

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the February 16 Mayor and Commission session was remote. The meeting could be viewed live at www.accgov.com/videos, on YouTube at www.youtube.com/accgov, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/accgov, and on ACTV Cable Channel 180 or the live ACTV stream at www.accgov.com/actvlive

Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia
Mayor and Commission
Tuesday, February 16, 2021
5:00 p.m.
City Hall/WebEx

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia met this date in a special called session. Present: Mayor Girtz; Commissioners Davenport, Parker, Link, Wright, Denson, Houle, Edwards, Myers, and Hamby. Absent: Commissioner Thornton.

The purpose of the meeting was to enter into executive session for discussion of real estate acquisition and/or disposal and an attorney/client conference to discuss threatened or pending litigation.

A motion was made by Commissioner Edwards, seconded by Commissioner Denson, to enter into executive session for discussion of real estate acquisition and/or disposal and an attorney/client conference to discuss threatened or pending litigation. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Clerk of Commission

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Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia
Mayor and Commission
Tuesday, February 16, 2021
6:00 p.m.
City Hall/WebEx

The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia met this date in a special called session. Present: Mayor Girtz; Commissioners Davenport, Parker, Link, Wright, Denson, Houle, Edwards, Myers, Thornton, and Hamby. No one was absent.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider AXON services and equipment contract extension, Linnestown, and Stand Your Ground resolutions.

Old business – Discussion

A motion was made by Commissioner Wright, seconded by Commissioner Parker, to

- a) Approve a term extension for the existing AXON services and equipment agreement for an additional period of up to five years for on-officer cameras and associated services as per agenda report revised February 11, 2021;
- b) Approve the addition of conducted electrical devices (CEDs), commonly known as "TASERs," and associated services within the existing AXON equipment and services agreement; and
- c) Authorize the Mayor and appropriate staff to execute all documents associated with the revised AXON services and equipment agreement.

A substitute motion was made by Commissioner Houle, seconded by Commissioner Parker, to DENY the agreement.

The substitute motion failed by roll call vote with Commissioners Parker and Houle voting YES; and Commissioners Davenport, Link, Wright, Denson, Edwards, Myers, Thornton, and Hamby voting NO. (2 YES; 8 NO.)

The original motion passed by roll call vote with Commissioners Davenport, Link, Wright, Denson, Edwards, Myers, Thornton, and Hamby voting YES and Commissioners Parker and Houle voting NO. (8 YES; 2 NO)

New business – Consider under suspension of Rules

A motion was made by Commissioner Wright, seconded by Commissioner Houle, to suspend Rules of Commission for items of new business. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

A motion was made by Commissioner Parker, seconded by Commissioner Houle, to adopt the following resolution. The motion passed by unanimous vote,

Resolution in support of recognition and redress for Linnentown, its descendants, and Athens-Clarke County Black communities harmed by urban renewal; acknowledging the City of Athens' collaboration with the University System of Georgia in the destruction of the Linnentown community and the displacement of Black property owners through urban renewal; supporting the establishment of memorials and historical places in honor of Linnentown; supporting the allocation of funds in the annual budget for the economic and community development of historically impoverished communities; calling on the Georgia General Assembly to establish a formal body to address the legacy of slavery and segregation in the State of Georgia and to determine the appropriate forms of material redress:

WHEREAS, as early as 1900, Athens Black families began to settle in a twenty-two acre area called "Linnentown" which was bounded by the currently existing Baxter Street, Church Street, and South Finley Street, and formerly contained the unpaved Lyndon Row and an unpaved portion of Peabody Street on what used to be Judge Newton's plantation land;¹

WHEREAS, from 1900-1960, Linnentown grew to fifty Black families and was a burgeoning and self-sustaining Black neighborhood consisting of skilled members of the Athens community including plumbers, electricians, beauticians, brick masons, housekeepers, and cooks;²

WHEREAS, Linnentown families were tax-paying residents with decent, albeit low-paying jobs who were building up generational wealth through the ownership of and investment in real property and durable goods;

WHEREAS, in December 1954, Linnentown property owners petitioned the City of Athens to pave Lyndon Row in its entirety and install a street light.³ By January 1955, the Mayor and City Council approved an ordinance to pave Lyndon Row, and by February 1959, approved additional ordinances to pave Peabody Street, South Finley Street, and Church Street in their entirety, which would have upgraded water and sewage infrastructure and enhanced general accessibility for all Linnentown residents, thereby improving their lives and property values. These ordinances were not followed and the improvements were not implemented for Linnentown residents;⁴

WHEREAS, the Housing Act of 1949 established the Federal Urban Renewal Program, which disproportionately affected Black Americans across the United States between 1950-1971;

WHEREAS, in 1959, the Housing Act was amended to allow universities and colleges to participate in the Federal Urban Renewal Program without providing housing for displaced communities;

WHEREAS, between 1959 and 1961, University of Georgia President Ormer C. Aderhold corresponded with several local, state, and federal officials, especially Athens Mayor Ralph Snow, University System of Georgia Chancellor Harmon Caldwell, and United States Senators Richard B. Russell and Herman Talmadge to request that they leverage political power for the University System of Georgia to obtain a federal urban renewal contract with the City of Athens to "clear out the total slum area which now exists off Baxter Street [i.e. Linnentown]";⁵

WHEREAS, the City of Athens and the University System of Georgia have a history within Black communities of acquisition of property through eminent domain for the purposes of urban redevelopment, e.g. in 1920, the University of Georgia Board of Trustees minutes allocated \$25,000 to purchase a tract of unspecified Black-owned properties "for the protection of [university] property and the safeguarding of the young women in [the university's] charge,"⁶ and then in 1950, a city planning map shows Linnentown as specifically targeted for urban redevelopment;⁷

WHEREAS, from 1962-1966, the University System of Georgia contracted with the City of Athens to demolish Linnentown in the name of 'slum clearance' in order to erect three 'luxury'⁸ dormitories—Brumby, Russell, and Creswell Halls— by means of the urban renewal program called the "University of Georgia Urban Renewal Program" or "Project GA R-50." This project operated concurrently with the "College Avenue Redevelopment Project" or "Project GAR-51." Both projects were federally funded through the former Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) which was superseded by the current department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD);⁹

WHEREAS, the City of Athens seized Linnentown properties through eminent domain for as little as \$1450 and families were displaced to public housing or sporadically throughout the City of Athens;¹⁰

WHEREAS, through intimidation,¹¹ weaponized code enforcement,¹² inequitable property value judgments,¹³ controlled demolition by fires,¹⁴ forced tenancy and rent,¹⁵ tokenized Black representation,¹⁶ invasions of financial privacy,¹⁷ and paternalistic relocation policies,¹⁸ Linnentown was effectively erased without a trace by the City of Athens and the University System of Georgia;

WHEREAS, by 1966, the City of Athens had sold all Linnentown properties to the University System of Georgia for \$216,935,¹⁹ and by 2019, the University's current land value plus improvement value of this property totaled \$76 million for a return on investment of 35,000 percent with an annualized return of approximately \$8.8 million (11.6 percent per annum);²⁰

WHEREAS, instead of investing money and resources into Linnentown for it to achieve middle-class status, the City of Athens and the University System of Georgia perpetrated an act of institutionalized white racism and terrorism resulting in intergenerational Black poverty, dissolution of family units, and trauma through the forcible removal and displacement of Black families, and the accumulation of the majority of their wealth and political power within the University System of Georgia and the City of Athens;²¹

WHEREAS, a total of 176 Black families compared to 122 white families were displaced by both Project GAR-50 and R-51 between 1962-1974, which shows that a disproportionate number of the Athens Black population were affected by urban renewal in Athens, Georgia and that urban renewal strategically targeted Black communities like Linnentown through dispossession and erasure;

WHEREAS, between 1959 and 1974, over 70 universities and colleges in the United States received federal funding for urban renewal, including the University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Georgia Tech University, and the Medical College of Georgia, which displaced 324 Black Americans in the State of Georgia from 1961-1974;²²

WHEREAS, in the words of the activist James Baldwin said, "Urban renewal is negro removal,"²³

the erasure of Linnentown is a key example of larger patterns of collaboration between public institutions of higher education and federal, state, and local government agencies to seize and dispossess Black-owned properties, which reflects the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow in both Athens, Georgia and in the United States at large;²⁴

WHEREAS, on September 14, 2019, Athens-Clarke County Mayor Kelly Girtz publicly stated that properties in Linnentown "would be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars each if preserved in their original locations, and an asset those families would have been able to rely upon to build wealth";²⁵

WHEREAS, in 2019, Congress passed H.R. 40 "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act" which establishes a commission to examine the socio-economic effects of slavery and to consider appropriate remedies;

WHEREAS, between 1989 and 2020, at least seven municipalities (Asheville, NC; Chicago, IL; Detroit, MI; District of Columbia; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; and San Francisco, CA) and seven state legislatures (California, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Texas) have adopted resolutions acknowledging the legacy of slavery and calling for reparational remedies for the lasting effects of segregation and racial violence; and²⁶

WHEREAS, this resolution results from research funded by the Athens-Clarke County Mayor's Office through an internship provided by its *Community Improvement Program* grant and fully supported by *The Linnentown Project*, which is a community-led project headed by former Linnentown property owners to celebrate the history of Linnentown and to educate the Athens community about the legacy and impact of urban renewal in Black communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, let it be resolved by the Mayor and the Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia that:

Section 1. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County acknowledges the fundamental injustice and resulting harm to Linnentown and other Black communities as a result of urban renewal by the City of Athens and the University System of Georgia.²⁷

Section 2. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, in partnership with Linnentown residents, shall seek to establish a partnership with the University System of Georgia to recognize the history and legacy of Linnentown and its descendants through the installation of an on-site 'Wall of Recognition.'

Section 3. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall, with the approval of the Commission, direct the Linnentown Justice and Memory Committee to determine the total amount of intergenerational wealth lost to urban renewal and, under the Committee's advisement, shall, for as long as the Committee exists under its charge, make annual budgetary recommendations to the Mayor and Commission for operational and capital projects to provide equitable redress, including but not limited to affordable housing, economic development, telecommunication services, public transportation, and public art as redress for past harms caused by urban renewal and to foster future reinvestment in historically underfunded and impoverished neighborhoods in Athens-Clarke County.

Section 4. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall designate as historic any and all relocated Linnentown structures, erect applicable historical markers, and apply to register them with the National Register of Historic Places.

Section 5. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall seek partnership with the University System of Georgia to create and co-fund a local Center on Slavery, Jim Crow, and the Future of Athens Black Communities.

Section 6. The Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County shall explore policies regulating property acquisitions by and land swaps between the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County and the University System of Georgia, including but not limited to policies requiring additional fees in lieu of taxes for any property acquisition by public entities.

Section 7. The Mayor & Commission of Athens-Clarke County urges the Georgia General

Assembly to establish an Authority on Recognition & Redress for the purpose of formally acknowledging Black communities harmed by slavery, Jim Crow segregation, redlining, and urban renewal in the State of Georgia; and to determine the appropriate forms of compensation to redress the loss of intergenerational wealth and property as the result of historically discriminatory policies and practices.

Section 8. The Mayor & Commission of Athens-Clarke County requests that Mayor Girtz deliver copies of this resolution, upon adoption, to Governor Brian Kemp, Georgia State Senators Bill Cowser and Frank Ginn, Georgia House of Representatives Spencer Frye, Houston Gaines, and Marcus Wiedower, United States Representative Jody Hice, United States Senators Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, the University System of Georgia Executive Director of Government Relations Casey Tanner, and the University of Georgia Vice President of Government Relations Toby Carr.

A motion was made by Commissioner Link, seconded by Commission Parker, to adopt the following resolution. The motion passed by unanimous vote,

Local Resolution in Support of Repealing Georgia Stand Your Ground Legislation

WHEREAS, Stand Your Ground laws threaten public safety by encouraging armed vigilantism, allowing a person to kill another person in a public area even when they can clearly and safely walk away from the danger; and

WHEREAS, Under current Georgia law, a person can use force likely to kill or seriously injure someone even if there is a safe way to avoid the danger.

WHEREAS, New legislation will allow Georgia residents to use force to defend themselves anywhere, however when individuals are outside their homes, they can only use force likely to kill or seriously injure someone, if there is no safe way to avoid it.

WHEREAS, Georgia's Stand Your Ground law provides broad immunity from arrest and other criminal and civil action, which prevents people from being held accountable; and

WHEREAS, Misunderstanding of the Stand Your Ground law can lead to lethal tragedies as with Ahmaud Arbery; and

WHEREAS, Stand Your Ground laws are associated with an increase in firearm injuries and homicides and do not deter crime; and

WHEREAS, At least 30 people nationwide are killed each month as a result of Stand Your Ground laws; and

WHEREAS, In Florida, the Stand Your Ground law was linked to a 32 percent increase in firearm homicide rates. At the same time, justifiable homicide rates increased by 75 percent; and

WHEREAS, Stand Your Ground laws have a disproportionate effect on communities of color. When white shooters kill black victims, the resulting homicides are deemed justifiable 11 times more frequently than when the shooter is black and the victim is white.; and

WHEREAS, Controlling for other factors—such as who initiated the confrontation and whether or not the victim was armed—Florida SYG cases with minority victims are half as likely to lead to conviction, compared to cases with white victims; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission records its strong support to any Repeal Stand Your Ground legislation in consideration in the Georgia state legislature.

The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.