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Information Item No. 3 Executive Standing Committee May 26, 2025

TO: Chair and Members of Executive Standing Committee
FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer
DATE: March 27, 2025
SUBJECT: ADAC - History of Africville

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

March 11, 2024 Executive Standing Committee Item 13.2.1:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Cuttell

THAT the Executive Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to research, beginning with the Campbell Road Settlement, using available municipal resources and other information provided to the Municipality, to understand the history of Africville up to February 24, 2010, the apology date.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

BACKGROUND

Located on the southern shore of the Bedford Basin, Africville was officially settled in the 1840s when William Brown and William Arnold originally purchased land, although oral history suggests some families can trace their connection to the land going back to the 1700s. Africville was home to a predominantly African Nova Scotian community for more than 150 years before the City of Halifax razed and relocated the community between 1964 to 1970.

Residents of Africville paid taxes, had meaningful employment, tended their gardens, raised their children, and took pride in their homes, however modest. Those who lived there recall a community of brightly painted houses where neighbor helped neighbor.

In the years before the relocation, Africville was a "thriving, close-knit community" with community-owned stores, a community school, a post office, and the Seaview United Baptist Church, the spiritual and social focal point of Africville.

Africville did not have the amenities that other areas of Halifax had, including sewage systems, access to clean water, and proper garbage disposal, among others. The situation was further compounded when Africville was designated as industrial land in 1947, and the development of an infectious disease hospital, a prison, and the relocation of the city dump near Africville in 1955.

Other industrialization soon began to encroach on the community as railway after railway started running

through the area (circa 1854). Facilities unwanted by other communities such as a prison, a slaughterhouse, and an infectious disease hospital were located in and around Africville. In 1958, Africville earned the dubious distinction of being officially labeled a “slum”, when the city moved the town dump (circa 1955) to an area just a stone’s throw to the church and people’s homes.

Between 1964 and 1969, residents were relocated. Those residents who had a proprietary interest in the Africville land (not clear title, but a home(s) in Africville) executed quit claim deeds, deeding their interest in Africville to the City. In exchange, the City paid various sums for those interests, based on appraisal reports done at the time. Many families were placed in public housing projects. Homes were demolished and the church was bulldozed.

In 1969, the people of Africville began seeking redress with the formation of the Africville Action Committee to reunite the people. In 1983, the Africville Genealogy Society was formed and in 1985, the society began to seek recompense from the City of Halifax for the destruction of the Africville community. A legal action against the City of Halifax was started in 1996. In 2010, a settlement was reached with the city which included reparations for the community consisting of 2.5 acres of land to serve for the reconstruction of the church together with \$3 million toward the construction costs. A formal public apology on behalf of the Municipality was also issued, as part of the settlement, by Mayor Peter Kelly. [Apology | Africville | Residents | Mayor Peter Kelly | Halifax](#). Not all former residents of Africville agreed to the settlement, and there is still ongoing litigation.

In an emotional ceremony that drew hundreds of people, the replica of Seaview Church was officially opened in the fall of 2011.

The memory and the spirit of the Africville community, which began on the shores of the Bedford Basin nearly two centuries ago, along with its heritage and rich history, remains alive. The story of Africville continues. It is the story of faith and of the strength of community, family, and home. ¹

DISCUSSION

- Due to the sheer magnitude of information available on Africville to the public, it would be beyond our capabilities to summarize in an information report. We have provided some accessible resources and options for your consideration.
- The Municipal Archives is available to conduct a presentation for the African Descent Advisory Committee (ADAC), showcasing the wealth of information available in their archives if the ADAC is receptive to this.
- All material related to Africville held at the Halifax Municipal Archives is scanned and available on a searchable online Africville Source Guide: <https://www.halifax.ca/about-halifax/municipal-archives/source-guides/africville-sources>. This enormous digitization project was started in 2010 for the apology and was enhanced for the 2020 Heritage Day. Physical binders of the thousands of pages of text, photographs and plans are also available for consultation at the Africville Museum and can be loaned to Committee members or viewed at the Archives.
- The Africville historical material at the Municipal Archives is primarily about the community’s interaction with the City of Halifax. The history of Africville is also found with community members, in other repositories (the Africville Museum, Black Cultural Centre, Halifax Regional Library, Nova Scotia Archives, Dalhousie University Archives, Saint Mary’s University Archives, Library and Archives Canada) and in the many academic and popular books and articles that have been written on the topic (see links at the end of the Municipal Archives’ Source Guide).

¹ Sources: City of Halifax and Halifax Regional Municipality records, Africville Heritage Trust, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Africville Museum, Canadian Museum For Human Rights.

- Municipal Archives has digitized all the content we have related to Africville and made it available on the [Africville Source Guide](#) web-page.
- Access to the Africville Walking tour can also be found here: [Africville | Diversity & Inclusion | History | Apology | Halifax](#)
- While we acknowledge the invaluable resources held within the Municipal Archives, we also recognize the inherent limitations and gaps in these records. Africville's story is not solely confined to the minutes of council meetings or official submissions; it lives on in the memories, stories, and artifacts passed down through generations within the Africville community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for this information report.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were recognized.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is no community engagement required for this information report.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008, c 39:

2 The purpose of this Act is to (a) give broad authority to the Council, including broad authority to pass bylaws, and respects its right to govern the Municipality in whatever ways the Council considers appropriate within the jurisdiction given to it; (b) enhance the ability of the Council to respond to present and future issues in the Municipality; and (c) recognize that the functions of the Municipality are as set out in Section 7A.

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to (a) provide good government; (b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

34(3) The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies, and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer.

ATTACHMENTS

All attachments are included in the report in the form of links.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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