

Sale Worries Neighbors

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

mitted.” He reiterated that the church is still prioritizing a non-profit or service provider at or near market value for the sale.

“To that end we are willing to have conversation with any person or organization,” he added.

The real estate tour involved a walk-through of the building when Head Start classes were still in session, which upset staff and families, Herndon said.

What’s more, the lease to Albina Head Start is set to expire at the end of June and the Methodist conference has not offered to extend it, despite requests, Herndon said.

Albina Head Start has been using the church complex for three of its classroom since the late 1970s, having worked out a less expensive rental agreement in exchange for paying for utilities and occasional building upgrades with the former local congregation.

The former Woodlawn United Methodist Church was the home to a diverse congregation that disbanded in 2016. When the congregation dissolved, leaders at the Methodist conference met with Herndon where he requested that if they were to sell the building in the future, could they please talk to Albina Head Start before they put it up for sale on the open market so he may negotiate a possible purchase agreement.

He said they never did reach out to him before deciding to sell the building using a broker.

“Normally brokers take a bid from the highest bidder. That’s normally how that works. That’s what the business is doing. So here we go again and this is exactly what gentrification looks like,” Herndon said.

The church conference briefly considered forming a new Methodist ministry at the same location. But their Board of Trustees

ultimately voted to sell the property in December, church leaders said.

A group has formed to ask the Methodist conference to hold off on the open market until further negotiations with the local non-profits and service providers are completed. The Coffee Talk Planning Committee consists of long-time activists who share an appreciation for gathering places important to the life of Portland’s African American community. They share some of the concerns raised by the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association; Deliverance Center of Generation X Church; Albina Head Start; and Trudy Pollard, a lifelong resident of Woodlawn neighborhood who was born in the community and was a member of the Woodlawn United Methodist Church before it disbanded.

“I am disappointed, needless to say, about the status. I am assuming the property is on the open market since the realtor is conducting tours,” said Pollard, 71. Her family was one of the first to attend the original congregation. Pollard’s father, Shelton Bailey, also had a room dedicated in his honor in the church building.

Pollard had been lobbying many United Methodist officials to reconsider putting the building on the open market, arguing doing so would “reopen some of the wounds that have healed and will justify in some minds that it is still okay to maintain and promote Portland’s shameful racist gentrification of its Black Community.”

“My fear is that a developer will come in and quickly make an attractive offer and level the building and replace it with a multiplex of sorts and mask it as affordable housing,” Pollard wrote in an April 10 letter to Bishop Elaine Stanovsky of Greater Northwest Area of the United Methodist Church. She also wrote a similar letter to the United

Methodist Idaho-Oregon Conference Board of Trustees Chair Larry McClure on April 8.

Deliverance Center of Generation X Pastor Treneil Washington said he sent a purchase proposal to the church conference on Friday. He too was disappointed that a real estate broker was giving tours of the building.

In his own purchase proposal, Washington hoped to allow his church and a non-profit he runs, called Torch of Hope—a program to help people get back on their feet after coming out of prison, to buy the property for \$1.4 million, over a 20 year period. Washington, who also runs a for-profit construction contracting company, said he would continue to allow Albina Head Start to lease the property as well, in that scenario.

“I understand that this thing is bigger than money. It’s about hope. It’s about saving a place for people that have already been pushed out,” Washington said.

The fair market value for the 6,648 square foot property is listed by the Multnomah County Assessor at almost \$1.7 million. Built in 1957, the site provided space for a chapel and classrooms serving a Portland congregation that originally formed in 1891, Nelson said.

Albina Head Start has 33 Head Start classrooms overall—serving children three to five-- from 22 Early Start centers—serving prenatal to three year olds--around Portland.

The Tina Clegg Albina Head Start Center at Woodlawn United Methodist has been servicing low income children and families in three Head Start classrooms for over 40 years. Currently it serves about 60 children and their families, who receive social service support through housing, food, and security assistance, among many other services. About 70 percent of the staff are current or former Head Start recipients, and are majority black or Latino, Herndon said. The

organization is also incredibly culturally diverse, with staff originating from over 25 different countries and who speak as many different languages.

Offsetting its rental costs, Albina Head Start has facilitated repairs to the building over the years, as part of their agreement with the original congregation. The organization installed two new furnaces and remodeled the kitchen in 2015, and added two new air conditioning units in 2017.

When the building’s management fell under the purview of the United Methodist Oregon-Idaho Conference, after the original congregation subsided three years ago due to dwindling membership, Albina Head Start’s rent jumped by 40 percent, Herndon said.

The management of the building, at the behest of the wider church organization, has changed hands quite a bit. It had been previously managed by Pollard, from the mid 2000s until 2017, but a community organization called Multicultural Impact Center (MIC), headed by Pastor Jon Umdenstock, took reigns after the congregation collapsed. Umdenstock moved on to a ministry in Idaho and the management since 2018 has fallen into the hands of Washington and his Deliverance Center of Generation X, a new congregation that has been using the space for what will be one year next month.

The building is also host to other community programs, like an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting place of over 10 years, and The People’s Poets, an open mic event whose goal is to amplify voices of color, hosted by MIC.

Nelson advised that “Any person or organization, particularly those who are current tenants, who are interested in purchasing the former Woodlawn UMC property can contact Rev. Daniel Wilson-Fey, Conference Treasurer for more information about the process at 1505 S.W. 18th Ave. Portland, OR 97201.”



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