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Halifax apologizes for razing Africville

By CBC News
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Peter Kelly apologized Wednesday for the loss of Africville, the black community that stood along the Bedford Basin for more than a century before it was razed to make room for a bridge in the 1960s.

"I'm here today on behalf of Halifax regional council to deliver a formal apology to all those whose lives have been altered by the loss of Africville in the 1960s," Kelly said at a ceremony held at the YMCA in north-end Halifax.

"We realize words cannot undo what has been done. But we are profoundly sorry and apologize to each and every one of you. The repercussions of what happened to Africville linger to this day. They haunt us in the form of lost opportunities for the young people who never were nurtured in the rich traditions, culture and heritage of Africville."

The apology was backed up a total of nearly \$5 million from three levels of government for the black community - \$3 million from the city, \$1.5 million from the province and \$250,000 from the federal government.

One hectare of land is also included in the agreement, along with a commitment to rebuild the Seaview United Baptist Church on the site. It will be used as an historical interpretative centre. Seaview Park will be renamed Africville, but it will still be owned by HRM.

And a special department at city hall will be created to deal with issues that affect African Nova Scotians.

The agreement was struck between the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Africville Genealogy Society

"Victory has been won"

Rev. Rhonda Britten, a leader in the African Nova Scotian community, welcomed the settlement and said it was time to put the past behind them.

"I know that there are some among us who are wounded, and some among us who bear those scars. But, in spite of all of that, the victory has been won," she said.

"We cannot continue to feed our children the bitter pills, we must give them the pills of love. We must plant in them the seeds of unity and victory. That is the only way."

There were cheers from most people in the crowd, while others shouted: "Not enough."

Britten's comments were directed in part at those members of the community who are unhappy with the deal. Some believe there should be individual compensation, while others argue that Africville should be rebuilt.

Africville was first settled in the 1830s when former American slaves and other black people moved to the area. The community was neglected by the former City of Halifax and became run-down over the years. In the 1960s, the city evicted the residents and bulldozed their homes in the name of urban renewal.

The land was used to build the approaches to the A. Murray MacKay Bridge, and the rest of it is now Seaview Park. It was declared a national historic site in 2002.

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