

# CITY OF HIGH POINT

## AGENDA ITEM



**Title:** One High Point Commission

**From:** Jeron Hollis – Managing Director

**Public Hearing:** N/A

**Meeting Date:** Feb. 7, 2022

**Advertising Date:** N/A

**Advertised By:** N/A

**Attachments:** N/A

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### **PURPOSE:**

To fulfill City Council's request to provide a refined One High Point resolution for consideration.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On May 17, 2021, James Adams, President of the High Point Branch of the NAACP, requested City Council consider an NAACP resolution regarding reparations for High Point's black community. On that date, City Council voted to move this item to the Prosperity and Livability Committee.

On Aug. 3, 2021, the Prosperity and Livability Committee heard from Attorney James Mayes and other members of the NAACP, who asked the Prosperity and Livability Committee to endorse the NAACP Reparations Resolution and to endorse the creation of a Reparations Commission. On that date, the Prosperity and Livability Committee recommended both items to the City Council favorably.

On September 20, 2021, City Council considered the recommendations from Prosperity and Livability and decided to form a One High Point Commission and created a workgroup made up of staff, City Council members and NAACP representatives to refine details and specifics on the structure and scope of the commission. The workgroup met on Oct. 12, Oct. 19 and Nov. 30. The resolution was discussed in the workgroup, reviewed by the City's legal department and endorsed by the High Point branch of the NAACP.

### **BUDGET IMPACT:**

No specified budget impact at this time

### **RECOMMENDATION / ACTION REQUESTED:**

On behalf of the One High Point Commission workgroup, staff presents the completed document to City Council as requested.

**A RESOLUTION FOR THE ONE HIGH POINT COMMISSION TO EXPLORE  
COMMUNITY REPARATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CITIZENS OF  
HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA**

**WHEREAS**, the City Council recognizes the fundamental injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity of slavery that occurred throughout the United States and in the City of High Point, North Carolina between 1859 and 1865; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council acknowledges receipt of a proposed resolution submitted by the NAACP at the City of High Point City Council meeting held on September 20, 2021, (“NAACP Resolution”) which set forth findings of the African American citizens of High Point, including:

- approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and colonies that became the United States from 1619 to 1865 and in 1850 the State of North Carolina had 288,548 enslaved persons; and
- the institution of slavery was constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned by the Government of the United States and the State of North Carolina from 1789 through 1865; and
- the slavery that flourished in the United States, the State of North Carolina, and the City of High Point constituted an immoral and inhumane deprivation of Africans’ life, liberty, African citizenship rights, and cultural heritage, and denied them the fruits of their own labor; and
- a preponderance of scholarly, legal, community evidentiary documentation and popular culture markers constitute the basis for inquiry into the on-going effects of the institution of slavery and its legacy of persistent systemic structures of discrimination on living African Americans and society in the United States, the State of North Carolina, and the City of High Point; and
- following the abolition of slavery, the governments of the United States, the State of North Carolina, and the City of High Point, continued to perpetuate, condone, and often profit from practices that continued to brutalize and disadvantage African Americans, including share cropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, unequal education, and disproportionate treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system; and
- as a result of the historic and continued discrimination, African Americans in the City of High Point continue to suffer debilitating economic, educational, and health hardships including but not limited to having nearly 1,000,000 black people incarcerated; an unemployment rate more than twice the current white unemployment rate; and an average of less than 1/16 of the wealth of white families, a disparity which has worsened, not improved over time; and

**WHEREAS**, the City is positioned for a call to action to join other municipalities around the country and within the State of North Carolina to establish a commission to consider a municipal apology and to study potential proposals for reparations for the institution of slavery, its

subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, the impact of these forces on living African Americans, and to make recommendations to the City Council on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes; and

**WHEREAS**, in an effort to address the issues brought to light by the NAACP Resolution, it is in the best interests of the citizens of High Point to establish a body which shall be known as the One High Point Commission.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the City Council of the City of High Point, North Carolina hereby establishes the One High Point Commission (“Commission”) with the following stipulations:

**Creation of the Commission:** There shall be thirteen (13) voting members of the Commission, and two (2) non-voting alternate members to be recommended through a selection committee and council approval process as described below.

**Selection Committee:**

Within thirty (30) days of the adoption of this Resolution, a Selection Committee shall be formed consisting of eight (8) members as follows:

- Two (2) members- the Chair of the Prosperity and Livability Committee, and one other member of the Prosperity and Livability Committee appointed by said Chair; and
- Four (4) members- appointed by the NAACP (High Point Chapter); and
- Two (2) members- City staff, as appointed by the City Manager.

**Commission Members:**

The Selection Committee shall appoint the members of the Commission (“Members”), which shall consist of thirteen (13) individuals who are especially qualified to serve on the Commission by virtue of their education, training, activism, or experience, particularly in the field of African American studies and reparatory justice. Of the thirteen (13) members:

- Two (2) shall be City Council members; and
- Nine (9) shall be citizens currently residing within the High Point City; and
- Two (2) shall be an NAACP representative of the High Point Chapter; and

In addition, two (2) non-voting alternates whom, shall be residents of the City of High Point shall be appointed to serve should a vacancy occur.

Within ninety (90) days after the date of adoption of this Resolution, the Selection Committee shall bring the names of recommended Members to City Council for consideration and approval.

**Member Terms:** The term of office for Members shall be for the life of the Commission. A vacancy in the Commission shall not affect the powers of Commission to continue to

conduct business and, such vacancy, or vacancies, shall be filled by an alternate that has been appointed by City Council or in the same manner in which the original appointment/approval was made.

**Officers:** At its first meeting, the Commission shall elect a Chair and Vice Chair from among its Members. The term of office of each shall be for the life of the Commission.

**Meetings:** The Mayor shall establish the time and date for the first meeting of the Commission which shall be held within 120 days after the date of the adoption of this Resolution. Thereafter, the Commission shall hold meetings as necessary at dates and times as may be fixed by the Commission. All Commission meetings are open meetings, open to the public and shall abide by applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The Commission shall work with the City Clerk and provide information necessary to assure each meeting is properly noticed.

**Quorum:** A simple majority of the voting Members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum.

**Responsibilities of Commission:**

- (1) Study the following:
  - (a) the institution of slavery, including both the Trans-Atlantic and the domestic “trade which existed from 1565 in colonial Florida and from 1619 through 1865 within the other colonies that became the United States, and which included the Federal government, the State of North Carolina, and the City of High Point, which constitutionally and statutorily supported the institution of slavery.
  - (b) the de jure and de facto discrimination against freed slaves and their descendants from the end of the Civil War to the present, including economic, political, educational, and social discrimination, in which the City of High Point is complicit.
  - (c) the lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery and the discrimination described in paragraphs (1)(a) and (1)(b) on living African Americans, especially the African American citizens of High Point.
  - (d) the manner in which textual and digital instructional resources and technologies are being used to deny the inhumanity of slavery and the crime against humanity of people of African descent in the public schools, colleges, and public institutions in the City of High Point.
  - (e) the direct benefits to societal institutions, public and private, including higher education, corporations, religious and associational in the City of High Point.
- (2) Identify, compile, and synthesize the relevant corpus of evidentiary documentation of the institution of slavery in the City of High Point, from 1859 through 1865. The Commission’s documentation and examination shall include but not be limited to:
  - (a) the capture and procurement of Africans for slavery in the City of High Point.

- (b) the sale and acquisition of Africans as chattel property in interstate and intrastate commerce as it pertains to slavery in the City of High Point.
  - (c) the treatment of African slaves in the City of High Point, including the deprivation of their freedom, exploitation of their labor, and destruction of their culture, language, religion, and families; and
  - (d) the extensive denial of humanity, sexual abuse and the chattelization of persons in the City of High Point.
- (3) The role which the City of High Point supported the institution of slavery in constitutional and statutory provisions, including the extent to which such governments prevented, opposed, or restricted efforts of formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants to repatriate to their homeland.
  - (4) The City of High Point ordinances or acts that discriminated against formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants who were slaved and their descendants who were deemed United States citizens from 1859 to the present.
  - (5) In the City of High Point, the other forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed African slaves and their descendants who were deemed United States citizens, from 1859 to the present, including redlining, educational funding discrepancies, and predatory financial practices.
  - (6) The lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery and the matters described in paragraphs (1), (2), (3) (4), and (5) on living African American citizens in the City of High Point.

**Subcommittees:** The Commission by a majority vote may create any number of subcommittees which action shall be reflected in the written minutes of the Commission. Such Subcommittees shall consist of no less than three (3) members, but less than a quorum of the Commission. If authorized by the Commission, a Subcommittee shall have the same authority as the Commission, to act and make decisions.

**Requests for Information and Public Records:** The Commission may, for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Resolution, explore and act at such times and at such places in the City of High Point, and request the attendance and input of such individuals or persons along with the production of such books, records, correspondence, memoranda, papers, and documents, as the Commission considers appropriate.

The Commission may make requests for public records which it deems useful in the discharge of its duties. Such requests shall be made through the City Clerk's office.

**Administration:** Upon the request of the Commission, the City Manager may assign City employees/ staff to assist and support the Commission for certain tasks.

**Contracts/Authority/Administrative Support Services:** The City Council hereby authorizes the City Manager, or her designee, to enter into agreements and provide payment for services which she deems appropriate and necessary for the Commission to achieve its purposes and goals as described herein. Such agreements and payments would be in accordance with the City Manager's applicable spending and contracting authority. Upon the request of the Commission and preapproval of the City Manager or her designee, certain expenses associated with Commission Member's activities may be reimbursed.

The Commission shall have no authority to bind the City of High Point, Council, or organization by any decisions or actions taken by the Commission, any subcommittees, or Members

**Funding:** Any funds received by the City and designated for the purpose and efforts of the Commission shall follow City financial/budgeting policies and practices.

**Report To City Council:** The Commission shall submit a written report of its findings and recommendations to the City of High Point City Council (“Report”) no later than twelve (12) months from the date of the Commission’s first meeting (“Deadline”). The Report shall include:

- (1) Recommendations for appropriate ways to educate the Citizens of High Point of the Commission’s findings; and
- (2) Recommendations for appropriate remedies in consideration of the Commission’s findings, which may include, without limitation, a formal apology by the City of High Point, creation, or amendments of current City of High Point policies and/or ordinances, awards of compensation; and
- (3) In making its recommendations the Commission shall address among other issues, the following conditions:
  - (a) How such recommendations comport with international standards of remedy for wrongs and injuries caused by the City, that include full reparations and special measures, as understood by various relevant international protocols, laws, and findings; and
  - (b) How the City of High Point may offer a formal apology on behalf of the African American citizens for the perpetration of gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity on African slaves and their descendants; and
  - (c) How High Point City ordinances, laws and policies that continue to affect African Americans disproportionately and negatively as a group, and those that perpetuate the lingering effects, materially and psycho-social, can be eliminated; and
  - (d) How the injuries resulting from matters described in paragraphs (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6) under the section entitled Responsibilities of Commission can be reversed and provide appropriate policies, programs, projects, and recommendations for the purpose of reversing the injuries; and
  - (e) How, in consideration of the Commission’s findings, any form of compensation to the descendants of enslaved African can be calculated; and
  - (f) What form of compensation should be awarded, through what instrumentalities and who should be eligible for such compensation; and
  - (g) How, in consideration of the Commission’s findings, any other forms of rehabilitation or restitution to African American citizens of High Point is warranted and what the form and scope of those measures should take.

Upon written request of the Commission, City Council may extend the Deadline for the Report to a date certain.

**Dissolution:**

The Commission shall automatically dissolve ninety (90) days after the date upon which the Commission submits its Report to the Council.

Adopted this the 7th day of February, 2022.

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Mayor Jay W. Wagner

ATTEST:

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Lisa B. Vierling  
High Point City Clerk