

Williams & Russell CDC Recaps Historic Groundbreaking Event

Remediation begins for the historic Black community hub, with completion expected by early 2028.

PORTLAND, OR, UNITED STATES, March 11, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Friday, February 28, 2025, the last day of Black history month, [Williams & Russell](#) broke ground on a 1.7-acre site at North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue, which has remained vacant for over 50 years. The \$120M Williams & Russell reparative development project will breathe new life into what was once Portland's Black cultural and economic hub.

Williams & Russell CDC was grateful to receive support from over 150 attendees, representing many of Portland's development and housing organizations including the Governor's Office of Oregon and Portland's Black community leaders. Organizations in attendance included Portland Housing Bureau, Portland Housing Center, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Prosper Portland, Colas Construction, Adre, LEVER Architecture, and many more.

This three-pronged project will include 85 affordable one- to three-bedroom units, a cultural-specific daycare, 20 townhomes for ownership, and a 30,000-square-foot Business Hub to support entrepreneurs, workforce development and community organizations.

The event featured powerful remarks from several influential community leaders and dignitaries, with Governor Tina Kotek (D-OR) delivering a notable address supporting the project. Her presence underscored the significance of this historic development.



Representative Travis Nelson, Governor Kotek, Senator Lew Frederick and Williams & Russell board members

"It's uniquely special to be here on the last day of Black History Month, celebrating a project that will help to repair past injustices," said Governor Kotek. "The plans set for this project are inspiring. They include housing development and a Black business hub. The people who brought us here today saw an opportunity to house their neighbors, uplift the community, and provide a pathway to prosperity."

Long-time congressional supporters such as Senator Lew Frederick and Representative Travis Nelson were also in attendance and provided remarks regarding the importance of the project.

"This is a bridge. We will keep moving forward, making changes, and putting things together. I want to celebrate the bridge," said Senator Frederick. "I want to celebrate our ability to get things done. And you all have been a part of that. I want to thank you so much."

"Like all of you, I see the Williams and Russell project is more than just development. This is about restorative justice for black communities in North and Northeast Portland and bringing accessible home ownership, affordable apartments, a business hub, and a

plaza that will uplift and empower the community," said Representative Travis Nelson. "I'm especially proud to support the funding for the Business Hub and this legislative session, because Economic Opportunity is a critical piece of justice."

Williams & Russell was also honored to have community leader, Paul Knauls in attendance. A former business owner and activist for the Albina region.

Paul Kanuls: "I'm happy about this project. I've driven by year after year after year. I had a



Kymerly Horner and Paul Knauls



Bryson Davis, Williams & Russell President

business in this area, but I think of the pharmacy, Billy's Cleaners, Lou's Men's Shop, and Sally's Restaurant. They were all located right on the corner over there. It made it great."

Quotes from Key Williams & Russell Board Members and Personnel:

"As a participating partner tasked and privileged to provide support to the future homeowners of the project, I ask the community to empower them," said Dana Fuller Shephard, Executive Director of Portland Housing Center and Williams & Russell Board Member. "I also ask for grace and patience as they become first-time, and in some cases, first-generation homeowners, preparing to return to a community that caused harm to their families and ancestors."

"Our people understand – the folk gathered here today understand – that the act of building is a generational responsibility. A steadfast commitment to the boundless potential of a future that can only be crafted through heart and human hands," said JT Flowers, Director of Communications and Government Affairs at Albina Vision Trust and Board Chair of Williams & Russell CDC. "But above all else, what we are building is a testament to permanence. A testament to the unwavering faith of an unbreakable people."

"The project working group was first convened in January 2018, we formed the Williams & Russell CDC from the project working group in 2021 and we have been working nonstop for over 7 years to make this project a reality," said Bryson Davis, Founder of Principia Law, member of the original project working group and Williams & Russell CDC President. "Seven years. That is just a drop in the bucket compared to how long the community has waited. 50 years. Five decades this block has been an empty hole in our city grid. That ends today."

"This project is a testament to what is possible when a community refuses to be forgotten, when history is honored, and when justice is more than just a word—it is action," said Azalea Renfield, CEO/Executive Director of Williams & Russell CDC. "But our work does not end here. Today, we break ground not only on buildings but on a renewed commitment to equity, resilience, and opportunity for generations to come."

"It has been a long journey to get here today and many, many people have been involved, from the original project working group to its various iterations to today's Williams and Russell CDC," said Karis Stoudamire-Phillips, Vice President of DEI and Community Initiatives at Moda Health, Vice Chair of the Williams & Russell Board and historically connected community member. "It has



Azalea Renfield, Williams & Russell Executive Director

been ALL of our unwavering collective perseverance, genuine love for our community, personal convictions and heartfelt desire for healing, even for 1.7 acres, that has pushed us to today's groundbreaking."

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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