

ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT

\$67M targets historically Black neighborhoods

Shane Dixon Kavanaugh *The Oregonian/OregonLive*

The Portland City Council unanimously approved a plan Wednesday to pump millions of dollars into affordable housing and economic redevelopment that proponents hope will benefit families displaced from Portland's historically Black neighborhoods.

Despite some concerns that the measure will fail to fully remedy decades of racist anti-Black policies, the mayor and the city's four commissioners — two of whom are Black — said it was a significant step toward righting those wrongs.

"We all know that displacement has a long history in Portland. That painful history has left our community scarred," said Commissioner Mingus Mapps, who last week became the fourth Black person in the city's history to serve on the council.

"Displacement will reach into Portland's future unless we make different decisions about how we invest in neighborhoods today," he said.

The \$67 million initiative will fund the construction of 40 to 50 new single-family homes to own and at least another 300 apartments to rent, according to city officials.

People whose families were pushed out of the historic North and Northeast Portland Albina neighborhood by the city nearly 50 years ago would have first rights to live there.

The initiative would also create a hub for emerging small businesses owned by



North Williams Avenue and Russell Street was once the commercial center for Black residents in Portland. *Oregonian archives*

Black people and other people of color along a 1.7-acre block along North Williams Avenue and Russell Street.

The site, once the heart of Portland's African American community, was among those areas demolished in the 1970s through eminent domain to make way for an expansion of Emanuel Hospital, now called Legacy Emanuel Medical Center. The expansion never occurred.

The money will come from extending by two years the diversion of some property taxes from a district stretching along Interstate 5 in North and Northeast Portland that would otherwise fund general

city operations, public schools citywide, Portland Community College and other beneficiaries of local property taxes.

Both the housing and redevelopment projects approved Wednesday emerged out of Black-led planning groups that included community leaders as well as representatives from the Urban League, Imagine Black — formerly known as the Portland African American Leadership Forum — and Soul District Business Association.

But some of the descendants of the area's displaced families and their supporters organized under a group called Emanuel Displaced Persons Association 2 called on the city to pay restitution to a specific set of descendants of families who were forced to sell their homes and businesses to the city under eminent domain. They objected to any measure that did not include such a provision.

The Council conceded that the prospect of new housing and economic opportunities alone would only begin to make up for Portland's treatment of Black residents.

"I agree that the reparations conversation is long, long overdue," said Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, adding that the issue is a priority among the city's federal legislative agenda for the coming year.

"We have a lot of work to do to create a city that is equitable and fair for us all."

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LEGISLATURE

Kayse Jama, Somali refugee and advocate for powerless, wins appointment to Senate

Kayse Jama, co-founder and executive director of a nonprofit that advocates for immigrants, people of color and low-income families and children, has won appointment to the Oregon Senate.

He will represent a long, narrow district spanning east Portland and northern Clackamas County along Interstate 205.

Nine of 10 commissioners from Multnomah and Clackamas counties indicated they viewed Jama as the strongest of three nominees for the position put forward by the Democratic party. The others were nurse and former nurses union head Adrienne Enghouse and Democratic Party of Oregon operations director Candy Emmons.

They cited Jama's widespread and fervent support in the community, his track record of inclusive leadership that lifts up the voices of the powerless, his personal history as a refugee from Somalia who learned English as a second language and his success building partnerships that have yielded policy gains and on-the-ground progress. All 10 said they were greatly impressed by all three nominees and thought each had the policy chops, lived experience and other credentials to serve as a state senator.

Jama was appointed to the Senate seat vacated Dec. 31 by Oregon's new secretary of state, Shemia Fagan. Jama will be the third Black member of the 2021 Oregon Senate and the chamber's lone immigrant and naturalized citizen.

Betsy Hammond