



Williams & Russell

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

SPRING 2020



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PORTLAND**
Building an Equitable Economy

Introduction

The Williams & Russell Community Engagement report provides an overview of the community engagement process that occurred over a span of approximately two years, from March 2018 to January 2020. The process sought to involve, by active participation, Portland's African American community, a community that has traditionally been marginalized politically and economically. The steps taken in this report illustrate the efforts to open the communication channels and take ownership of the process to reclaim the history of this undeveloped portion of land that, given its history of urban renewal and displacement of a thriving African American neighborhood, has been both a catalyst and often a polarizing divisor within the community.

Engagement produces “the voice of the people,” and thereby gives officials the feedback necessary for involved and participatory planning. This report summarizes key themes that emerged from the outreach efforts and indicates the responses to feedback received during the process.

The Williams & Russell project is a collaborative effort between a community-based Williams & Russell Project Working Group (PWG), Prosper Portland, Legacy Health and the City of 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 purpose of this report is to inform the community and support the future Request for Proposal (RFP) process which will guide the project deliverables including the development of the site and selected community priorities. One of the deliverables is a building (or buildings) on the site that serves the goal of being community-owned and/or serves the purpose of the community priorities described later in this report. Starting in October 2019, the community, through the leadership of the community-elected PWG, has participated in a multi-faceted community engagement process through meetings, surveys, and small group discussions to determine what should be constructed on the site. A roster of PWG members is provided [on page 2](#).

Historically, the site once was part of a thriving community that housed the majority of African Americans in Portland and Oregon. Institutional racism made it illegal and difficult to own land as a minority, and with few options beyond the least desirable areas of Portland, Afri-



can Americans primarily settled in the northeast quadrant of the city. Hence the area has had a long-standing history of African American residents and businesses. Therefore, the City of Portland, Prosper Portland and Legacy Health decided early on that the property should be returned to the community and that its development would be a community-led project with significant community outreach. The community-elected Project Working Group (PWG) was established to define and drive a community-centered visioning and development process. The community engagement process led by the PWG, with project partner support, has driven the informed outreach approach thus far.

Site History

In the early 1970s, Prosper Portland (then Portland Development Commission) and the City of Portland condemned, purchased and demolished 188 properties as part of the Emanuel Hospital expansion project. According to a report written by Jeana Woolley, entitled “Reconciliation Project: The Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project,” 171 households representing 88 families were removed as part of the Emanuel/PDC urban renewal project. Woolley stated that of the 188 properties PDC purchased and demolished for the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project from 1971-1973, 158 were residential and 30 were commercial/business properties.

Emanuel Hospital purchased the Williams & Russell property on September 29, 1980 for \$396,777. The deed from PDC to Emanuel Hospital as part of this acquisition required that Emanuel would “begin the redevelopment of the Property by the construction of the improvements thereon within a reasonable period of time and, in any event, the development of the Property for hospital and other related uses shall be completed by January 1, 1990.” The deed also stated that this specific requirement was “binding for the benefit of the Community and (PDC) and enforceable by PDC against (Emanuel Hospital).”

Legacy Health and Prosper Portland neither met nor enforced requirements for Legacy Health to redevelop the property. Rather than resort to legal means of remedy, the City, Prosper Portland and Legacy Health decided to work together in a collaborative manner to support economic opportunities and the social determinants of health for the community that was adversely impacted.



The Hill Block Building, built in 1890, was located on the Williams & Russell property before it was demolished in the 1970s. The distinctive building cupola now stands in Dawson Park.



The vacant Williams & Russell site, as it looks today.

Project Working Group (PWG)



The Williams & Russell Project Working Group at New Song Community Center, 2018

The significance of the property was highlighted during outreach processes related to the City's development of the North/Northeast Housing Strategy and Prosper Portland's development of the North/Northeast Community Development Initiative. Based on significant interest and the desire for a community-led approach to generate ideas for the development of the property at Williams & Russell, a community-based Project Working Group made up of 25 community members convened in January 2018. The overarching principle of connection to the N/NE community was central to the makeup of the PWG. Members represent a wide array of community partners, some with an inter-generational perspective and others with technical expertise. The PWG members were nominated via a community-led process and a public call for community-at-large interested parties, and the group is guided by a Charter it adopted in 2018. The PWG also includes representatives from Prosper Portland, Legacy Health, the Portland Housing Bureau, and the Mayor's Office. These institutional partner representatives are ex-officio and non-voting members.

The [2018 Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the PWG, Legacy Health, City of Portland and Prosper Portland established commitments, roles, and responsibilities to support a community-desired project at Williams & Russell. The [Project Working Group Charter](#) establishes the PWG's role to define and drive a transparent, community-centered and community-led process and define the development programming for the project.

The Project Working Group hosted monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of each month to discuss and outline engagement efforts the PWG has participated in and led, to advance project needs, to discuss upcoming events, and to track milestones. Project Working Group meetings are open to the general public. While the PWG is now unable to host in-person meetings due to COVID-19 health restrictions, the PWG continues to meet virtually to ensure the project moves forward. Recent actions include the preparation and issuance of a Request for Interest and early discussion of the forthcoming Request for Proposals, together with related future community events for the PWG to share their work and gather community feedback.

PWG Members

- ▶ **Cupid Alexander**, City of Portland, Mayor's Office
- ▶ **Michael Alexander**, Black United Fund & Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC)
- ▶ **Bryson Davis**, Soul District Business Association (SBDA)
- ▶ **Joy Alise Davis**, Portland African-American Leadership Forum (PAALF)
- ▶ **Anthony Deloney**, Self Enhancement Inc (SEI)
- ▶ **Lakeitha Elliott**, Community at large
- ▶ **James Faison**, Professional Business Development Group (PBDG)
- ▶ **Leslie Goodlow**, City of Portland, Portland Housing Bureau
- ▶ **Stephen Green**, Black Investment Consortium for Economic Progress (BICEP)
- ▶ **Tony Hopson**, Self Enhancement Inc (SEI)
- ▶ **Sharon Maxwell**, Community at large
- ▶ **Denetta Monk**, Urban League
- ▶ **E.D. Mondainé**, Portland National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- ▶ **Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capua**, Prosper Portland
- ▶ **Shei'Meka Owens**, Emanuel Displaced Persons Association 2
- ▶ **Justice Rajee**, Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC)
- ▶ **Walter Robinson II**, Portland African-American Leadership Forum (PAALF) & Urban League
- ▶ **Jillian Saurage**, North/Northeast Housing Strategy Committee
- ▶ **Karis Stoudamire-Phillips**, North/Northeast Community Development Initiative Oversight Committee
- ▶ **Chabre Vickers**, Wells Fargo
- ▶ **Charles Wilhoite**, Legacy Health, Board of Directors

Community Engagement Process

Project Working Group Priorities

The Williams & Russell PWG members hold strong connections to the geographic area known as the North/Northeast community. Several are second and third generation Portlanders and have personal experience and institutional knowledge about the community, family members who were displaced as a result of urban renewal tied to this area, and extremely strong ties to community-based institutions and organizations. Collectively, they have clear perspective about the needs of Portland's Black/African American community.

Based on the framework of the community and the investment potential of the parcel of land, the Hill Block Community meeting on March 27, 2018 launched a community engagement process that lasted through early 2020. Mayor Ted Wheeler and representatives from Legacy Health, Prosper Portland and the PWG attended. During its initial inquiry, the PWG determined the following priorities as most important to the community. They were:

- | | |
|--|--|
|  Housing / Affordable Rental and Home Ownership |  Support for Entrepreneurs |
|  Education / Workforce Training |  Gathering Space |
|  Community Space |  Healthcare/Social Services |
|  Childcare / Early Childhood Education |  Food/Market |
| |  Arts & Entertainment |

Community-Based Outreach

Since the beginning of this project, the PWG members have supported and welcomed honest and deep engagement with the N/NE community. Each member identified an engagement opportunity within their respective networks and the group created a diverse offering of engagements. Subsequent planned activities registered the interests



Photo by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media

and development direction of the community for the property. One such event was a social mixer that was hosted by the co-chairs of the Project Working Group at the Alberta Abbey in North Portland in collaboration with the Soul Business District Association. More than 50 invested community stakeholders attended the event and participated in the conversation.

Other PWG members held informational events tailored to the organizations they represented. Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI) focused on engagements with youth groups within its organization and captured their input and ideas about the future of the proposed development. One PWG member facilitated interviews with a focus group of senior community members and created a short video capturing intimate conversations with influential members such as Senator Avel Gordly. The Urban League representative also held information sessions for residents and community visitors at two separate locations.

Community Survey

With input from various members, the PWG designed a survey that would gauge interest, development direction and raise awareness of the project. The survey asked community members to weigh in on the priorities identified through the engagement process. It focused on quantifying and formalizing those most impacted by the displacement as well as those who still have connections to the area. The survey was distributed both online and via hard copies to allow for multiple methods of community interaction and access as well as data collection.

Community Open House

In addition to the survey comments, community feedback was also gathered at an open house event on January 9, 2020. Community members were asked about what they envisioned to be developed on the property and what specific outcomes they wanted to prioritize from the development. Some of the feedback from that event included needs of the community, which was expressed around the types of services and business that should operate in the space. Those services included navigation sites for supportive resources like legal help, housing supports, and workforce development. Other community needs were expressed as a need for housing and business ownership opportunities within the Black community; community space open accessible to youth and seniors; a sustainably developed property with a high priority on the importance and significance of nature and aesthetics, ultimately to create a sense of place where people will want to gather.

Outreach Methodology

The Project Working Group and its many project partners used various communication channels to reach a wider audience. This included promoting events through a N/NE Portland email list, which reaches more than 1,500 community stakeholders, as well as through Prosper Portland's communication channels including its website. In addition, the project received attention and promotions through Twitter and Facebook, reaching more than 15,000 followers across social media channels.

Printed materials played an important role in creating an additional opportunity for disseminating information to community members. Open house posters were created to help spread the word about the open house event. The posters and other printed materials were distributed at the following places: Matt Dishman Community Center, Open Haus, Elevated Coffee, Urban League, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative (PCRI), Kairos, and Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI).

The PWG members created marketing material for the promotion of their events including welcome signs, supportive map data, comment cards and sign-in sheets. The information captured throughout this engagement process included videos of meetings and events, transcribed recordings, comment cards, survey responses both online and through paper copies, photographs, and feedback received through online communication channels. The Project Working Group and the N/NE Community utilized the information to confirm the development priorities of the site and as decisive direction for the community's future.

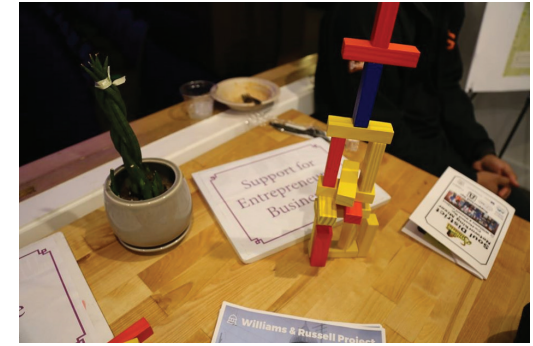
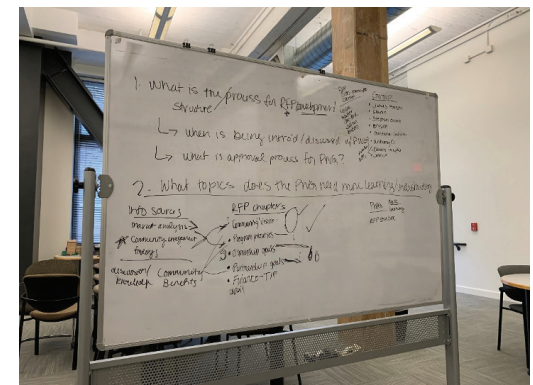


Photo by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media



Engagement Outcomes

In all, more than 600 people have shared their perspectives and ideas throughout the outreach mechanisms of open houses, social mixers, emails, advertisements, posters and social media. From the original nine (9) priorities identified by the PWG, the community narrowed the selection to the four (4) top priorities for the site. They are:

- 1  **Education/Workforce Training**
- 2  **Housing/Affordable Rental**
- 3  **Home Ownership & Community Space**
- 4  **Support for Entrepreneurs**



Photo by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media

The Data

The results of the survey have been quantified as follows:

- ▶ 608 surveys received
- ▶ 367 comments collected via the survey

Questions and data presented in the survey included the following:

- ▶ Demographic Data
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Zip Code
- ▶ Have you or your family been displaced from the N/NE Community Neighborhood?

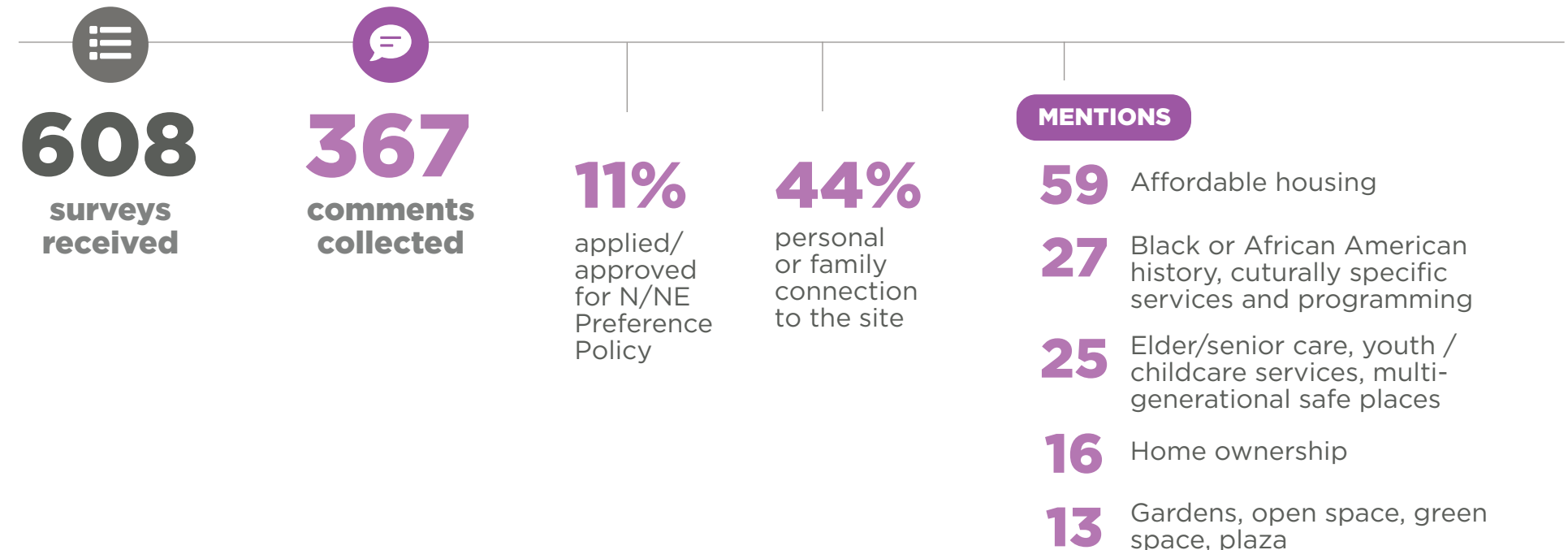
Of the 608 survey responses, slightly more than 60% responded with comments. The

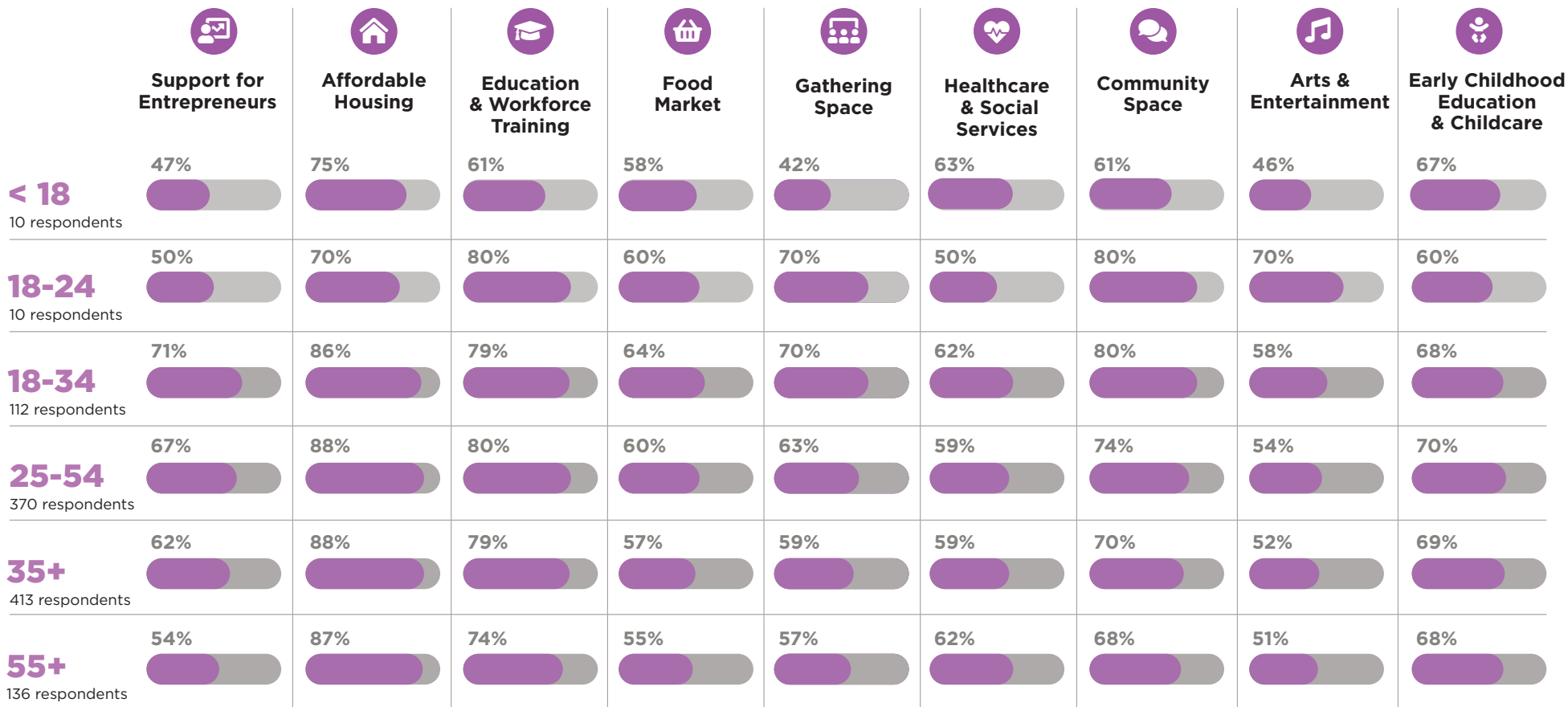
comments section allowed respondents to elaborate further on their priorities or indicate unique ideas that were not identified in the survey. Some of the comments received were as follows.

Of the 608 survey responses, 367 responded in the comment boxes:

- ▶ 67 respondents, or 11% of comments, have applied or been approved for the North/Northeast Preference Policy, which is an effort to address the harmful impacts of urban renewal in North/Northeast Portland, including the historic and ongoing displacement of longtime community members, by giving preference to housing applicants with generational ties to the area.

- ▶ 269 respondents, or 44% of comments, marked they or their family has a connection to the site or area.
- ▶ 59 respondents mentioned affordable housing versus 16 respondents who mentioned home ownership for the site.
- ▶ 27 respondents mentioned Black or African American history, culturally specific services or programming.
- ▶ 25 respondents mentioned the need for elder/senior care, youth/childcare services, or multi-generational safe spaces on site.
- ▶ 13 respondents mentioned on-site preference for gardens, open space, green space or plaza area.





Priorities by age group

Youth <18 to 24 yrs



Adults 25 - 54 yrs



Seniors 55 yrs +



Priorities by identity

Black



African American



Connection to site



Community Responses & Comments

The opinions of the community in their responses will hold high sway in the decisions of what should be placed on the site. Equally important are the thoughts and comments of the anonymous respondents, contributors of various backgrounds, ages and yet still ethnically woven into the fabric of N-NE, some of which are captured below about what they envision for the property.

"I think the space should be somewhat of a community-based partnership that not only stabilizes housing opportunities but teaches hands-on fiscal literacy in ideals and in action. The value of land ownership, stewardship, and leveraging the space to not only grow minds but healthy bodies in action. This could be a bit of a mecca for calls to action in these areas of importance within the black community - coupled with oversight and support. Workshops put on by community established businesses, as well as teaching the entrepreneurs of the future. Please don't cut corners on this project by overlooking the need to tie in food conscious choices."

IDENTIFIED AS NATIVE AMERICAN, BLACK, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AGED 35-44

"Something that will bring the community together and is beneficial to kids."

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK & AFRICAN AMERICAN, AGE UNDER 18

"I want to see a space that celebrates the culture of Black Oregonians. The space should be rooted in the history of the area and with a vision towards supporting the future well-being of residents."

IDENTIFIED AS NATIVE AMERICAN, INDIGENOUS, WHITE, AGE 35-44

"A project that is culturally and educationally motivating and inspiring that strengthens our children, so I would envision an outreach for children to better their minds with information that is preparation and confidence for young minds to be successful."

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK AND LATINX, AGE 45-54

"I envision a safe place for displaced Black community to come together to build, grow, connect, and support each other at ANY time of day or night and experience community, opportunities for healing, opportunities for families and youth focused events, opportunities for adults to mingle and network, and opportunities for professional growth and learning."

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK AFRICAN AMERICAN, AGE 25-34, FAMILY CONNECTION TO SITE

"I think a place that is welcoming and healing. The space has been a raw wound in the community for decades and that needs to be addressed in the choice of what goes there and the design."

IDENTIFIED AS WHITE, AGE 45-54



Photos by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media



Photos by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media

"I'd like to see what's not being done. What made Hill Block a vibrant community for blacks in the 40s, 50s and 60s? We need an Events Space with state-of-the-art kitchen facilities which can be used for gathering space, community space, Arts and Entertainment, concerts, plays, etc. We need space for African American Businesses, affordable housing (apartments only...no room for homes) and an African American health services connected to Emanuel Hospital. There needs to be a monument erected on the corner where Emanuel has their obelisk representing a small tower of reconciliation or restoration honoring the African American Community."

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AGE 65+ WITH FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

"My father came to Portland in 1945 to work in the Kaiser shipyards during the war. He was a carpenter and mason. He pastored several churches and founded the Neighborhood Church of God. He was the original founder of the St Joseph Masonic Lodge. My parents owned several businesses here. One was a restaurant and ice cream parlor on N Williams Ave and a second-hand store on NE 15th and Alberta."

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK, AFRICAN AMERICAN, AGE 65+ WITH FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO THE SITE

"Demand the best resources, (the) commitment of people that have benefitted from the displacement to support this small beginning of repair. Whatever happens here is not an endpoint for all the things that have happened to the Black community here."

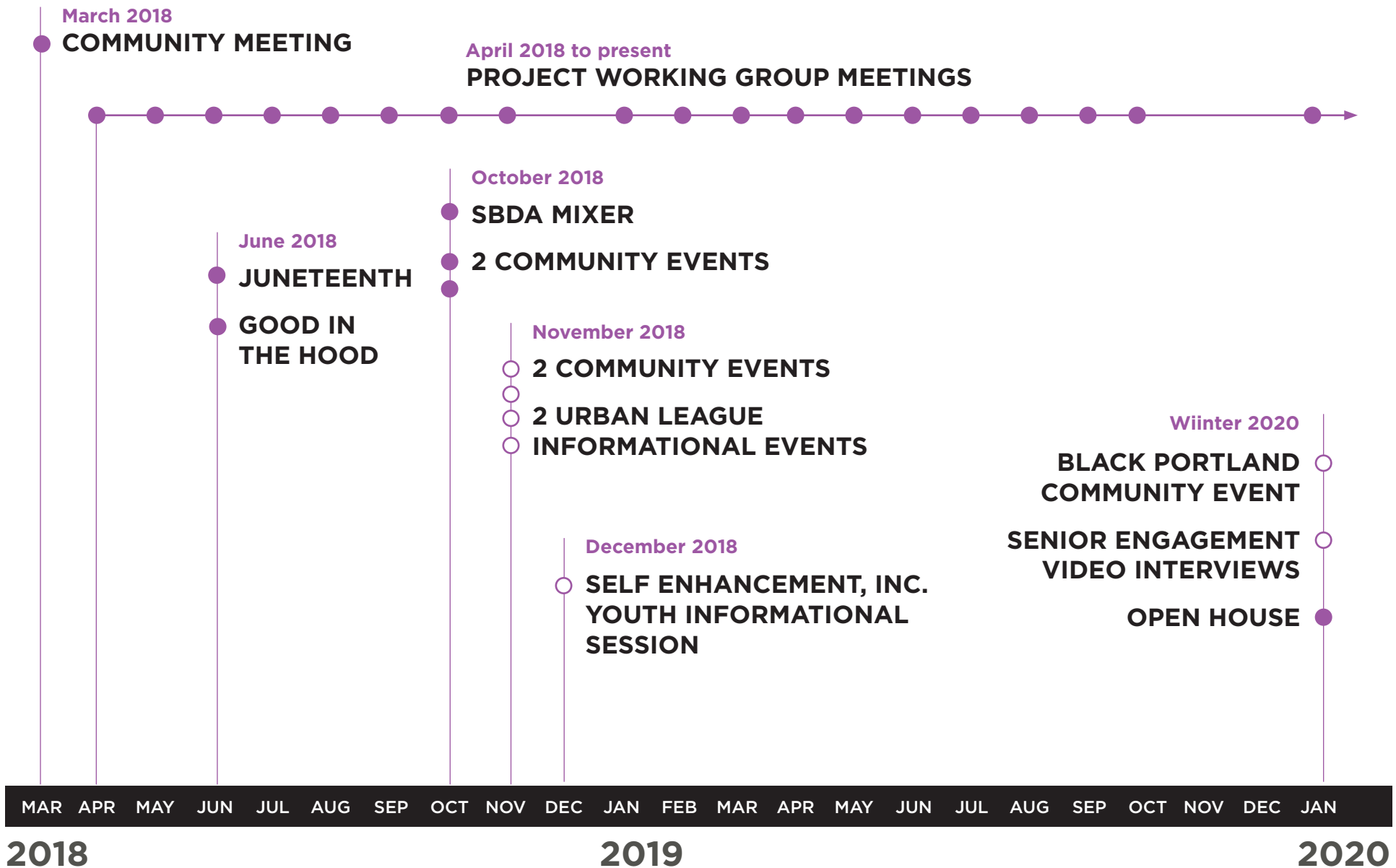
PWG MEMBER, JUSTICE RAJEE

Project staff analyzed and categorized comments to identify shared themes, including:

- ▶ More than half of the comments identified their desired outcomes for the future project, ranging from seeing places for multigenerational community, opportunities of Black wealth creation and business ownership to the development of safe, culturally specific physical spaces
- ▶ In line with the survey questions, more than one-third of the comments centered around the need for affordable housing; comments identified the desire for increased Black homeownership, affordable rental spaces and condominiums
- ▶ Additional comments highlighted the need to honor the history of the neighborhood, with attention to the displacement and gentrification that occurred, and the need for neighborhood revitalization that honors the desired outcomes of the local community

Community Engagement Timeline

- General Community Outreach
- Individual PWG Member Outreach



Conclusion

The process to gather the documentation, facilitate meetings, create venues and resources for gathering and to provide input opportunities within a large cross-section of community members is by no means a small task. It takes a large force of dedicated personnel who often work under the “volunteer” banner. The compilation of the information could not be successful without them. More important to “information” is the opportunity to come together to foster a sense of purpose and objective and rally around a significant project that means more than the desired outcome. The process has offered a sense of recognition of the past inequitable actions and how that has harmed the community. But it also features something greater - a bright spot of hope for equality in the present and future for this and the next generations.

For the work and commitment of the volunteer staff and multiple organizations, the PWG and all community members, we are grateful and appreciate you. For all those who filled out every survey, and for each focus group participant, the results and tabulated decisions could not be achieved without you. So, for your contribution, we thank you.

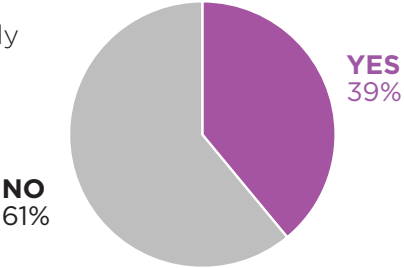
We look forward to the next step - our Request for Proposal (RFP) which will take the recommendations of the community to garner interest of a developer who will work to take the desired outcomes and create a physical building based on the ideas of the community while building upon the history of the people who are intrinsically tied to this neighborhood.



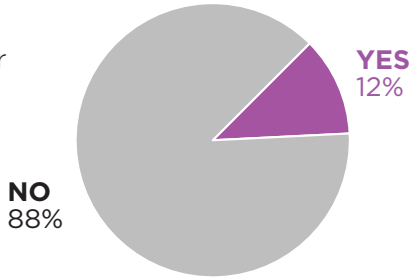
Photo by Hailei Aberson, Flossin Media

Appendix: Survey Demographic Data

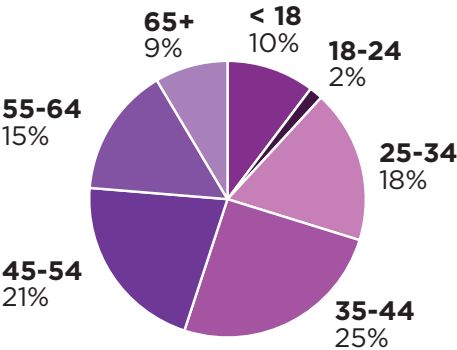
Have you or your family been displaced from the N/NE community/ neighborhood?



Have you ever applied to or been selected for the Portland Housing Bureau's Preference Policy?



Which of the following includes your age?



Do you identify with any of the following racial or ethnic identities? Select all that apply.

