

Metro, Portland hold affordable housing workshop related to future light rail line

SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PLAN

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

An affordable housing workshop related to the future southwest light rail line was held on Oct. 14 at Markham Elementary School. Over 100 citizens participated.

Sponsored by the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, Mayor Ted Wheeler was also invited to share the city's role on the future of housing in the transportation corridor.

To ensure that the southwest corridor is not only a place where people will travel through, but also remain livable for future generations, both the cities of Portland and Tigard are developing housing strategies which will support public investments with inclusion, equal access to opportunities, and diversity in the community.

In December 2016, the Metro Council unanimously voted to award \$575,000 in grants to support equitable housing in seven communities around greater Portland.

Metro planners were on hand to discuss the process. Chris Ford, Metro project manager, said that by the year 2035, an additional 70,000 residents will be living in southwest Portland.

"The southwest corridor project planning began in 2011," Ford said. "By summer of 2018, a preferred route will be decided but we won't really know until 2021 if everything is finalized.

"Then there will be four years of construction and by summer of 2025, we'll be ready to roll."

Ford explained that the current housing crisis has impacted 3,500 lower income renters in the southwest who are paying over 50 percent of their income on housing.

Ford said that parts of an equitable

housing strategy include committing early financial resources, preventing residential and cultural displacement, and increasing choices for new homes.

"The new MAX line is not just about transportation," Mayor Ted Wheeler said, "It's about meeting other goals of inclusion, a sense of community, prosperity, and creating jobs.

"Rents have increased by 30 percent since 2012 while household wages have remained stagnant," Wheeler said. "More residents are sliding into housing insecurity."

Wheeler said when the North Interstate Avenue MAX line was built, the city made many promises.

"We didn't follow up with the community," Wheeler said. "Many in the private sector made speculative decisions and displaced residents along Interstate. We own these mistakes."

Wheeler promised he would work together with partners.

"We need to dig deeper into resources investing in land," Wheeler said. "We need the private sector to make mixed-income housing work with TriMet. Funding would be included in an upcoming proposed bond measure."

Wheeler asked TriMet to include \$100 million for affordable housing in the \$1.7 billion regional transportation funding measure it is preparing for the November 2018 ballot.

The potential bond measure tentatively includes \$750 million as the region's share of the \$2.4 billion light rail line, and \$950 million for local congestion relief and safety projects.

In November 2016, Portland voters overwhelmingly approved a \$258 million bond for affordable housing and unseated City Commissioner Steve Novick in favor of Chloe Eudaly, a bookstore owner and renters' rights activist who campaigned chiefly on housing.



More than 100 residents and government officials met on Oct. 14 to provide input into affordable housing strategies along the future light rail line in Southwest Portland. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Following Wheeler's remarks, Katrina Holland, executive director of the Community Alliance of Tenants spoke.

"It's very clear who is denied affordable housing: people who look like me!" said Holland, who is African-American.

"We're here to stop that," she said. "We need to enact some tenant's actions policy to prevent issues. Fair housing issue is a civil rights issue. The refugee community needs to be given more safety and stability. We need to pump money into the issue."

Holland said that residents can get involved by connecting with neighbors, volunteer with local housing organizations, and share their comments on the transit planning process.

When the vetting and community input are finalized, a unified, strategic approach to the corridor housing will be presented to the cities to take action. This will include a way to guide action and track housing progress, proposals for financing sources, and supportive land use policies to meet the corridor's housing targets.

(Continued on Page 6)

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