

## **The City of Florence Celebrates Black History Month**

The first election of the Town of Florence was held on April 10, 1871. The April 12, 1871, issue of the Marion Star reported that two blacks, P.C. Fludd and Nathaniel D. Harper were elected. Mr. Harper also served as Clerk of Town Council from 1871 to 1874. In 1872, two other black men, J.E. Wilson and T. Bennett were elected to Council.

Florence was incorporated as a municipality in 1890. Mordecai C. Johnson was the first black to hold a seat on the council since Reconstruction and served on Florence City Council from 1977 - 1981. Reverend John Sellers was elected to City Council shortly after and served from 1977 – 1988. Reverend E.J. McIver was elected in 1981 to replace Councilman Johnson and continued his service through 1985.

More recently, the following notable Black History moments with Florence City Council have occurred:

- In 2008, Councilwoman Octavia Williams Blake was the first black person to be elected as an At-Large Council member. She also made history in 2018 when she became Florence’s first black President of the Board of Directors for the South Carolina Municipal Association.
- In 2016 the City of Florence lost a beloved long serving Black Councilman, Ed Robinson. Councilman Robinson served the City of Florence from 1989 – 2016 and was known as a passionate advocate for civil and racial equity. He was well known for the Annual Freedom March in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which he organized for nearly 20 years. He also was a long serving member of the PDRTA Board and was a fervent leader for the residents in Districts 1 & 2.
- In November 2020, the municipal election made history:
  - Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin - the city’s first black and female Mayor was elected.
  - Councilman Chaquez T. McCall and Councilwoman Lethonia Barnes were elected as At-Large members.
  - Chaquez T. McCall was also the youngest black council member elected to City Council.
  - For the first time in Florence history, blacks make up the majority of City Council.
- In 2021 the City of Florence lost another treasured long serving black council member, Billy D. Williams. Councilman Williams served the City of Florence on City Council from 1988 – 2010 and served as Mayor Pro Tempore from 2003 - 2010. He was known as “A man for all the people” and a successful civil rights leader. His work across the community encompassed revitalization, affordable housing, and numerous youth programs.