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412-2023

Proclamation

Proclaim May 30, 2023 to be Vanport Day of Remembrance

Placed on File

Whereas, our understanding of history shapes our view of the present, and to understand where we are going, we must understand where we are from; and

Whereas, 2023 is the 75th anniversary of the flood that erased Vanport in a matter of hours; and

Whereas, Vanport was once the country's largest public housing project and Oregon's second-largest city, with a peak population of 42,500; and

Whereas, Vanport was intended as temporary housing for the war workers pouring into Portland from all over the country, supplying labor to three major shipbuilding yards; and

Whereas, Vanport was demographically diverse, with African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian and white populations who all came from elsewhere to work in the shipyards; and

Whereas, a postwar housing shortage affected all incoming laborers but due to Portland's discriminatory housing policies of the time, such as redlining, many of the African American workers could find no place to live because they were restricted to a small area of Portland that was already at capacity; and

Whereas, Vanport was a city of many firsts in Oregon, including being the first to hire African American police officers and teachers; and

Whereas, after the war, the city was also home to many Japanese Americans who had few living options when released from American concentration camps during WWII; and

Whereas, these groups of people found themselves all strangers together and forged new connections that endured even after Vanport was gone; and

Whereas, Vanport was constructed in the Columbia River floodplain and was protected from the river by a series of levees; and

Whereas, exceptionally heavy snows in the winter of 1947-48 and the cold spring that followed, combined with the sudden warm-up and rains of May to decimate the snowpack and swell the Columbia River; and

Whereas, although the river levels rose to alarming heights over weeks, the Housing Authority of Portland assured by the Army Corps of Engineers that

Introduced by

[Mayor Ted Wheeler](#)

Contact

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Requested Agenda Type

Regular

Date and Time Information

Requested Council Date

May 24, 2023

Time Requested

20 minutes

the dikes were both strong and high enough to protect Vanport from the expected peak water levels, did not order the residents to evacuate; and

Whereas, the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) did, however, after an emergency meeting on the evening of May 29, 1948, provide a notice on some of the residents' doorstep telling them that they were safe at the present time, that they would have plenty of time to evacuate if there were flooding and that they should not "get excited"; and

Whereas, at 4:17 p.m. the next day, Sunday, May 30, the HAP and the Army Corps of Engineers were proven wrong when a 600-foot section of the railroad berm to the west of the city failed and water began to pour into Vanport; and

Whereas, the flood wiped out the city in a matter of hours; and

Whereas, at least 15 people died in the Vanport flood; and 18,700 residents, about 6,300 of them African American, lost their homes and most of their belongings; and

Whereas, Vanport Mosaic will hold the 8th Vanport Mosaic Festival from May 18 to May 29 to honor and celebrate Vanport as an essential and often forgotten chapter in Portland's history - a story that provides a template for how we all can live together and create a society that honors history, cultural contributions, and paves the way for our humanity and our city to thrive.


Now, therefore, I, Ted Wheeler, Mayor of the City of Portland, Oregon, the "City of

Roses," do hereby proclaim May 30, 2023, to be

Vanport Day of Remembrance

In Portland and encourage all residents to observe this day. Let us remember and honor the lives affected by the Vanport flood, learn from their experiences, and strive to create a more inclusive and resilient city for all.

Documents and Exhibits

 [Proclamation](https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/council-documents/2023/vanport-day-of-remembrance-proclamation-2023.pdf) (https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/council-documents/2023/vanport-day-of-remembrance-proclamation-2023.pdf) 130.53 KB

Agenda Items

412 Regular Agenda in [May 24, 2023 Council Agenda](https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2023/5/24) (https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2023/5/24)

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