



666 Broadway, 7th Floor  
New York, New York 10012  
212-614-6464  
ccrjustice.org

June 1, 2026

St. James Parish Council  
5800 Hwy. 44  
Convent, LA 70723

**Re: Legal Notice to Parish Council Regarding Proposed Ordinance to Re-Designate a Historic Black Community, Including the Estate of Harriet Jones, to “Industrial”**

To the St. James Parish Council:

On behalf of Inclusive Louisiana, Mount Triumph Baptist Church, and RISE St. James, the undersigned counsel write to put you on notice that the proposed ordinance (“Ordinance”) that would redesignate a large part of Romeville into an industrial area is unlawful. Further, should it not be promptly withdrawn from the Parish Council’s agenda, we intend to take urgent action in federal court in connection with the pending litigation *Inclusive Louisiana v. St. James Parish*, Case No. CV 23-987. This is the latest planned action by a Parish whose land use system is the subject of that ongoing civil rights lawsuit. The federal court in that case has concluded that Plaintiffs have raised plausible claims that the land use system is a vestige of slavery, that it is discriminatory on the basis of race and religion, that it unlawfully interferes with sites of historic, cultural and religious significance to Plaintiffs, and that it puts Plaintiffs’ health at risk. If allowed to pass, this Ordinance will be yet more evidence of a discriminatory and unlawful land use system that, in the words of a federal court, “quite literally originated in slavery.” *Inclusive Louisiana v. St. James Parish*, No. CV 23-987, 2026 WL 352793, at \*7 (E.D. La. Feb. 9, 2026).

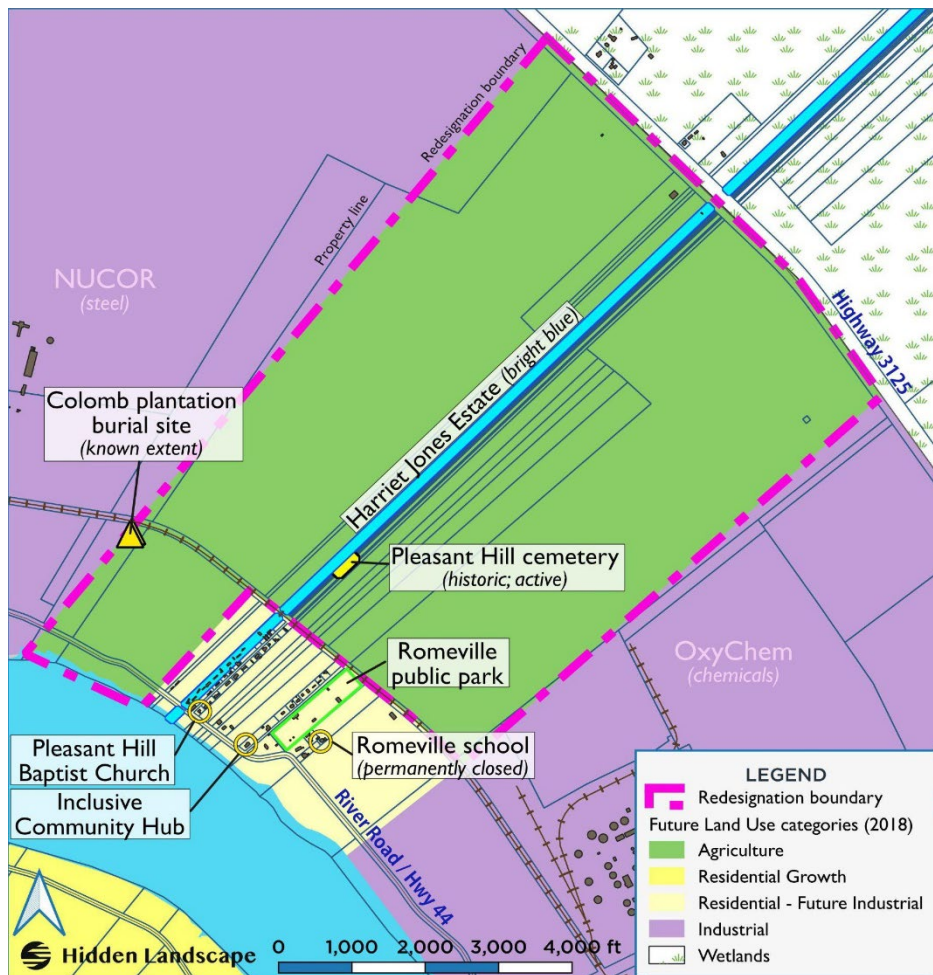
More specifically, this redesignation would transform the following historic sites into industrial sacrifice zones: our clients’ formerly-enslaved ancestor, Harriet Jones’s, property; the historic Pleasant Hill Cemetery where their formerly-enslaved ancestors and their descendants are buried; and potentially the Colomb Plantation Cemetery where their formerly-enslaved ancestors are likely buried. It would also allow industrial plants to fully encircle Inclusive Louisiana’s Community Hub, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, and Romeville Park, all of which are located in historic Romeville. This appears to be the latest attempt by the Parish to surround, and eventually erase, the historic, majority-Black communities in the Fourth and Fifth districts in the Parish.

Should the Ordinance not be withdrawn from the Parish Council’s agenda, we intend to take urgent legal action in the relevant litigation in federal court.

## The Redesignation Would Transform the Estate of Harriet Jones, a Historic Site and Monument to Freedom from Slavery, Into an Industrial Sacrifice Zone.

Harriet Jones was a woman who was born around 1809 in Maryland and trafficked to and enslaved in St. James Parish. In a remarkable feat, just eight years after the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified abolishing slavery, on February 19, 1874, Ms. Jones was able to purchase 34 acres of property from plantation owners Alfred Colomb and J. Bruce Morson in what is today Romeville.

For over 150 years, that property--the Estate of Harriet Jones—has been preserved, and passed down through the generations, and is now co-administered by her fifth-generation granddaughter, who is a co-founder of Inclusive Louisiana and current resident of Romeville. Notwithstanding slavery, the subsequent subjugation of and violence against freedpeople, the disenfranchisement of Black voters and landowners in the area, and more recently the displacement caused by industrial expansion, Ms. Jones’s family has been able to hold on to this tract of land through the years. The land is a monument to freedom from slavery, and to the multigenerational, unyielding ties that the family and descendant community have to the area.



The Estate of Harriet Jones sits in the Fourth District of St. James Parish, in the heart of what the world knows as “Cancer Alley,” but until today has been preserved against all odds. It has been used primarily as agricultural and residential land, and was recognized and therefore designated as “Agricultural” in the Parish’s 2014 Land Use Plan. Now, the Parish Council is contemplating redesignating this land as “Industrial,” and readying this historic monument for industrial expansion and erasure.

**The Redesignation Would Also Transform Two Historic Black Cemeteries and a Historic Black Baptist Church Into Industrial Sacrifice Zones.**

The redesignation would encourage industrial plants to encircle Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. One day after Ms. Harriet Jones purchased her property, on February 20, 1874, another nearby parcel of land in Romeville was sold by the same sellers to a group of formerly-enslaved people to build a church. The people in that group had been born in Virginia and North Carolina, and most, if not all, of them had been enslaved on the adjacent Wilton Plantation, where Nucor Steel now sits. The church is known today as Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. The church is very near Inclusive Louisiana’s Community Hub. The Parish is now contemplating allowing industrial plants to fully encircle the church and Community Hub.

Additionally, the Parish’s redesignation would transform at least one, and likely two, historic cemeteries into industrial sacrifice zones. Just on the other side of the railroad tracks from where Pleasant Hill Baptist Church sits is a historic Black cemetery where formerly enslaved and emancipated people and their descendants are buried: Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Both the church and the cemetery have recently received markers from the Louisiana Historic Markers program. The Parish is proposing to fully redesignate the cemetery for industrial use. Just west of Pleasant Hill Cemetery, there is another unmarked cemetery on the former Colomb Plantation. That cemetery likely contains burials of people formerly enslaved on that plantation. The redesignation boundary crosses the probable area of the cemetery.

As the Louisiana Attorney General has said, “[our cemeteries] lead us to a better understanding of our own culture: who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going . . . [W]e, the living, are custodians of the dead and the stories that they can tell, and we must strive to protect those stories.”<sup>1</sup> Instead of acting to protect the cemeteries of formerly enslaved people and freedpeople, and to protect their stories, the Parish is instead working quickly to attract industrial plants onto these cemeteries.

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<sup>1</sup> Louisiana Attorney General, [Opinion No. 07-0183](#) at 2-3, September 17, 2007.

## **This Is the Parish’s Latest Attempt to Erase and Displace a Historic Black Community.**

The Harriet Jones Estate, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Pleasant Hill Cemetery, the Colomb Plantation Cemetery, Inclusive Louisiana’s Community Hub, Romeville Park, and a historic residential community, are all located in Romeville, which is 75% Black.

In 2014, the Parish revealed its intent to erase this historic Black community when it designated it as “Residential/Future Industrial,” and designated areas upriver and downriver of it as “Industrial” - an ominous revelation of the Parish’s intentions. Romeville is today sandwiched between two giant industrial plants: Nucor Steel, which sits on the former Colomb, Wilton, and Helvetia plantations, and Oxychem, which sits on the former St. Michel and Malarcher plantations. The plants are two out of at least 28 industrial facilities that the Parish has steered into the majority-Black parts of St. James Parish.

In recent Parish Council and Planning Commission meetings on May 18 and May 20, 2026 Parish officials revealed that the Parish still had this intention to erase Romeville. They repeatedly stated that the area currently designated Agricultural should be redesignated as Industrial to ensure that the promise that Romeville would be “Future Industrial” would be soon fulfilled—in other words, so that industry can more completely move into and displace Romeville.

The Parish is fully aware of the costs of industrial expansion and displacement, including the severe health risks, and the unfulfilled promise of economic growth.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this steering, the residents of Romeville now reside in some of the most polluted, toxic—and lethal—census tracts in the country. And yet, instead of protecting this historic community, protecting its residents’ health and sites of historic, cultural, and religious significance to them, the Parish continues, relentlessly, to steer industry there.

## **The Parish’s Actions Are Unlawful.**

The Parish is currently the subject of an ongoing federal civil rights lawsuit that challenges this land use system which reflects a pattern and practice of actions precisely like this one, where industry is steered into majority-Black parts of the Parish. The federal court in that case has already ruled that the lawsuit raises plausible claims that these actions threaten the health, cultural heritage, religion, and properties of historic Black communities, and that the Plaintiffs have raised plausible claims that this land use system violates the Thirteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause and protection of bodily integrity, 42 U.S.C. Section 1982 which ensures non-discrimination in the use of property, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, and the Louisiana Constitution Art. XII, Sec. 4. which protects the right of the people to preserve, foster, and promote their respective cultural origins.

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<sup>2</sup> Allison Plyer Anissa Hyde, *Pathways to Prosperity: Louisiana 2026*, April 2026, available at: [https://www.datacenterresearch.org/reports\\_analysis/pathways-to-prosperity-louisiana-2026/](https://www.datacenterresearch.org/reports_analysis/pathways-to-prosperity-louisiana-2026/)

Should the Council not take this Ordinance of the agenda, we intend to take urgent action in the relevant litigation in federal court.

Sincerely,



Clara Potter  
Devin Lowell  
Lisa Jordan  
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CLINIC  
TULANE LAW SCHOOL  
6329 Freret St.  
New Orleans, LA 70118  
Tel.: (504) 865-5789  
Fax: (504) 862-8721  
[cpotter2@tulane.edu](mailto:cpotter2@tulane.edu)  
[dlowell@tulane.edu](mailto:dlowell@tulane.edu)  
[lwjordan@tulane.edu](mailto:lwjordan@tulane.edu)

*Attorneys for RISE St. James*

Astha Sharma Pokharel  
Pamela C. Spees  
Baher Azmy  
Kayla Vinson  
Celine Zhu  
CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL  
RIGHTS  
666 Broadway, 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10012  
Tel. & Fax (212) 614-6462  
[asharmapokharel@ccrjustice.org](mailto:asharmapokharel@ccrjustice.org)  
[pspees@ccrjustice.org](mailto:pspees@ccrjustice.org)  
[bazmy@ccrjustice.org](mailto:bazmy@ccrjustice.org)  
[kvinson@ccrjustice.org](mailto:kvinson@ccrjustice.org)  
[czhu@ccrjustice.org](mailto:czhu@ccrjustice.org)

William P. Quigley  
Professor Emeritus  
Loyola University College of Law  
7214 St. Charles Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70118  
Tel. (504) 710-3074  
Fax (504) 861-5440  
[quigley77@gmail.com](mailto:quigley77@gmail.com)

*Attorneys for Plaintiffs Inclusive Louisiana  
and Mount Triumph Baptist Church*