

New Executive Director to Spearhead Oregon Black Community Restoration Project

Azalea Renfield leads the restoration of the historic Hill Block as Executive Director of Williams & Russell CDC

Portland, OR – April 22, 2024 – Today, the Williams & Russell Community Development Corporation (W&R CDC), a community-driven initiative to revitalize the historically Black neighborhood of Albina in Portland, Oregon, announced the appointment of Azalea (AH-za-lay-ah) Renfield (she/her) as Executive Director. With over ten years of experience managing housing programs and services, Renfield’s responsibilities as Executive Director include all aspects of the nonprofit’s operations, focusing on policy, housing, community & economic development, and partnerships.

Azalea Renfield, a seasoned public servant with over a decade of experience in local government, has steadfastly advocated for communities of color. Her passion lies in championing equity, human rights and economic empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups such as children, seniors and women of color.

Renfield holds several master’s degrees in public policy, public and nonprofit administration, politics, and resource management from top institutions, including the University of the Pacific’s McGeorge School of Law, the University of San Francisco, and Golden Gate University. She also holds a BA from the University of California, San Diego. Outside of work, Renfield enjoys spending time with family, friends, and the community.



“I chose to work with W&R CDC because I understand displacement firsthand as a Black, African American woman. We can actualize the vision many want to see with Adre, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Prosper Portland, and the Portland Housing Bureau. For this reason, I couldn’t be more excited to help rebuild

and revitalize the Hill Block into something the Black community of Portland loves and deserves.”

The Williams & Russell CDC has unveiled plans for the Williams & Russell Project, a [\\$115 million](#) multi-project development to revitalize the historic Hill Block. Centered on a 1.7-acre vacant block between North Williams Avenue and North Vancouver Avenue at the intersection of North Knott Street, the Williams Russell property is within the neighborhood that the Prosper Portland (then called the Portland Development Commission) condemned in the early 1970s under urban renewal for an expansion of the Emanuel Hospital campus, an action that displaced 171 families, 74 percent of which were African American. Once home to a bustling and prosperous business center, the project seeks to address past injustices by providing affordable rental apartments, homeownership opportunities and business ventures tailored to the needs of those affected by displacement. By honoring Portland's Black community and promoting economic empowerment, the project aims to create a healthier economy while fostering a sense of belonging and resilience within the neighborhood.

“We are excited to welcome Azalea Renfield as the incoming Executive Director of Williams & Russell CDC,” said Bryson E. Davis, Board Chair of Williams & Russell CDC. “Her appointment signifies a pivotal moment in our mission to rejuvenate the historic Hill Block of the Albina neighborhood, once the commercial hub of Portland's Black community. This reparative project is an important step towards long overdue property justice for displaced Black Americans and Azalea’s expertise will be vital in driving this initiative forward.”

Eminent domain and urban renewal policies, including the Emanuel Hospital expansion in 1970, the 1993 Albina Community Plan, redlining and more have forced thousands of Black Oregonians and their descendants out of neighborhoods, property and land that are historically their own. Between 2000 and 2010, nearly 10,000 Black Oregonians were forced out of Portland due to decades of exclusionary tactics including discriminatory lending policies, disinvestment and strategic displacement. The Albina neighborhood is located in a portion of inner Northeast Portland, including Elliot, Boise, King, Humboldt, Overlook, Irvington and Piedmont neighborhoods. Williams & Russell CDC works closely with community organizations, black business owners and Albina neighborhood descendants to repair and revitalize this historic Black business community.

The Williams & Russell Project is on track to break ground on the first phase of construction in May 2025, and the entire project is expected to be completed in 2027.

About Williams & Russell CDC

The Williams & Russell CDC, formed in 2021, is a non-profit that funds the Williams & Russell Project, a collaborative effort between community-based organizations Prosper Portland, the Portland Housing Bureau, and Legacy Health, established in 2017. The projects have collectively secured \$10.3M in pre-development funding from Oregon Housing & Community Services (OHCS), Congressionally Directed Spending, Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF), and Meyer Memorial Trust's Justice Oregon for Black Lives, and have over \$23M in pending funding from the Portland Housing Bureau and Prosper Portland. The project involves Legacy Health returning to the community a 1.7-acre vacant block at North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue. The project aims to honor and enrich Portland's Black community, create wealth, and promote a healthier economy by providing affordable rental apartments, homeownership, and business opportunities for the community, especially for those whose families were impacted by the displacement.

Williams & Russell CDC is on a mission to restore and revitalize the Hill Block corner in Portland's historically Black Albina neighborhood, once a vibrant economic center for Black Portlanders. The Williams & Russell CDC is committed to fostering a community-led development that honors the legacy of the past while creating a thriving future. Through affordable housing, homeownership opportunities, and establishing a Black Business Hub, we aim to empower and uplift the Black community, promoting equity, wealth creation, and economic resilience. The Williams and Russell CDC strives to create a legacy of economic prosperity, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, ensuring that future generations can thrive in a supportive and flourishing environment and providing an economic development template for how governments, organizations, and communities can come together to right past wrongs.

Learn more here: <https://www.williamsrussellcdc.org/>