

Alachua County Community Remembrance Project
September 9, 2020

Dear County Commissioners,

The Alachua County Community Remembrance Project (ACCRP) is a local community group working in partnership with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) from Montgomery, AL for truth and reconciliation, by recognizing the victims of the Jim Crow era of racial terrorism in our county, and educating our community about this history and it's legacy of racial disparities that we continue to face.

The Gainesville Community Remembrance Project (GCRP), which is a subcommittee of ACCRP is planning soil collection ceremonies in February 2021. Soil collection ceremonies, conceived by EJI, are a solemn ritual to collect soil from the lynching site. The soil persists as a physical connection to the lives lost there. The soil of the lynching site stands as mute witness to egregious wrongs. By publicly collecting, displaying, and creating a space for dialogue around this tangible piece of the past, the soil will have a voice. Link to EJI video about soil collection: (name of video is - EJI's Community Remembrance Project) <https://eji.org/videos/>

The site of the killing of Lester Watts in 1942 was determined to be at Pleasant Street and University Avenue, which is at the corner of SW 2nd Street and University Avenue (see attached photo). This is county property. We are writing to request permission to perform a soil collection ceremony at this site in February 2021. Two gallon sized glass jars of soil will be collected from this site. One will be displayed in Montgomery, AL and the other will be displayed here in Alachua County. If the pandemic continues to be a safety risk in February 2021, the ceremony will be done by no more than ten people, all wearing masks and socially distancing. It will be live streamed for a wider audience.

We believe permission for a soil collection ceremony is a part of the great work the county is already doing. We are very grateful for all the truth and reconciliation work the Alachua County Commission has done. We are proud to share the excellent website <https://truth.alachuacounty.us/> that the county has created. We are very grateful for the initiative of Commissioner Chestnut in spearheading the ACCRP.

Thank you for your support,

Sincerely,
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