



Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

Request for Board Action

Meeting Date: 3/7/2023

New Business

Department: County Manager's Office

Presenter(s): Matt Baker, Strategy & Innovation

Contact(s): DK Wesley, Assistant County Manager

Jason Hyatt, Library Director

Matt Baker, Strategy & Innovation

Subject: Community Reparations Commission - Additional Research Capacity

Brief Summary: The City of Asheville and Buncombe County together formed the Asheville-Buncombe Community Reparations Commission, through the adoption of resolutions to support reparations for Black people. The Reparations Commission is empowered to make short, medium, and long-term recommendations that will make significant progress toward repairing the damage caused by public and private systemic racism.

The Reparations Commission has formed 5 Impact Focus Area Workgroups (IFAs) tasked with the documenting harms and drafting recommendations across the following areas: Criminal Justice; Economic Development; Education; Health; and Housing. The IFAs have made requests to the City and County for data and information to support their deliberations on recommendations. Data support is being provided by city and county staff in collaboration. It is critical to properly equip the IFAs with resources to respond to the requested data and information so that the Reparations Commission can accompany their recommendations with evidence that can be used as a justification and legal basis.

The information requests submitted to date by IFAs are specialized and complex. There is a data support structure in place, staffed in part by Buncombe County Strategy & Innovation, is equipped to identify and collect readily accessible data that are either publicly available or within local government data systems. There are significant limitations to what is “readily available.” For example, the Education IFA requested data about student enrollment and student performance race over time, but the earliest available data they can retrieve is from 2012. Information will need to be retrieved from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including Buncombe County collections (e.g., library, deeds), institutional partner archives (e.g., university, local school districts), historical media (e.g., newspaper archives), and the State Archives of NC. There are not any currently existing roles specifically dedicated or adequately skilled or resourced to conduct the needed research. BCSC is our in-house archival facility with on-staff librarians and library assistants with the necessary skills to conduct this research, but they are unable to take on the work at existing staffing levels. BCSC is best positioned to be the research partner. Accordingly, there is a need to increase capacity to allow staff to provide this support by adding a contract, but full-time position in BCSC and for the duration of the Community Reparations Commission project.

Recommended Motion & Requested Action:

- Authorize the County Manager to increase capacity to support the Community Reparations Commission through a time-limited contract employee (equivalent to a library assistant) allowing existing BCSC staff the ability to dedicate their time to reparations research. The maximum annual total cost of is an estimated \$100,000 (includes salary/benefits and any tangential expenses related to travel and/or archival duplication fees). Should the board approve, this position would be posted as soon as possible.

County Manager’s comments and Recommendation: County Manager recommends approval.