



AGENDA REPORT

TO: City Council

FROM: City Attorney Barbara J. Parker, Mayor Sheng Thao, Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas, President Pro Tempore Dan Kalb, and Councilmembers Carroll Fife and Rebecca Kaplan

SUBJECT: Resolution Honoring James Vann

DATE: April 18, 2023

RECOMMENDATION

City Attorney Barbara J. Parker, Mayor Sheng Thao, Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas, President Pro Tempore Dan Kalb, and Councilmembers Carroll Fife and Rebecca Kaplan Recommend that the City Council Adopt the Following:

RESOLUTION HONORING JAMES VANN FOR MORE THAN 35 YEARS OF ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF OAKLAND TENANTS; RECOGNIZING THE PROFOUND IMPACT JAMES VANN HAS HAD ON THE LIVES OF OAKLAND TENANTS; AND RECOGNIZING JAMES VANN AS A CHAMPION FOR THE PEOPLE OF OAKLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This resolution recognizes and honors James Vann, co-founder of the Oakland Tenants Union, for his decades of selfless advocacy as a champion for the people of Oakland.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

James Vann co-founded the Oakland Tenants Union in 1989, when the City of Oakland lacked any meaningful protections for tenants. Since that time, Mr. Vann and the Oakland Tenants Union have played a pivotal role in advancing the rights of tenants in Oakland.

In the late 1980s, James Vann began advocating for the Oakland City Council to adopt eviction protections similar to those adopted in San Francisco and Berkeley. When Council failed to adopt eviction protections, James Vann took this battle to the voters as part of the Just Cause for Eviction Coalition, and in 2002, the voters passed Oakland's Just Cause for Eviction Ordinance which, for the first time, provided protection from unjust evictions to tens of thousands of Oakland tenants. In subsequent years, James Vann campaigned for the adoption of Measure JJ, Measure Y, and Measure V, all of which strengthened and expanded the scope of the Just Cause Ordinance.

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For more than 15 years, James Vann engaged with City policy makers on the development of a Condominium Conversion Ordinance that protected the rights of tenants. He helped to defeat early proposals that would have increased conversions and removed the requirement to replace converted units. James Vann provided valuable input and support for the Ordinance adopted by Council in 2020 that strengthened tenant protections and expanded the requirement to provide replacement rental units prior to conversion.

James Vann has been instrumental in advancing virtually every new tenant protection adopted by Council over the last three decades including the Tenant Protection Ordinance, the Uniform Relocation Ordinance, the Ellis Act Ordinance, and numerous improvements to the Rent Adjustment Ordinance. He regularly provides thoughtful, insightful written feedback on proposed legislation to City Staff and to Council. In 2020, James Vann proposed that the City should amend the Rent Adjustment Ordinance to change the maximum allowable rent increase from 10% to either 5% plus the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index (“CPI”), or 10%, whichever is lower, to mirror state law. Council considered and adopted his proposal and amended the Rent Adjustment Ordinance accordingly.

Throughout his decades of working with the Oakland Tenants Union, James Vann has provided individual counseling to thousands of tenants about their rights. He has also represented hundreds of tenants at administrative hearings before the Rent Adjustment Program and at appeal hearings before the Housing, Residential Rent and Relocation Board, always free of charge.

In addition to championing tenants’ rights, James Vann has devoted countless hours to numerous coalitions promoting equity and environmental and economic and racial justice, many of which he helped found and/or lead, including African Americans for Peace and Justice; the Berkeley-Oakland Rainbow Coalition; the Coalition of Advocates for Lake Merritt (CALM); and the Homeless Advocacy Working Group (HAWG).

James Vann’s work on tenants’ rights issues, including eviction protections, rent control, tenant harassment, and relocation benefits has helped to establish Oakland as a leader among California cities with some of the strongest tenant protections in the state. Moreover, James Vann has educated and inspired thousands of young activists who will carry on his legacy for generations to come.

For these reasons, the City of Oakland, Mayor Sheng Thao, City Attorney Barbara J. Parker, and Councilmembers Carroll Fife, Dan Kalb, and Rebecca Kaplan wish to honor James Vann and recognize that he has profoundly and immeasurably improved the lives of Oakland’s tenants; and they wish to recognize James Vann as a champion for the people of Oakland.

FISCAL IMPACT

This resolution will have no fiscal impact or cost.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

No public outreach was deemed necessary for the development of this report and resolution beyond the standard City Council agenda noticing requirements.

COORDINATION

The City Attorney's Office coordinated with the Mayor's Office regarding this proposed resolution.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic:

The resolution recognizes James Vann's decades of work securing economic opportunity for Oakland residents through his zealous advocacy for tenants' rights.

Environmental:

The resolution recognizes James Vann's decades of work securing environmental justice for Oakland residents through his zealous advocacy for more just housing and land use policies.

Race & Equity:

The resolution recognizes James Vann's decades of work securing economic opportunity for Oakland residents through his zealous advocacy for tenants' rights which has provided housing protections for tenants many of whom are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian and other persons of color. These tenants otherwise may have fallen prey to abusive landlords destabilizing their lives and potentially resulting in tenants' losing their housing.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

City Attorney Barbara J. Parker, Mayor Sheng Thao, Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas, President Pro Tempore Dan Kalb, and Councilmembers Carroll Fife and Rebecca Kaplan Recommend that the City Council Adopt the Following:

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For questions regarding this report, please contact Laura Lane, Supervising Deputy City Attorney, at (510) 238-3838.

Respectfully submitted,



Barbara J. Parker
City Attorney



Mayor Sheng Thao



Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas



President Pro Tempore Dan Kalb



Councilmember Carroll Fife



Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan