

Public Comment to Prosper Portland Board of Commissioners

Linda Sporer, member of SEIU Local 49 and Healthy Communities Coalition

January 15, 2020

Hello Chair Cruz and members of the Board of Commissioners:

My name is Linda Sporer. I've worked in the security industry for 20 years, as a frontline security officer, supervisor, and training manager. I've worked for non-union companies, large and small, and now I'm a member of SEIU Local 49. I'm also a grandmother, and I've survived breast cancer, twice.

I'm here today with the Healthy Communities Coalition because I hope that the new Broadway Corridor district will deliver on its promise of equity for workers like me.

When I started my career, the industry standard was poverty wages, with no benefits, or health insurance so expensive that workers couldn't afford to use it. This is still often the case today when building owners choose non-union security companies. But a few years ago, we security officers formed a union and are raising standards around the region.

Now my coworkers and I receive better pay and predictable raises, and good health insurance. This helps keep my family stable even as the cost of living around Portland rises so fast. And as a cancer survivor, I know how important it is to have decent health insurance.

But working with a union contract isn't just about wages and benefits. It's about respect.

Before, as one of the few women in private security, I experienced sexual harassment on a daily basis. There are so many stories. When I was a training officer and quality management representative, one male officer made lewd gestures and comments at me when I did my job and pointed out something he needed to do. I'll spare you the details. He was reassigned to another site, but returned a few months later. Other male coworkers called me "Rag Nag of the Year" or "Wicked Bitch of the West." One officer managed to access my computer before I began a shift, and set up pornography for me to see when I logged in.

I knew that if I stood up for myself, I was at real risk of losing my job, no matter what civil rights laws say. I was an at-will employee. I would be easy to get rid of.

Since then, the #metoo movement has brought to light what my coworkers and I know – sexual harassment and discrimination are too widespread.

Thankfully, I'm not afraid to speak up anymore. With a union, security officers know that our jobs are protected when we raise concerns. Now, managers know that if they allow harassment to happen, or if they take part in it, we are going to say something. We have fair work rules and a grievance procedure to defend our rights. That pulls our team together and creates a better work environment.

With the Broadway Corridor project, you have a once-in-lifetime opportunity to make sure that all jobs are good jobs in the district, including for security officers like me. I ask you to make sure that the Community Benefits Agreement you are negotiating with the Healthy Communities Coalition includes enforceable standards to create quality jobs for service workers, with decent wages, and health care, and respect on the job.

Thank you.

Statement by Adela Maza, SEIU Local 49, to Prosper Portland and Continuum Partners, as part of Healthy Community Coalition negotiations for a Community Benefits Agreement for Broadway Corridor

September 30, 2019

My name is Adela Maza. I am 60 years old. I came to this country from Guatemala 35 years ago.

I have worked as a janitor in Portland for 19 years, with ABM, and I'm a board member of Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 49.

I am here today to share with you some of my experiences as a janitor and the difference it makes to me and my family to work for a company where workers have a union and a contract.

Until recently, I worked for 8 years at Standard Plaza.

We were a team of 5 people, cleaning 17 floors.

I cleaned 22 bathrooms every night. Clients never complained about my work.

We worked from 5:30 p.m. to 2 in the morning. My coworkers and I work hard, and we are proud of keeping the offices clean and tidy.

The people who benefit from our work almost never see us.

Most buildings have day porters who clean during business hours, but the majority of the people who work in janitorial work very late at night. The majority of us are Latina women.

ABM pays me \$15.50 per hour. I have good health insurance, so I know I can go to the doctor when needed without working that I will lose everything due to medical bills.

I have paid vacations and holidays every year, so I can take some time to rest sometimes and enjoy my loved ones.

My company contributes to a pension fund so that I will have something more than Social Security when I retire.

Our union contract guarantees a cost of living adjustment every year.

Working for a union company gives me and my family some stability. We need every cent because Portland is getting more expensive all the time.

I live in Gresham with my daughter and my two grandchildren, who are 11 and 14 years old. My daughter is looking for work and to tell you the truth, things are not easy.

Recently, they were about to cut off our electricity and I had to request support from a community organization so that we would not be left in the dark.

In the apartments where I live, if we pay rent even one day late, they charge us \$100. That is extra money we simply do not have.

I ride the bus to get to work. It is so long, it takes me an hour and 15 minutes to get there, and when I get out of work at 2:00 am, I have to wait an hour to catch a bus. I finally get home around 4 in the morning.

In fact, the organization OPAL made a documentary about transit riders like me, called "Adela's Story," which helped convince TriMet to extend the length of transit transfer times from 2 to 2.5 hours.

My life is not easy. It is hard work being a janitor, and even with the wages and benefits with my union contract, it is hard to cover the cost of living.

I have met many janitors who work for companies that don't have a union, and I understand that often they are paid minimum wage, no medical insurance, or they have a plan that is so expensive they're afraid to go to the doctor.

The majority of the large buildings in downtown Portland use union janitorial companies, but not all of them.

I was shocked this year when I found out that Standard Insurance had decided to push out ABM and replace all of us night janitors with a non-union company, Millennium Building Services.

From talking with Millennium janitors, we have heard over and over again that those workers are paid little, and their workload is too heavy.

After eight years at Standard Plaza, I lost my job there. Because of my union contract, I was able to transfer to another site.

But the Millennium janitors who now work at The Standard, I believe their employer is not treating them right.

I came to your community meeting last year when Continuum was chosen to be the developer for this Broadway Corridor project.

I liked what the Mayor said, that it would be better than any other project that's been built in Portland, because all kinds of people can live and work there, and that it will create good jobs.

Honestly, I found this hard to believe.

Building owners often save money by hiring janitorial companies with no union and low wages and benefits.

They make their money on our backs.

I am here to ask you to make sure that this project really is different, that all jobs in Broadway Corridor are good jobs, that workers have the opportunity to negotiate a fair deal for ourselves.

We want to be part of the community, not just the cheap workforce, struggling to survive in poverty.

Thank you.