and on behalf of the City of Detroit, the City with the largest black majority per capita in the nation, particularly acknowledges its own history of racially-motivated policies and practices, apologizes for the damage this history has caused the City and our People, and declares that it stands against White Supremacy;

WHEREAS, The Detroit City Council strongly supports reparations for centuries of human enslavement and post-emancipation systemic discrimination and racism. The purpose of this resolution is to help establish processes, develop, and implement community reparations in Detroit for mass-historic unjust treatment of Detroit’s majority Black population; and

WHEREAS, Assuming and strongly supporting the successful overturning of Michigan’s state constitutional ban on any racial or other affirmative action (Art. I, Sec. 26), as declared by City Council’s previous resolution supporting affirmative action policies in July 2020, reparations have been prominent among protestors’ demands during historic demonstrations in the wake of the George Floyd killing; and

WHEREAS, The Detroit City Council specifically recognizes and supports the City Council of Asheville, North Carolina’s July 14, 2020 Resolution Supporting Community Reparations for Black Asheville (attached), as well as successful or pending reparations initiatives in many other communities, including Evanston, Illinois; St. Paul, Minnesota; Durham, North Carolina; Providence, Rhode Island, and the State of California. City Council hopes a mass movement in such local city councils can powerfully support the demand for reparations; and

WHEREAS, The Detroit City Council demands a strong and sufficient US federal government program funding commitment to reparations, funding programs that should be democratically administered at the local level for the benefit of Detroit’s Black community applying a racial equity framework, including without restriction or limitation such popular social initiatives as shall be necessary and appropriate to support this core Detroit population’s needs and capacities for protection, enforcement and fulfillment of all their human rights, including:

- a. Right to Water and Sanitation
- b. Right to Environmental Health
- c. Right to Safety
- d. Right to Live Free from Discrimination, including people with disability, immigrants, LGBTQ, and others
- e. Right to Recreation
- f. Right to Access and Mobility
- g. Right to Housing
- h. Right to the Fulfillment of Basic Needs; and

WHEREAS, Pursuant to City Council’s Charter-mandated powers of investigation, legislation, oversight and comprehensive responsibility for City affairs, City Charter Art. IV, the above public policy priorities for a human-rights based economic reparations system should be pursued vigorously in Detroit by establishment of an adequately resourced task force oriented in solidarity and partnership with development of the national community reparations movement, including the passage of federal reparations legislation; and

WHEREAS, These formal demands are cumulative and intended for the benefit of the community of Black descendants of formerly enslaved and exploited claimants – descendants of those previously enslaved Americans who were first solemnly promised, then unjustly denied 40 acres and a mule to establish economic independence after centuries of bondage, and in the course of more generations of racial terror; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the Detroit City Council strongly supports reparations and a governmentally sponsored, citizen-led grassroots movement for reparations due Detroit’s Black community, as briefly outlined in this resolution; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Detroit City Council calls on all Detroiters, Michiganders, Americans and people of good faith, as well as all guilty institutions, organizations, groups and individuals, without limitation, to examine their role in causing harm; Detroit and all others should call on other organizations and institutions that have advanced and benefited from racial inequity to join the City of Detroit in its apologies, and address racism within their own structures and programs, working with the City and others to more comprehensively address systemic racism by supporting the historically justified demand for reparations for Blacks' exploitation from enslavement to the present; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That City Council establishes a reparations process to, within the next year, develop short, medium and long term recommendations to specifically address the creation of generational wealth and to boost economic mobility and opportunity in the black community; and, be it

FINALLY RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be forwarded to Mayor Mike Duggan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and all interested public media, civil society, educational and civil groups and individuals attending to the historic responsibility of reparations.