



SW Corridor Tenant Engagement Project

Final Report

April 1, 2020

Unite Oregon has been proud to partner with the City of Portland to coordinate engagement and organizing of diverse, low-income residents around anti-displacement strategies in the Southwest Corridor and land use planning in West Portland.

Cristina Palacios, Housing Director, has provided project management and support with Seemab Hussaini, Multnomah County Organizer, implementing the majority of the deliverables. Our Executive Director Kayse Jama, Field Director Sushma Raghavan, Grant Coordinator Claudia Arana Colen and Policy & Communications Associate Andrew Riley have also provided support to this project.

Community Kick Off; April 27th, 2019

Unite Oregon spent 30 hours canvassing 100 apartment units and 20 businesses, focusing engagement and outreach on tenants, low-income residents, people of color, immigrants and refugees and building relationships in SW Portland. In addition to canvassing, staff hung flyers in about 15 community centers and businesses (schools, libraries, stores, etc) in the neighborhood, and reached out to leaders from the Islamic School of Portland to explain the goals of the project and the importance of their participation.

Seemab and Cristina twice phone-banked our list of our members that live in that neighborhood. Unite Oregon also contracted three interpreters to outreach to community members in their primary language and ensure diverse outreach and representation. Unite Oregon staff also advertised the event on social media, writing targeted eblasts to specific cultural groups and our list of members that live in the neighborhood.

This outreach led to around 60 people attending the kickoff meeting. Simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, Swahili, and Somali was provided.

In the small group discussions we witnessed, participants were open about their vision for their neighborhood. In particular, participants shared:

- Their concerns about the lack of walkability and pedestrian infrastructure, and the impact it has on low-income immigrants and refugees who depend on walking to get around. Participants were especially concerned about the safety of the intersection of Capitol Highway and Barbur Blvd.
- The need for a cultural marketplace
- A strong desire for more affordable housing, and access to the information about affordable housing in multiple languages

- The need to access healthy and affordable food, and protecting and expanding existing opportunities for cultural centers like the Halal market
- The need for many basic services like daycare, multicultural spaces; places for families to get together-- spaces which are currently missing

Overall, many SW Portland residents in attendance were not aware of the potential MAX line and the impact it could have on the neighborhood, and reacted positively to learning this information.

Walking Tour; June 15, 2019

For the June 15th walking tour, our organizer Seemab Hussaini canvassed about 200 homes and apartments and 30 businesses in the neighborhood. Outreach was done to Arabic community members (who also spoke English), Swahili, and Somali speakers. Swahili interpreter Mohamed Salim Bahamadi, supported our outreach to the Swahili community. We advertised the event online via social media, our website, and emails to our members and partners. Over 50 people attended the walking tour, including about a dozen youth from immigrant communities.

The event was held outside Markham Elementary School; Unite Oregon and City of Portland hosted information tables; snacks, childcare, and simultaneous Interpretation in Somali and Swahili were provided at no cost to attendees.

This event highlighted the safety challenges and lack of walkability in the area. Feedback we heard from participants includes:

- Ethnic stores, family friendly spaces, and a cultural center/marketplace are needed in the neighborhood
- Slower pedestrians, such as the elderly, parents with strollers, children, and people with disabilities have a hard time crossing the street in the time given by existing signals
- Lack of sidewalks are a problem for public safety
- Cars barely notice pedestrians at major intersections
- Longer signals, pedestrian bridges, more crosswalks, pedestrian lights are needed
- Modifications for people with disabilities are needed

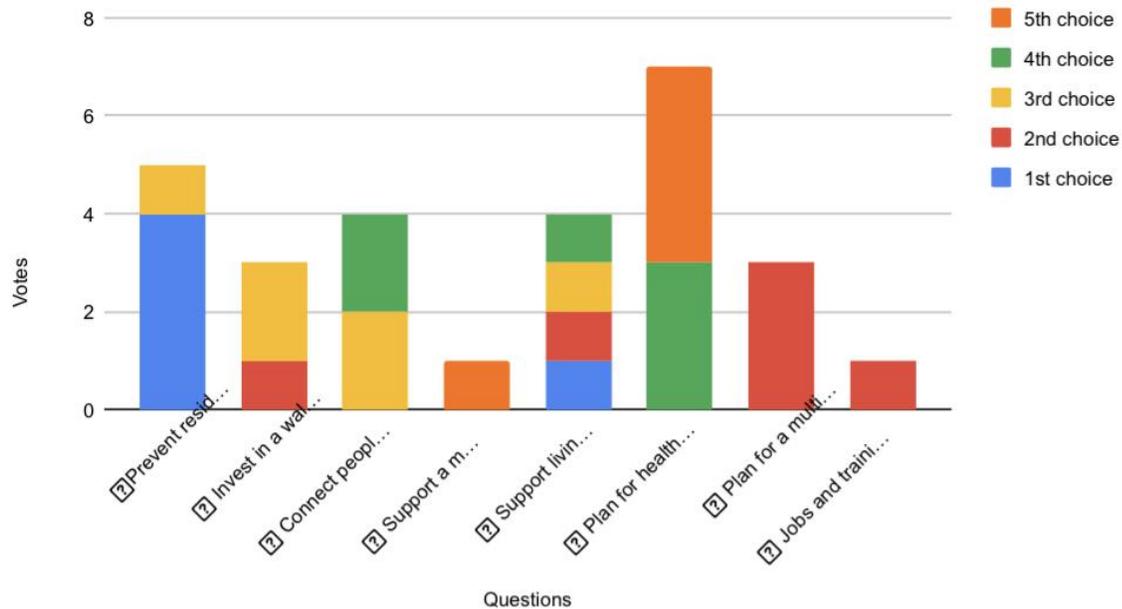
After the walk, participants left without a sense of what concerns were shared in other groups because we didn't come together at the end. In the future we recommend a group debrief after an event like this.

Focus Group #1 -- Community Prioritization; November 6th, 2019

On November 6th, Unite Oregon recruited six community members to participate in the first of two focus groups. Three Somali, one African, one Asian, and one white Muslim participated. The focus group was an opportunity to begin educating community members, and to build leaders. We talked about what organizing around issues they care about could look like, and learned about the history of organizing in the SW Corridor. The City of Portland had prior collected a list of recommendations made

by other community members about development in their neighborhood; we asked the focus group members to identify and rank their top five priorities or concerns about development in their neighborhood. The priorities identified by the group were:

SWC 6 Person Focus Group



1. Prevent residential and cultural/social displacement. Housing displacement is a major concern. It affects households and the broader community.
 - a. 5 of 6 chose this as their #1
 - b. 1 person chose as their #3
2. Invest in a walkable and safe pedestrian environment to improve health outcomes and reconnect a divided area and offer choices beyond the private automobile.
 - a. 1 person chose as their #2
 - b. 2 people chose as their #3
3. Connect people and places. Community is about relationships, which need cultural gathering spaces and physical improvements across the area.
 - a. 2 people chose as their #3
 - b. 2 people chose as their #4
4. Support a more resilient and emergency-ready community
 - a. 1 person chose as their #5
5. Support living wage jobs and affordable housing for young adults.
 - a. 4 people chose this as their 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th priorities
6. Plan for healthy food options that bring people together and provide business opportunities.
 - a. 3 people chose as their #4
 - b. 4 people chose as their #5

7. Plan for a multicultural commercial hub with affordable retail and culturally relevant goods and services.
 - a. 3 people chose as their #2
8. Jobs and training for low-income residents should come with the new development.
 - a. 1 person chose as their #2

While input on priorities was limited to just these 6 focus group members, their answers give us a lot of insight into the priorities of communities of color in SW Portland. We should seek buy-in from the community about these priorities in future meetings.

Community Workshop -- Design Concept; November 9th, 2019

The City of Portland; BPS, Unite Oregon, Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT), and HAKI Community co-hosted this Community Workshop. The focus of the event was to give power to the West Portland Town Center communities in design concepts. During the event, city planners talked about the planning and development opportunities in the WPTC, and how community participation is vital to their work.

Unite Oregon coordinated simultaneous translation services, childcare, and outreach and recruitment of impacted community members and businesses, specifically first generation immigrants, low income renters, etc. We also co-facilitated the workshop sessions. We are pleased to report that we were able to turn out approximately 100 diverse community members to this event, and that they participated actively in the workshop sessions.

We did have several lessons learned from this event:

- The workshop topics on transportation and infrastructure were new to many participants. The complexity of those topics merited spending more time providing background information than we'd originally planned. In the future, community members may benefit from a separate, introductory workshop on these more complex topics
- The workshops felt too long
- We need to ensure there is a plan in place to report back to community participants on what we heard from them and how their input will impact the WPTC plan

Focus Group #2 -- Reviewing Community Prioritization; November 13th, 2019

Eight low-income community tenants/renters, one Swahili interpreter and two Unite Oregon staff attended this focus group. Several focus group attendees had attended the November 9th community workshop.

We used Focus Group #2 as an opportunity to review what they learned during the November 9th community workshop as well as Focus Group #1's top five priorities and concerns about potential development in their neighborhoods. In summary, participants shared:

SW Corridor; Summary of Fears and Needs/ Opportunities

Fear of:

- Displacement due to the potential MAX line
- Any sort of development
- Being separated from their small communities; an indicator of their established cultural ties to this region and the value it holds for them
- Development increasing crime rates and drugs in their community

Needs (Opportunities):

- The need for a multicultural community center with offices and shops, ideal for the Barbur transit center
- The need for public venue spaces for events and planning, also ideal for the Barbur transit center
- The need for indoor sports and recreation center with children's playground and swimming
- The need for community center/ spaces for women
- The need for additional low-income housing, and for low-income housing to be placed near the aforementioned multicultural community centers and public venues
- The need for temporary, free housing for refugees and asylees, including one year of free rent, utilities, internet, staff and community center with computers
- The need for better sidewalks and water drainage infrastructure, and to create/maintain paths to school and masjid, and more crosswalks on main streets like Barbur Blvd
- The need for zero displacement to result from any sort of development or design improvements
- The need for Halal stores and restaurants
- The need to incentivize landlords to upgrade existing low-income housing and fix mold or lead, but without displacement
- The need for more bus stops

In addition, focus group participants noted they were unaware of the existing footbridge. They expressed concern with reducing the width of the road at the intersection of Barbur Blvd and Capitol Hwy as a pedestrian safety measure as it may cause more traffic and increase accidents, making the road less safe for drivers and pedestrians alike. They instead recommended building footbridges to address pedestrian safety concerns.

SW PDX and SW Tigard Community Meeting; January 16th, 2020

Unite Oregon co-hosted a SW Portland and SW Tigard Community Meeting in partnership with the City of Portland, Metro, City of Tigard, and Proud Ground. The purpose of this meeting was to have community members from both sides of the corridor meet, learn about affordable housing, homeownership opportunities, land banking, and discover together how they can advocate for what they need and to stay in place.

Unite Oregon hired several interpreters to support staff and volunteers to turnout community members to this event. We used a combination of phone banking, social media and targeted e-blasts to mobilize our community. As a result of our efforts over 60 Somali, Arabic and Spanish- speaking community members attended this event, engaging and brainstorming ideas on how to advocate for affordable and accessible homeownership in the SW corridor.

Frank Alexander of Grounded Solutions provided an opening presentation on “land banking”. Later, attendees spoke directly with a panel that included Tigard Mayor Jason Snider; Washington County Commissioner Kathryn Harrington; Proud Ground Executive Director Diane Lynn; and other policy and decision- makers representing low-income housing and development sectors. The panel spoke about a variety of housing, homeownership, land use and development topics, and answered many questions from community members about their housing needs and concerns, as well as their hopes for the future of the SW Corridor in light of the potential MAX line.

Open House at Markham Elementary; March 4th, 2020:

Our final deliverable for this project was to support the City of Portland’s Open House event on March 4th, 2020. Unite Oregon supported this event by turning out community members using a variety of tactics, including canvassing and flyering local low-income renters and small businesses; phone banking targeted communities in the area; and e-blasting targeted list-serves, successfully turning out 60 diverse community members. The goal of the event was to follow up with communities that had attended prior SW Corridor community events and workshops held throughout 2019.

City of Portland staff led the community through various development concepts that reflected the community’s feedback to date on the Barbur Transit center and design; Bow Tie/ viaduct pathway; and the Trimet Conceptual Design Report (CDR), and asked participants to complete surveys in response to what they saw. 25 community members responded to the survey at the Open House; an additional 102 surveys were completed online. As of this writing, the responses to the surveys are being compiled by BPS.

Monthly Meetings:

We participated in the **Community Advisory Group (CAG)** meetings, which met the first Monday of every month. These meetings included community members representing homeowners, neighborhood associations, and immigrant and refugee low-income/affordable housing renters. Unite Oregon and the HAKI Community Organization provided regular support to the immigrant and refugee representatives, ensuring they felt heard and empowered throughout the process.

We also attended and co-facilitated with Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) check- ins with organizational and city partners at monthly **SW Corridor Partners meetings**. We used these meetings to connect with one another, provide updates on our organizing work, and develop plans and next steps for upcoming work in the SW Corridor community.

Unite Oregon staff attended each of these meetings on a monthly basis from January 2019 to March 2020 (with the exception of one February 2020 CAG meeting,, as Unite Oregon staff member Seemab Hussaini was on a business trip).

Summary and Recommendations

1) SW Community members and business owners want to remain engaged

Many of the community members Unite Oregon engaged in this project identify as Somali (Swahili - speaking), or as Middle Eastern, and are deeply connected to the Masjed As- Saber Islamic Center-- Portland's largest mosque-- and the Islamic School of Portland, a nonprofit K-12 school, both of which are located in the SW Corridor and will be impacted by the potential MAX line.

Overall, community members have shared with us their concerns over the risk of displacement--loss of low-income housing, rent increases, and gentrification. They are generally excited about improvements in safety, access, and walkability, and opportunities to create or preserve low-income housing and create community spaces for their communities and families. They have a lot of questions about how the city is planning to preserve and expand the availability of affordable housing. They are afraid of the impact of displacement of people of color with little resources who are renters and small business owners in the neighborhood. We found that in general, community members are not aware of the risks that come with development, until they are educated.

2) Authentic community engagement means meeting community members where they are

Unite Oregon suggests more time be invested in providing education for community members. When talking to meeting participants, they didn't have enough context to understand the background of the project and potential risks. Without understanding what's at risk and how their neighborhoods could change, they are not always able to engage around what they want to protect. We especially saw this play out when doing outreach to the religious community in the area.

In our experience, focus groups give community members a better opportunity to identify what they want to see and learn how to make what they want happen. That's where movement and leadership building happens. Unite Oregon is excited about the future of this work and we want to be able to support this community, and teach them to advocate for their needs in the years to come. We recommend the City invest in more focus groups with community members if they want more genuine engagement with historically marginalized communities.

Unite Oregon recommends a bigger investment be made to educate immigrants, refugees, and low-income communities of color to make sure their voices are heard. We know that our communities need the time and resources to learn information, digest it, and ask questions. Often, we find that once people hear information relayed in a simple language, two to three times, and in smaller, short meetings, everyone is able to participate and we are able to get true community input. We recommend continued engagement with the community in SW Portland in a more purposeful way--this project will

not be enough. And as noted above in our Walking Tour summary, we recommend leaving time in every community meeting for participants to gather as a group and debrief.

Finally, many small businesses that cater to this community are also dependent on this region. Restaurateurs, technology repair shops, ethnic foods stores, and small businesses providing an array of goods and services are lined up and down this corridor and up until now, have not been informed of the potential MAX line and disruptions it may cause. Many of these small business owners have few or no staff, and are unable to attend community meetings as their businesses tend to run from early morning into the late evening. It is vitally important to find alternative ways to engage with these business owners to ensure they are informed of the potential MAX line and impacts to their business, and to ensure they will not be displaced

3) Continue ongoing engagement with diverse communities along the SW Corridor

The City of Portland and other local government partners must continue to engage in ongoing, intentional engagement with immigrants, refugees, people of color and low-income communities in order to maintain community participation and a progressive learning curve. There is a lot of time and facilitation needed for these community members to remain engaged. They are excited to be better informed and empowered in these events, but much time is spent during these events to inform and translate terminology and jargon around planning and infrastructure. In fact, this was also an issue for more seasoned community members who have successfully attended many such events over the decades, though they fared better overall overcoming cultural, economic and language barriers.

Finally, Unite Oregon would like to see intentional community outreach and engagement focused on the SW Corridor Equitable Housing Strategy. As we understand it, this joint effort between the City of Portland, City of Tigard and Metro has helped inform this project, and we think both the community and the Strategy itself will benefit if community members have the opportunity to be educated and provide feedback about the Strategy.