

From: [Jeffrey Delapena](#)
To: [Heidi Cody](#); [Oliver Orjiako](#); [Jenna Kay](#); [Jose Alvarez](#)
Subject: RE: Coalition letter to Planning Commission re: including references to race
Date: Thursday, September 4, 2025 8:07:00 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)

Good day, Heidi,

Thank you very much for providing this coalition letter and feedback related to Clark County's Comprehensive Plan update.

This will be brought to the attention of the Planning Commission and added to the Public Record.

Best regards,



Jeff Delapena
Program Assistant
COMMUNITY PLANNING

564.397.4558



From: Heidi Cody <heidi@waconservationaction.org>
Sent: Wednesday, September 3, 2025 5:34 PM
To: Jeffrey Delapena <Jeffrey.Delapena@clark.wa.gov>; Sue Marshall <Sue.Marshall@clark.wa.gov>; Wil Fuentes <Wil.Fuentes@clark.wa.gov>; Glen Yung <Glen.Yung@clark.wa.gov>; Matt Little <Matt.Little@clark.wa.gov>; Michelle Belkot <Michelle.Belkot@clark.wa.gov>; Oliver Orjiako <Oliver.Orjiako@clark.wa.gov>; Jenna Kay <Jenna.Kay@clark.wa.gov>; Jose Alvarez <Jose.Alvarez@clark.wa.gov>; Rebecca Messinger <Rebecca.Messinger@clark.wa.gov>; Kathleen Otto <Kathleen.Otto@clark.wa.gov>
Subject: Coalition letter to Planning Commission re: including references to race

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Hello Jeffrey, Clark County Planning Commission, Countu Council, and staff--

The attached letter signed by nine mostly local community-based organizations of color is addressed to the Clark County Planning Commission, and all of you are cc'd to keep you in the loop. Jeffrey would you please share this directly with the members of the Planning Commission?

We ask the Planning Commission to honor the work of the CAG and EJC by including references to race in their Comprehensive Planning policy suggestions.

Thank you,
Heid Cody on behalf of the co-signed organizations.

September 3, 2025

Clark County Planning Commission
cc: Clark County Council and staff

Dear Clark County Planning Commission,

We are a coalition of local Community-Based Organizations, mostly of color, who are [working to advance equity and climate resilience in Comprehensive Planning](#). On July 10, several Planning Commissioners had a conversation during a work session, questioning the appropriateness of including references to race in recommended policies drafted by the County Climate Advisory Group (CAG) and Environmental Justice Group (EJC). That conversation was recorded [here](#), starting at roughly the 30-minute mark to 40 minutes.

We unanimously and unequivocally support keeping these references to race in the climate element of our County Comprehensive Plan, and want to explain why this is important.

Do Not Undermine Equity and Inclusion

Equity is a focus of the Comprehensive Plan. Thanks to funding by the Climate Commitment Act, input for the climate element of the 2025 Clark County Comprehensive Plan was designed to be inclusive. In a historic first, the CAG and EJC were created specifically to invite historically disenfranchised folks into the policy development process.

President of Vancouver Metro LULAC Monica Zazueta is one of the members of our coalition. She also served on the CAG and the EJC. In a [letter to the editor](#) in The Columbian on August 17, she stated:

"Historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Hispanics, Chuukese, and Asian communities cannot be ignored when considering how Clark County could develop more equitably. The legacy of colonization, land theft, genocide, and broken treaties created lasting inequalities and environmental degradation, with communities of color suffering the worst impacts of pollution and climate change.

Removing references to race from our policy contributions, as Planning Commissioners Houran [sic] and Johnson suggested...weakens our work and repeats a harmful racist narrative of human value based on skin color.

Our Environmental Justice Coalition's approach recognized the interconnectedness of race and climate issues. It is crucial that the County Planning Commission honor these groups' input by clearly including race in the climate element of our Comp Plan. Doing so would demonstrate a commitment to justice and equity. Inviting diverse voices to help shape our future is a great thing."

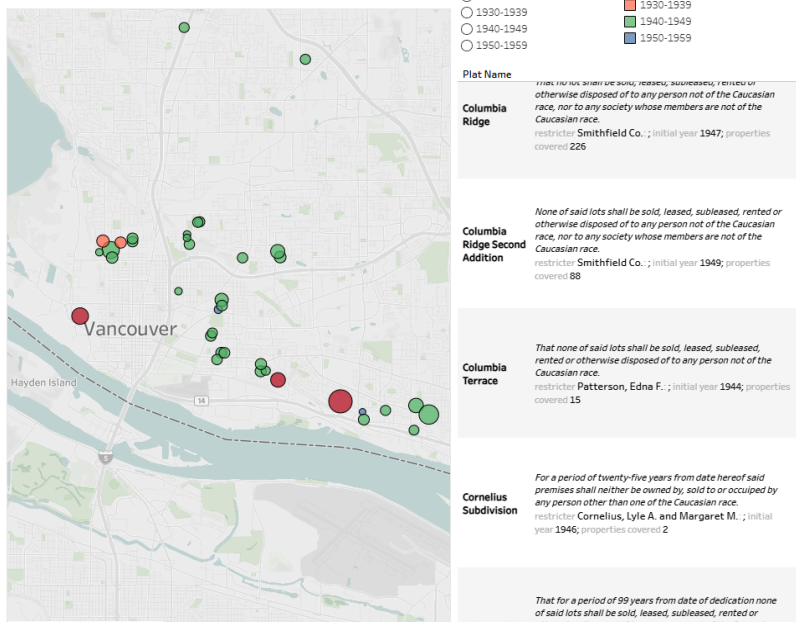
Examples of Race-Based Discriminatory Policies in Washington and Clark County

During the July 10 Planning Commission workshop, one of the Commissioners asked if “we have ever written a racist law.” The answer to that question is yes, within the larger context of statewide racial discrimination related to housing, Clark County also has a history of racial housing discrimination by property owners and racial covenants at Clark County.

With better data, you can make better decisions. Here is some data that sheds light on this history. This Washington State Covenant Homeownership Program Study¹ by the National Fair Housing Alliance found that:

“since Washington’s inception, housing discrimination and segregation have been embedded in its history. As noted by the legislature, in the Covenant Homeownership Act: “Generations of systemic, racist, and discriminatory policies and practices have created barriers to credit and homeownership for Black, Indigenous, and people of color and other historically marginalized communities in Washington.” The legislation goes on to note that the homeownership rate for Black, Native American, and people of color and other historically marginalized communities (herein referred to as “historically marginalized communities”) in Washington is 19 percentage points below that of non-Hispanic White households, and that gap is even wider between Black and White households. The law also recognizes that mortgages are harder to obtain and more expensive for historically marginalized communities. Our thorough analysis of hundreds of reports, articles, and documents reveals this pervasive discrimination led to decades of missed wealth building opportunities for marginalized communities and continues to yield racially and ethnically disparate outcomes in housing, credit, education, health, employment, and other areas.

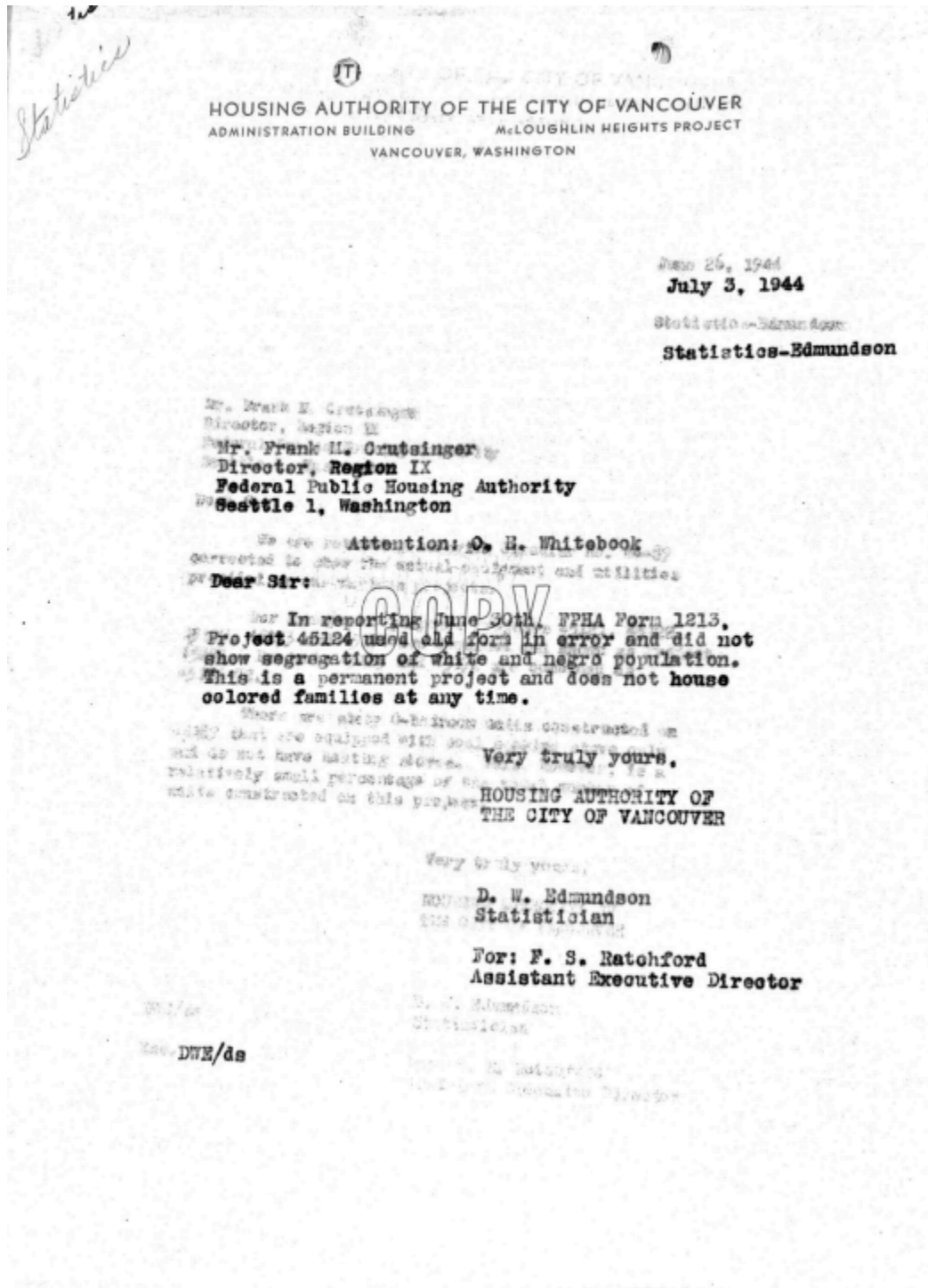
Subdivisions with restrictions by decade
click or hover for details



To the left is an image from [Racial Restrictions Covenant Project, WSU](#) that shows race restrictions on who could not own, lease, sublease or rent property in Clark County until 1959.

¹<https://www.wshfc.org/covenant/WSHFCWACHPFULLSTUDY32024.pdf>

Clark County also has a history of discriminatory housing practices. Here is a 1944 letter from Vancouver Housing Authority to the Federal Public Housing Authority, stating that a permanent housing project within Clark County "does not house colored families at any time."



As we were working on this coalition letter and researching housing-based racial covenants in Clark County, we reached out to the Clark County Historical Museum, which in turn referred us to the Vancouver NAACP. Michael Jones, Vice President, asked us to include this comment in this letter:

"The NAACP Vancouver Branch is deeply disturbed to hear comments in 2025 that question the appropriateness of naming race in policy, given both the history of this country and the ongoing inequities we witness every day. It is not lost on us that our people were once legally barred from owning property in this county, and today, we still see the impact of those exclusions in homeownership rates, housing affordability, and exposure to environmental harms. To suggest that race should be erased from planning is to ignore both the past and the present reality facing Black families and other communities of color in Clark County.

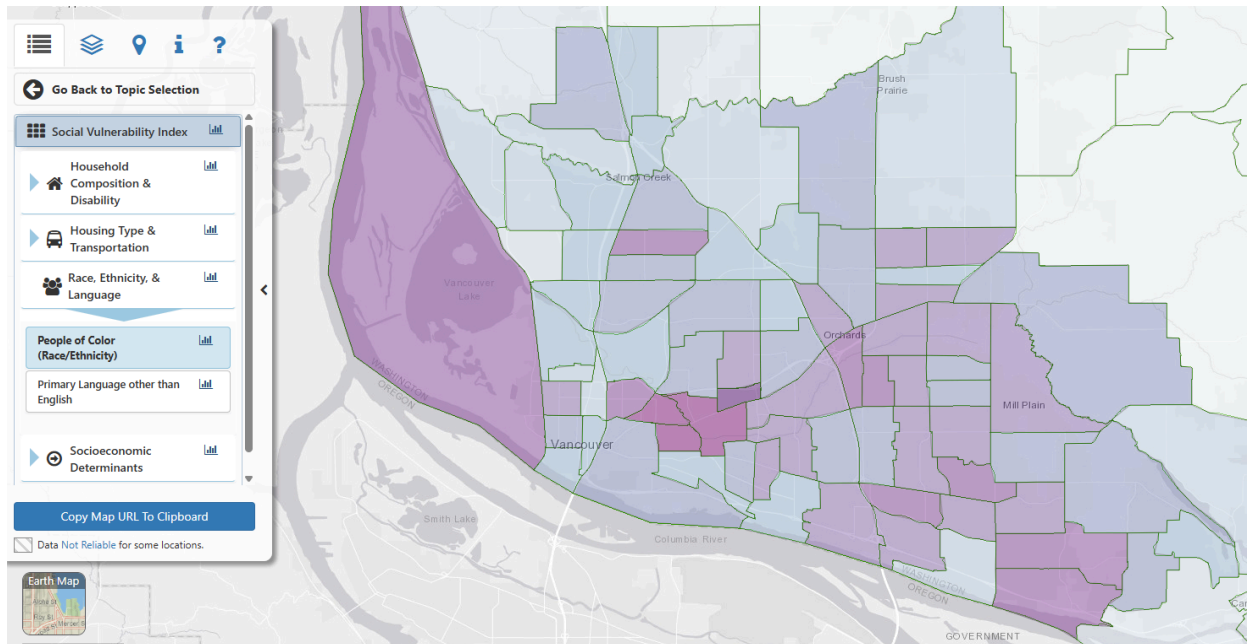
The attempt to remove race from this process is not only misguided, it is harmful. In a year when the nation continues to wrestle with the consequences of racial injustice, it is unacceptable for local government to retreat from truth. Equity requires honesty, and honesty requires naming race. To do otherwise is to deny lived experience and silence the very communities this process was designed to include. We urge the Planning Commission to stand on the side of justice and ensure that race remains explicitly acknowledged in the Comprehensive Plan.

*The Rev. Michael Jones Jr., M.Div
Vice President, Vancouver NAACP Branch 1139-B
Chair, Legal Redress & Civil Rights Committee*

Honor the Input and Work of the CAG and EJC. Include References to Race

It is not o.k. to ignore or belittle the work and policy suggestions of the CAG and EJC members, to ignore the history of race-based housing discrimination here, or the voices of communities of color who live in Clark County and are concerned about these issues. We continue to be impacted by decisions made by the Clark County government.

Removing references to race would also ignore the health impacts that communities of color have suffered from discriminatory housing policies and still suffer from due to proximity to pollution sources. The [WA Health Disparities Map](#) shows this problem visually. Here is a screenshot of the map when viewing Clark County's current air pollution exposure by race.



Courtesy of Washington Health Disparities Map, accessed 8.22.25

United States census data similarly shows that [in 2020 in Vancouver](#), of 37,756 owner-occupied houses, 82% of those homeowners were white, 6.1% were Latino or Hispanic, 5% were Asian, 1.5% were Black or African American, 0.69% were Indigenous, and 0.44% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Our Clark County Comprehensive Plan is a rare opportunity to pass a more equitable, protective policy that seeks to bring awareness to the historical discriminatory practices of racial covenants that restricted BIPOC populations from owning property throughout Vancouver and other parts of Clark County. We ask you not to disenfranchise or marginalize voices that have been invited into the policy process. The CAG honored the input of the EJC. The Planning Commission should, in turn, honor the input of the CAG and EJC.

We cannot change the practices of the past, but we can seek to learn from them and do better because of them. This is an opportunity for us to learn from the past, rather than remaining disconnected and isolated from one another. This policy work ultimately allows us to grow better together as a community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

NAACP Vancouver
SW Washington LULAC #47013
NAYA Family Center / NAYA Action Fund

Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE) SW WA
Washington Conservation Action
Vancouver Metro LULAC
Vietnamese Community of Clark County
Fourth Plain Forward
Latino Leadership Northwest