

For Immediate Release

Date: January 30, 2025

RSAA Announces Historic Property Conveyance as Part of a Bold Reparative Act

Asheville, NC — On Saturday, January 25, 2025, history was made as the Presbytery of Western North Carolina (PWNC) unanimously voted to convey the former property of the West Asheville Presbytery Church to RSAA at no cost. This groundbreaking decision marks a transformative act of reparations, acknowledging Asheville's painful history and laying the foundation for a more equitable future.

"This is not just a transaction—it is a bold and deliberate act of repair," said Torre Garrison, Executive Director of RSAA. "This property represents a step toward justice and a powerful example of what can be achieved when we confront systemic harm and commit to healing and equity."

A Historic Reparative Act

The origins of the West Asheville Presbyterian Church property dovetail with the history of Asheville in the early 1920s, a time deeply marked by structural racism. In 1916, the Asheville Presbytery acquired the property at 690 Haywood Road to establish a congregation in the rapidly growing West Asheville community. However, the site also carries the legacy of Wilson's Chapel AME Church, a Black congregation founded in the 1880s on a tract of land donated by J.L. Henry, a wealthy white landowner.

Wilson's Chapel thrived until systemic pressures in the 1920s forced the congregation to sell their property, relocate their church building, and move their cemetery. This was a direct consequence of the discriminatory practices codified by city planning initiatives that prioritized segregated neighborhoods and sought to relocate cemeteries to the outskirts of town. Many graves were unmarked or poorly documented, leaving the remains of some congregants behind. Today, part of the property conveyed to RSAA contains a parking lot that was once part of Wilson's Chapel's cemetery, a stark reminder of the injustices of the past.

The Journey to This Moment

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina elected an Administrative Commission in July of 2021, co-chaired by Marcia Mount Shoop, Pastor/Head of Staff at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church and Patrick Johnson, Pastor/Head of Staff at First Presbyterian Church in Asheville. Early in the AC's discernment process they envisioned a community centered future for the



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space that acknowledged the realities of historic patterns of oppression and the continued impacts of those patterns today.

A conversation in 2023 between the Administrative Commission, Libby Kyles (former RSAA steering committee member and current RSAA member), and Torre Garrison was the beginning of a partnership that made space for the difficult and liberating collaboration that led to the unanimous vote by the Presbytery on January 25.

The decision to transfer the property to RSAA exemplifies a courageous acknowledgment of historical harm and a commitment to repair. The work of the WAPC Administrative Commission was instrumental in this process. Their leadership and dedication to addressing the legacy of structural racism made this historic conveyance possible.

About the Property

The conveyed property includes a 15,736-square-foot building and 1.39 acres of land. While the property will require repairs to fully meet community needs, its historical and symbolic significance cannot be overstated. This site will become a cornerstone of RSAA's work and address systemic injustices in Asheville and Buncombe County.

Reimagining the Future

RSAA envisions this space as a hub for community engagement, healing, and empowerment. Plans for the property will involve robust community input to ensure it meets the needs and aspirations of Black residents. It will serve as a tangible symbol of resilience and a center for transformative justice.

A Call to Action

While this moment is worth celebrating, the work is far from over. RSAA acknowledges the need for future repairs and anticipates launching a capital campaign fundraiser to transform this space into a thriving resource for Black liberation and equity. "This is only the beginning," said Garrison. "We will continue to organize, advocate, and fight for justice, honoring our ancestors and building a brighter future for generations to come."

About RSAA

RSAA is a Black-led nonprofit organization committed to centering Black voices and fostering transformative justice. Their mission is to repair historical harm by addressing systemic oppression and creating pathways for healing, equity, and lasting change. Learn more about RSAA's work and impact at rsaasheville.org

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