

**Agendum
Oakland University
Board of Trustees Formal Session
February 13, 2017**

**APPROVAL OF HONORARY DEGREE FOR JAMES A. SHARP, JR.
A Recommendation**

- 1. Division and Department:** Academic Affairs, Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.
- 2. Introduction:** In accordance with Article IX of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, honorary degrees may be awarded by the Board of Trustees in recognition of distinguished accomplishment and service within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences, professions, and public service as recognized and supported by the University. The awarding of honorary degrees reaffirms Oakland University's scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and ties the University to the community at large.

Born during the Great Depression and raised in New York City, James A. Sharp Jr.'s experience with helpful neighbors and strong community as a child in Harlem and the Bronx led to a lifetime of service to the country, the community of Flint, Michigan, and Oakland University. Sharp's memories of his childhood are of neighbors watching out for him while his parents worked and "the system on the street of people who cared." From the police officer who rewarded the kids to play stickball in the street when they behaved to the "unorganized organization" in the neighborhood that "kept youth walking straight," Sharp learned to value community and the importance of engagement with people as individuals. Sharp served 20 years in the United States Marine Corp where he was on active duty in both Korea and Vietnam. He served 11 years as a staff member for Representative W. Riegle, Jr. (Later Senator Riegle) where he learned the art of politics and governance. He was the first popularly elected African American Mayor in the City of Flint, Michigan serving the city from 1983 to 1987. Sharp served as a member of the Oakland University Board of Trustees from 1988 to 1999, and was board chair from 1992 to 1994. Sharp was described in a 1986 Christian Science Monitor profile as "a father figure with a gentle manner and a steely core."

Service has been at the fulcrum of Trustee Sharp's career. One member of our committee stated that "Sharp realizes what is important and has spent his career working to improve lives." His service as a marine was distinguished and recognized. He holds three commendation medals for valor and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry. As Mayor of Flint, Sharp was a force for unity and understanding during a particularly divisive chapter of the City's history due to high crime and racial segregation. Sharp believed that positive change could be achieved through families focused on teaching values and respect. He stated, "When you begin to respect others, you eliminate anger. Then you don't have murders that erupt over a pack of cigarettes or over who's going to put gas in the car." In 1984, Flint residents were concerned about the potential for gang violence during the summer months. Sharp responded by hiring 28 gang members,

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who he termed opinion leaders, to clean around city hall and the police department. The gang members gained respect, the city was cleaner and fewer gang members were on the street. He advocated for the Board of Education to require 75 hours of community service as a part of the high school curriculum to help students develop respect for local organizations. Because he believed connections were an important aspect of community, he held open office hours every Thursday in his office in city hall and regularly walked neighborhoods despite warnings that there was a contract out on his life. As mayor, he initiated an affirmative action policy in the Flint police department, took steps to diversify the city's industrial base, and made sure the downtown streets and parks were clean. In all, the residents were at the core of all he did.

In 1988, Sharp was appointed to the Oakland University Board of Trustees. His leadership was so respected and vital to the University that he was reappointed in 1992. During his time on the board, Trustee Sharp served as Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Board, Chairperson and member of the University Affairs Advisory Committee, Chairperson and member of the Investment Advisory Committee, member of the Finance and Personnel Advisory Committee, member of the Blue Ribbon Strategic Planning Steering Committee, and member of the Ad Hoc Nominating Committee. The board cited him for his concern for the financial burdens faced by students, sensitivity toward student concerns and involvement in major university initiatives and for his support of the Oakland University Trustee Academic Success Fund that fosters cultural dialogue and training among diverse groups of students. As a trustee, Sharp also supported minority vendor expenditure efforts and provided assistance to the university in its relationship with the legislature and other governmental entities.

In addition to his support of the OU Trustees Academic Success Fund, Trustee Sharp and his wife, Tessie, established the James A. Sharp, Jr. and Tessie Baltrip Sharp Endowed Emergency Loan Fund in 1995. The purpose of this fund was to provide small, interest-free loans to students, and especially at-risk students, to alleviate financial emergencies to prevent a few hundred dollars from derailing them academically. In a thank you note to Trustee and Ms. Sharp, Geoff Upward stated "[I]n establishing this endowment, you have demonstrated your belief in what OU can become - not just today, but well into the future. Generations of students and faculty will benefit from your vision, as income from the endowment enables us to meet the growing intellectual, physical and social needs of our students, our faculty and the community in which we are a part." In 2004, the fund was expanded to also provide awards to help students with financial need pay for research of international educational opportunities. Over the years, these funds have helped numerous students stay in school, experience enriching educational opportunities, and most important, graduate.

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Trustee Sharp also served on numerous community boards and has maintained his interest in the City of Flint. He has advocated for the federal government to take a larger role in investigating the water crisis and ameliorating its effects. His own experience with a serious water contamination incident, which he believes is related to the deaths of a young daughter and his wife, has guided his demands for justice and support for the residents of Flint. He has advocated for the federal government to take a more active role in the Flint water crisis and for families in Flint to receive the same type of follow up that he and others affected by the Camp LeJeune water crisis have experienced over the years.

Angie Schmucker and Glenn McIntosh sum up Trustee Sharp in this way, "[T]he effects of Mr. Sharp's vision in each facet of his career cannot be overstated. The faculty and staff of Oakland University, residents of the State of Michigan, and citizens of Flint all owe him a great debt. His efforts and unrelenting commitment to protect and elevate the underserved among us have been astonishing. Trustee Sharp has distinguished himself as a truly remarkable member of the Oakland University Family and we sincerely and enthusiastically recommend him for this highest honor that Oakland may confer." The Honorary Degree Committee unanimously concurs and recommends Trustee Sharp be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities.

3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board of Trustees periodically awards honorary degrees at its Formal Sessions.
4. **Budget Implications:** None.
5. **Educational Implications:** The awarding of honorary degrees is an established tradition in academe, by which the University reaffirms its scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and its ties to the wider community.
6. **Personnel Implications:** None.
7. **University Reviews/Approvals:** The Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has recommended approval of the recipient to receive an Honorary Degree.

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8. Recommendation

RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities *Honoris Causa* to James A. Sharp, Jr.

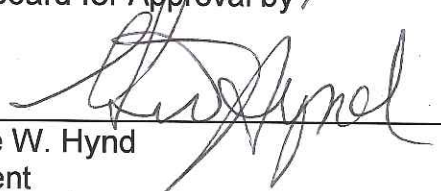
9. Attachments: None.

Submitted to the President

on Feb 6, 2017 by


James P. Lentini, D.M.A.
Senior Vice President for
Academic Affairs and Provost

Recommended on 2/6, 2017
to the Board for Approval by


George W. Hynd
President