

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

## *One High Point Commission*

Prepared By  
Lea Henry, Director Housing Equity Initiatives,  
Research, Policy & Impact Center  
National Institute of Minority Economic Development US  
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## OHPC Executive Summary

### ***Purpose and Process***

The One High Point Commission (the Commission) was created to study how chattel slavery, Jim Crow and systemic legal and de facto race-based discrimination against African Americans have limited opportunity and prosperity for the African American population of High Point, North Carolina. Additionally, the Commission, a group of 13 appointed community members, is charged with developing a set of policy recommendations that would address identified disparities and continued harms being perpetrated upon High Point's African American population.

The genesis of the Commission's creation was through the advocacy of the High Point NAACP, which presented a resolution to create a reparations commission to the High Point City Council in 2021. The Prosperity and Livability Committee of the High Point City Council unanimously recommended the creation of a commission to the City Council in September 2021. The High Point City Council approved the Creation of the One High Point Commission on February 7, 2022. The full text of the resolution is included in Appendix A.

After the Commission was created, but before the members were seated, the City of High Point engaged WPR Consulting, LLC to support staff in the facilitation of the process. In December 2022, the High Point City Council approved a budget to hire an external project manager and several Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). The SMEs were assigned several topics of particular importance to the Commission: current demographics and disparity indicators for the City of High Point; a history of the slave trade and slavery in the United States and North Carolina; unequal treatment of African Americans by the High Point City Schools; and City actions related to housing and economic development that have negatively impacted the city's African American residents.

For 16 months, the Commission held regular monthly public meetings, a retreat in October 2022 and a joint meeting with the NAACP in March of 2023. The process will culminate in a presentation of policy recommendations, submission of the final report, and a public meeting in July 2023. An interactive public information session will be held in August 2023. The One High Point Commission report and collected public input will be presented to the High Point City Council in September 2023.

### **Subject Matter Experts**

Dr. Stephen Sills, Senior Vice President of the Research Policy and Impact Center at the National Institute for Minority Economic Development and a distinguished professor who has done in-depth research into racially identifiable disparities in High Point and Guilford County, summarized a decade of relevant research on health, education, housing and economic opportunity in the city and county.

Dr. Omar Ali, Dean of the Lloyd International Honors College at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Professor of Comparative African Diaspora Studies, African American and African Diaspora Studies connected the Transatlantic slave trade and the entrenchment of race-based chattel slavery in the United States to later conditions of enslaved and free African Americans in North Carolina. Dr. Ali and his research assistants also reviewed the oral histories of the William Penn Collection, a set of oral histories of graduates of the segregated William Penn High School. Dr. Omar's team also conducted additional oral histories with a small number of African American residents of High Point.

Dr. Virginia Summey, historian and Faculty Fellow at the Lloyd International Honors College at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro researched two specific periods of City of High Point government actions that had extreme and long-lasting impacts on the city's African American residents: Urban Renewal and Model Cities. Dr. Summey's research found a strong correlation between the communities that were cleared for urban renewal and targeted for Model Cities interventions, with the areas that were redlined for mortgage lending before and during these periods, and the areas that today contain disproportionate amounts of poverty, poor health indicators, vacancy, and dilapidation.

Dr. Paul Ringel, Professor of History at High Point University, reviewed and summarized the public records of the High Point City Schools system from its inception until the official end of race-based practices in the early 1970's. Dr. Ringel found evidence of pervasive, systemic under-resourcing of segregated schools for African Americans and African American educators and school staff. His review of several decades of school system spending has implications for the educational and developmental trajectory of African American students, the neighborhoods in which segregated schools were located, and the unrealized potential generational wealth transfer of African American employees who were paid significantly less than their White counterparts.

In addition to these academic researchers, Commission members formed work groups that explored genealogy and federal reparations. The federal reparations work group presented a report to the full Commission in May 2023. The genealogy work group submitted a report on genealogy and tracing the ancestors of current African American residents of High Point in June 2023. Their reports are included as appendices to the full report.

### ***Recommendations and Next Steps***

Finally, the project management team from the National Institute for Minority Economic Development, Dr. Stephen Sills and Project Manager Lea D. Henry developed a set of policy recommendations designed to address disparities that have resulted from centuries of discrimination and deprivation. The team also recommended topics that would be essential to the creation of a holistic and complete plan for an equitable, thriving High Point community.

These policy recommendations build upon the policies discussed by Commission members from the inception of the Commission. Policy recommendations focus on the areas of Health, Housing, Education, and Economic Opportunity. These policy recommendations are based on real world, successfully implemented programs in North Carolina and similarly sized cities throughout the Southeast. They also consider ways in which the recommendations may have synergy with current and planned local government activities, as well as the outcome of the current High Point 2045 Comprehensive Plan. In the final One High Point Commission report, we will connect these recommendations, in detail, to recent demographic and economic data as well as the reports of subject matter experts.

These findings and recommendations will be shared with the High Point community virtually, in public meetings on July 27 and August 15, culminating in a presentation of findings and recommendations to the High Point City Council on September 18, 2023.

## OHPC Restorative Policy Recommendations

### ***Reconciliation and Community Dialogue***

Policy changes and new programmatic initiatives are most successful when they have broad community support. The history, data, and firsthand accounts of racial discrimination against African Americans, and the data on present day disparities and continued harms to the African American residents of High Point, must be clearly and thoroughly shared with the residents and policy makers of High Point. Greater understanding among the High Point residents and stakeholders should support the acceptance and implementation of the restorative policies in this report and those that arise after further research.

### ***Apologize for City Sponsorship and Enforcement of Racial Discrimination Against African Americans***

Acknowledging the inhumanities and injustices which were wrought on African Americans in High Point, is an appropriate first step in fostering reconciliation. Internationally, African and European countries involved in the Transatlantic slave trade have made formal public apologies for the atrocities. The United States House of Representatives issued an [apology for slavery](#) in 2008. Several state legislatures, including [North Carolina](#), have apologized for slavery and racial oppression. Cities such as [Charleston, South Carolina](#) have also issued apologies for slavery from their governing bodies.

### ***Create a Truth and Reconciliation on Process***

Despite the groundbreaking, historical nature of the creation of the One High Point Commission, the Commission has not been universally embraced by the community. The July 27, 2023, public hearing and August 15, 2023 interactive community event, both scheduled after the publication of the final report, will help in generating community interest and support both for implementation of policies, and for continued exploration and discussions of the issues discussed as a part of the Commission's deliberations.

In order to create more shared understanding and public support for restorative policies, the City of High Point, with stakeholder support, should create a 'truth and reconciliation' process that will share the results of the One High Point Commission's work and subsequent research with a wider audience in High Point. There are many precedents for Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, from South Africa after the end of Apartheid, to the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which examined the causes, precursors, facts and lasting impacts of a specific incident of racial violence in 1979.

### ***Address Housing Disparities***

Housing stability and housing affordability are fundamental to human health, progress and development. The ability to own property and benefit from its market appreciation or intergenerational transfer are the most common ways that family wealth is created in the United States. African Americans have been denied opportunities to purchase homes and land, and to finance these purchases fairly, for several hundred years. Legal and de facto residential segregation and redlining has resulted in African American residents of High Point not having free choices about where to live and how to benefit from property ownership. The City of High Point underinvested in infrastructure and housing development in historically African American neighborhoods since its founding. These practices have resulted in extreme racial segregation and a correlation between majority African American neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high levels of dilapidation, vacancy, and low property values.

The City of High Point should focus on historically African American neighborhoods and those areas demolished and ‘redeveloped’ under Urban Renewal programs. Designating all or a subset of these neighborhoods as Redevelopment Areas by City Council action will provide the City with enhanced abilities to deploy federal funds in those areas.

Some of the programs that the City of High Point can implement or expand within designated communities include:

- **Create a robust city Fair Housing Program to enable tenants and housing seekers to access more convenient assistance with fair housing complaints.** A robust fair housing ordinance and local office send a clear message to those renting and selling housing to the public that discrimination will not be tolerated and the City is committed to protecting its most vulnerable citizens from exploitation or unfair treatment in housing.
- **Create a loan pool, with lending institutions as partners, that can support homeownership and affordable housing construction.** This loan pool could provide flexible, affordable financing or loan guarantees for real estate developers and home buyers.
- **Create a program to assist existing homeowners in substantially African American neighborhoods.** Building on the City’s experience assisting homeowners with urgent repairs and home renovations, assistance to existing homeowners could be expanded to cover more homeowners, at higher household incomes, than existing programs allow. This assistance can take the form of forgivable, low interest loans and grants for home rehabilitation.



- **Provide financial support to nonprofits that assist low to moderate-income property owners in resolving heirs' property issues.** This will ensure that property owned by High Point families for generations is not lost to tax foreclosure or abandonment.
- **Create a down payment assistance program for targeted neighborhoods which prioritizes current neighborhood residents and potential residents who can document a family residential connection to the targeted neighborhoods.** Prioritizing current residents and persons with ties to the community will not prevent new people from moving into targeted areas but may decrease the likelihood that neighborhoods will change drastically as more residents embrace living in the urban core. This can also promote the intergenerational transfer of wealth through real estate for long-term families in the community.
- **Incentivize the development of infill units and renovation of existing vacant units for rent or purchase by current or former city residents.** This will support the growth and stability of existing neighborhoods. Incentives may include subsidizing or providing infrastructure to connect to housing, rebates of fees for completed units, or an expedited planning review process, among others.
- **Create incentives for contractors and developers who commit to residential development in neighborhoods that encompass historically African American neighborhoods and those areas demolished and 'redeveloped' under urban renewal programs.** These incentives can include those listed above, as well as credit enhancements for construction financing and support for small business support services in the community.

### ***Address Health Inequities***

African Americans in High Point, as in many other cities across America, disproportionately live with diseases and disabilities that are magnified by the social determinants of health: lack of sufficient income to purchase healthcare, limited access to healthy food and safe recreation as well as limited access to healthcare facilities and professionals. For these reasons and more, High Point's predominantly African American neighborhoods highly correlate with the neighborhoods that have lower than average life expectancy.

- **Partner with public and private healthcare stakeholders to support sustained health interventions in neighborhoods that lack healthcare facilities.** This could take the form of partnering with hospitals or health systems to build or renovate community health centers as well as providing incentives for medical professionals to locate offices within target neighborhoods.

- **Invest in lead abatement and indoor air quality improvement in concentrated areas of poverty and targeted neighborhoods to decrease preventable respiratory and developmental harm to residents.** These interventions can be coordinated with home repair and rehab programs to ensure that homes are healthy, as well as safe and affordable. Through partnerships with local hospitals, the City can identify neighborhoods that represent disproportionate numbers of emergency room visits for asthma and other acute conditions linked to the environment.
- **Promote and support community gardens and urban agriculture.** One source of fresh produce, in addition to economic stability and community cohesion, is the increased production of fruits and vegetables at home, in community gardens, and through larger-scale urban agriculture. Vacant lots and city-owned or donated property can be put to productive use by community residents. To sustain interest and increase the chances of success, the City of High Point can provide ongoing technical assistance and small grants to support these activities.

### ***Address the Education Gap***

While the current school system is run and primarily financed by Guilford County, the City of High Point can play important roles in fostering the improvement of both the neighborhoods in which schools are located, transportation that supports students and staff, and other community supports for education.

- **Create policies that incentivize new construction and rehabilitation of schools in current and historically African American neighborhoods.** New and renovated schools attract new interest from families and employees and can help a neighborhood grow. Conversely, a lack of schools can cause a neighborhood to slowly die, as families seek housing closer to the school of their choice.
- **Create policies that incentivize comprehensive community development in conjunction with the development of new schools.** A school is a major investment in construction and site work that can be leveraged to attract new housing, amenities, and businesses in close proximity. School construction projects are also an important opportunity to employ local residents and contract with local businesses.
- **Provide, or facilitate, convenient, affordable high speed internet** access to allow all High Point residents to successfully access education and complete homework online. While many North Carolina municipalities are wrestling with the best way to ensure that their residents have access to reliable, affordable internet service, there are ways

that the City of High Point can incentivize upgrades, increase communication and coordination with providers, and advocate at the state and federal levels for universal internet access.

### ***Address Economic Opportunity***

The City of High Point can support economic opportunity and address disparate access to economic opportunity through supporting bridges to employment and work supports. The City can also support small business development and growth, as small businesses hire locally, reinvest in the community, and anchor main thoroughfares in neighborhoods.

- **Create and expand youth employment programs, emphasizing youth from target neighborhoods.** Programs like YouthBuild, service corps and conservation corps provide meaningful employment and connections to career pathways. They also provide opportunities for teenagers and young adults to participate in the renewal and rehabilitation of their own communities.
- **Create a business microloan program.** This loan program can be seeded with CDBG, local funds, or funds for which the City can compete. The program could match small community-based businesses, start-ups, and sole proprietors in target communities with technical assistance and business coaching. It can provide seed capital to assist inexperienced and low-wealth business owners to progress through the business financing ecosystem.
- **Support social enterprises and social entrepreneurs.** Make seed funding available for social entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas to tackle the disparities highlighted by the High Point Commission.

### ***Address Transportation Access***

The lack of adequate transportation is a recurring and persistent concern for High Point residents, especially lower income residents and residents of core city neighborhoods that are historically predominantly African American. Transportation that is affordable, convenient, and available most of the day, seven days a week, is a crucial ingredient to ensure that High Point's residents can take part in all aspects of community life and economic activity.

- **Identify and implement improvements in public transportation** that will move persons and communities with lowest income and lowest rates of car ownership, to centers of employment, education, amenities, and services.
- **Expand routes and hours for public transportation to facilitate access to employment, education and training** that accommodates all shifts of work and

connects city residents to new and existing employment and education sites both within the city. This recommendation requires a regional solution and expert knowledge of applicable laws.

### ***Review and Revise Municipal Operations***

The City of High Point's own official records confirm that discrimination against African Americans by the city government was common practice. Discrimination occurred in the hiring, compensation, and promotion of municipal employees, as well as in the application of zoning ordinances, permits, licenses and other official business. While the City of High Point does not knowingly engage in practices that are discriminatory, there may be vestiges of racial discrimination embedded in the City's policies, procedures, and business practices.

- **Engage an experienced and qualified firm to analyze current municipal policies and practices** to ensure that they are not currently creating or reinforcing bias in services to the community, employment within the city government, and vendor contracting opportunities.
- **Institute an organizational program to correct systemic bias**, as identified and documented through a transparent process, as well as a program to implement policies centered in equity, targeted toward redressing identified and documented previous unfair or harmful practices.

## **Recommendations for Other Stakeholders**

### ***Community Stakeholders***

- Increase the teaching of local African American history and the present-day impacts of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation on the community, as well as ways that community members and community-based organizations can address these impacts.

### ***Guilford County***

- Engage an experienced and qualified firm to analyze current municipal policies and practices to ensure that they are not currently creating or reinforcing bias in services to the community, employment within the city government, and vendor contracting opportunities.
- Institute an organizational program to correct systemic bias, as identified and documented through a transparent process, as well as a program to implement policies centered in equity, targeted toward redressing identified and documented previous unfair or harmful practices.
- Increase access to preventative care and public health services throughout the county, focused on underserved areas and areas of concentrated negative health indicators and outcomes.
- Enhance the history of African Americans, slavery, resistance, Jim Crow, and the Civil and Voting Rights Movement taught in history classes.

### ***State of North Carolina***

- Institute an organizational program to correct systemic bias, as identified and documented through a transparent process, as well as a program to implement policies centered in equity, targeted toward redressing identified and documented previous unfair or harmful practices.
- Strengthen and expand the teaching of African American history, the Transatlantic slave trade, Jim Crow and systemic discrimination in North Carolina, in North Carolina public schools.

### ***Federal Government***

- Advance Comprehensive Reparations as put forth by H.R. 40 – Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.

***Philanthropy***

- Fund additional research on issues pertinent to a comprehensive community response to the lasting impacts of slavery and racial discrimination.
- Ensure that community-based organizations and community members participate in, and benefit financially from, grants made to further research and programming aimed at addressing the lasting impacts of slavery and racial discrimination.

## Topics for Further Research

There is a plethora of topics that the One High Point Commission was initially charged with, or identified during the past year of deliberation, that were beyond the scope of the citizen Commissioners and the time and financial resources available. As the city government and city residents continue to consider the ills of the past and the impact they have had on all High Point residents, but especially African Americans, there are additional topics that must be studied to arrive at a comprehensive, integrated policy framework for healing and progress. These topics include:

- Identifying underpaid African American High Point Public Schools employees, quantifying the present-day value of their withheld pay, from the creation of the city school system until the official end of the policy of race-based pay.
- Identifying underpaid African American City of High Point employees, quantifying the present-day value of their withheld pay, from the creation of the city until the official end of the policy of race-based pay.
- Studying the extent and impact of race-based policing by City of High Point police. This includes a thorough review of arrest records, traffic stops, call response times, and injuries and deaths in police custody.
- Studying the history and roles of African Americans in the crucial furniture, textile, and transportation industries that grew the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This topic would explore the critical role that African Americans have played as artisans and factory labor, as well as their compensation and working conditions.
- Identifying incidents of environmental racism, which may include siting of trash dumps, trash incinerators, and other potential pollutants, as well as previous uses of sites in historically African American neighborhoods that are currently parks or other public spaces.
- Studying and quantifying the financial investment in providing water, sewer, electrical, gas, and street paving infrastructure by neighborhood to determine if certain areas have received less than their anticipated per-capita public investment in the utilities and infrastructure that support a high quality of living.