

April 27, 2026

The Honorable Keith A. James, Mayor

Commissioner Cathleen Ward, District 1

Commissioner Shalonda Warren, District 2, Commission President

Commissioner Christy Fox, District 3

Commissioner Joseph A. Peduzzi, District 4

Commissioner Steve Sylvester, District 5

City of West Palm Beach

401 Clematis Street

West Palm Beach, Florida 33401

RE: Formal Community Opposition to the Proposed \$9.5 Million Lease Buyout of The Salvation Army Northwest Community Center — 600 North Rosemary Avenue, West Palm Beach, Florida (City-Owned Land, Historic Northwest Neighborhood) — and Demand for a Transparent, Community-Led Process Before Any Future Occupancy Determination Is Made

Dear Mayor James and Distinguished Members of the West Palm Beach City Commission:

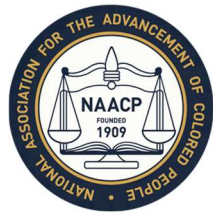
The NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B writes on behalf of the residents, families, and children of the Historic Northwest neighborhood — and on behalf of the broader West Palm Beach community — to formally and unequivocally oppose the City's proposed \$9.5 million buyout of The Salvation Army's long-term ground lease at 600 North Rosemary Avenue.

We are not opposed to progress. We are opposed to the erasure of a community under the name of progress. What is being proposed here is not development — it is displacement. And this Commission has both the authority and the moral obligation to stop it.

I. THIS IS PUBLIC LAND — SET ASIDE FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

The property at 600 North Rosemary Avenue is owned by the City of West Palm Beach. It belongs to the people of this city. In the 1990s, the City made a deliberate decision — evidenced by a city-constructed building and a long-term, rent-free ground lease — to dedicate this land to the service of the Historic Northwest neighborhood. That was not an accident. It was a promise.

The Salvation Army has honored that promise for decades, providing after-school programs, youth mentorship, character development, tutoring, recreational activities, and a safe haven for children who have no other place to go. The current lease has approximately 70 years remaining. The City entered that agreement knowingly and with full legal authority.



Now the City proposes to spend \$9.5 million in public funds — funds that belong to taxpayers — to reclaim that land and remove the community center that serves the very residents the land was dedicated to serve. This Commission must ask: who does that serve? And who does it harm?

II. A PATTERN OF DISPLACEMENT — THE CHANGING COMPLEXION OF A COMMUNITY

The NAACP does not use the word "displacement" casually. We use it because the evidence demands it. The Historic Northwest neighborhood is one of West Palm Beach's oldest and most historically significant Black communities — a neighborhood that survived forced segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and decades of disinvestment. What sustained it was the resilience of its people and the institutions built to serve them.

Today, luxury apartment towers are rising on the block directly to the south of 600 North Rosemary Avenue. Property values are climbing. Long-term residents are being priced out. And now the City proposes to remove the community center that serves the children who remain — in favor of a use that has not been determined through any transparent, community-driven process.

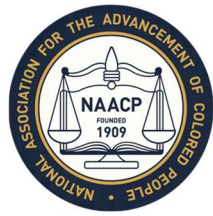
The NAACP is compelled to name what this pattern represents: the systematic transformation of a historically Black neighborhood through the deliberate removal of its institutions, its anchor organizations, and ultimately its people. This is not an allegation — it is a documented pattern repeated in cities across America, and West Palm Beach is not immune to it.

We further note, for the record, that City planning documents dating as far back as 2020 — specifically the City's own Historic Northwest District Community Redevelopment Agency Investment Booklet — labeled the Salvation Army site as the planned future location of a specific city-affiliated arts institution. The community was never formally notified. No public hearing was held. No community impact study was conducted. The decision to repurpose this land was being quietly built into the City's planning infrastructure years before it was disclosed to the public in late 2025.

That is not transparent governance. That is not equitable planning. And this Commission has the responsibility to correct it.

III. SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT THE PROCESS — A REPLACEMENT OCCUPANT CANNOT BE PREDETERMINED

The NAACP has become aware that at or around the City Commission meeting of April 14, 2026, the Commission may have considered — or been presented with — a specific organization as a proposed replacement occupant for 600 North Rosemary Avenue, prior to any resolution of the Salvation Army's existing lease, prior to any formal public hearing, and prior to any transparent competitive process.



The NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B takes no position on any specific organization at this time. We make no endorsement of any replacement tenant, program, or use — and we will not do so until and unless a fair, open, and fully community-informed process has been completed.

Our objection is to the process — or more precisely, the absence of one. Regardless of the merits of any individual organization being considered, the manner in which this has unfolded is disqualifying on its face:

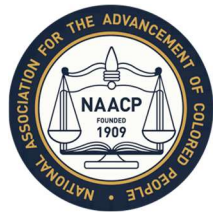
- The existing tenant — The Salvation Army — has not vacated the property and retains approximately 70 years on its lease. Any replacement determination is legally and procedurally premature.
- The Historic Northwest community has not been meaningfully engaged in determining who or what should serve this space after the Salvation Army.
- No formal Request for Proposals has been publicly issued, no competitive evaluation criteria has been published, and no scoring or selection process has been disclosed.
- The NAACP is aware that community organizations — including those rooted in the Historic Northwest neighborhood — were not given an equal opportunity to express interest in or compete for this space.
- The identification of any specific replacement occupant before these steps are completed sets a troubling precedent: it signals that the outcome of this process has already been decided, and that community input is being sought after the fact rather than at the foundation of the decision.

This Commission must make clear that no replacement organization, program, or use has been selected or pre-approved, and that any future determination of the site's use will be made only after a transparent, competitive, and fully community-inclusive process.

IV. WHAT A LEGITIMATE PROCESS MUST INCLUDE

The NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B recognizes that the Historic Northwest neighborhood deserves vibrant, well-resourced institutions that serve the existing community. We are not opposed to new programming or new organizations coming to this space. What we are demanding is that any such decision be made the right way. A legitimate process must include, at minimum:

- A formal public hearing held in the Historic Northwest neighborhood — not at City Hall — with adequate notice, in-language outreach, and a genuine opportunity for residents to shape the vision for this land.
- An independent community impact assessment that evaluates the displacement effects, equity implications, and service gap consequences of removing the Salvation Army from the site.
- A publicly issued Request for Proposals open to all qualified community-serving organizations, with clear, published criteria that prioritize demonstrated ties to and accountability to the Historic Northwest neighborhood.
- Priority consideration given to Black-led and community-rooted organizations that are already operating in the Historic Northwest and have existing relationships with its residents and families.



- A guaranteed continuity of services — no child or family currently served by the Salvation Army Northwest Community Center loses access to comparable services before a fully funded, fully operational replacement is open and accessible in the same neighborhood.
- Full public disclosure of all communications, planning documents, and presentations related to any prospective replacement organization or use, including any discussions that occurred before the Commission or with City staff.

V. OUR DEMANDS

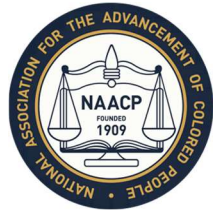
The NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B calls on the Mayor and the City Commission to take the following immediate actions:

- Immediately halt any further negotiations toward the buyout of the Salvation Army's lease at 600 North Rosemary Avenue until a comprehensive, transparent, and community-led planning process is completed.
- Publicly confirm, on the record, that no replacement organization, occupant, or use for 600 North Rosemary Avenue has been selected, pre-approved, or promised — and that any such decision will be made only through the open process described above.
- Convene a formal public hearing in the Historic Northwest neighborhood dedicated exclusively to the future of 600 North Rosemary Avenue, with adequate notice and in-language outreach to all affected residents.
- Commission an independent community impact assessment evaluating the displacement effects, affordable housing implications, and equity consequences of the proposed buyout on Historic Northwest residents and families.
- Release all public records related to this matter — including the original lease agreement, all amendments, all City Commission minutes and resolutions, all internal communications regarding the proposed buyout or any prospective replacement occupant, and all CRA planning documents designating the property for alternative uses — in response to the NAACP's concurrent Florida Public Records Act request.
- Guarantee that no resident, child, or family currently served by the Salvation Army Northwest Community Center will lose access to comparable services before a fully funded, fully operational replacement facility is open and accessible in the same neighborhood.
- Acknowledge publicly and on the record that the City's use of the term 'underutilized' to describe a functioning community center serving approximately 50 children in one of the city's most economically vulnerable neighborhoods is inadequate, misleading, and inconsistent with this Commission's stated commitment to equity.

Mayor James and Members of the Commission — the Historic Northwest neighborhood did not survive over a century of exclusion, segregation, and disinvestment for its people and their children to be quietly removed from their own community in the name of development. This land was set aside for them. This Commission has the power — and the duty — to keep that promise.

NAACP

WEST PALM BEACH BRANCH 5143-B



The NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B stands ready to work collaboratively with this Commission, with the Salvation Army, and with any organization that emerges through a fair and open process to build a vision for 600 North Rosemary Avenue that serves the people who have always called the Historic Northwest home. What we will not accept — and what this community should not accept — is a process that excludes its voice, predetermines its outcome, or uses public dollars to accelerate the displacement of a historically Black neighborhood.

We expect a written response to this letter within fifteen (15) days and respectfully request that this correspondence be entered into the official record of the City Commission.

Respectfully and resolutely submitted,

Alfred Fields Jr.

President, NAACP West Palm Beach Branch 5143-B

Area Director, Area 5 — Palm Beach

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cc: Dedrick D. Straghn, President, NAACP South Palm Beach County Branch #5128; Florida State Conference of the NAACP; City Manager, City of West Palm Beach; City Attorney, City of West Palm Beach; Palm Beach Post; WPTV News Channel 5; WPBF 25 News; WLRN / Stet Palm Beach