



## **RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1978 SANITATION WORKERS STRIKE**

**WHEREAS**, Alexander Evans of the Bloomer Hill Community, Whitakers, North Carolina, was employed by the City of Rocky Mount as a sanitation worker beginning in February 1977 and was soon given the nickname "Preacher" Evans by his co-workers because of his deep Christian faith and his ministry to give food and clothes to those in need as well as lead co-workers in morning prayer before work; and

**WHEREAS**, the Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* featured these aspects of Mr. Evans' character in a People profile article on him on November 25, 1977; and Alexander Evans became a leader among the sanitation workers in speaking out about unsafe conditions when required to work in the snow and also protesting the City's mandate that required workers to donate a days' pay to United Way; and

**WHEREAS**, sanitation workers had long been instructed by management that any items left within a five-foot vicinity of trash cans could be picked up by the workers; and on June 20, 1978 Alexander Evans picked up a suit of clothes left by the trash cans at a residence in the Englewood neighborhood for the purpose of donating the clothes to the needy, as was his ministry; and thereafter the residents complained to the City that a suit of clothes had been "stolen"; and

**WHEREAS**, when informed of this complaint, Mr. Evans returned the suit of clothes to his supervisor the next day; and due to subsequent calls from the residents alleging that other items were missing which Mr. Evans denied taking, on July 5, Mr. Evans was suspended from his job for two days and charged with misdemeanor larceny by the City of Rocky Mount; and

**WHEREAS**, when his co-workers heard of Evans' suspension, the sanitation workers did not start to work on July 10, 1978 and demanded a meeting with the City Manager to request he drop the charges against Mr. Evans; and on July 11, 1978, workers once again did not start to work until they had a meeting with the City Manager; and workers were given the understanding that the Mayor, City Manager and Human Relations Director would see that charges against Mr. Evans were dropped before going to District Court; and when workers learned that charges against Mr. Evans had not been dropped as promised by Monday, July 24, and he was scheduled for District Court on July 27, workers walked off the job on Tuesday, July 25, and demanded charges dropped and an apology from the City; and

**WHEREAS**, workers and their supporters in the Concerned Citizens Association, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, NAACP and others staged a march from the Weeks Armstrong project through the community and a rally at Tom Stith Park on Sunday, July 30, 1978; and workers were reinstated by the City on July 31 and returned to work on Tuesday, August 1, and continued efforts to secure justice for Mr. Evans demanding that charges be dropped, and that Mr. Evans receive an apology from the City; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Evans' court date at District Court was continued from July 27 to August 3 to August 10; and on August 10, Mr. Evans was found guilty of misdemeanor larceny in District Court, whereupon he appealed his case to Superior Court; and workers walked off the job again on Monday, August 14 in protest of the District Court ruling and continued on strike until August 31; and the Concerned Citizens Association announced a boycott of downtown Rocky Mount businesses until Mr. Evans was exonerated and reinstated in his job; and workers and community supporters staged a march from City Lake to Tom Stith Park on Sunday, August 20, that was attended by over 1,000 people; and

**WHEREAS**, after negotiations with the City Manager, the workers agreed to return to work without retaliation; and the Concerned Citizens Association released a press statement on August 30, 1978 outlining the condition of the workers' return to work and also outlining future goals of the movement, one of which was to change the unfair method of electing City Council, which underrepresented the 40% black population of the City; and

**WHEREAS**, a Unification rally was held at Tom Stith Park on September 3; and on September 25, Alexander Evans' case came before Nash County Superior Court and many sanitation workers did not work that day in order to attend the trial in support of Mr. Evans, and carried a floor model color television set into the court room as evidence of items residents left by the trash for sanitation workers to pick up; and

**WHEREAS**, after just fifteen minutes of deliberation, the jury found Mr. Evans **not guilty**; and Alexander Evans returned to work and continued to work for City of Rocky Mount until he retired in 1996; and

**WHEREAS** this worker strike and community support movement from July 10 to September 25, 1978 is considered the major civil rights and labor struggle in Rocky Mount history; and the community came together to see that justice was served and challenged racial discrimination in the City of Rocky Mount and improvements were made in the wake of this strike; and

**WHEREAS**, the 1983 voting rights suit of Naomi Green, et. al. vs. the City of Rocky Mount resulted in a fair and racially proportional ward system by which the Rocky Mount City Council is elected, which is still in effect today; and

**WHEREAS**, this year marks the 40th anniversary of the 1978 Rocky Mount Sanitation Workers Strike and the Phoenix Historical Society will sponsor an educational program on Saturday, October 13, 2018 at 1 p.m. at the BTW Community Center, 727 Pennsylvania Avenue, on the Significance of this Movement for Eastern North Carolina; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Rocky Mount desires to recognize the courage and determination of sanitation workers who risked their jobs for justice for a co-worker unfairly accused and stood fast with their community supporters in the face of the City administration at that time which failed to do the right thing to resolve this issue with Mr. Evans and the workers; and the result of this struggle exonerated Alexander Evans from the charge of larceny and improved the condition of workers at the City of Rocky Mount; and, as expressed in the CCA press statement of August 30, 1978, "the suffering of the sanitation workers and of the Rocky Mount community is a price that must be paid for democratic government and freedom."

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the City of Rocky Mount does hereby apologize to the family of Alexander Evans and the sanitation workers for the actions taken by City Government in 1978 and recognizes that the actions of the sanitation workers and the supporting organizations in 1978 made an improvement in racial justice in Rocky Mount.

Adopted this the 8<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2018.



David W. Combs, Mayor



Pamela O. Casey, City Clerk

