



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 November 2, 2023
MINUTES OF THE RACE EQUITY COMMISSION
October 12, 2023**

A meeting of the Salem Race Equity Commission (REC) was held on October 12, 2023, at 5:30 pm via ZOOM, an online video conference call system in accordance with Chapter 107 of the Act of 2022.

A recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

1. Roll Call

Present on the call were: Regina Zaragoza Frey (Chair), Alphonse Wright (Vice Chair), Shantel Alix, Rosa Alvarado, Nicole McLaughlin, Kenzie Chin, Lisa Cammarata, Chief of Police Lucas Miller, and Salem Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Stephen Zrike.

Absent were: Paola Miranda, Tara Dhanraj Roden, Alexandra Ramos, and City Council Liaison Leveille McClain.

Other meeting attendees include: Andy Varela - Councillor Ward 7, Nathan Thomas from SATV, Doreen Wade, and Maritsa Barros from HCH Enterprises.

2. Approve previous meeting minutes.

- a. August 3, 2023
- b. September 7, 2023

Chair Zaragoza entertained a motion to approve the previous meetings' minutes for August and September. Motion was made by Vice Chair Wright, seconded by Lisa Cammarata, and the motion was carried unanimously

3. Follow up regarding question submissions to League of Women Voters.



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Chair Zaragoza updated that the following questions were submitted to the League of Women Voters for their upcoming city councillor candidate forums on behalf of the Race Equity Commission:

- What do you see as the three biggest areas of inequity in Salem?
- What are your plans to address these inequities?
- How are you going to consider racial equity in your decisions?
- What steps do you plan to take to educate yourself on racial inequity in Salem?

4. Follow up regarding public comment and Steve Kapantais' comment regarding Veterans parking.

Chair Zaragoza spoke with the City Solicitor and Steve Kapantais's concern has been addressed. It was originally ordered that the City permit any individual with a Veteran license plate and any military passenger plate to park for free at any on and off-street metered space as well as any off-street space requiring payment via a kiosk or app-based payment within the City of Salem.

The updated order states that the City of Salem hereby affirms its commitment to providing free parking for veterans and offers veterans without a military plate the opportunity to seek ticket forgiveness by presenting proof of their military service to the Veterans' Service Agent and Director of Traffic and Parking.

Vice Chair Wright brought up a concern about veterans who do not have the time to go to the Veterans' office to seek ticket forgiveness before the payment deadline. Chair Zaragoza shared that she brought up this concern with the City Solicitor and it was addressed. Veterans who do not go to the Veterans' office before the ticket payment deadline will have the total amount owed completely waived including any late fees.

According to the City Solicitor, this is the process the city can provide right now within the parameters that we have as a municipality around parking and trafficking. There is currently no way for the city to get around this process from a legal standpoint.

5. American Freedmen Commission Ordinance Proposal. Presentation from Saskia VannJames and Dr. Shields, City of Salem constituents.

Chair Zaragoza introduced speaker Saskia VannJames and the presentation. Saskia gave a presentation about an American Freedmen Commission Ordinance Proposal as part of an educational lesson on transitional justice. During this presentation, Saskia discussed institutional racism, the impact of recent Supreme Court ruling on race no longer being used for affirmative action, the differences between transitional and racial justice, a



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detailed overview of reparations, a proposed solution, an immediate vision for action, and a long term vision for action for the city of Salem. Much of Saskia's presentation was based on work being done at the statewide and local level in communities across the country.

Immediate Vision for Transitional Justice:

- Build community by supporting safe learning spaces on transitional justice.
- City wide training on transitional and reparative justice.
- Join state conversations for transitional justice in Massachusetts Bill H.3921, developed with national reparations advocacy group, SoliDarity, founder Antonia Edwards.
- Support an American Freedmen Commission ordinance in your town. This Commission would be asked with:
 - Conducting a harm report. Many pathways to do this at low cost including working with colleges and local organizations.
 - Providing public education on transitional justice.
 - Truth and reconciliation process including listening sessions where those who were harmed share grievances. If there is harm identified outside of American Freedmen, then this can be included in the efforts.

Long term vision: Normalize transitional justice in Salem.

- Permanent recognition of American Freedmen by federally legal name and not by race.
- Reparations is a process. The true cost is beyond any city budget.
- Provide repair services to American Freedmen through the office of freedom affairs.
- Normalize culture or transitional justice for your town.
- 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.
- Support land ownership for American Freedmen as part of 40 acres reparations claim.

Lisa Cammarata asked about the status of the establishment of the American Freedmen Commission ordinance in Cambridge. Saskia responded by sharing that this ordinance was presented to the Civic Unity Committee which consists of some city councilors and the Mayor, all of whom approved/endorsed it. Next it will go before the Ordinance Committee then it will go before all of the City Council. Saskia is confident there is strong support among the city councilors and that this will pass within November 2023. This would be the



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first American Freedmen Commission to pass in the entire country. Saskia promised to keep REC updated regarding the progress in Cambridge.

Nicole McLaughlin asked for clarification if this is a movement across the country. Saskia responded that yes, there are American Freedman providing education about this across the country and there are many reparations task forces including in Philadelphia, Detroit, Atlanta, and Los Angeles where they are pushing to establish an American Freedman Commission. Several other states have already started the reparations process, but there have been issues in defining “Black Americans” and the challenge of pursuing reparations in a race-based approach. Locally, Rhode Island and Amerherst, MA pursued race-based reparations which, under federal law, requires all reparations to be available to all residents including white residents. Saskia emphasized the importance of American Freedmen being identified by their ethnic name versus “Black.”

Chair Zaragoza asked about challenges California encountered about who would qualify for monetary reparations. Saskia responded that the challenges came up because California initially pursued racial justice then course corrected to pursuing transitional justice. On this course, in terms of ancestry, residents would need to show that they had family in the United States prior to 1900 because then it is almost guaranteed that the resident is a child of enslaved ancestors.

Vice Chair Wright wanted clarification about the process for identifying who is an American Freedmen. He expressed concern about using blood quantum and condemned it as a process for initiatives such as this. Saskia confirmed that blood lineage would not be the process. Instead, people would need to be a direct descendent of an enslaved person. Saskia also briefly explained the background of the term “American Freedmen” and the diversity within the identity.

Shantel Alix asked if Saskia possessed data indicating the current population of American Freedmen in Salem, Massachusetts. Saskia does not have that data but encourages members to connect with the American Freedmen that live in Salem because they would have a better idea of who else is an American Freedmen.

Chair Zaragoza thanked Saskia for presenting to the REC. Chair Zaragoza clarified that the scope of the Race Equity Commission would be to recommend to the Mayor the creation of an American Freedmen Commission. This would require a vote which would need to take place at an upcoming meeting. Lisa recommended that we add this topic to the agenda for the next meeting. Saskia shared they will email additional documentation to Chair Zaragoza including Cambridge’s ordinance and California’s Harm Report.



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6. New business.

- a. Chair Zaragoza recognized Shantel Alix for her work with the Latino Leadership Coalition in organizing the Hispanic Heritage month dinner as well as her work with the North Shore Community Development Coalition in organizing Fiesta en la Calle. She also thanked those who helped at the REC's table at the Fiesta.
- b. Chair Zaragoza stated that an update regarding the discrimination form will be provided at the next meeting. Member Kenzie Chin asked if information about this form will be shared in any way with the tourists in October. Chair Zaragoza explained that the form has been advertised with the community of Salem and next year it will be shared in the detailed Halloween resource that is published for tourists. Member Chin recommended sharing a QR code in parking lots or other areas that may be accessible to tourists. Chair Zaragoza shared her plan to distribute posters around Salem, but primarily in city buildings.
- c. Vice Chair Wright agreed with Kenzie about posting throughout the city and offered to support efforts to post. Lisa Cammarata brought up concerns about posting in parking lots because then there may be submissions complaining about parking. Chair Zaragoza discussed exploring other strategic areas such as the welcome booth in downtown. Member Nicole McLaughlin recommended leaving a stack of posters with Destination Salem.

7. Public Comment.

Doreen Wade (62 Frederick Street, Dracut, MA) asked about the Discrimination Form being referenced and its purpose. Chair Zaragoza answered that the purpose of the form is to collect data in order to understand the full scope of discrimination in Salem. Vice Chair Wright emphasized the importance of the data collection in the REC's future work and that the form may expand in the future to include follow up actions for form submissions. Doreen expressed concern about the community filing reports with this form, then not seeing anything happen which could cause the community to stop coming to the REC as a resource for the community. Vice Chair Wright validated Doreen's concern and emphasized the importance of first understanding the scope of the issues in order to systematically address them instead of addressing them on an individual basis. He clarified that it is very clear on the form that this is only for information gathering so submitters should not expect action unless they choose to contact the police themselves.



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8. Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn made by Vice Chair Wright, seconded by Lisa Cammarata, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Giffen
Race Equity Commission Minute Taker