

Williams & Russell CDC Breaks Ground on Historic 1.7-Acre Development

The block at North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue sat empty for fifty years, and tomorrow, the remediation process begins.

PORTLAND, OR, UNITED STATES, February 27, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Tomorrow, [Williams & Russell Community Development Corporation](#) (CDC) marks a momentous step forward in revitalizing a historic Portland neighborhood and fostering a brighter future for its community. A [groundbreaking ceremony](#) will be held on Friday, February 28, 2025, from 2:00 PM to 3:30 PM PT on North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue, on a lot vacated more than 50 years ago

due to urban renewal and racist redlining practices that disrupted the Black community. This event will bring together the community, local leaders, board members, and political representatives to mark the beginning of this historic community-led development project.

“

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Azalea Renfield, Executive Director

The \$120M Williams & Russell reparative development will breathe new life into the 1.7-acre site at North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue, which has remained vacant for over 50 years. This impactful project, supported in part by Portland Housing Bureau and Portland Housing Center, will provide 85 affordable one- to three-bedroom units, including a cultural-specific daycare on the first floor, 20 townhomes for ownership, and a 30,000-square-foot

Business Hub to support entrepreneurs, workforce development and community organizations.

With deep historical significance, the Williams & Russell property holds a special place in



Portland's African American history. In the early 1900s, Portland's Black community settled in Albina, drawn by job opportunities in the railroad industry, only to face redlining and discriminatory practices. By the 1930s, Williams Avenue became the economic and cultural hub of the community.

During the 1940s, thousands more African Americans migrated to Portland for work in the shipping

industry, with many residing in Vanport. After the Columbia River flood of 1948 destroyed the temporary settlement, many African Americans moved to Albina, adding to a culturally vibrant community.



In the early 1970s, urban renewal displaced 171 families, 74% of whom were African American, to make way for the expansion of the Legacy Emanuel Medical Center campus, leaving a lasting impact on the neighborhood. Today, this redevelopment aims to heal and restore what was lost, creating a vibrant, thriving space for future generations.

The Williams & Russell Project, led by the Williams and Russell CDC and commercial development partner Adre, aims to revitalize the area with a transformative development that includes affordable apartments, homeownership opportunities, and a Black Business Hub. The initiative began as a collaborative Project Working Group in 2021, supported by Legacy Health, Prosper Portland, and the City of Portland; the initiative has involved due diligence, environmental assessments, public works, and land division, with detailed design and community outreach.

Focused on equitable economic opportunities, the project targets 30% of the budget for BIPOC- and women-owned businesses, includes Minority, Women Owned, Emerging Small Business (MWESB) participation, and incorporates sustainability goals such as LEED certification and solar energy. The development will also feature a plaza and central garden designed by Walter J. Hood. The Williams & Russell Project team has raised over \$30 million toward the design and construction. The Affordable Homeownership Project is slated to start first. Completion of all three projects is slated for early 2028.

Quotes from Key Personnel:

“This groundbreaking is a turning point for our community,” said Azalea Renfield, executive director of Williams & Russell CDC. “After decades of institutional racism and displacement, this project represents resilience, progress, and a vision for an empowered future. We’re not just building homes – we’re building opportunities, economic growth, and a stronger, more united

community. This is no ordinary development project; this is an example of reparative development in action."

"The vision of the Williams & Russell project honors Portland's displaced African-American community and we are feeling hopeful for the future," said Legacy Health board chair Charles Wilhoite. "Legacy Health is looking forward to returning the land to the community."

"The groundbreaking of the Williams & Russell project marks an important milestone in the advancement of socially responsible real estate development in Portland – a core value that is integral to our mission alongside design excellence, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship," said Anyeley Hallová, founder, Adre. "Through this reparative project, we are proud to help create new pathways to prosperity for Portland's Black community through homeownership, business enterprise, and intergenerational wealth creation."

"This important project pays proper and overdue recognition to a historic part of our city that so many community members have dedicated years of time and energy toward making a better place to live and work," U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) said. "I will keep fighting for Oregon organizations like Williams & Russell CDC to get the support they deserve to improve housing availability in the state and create opportunities for Oregonians."

"The groundbreaking of the Williams & Russell project marks a huge milestone for Black Portlanders, paving the way for home ownership, more affordable housing options, and business opportunities in this vibrant community hub," said U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), who secured funding to support this project as a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "This exciting project is a critical step forward to correct the historical wrong when the city displaced many Black community members, and it enhances our community's diversity and equity at a time when that has never been more important. As Oregon's voice in Washington on the committee in charge of government funding, I will never stop fighting to deliver federal resources and support to communities in every corner of our state."

"This initiative is a transformative leap toward providing vital rental housing, accessible homeownership, and a thriving Black business hub," said Kymberly Horner, executive director for Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Inc. (PCRI). "We are not just laying the foundation for buildings; we are building a brighter future for generations to come."

"The Portland Housing Bureau is proud to invest in the Williams & Russell Project, a beacon of healing for a community the City neglected for too long," said Portland Housing Bureau Business Operations & Equity Manager Leslie Goodlow. "As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of our N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy, we are honored to help bring life back to this historic site for Portland's Black community in the form of affordable homes for generations of low-income families."

"The Williams & Russell Project will restore a legacy, driving economic growth and serving as a

catalyst for lasting empowerment,” said Andrew Colas, president of Colas Construction. “COLAS is honored to steward this vision into reality—building a landmark that uplifts our community, honors our history, and paves the way for future generations.”

“The Williams & Russell groundbreaking signifies yet another major milestone achieved over the course of time,” said Dana Fuller Shephard, board member at Williams & Russell CDC and executive director of Portland Housing Center. “I have been closely connected to this work personally and professionally as a 4th generation Portlander whose family hailed from the deep south, claiming North and Northeast Portland as home, to today, serving as a board member of the CDC and a contributing partner to ensure that the people and families displaced can reclaim this as home.”

“Prosper Portland has been committed to this project from the earliest discussions of the Project Working Group to this current moment, and we look forward to continuing our partnership for years to come,” said Chabre Vickers, director of Equity, Policy, and Communication at Prosper Portland. “This project should be seen as a blueprint for what can be done when leaders and community meet, invest in hard conversations and difficult decisions, and remain jointly focused on community-centered priorities and the path to reach them.”

About Williams & Russell CDC

The Williams & Russell CDC, formed in 2021, is a Black-led non-profit leading the Williams & Russell Project, a collaborative effort between Portland’s Black community, Prosper Portland, the Portland Housing Bureau, and Legacy Health, established in 2017. Williams & Russell CDC is on a mission to restore and revitalize Portland’s historically Black Albina neighborhood, once a vibrant economic center for Black Portlanders. Learn more here: <https://www.williamsrussellcdc.org/>

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