



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 the "Henry Ramsey Jr. South
Berkeley Senior Center"

RECOMMENDATION

That Council refer the Public Works Commission and the Commission on Aging to coordinate renaming the South Berkeley Senior Center the "Henry Ramsey Jr. South Berkeley Senior Center."

BACKGROUND

The late Henry Ramsey Jr., who died in Berkeley on March 14, 2014, at age 80, was a Berkeley City Council member (1973-77), lawyer, judge, professor, law school dean, activist, and U.S. military veteran. To the central point of this document, during his tenure on the City Council he spearheaded the local movement to establish vibrant, reachable centers for all senior citizens of Berkeley. But his "positive effect on the community," as mentioned in the City of Berkeley's Policy for Naming and Renaming Public Facilities, was virtually lifelong – locally and in the larger community.

Henry Ramsey Jr. was born and grew up in the segregated Deep South. He dropped out of high school and on his 17th birthday enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. After honorable discharge he enrolled as a first-year student at Howard University, Washington, D.C., and later transferred to the University of California, Riverside (UCR), where he was a member of the debate team and the baseball team and graduated in May 1960 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy. While at UCR, according to an interview with one of his former UCR professors in the transcript of an oral-history project, Judge Ramsey started a one-man desegregation picket of the downtown Riverside Woolworth's. Accepted for admission in 1960 to three law schools, he chose the University of California, Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law, where he was one of two African Americans among 268 entering students in the graduating Class of 1963. He taught for 10 years as a member of the Boalt Hall faculty and eventually served as dean of the Howard University School of Law.

As noted by Benjamin Todd Jealous, then-president and CEO of the NAACP, in Judge Ramsey's autobiography (*The Life Story of Henry Ramsey Jr.*, Hardscratch Press, 2008), "... His frank and eloquent account of the journey from Jim Crow childhood to a life of activism, public service, and high achievement will be familiar to some, a revelation to others. The challenge he issues is for all. ..."

To list just a few among the challenges he himself *accepted*, besides his years in academia: Serving as the second-ever African American assistant district attorney in Contra Costa County. While an attorney in private practice, successfully representing a group of Black police officers in their pioneering racial discrimination suit against the City of Richmond. Traveling on his own, at the height of anti-civil rights violence in the 1960s, to Selma, Alabama – knowing no one in the area, being held by the police for several nights for the "crime" of picketing with a group of like-minded people in a segregated (white) neighborhood, and ultimately making the 5-day, 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery. Serving as an observer during the first free elections in South Africa.

In 1981, Henry Ramsey Jr. was appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. to the California Superior Court in Alameda County. Congresswoman Barbara Lee has referred to Judge 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 an interview with the *East Bay Times*, Judge Ramsey's son Charles Ramsey described his father as "a man who came west from the segregated South and built a life based on community service and tried to make the world a better place for as many people as possible." In Berkeley that came to include as many senior citizens as possible. Various churches had done their best for senior groups and individuals, but space and facilities and personnel were limited and the need was growing. In response, then-Councilman Ramsey worked extensively with 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 facilities that could also be used for other community programs, with the consent of the seniors themselves. The South Berkeley Senior Center, the first to be completed, opened its doors in January 1979, followed by centers in West and North Berkeley.

"While the two centers in the mostly black areas of West and South Berkeley had been brought to my attention first," Judge Ramsey wrote in his autobiography, "I knew about the North Berkeley center that served a mostly white population. To my thinking, every senior in Berkeley deserved to be treated well, without regard to neighborhood, ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion."

Throughout his long and varied professional life, Judge Ramsey was an active presence in the lives of his children and grandchildren. After retiring from his position as dean of the Howard University School of Law, he began devoting his time and experience to various programs focused on youth education and juvenile justice. At the time of his death, he was on the Board of Directors for the Center for Youth Development for Law as well as the National Center for Human Rights Education, and an active member of a

number of other civic and legal organizations. His work earned him many awards, citations and honorary degrees. But his most important accomplishment in the City of Berkeley and the one in which he took most pride was the construction of the three senior centers. Every out-of-town visitor to the Ramsey home would start their tour at the South Berkeley center. There could be no tribute better suited to the life of Judge Henry Ramsey Jr. than to have the South Berkeley Senior Center named in his honor.

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

The City of Berkeley's Policy for Naming 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" – describes Judge Henry Ramsey Jr.

We respectfully request that the Council honor Judge 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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