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Tubman School Could Move for I-5



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/PORTLAND OBSERVER PUBLISHER

Portland Public Schools is getting support from Gov. Kate Brown to move Harriet Tubman Middle school to another location because of air pollution impacts.

School district and governor eye solution

BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Moving Harriet Tubman Middle School to another location because of air pollution impacts has gained traction with new demands from the Portland School Board and an endorsement of the idea from Gov. Kate Brown.

The school which has historically served Portland's African American community from its perch above I-5 had \$10 million in heating and cooling equipment upgrades to mitigate toxins from air pollution a few years earlier as it established the only middle school serving the Black community in Albina, but now faces added environmental risks with plans to expand the highway at the Rose Quarter.

Former School Board Chair Julia Brim-Edwards updated the panel last week on history of the site and presented a district reso-

lution demanding that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) compensate the district for past negative impacts for building a freeway alongside the school initially and to pay for the relocation of Harriet Tubman if it moves forward with plans for widening the freeway.

The current board then passed the resolution unanimously, led by current Chair Michelle DePass, a lifelong member of Portland's African American community, and two new members of the Black community elected last May.

Brim-Edwards told the Portland Observer that she has spoken with Gov. Brown about the district's concerns and the governor indicated she supports moving the school.

A spokesman for the governor recently told the Willamette Week that Brown finds the air quality and health impacts to students at Harriet Tubman to be very concerning and she supports the state paying for moving the school regardless of what form the Rose Quarter project takes.

The cost to move the school is estimated at \$84 million, not

including the 6 to 9 acres of land needed for the new site which the district would want to remain in the Albina community, Brim-Edwards said.

The school district resolution also gives support to the Albina Vision Trust and the Black community to reclaim the Albina community as a center of African American life in Portland in a push similar to the district's desire for equitable access to public education, a key component of the civil rights movement and the fight for racial justice.

Brim-Edwards said she is encouraged that the I-5 project could be a "win, win, win" for the district and the African American community because ODOT has recently concluded it might be able to add caps to the freeway at the Rose Quarter to support Albina Visions plans for new housing and commercial activity for the area, and the project could also move forward with the jobs promised to minority contractors and workers from its construction, a major desire for the community, Brim-Edwards said.

Unpaid Renters Brace for Evictions

Oregon had a housing crisis before the coronavirus pandemic, and since then it has only been exacerbated. It's hard to say exactly how much homelessness will increase in Oregon with evictions pending on both the federal and local levels.

However, one indication of the scope of the problem is census data in July showing 38% of Oregon tenants who responded to a survey — or more than 35,000 renters — said that it was "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that they would be evicted from their home.

A federal freeze on most evictions was scheduled to expire Saturday, but the Biden administration extended the date Tuesday by two months. The original moratorium,

put in place by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in September, was successfully challenged in court by landlords arguing they also had bills to pay. They pointed out that tenants could access nearly \$47 billion in federal money set aside to help pay rents and related expenses.

Advocates for tenants said the distribution of the money had been slow and that more time was needed to distribute it and repay landlords.

Oregon is one of several states that enacted a moratorium last year halting eviction proceedings for residents who have experienced financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the measure expired in June.

As a result, Oregon lawmakers passed a "Safe Harbor" amendment to pause eviction for tenants who are unable to pay July or August rent if they provide proof to their landlord that they have applied for rental assistance.

In addition, commissioners in Multnomah County voted earlier this month to extend the "Safe Harbor" amendment through the end of September. Officials say an additional month will give service providers more time to process and distribute funds to struggling tenants.

Also, earlier this year Oregon lawmakers voted to extend the grace period for past-due rent during the moratorium, allowing tenants to have until Feb. 28, 2022, to pay back rent.

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