

Oregon Historical Photo: Intersection of North Williams Avenue & North Russell Street

In the heart of the Albina district, the corner of North Williams and North Russell was once the center of a small yet thriving business district. These businesses were torn down in the early 1970s as part of large-scale urban renewal projects. Photo ca 1962.

The Oregon Historical Society. #bb009732



by [Jen Bodendorfer OPB](#) | April 20, 2015 8:42 a.m. | Updated: April 21, 2015 10:26 p.m.

Every week, Oregon Experience shares a photo highlighting the state's diverse, exciting history. All photos are courtesy of The Oregon Historical Society. At the turn of the last century, Portland's small African American community of about 2,000 lived near the train station on the west side of Portland. During World War II, more than 20,000 African Americans moved to Portland to work in the shipyards. Many of these workers lived in Vanport, a hastily constructed public housing project. When the Columbia River flooded in 1948, Vanport was destroyed. Due to Portland's discriminatory real-estate and banking practices, most of Vanport's African American residents were forced to relocate across the Willamette River to the inner-northeast district of Albina. Over time, the corner of North Williams and North Russell had become the thriving heart of the Albina business district. However, in the 1960s an urban renewal project to expand Emanuel Hospital displaced many of those living in Albina's central core. Once again, African Americans were forced out of their homes and funneled to neighborhoods further north and east. To learn more about the history of African Americans in Portland, watch the Oregon Experience documentary "Portland Civil Rights: Lift Ev'ry Voice."

November 19, 2015

To: Portland City Council

Re: Rezone 3 blocks between North Williams Avenue and North Gantenbien Ave., Russell Street and Graham Street from IR to Mixed Use/Residential.

Dear Portland City Council Members,

The North Northeast Business Association (NNEBA), an organization whose goal is to improve the economic and business climate in inner North Northeast Portland since 1977, believes it is long overdue for Emanuel Hospital to follow through with its signed promise it made in March 1971 with the City of Portland and community which was called the Replacement Housing Agreement. NNEBA, not to be confused with NEBBA (NE Broadway Business Association) encourage Portland's City Council to begin this process by rezoning the three block area between North Williams Ave., North Gantenbien Ave., North Russell Street and North Graham Street from IR to a Mixed Use/Residential zone as part of the new Comprehensive Plan.

Our goal is a revival of the once, thriving African American business and residential district by creating a center for a diverse population and uses such as retail, housing and a health care vocational training school for high school and junior college students. This cannot be done with the current IR zone which is for exclusive hospital use. Emanuel could then fulfill its promise to give up the properly zoned land for the development of 180 to 300 affordable housing units. NNEBA and others wish to heal the wounds that are still felt in our community. Without dwelling too much on the violations of the past it is important to understand the following historical facts in order to move forward.

Portland was no different than many other cities throughout the United States in regards to racist real estate and urban "renewal" actions. Up to 1952 districts were redlined so that minorities could not buy properties in certain neighborhoods. After the Vanport flood in 1948 many black families and individuals purchased and rented properties in designated north and northeast neighborhoods such as Eliot, where Emanuel Hospital was established in 1915. In 1960 Emanuel asked the recently formed Portland Development Commission (PDC) to create a new urban renewal district surrounding the hospital. In 1962 PDC completed a report stating that the area around Emanuel Hospital was unfit for residential rehabilitation and recommended land clearance to make way for Emanuel's urban renewal project.

While planning continued by Emanuel and PDC, residents in neighborhoods adjacent to Eliot took advantage of a popular PDC housing rehabilitation program called Albina Neighborhood Improvement Project (ANIP). In 1967 more than 1000 Eliot citizens petitioned the City Council to extend the ANIP to south of Fremont. PDC denied the request because the area was already targeted for Emanuel's urban renewal efforts.

On February 28, 1967, Emanuel announced its four phase plan for the removal and development of 22 blocks of the nearby properties. Between 1963 and 1969, Emanuel created its own blighted conditions surrounding them by buying 101 properties and cleared the neighborhood of many buildings worthy of rehabilitation.

On May 30, 1970 PDC announced receiving \$5 million from the Federal Government to acquire another 209 households for Emanuel and displace 111 families and 98 individuals. The threat or use of eminent domain powers, reserved only for public jurisdictional use for outstanding public need, not private needs, were illegally used to force some unwilling landowners to capitulate and sell. This process of displacing families, eliminating jobs, demolishing historic properties and clearing 22 blocks of residential and commercial properties tore the heart out of the predominately black community.

A decade of planning by Emanuel Hospital and PDC had occurred before the first public hearing was held on July 29, 1970. Emanuel Displacement Persons Association (EDPA) formed soon thereafter, but it was too late to stop Emanuel's and PDC's plans. EDPA did manage to delay the project via petitioning the Federal Housing and Urban Development Agency in Washington D.C, to intervene and demand a compromise. The hospital project moved forward after EDPA, Emanuel Hospital, Housing Authority of Portland, PDC, Model Cities Planning Board and City Demonstration Agency signed a Replacement Housing Agreement in March of 1971. The Agreement provided for the development of 180 to 300 housing units to replace the demolished homes. Shortly after signing the agreement Emanuel Hospital stated that it would provide land for the replacement housing, but would not be responsible for funding or developing it. Portland's Housing Authority, PDC and the Portland City Councils since then have not offered any housing funds for development in Emanuel's IR zone.

Of the four phased plan of Emanuel Hospital, in the 1960's and 70's only two phases were developed. The most important third phase for the community, which included 180 to 300 low income multi-family units, was never developed because on April 7, 1973, Emanuel announced that the Federal funds they applied for were curtailed. The demolition of buildings continued anyway even though plans for development were dropped.

The IR zone classification of the property has been a detriment to the City of Portland. For 42 years it has been a greater blight to the North Portland community than it was before demolition of the popular historic commercial district. No jobs, property taxes or housing has occurred in this three block location that has become desirable for development. Emanuel Hospital has no interest in developing housing or hospital related uses in the near future on these blocks.

NNEBA and the community encourage the Portland City Council to take a proactive position and change the institutionalized zone to more community based uses. The Portland City Council should also help create a development corporation involving the community, Legacy, Portland Community College, and PDC for a land transfer by Emanuel for 180 to 300 housing units and plan the future use of what remains of the three blocks in question.

Thank you,


NNEBA Board Chair, Joyce Taylor



NNEBA Transportation & Land Use Rep., Brad Perkins

December 14, 2015

George J. Brown, MD, CEO Legacy Health Systems

Re: Legacy's reconciliation with the Community

Dear Dr. Brown,

It is long overdue for Legacy's reconciliation with the African American and Eliot Community. Rather than dwell on the obvious, the Community and Legacy Health need to heal the wounds that the former residents suffered by Emanuel's actions over 40 years ago. Although, the level of past animosity towards Emanuel Hospital today is not what it was in the past, when the residents and businesses were forcefully displaced, it is time to officially begin negotiations and planning for the land that was promised to the community in 1971.

We are encouraged by your quotes, "We are offering and committing to a process by which the Community can be involved as we consider future development for the Emanuel campus." The only thing different by your quote is that the Community is now taking the initiative and wants to engage in planning for the development of the 300 residential units on the three blocks as described in the November 19th, 2015 letter to the Portland City Council (please see attached letter).

Ten years ago my attempts to work with Legacy's Property Manager, Larry Hill, was to no avail. Today, the Community is very fortunate to have you as the current CEO of Legacy Health Systems. Emanuel Hospital's troubled history documented on placards displayed in Emanuel's dining area is well done and a blessing to the Community. Your words, "We do this because it is the right thing to do. Part of healing is acknowledging past wrongs and ensuring that they are never repeated," couldn't be better said.

Other quotes on display say "Emanuel is currently engaged in reconciliation efforts to acknowledge and honor those affected by the experience of the 1960's and 70's....Legacy Emanuel offers job shadowing and internship opportunities for students from local schools, including Jefferson and Benson Polytechnic high schools." I think our efforts should be strengthened by including a medical/technical school at this location with 300 units of housing and retail to revitalize the once existing black not "blighted" community.

The North Northeast Business Association and the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods hope that we will work together to begin the process of healing. We are hoping to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,



Brad Perkins, Transportation/Land Use Chair
North Northeast Business Association
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