

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The North Williams Avenue That Was – 1956

By Lisa Loving
Of *The Skanner News*
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Doctors' offices, bike shops, groceries, churches and an ice cream store. Manufacturing, greenspace, boutiques, salons and plenty of affordable housing.

If ever the City of Portland wanted a model for a 20-minute urban neighborhood, Albina in 1956 was it.

Until city leaders opted to bulldoze it for "urban renewal."

The current debate about North Williams Avenue – once the heart of Albina's business district — is only the latest chapter in a long story of development and redevelopment.

The Skanner News this week unveils our special tribute to the families who lost their homes and businesses over the past 60 years with this interactive Google map feature listing every business along North Williams Avenue in 1956 – including Dr. DeNorval Unthank's medical office — paired with a street view of what is on North Williams now (Go to "Portland, Or., Gentrification Map: The North Williams Avenue That Was – 1956")

We left out private homes, of which there were many, to link our historical account of

gentrification there on the impact of city policies on small businesses.

A Fateful Era

For Albina, the district which included the city's traditionally African American neighborhoods, 1956 represents the height of home ownership, business success and tightly-bound family connections.

It was a watershed year for other reasons as well: Terry Doyle Schunk won election to mayor on an urban renewal platform, firmly laying the track for creation of the Portland Development Commission two

By 1962, the PDC's "Central Albina Study" earmarked the area as "beyond rehabilitation." The city document "History of Portland's African American Community (1805-to the Present)" quotes the study:

"Clearly, urban renewal, largely clearance, appears to be the only solution to, not only blight that presently exists in central Albina, but also to avoid the spread of that blight to other surrounding areas."

The Polk's Guide for that year shows scores of vacant properties along North Williams.

When it came time for local officials to win grant funds from the federal government to expand Emanuel Hospital, the 1966 grant application read, in part:

"There is little doubt that the greatest concentration of Portland's urban blight can be found in the Albina area encompassing the Emanuel Hospital. This area contains the highest concentration of low-income families and experiences the highest incidence rate of crime in the City of Portland. Approximately 75 percent to 80 percent of Portland's Negro population live within the area. The area contains a high percentage of substandard housing and a high rate of



North Williams

Contrary to popular belief, ghetto neighborhoods are not a chance occurrence

years later – the arm of city government which carried out wide-scale demolition of neighborhoods for decades to come.

It was the year voters approved construction of Memorial Coliseum in the Eliot neighborhood, ensuring the tear-down of more than 450 homes and businesses.

It was also the year federal officials approved highway construction funds that would pave Interstates 5 and 99 right through hundreds of homes and storefronts, destroying more than 1,100 housing units in South Albina.

unemployment."

Portland won the grant, and demolition of buildings began in the late 1960s. Within a few years the federal money ran out for Emanuel Hospital expansion – after the demolition was complete.

Cause and Effect

Contrary to popular belief, ghetto neighborhoods are not a chance occurrence, nor are they the natural evolution of "old housing stock" that hasn't been properly maintained by its owners.

In her ground-breaking study, "Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment, 1940-2000," Portland State Urban Studies Adjunct Professor Karen J. Gibson detailed how municipal development policies, coupled with racism in the real estate

See WILLIAMS on page 13

For more about your neighborhood go online to www.TheSkanner.com

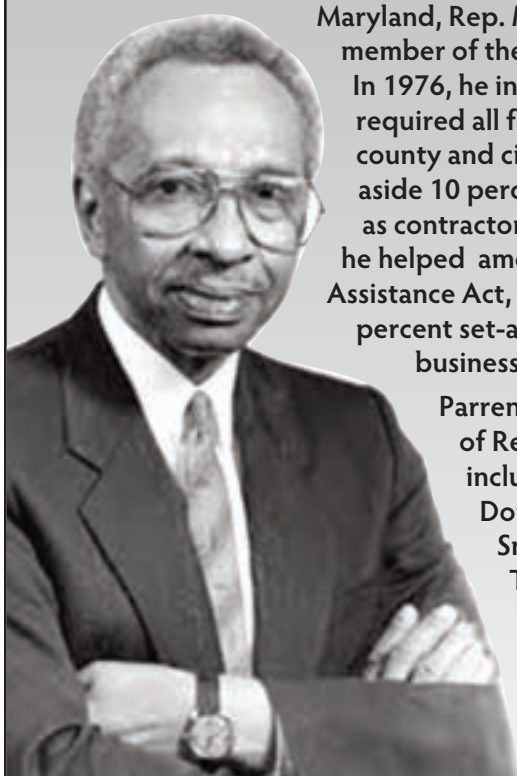
Celebrating Black History

Parren J. Mitchell was the first black elected to Congress from Maryland

Parren Mitchell was born in Maryland on April 29, 1922. After serving in WWII and earning a Purple Heart, Mitchell graduated from Morgan College, later named Morgan State University. He went on to gain a master's degree in sociology from the University of Maryland.

In 1970, as the first black elected to Congress from Maryland, Rep. Mitchell became an outspoken member of the Congressional Black Caucus. In 1976, he introduced legislation that required all federal grants going to state, county and city municipal government to set aside 10 percent for minority firms working as contractors and subcontractors. In 1982, he helped amend the Surface Transportation Assistance Act, which also required a 10 percent set-aside for disadvantaged businesses.

Parren Mitchell chaired several House of Representatives' committees, including: the Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy, the Small Business committee, the Task Force on Minority Enterprise and the Congressional Black Caucus Minority Enterprise and Economic Development Committee.



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