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April 4, 2017

Amanda Fritz, Commissioner, City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Avenue, Room 220
Portland, OR 97204

Mike Abbaté, Director, Portland Parks and Recreation
1120 SW 5th Avenue, Suite 1302
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Fritz and Director Abbaté:

Once in a great while we truly reach a crossroads where a concerted and timely effort will make a difference for generations to come.

We've touched on this issue before. Between SE Alder and Morrison Streets and west of SE 14th sits 1.31 acres of rare, close-in open space owned by Portland Public Schools (PPS). The City of Portland (City) has a first right of refusal to purchase this property – one that expires May 29, 2017. If the City does not exercise this option, a publically held asset will likely be lost forever (reference Tax Lot 1S1E028A 300).

The 1.31 acres of open space sits next to 4.5 acres the City already owns – where the long-planned and already approved Washington High School Community Center (WHSCC) has yet to be built. And here's the twist, the right of first refusal includes a clause requiring funds to build a new Center must be on hand to exercise this right.

We are asking the City to bond Phase I of WHSCC and purchase the 1.31 acres before May 29 so our community can benefit from both a new Center and much needed open space. This request is inspired by Mayor Ted Wheeler's commitment that, "beginning next year," our City can start, "leveraging guaranteed revenues," from expiring Urban Renewal Areas for investments like park facilities. (2017 State of the City Address)

Yet, next year may be too late. And the promise of this site has been on the radar for a long, long time.

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In 1991 the Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) Futures Master Plan issued by Commissioner Mike Lindberg noted the, "shortage of community centers, especially in the Inner Southeast Area, where densities are highest."

Today, those densities are rising rapidly and the rezoning of numerous properties in the Central Eastside district from EG1 to EX grants by right a marked increase in residential capacity. Thousands of new residents will call this area home in coming years, a stretch of city blocks with a scarcity of open space and parks. Rapid growth continues along close-in corridors like SE Division and Hawthorne, while the Buckman Pool is now offline.

Millions of dollars of System Development Charges for parks infrastructure are being generated by this development.

Much planning and community effort has already been invested in the Washington High School Community Center:

- 2003-2008: First Project Advisory Committee (PAC) includes Neighborhoods, PP&R and PPS reps, who meet over several years.
- 2004: City purchases from PPS 4.5 acres (Tax Lot 1S1E028A 101) - a portion of the Washington-Monroe High School property at Southeast Stark and 12th - as a site for the Community Center.
- 2009: Second PAC formed; works with SERA architects to develop recommended option. Oregon Senators Gordon Smith & Ron Wyden snag \$656,000 Housing and Urban Development Grant for PP&R towards this effort.
- 2009: Washington High School property is brought into the Central Eastside Urban Renewal Area through a boundary adjustment. **\$985,000 is allotted to the Center (A00425; 2016-17)** / (9th Amendment to URA / Ordinance 180316).
- 2012: PP&R applies for and receives a ten-year Conditional Use permit for WHSCC Master Plan. (LU 11-201984)
- 2012: As part of a funding package, PPR grants the City a five-year option to purchase another 1.31 acres (adjacent to the 4.5 acres the City already owns). **This Memorandum of Understanding expires May 29, 2017.** (Ordinance 185561/ Item #4)

Time indeed is running short. We need land for a Community Center and we need open space for today's residents and the many more to come.

We support our coalition member, Buckman Community Association (BCA), and their March 9, 2017 letter asking the City to find a way to extend the existing MOU on the remaining 1.31 acres of open space at the site. Better yet, let's bond the Community Center now and purchase the land before Memorial Day. **We have read the March 31, 2017 response by Mayor Wheeler and yourselves to the March 9 BCA letter and**

reiterate our support for the BCA position and the need for the City to purchase the 1.31 acres and keep this land open space for future generations.

Lastly, we wish to address a notion, or a perception perhaps, that inner Southeast Portland has become relatively wealthy, and residents in this area can well afford recreational amenities through the private market rather than public community centers.

If the path to a vibrant city begins with a safe, affordable home, the next place that demands our attention is how to maintain, and ultimately upgrade ... parks and other civic infrastructure that is so critical to the vitality, safety and livability of Portland...

We can no longer put off needed investments in this area.

-Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler
2017 State of the City Address

To be sure, there is a rapid influx of higher earners settling in many parts of close-in Portland. Yet there is still a diverse range of social economic strata nearby the proposed community center site. Further, new rules to provide inclusionary zoning as well as other affordable housing efforts will create homes with a wide range of incomes.

Most important is the mindset and the opportunity to create public gathering arenas where residents from all walks of life cross paths and recreate or spend time using a shared resource. Community centers, public parks, and plazas are the glue that binds us together as Portlanders. What we use together we all can support together.

The plan has been developed; the time to fulfill it has narrowed. SE Uplift urges swift action by the City to complete land procurement and build our new community center and park at SE 12th and Stark.

This letter was approved by a unanimous vote of the SE Uplift Board on April 3, 2017.

On behalf of the SE Uplift Board of Directors,



Robert McCullough
Chair
CC: Portland City Council
CC: The Tribune, Oregonian and other media