



Councilmember Ben Bartlett
City of Berkeley, District 3

CONSENT CALENDAR
April 4 2017

To: Honorable Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Ben Bartlett, Councilmember Kriss Worthington,
Councilmember Kate Harrison, Mayor Jesse Arreguin

Subject: Referral to the Public Works Commission and the Commission on Aging:
Rename the South Berkeley Senior Center to the “Henry Ramsey Jr.
South Berkeley Center”

RECOMMENDATION

Refer the Public Works Commission and the Commission on Aging to coordinate renaming the South Berkeley Senior Center to the “Henry Ramsey Jr. South Berkeley Senior.”

BACKGROUND

On March 14, 2014, Henry Ramsey, Jr died in Berkeley, California at the age of 80. The late Henry Ramsey Jr. was a Berkeley politician, lawyer, judge, professor, activist, and veteran. Mr. Ramsey served on the Berkeley City Council between 1973 and 1977, during which time he spearheaded the local movement to bring senior centers to Berkeley.

Mr. Ramsey realized that seniors could experience improved quality of life if they had a place to engage with community and receive services. In response to this need, Mr. Ramsey coordinated the senior community and lobbied his fellow Council members to approve the use of the City’s new federal block grant funds to construct three senior centers. South Berkeley Senior Center, the first senior center in Berkeley, opened its doors in January 1979.

In an interview with the East Bay Times, Charles Ramsey, Mr. Ramsey’s son, described his father as “a man who came west from the segregated South and built a life based on community services and tried to make the world a better place for as many people as possible.”

Mr. Ramsey came of age in the segregated Deep South. He dropped out of high school at the age of 17 to serve in the Airforce. After completing his service, Mr. Ramsey enrolled in Howard University, Washington D.C. and later in the University of California, Riverside, where he graduated in May 1960, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy.

In the late 1950s, Mr. Ramsey started a one-man picket of the downtown Riverside Woolworth, to desegregate it, according to a UCR oral-history-project transcript of an interview with a former UCR professor of Mr. Ramsey.

Mr. Ramsey moved to Berkeley to enter the University of California, Berkeley Boalt Hall School of Law class of 1963. There, he was one of two African Americans in a class of 202 students. After graduating, Mr. Ramsey became one of two African-Americans, along with Eugene Swann, to integrate the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office in the 1960s. Mr. Ramsey quickly rose to deputy district attorney.

In 1965, Mr. Ramsey traveled to Selma, where he was jailed with about 60 others after they tried to demonstrate in a white neighborhood, according to a 1997 profile of Mr. Ramsey in the Contra Costa Times.

In the late 1960s, Mr. Ramsey moved into private law practice and handled criminal and civil matters. According to his son, the latter included representation of Black police officers in Richmond, California, who successfully sued on the grounds of racial discrimination because they couldn't get promoted.

In 1971, Mr. Ramsey joined the Boalt Hall law faculty and taught for ten years. He juggled his professorial responsibilities alongside those of public office while serving as a Berkeley city councilmember.

In 1981, Mr. Ramsey was appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr to the California Superior Court in Alameda County. Congresswoman Barbara Lee referred to Mr. Ramsey as "a renowned leader in the fight for social justice [who was] acutely aware of the role the judicial system plays. His dedication improved the lives of many and inspired all of those around him."

In 1991, Howard University School of Law recruited Mr. Ramsey to serve as Dean of the law school. Five years later, Mr. Ramsey retired from Howard School of Law and began devoting his time and experience to various programs focused on youth education and juvenile justice. At the time of his death, Mr. Ramsey was on the Board of Directors for the Center for Youth Development for Law and the National Center for Human Rights Education, and an active member of many civic and legal organizations. His work earned him many awards, citations and honorary degrees.

Mr. Ramsey is survived by his wife of 45 years, Eleanor Mason Ramsey, Ph.D., six children, and eight grandchildren.

Pursuant to the City of Berkeley's Policy for Renaming and Renaming Public Facilities, "The naming of a public facility or any parts thereof in recognition of an individual posthumously may only be considered if the individual had a positive effect on the community and has been deceased for more than 1 year." Mr. Ramsey meets all of these categories.

We respectfully request that the Council honor Mr. Ramsey's legacy by naming the South Berkeley Senior Center after him.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Minimal.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No negative impact.

CONTACT PERSON:

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