

Town of Amherst  
African Heritage Reparation  
Assembly (AHRA)

Initial Report

November 3, 2021

Assembly Membership:

Jamileh Jemison Co-Chair

Michele Miller Co-Chair

Heather Lord

Yvonne Mendez

Alexis Reed

Irv Rhodes

Amilcar Shabazz

## Assembly Charge

The African Heritage Reparation Assembly's (AHRA) mission is to study and develop reparation proposals for People of African Heritage in Amherst to further the goals of the resolution *"Affirming the Town of Amherst's Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity for Black Residents"* adopted by the Town Council on December 7, 2020.

## Meeting Dates

Link to all agendas: <https://www.amherstma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=254>

Wednesday September 22, 2021

Tuesday September 28, 2021

Friday October 8, 2021

Wednesday Oct 13, 2021

Wednesday October 20, 2021

Wednesday October 27, 2021

Monday November 1, 2021 - Subcommittee Meeting

Thursday November 4, 2021 - Posted

## What the AHRA has done September 22 to November 3, 2021

### 01. Administration

- a. Elected co-chairs
- b. Welcomed the 7<sup>th</sup> member to the Assembly
- c. Welcomed two Councilor liaisons
- d. Adopted The ROPES as our meeting etiquette guidance
- e. Agreed to hold two public comment periods at each meeting; one at the beginning one at the end

### 02. Funding for reparations activities

- a. Identified a need to establish a sustainable funding tool to support all future reparations efforts
- b. Explored funding streams available through the Town of Amherst
  - i. ARPA – Spoke at a listening session on October 21 to request ARPA funds to support future reparations activities

- ii. Community Preservation Act (CPA)
- iii. Cannabis Tax Revenue
- iv. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- v. Free Cash

### **03. Community engagement and education**

- a. Met with the co-producer of *A Reckoning in Boston* and made arrangements to screen the film as a community event in the second week of December
  - i. This film explores the history and lived experiences of racism within communities of color facing systemic oppression in the Boston area. The committee felt this was a good resource for building awareness and understanding of the importance of reparations.
  - ii. Amherst Media will be a partner for the local screening
- b. Voted that the Town website offer the community more access to AHRA information beyond Minutes and Packets, including access to resources about reparations, the ability to participate in surveys including through Engage Amherst, etc.
- c. Discussed multiple efforts to reach and engage with the community outside of public meetings and the website
- d. Voted to document the process of this committee via film or other media
  - i. AHRA has applied for a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant to fund this work

### **04. Legal questions**

- a. Scoped the legislative actions required to allow a multi-faceted approach to reparations
  - i. Began a discussion with Representative Mindy Domb about possible legislation to support municipal reparations
- b. Exploring a Community Preservation Act structure for planning and funding reparations activities

**05. Foundational work**

- a. Discussed supporting Black Assembly of Amherst Massachusetts’ (BAAM) effort to establish a communication strategy with the African Heritage community
  - i. Planning a black census

**06. Visioning reparations for people of African Heritage**

- a. As a future commitment to reparations we are identifying the needs and possible structures to support ongoing reparations work, after the AHRA term ends

**07. Next steps**

- a. Develop a full strategy for a reparations program for the Town of Amherst
- b. Decide on a funding target
- c. Participate in the upcoming Financial Indicators meeting and Budget Forum
- d. Develop a full strategy to fulfill the funding target
  - i. Discuss and vote on specific amount of funds to request from ARPA
  - ii. Deliberate on making a request to earmark cannabis tax revenue to fund reparations activities
- e. Discuss the recommendation of the CSWG to have a community wide healing process

**08. Immediate request to the Town Council**

- a. The certified free cash amount from FY 2021 of \$206,000 is slated to be discussed and voted on by the Council on November 8, and deposited in the Stabilization Fund by December 31, if approved.

**09. Articles and references**

- a. Full AHRA Committee Charge
- b. The ROPES
- c. Statement made at ARPA listening session
- d. Black Assembly of Amherst, MA Proposal for Organizing Structure



## TOWN OF AMHERST

### Committee Charge

**Name:** African Heritage Reparation Assembly (AHRA)

**Type:** Town

**Legal Reference:** Amherst Home Rule Charter Section 2.5

**Appointing Authority:** Town Manager per Amherst Charter Section 3.3(c)

**Number of Voting Members:** 7

**Number of Non-Voting Members:** 0

**Number of Liaisons:** 1 or 2 Town Councilors

**Term of Appointment:** 1 year

**Special Municipal Employees:** Yes

**Staff Support:** Town Manager or Designee

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#### Composition:

Seven (7) Voting Members

- Six (6) Black Residents, at least two of whom are current or former members of elected bodies in Amherst
- One (1) Representative of Reparations For Amherst (R4A)

#### Purpose:

AHRA's mission is to study and develop reparation proposals for People of African Heritage in Amherst to further the goals of the resolution "Affirming the Town of Amherst's Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity for Black Residents" adopted by the Town Council on December 7, 2020.



**Charge:**

The AHRA shall:

1. Develop and recommend to the Town Council a Municipal Reparations Plan that includes both a reparations fund and a community-wide process of reconciliation and repair for harms against Black people. This plan will include:
  1. A plan for developing ongoing funding streams to repair past harms committed by the Town against Black people.
  2. An allocation plan including eligibility criteria, which will be determined and approved by the broader Amherst Black community through a census and community feedback process.
  3. Additional means of repair for anti-Black structural and communal racism, including public events and activities that prioritize truth telling and reconciliation.
2. Coordinate with other groups working toward racial equity in Amherst to ensure collaboration.
3. Engage, as appropriate, community stakeholders such as the BID, Chamber of Commerce, Faith Communities, and other organizations to develop extra-municipal reparations efforts that align with and complement the Town's Municipal Reparations Plan.

**Reports:**

A proposed Municipal Reparations Plan to the Town Council by October 31, 2021 and a final report at the completion of the Assembly's work.

**Action:**

None

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**Charge Adopted:** June 21, 2021

**Charge Revised:** - - -

**SME Status Voted:** June 21, 2021

# The ROPES to Know

Adapted from the Anti-Defamation League

 **R**

**Respect** for different people, experiences, opinions and levels of understanding. All perspectives are valid.

 **O**

**Risk** -- Stretch past your comfort zone and be open to learning

 **P**

**Openness** -- Challenge yourself to consider what you are hearing; be open to other thoughts, ideas, opinions and to change.

**Ouch** -- Speak up if situations are uncomfortable or hurtful.

 **E**

**Ooops** -- That's not what I meant. Please let me explain.

**Participation** -- what you put in, you'll get back!

 **S**

**Pass** -- You can choose to actively participate or actively observe.

**Education/Exploration** -- We are all learners, no matter where we start our journey.

**Step Up, Step Back** -- Be aware of the space you use, and work to create space for others.

**Sensitivity** to each other and to confidentiality -- what is said here stays here.

**Speak for yourself** -- Use I statements

**Stay Focused** on what you can do and what you can change.

My name is Michele Miller and I'm here with Dr. Jamileh Jemison in our capacity as co-chairs and representatives of the African Heritage Reparations Assembly.

We recognize there are many critical needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and we appreciate the Town's commitment to Public Health and Racial Equity, as reflected in the Initial Spending Plan.

We've all been affected by the pandemic, however the impact of the pandemic and its consequences are felt disproportionately for Black people. Recent studies show that COVID-19 significantly impacted Blacks across all the outcomes measured compared to whites. The study found that the prevalence ratios in Blacks were 156% higher than in whites, and that Black people are at least twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as their white counterparts.

Covid may be a novel virus, but the pattern of Blacks being negatively impacted with respect to health and well-being is not new.

Marginalization, isolation, and exclusion that results from interpersonal and institutional racism have negative consequences for Black residents in Amherst. The mechanism is clear: living under systemic racism perpetuates a state of physiological stress, ultimately causing physical and mental illness.

- According to Cooley Dickinson, local Black communities bear a disproportionate burden of disease, suffering higher rates of chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular conditions, asthma, and diabetes. Both adults and children suffer disproportionate levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm.
- Racism affects Black patients in the form of medical bias. Local providers acknowledge that bias and prejudice exist throughout their agencies, specifically in a lack of staff diversity, policies, assumptions, prejudgments, and intolerance. Meanwhile, health outcomes, including survival, vastly improve when Black patients receive care from Black providers.
- A significant threat to health, food insecurity affects 38% of all Hampshire county households. Last year, 24% of those using the food pantry at the Amherst Survival Center were Black.
- In Amherst, the safety-net health facilities Musante Clinic and Amherst Survival Center Free Clinic cannot meet all the needs of the local at-risk population.
- Black communities show higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death from Covid-19. Although vaccines are now available, Black residents of Massachusetts have a vaccination rate that is half that of whites.

The culture of a community is a strong determinant of the health and well-being of its residents. The Amherst Board of Health is set to release a statement naming racism as a public health issue and outlining actionable steps to address it. The AHRA will also be developing

recommendations in the coming months to address anti-Black racism, historical and present, in Amherst.

To support this mission we request that the Town apply funds, which have already been allocated for Public Health and Racial Equity, toward reparations for residents of African Heritage. If depositing into the stabilization fund is restricted by the Treasury, we ask you to set aside funds for a particular eligible use, to be determined.

We also wish to express the Assembly's support of the recommendation made by the CSWG for a BIPOC led Youth Empowerment Center, and hope the Town will allocate ARPA funds toward the development of that project.

## Proposal for Organizing Structure Black Assembly of Amherst MA (BAAM)

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*A proposal including a statement of mission, vision, values, title, and guidelines for functioning of the group*

### Mission

The purpose of the Black Assembly of Amherst MA (BAAM) is to serve as a coordinating body for the reparative justice effort in the Town of Amherst.

### Vision

BAAM's ultimate goal is to win reparations for Black African Descendants residing in Amherst, MA. BAAM shall organize and mobilize all strata of Black Amherst, into an effective reparative justice movement to address the historical crime against humanity of the Transatlantic Slave "Trade," Chattel Slavery, Jim Crow and slavery's continuing manifestations in the form of intergenerational trauma and continuing harm from racist policies. BAAM recognizes reparations is a just demand for all African peoples and shall join with others in building the international reparations movement.

### Title

BAAM or the Black Assembly of Amherst, Massachusetts is the formal name of our organization which will come together on a monthly basis by virtual and/or in-person means as appropriate.

### Membership Guidelines

BAAM will be made up of all Black persons of African descent who are residents of the Town of Amherst. To be able to vote and participate in the consensus building process that results in decisions about reparative justice priorities residency will be defined as living in the boundaries of the town in a home, apartment or other dwelling. U.S. Citizenship is not a requirement of membership in BAAM. However, former Black residents of Amherst may attend and speak at BAAM meetings, but voting is limited to current residents. A youth contingent of BAAM is encouraged and will be supported.

### Meeting Structure

BAAM members will elect a facilitator for its meetings on a semi-annual (six month) basis. The facilitator will convene the body, recognize and limit speakers to a three-minute time period unless extended, and oversee the voting process. The agenda of the meeting will be set by proposals (warrant articles) that are sent in to the facilitator by members - in advance of the meeting.

## Organizational Structure

BAAM will be a direct democratic body wherein all voting age black residents will be able to present, debate and vote on reparative justice proposals. A small executive committee will be created to assist the facilitator. Elected by BAAM

\*Reparations involves the redress of multiple injury areas that include:

**Criminal Punishment**

**Education**

**Health**

**Peoplehood/Nationhood**

**Youth/Civic Engagement**

**Wealth/Poverty**