

Long-ago residents of **Russell City**, once a haven for Black and Latino families in modern Hayward that was demolished in the 1950s and 1960s, may soon be eligible to receive reparations aimed at closing the racist wounds that have never healed.

Thursday, Hayward and Alameda County Supervisors Elisa Marquez and Nate Miley announced plans to establish the **Russell City** Redress Fund for former **Russell City** residents, which will attempt to succeed where similar efforts across the state have folded or faltered.

The proposal, which needs the approval of the Board of Supervisors, is scheduled to go before that group at its next meeting on July 22.

"When I was on (The Hayward City) Council in 2021 and we issued the apology, I knew that was meaningful, but it wasn't enough," Marquez said. "They're community members still today; they haven't gone away. The hurt and pain and trauma that this has caused are still here, and we're centering those experiences."

The former unincorporated area in Alameda County became a center for Black and Latino people after World War II, as discriminatory housing policies across the Bay Area pushed minorities to find homes in **Russell City**. Though it didn't have a fire department or basic services like sanitation because of its unincorporated status, the community became a hub of blues music and attracted entertainers such as Ray Charles and Bay Area blues singer Dottie Ivory.

But in 1964, Alameda County used eminent domain to take property from residents and annexed the community into the city of Hayward to make way for an industrial park. The city bulldozed homes and razed approximately 700 parcels. An estimated 1,400 people were displaced.

The Hayward City Council formally apologized in 2021 for the destruction of the neighborhood. The city took another step forward with the establishment of the **Russell City** Arts Committee in 2022, which gathered photographs, art and other stories from former residents to honor the legacy of the former community.

Alameda County extended a similar apology in 2023. The county created a Reparations Commission that same year to review evidence of the injustice done to **Russell City** residents, a "first step acknowledging this injustice," Marquez said.

Raised in the Kelly Hill neighborhood, Marquez had heard about **Russell City** from her classmates at Fairview Elementary School.

"As a young child, it didn't make a lot of sense, like, what do you mean it doesn't exist anymore? When I got involved in government, I learned about the destruction of the community," Marquez said. "It was a place where legendary musicians came to play like Ray Charles. There was a strong bond and community pride."

The fund will be established at a local foundation and supported with \$250,000 from the city, \$400,000 from Marquez's office and \$250,000 from Miley's office. The funds are intended to go to living former **Russell City** residents who had their property seized by the county. First, officials need to finalize eligibility requirements, applications for redress payments and forms of compensation, according to the county.

"It is imperative that we do what we can while owners are still living," Hayward Mayor Mark Salinas said on behalf of the Hayward City Council in a statement.

The state's reparations task force released a report of recommendations to lawmakers in 2023, which advocated for direct cash payments to victims of anti-Black racism. Though the state offered a formal apology for the legacy of slavery and racism in 2024, Gov. Gavin Newsom pledged that direct cash payments would not be part of the state's reckoning with its past. But Alameda County has remained committed to addressing the local center of racial justice in the shadow of **Russell City**.

Though the announcement is a major step for the Reparations Commission, Marquez said that the fund is "not over the hill yet."

She hopes her colleagues on the board will see the significance of the efforts when they take up the proposal at the July 22 meeting.

She contrasted this move with the erasure of historical Black figures from government websites, the reversal of diversity, equity and inclusion programs and the increased policing of immigrant communities.

"With the background of everything going on at the federal level, it's more important now than ever that we uplift this reality," Marquez said. "We control our own voices, values and destiny at the local level."

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