

Portland must choose to end displacement injustice

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Portland's African-American community knows well that the repeated displacement of our people from their homes and neighborhoods is not an accident. It is the result of explicit political decisions that have been made over the course of many decades. However, instead of continuing to cause and allow mass displacement, we can change course and rebuild communities that have been torn apart. We can also prioritize the health and stability of our families by preventing further displacement and expanding access to affordable housing citywide.

That is why the Urban League of Portland joins its partners in the Anti-Displacement PDX campaign to demand that City Council enact bold anti-displacement measures as part of Portland's new Comprehensive Plan. The drafting of this plan, which will guide our city's development for the next 20 years, is an opportunity to decide what kind of city we want to be.

In past decades, African-American families were removed from their homes to make way for freeways and a series of "urban renewal" projects. In more recent years, displacement has occurred through gentrification, which is fueled by public policy and investment, and enabled by our leaders' repeated decisions to tolerate displacement as housing costs spiral out of control. Though this ongoing displacement through gentrification is predictable, it is not inevitable. Instead of allowing Portland to become more exclusive and less accessible to African Americans and other people of color, we must choose, as a city, to change this pattern of injustice.

Charlene Campbell, 62, is one of many black Portlanders who have been displaced from their neighborhoods in recent years. Campbell grew up in a tight-knit black community in North Portland, but as an adult she moved from place to place,

progressively farther from where she grew up. Rising housing costs and being at the mercy of her landlords' decisions created constant uncertainty.

"It affects a lot because you don't know whether you're going to be in a place or on the streets," Campbell said.

After receiving a "no cause" eviction from her landlord seven years ago, Charlene found she could no longer afford to live in her own neighborhood and moved in with her daughter and granddaughters in East Portland.

"There are more blacks living out here than before," Campbell said. "All those people you mean when you say, 'I wonder what happened to them,' they're out here." Yet the community is splintered and dispersed. Unlike where she grew up in North Portland, Charlene found few friends in her new neighborhood and, for the most part, kept to herself.

Charlene is just one of thousands of African Americans and other people of color who have been pushed out of their

neighborhoods. Thousands more stand at risk of displacement due to our continued, willful inaction. Portland must change course now, starting with the Comprehensive Plan.

As a result of the advocacy of the 30 community-based organizations that make up Anti-Displacement PDX, the draft Comprehensive Plan passed in July by the Planning and Sustainability Commission includes over two dozen anti-displacement measures.

"We are grateful for the vision and leadership of the PSC to advance a draft Comprehensive Plan to City Council that will help end displacement and build an equitable future for the black community, and for the city as a whole," said Katie Sawicki, Policy Director for the Urban League of Portland. Now, City Council's responsibility is simple: pass a final Comprehensive Plan that includes all of the anti-displacement policies that have already been added by the PSC.

Several of these policies are particularly

important to Portland's black community. For instance, the plan calls for communities that will be most affected by the results of a planning policy decision to be at the forefront of making that decision. So, when a policy will have an effect on the cost of housing in a particular neighborhood, the low-income residents of that neighborhood should guide that decision.

Other policies in the draft Comprehensive Plan would help our communities control land and development and keep housing affordable. For example, the plan now calls for land to be set aside proactively in gentrifying neighborhoods, in order to keep it off of the market and reserve it for affordable housing.

When new plans or zoning decisions are adopted, or new light rail lines are built, the Comprehensive Plan would require the city to study the impact of those decisions on the affordability of housing and the potential for residents to be displaced. When displacement is anticipated, proactive measures must be carried out to prevent it and to ensure that affordable housing opportunities will exist into the future.

The draft Comprehensive Plan also calls for the city to make intentional, coordinated investments to rebuild our scattered communities, which would support a "right of return" to their former neighborhoods for African-Americans and others who have been displaced by past city actions and by gentrification.

We urge City Council to keep all of these new anti-displacement measures in the final Comprehensive Plan. By doing so, we can improve thousands of lives by ending the cycles of displacement and gentrification that continue to tear apart the city's most affected communities.

There is no excuse for history to continue repeating itself. The moment to act is now.

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Charlene Campbell, who was displaced from North Portland by rising housing costs and a no-cause eviction.

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young people. We've really fought very hard to work with young people to be part of the conversation, questions and answers, all of that. Conversations have been lively because there's always people who want to talk about Black Lives Matter, people who want to talk about the legacy of the Panthers, people who want to talk about the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover. So they've been very, very, very lively.

A.G.: Why did you decide to include these conversations after the screenings?

S.N.: I think because it's a film you want to talk about. We want people to talk about the film, and we want people to talk about how it relates to our lives today – to this day! You can't help but think about – when you see the film – how 50 years later these things are still with us. Police brutality, it's right there in the front of our minds. And it's not like it left and came back, it's been there. One thing we found from doing the screenings is that everybody, a lot of people, come there with some opinion about the Panthers, or they know about one event or they know about one person and they'll say, "Why didn't you include this event?" or "What about that person?" or "What about this thing?" which is very different from most films that I've worked on. We've gotten that the film is too easy on the Panthers from critics, we've gotten that the film is too hard on the Panthers from critics, so I think we're in a beautiful (place) somewhere right there in the middle.



Charles Bursey hands a plate of food to a child seated at Free Breakfast Program.

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