

October 7, 1942

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON, WAS HELD THIS 7th day of October, 1942, at 9:30 A.M.

Those Present Were: Mayor Riley, presiding; and Commissioners Bowes, Clyde, Cooper, Peterson, 5.

Officers in Attendance: Mr. Ralph Ivey, Deputy City Auditor; Mr. J. B. Seabrook, Acting Chief Deputy City Attorney; Mr. Linwood B. Cornell, City Treasurer; Mr. J. Hutchinson, Chief License Inspector; and Officer Schad, Sergeant At Arms.

By unanimous consent the Reading of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 30, 1942, at 9:30 A.M. and of the Recessed Adjourned Meeting of October 1, 1942, at 1:30 P.M. was dispensed with and same, considered read and approved.

PETITIONS, MEMORIALS, REMONSTRANCES, COMMUNICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS PERTAINING THEREBY

AND REMONSTRANCES PRESENTED PRIOR TO SAID WEDNESDAY MEETING

4472 Protest of Central East Portland Community Club against plan to set the negro colony in Albina district was presented and read by title.

4472-1 Petitions of Mary Ellen Coffman et al, were presented in connection with Calendar No 4472.

MAYOR RILEY: I think there are some people here, probably all the people here, that are interested in this matter and they have a spokesman or spokesmen that can represent them. The Council will be glad to hear them at this time.

REV. ELBERT D RIDDICK: I am here in a threefold capacity, and I trust that Your Honor and the Commissioners will remember that. It may be difficult for a few people to distinguish. I am here, first of all, as the rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd of Albina Incorporated. I am here also as a member of the Central East Portland Community Club and also President of the Federation of Community Clubs.

Last night at our regular meeting we passed a resolution to be submitted to this Council and I should like to present them and I have been asked to say, by the delegates at the meeting, and to make this specific that the Federation, as such, in presenting this resolution does not enter into the question of color or race. I trust that that is well understood (Read)

"The Federation of Community Clubs hereby protests the action of the Gartrell Commission in attempting to use the property of the Neighborhood Park and Playground and the Central East Portland Community club house situated thereon in the district known as Albina for any but their original purpose, and respectfully requests the City Council to preserve both lands and building for that purpose.

"Nothing hereinbefore stated is to be construed as entering into the question of distinction between color and race."

In other words our feeling is that the property so bought should be used as a recreational area for the children for whom it was originally bought. Speaking as rector of the church of the Good Shepherd, I have a report of the Central East Portland Community Club. With your permission I will read this statement. (Read)

9th October, 1942

"The following incidents have led to our appearance before you: 1. A highly-placed, well-known, and trusted employee of the Park Bureau visited Mr. Frank Demme, of Demme Bros., on Russell Street, during the week before last to inform him that the property purchased for a parkland playground site on Flint Street was to be used to house transient negro workers by the Gartrell Commission, and that the club house heretofore used by the Central East Portland Community Club, and those associated with them, was to be turned over to negroes.

2. As a result, the first vice-president of the Federation of Community Clubs was contacted by myself with a request for his assistance in blocking the proposal. He talked to Mr. Gartrell over the telephone Saturday, the 26th of September, Mr. Gartrell, for reasons known to himself, failed to do so. After waiting until Wednesday, our official called Mr. Gartrell again, and was informed as follows: "There was a tentative plan to house fifteen negro units on the playground property, with the further intention of later transferring some sixty-seven more negro units from Union Avenue to the same general locality. But the Commission would be willing to grant a time and place, to be selected by ourselves in the immediate future, to show why there was no necessity for their proposed action."

3. However, since this information, due to Mr. Gartrell's dillying, had reached us after a mass meeting of interested residents had been held; and since they had instructed us to carry their protest to the City Council; and since the Gartrell Commission is the creature of the City Council, subject to its directions; we felt it necessary to continue our action here.

We protest the proposed action of the Gartrell Commission for the following reasons:

1. The property under question was purchased by the City from a special fund voted by the people for the purpose of supplying neighborhood parks and playgrounds for the children of various localities within the city. To now preempt it for a totally different purpose, obnoxious to the residents of the section, and destructive of the original purpose to provide safe recreation grounds for children, is to be found guilty of a breach of trust.

2. The club house in question is peculiarly the result of the labors of the white residents of the community for themselves and their children. It is particularly the monument of the labors of the late Officer Mike Lillis, who for a period of twenty years gave unstintingly of his time and efforts, far beyond the call of duty, to provide a place of wholesome recreation for the children he loved, and who loved him. His attitude, during his lifetime, toward the question with which we are now faced is too well and too widely known to need any comment here. To expel the children from a club house made possible by the labor and gifts of their fathers, to prohibit its use by those who made its existence possible, would be an example of the rankest and most vicious kind of bureaucratic injustice.

3. To deliberately plant a colony of negroes in the midst of an established white community is to deny the very foundations of that freedom and equality of which the negro and his quondam friends so misguidedly prate.

The truth is the negro needs to learn to make himself worthy of the white companionship he craves. Until he does, segregation will be practiced by white people in some form in very self-defense:

For the presence of negroes in a community means inescapable property devaluation. Every white person who is compelled to live in a community invaded by negroes and who has experienced their more than unpleasant behavior; every white person who has had to sell property after such an invasion; and every real estate agent who has had to deal in such property knows the bitter reality of this fact.

Also, the presence of negroes in any number means an inevitable increase of crimes, particularly against the person.

According to the official report of the Commissioners of Police of St. Louis, the eleven percent of the population who are negroes perpetrated forty-seven per-cent of the crime in that one city alone. Of particular crimes, the negro committed 62% of the murders, or approximately six times as many murders as an equal number of whites; the negro committed 20% of the manslaughter, or approximately twice as many as the whites; the negro committed 59% of the attempted murders, or over five times as many as an equal number of whites; and the negro committed 59% of the unspeakable crime of rape.

We not only grant our physicians the right to quarantine persons whose diseases are a danger to the community at large, we demand that they do so, and our President, in a great speech at Chicago some two years ago, spoke of the necessity of quarantining aggressor nations. As long as the negro continues to be the menace to the persons and the property of white people that his record up until now has proved him to be, he ought not to wonder at the demand for segregation.

The professional negro agitator, by the professional negro agitator I mean both black and white, Your Honor, forgets that the right of association includes the right not to associate. The right to be free from those associations obnoxious to men's sense of right and decency. Even the negro himself insists on exercising that right, as witness the stringent social strata into which they divide themselves. For the negro to insist on the supposed right to force his presence on the persons and the homes of those who do not desire him is to betray a criminal ignorance of the very foundations on which human rights are built, and to show an utter disregard of the welfare of his neighbor. Were the negro half the man he claims he is he would know that the first instinct of the gentleman is to be so self-sufficient that he is under no necessity to impose himself on those who do not want him.

We claim the right to be protected in one of the most sacred of human possessions, the right of our homes; to their peaceable and secure habitation, free from the threat imposed by the actions of your Commission. If the negroes wish homes, which is their right as it is ours, let them secure their homes as the established whites of our community, and of this whole city, secured theirs; not by acting as a plague of Egyptian locusts, floating on alien winds.

We therefore respectfully request this Council to reverse the policy of the Gartrell Commission; to order that park properties shall be preserved for park purposes exclusively; and that the Central East Portland Community club house be retained for the use of those white residents of the city who originated it for themselves and their children; and that the memory of an honorable and highly esteemed officer of the Portland Police force be kept as he would have had it kept, in connection with those facilities he did so much to produce for the children he loved, by keeping those facilities for those children.

(SIGNED) ALBERT D. RIDDICK
Rector
Member, Central East Portland Community Club.

* I hardly need add the high yellows and very deep blacks are hardly on speaking terms with each other and they are their own people.

MAYOR RILEY: There is only one matter I think should be corrected and that is the Portland City Council has no authority to direct the Housing Authority in any manner. We have no control over them.

REVEREND RIDDICK: May I ask Your Honor, did you not appoint them?

MAYOR RILEY: That is true. The law says the Council appoints, the state law and the Federal law. After that they are on their own and we have no control over them, whatsoever.

REV. RIDDICK: My dear sir, if I may be permitted to say this, this is the first time I ever heard in a democracy that an appointing body surrendered its authority by the act of appointing.

MAYOR RILEY: I shouldn't doubt from now on you are going to find many things of a similar character that digress materially from the accepted practices of the past. After they are appointed we have absolutely no authority over them at all.

REV. RIDDICK: Who does control them?

MAYOR RILEY: If there is any authority it comes from Washington, D.C.

REV. RIDDICK: May I suggest, I have a telegram from Senator McNary of this state. That telegram states explicitly that the Housing Authority does not have any intention of settling a negro colony in the Albina district.

MAYOR RILEY: I have a letter which should perhaps, be read right now, which will support what you have just said. The clerk will read it.

The Clerk read the following letter.

(October 6, 1942)

This is in reference to your inquiry regarding the housing of negroes in the Albina district.

The Housing Authority of Portland has not planned any housing project exclusively for negro occupancy. So far we have only had two applications from negro families for house occupancy out of a total in excess of five thousand certified applications now on hand. You can readily see, therefore, that conditions are such that it does not warrant any thought be given at this time to the housing of negro families.

The Housing Authority, as you know, has leased several parcels of city property throughout the community. One of those parcels happens to be in the Albina section on the corner of Russell and Commercial, and there is now under construction fifteen units under this leased property plan. The tenants of these units have not yet been determined, as it will be some time before they are ready for occupancy.

When the case arises that there are sufficient negro families in need of housing, you may be sure that the Housing Authority will give every consideration to their problem. I might mention that the units being constructed on Russell and Commercial do not affect the present community house or any other building on that property and as a matter of fact are below the hill and do not affect the grounds now being used as a playground. I trust this gives you the desired information.

(Signed) C. M. CARTRELL
Chairman

REV. RIDDICK: May I suggest one thing? You know that the word used in that letter is the word "exclusively", secondly that the last paragraph of the letter is tantamount to saying that they shall continue their course in placing negroes where they please. I understand, Your Honor, that this, according to your own word, that yourself and the City Council have evidently not entered into this whatever we thought when we came here. We thought by this appeal to the City Council controlling city property, to reserve that park for the purpose for which it was bought.

If I remember the Calendars of the City Council, there was a time when you refused to give to the U.S. Army the use of park property in a certain section of this city. It seems to me that refusal should apply equally as well in this situation.

MAYOR RILEY: I doubt if you will find any circumstance where the Council refused to give any property to the United States Army. I think you will find where the Council negotiated with the United States Army for the use of park property and asked them to give consideration of some property other than they had selected. As a matter of fact the United States Army would have used the property had they gone forward with their project. They gave us the project in Portland.

REV. RIDDICK: Nevertheless you asked them to consider it.

MAYOR RILEY: Yes we did.

MR. JOHN L. DAY: I am here as chairman of the committee of the Central East Portland Community Club, who with the Citizens' Committee sponsored the circulation of the petitions to be signed by the neighbors in that district against the threatened infiltration of the negroes in that neighborhood.

MR. DAY CONT'D:

After listening to the very able presentation made by our fighting parson from Albina, Rev. Riddick, I feel it is unnecessary for me to go into this any further than to say that those good ladies and gentlemen who are here in the interests of their homes and the values of their homes, along with the hundreds of names on these petitions and the thousands more that will be on the petitions being circulated are evidence that we mean what we say in this. We are going on up, if Mr. Gartrell and this committee do not feel they can hear us, we are going above them to see if the Government destroy the values of our properties over there, if they won't reimburse the people over there and buy the properties outright.

This appears to be, I won't say a great era of spending unnecessary money, so we are asking them to take care of the neighbors in Albina when they are taking care of so many.

Our club members paid rent for a club house down there for a number of years. We volunteered our services to paint it, to remove walls inside and make it as large as the house would hold, so we might have a club room for boys and we resent the idea of that being taken away from the boys in that community.

Albina was a city of its own long before it entered the corporate limits. They have never had a park before and that may have been the reason for a little wildness on the part of our children. They had no place to play. We are going to fight to preserve that park for our children if we have to go to court with an injunction and determine whether purchased for this purpose can be turned over to this use.

We are all out for the war. I am, and I know my neighbors are. There are plenty of places that can be arranged for without taking this away from our children. I say our children, mine have been away for a long time, I mean the children of the neighborhood.

We do resent this effort to infiltrate our neighborhood with this group of transients who have, many of them, I won't say all of them, shown their viciousness in things they have done there and elsewhere, and we say this without any feeling against the old-timers. The great majority of colored people in that neighborhood adjacent to the railroad bridge are just as fine people as any you could find. They obey the law. They are fine people, in fact I sold my house in that neighborhood. I didn't do anything anyone else wouldn't do. The neighbors all around there were negroes. I have no opposition, no prejudice against them in that area but we do object to them spreading over the district and we do object to taking our park property away from our children.

In presenting the petitions I will say there are many more to follow if you care to have them.

MAYOR RILEY: I think your approach to this is quite proper in this. You have recognized the fact that the City Council are as impotent as your community club in the matter of directing the United States Housing Authority in any matter that they may engage in and we are just as impotent as the community club. You have presented petitions to us so that we may represent you as a community and present them to whatever agency we can find that can be of assistance to your program. There is only one thing I think probably should be explained. We wouldn't have to have a housing commission here appointed under the provisions of the Federal Housing Act. That wasn't necessary in this, that if we didn't have it the Federal Government would send their own commission in. You may remember my statement about carpet baggers. That is the reason we felt we had better take advantage of the little privilege that the Federal Government had granted the community and get our local people appointed on the commission rather than have, as I said at that time, rather than have carpet baggers come in here.

I think that is the right policy.

There is one other thing that the commission has no control over, neither has the City and we have had the threat, as a matter of fact they have been more than threats in some instances. If it is the desire and the intent and the wish of the Federal agencies to use a piece of land for this emergency housing they will come in and use it, appropriate the land and make such disposition of it afterward as they feel best. However, there has been a saving clause that some communities have resorted to recently that they have to come into the Federal court and they place in the Federal court an amount of money. If they are just taking it for the duration they place in the hands of the Court an amount of money which is, in their opinion, a reasonable price. Later the court decides whether that is a reasonable amount or not. If the Court decides it should be more they issue that order. If they decide it should be less they issue that order. Under the present system, Jack, we may face their court and find ourselves having absolutely no control of the citizens' as well as the public property.

MR. DAY: Mr. Mayor, and gentlemen. We feel about the same about the war as you do. We want to win it at any cost but we also feel that there are many locations that are just as desirable as our little spot over there, maybe a little further out and I think in the interest of good judgment, the peace and quiet of the community there would be better places that could be substituted for that spot over there.

I am in hopes that Mr. Gartrell and the committee will keep it in mind.

MAYOR RILEY: I should add this, the Council learned more about this last Wednesday than they had previously known. Prior to Wednesday some of us had made an investigation that was not complete. On Friday I called a meeting for all the Council and the representatives of various classifications of interests, including Mr. Gartrell and others who could throw a light on this program and we could get the facts. It lasted all afternoon. It was a very satisfactory meeting. We got more facts out of it than we had previously had. What Mr. Gartrell said in his letter today is substantially what he said at that meeting. As a matter of fact he asked him if he would put it in writing.

MAYOR RILEY:

There is another meeting planned. The reason it is delayed is because certain principals with whom we have to discuss this matter, people who are important factors in directing the entire program are in the East and we expect them back very shortly and they have promised to meet with us when they return to Portland at that time the Council will be able to get more information.

MR. DAY: We all know a short time ago the President was granted full authority in conducting the war and defense and all that goes with it and we also know that authority goes down through the commissions he appoints. We should know the background of all the different links with the Federal Government.

We appreciate your statement that you will represent us. I think the citizens here have expressed our views and at any time we need help we will come to you for it.

REV. RIDDICK: May I ask a question? Since the Council has lost directive power over the commission,-

MAYOR RILEY: It isn't lost. We never had it at any time.

REV. RIDDICK: I am very sorry. I don't question the fact, I very seriously question the processes.

MAYOR RILEY: That wasn't a process of our making.

REV. RIDDICK: I am going to be very frank. I don't know very much reason why American boys should die in the Solomon Islands and lie in the depths of the Coral Sea and spend seasons far from home in the dryness of the Australian plateau, and perish in Arabia if we are to lose democracy here. I think the Roosevelt Administration might remember that 120,000,000 white people who made this country have no more desire to see negroes forced upon them than they have to see Japanese forced upon them. I think it might remember that in the processes of the totalitarian uses of economic force, which I grant is necessary, I think with everything that is done in the process of totalitarian uses of our armed forces there is such a thing as preserving the democratic use of property.

My question, Your Honor, is simply this. I do not wish to be embarrassing but these good people have come here because they are exercised. They are their homes. They have bought and paid for them. Our children run the streets. Is it too much to ask your honors that the City Council go on record as opposing the protest of this community to the Gartrell Commission itself?

MAYOR RILEY: Do you want my answer now?

REV. RIDDICK: Yes.

MAYOR RILEY: The City Council are going to meet with the Gartrell Commission and others on Friday. What disposition the Council will make of these matters I cannot forecast. I do not know their mind.

REV. RIDDICK: Would they go on record now?

MAYOR RILEY: I am sure they are in no position to go on record now.

LOUISE LINTHICUM: Is it not true that negro boys are just American citizens first and gave up their lives at various parts of the coast in the interest of democracy?

REV. RIDDICK: Since the question was addressed to me, may I answer it?

MAYOR RILEY: I don't think this is any time to enter into personalities.

REV. RIDDICK: I just want to say if there is any other district in Portland that desires to invite these negroes to live with them we should be very happy to be relieved of the problem.

REV. J. J. CLOW, PASTOR OF THE OLIVETTE BAPTIST CHURCH: I think in all fairness something should be said in behalf of the negro. I think some of these people have forgotten the history of their country or didn't know it. The very first person to die in this country for democracy was a negro. We have given our lives for this country, ever since it was founded.

I have a brother in the army now who is likely to give his life and he is giving it. I had a letter from him last week. He is giving it because he feels the sort of thing going on here this morning will not be when this war is over. The negroes, those who are fighting, have a hope that when this war is over they will have a place under the sun and will not be restricted and shunned as so many lice, or fleas that people must avoid.

The negroes in Portland have already been restricted to that housing conditions for negroes in this city have been, for a number of years, very undesirable because any community in which they tried to move they have the same sort of thing you have here this morning, let them be doctors, lawyers, or whatever, there is always a protest.

We have a great deal tied up in America. The negroes have everything they have got tied up in America and we are insisting that the majority group in America, let us breathe the free air.

This Aldeia district, I don't know what they are going to do out there. I think the Federal Government should build houses for war workers, not for negroes or whites but for war workers. That is my opinion. I have said so to the Housing Authority.

REV. CLOW: It is exceedingly unfortunate that these white people from the Albina district would bring such a protest at this time. I think even though we are giving out best, the best we can in this war effort, our morale is lower now than ever in the history of this country, just because of the sort of thing that is going on now. Just before I left home someone called me up and asked me to come out and give a pep talk to a group of negroes doing war work because our morale is so low. It is one thing to say you are all out for war and another to practice it. This fine talk about being all out doesn't mean anything when you sound disunity. This one thing has sounded disunity not only in Portland but over the nation. We have telegrams from all over the country protesting. Such protests isn't the thing we need at this time or any other time. You talk about democracy. Why talk about democracy when you say to American citizens, "You can't breathe the air." It is a good thing to prate about democracy but another thing to practice it.

I am not making a plea for criminals, either white or black. We have jails for criminals and I am sure they will be taken care of, but when decent citizens, white or black want to live in a democracy they have a right to live there, anything else will be sabotage of democracy.

These people who come here with pleadings can talk about democracy and christianity all they want but they are sabotage

MAYOR RILEY: If no others representing the petitioners wish to be heard who can add an thing, we will consider it.

MRS. LOUISE PALMER WEBER: I was very much interested in what Mr. Day had to say about the President being given unlimited powers over every department, the Housing Department, etc. Would it not be a good idea for you who want this matter settled to your liking to write the President personally, and lay the matter before him exactly as it is and I am quite sure he will lend a hearing ear.

The President has said many times that the thing we are fighting for is home and country and if you have your homes at issue as well as your country write your President. He was elected by the majority and he serves you in that capacity and in a democracy he is never beyond your voice or your appeal.

Personally I think at this time, and when we talk of disunity so much it is merely in a democracy the offering of various opinions and we have a right of free speech, a right to air our opinions and we can settle things agreeably and not disagreeably and therefore I don't think it quite right for someone to rise and say because we happen to disagree with them we are stirring up disunity. We are doing nothing of the kind. We are part and parcel of this great country, you are all equal and therefore appeal to your elected President. I would advise you to do it right away if you can, even a telegram. A telegram sometimes gets through when a letter doesn't.

MAYOR RILEY: I don't want to shut anybody off who can properly represent the district.

REV. RIDDICK: May I express our appreciation to you for the consideration given us.

Mrs. C. C. WALLER: Those petitions also represent the Overlook District, the Thompson School and the Boise School.

Mrs. FALMER DORAN: We certainly want the war won. If it is necessary to put the white and colored people together let the colored people be put in all districts, in Mr. Kaiser's district, in your district, then I will feel everything is all right.

We have lived in that district many years. I don't think we can ever be neighbors. Let them be in every district in town if they must be brought in.

MAYOR RILEY: These petitions filed here, they are not going to be any good to us if they are placed in our files and gather dust. They are asking us to represent them. Does the Commission feel we should forward those petitions to the Housing Authority?

They are using us as a medium through which they have to reach another governmental agency. I understood from the statement of Rev. Riddick that this other governmental agency had failed to hear them so they came to us to speak for their people and to express themselves asking us to transmit to the other governmental agency or agencies. In that case I can't see any reason why the petitions should remain in our files, Can you Jack?

Mr. J. B. SEABROOK, ACTING CHIEF DEPUTY CITY ATTORNEY: Not in view of the statements that were made by the representatives presenting them. It is at their request that you act for them to forward this information to the people that can do some good.

COMMISSIONER PETERSON: These others coming in, shouldn't we include those?

MAYOR RILEY: I don't think we can direct the Auditor carte blanche to forward them. I think it is our order after we have given consideration to the petition and it has been here. I think that is the proper thing to do. We are the representatives of those people and it is our duty to hear them and to carry their sentiment and expressions to another agency. We would have to receive them and order the Auditor to do that.

COMMISSIONER GOODE: Would it be well to photostat them?

MR. RALPH IVEY, ACTING CLERK: The Charter does provide that anything filed with the Auditor must be kept on file. However, these have not been filed but others coming in will be filed.

MR. SEABROOK: Why not file them and say to the Housing Authority return them. They will be a permanent part of our files.

4472
4472-1 By unanimous consent same was ordered filed and copy sent to Housing Authority. By unanimous consent the petitions were ordered filed and the Auditor instructed to forward them to the Portland Housing Authority with the request that they be returned when the Housing Authority have finished with them.

4472-2 By unanimous consent the communication from the Housing Authority was ordered placed on file.

4473 Resolution of Gul Reazee Grotto protesting against the further housing of negroes in the Albina district was ordered placed on file and copy ordered sent to the Housing Authority.

4474 Protest of Antonia Koberstein against establishment of negro colony in Albina community was presented and read by title.
By unanimous consent said protest was ordered filed and copy sent to Housing Authority.

4475 Communication from Mrs. Minnie Martin Shank expressing approval of negroes as good neighbors and citizens was presented and read by title.
By unanimous consent said communication was ordered placed on file and copy ordered sent to the Housing Authority.

4476 Communication from George Hardie relative to housing problem in the City of Portland was presented and read by title.
By unanimous consent said communication was ordered placed on file.