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Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission

CONSENT CALENDAR
November 17, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Commission

Submitted by: Allan Abshez, Chair

Subject: Officially Naming the Gymnasium at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Services Center in honor of Philip Harper-Cotton

RECOMMENDATION
Adopt a Resolution officially naming the gymnasium at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Services Center (MLK Center) in honor of Philip Harper-Cotton.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
None

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS
On September 1, 2017, Philip Harper-Cotton retired after 49 years with the Recreation Department, his final 11 years as a recreation program supervisor. His work helped shape Berkeley's youth and family recreation offerings, from sports leagues to youth mentoring to special events, for over three generations of Berkeley residents in South and West Berkeley.

Per the Council Naming Policy procedures, on July 8, 2026, the Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Commission conducted a public hearing, and on September 9, 2026, the commission took action to recommend that Council name the gymnasium at Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Services Center in honor of Philip Harper-Cotton (M/S/C: Nash/Stewart/U). Ayes: Abshez; Granzella; Nash; Philip; Rybczynski; Samelson; Stewart; Noes: none; Absent: Muszynski; Yeo.

BACKGROUND
The City of Berkeley has continuously recognized individuals whose leadership and service have shaped the City's cultural and civic identity. Public space naming is an important tool that honors community legacy by strengthening neighborhood identity and civic pride. Philip Harper-Cotton's impact on the City's Recreation Division is without parallel.

Mr. Harper-Cotton grew up in Berkeley, spending much of his youth playing ball at Grove Park. This early connection to the city's parks led him into youth sports and

recreation, eventually earning him a bachelor's degree in recreation from Cal State Hayward (now California State University East Bay).

He joined city staff in 1968 as a playground leader and became a full-time recreation programmer in 1975, initially assigned to San Pablo Park. Over his career, he played many roles at the City, including developing the programming at the Young Adult Project, which was part of the national Model Cities program that was implemented in Berkeley by Maudelle Shirek, Ron Dellums, and many other local civic leaders; coached youth baseball, basketball, and football teams; created numerous mentoring programs for young adults; founded the Greg Brown Memorial Basketball Tournament in 1975 that honored a Berkeley High basketball player who died while playing in a game; launched and expanded numerous community programs in response to local needs, many of which still exist today; and led the Recreation Division through challenging periods, such as the budget cuts after Proposition 13 in 1978. Mr. Harper-Cotton retired in 2017, after almost five decades of dedicated service working with primarily under-served youth in South Berkeley. By the time he retired, he had been working with the grandchildren of the youth he worked with at the start of his career.

CITY MANAGER

Based on the significant contribution Philip Harper-Cotton has made to the South Berkeley community as a dedicated City employee over 49 years, the City Manager concurs with the recommendation contained in this report, and acknowledges the City Council's exception to the City Policy for Naming and Renaming Public facilities section3(B) permitting the City Council to approve the name of a living person with a 2/3 voting majority.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no negative environmental impacts were identified as a result of this recommendation.

RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION

See body of report.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

None

CONTACT PERSON

Allan Abshez, Chair, Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission, 510-922-7573
Roger Miller, Secretary, Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Commission, 510-981-6704

RESOLUTION NO. _____ -N.S.

OFFICIALLY NAMING THE GYMNASIUM AT THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. YOUTH SERVICES CENTER IN HONOR OF PHILIP HARPER-COTTON

WHEREAS, the City of Berkeley has continuously recognized individuals whose leadership and service have shaped the City's cultural and civic identity. Public space naming is an important tool that honors community legacy by strengthening neighborhood identity and civic pride; and

WHEREAS, on September 1, 2017, Philip Harper-Cotton retired after 49 years with the Recreation Department, his final 11 years as a recreation program supervisor. His work helped shape Berkeley's youth and family recreation offerings, from sports leagues to youth mentoring to special events, for over three generations of Berkeley residents in South and West Berkeley; and

WHEREAS, Philip Harper-Cotton's impact on the City's Recreation Division is without parallel; and

WHEREAS, per the Council Naming Policy procedures, on July 8, 2026, the PRW Commission conducted a public hearing, and on September 9, 2026, the commission took action to recommend that Council name the gymnasium at Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Services Center in honor of Philip Harper-Cotton (M/S/C: Nash/Stewart/U). Ayes: Abshez; Granzella; Nash; Philip; Rybczynski; Samelson; Stewart; Noes: none; Absent: Muszynski; Yeo.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the gymnasium at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Services Center is officially named in honor of Philip Harper-Cotton.