

# Interstate Renewal Provides Challenges and Opportunities for Minority Businesses

By Lee Perlman for The Portland

The new Interstate Urban Renewal District will mean a whole new world for minority-owned businesses within it, with new dangers but also opportunities.

Stretching at its widest points from North and Northeast Broadway to the Columbia Slough and from the Burlington-Northern railroad tracks to Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, the district takes in 3700 acres. In the next 20 years \$300 million in taxes generated by

local property owners will be reserved for use within this area. The first \$30 million of this are earmarked for a new MAX light rail line along North Interstate Avenue. How to spend the rest is still under discussion, but guidelines created by a citizen committee call for some of the funds to be spent on economic development, including aid for entrepreneurship, business expansion, training facilities and creating a positive business environment. They

also call for retaining existing residents and businesses at all costs.

Carl Flipper, director of the Humboldt Target Area Program, says there will be "significant hardships" for businesses along Interstate itself during the light rail construction. Hopefully, this can be overcome through signage, to help people find the business and its parking, and subsidies for advertising and other business expenses. "It would be very challenging indeed to

encourage new business startups during construction," he says.

During this period, development activity is more likely along North Williams, Vancouver, Albina and Denver avenues and Killingsworth Street.

"On the positive side I see unprecedented opportunities for emerging African-American businesses because we have a commitment to pull out all the stops to rekindle the spirit of enterprise in the community," Flipper says.

Specifically how? Jacky Strong would like to see the district

provide "some low-interest loans with favorable payback schedules

for expansion." Strong currently operates Ma and Pa Strong's

Kitchen at 4134 N. Vancouver Ave. He is pursuing a mixed use project combining ground floor retail with mixed-income housing

at 20 N. Killingsworth St. Consultant Peter Wilcox says the project could use help with "pre-development" costs such as

surveying and soils testing.

Janet Bauer, director of the Mississippi Avenue Target Area, points out that ur-

ban renewal funds can pay for physical improvements and some services such as development opportunity assessments, but not for on-going programs and maintenance.

but it could speed it up unless we take specific steps."

Betty Jo Austin believes in the district. Her Mrs. B.J.'s Academy for Hair Design at 435 N. Killingsworth St. offers accredited training in hair,

face and nail cosmetology, with

emphasis on care of African-American hair. Austen attended

meetings about the proposed district and was impressed.

*"On the positive side I see unprecedented opportunities for emerging African-American businesses because we have a commitment to pull out all the stops to rekindle the spirit of enterprise in the community." - Carl Flipper, director of the Humboldt Target Area Program*

She also raises the specter of gentrification. Urban renewal activity

"calls attention to the area, creates incentives to invest and move in, and creates competition. Then it may be harder for people without a lot of capital to buy or lease on the street. We need to be careful. If we don't provide support, we're not doing minority businesses a favor."

Flipper sees it differently. "If what business owners are looking for is low rent, they may have to start looking toward another part of town. If they want to be a productive business employing people in the community and taking part in the revitalization, they can be equal partners. If they want to own the property they're currently occupying, we can help with that.

"There's good gentrification and bad gentrification involving displacement. Both have been going on for a decade. The new district is not the cause of that,

"I saw real camaraderie between neighborhoods, businesses,

public and private," she says. "There was concern and excitement,

friendliness and beauty. It can't be anything but good. It will

affect business in a very positive way. I'm real tickled my husband and I will be here to see it."

Specifically, Austen would like to see "buildings restored and occupied, the street scape well lit, the area thriving as if you were in New York City, with people out on the street enjoying themselves. I'd like to see cultural activities and things happening, such as the Alberta Street Fair."

Gentrification "is a concern," she says. "We need to work at

the grass roots level to accommodate everyone."



Gail and Luther Strong, Co-owners of Ma & Pa Strong's Kitchen

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