

To: Mayor Charlie Hales Patrick Quinton, Executive Director,
Portland Development Commission John Jackley, Director - Business
and Social Equity, Portland Development Commission

The Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF) is writing in response to the proposed development in partnership with Majestic Realty. Our opposition is rooted in the well-documented and ongoing attempt to profit from development in inner N/NE Portland at the expense of Black and low-income individuals. Rather than invest in proven methods to stop displacement and empower the African American community, the Portland Development Commission (PDC) and City of Portland have consistently supported projects that have displaced existing residents and attracted wealthier ones in their place.

In October, PAALF met with city officials including, Mayor Hales, Patrick Quinton and John Jackley to discuss the disparate impact gentrification has had on our community's wellbeing and viability. Both Mayor Hales and Patrick Quinton expressed a commitment to solving the issues related to gentrification and to finding community based-solutions to stabilize Black residents. This decision indicates the opposite and reflects the City's overall track record of implementing policies that serve to uproot, displace and disempower our most vulnerable community members.

The following is a brief summary of the reasons we are protesting the proposed Majestic Realty project and a series of demands moving forward to ensure the stabilization of our community. This document is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to highlight a few of the reasons why this decision is fraught with injustice and misgivings.

In both the Albina Plan[1] and the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area Plan[2], the PDC and the City justified their investment in N/NE Portland as an action that would “primarily benefit existing residents” and improve their quality of life.

- The property in question was assessed at \$2.9 M and was offered to Majestic Realty for \$500,000, which amounts to a nearly \$2.4 M “subsidy.” This subsidy primarily benefits the Roski family, one of the richest families in the country. It secondarily benefits Traders Joes, a national corporation. It

- mandates no affordable housing and no job guarantees from Trader Joes.
- A new Trader Joes will increase the desirability of the neighborhood to non-oppressed populations, thereby increasing the economic pressures that are responsible for the displacement of low-income and Black residents. The choice to not provide family appropriate affordable housing above the proposed Trader Joes retail space is consistent with a long standing series of actions that between the 2000 and 2010 census displaced over 10,000 people out of Inner NE Portland.[\[3\]](#)
 - While the African American community has participated in countless city government “community engagement” efforts, including supporting the development of the Albina Community Plan, sitting on city advisory councils and participating in community meetings with the PDC and other land-use entities, the City has never granted such bodies with decision making power and has failed to respond to community demands for stabilization and support. We conclude that these engagement efforts primarily function to provide political justification for predetermined actions.

Gentrification, and the economic inequality it produces, is not an unforeseen byproduct of increasing density or improving the livability of streets.

- Planners, academics, the City of Portland and the PDC have all acknowledged that gentrification in N/NE Portland is occurring. In fact, the area is one of the fastest gentrifying neighborhoods in the country. Contrary to Mayor Hales’ stated belief in a recent Portland Tribune article[\[4\]](#), the involuntary displacement of Portland’s Black community has no upside. By placing a Trader Joes on this land, without an affordable housing mandate (serving up to 60% median family income) and a legally binding community hiring agreement, our community will continue to suffer disproportionate burdens. Our community faces the same adversity that this investment was supposed to relieve; they just do so without the support and familiarity that their old neighborhood provided. The City of Portland cannot continue to sweep Black and low-income people out of Inner NE Portland and claim success.
- While the mechanisms of gentrification are complicated the basic idea is

not. Wealthy and politically powerful interests (financiers, developers, and speculators) want “blighted” inner-city land because it is profitable. In Portland’s history, primarily Black neighborhoods have been located on some of this land. Interests have used their power and influence over our government to take the land that Black people once held for their personal profit.

- Gentrification of primarily Black inner city neighborhoods is or has taken place in dozens of cities nationwide for decades and occurs internationally. The institutions, policies, funding and marketing of these actions – often through eminent domain – are consistent and have remained largely unchanged since the 1950’s. The City and the PDC are aware of the devastating impacts of urban renewal on the Black community (Bureau of Planning 1993), yet have failed to successfully or completely implement any of the mitigating and potentially ameliorating policies promised in the Albina Plan or in the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area Plan.

This area is not a “food desert.”

- It is claimed that the area surrounding the property is a food desert and thus, the proposed Trader Joes, will support existing low-income residents. Food deserts exist in Portland, but not in Inner NE with several grocery stores, both small and large chains, within 2 miles of the property.
- The use of the term “food desert” as a justification for this development is inconsistent with the Portland Housing Bureau’s 2013 opportunity mapping project, which identifies the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area as one of the areas of highest opportunity for the Healthy Eating Active Living (H.E.A.L.) indicator.
- City Politicians, the PDC and developers have taken advantage of well-meaning Portlander’s social and environmental consciousness to garner support for new development, which is diametrically opposed to sustainability and community building. Claiming to alleviate a “food desert” appeals to the wealthier, incoming population and paints the Black community as being opposed to development when in actuality, we are only opposed to the continued displacement of our community. Other terms like “sustainability,” “livability,” “active transportation,” “economic development” and “smart growth” are frequently used in a similar fashion.

As a community, we demand that the City of Portland and Portland Development Commission commit to the following:

- Suspend all further TIF funded development in Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area.
- Account for all spending in the Interstate Urban Renewal Area since its inception to include individual recipients and amounts and make that information readily available to the public.
- Suspend the development of the property on NE MLK Jr. Blvd. and Alberta St. until a sufficient amount of affordable housing is incorporated and an independent, community-controlled body can negotiate a legally binding community benefits agreement.
- Publicly endorse the position that Legacy Emmanuel Hospital must relinquish the still vacant property on the corner of North Russell and Williams, and bequeath it to the African American Community in the form of a community land trust. Formerly the location of a Black business district, the Emanuel Hospital expansion razed and displaced hundreds of African American homeowners and businesses on this site almost 40 years ago.

We request a response to this letter by January 14, 2014.

Should you have any clarifying questions or needs, please contact PAALF Staff (Rachel@aalfnw.org or Ph [503.249.1721 ext 230](tel:503.249.1721)).

Given the long-standing list of promises made, and yet unfulfilled, by the PDC to prevent community displacement, PAALF is and will remain opposed to any development in N/NE Portland that does not primarily benefit the Black community. We will continue to publicly voice our concern and make demands on any further decisions by the Commission that do not support community development and stabilization of displaced Black residents.

Sincerely,

The Portland African American Leadership Forum