

Palm Springs Reaches Nearly \$6 Million Reparations Deal With Former Section 14 Residents

The City Council is expected to vote on the settlement for residents of a neighborhood that burned more than 50 years ago. It could also consider another \$21 million for community programs.



Listen to this article · 4:55 min [Learn more](#)



By Audra D. S. Burch

Audra D.S. Burch writes about race and identity around the country.

Nov. 13, 2024

The city of Palm Springs, Calif., will consider a nearly \$6 million reparations settlement for former residents of a neighborhood of mostly Black and Latino families that was destroyed more than a half-century ago.

Former residents of Section 14, which was razed in the 1960s to make room for commercial development, accepted the city's final cash offer of \$5.9 million. Up to another \$21 million could go toward housing,

economic development and small business programs. The City Council is expected to vote on the settlement offer and the initiatives at a public meeting on Thursday.

“We have been fighting for a long time to tell our story,” said Margarita Genera, 86, who lived with her parents and two siblings in the neighborhood.

If the settlement is approved, Palm Springs, a desert resort destination, would become one of a few municipalities in the country to have successfully reached a deal on reparations. Evanston, Ill., in 2021 became the first city to offer reparations in the form of housing grants, though the program is currently being challenged in a lawsuit. Some cities, like New York City and Tulsa, Okla., have recently created commissions to study and develop plans for a reparations program.

African Americans, along with Mexicans, built and rented homes on leased land in Section 14, a one-square-mile tract near downtown Palm Springs owned by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. It was one of the few places minorities could live because of discriminatory housing restrictions.



Newspaper articles and other archival documents described deteriorating living conditions in the neighborhood. Carlos Jaramillo for The New York Times

A change in a federal law allowed the tribe to lease the land for up to 99 years, making it more attractive for development. According to municipal records, from 1965 to 1967, 235 structures in the neighborhood were demolished and burned by the city Fire Department. A state investigation in 1968 concluded that the city had shown “civil disregard” for the rights of its minority residents, but there was no evidence that any crimes were committed in the removals. Former residents have long held that they were evicted with little or no notice.

For years, a group called the Palm Springs Section 14 Survivors have asked the city to pay for the loss of their homes and personal property, and damages for racial trauma. In 2021, the city apologized for its role in the evictions.

The following year, the group filed an amended claim against Palm Springs, alleging the forced removals were unlawful and amounted to “racially motivated attacks.”

“This was a community that was told that you are not deserving. They were told they were a menace, an eyesore, a public nuisance,” said Areva Martin, a Los Angeles civil rights attorney representing the group. “This was about acknowledging the harm that was done.”

Some residents have opposed paying reparations, saying the tribe had the right to develop the land but ultimately bore responsibility. Others have argued the city should not be held responsible for something that happened more than 50 years ago. Residents will have an opportunity to express their opinions at the Council meeting before the vote.

Pearl Devers, who organized the Section 14 group, said the settlement is a long-overdue recognition of what families experienced. “While no amount of money can fully restore what we lost, this agreement helps pave the way for us all to finally move forward,” she said in a statement.

In April, the City Council approved a package to address the historical injustices including a cash settlement of about \$4.3 million. That number was increased to \$5.9 million last week.

The cash settlement would be open to verified former residents and descendants. Ms. Martin said there were approximately 300 people in the group, but she expected a smaller number to meet the qualifications.

The city has already set aside \$20 million of its funds to be spent over 10 years on “affordable homeownership” for first-time buyers, and establish a community land trust for low-income residents. Those who lived in Section 14 and their descendants would receive priority access.

In addition, \$1 million would be used to support small businesses through grants and low-interest loans. A Section 14 monument, along with naming rights for future public parks, is also included.

“The City Council is deeply gratified that the former residents of Section 14 have agreed to accept what we believe is a fair and just settlement offer,” said Jeffrey Bernstein, mayor of Palm Springs. The resolution, he said, will create “lasting benefits for our entire community while providing programs that prioritize support for the former residents of Section 14.”

***A correction was made on Nov. 13, 2024:** Because of an error in a City of Palm Springs news release, an earlier version of this article incorrectly characterized the legal settlement. The actual settlement is only \$5.9 million. The other \$21 million that could go toward community programs is not part of the settlement.*

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at nytnews@nytimes.com. [Learn more](#)

Audra D. S. Burch is a national reporter, based in South Florida and Atlanta, writing about race and identity around the country. [More about Audra D. S. Burch](#)

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Residents
Take Reparations Deal in Palm Springs