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The Landscape: Cully Neighborhood

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Cully Neighborhood

by Eavan Moore

The Cully neighborhood's population has transformed more rapidly than its landscape since its annexation by the City of Portland in 1985. Formerly rural and majority-white, Cully still has limited urban amenities but is now one of the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood in Portland.¹ The Living Cully coalition of nonprofits—Verde, Hacienda CDC, the Native American Youth and Family Center, and Habitat for Humanity—is working to build safer, greener, and more culturally resonant spaces, while avoiding displacement of low-income people as the neighborhood begins to gentrify.

One flagship project, the 25-acre Thomas Cully Park, is representative of Living Cully's place-making work. The City of Portland acquired a landfill in 2000 and designated it as a future park, but lacked funds to develop it. The nonprofit Verde struck a public-private partnership agreement with the city in 2012 and involved community members in designing a proposed space. The resulting master plan includes a community garden (completed in 2012), an off-leash dog area, a parking lot, a child-designed play area, a habitat restoration area, a youth soccer field, and a spiraling garden designed by Native American residents.

In 2017, Verde began construction on the rest of the park and met its \$11.3 million cost with a complex combination of federal, state, county, city, foundation, corporate, and private contributions. The stretch of Seventy-second Avenue that connects the site to NE Killingsworth Street has already been rebuilt; a paved road lined by broad sidewalks, streetlamps, and stormwater runoff vegetation now runs between rows of homes in the Fir Grove mobile home park.

Around the corner, at the intersection of NE Cully and NE Killingsworth, Living Cully makes its home in a former strip club purchased in 2015. Plans are underway

to demolish the building and replace it with a mixed-use community center. For now, Yucatecan food carts, a basketball hoop, and a temporary sign welcome visitors to Living Cully Plaza.

This work takes place in the context of a broad plan to link environmental sustainability with housing and job opportunities. Twenty percent of residents fall below the federal poverty line.² Meanwhile, regional cost of living pressures have hit Cully, where the median house price rose 13 percent between 2015 and 2016, compared to a 12 percent increase in the Portland metro area.³ Verde's ownership of construction and planting projects allows it to provide work for residents and minority-owned businesses. Living Cully seeks to preserve the low-cost housing that drew many residents to the area by lobbying for renter protections, offering information and services to homeowners, and buying property for affordable housing development (as, for example, at Living Cully Plaza).

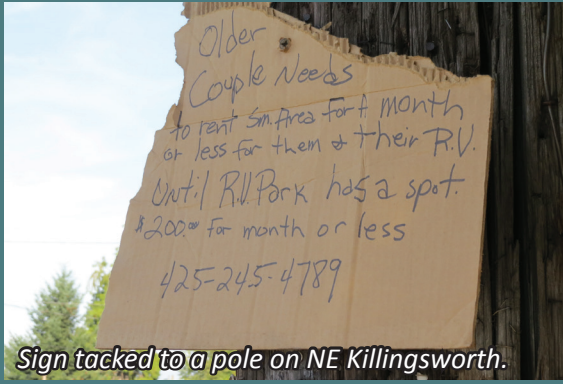
When residents of the Oak Leaf mobile home park learned in 2016 that it was up for sale and redevelopment, they asked nonprofits for help acquiring the property. After a year of rallying supporters, Living Cully secured a \$1.5 million loan from Portland Housing Bureau and bought out the owner. About sixty people will remain in their homes through this effort. Whether the same effect can be replicated on a larger scale remains to be seen.

Eavan Moore is a first-year student in PSU's Master of Urban and Regional Planning program and a graduate research assistant for *Metroscape*.

1. Ricardo Bañuelos, Brooke Jordan, Rebecca Kennedy, Danell Norby, Erik Olson and Cary Watters, "Not in Cully: Anti-Displacement Strategies for the Cully Neighborhood" (report, Portland State University, June 2013), 1, https://www.pdx.edu/usp/sites/www.pdx.edu.usp/files/A_LivingCully_PrinterFriendly_0.pdf

2. Ramona DeNeis, Portland Monthly online, "Portland Neighborhoods by the Numbers 2017: The City," March 22, 2017, <https://www.pdxmonthly.com/articles/2017/3/22/portland-neighborhoods-by-the-numbers-2017-the-city>

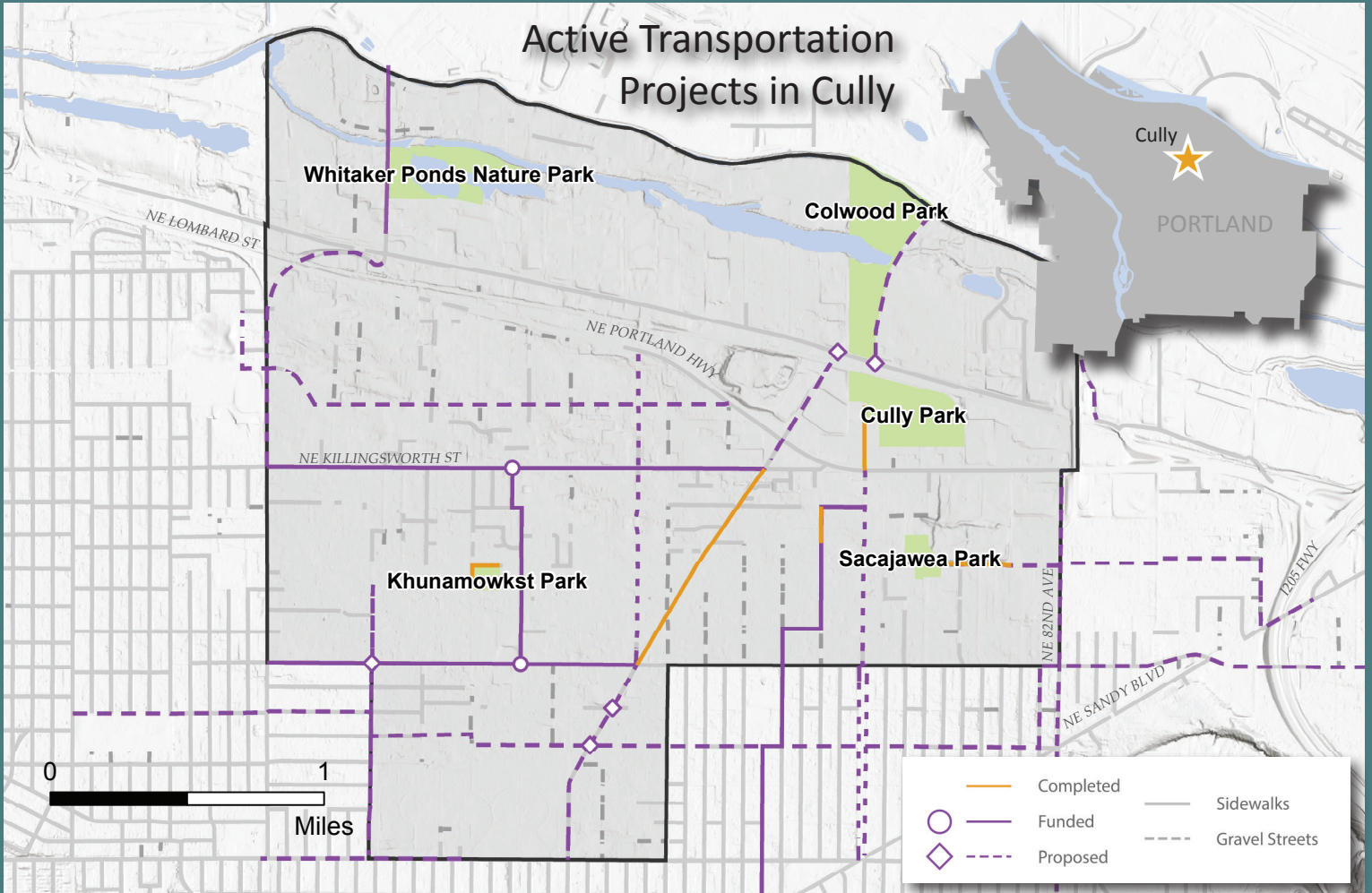
1. Neighborhood Pulse, December 11, 2017, <http://neighborhoodpulse.imspx.org/cully>



Sign tacked to a pole on NE Killingsworth.



Living Cully Plaza Rendering by Salazar Architects.



The Living Cully office.



Thomas Cully Park in 2017.