



City of Portland
Historic Landmarks Commission

City of Portland
Design Commission



TO: Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Council

April 14, 2022

FROM: Portland Historic Landmarks Commission and Design Commission

RE: Albina Vision Trust

The Portland Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) together with the Portland Design Commission (DC) received a joint briefing on a redevelopment plan in NE Portland from the Albina Vision Trust (AVT) on February 14, 2022. The two commissions are writing this letter to express our strong support and our shared perspective that this extraordinary project is timely and achievable, if the City commits to it.

The Community Investment Plan developed by AVT has been seven years in the making. Yet the area of NE Portland in the Plan has been important to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) history for far, far longer. Before it was claimed by settlers, indigenous peoples farmed the land for sustenance harvest and trade using the plentiful natural resources of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers for hundreds of years. Over time, as Portland, East Portland, and Albina grew up around the Willamette, discrimination by those of European descent kept the small Black population of Portland confined to a few districts. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the areas along NE Broadway and along NE Williams were the centers of Black commercial and social life. It is absolutely no accident that these very areas were targeted for demolition and Urban Renewal by Portland's white political elite. Attached is a map from a 1955 report which highlights part of the area in the AVT plan.

Following are some observations, questions, or highlights about the proposal from the DC and the HLC.

- The **ground-up, but highly professional planning effort** represented in the AVT Plan has never been seen before in Portland or, to our knowledge, in other cities. This work deserves national attention. The City at one time was on the national radar for its planning efforts; with an urban growth boundary and other innovations. Yet our past planning has always been done by traditional top-down methods and has almost always represented wealthy, white interests. The work of Albina Trust is radical, brilliant, BIPOC-centered, and at the same time, such a boon for the City as a whole.
- The location of the **redevelopment efforts in the Plan are absolutely in the right place**, as the historic location of many Black homes and businesses that were destroyed by the City of Portland.
- The location of the redevelopment efforts in the Plan includes a huge proportion of vacant lots without so much as a street tree; lots used solely for surface parking, vehicle sales, and other auto-supporting uses; and entertainment uses. These are **shockingly underdeveloped and underutilized lots** (in Central City!!). In recent years, the City has spent considerable taxpayer dollars on a streetcar installation, yet has done nothing to require landowners along the streetcar line to make even temporary improvements.
- There are still some **older buildings within the AVT project boundary**, with opportunities for many of these to be incorporated into future programming. Specifically:
 - The HLC strongly encourages consideration of ways to use and adapt the Memorial Coliseum (Historic Landmark), Portland Van & Storage Building (Historic Landmark), Left Bank Building (Historic Resource Inventory-ranked III) and Annex building (Historic Resource Inventory-unranked).
 - Some buildings within the boundary, like the Left Bank and Paramount Apartments, are historically significant to the Albina community and retaining them could be the seeds from which to grow the rest of the development. The Left Bank had a music venue called the Dude Ranch where lots of





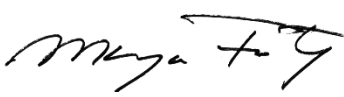



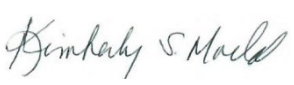

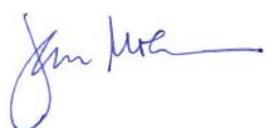
well-known black musicians played and the Paramount Apartments was one of the only places black folks were allowed to stay when they came to Portland.

- We appreciate the efforts to preserve one of the last remaining historic residential structures within the project boundary (Paramount Apartments at 253 N Broadway).
- Given the number of buildings and places significant to Portland's black history that have been lost, these remaining buildings become increasingly important to Portland and the implementation of AVT's Community Investment Plan. We are concerned that the owners of the Left Bank building requested to be removed from the City's Historic Resource Inventory (HRI). The Landmarks Commission intends to engage with the owners in the near future to encourage reconsideration of the HRI removal and instead consider permanent historic protection, which may come with benefits and opportunities the owner is not yet aware of.
- Existing single-family and multi-family homes at the south end of Eliot can fit within and next to newer developments to create a rich residential diversity and a bridge to the past.
- AVT's efforts align with the shift towards **more inclusive and comprehensive historic preservation**, both locally and nationally, that is shifting from not just buildings but the communities that inhabit those buildings and a focus on under-recognized histories. AVT has willing partners in trying to push the narrative of reclaiming the community at this space.
- Encourage the plan to **ensure activation** remains and is enhanced at the southern end, near the Rose Quarter.
- The **housing density and diversity** proposed within the plan is exciting.
- The **connection to the river** in the plan is a good opportunity to encourage access to the river for recreational activities such as fishing.
- How the **Monument Plan** honors Black pioneers from Albina is impressive.
- The **entrepreneur hub** could include makerspaces where entrepreneurs can design and create.
- AVT is encouraged to look at the **Cornerstones of Community report** that identifies buildings of Portland's African American history as well as the **African American Multiple Property Documentation** for the National Register.

In closing, both the HLC and DC are willing partners in AVT and City efforts in the realization of the Community Investment Plan.

Sincerely,

The Historic Landmarks Commission and the Design Commission

			
Matthew Roman			
			

cc: Rebecca Esau, Director of BDS

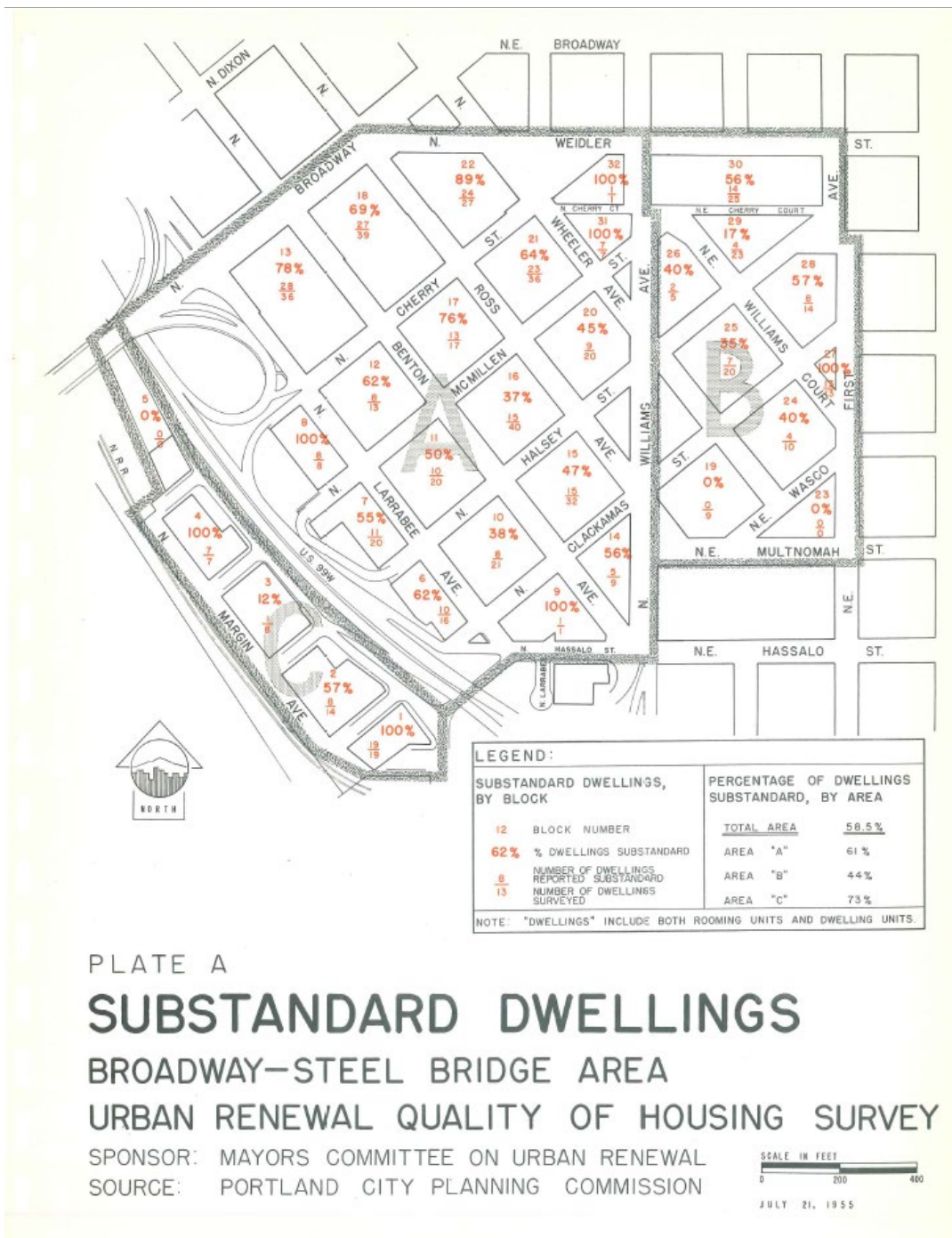
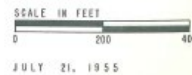


PLATE A
SUBSTANDARD DWELLINGS
 BROADWAY-STEEL BRIDGE AREA
 URBAN RENEWAL QUALITY OF HOUSING SURVEY

SPONSOR: MAYORS COMMITTEE ON URBAN RENEWAL
 SOURCE: PORTLAND CITY PLANNING COMMISSION



In general, the area is dominantly occupied by nonwhite families, the homes are characteristically older single and multiple family structures, occupied by average sized families having an education and income level somewhat below the city average.