

Rekindling a Promise

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“Affordable housing is not the remedy to what happened to these specific families because you can’t build wealth in affordable housing you don’t own,” Johnson said. Instead of trying to generate cash from the land, the City Council needs to focus on its unfulfilled promises, he said.

Using eminent domain, the city took 55 acres for the expansion of Emanuel Hospital, but according to the report, “much of the expansion area remained vacant and disinvestment by the city blighted the neighborhood.”

Then, in the late 1990s, in the midst of a major population boom and new light rail mass transit on Interstate Avenue, according to the report, the city developed additional plans for housing in the Interstate 5 corridor and the Albina community.

“The ensuing wave of gentrification has earned nationwide attention,” the report states, “and the area that was once the heart of Portland’s Black community has become whiter than Portland overall.”

The report pulls no punches in laying blame: “Racist planning and urban renewal practices carried out by the City of Portland, the state of Oregon and other institutions have caused a range of harms against Portland’s Black residents.”

In addition to the loss of real estate properties, which can be quantified, according to the report, there are incurable losses to the Albina community that include “broken social networks and loss of ownership



A group of homes in the Albina community represent the 171 houses lost to urban renewal and the expansion of Emanuel Hospital during the 1970s. Much of the historically Black neighborhood was labeled “blighted” and marked for urban redevelopment, which allowed the city to condemn the properties. Black businesses were also displaced.

and control over neighborhood institutions and assets.”

Those hard to quantify incurable losses, according to EDPA2 members, are as valuable as curable assets and the impacts “leave an indelible pain and memory that accompanies the survivors of forced removal for the rest of their lives.”

Following the release of the report on Feb. 14, Byrd led an EDPA2 Zoom meeting that stretched to two hours, with input from many survivors and the PSU task force that created the report, led by grad

student Stephen Greenslade.

Greenslade said before properties were confiscated for the Emmanuel expansion, the Albina community was one of the only places in Portland where Black communities could live.

“It was beginning to thrive in the late 1950s and ‘60s and we found the blight was the effect of urban renewal rather than the mitigating cause,” he said.

In the Zoom meeting, Byrd recalled the redlining that was prevalent in times past, but that early residents of

the Albina neighborhood were able to get financing for building or repairing their homes not from banks, but from first-generation immigrants.

“My grandmother purchased a house from a German, and Jewish people and Austrians sold to Blacks,” she said.

Many voices spoke out during the Zoom meeting, including Sharon Gary-Smith, president of the Portland NAACP, who strongly criticized the city.

“Taking homes for pennies on the dollar, declaring multiracial neighborhoods ‘blighted’ in order to condemn and take them for the ‘public’s best interest,’ that’s theft,” she said. “The data (in the PSU report) is not just academic, it lives and centers on the lives of the people impacted.”

If Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler can suggest giving a \$25,000 re-hiring bonus to police officers who have quit or retired, then the city has the money for restitution to Albina survivors and descendants, Gary-Smith said.

“We know he can find the money to repay community homeowners who were stolen from,” she said.

Byrd and others are also planning further action, including the purchase of a home in the Albina area which will serve as headquarters for EDPA2, with a gofund-me.com account at <https://bit.ly/3s5b0R9>.

“Black folks in this country are in a constant state of reclamation, a constant state to have to reclaim what was yours because of various reasons, and it goes back to slavery,” she said. “It’s reclaiming what is ours.”



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