



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Floodplain Resilience Project

Focus Group: Environmental Justice

Key Findings Report | May 23, 2022

BACKGROUND

The City of Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) partnered with Camille E. Trummer Consulting to promote the Floodplain Resilience Plan to key stakeholders — a project designed to reduce the impacts of future flooding on residents and prevent the degradation of floodplain habitat for endangered fish species. To deepen our understanding of stakeholder concerns, benefits, and potential challenges of a City-led mitigation banking program, BPS and Camille E. Trummer co-designed and implemented a caucused focus group with environmental justice organizational leaders. During the focus group, BPS and Camille E. Trummer led facilitation in order to:

- 1) Inform participants about the Floodplain Resilience Plan and associated mitigation banking efforts
- 2) Understand participant concerns about future flooding and the floodplain management proposals
- 3) Solicit input on the benefits and potential challenges of a City-led mitigation banking program
- 4) Identify programs and/or actions the City could implement to address concerns and potential impacts to historically disadvantaged communities through the lens of environmental justice

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION BREAKDOWN

- 7 attendees
- 42% female
- 28% BIPOC
- 100% English speakers

HIGH-LEVEL DISCOVERY FINDINGS (AT A GLANCE)

- Discussing the impacts of future flooding enabled participants to recall their memory of recent emergency responses including a fire in the Cully neighborhood. Recalling their experiences prompted them to question the City’s protocols for emergency response. *“What will the City’s approach be in the event of a disaster-level flood?”*
- 100% of participants acknowledged the current risk-level for floods in the City and were able to make the connection to potential devastating impacts including long-term environmental and physical impacts on people and natural areas such as groundwater and stream flooding, chemical spillage, and entrapment. In addition, participants mentioned that flooding in industrial lands will present a risk of contamination to natural resources and amenities.
- Several participants expressed concerns about the impacts on flooding on historically disadvantaged populations including non-English speakers, lower-income neighborhoods, and BIPOC populations, especially older adults. In addition, participants identified geographies of concern: Johnson Creek, North Reach, Forest Park, Linnton Mill, St. Johns and Greater North Portland.
- Participants had several areas of concerns in response to the Floodplain Resilience Plan proposal, the highest priority being general disagreement about the exemption of industrial lands. Other concerns included the impacts to housing and employment in North Portland since major activities are close to larger bodies of water.
- Several programs and actions were recommended in order to reduce potential impacts on people and natural resource including:
 - Apply the floodplain regulations to the Columbia Corridor and North Reach, concurrent with the forthcoming Economic Opportunity Analysis. Participants advocated to make changes immediately versus waiting for the forthcoming River Plan updates
 - Create clear guidelines for mitigation banking to either encourage or discourage the “double-dipping” of credits. Ensure locations with a higher percentage of disadvantaged populations (i.e. North Portland) aren’t the only case study sites.
 - Factor in the anticipated 500 year flood to ensure Plan updates include climate change data and regulations
 - One participant articulated how on-site mitigation can create unintended impacts (someone benefits while another absorbs potentially negative impacts) In response, she asked BPS: *“What is the criteria for on-site mitigation? How will the City determine feasibility and geography-based determinations?”*

NEXT STEPS

The focus group findings included in this memo help set the stage to integrate diverse stakeholder feedback into the Floodplain Resilience Plan and any forthcoming proposals related to mitigation banking. Because the focus group session didn’t allow enough time for all

participant feedback, I recommend scheduling a follow-up session within the next 30 days with environmental justice leaders interested in sharing additional feedback.

In addition, key findings directly related to mitigation banking should be shared with BES to facilitate cross-bureau alignment and strategies that meet community needs in the event of a catastrophic event like a flood. In the coming weeks, Camille E. Trummer Consulting will align with BPS and BES to support the prioritization of ideas/recommendations offered in this memo and as they relate to feedback gathered during forthcoming focus groups with other populations including Urban Natives and mitigation banking-focused sessions. I look forward to working closely with both teams to determine our next set of actions in alignment with the project scope and budget.