ACKNOWLEDGING THE PAST, EMBRACING THE FUTURE
A Glimpse into The History of Albina’s Eliot Neighborhood

Albina, Eliot and Early Development of the Area

This exhibit highlights the history of the Eliot Neighborhood within the Albina District of Portland. Particular focus is paid to the role of Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in changing the dynamic of the neighborhood during the 1960s and 1970s, through its controversial urban renewal campus expansion.

Defining Eliot

The city of Portland defines the boundaries of Eliot as the Willamette River to the west, N. and N.E. Fremont Street to the north, N.E. 7th Avenue to the east, and N. and N.E. Broadway to the south. Eliot is one of several neighborhoods within the Albina District of Portland. The district itself is divided into lower, center and upper, with the Eliot Neighborhood situated in Central Albina.

The name Eliot was not adopted as the neighborhood’s designation until 1968, with the formation of the Eliot Neighborhood Association. The Model Cities Program, first begun in 1967, led to the establishment of eight neighborhoods and corresponding neighborhood associations in Albina. Eliot was named after Eliot Elementary School. The names Eliot and Albina are used interchangeably in this exhibit, prior to the late 1960s.

Albina was a separate city, located on a donation land claim. Edwin Russell and George H. Williams purchased the land from William Page in 1872. The men named the town Albina, originally pronounced “Al-BEEN-ah,” after the wife and daughter of Page. Major streets in the Albina District now bear the names of the town’s early developers Russell and Williams.

Albina experienced rapid growth in the 1880s, due to the introduction of railways to the area. In 1882 it became the western terminus for a line operated by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company. Albina was incorporated in 1887 with its original city plat boundaries similar to those of the Eliot Neighborhood. By the time Albina consolidated with the cities of Portland and East Portland in 1891, its physical area had expanded greatly and it covered more land than the other two cities combined.

Legacy Emanuel in Eliot

Legacy Emanuel Medical Center was established as Emanuel Hospital in 1912. The Swedish Lutheran hospital was originally located in downtown Portland. Three years earlier, Rev. Carl J. Renhard purchased undeveloped lots in Albina, at the corner of N. Commercial Avenue and Stanton Street. At the time, the surrounding community included a heavy concentration of Scandinavian immigrants, with Swedes living primarily in homes between Graham and Norris Streets. With a new building constructed on the lots purchased by Renhard, Emanuel Hospital moved into the neighborhood in 1915 and continues to stand at the same location.

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The Albina District and Eliot Neighborhood grew quickly in the first decades of the 20th century. The area fostered the development of a diverse community and was home to many immigrants and minorities in Portland.

Albina as a Gateway

Between the 1880s and 1910s, an increasing number of immigrants settled in Albina, attracted by inexpensive housing and easy access to industrial and commercial jobs. Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks and Italians joined already-established communities in Albina from Germany, Ireland, Sweden and Norway. Albina served as a gateway for immigrants just arriving to Portland in the first half of the 20th century.

Migration of the Black Community

A second wave of migration began in the early 1900s. Portland’s black community, once centered in Northwest Portland near Union Station, began moving eastward. Albina offered jobs in the railroad industry, then the predominant employer of black workers in the city. Prior to the early 20th century, blacks could live throughout Portland, but as the black population increased rising racist attitudes and discriminatory practices made it difficult to purchase property or rent apartments in areas outside of Albina. In 1899, the Portland Realty Board adopted a policy restricting its members from selling property to blacks or Asians, claiming such sales would depreciate property values. The Realty Board officially abandoned its racial exclusion policy in 1952, but the practice continued. Such actions led to redlining practices that geographically restricted the black community Albina became increasingly known as a black neighborhood.

Williams Avenue: The Commercial Hub of the Neighborhood

As the population increased in Albina, so did businesses. The intersection of Williams Avenue and Russell Street became a commercial center of the area. By the 1930s, Albina was a thriving, working class community, with a growing black presence. Many black residents moved into homes and established businesses, centered predominantly along Williams Avenue, particularly near the intersection with Broadway. The street also offered valued social and community centers, like the Williams Avenue YWCA. The building was and continues to be an important structure in the community, once used by the local branch of the NAACP, the USO during World War II and various social and political clubs. By 1940, a significant portion of Portland’s black population lived in Albina. That number increased during and after World War II.

Acknowledging the Past, Embracing the Future

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World War II saw an explosion in Portland's population. Recruited to work in the shipbuilding industry, approximately 15,000 blacks, many from the South, moved to the area. An estimated 3,000 new black residents settled in Eliot, but were segregated from other neighborhoods in the Albina District.

The population influx resulted in a significant housing shortage. Wartime housing projects, like Vanport and Guild's Lake, were constructed to alleviate the problem. Vanport became the largest public housing project in the country and by 1945 its population reached nearly 40,000. Following the end of the war, the housing shortage continued and many residents remained in the temporary wartime housing projects.

**The Vanport Flood**

On May 30, 1948, the Columbia River broke through a dike and flooded the city of Vanport. Thousands were left homeless. The Vanport flood intensified the existing housing shortage and many blacks were forced to resettle in the already crowded Albina area. The Portland Realty Board continued its discriminatory practices of decades past, further encouraging black settlement in North and Northeast Portland.

Founded in 1945, and currently headquartered in the Eliot Neighborhood, the Urban League of Portland, along with the local NAACP branch, fought housing and employment discrimination facing Portland's black residents. The Albina Ministerial Alliance formed in 1958 to fund programs that encouraged community, education and economic development. Community leaders like Otto Rutherford, Dr. DeNorval Unthank and Rev. O. B. Williams fought for civil rights for Portland's black community, which by 1957 was heavily concentrated in the Albina District.

Civil Rights

The black community in Albina continued to grow during the 1940s and 1950s and the area experienced white flight in the postwar years. By 1950, Albina was an economically challenged section of Portland, but one supporting a vibrant community. Many black families resided in Eliot, along with older white residents.

Blacks were routinely denied mortgages and financing to improve their properties, which further encouraged the deterioration of housing stock in Albina, with many homes more than fifty years old. Many blacks in the postwar era found little employment outside of service industries and thus some of the city’s lowest income households were located in Albina.

Land values in Central Albina and Eliot soared in the mid-20th century, as planners and developers targeted the area for light industrial and commercial activities. Immense changes occurred in the Albina District in the next few decades, as vast amounts of housing were razed and cleared away to make way for urban renewal projects.

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In the 1950s and 1960s, Portland’s city leaders, planners and developers embraced nationally accepted planning principles and began labeling inner-city communities, like Albina, as so-called “blighted areas,” neighborhoods beyond salvage and thus targeted for clearance.

Urban Renewal: A National Trend

The United States Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, which sought the elimination of substandard housing and “blight” in an effort to improve national welfare. Urban renewal, as supported by such federal legislation, was said to redevelop and rehabilitate deteriorating areas, but in Albina it led to the demolition and displacement of many communities.

Memorial Coliseum and the Beginning of Urban Renewal Projects in Albina

Planners thought Albina, offering highly valued inner-city land, would better serve such projects as light industry, highway development and institutional expansion. In 1956, Portland citizens voted to construct a sports center. The Memorial Coliseum project led to the demolition of 470 housing units at the southern end of Portland’s black community and displaced hundreds of people, black and white. More homes were also razed for the construction of the right-of-way for the Minnesota Freeway, also known as Interstate 5, in 1964.

The Portland Development Commission (PDC) was established in 1958 to perform functions related to urban renewal, including redevelopment, property acquisition and land clearance. In 1962, the PDC published the Central Albina Study, an examination of an urban renewal program for an area bounded by Fremont Street, Union Avenue (now MLK), Broadway and Interstate Avenue. In its report, PDC found the neighborhood to be in advanced stages of blight, beyond rehabilitation and recommended urban renewal, largely through clearance of properties, as the only solution.

The Albina Neighborhood Improvement Project and the Exclusion of Eliot

A year earlier, PDC had launched the Albina Neighborhood Improvement Project (ANIP), the first urban renewal project in Northeast Portland targeting neighborhood rehabilitation, rather than redevelopment. The program addressed residences in the area bounded by Fremont Street, Skidmore Street, Vancouver Avenue and Mississippi Avenue, and thus excluded the Eliot Neighborhood. Many Albina residents considered ANIP to be a success and in 1967, more than 1,000 citizens petitioned City Council to extend the project south of Fremont. The request was denied as PDC had written off future residential potential in the area south of Fremont and west of Union Avenue because the area was already targeted for Emanuel Hospital’s urban renewal efforts.

More than any other neighborhood in Albina, Eliot suffered the effects of urban renewal. Through the aforementioned projects, as well as the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project, Eliot lost half of its residents between 1960 and 1970, approximately 3,000 people.

Clearly, urban renewal, largely by clearance, appears to be the only solution to, not only blight that presently exists in Central Albina, but also to avoid the spread of that blight to other surrounding areas.”

Central Albina Study, 1962
Administrators at Emanuel Hospital announced to the public on February 28, 1967, plans to develop a modern medical campus. The hospital cited a need for expansion, and the subsequent land clearance in the Eliot Neighborhood, lest it be forced to relocate to a suburban location. This was the first time the public learned of the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project, though the hospital, Portland Development Commission (PDC) and others had been working on a hospital expansion plan for several years.

Urban Renewal Program Possibilities

Beginning in May 1960, representatives from the City of Portland, urban renewal consultants and Emanuel Hospital administrators, including Paul Hanson, discussed establishing an urban renewal zone in Central Albina. By July 1962, Emanuel notified the city about its interest in preparing a campus expansion development plan, utilizing the urban renewal program. Hospital administrators met with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to discuss the possibility of such a plan. PDC directed its staff to prepare a report regarding the feasibility of an urban renewal zone in the Central Albina area. Findings of the report concluded that the area was unfit for residential rehabilitation and recommended land clearance to make way for the urban renewal project.

Emanuel Acquires Properties in Eliot

Soon after PDC passed a resolution to study the feasibility of forming an urban renewal district in the area, Emanuel Hospital began a seven-year property acquisition program. Emanuel privately purchased and demolished 101 properties, which ultimately served as the local matching funds for federal urban renewal funding. None of these property owners received relocation benefits.

The Hamilton Report

Emanuel Hospital hired James A. Hamilton & Associates, hospital consultants based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to prepare a report detailing the future role of the hospital and possible development. Completed on September 25, 1964, the Hamilton Report identified the needs for the hospital’s expansion in the surrounding community and quantified the amount of land needed to accomplish such plans. These requirements, as outlined in the report, were used by PDC to define the land required for the Emanuel Hospital urban renewal zone. The figures were also cited in the Survey and Planning Grant Application, later submitted to HUD.

Development for the Emanuel Hospital urban renewal zone included hospital and related facilities, offices, parking, employee housing and housing for low-income elderly residents. The proposed extended hospital campus included a 55.3-acre area bounded by Interstate 5, N. Kerby Street, N. Russell Street and N. Williams Avenue. The Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Plan moved forward in early 1967. On January 9, PDC approved the undertaking of surveys and plans related to the project and authorized the filing of the grant application to HUD. Ten days later, City Council formally approved the urban renewal project.

“There is little doubt that the greatest concentration of Portland’s urban blight can be found in the Albina area encompassing the Emanuel Hospital… Conditions will not improve without a concerted effort by urban renewal action.”

- Portland Development Commission, 1966

The Origins and Planning of the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Plan
Plains for the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project were well underway when the hospital formally announced its plan to the public. Coinciding with the announcement of the plan was Portland’s receipt of federal funding through the Model Cities Program, an initiative created to improve implementation of existing urban programs by emphasizing comprehensive planning, rehabilitation and citizen participation. A 4.3 mile area in North and Northeast Portland was declared the Model Cities district. The Model Cities Program also led to the establishment of several neighborhood associations, including Eliot, Base, King, Humboldt, Irvington, Vernon, Woodlawn and Sabin.

Emanuel Hospital and the Model Cities Program
Between March and November 1967, Emanuel’s Survey and Planning Grant application was amended to meet the new requirements under the Model Cities Program. Emanuel’s Board of Directors adopted a resolution in 1968 to coordinate the hospital’s urban renewal plan with Model Cities. The Model Cities Citizens’ Planning Board was organized in 1968 and became the main citizen review vehicle for the Emanuel project. The board expressed concerns that the PDC and the City had failed to provide adequate citizen review of the planning and implementation process. Through negotiations, PDC and Emanuel promised to keep citizens better informed and more involved, primarily in the form of a working relationship with the Model Cities Citizens’ Planning Board.

The City Approves Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Plan
In May 1970, the Department of Housing and Urban Development approved Emanuel’s Survey and Planning Grant application. The Model Cities Citizens’ Planning Board, Portland Development Commission and the City Planning Commission then approved the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Plan in July 1970. Despite a decade planning the urban renewal project, the first public hearing for residents and businesses affected by the urban renewal project was not held until July 29, 1970. This was the first time many affected residents heard about the hospital’s urban renewal plan or the project’s relocation plan. City Council adopted the urban renewal plan at the meeting.

Eliot Citizens React
In response to the project, a citizens’ group of residents organized to express concerns regarding the proposed relocation of residents, compensation offered for properties and lack of affordable housing for displaced citizens. They called themselves the Emanuel Displaced Persons Association.
**Community Opposition, Relocation and Building Demolition**

“Didn’t they have a long range plan? After all, if your life’s investment was smashed to splinters by a bulldozer to make room for a hospital, you could at least feel decent and perhaps tolerable about; but to have it all done for nothing...”

- Mrs. Leo Warren, 1973

The Emanuel Displaced Persons Association (EDPA), led by Mrs. Leo Warren, became the main voice protesting the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project. EDPA went before City Council in October 1970, to express its concerns regarding the fairness of the project’s relocation assistance plan. Developed in 1969, the relocation plan claimed ample alternative housing was available for displaced residents, thus there was no need to construct new housing. The group also objected to the manner in which the Portland Development Commission communicated with affected residents in which the Portland Development Commission housing was available for displaced residents, therefore there was no need to construct new housing.

The hospital project moved forward after EDPA, Emanuel Hospital, Housing Authority of Portland, PDC, Model Cities Citizens’ Planning Board and City Demonstration Agency signed a Replacement Housing Agreement in March 1971. The agreement provided for the development of 380-390 housing units as replacements for demolished homes. Shortly after signing the agreement, Emanuel stated that it would provide land for the replacement housing, but would not be responsible for funding or developing it. None of the other agencies agreed to stop forward. Subsequently, low-income housing, an original component of the project, was never provided.

Portland Development Commission Acquires and Demolishes Properties

PDC began acquiring properties in 1971. Federal laws required PDC to relocate all homeowners into comparable housing without financial loss to the homeowner. Approximately 74% of those relocated were black. Most moved into neighborhoods within a three-mile radius of their old homes. Renters were relocated, primarily to Northeast neighborhoods. Apartment buildings and commercial structures were also demolished to make way for the expanding medical campus. In total, twenty-two blocks in the Eliot Neighborhood were cleaned.

Emanuel Campus Expansion Postponed Indefinitely

Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project was intended as a multi-phase venture. The first two phases were completed by 1970 on property the hospital had owned or privately acquired in the previous decade. In 1973, the hospital announced the cancellation of the third phase, citing lack of federal funding due to the curtailment of the Hill-Burton Act. With the demolition of properties completed, displaced residents expressed anger at the hospital, PDC and the city, as cleared land would remain vacant for decades.
It was like one big family. But now everyone's pretty well scattered.  

- Lucie Glass, 1973

The following names are known individuals, families and businesses relocated by the Portland Development Commission as part of the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project between 1971 and 1973. The names were recorded as found in the Portland Development Commission Emanuel Relocation records at the City of Portland Archives.
The Eliot Neighborhood was dramatically altered by urban renewal projects during the 1960s and 1970s, losing more than half of its residential buildings during this period. The construction of the Fremont Bridge resulted in the loss of additional housing. Zoning issues continued to arise, as city planners pushed for rezoning of surviving residential areas into light industrial.

Eliot Neighborhood Association

The Eliot Neighborhood Association (ENA), formed in the late 1960s, worked to stabilize and preserve surviving homes in the community. The advocacy of the association coupled with a shift in urban planning philosophy by the late 1970s worked toward redeveloping residential and commercial properties rather than clearing so-called “blighted” areas in inner-city neighborhoods like Eliot. In 1978, the Housing Authority of Portland redeveloped vacant land on N. Williams Avenue into Unthank Plaza, an 80-unit low-income housing project, named in honor of the late DeNorval Unthank, M.D., a black physician and civil rights activist.

Pressures on the Community

The neighborhood experienced serious problems during the 1980s and suffered a decline in population, as crime increased throughout the Albina District. Abandoned housing, absentee landlords, drug dealing, prostitution and gang warfare became common threats to the community. The Black United Front, Portland Organizing Project, and other neighborhood activists fought to improve conditions in Albina and stem the growth of crime.

By the 1990s, Eliot was home to a growing number of white and Hispanic residents, in addition to the remaining black members of the community. The city began efforts to revitalize Albina and in 1993 it adopted the Albina Community Plan, an ambitious community planning effort that focused on land use, housing needs and transportation but also the education, employment and economic development needs of the community. The Albina Community Plan aided in the establishment of conservation districts in Eliot and along Russell Street, as part of efforts to preserve what remained of the neighborhood’s historic structures. While significant improvements occurred in the neighborhood, issues like gentrification and rising property costs continued to plague Eliot.

Eliot Neighborhood Plan

The Eliot Neighborhood Plan was part of the larger Albina Community Plan and originated with the Eliot Neighborhood Vision Statement, developed by the ENA and Emanuel Hospital between 1988 and 1990. The plan recognized the hospital as a significant member of the neighborhood, one that provided medical care and employment opportunities to Eliot residents, but also recommended a growth boundary for the medical campus to prevent further encroachment on surviving residential and commercial buildings. The plan also included a provision making it as difficult as possible to change residential zones to commercial or industrial zones, a lesson learned from the earlier urban renewal era.

“We fought like mad people to keep the crime out of here. Had we not fought, I don’t know what this area would’ve eventually been. But the newcomers haven’t given us credit for it.”

- Charles Ford, 1990
Legacy Emanuel Medical Center and the Community

Legacy Emanuel Medical Center has been a member of the Eliot Neighborhood since 1915. Though the Emanuel Hospital Urban Renewal Project caused significant losses in the community through resident relocation and building demolition, the hospital has long been a strong community supporter, and is currently engaged in reconciliation efforts to acknowledge and honor those affected by the urban renewal experience of the 1960s and 1970s.

To stimulate stability and economic growth in the surrounding community, and improve relationships with the neighborhood, Legacy Emanuel launched the Emanuel Neighborhood Home Ownership Program (ENHOP) in 1994. Participating employees received forgivable loans to assist in purchasing homes within a four-mile radius of the hospital. By the time the program ended a decade later, more than 100 employees had purchased homes through ENHOP.

A Part of the Neighborhood

The Legacy Emanuel campus is a vital part of the Eliot Neighborhood. In addition to medical care, the campus provides free meeting and office space. Organizations like the African American Health Coalition and Oregon Lutheran Synod have long maintained offices at Legacy Emanuel. The Eliot Neighborhood Association hosts its monthly meetings on the campus. When a fire destroyed the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church in 2007, Legacy Emanuel provided the congregation with complimentary office space. Legacy’s Community Health Fund, established in 1998, further assists community organizations by funding health initiatives in the Portland-Vancouver area.

Revitalizing Dawson Park

In 2001, hospital representatives, community members and local businesses collaborated in efforts to take back Dawson Park. The Dawson Park Revitalization Project resulted in the transformation of the park from a center of criminal activity to a family friendly area, offering health fairs, the Concert in the Park series and church picnics.

The grounds of Legacy Emanuel also benefit the Eliot Neighborhood. The hospital’s healing gardens are open to the public. In 2012, a vacant lot, leftover from urban renewal, was repurposed into the Albina Cooperative Garden – a partnership with Legacy Emanuel, Project Grow at Port City, Eliot Neighborhood Association and Lloyd District Community Association.

Community Outreach

Legacy Emanuel has long provided outreach to the community through educational and injury-prevention efforts. One such offering is Legacy Trauma Nurses Talk Tough (TNTT), a nationally renowned injury prevention program aimed at reducing risky behavior among youth. Legacy Emanuel has implemented other programs and services related to injury prevention, including burn prevention classes, CPR tutorials and home safety assessment courses. In 1999, Legacy Health established the Youth Employment in Summer (YES) program, an employment and college scholarship program for Hispanic, African American and Native American high school students. Legacy Emanuel also offers job shadowing and internship opportunities for students from local schools, including Jefferson High School and Benson Polytechnic High School.