



**City of Salisbury
TRUTH Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2024**

Committee Members Present

Amber Green, *Chair*
Kat Savoy
Kenisha Le’Cole
Samuel Henry
Nanay Paul

Committee Members Absent

James Yamakawa
Joe Venosa

Others Present

Jessie Turner—*City Staff Liaison*
D’Shawn Daughty—*City Council*
Member of the public

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 pm.

Welcome & Introductions

Approval of Minutes

- **January Minutes**—Motion by Kat to approve. Kenisha seconded. All agree.

Current Works For Discussion

- **Election of Vice Chair**—Kenisha was nominated for Vice-Chair and accepted the nomination. Motion to elect her as Vice President was made and the vote was affirmative by all present.
- **Workplace Discrimination Training**—Jessie has been in communication with MCCR and updated that the Commission can provide the training in March.
- **Apology Resolution**—The committee reviewed the Apology Resolution from the Mayor’s Office. Discussion centered around two main points—the wording reflecting the definition and intent of “lynching” and the potential audience for the apology. The Committee agreed that the most important step was taking the first step. Committee members, James Yamakawa and Joe Venosa submitted their opinions via email to the group, and those emails were read by Chair, Amber Green and are included in these minutes as public record per request of the members. There was a motion, a second, and a unanimous to recommend the Apology Resolution move forward to a City Council Work Session. Jessie will draft a memo and send this recommendation to the Mayor.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

- TRUTH Committee meetings are scheduled for the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00 pm in the Salisbury Headquarters (HQO Conference room).
- Motion to adjourn by Kat and seconded by Kenisha. The meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Minutes Taken By: Jessie Turner, City of Salisbury staff liaison

Jessie Turner

From: jgyamakawa <jamesgyamakawa@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 16, 2024 8:58 AM
To: Joseph Venosa
Cc: Kenisha Le'Cole; Jessie Turner; Amber Green; Katherine Savoy; Sam Henry; onanay90@gmail.com
Subject: Wednesday 21st meeting

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Dear all,

Wanted to give a heads up that I will not be in attendance at next Wednesday's meeting. My daughter has her orchestra concert at Mardela at the same time.

I will leave my final recommendations here, with the understanding that I cannot vote on them nor on final recommendation of the apology resolution. That being said, I and the WTRI will stand by any recommendations and vote made by the NAACP representative on this matter. I also request that my recommendations be entered into the official record.

If you have not read EJI's report on the history of racial terror, it was probably the premiere resource in my eventual understanding of the broadness of the issue:



eji

LYNCHING IN AMERICA

CONFRONTING THE LEGACY OF RACIAL TERROR

Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror

This video explains why the term “lynching” may be insufficient to describe what happened in Salisbury.

WHAT IS A RACIAL TERROR LYNCHING?

Lynching in America: What is a Racial Terror Lynching?

Article on the passage of the Emmitt Till anti-lynching act, mentioning the community impact of racial terror lynchings.



What an anti-lynching law means in 2022

The first provision in the draft resolution we presented to the Salisbury City council back in September of 2023.

WHEREAS the term “racial terror lynching”, according to the Equal Justice Initiative, means the intentional inflicting of lethal violence at people because of their race, as an effort to terrorize the entire community and reinforce an existing racial heirarchy.

While it may seem pedantic, the way we define something has a very real impact on how it is perceived. The word “Lynching” could be read as racial terrorism, or as simply extrajudicial punishment (and in a punitive society such as ours it is more likely to be understood as the latter, particularly

when it comes to the dominant white culture: something “unfortunate and terrible” but somehow also “deserved” (think of responses to George Floyd, Eric Garner, etc.)

All that helps provide more context to the recommendations below:

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**Recommendation #1:**

***That the term and definition outlined above be used in its entirety within the apology resolution; or if not clear stated elsewhere in the document that what happened to Matthew Williams, Garfield King, and Unknown were “message” crimes, targeted at not only the victims but also their community, because of their race.***

**Recommendation #2:**

***That the apology be given not only to the descendants, but to the entire Black community of Salisbury.***

(I understand this is controversial, as we don’t know what every single Black member of the Salisbury community actually wants in regards to this. But this also has to do with accountability for the white community of Salisbury as well, those who either took part in these crimes, or who kept silent afterwards) not everyone will agree on this. Not everyone agrees on anything

**Recommendation #3:**

***That the apology be stated as being from the city Fire Department and Police Department in addition to the city administration, or stating***

***clearly that the city is apologizing on behalf of the fire department and the police department.***

(Again, there needs to be institutional accountability as well)

I understand that these were all dealbreakers with the city (both council and administration) during the last year of negotiations. Though they are politically untenable and unlikely to be approved by the Mayor's office, doesn't mean they are wrong in my opinion.

As for concrete actions, it is hard to say what those could be without the city accountability to back them up. Plaques explaining the history (beyond the sign already existing downtown) might be possible, including:

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- a) **Plaque or marker on the firehouse stating that this is where the mob got the rope, and who gave it to them.**
- b) **plaque or marker on the building next to the courthouse (one plaza east?) highlighting its history as the Wicomico Hotel, specifically that some Black workers were trapped there and forced to watch what happened just across the street (also that the Delmar and Salisbury football teams were having dinner there and rushed out to join the mob)**
- c) **The city's promise to help foster truth and reconciliation by helping us to reach out to descendants of the perpetrators.**
- d) **The city's commitment to educating all city personnel on this history, with oversight.**

Jessie Turner

From: Joseph Venosa <JLVENOSA@salisbury.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, February 20, 2024 12:52 AM
To: jgyamakawa; Amber Green; onanay90@gmail.com; Jessie Turner; positivitymatters19@gmail.com; katherine.savoy@gmail.com; shenry@theinspireone.com
Subject: City Apology/Recommendations

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Good Evening Everyone,

Because this semester I have to teach my Wednesday evening seminar from 5:30 to 8:15, I also can't physically attend the meeting. I apologize but I believe I made mention of this in a previous email message. That being said, I also wanted to put into writing my own thoughts and recommendations after having read over the resolution draft and having talked with some local residents. I've also tried to frame my thoughts within the context of our committee being specifically a city-based committee.

Points/Recommendations:

#1: I concur with James that the basic language of the resolution should be consistent and that the term "racial terror lynching" is probably the most historically accurate term given the nature of the killings and the intended effect on the local Black community.

#2: Having a prominent Plaque or monument on the side of city hall/fire station is an obvious action that the city can and should do. Providing a brief but detailed description with the historical facts would be the most basic and prudent physical act that could be made in the near future.

#3: I think that the resolution/apology should remain specifically geared to the families of the victims, while also simultaneously acknowledging that they were connected to broader attempts at terrorizing the city's black community. Providing a

broader apology to the entire black community is actually something that I know that some Black community members have taken issue with for a multitude of reasons. Frankly, I don't know to what extent this committee can make such a judgement call, but that is at least my initial thought on it based on the conversations I've had.

#4: I agree with James in principle that both the SBY fire and police departments should be involved in the apology, although I don't know if the city apology itself can technically "count" as already including them. This is something that the city clerk or council or mayor could perhaps best address. If we are wanting specific departments to provide their own apology for their role in the racial terror lynchings, then there are several county department's that would by definition also need to be included/confronted. James' WTRI is county based, so that is perhaps something he or the broader organization will want to pursue in the near future as way of keeping consistent with the broader goals.

#5; The city should hold a series of direct conversations with those directly impacted by the racial terror lynching, including both the descendants of the victims and perpetrators. Elected city officials should also be included in these discussions and their proceedings should/could be recorded in some way for the historical record. I would advise reaching out to Salisbury University's Nabb Center or the Chipman Center to help facilitate such an action. Frankly, I think that Having structured and actually honest conversations about racial, cultural and economic issues within the city and its history should frankly be a recurring event that should be hosted by city authorities.

#6: As a longer-term point, I believe that the City can work to establish (with the County board of education and school officials) the creation of a specific black history course taught at the high school level that focuses on the history of Wicomico county in particular and the eastern shore more broadly. For younger students within the city, we could create a series of focused lectures and community events that highlight the broader contributions and fundamental role of African-Americans. The city or related committees could work with other county entities such as the library

system for such an initiative. I would strongly urge city entities as well as the Wicomico NAACP, WTRI and any other invested community groups to contact Dr. Clara Small, who is perhaps the most renown authority on African-American contributions to Delmarva history and culture, to help coordinate such events and find ways to make them sustainable. Other faculty/teachers from UMES and Salisbury University who are content experts could perhaps also be consulted to help such educational programming development.

I hope these points make sense and I regret that I can not be there in person to fully articulate them. Thanks for reading them over and please let me know if anything requires clarification or further elaboration. My apologies again for my current attendance challenges, but I'm Looking forward to seeing you all in person at some point in the near future. If there is a need for an official vote in the near future, I can certainly try to meet at another time or online if need be.

Best,
Joe