



CITY HALL ■ 1 FRANK H. OGAWA PLAZA, 2nd Floor ■ OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94612

Office of the Honorable Lynette Gibson McElhaney
COUNCIL PRESIDENT ~ DISTRICT 3

(510) 238 – 7003
FAX (510) 238 – 6910
TDD (510) 238 – 6451

Date: Friday, September 2nd, 2016
To: Public Art Advisory Committee
From: Council President Lynette Gibson McElhaney
Re: Recommendations for Use of DeFremery Park Public Art Funds

Dear Members of the Public Art Advisory Committee:

On behalf of West Oakland community members, I request your support in in establishing the thematic direction of the Public Art project at DeFremery Park (City Council Resolution 85494). Specifically, **we recommend that the Public Art Advisory Committee direct the Public Art funds earmarked for DeFremery be used to memorialize and celebrate the Park’s rich history as a center of African American social and political expression and its legacy as a center of activity for the Black Panther Party in Oakland.**

DeFremery Park is located in one of Oakland’s oldest historically black neighborhoods and, consequently, has been a center of black political expression, from the organizing of the nation’s first Black Labor union and most notably for the activities and heritage of the Black Panthers. The following sections outline just a few examples of black political expression at the Park:

DeFremery Park and Black Political Expression

- **Rallies and Protests:** The Park has been the site of many protests and rallies over the years. Most recently, the Oscar Grant protests in 2013 intended to end with a rally at the Parkⁱ, protests of Oakland’s proposed citywide surveillance system in early 2014 began at the Parkⁱⁱ, protests of the West Oakland Specific Plan’s potential to increase gentrification of West Oakland began at DeFremery Park in June of 2014ⁱⁱⁱ, and a community picnic to rally against coal being transported through Oakland and the increasing number of evictions^{iv}. Historically, many anti-war protests ended in DeFremery Park, including in the Fall of 1965 when over 10,000 UC Berkeley students marched to DeFremery Park to jointly protest the Vietnam War with the local, predominantly black community.^v
- **Cultural Events:** the Park also hosts numerous cultural events that affirm black political expression in Oakland. The annual Black Cowboy Parade pays homage to the Buffalo Soldiers and works to reclaim the narrative of western pioneers.^{vi} In 2013, an art exhibit focused on gentrification in the area and its threat to black culture.^{vii} The 2015 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate performed in the Park to speak to issues of black-nationalism and power.^{viii} Finally, in 2015, the DeFremery Center was the site of a celebration of African American veterans.^{ix}
- **Historical Organizing:** DeFremery served as the organizing hub for the Black United Servicemen Organization for African Americans during World War II when the armed services were segregated. Additionally, DeFremery Park hosted youth development services in the late 40s and 50s to teach black youth to “express their political will and challenge the color line that discriminated against them



and their community.” Most notably, the youth organized a successful boycott of Coca-Cola, which resulted in the hiring of the first African American.^x

DeFremery Park and the Black Panther Party (BPP)

- **Bobby Hutton Park:** DeFremery Park has been informally known by the community as “Bobby Hutton Park” since the early 1970s. Often referred to as the “first to fall,” Bobby Hutton was the first member to join the Black Panther Party as well as the first to lose his life as a member. The community commemorates his passing each year at DeFremery Park and considers his death a turning point in the political history of Black people in Oakland. In addition, the Council President, on behalf of members of the community, has advanced the naming of a grove of trees in the Park as “Bobby Hutton Grove” in honor of this legacy. This resolution received the unanimous backing of the Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee on April 13th, 2016.
- **Rallies and Events at DeFremery Park:** After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the Park was named as the site of a mass protest rally.^{xi} The community inaugurated the Dr. Huey P Newton Foundation at the Park in 1997.^{xii}
- **Community Service at DeFremery Park:** As long-time resident Olleita Thomas pointed out, the Park was the place where the community service side of the BPP was pronounced: “People see them as this radical group that was violent, but they did things like raise money for black kids who didn't get enough to eat. They did a lot of good in the community.”^{xiii} In 1972, the Black Panther Party held its Black Community Survival Conference at the Park where they provided free sickle cell anemia testing.^{xiv} The Park was also a place where the Party frequently distributed free groceries.
- **Historical Landmark:** The Oakland Museum of California recognizes DeFremery Park as one of the historical landmarks of the Black Panther Party.^{xv}

In addition to this rich past, DeFremery is included in Oakland’s Black Arts Movement and Business District. Residents and academia have long recognized the importance of the history of place in preserving the memory of activism and the pursuit of social justice. This year, we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party amidst a national conversation where issues of police violence, race, voting rights, workers’ rights, and poverty are once again at the forefront of our Presidential debates. Oakland has been injected into this national discourse by both Presidential front runners because of our importance in our nation’s history and future.

We ask you to honor the request of our resident leaders and direct these funds to be used to celebrate and memorialize these contributions of African Americans in Oakland. In so doing, you will honor this unique history and, more importantly, allow future generations to understand Oakland’s unique role in advancing and informing national movements for justice.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact District 3 Legislative Analyst Alex Marqusee at (510) 238-7031 or AMarqusee@Oaklandnet.com.

Signed,



Lynette Gibson McElhaney
Council President and District 3 Representative



-
- ⁱ Van Deberken, Jaxon. "100 Protesters Arrested in Oakland." *SFGate*. N.p., 06 Nov. 2010. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ⁱⁱ Charles, Candese. "Residents Protest Oakland's Proposed Citywide Surveillance System." *The Pioneer*. N.p., 27 Feb. 2014. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Edge, Pink. "Featured." *West Oakland Takes A Stand Against Gentrification*. N.p., 12 June 2014. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{iv} "No Coal In Oakland | No More Evictions Community Picnic." *COMMUNITY PICNIC* (n.d.): n. pag. No Coal in Oakland, 21 May 2016. Web.
- ^v *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*, by Hugh Pearson, Perseus Publishing in Cam Mass, 1996. Page 102
- ^{vi} Greenberg, Alissa. "Oakland Black Cowboys Parade Celebrates 40 Years." *Oakland North*. N.p., 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{vii} Jones, Carolyn. "Fear White Influx Will Erase West Oakland History." *SFGate*. N.p., 7 Oct. 2013. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{viii} Kost, Ryan. "In a Young Poet's Writing, a Nod to the Future." *SFGate*. N.p., 27 Nov. 2015. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{ix} Post Staff. "DeFremery Center to Honor Black Veterans - Post News Group." *Post News Group*. N.p., 01 Apr. 2015. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^x Grable, Chance. "FoundSF." *De Fremery Park and Recreation Center West Oakland* -. N.p., 2015. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{xi} DelVecchio Chronicle Staff, Rick. "Oakland Tribute to Panther Leader / City Holiday Honors Slain Bobby Hutton." *SFGate*. N.p., 25 Apr. 1998. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{xii} "BAY AREA DATELINES." *SFGate*. N.p., 24 Oct. 1997. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{xiii} Grable, Chance. "FoundSF." *De Fremery Park and Recreation Center West Oakland* -. N.p., 2015. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.
- ^{xiv} Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1.)
- ^{xv} *Black Panther Party Landmarks*. Oakland Museum of California, n.d. Web. 02 Sept. 2016.

