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Evaluating the N/NE Preference Policy

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Evaluating the N/NE Preference Policy



Portland State
UNIVERSITY

Cover images, clockwise from top left:

King + Parks, photo provided by PCRI; Jeannette and John at Charlotte B. Rutherford Place, photo provided by Central City Concern; Renaissance Commons, photo by Lincoln Barbour - www.lincolnbarbour.com

N/NE Portland has long been the heart of Portland's Black community. By 2010, the area had lost two-thirds of its Black residents to displacement. In response, the City adopted a Preference Policy that prioritizes displaced affordable rental and homeownership applicants. This report describes findings from the first phase of a study to understand what difference this policy is making in the lives of residents.



Renaissance Commons apartments. Photo
Lincoln Barbour.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The researchers wanted to learn who accessed housing through the Preference Policy, why they applied, what (if any) difference they have experienced in their well-being, and any recommended improvements to the policy. In summer 2019, we collected data from residents living in the first three apartment buildings to use the Preference Policy. We gathered 98 surveys, 29 interviews, and held 3 focus groups.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Preference Policy is serving the intended population.
- Place matters to residents housed through the Preference Policy.
- Residents are generally experiencing improvements to their well-being.
- Many residents also experience threats to their well-being.



had lived their entire life in the neighborhood



say the history of the neighborhood matters to them



say the neighborhood is a good place to raise a family



experience racism in the neighborhood

Implication: Affordable housing is necessary but not sufficient. Comprehensive community development is necessary to meet the broader goals of advancing racial reparation and equity in N/NE Portland. Residents suggest the need for holistic community development.

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N/NE PREFERENCE POLICY EVALUATION: Study Report to the North/Northeast Community

For more than 60 years, North/Northeast (N/NE) Portland has served as the residential, economic, spiritual and cultural heart of the city's Black community. Waves of urban redevelopment have disrupted the community under urban renewal policies, beginning with demolishing homes to build highways and stadiums in the 1950s and continuing with transit investments that spurred gentrification in the 2000s. By 2010, the area once home to the majority of Black residents in the state of Oregon had lost two-thirds of its Black community members to displacement (Bates, 2013). In 2015, following years of organizing by Black community leaders, the City of Portland adopted a N/NE Housing Strategy with specific rental development, home repair loans and grants, and homeownership goals. The City of Portland has redirected \$70 million of urban renewal funds for the strategy.

A key aspect of the strategy is a Preference Policy that prioritizes affordable rental and homeownership applicants “who were displaced, are at risk of displacement, or are the descendants of families displaced due to urban renewal in N/NE Portland” (Portland Housing Bureau, 2019, p. 109). In the first five years of implementation, the strategy has created housing opportunities in N/NE for 680 households through home repair grants and loans; supported homeownership for more than 100 first-time home buyers, and created more than 500 units of affordable rental housing (Portland Housing Bureau, 2020).

To understand what difference this policy is making in the lives of residents who have returned to N/NE, Portland State University researchers began to study the effects of the Preference Policy on residents' well-being. This report describes findings from the first phase of our study, including who the Preference Policy is serving, how the policy benefits residents, and what residents would like to see more of in their neighborhoods.

As the N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy Oversight Committee cautioned in 2017, “The neighborhood has changed, and there is a need to make sure that families can do more than exist.” We hope that this report will support further community development to ensure that longtime North/Northeast families can be part of a thriving community.

N/NE NEIGHBORHOOD TIMELINE

1956 MEMORIAL COLISEUM

Voters approve the construction of Memorial Coliseum in the Eliot Neighborhood, resulting in the teardown of more than 450 Albina homes and businesses. At the time, 4/5 of people in this thriving, close-knit community are Black.

1999 ALBINA REVITALIZATION

In response to complaints of neighborhood activists and the recommendations of a citywide task force report on abandoned housing, the City of Portland begins revitalizing the Albina neighborhood, using building code enforcement to confront the extreme level of housing abandonment. Whites buy homes, displacing many low-income Black families to relatively far-flung areas where they can afford the rents. By 1999, Blacks own 36 percent fewer homes in the neighborhood than a decade prior, while whites own 43 percent more.

2010 ROSE QUARTER

PDC tries to expand the ICURA to include Rose Quarter in order to help fund the TrailBlazer's proposed Jump Town development (an entertainment district to be developed/managed by a company accused of racial discrimination against patrons in their Kansas City, Louisville, and Philadelphia entertainment complexes). PDC abandons the large expansion plan in 2011 and instead just adds some neighborhood areas to the URA.

1970 EMANUEL HOSPITAL

Portland Development Commission (PDC) creates another Urban Renewal Area (URA) as the Black community protests the expansion of Emanuel Hospital. The expansion demolishes nearly 300 homes in North Portland. Residents are given 90 days to move. Homeowners are compensated with a maximum \$15,000 payment, and renters receive \$4,000. The federal construction funds run out after the homes are demolished but before construction is finished. The expansion is not completed and after decades a full city block, once the heart of the Black business district, remains vacant.

2000 INTERSTATE CORRIDOR

The Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area (ICURA) is drawn to fund the extension of the Max light rail into Northeast Portland, the HOPE VI redevelopment of Columbia Villa public housing, and continued physical infrastructure improvements. While the original ICURA plan includes anti-displacement measures, they are largely abandoned within just a few years. The ICURA sparks a wave of market redevelopment and displacement of Black households, leaving no majority Black neighborhoods in the city by 2010. The promise of 1,000 affordable housing units is not met.

2015 N/NE HOUSING STRATEGY

Portland Housing Bureau (PHB) launches N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy to mitigate gentrification. Base funds are \$20 MM promised by Mayor Hales after Portland African American Leadership Forum (now Imagine Black) protested the sale of a site at MLK & Alberta at 80% discount of market value to a developer to bring a Trader Joe's to the neighborhood without any affordable housing or community benefits agreement on the site. The strategy includes a Preference Policy to give priority placement in publicly funded housing programs (rental and ownership) to those with historical roots and multi-generational displacement in N/NE.

ABOUT THE N/NE PREFERENCE POLICY

Portland, Oregon's "N/NE Preference Policy" is among the first in the nation to recreate housing access in a historical community of color for those whose families experienced displacement due to urban renewal and gentrification.

The N/NE Housing Strategy builds new affordable housing with the Preference Policy giving priority access to families with inter-generational ties to North and Northeast Portland neighborhoods.

The policy addresses the harmful impacts of urban renewal by creating affordable housing in now-gentrifying areas. The policy is tied to Portland's Fair Housing Plan to advance racial equity through reparative action.

"The N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy is an initiative by the Portland Housing Bureau to address a legacy of displacement in North and Northeast Portland through investments in new affordable rental housing, opportunities for first-time homebuyers, and home retention programs for longtime residents"
- Portland Housing Bureau

Key aspects of the N/NE Preference Policy:

- Applicants demonstrate that they themselves, their parents, and/or grandparents lived in the neighborhoods affected by urban renewal since the mid-1950s.
- Those with the longest ties to the most affected areas have priority placement into new rental housing or homeownership opportunities.
- There is a special status for families whose homes were condemned under a City eminent domain action now recognized as unlawful.
- The application is open to former and current N/NE residents, providing both a path to return and an opportunity to stay in stable, low-cost housing.

Applications to the Preference Policy far exceed available housing. To date, approximately 5,700 people have applied for 531 rental homes. Between March 2018 and September 2020, 449 households moved into affordable rental housing through the Preference Policy.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Why study the N/NE Preference Policy?

Portland is among many cities that are grappling with the complexities of neighborhood change, gentrification and shifting geographies of racially segregated poverty. One of the greatest policy challenges is how to support residents to be able to stay in place, and even more difficult, how to return to the neighborhood after it's begun to gentrify. The N/NE Preference Policy is one attempt to meet that challenge, and housing advocates and policymakers across the country are eager to understand how it is working. This longitudinal study is designed to inform continued policy implementation in Portland, and to contribute knowledge regarding the effects of reparative housing policies as many cities are contending with how best to address legacies of racial and spatial inequality.

What did we hope to learn?

In the summer of 2019, we conducted the first phase of research, talking with residents in the first three apartment buildings to open: Garlington Place, Charlotte B. Rutherford Place and The Beatrice Morrow. At this time, 137 households had moved into affordable rental housing in one of these buildings through the Preference Policy.



Garlington Place, image provided by Portland Housing Bureau.

We wanted to understand:

- Who sought housing through the Preference Policy and their motivations for applying.
- Residents' experiences in the neighborhood and sense of community well-being in their first year in their building.
- Residents' recommendations to improve social, cultural, civic, economic and environmental well-being.

INFORMATION GATHERING

We gathered insights from residents through surveys, interviews and focus groups in each of the three buildings.

- We began by surveying residents of each building, **collecting a total of 98 surveys**, and reaching 69% of residents living in Preference Policy apartments. The survey included questions about why residents applied for the Preference Policy, their sense of community, and their quality of life before and since moving into housing.
- We **interviewed 29 residents**, reaching between 13%-30% of households in each building. These interviews helped us understand the factors that residents see contributing to, and detracting from, their well-being. Residents also shared many ideas of ways to improve community well-being.
- We then reported preliminary survey findings to residents in focus groups (**one per building, with a total of 28 residents participating**). Participants helped interpret the initial survey findings and shared additional ideas for the community.

Who participated?

All participants were current adult residents living in Preference Policy apartments. Participants ages ranged from 19-71; 84% identified as Black, 68% identified as women, and 54% were currently raising children.

Analysis of data produced four major findings:

The Preference Policy is serving the intended population.

Place matters to residents housed through the Preference Policy.

Residents are generally experiencing improvements to their well-being.

Many residents also experience threats to their well-being.

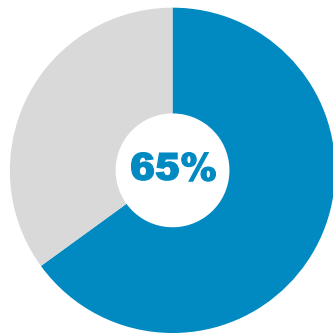
FINDING 1: THE PREFERENCE POLICY IS SERVING THE INTENDED POPULATION.

The Preference Policy aims to serve community members with multi-generational ties to Northeast Portland, particularly those whose families have been involuntarily displaced.

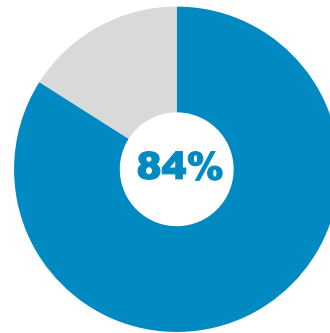
On average, residents who completed the survey had lived in the neighborhood 32 years, and 65% had lived their entire life in the neighborhood.

"I grew up in Northeast...my family has been having their house for almost four generations."

~Rutherford resident



HAD LIVED THEIR ENTIRE LIFE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



IDENTIFIED AS BLACK

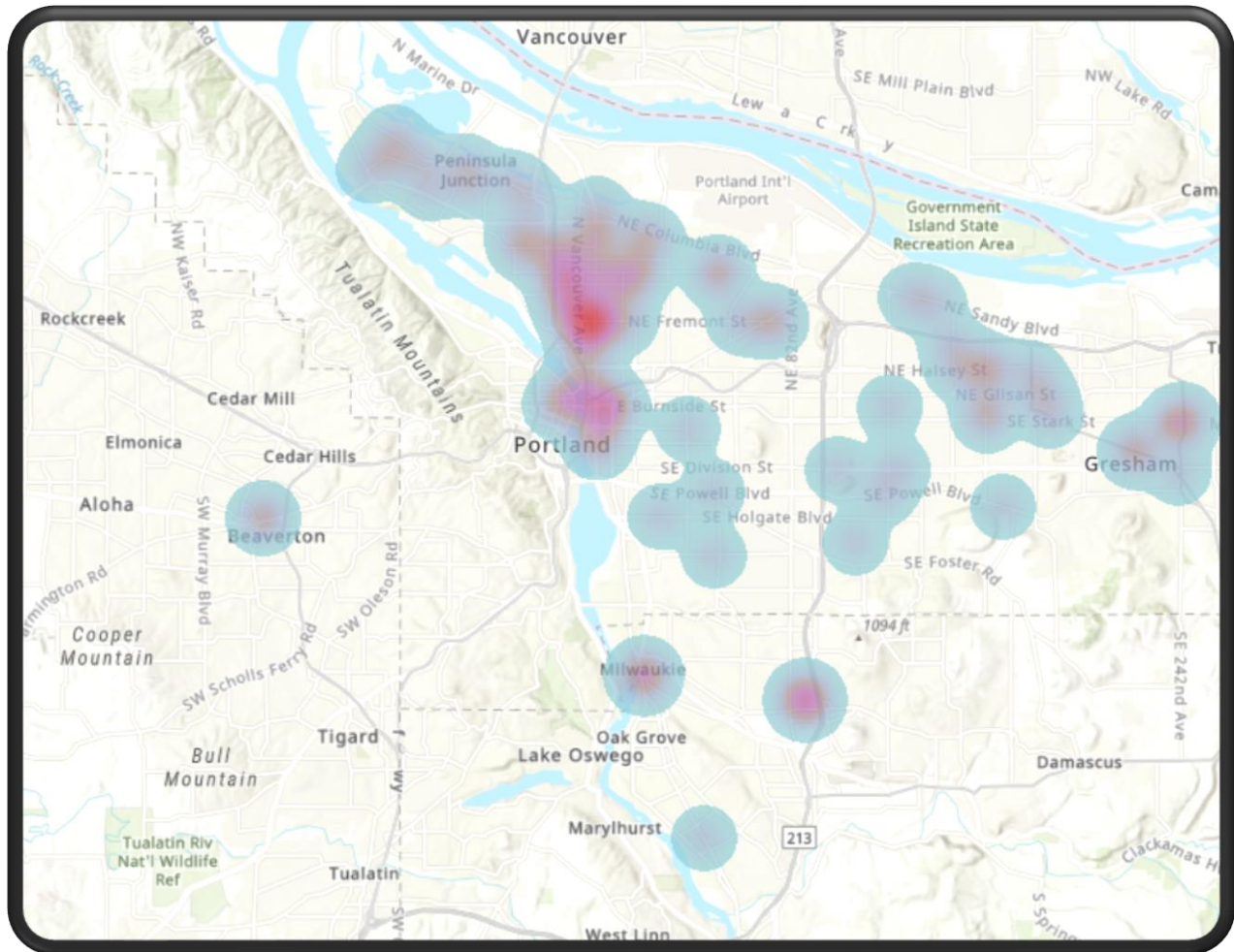
Given that the policy was designed to redress the harms caused by past land-use decisions that disproportionately harmed Black residents of N/NE Portland, it is striking that 84% of the residents surveyed identified as Black (particularly when compared to Portland Housing Bureau's overall portfolio of affordable rental housing, in which 19% of residents identify as Black).

Where did residents move from?

Most residents moved from other parts of N/NE Portland. There were also clusters of residents who moved from Gresham, Milwaukie, and Beaverton as well as other East County and SE neighborhoods. Several residents moved from outside Portland, from as far as Atlanta, GA. Though we did not directly ask if people had been previously unhoused, 10% self-reported being homeless prior to entering Preference Policy housing.

Heatmap of residents' prior address

We asked residents their prior address, and used that data to create the heatmap below. This map uses color to show the areas where residents moved from. The greater the number of residents who moved from a similar area, the darker the areas appears.



FINDING 2: PLACE MATTERS TO RESIDENTS.

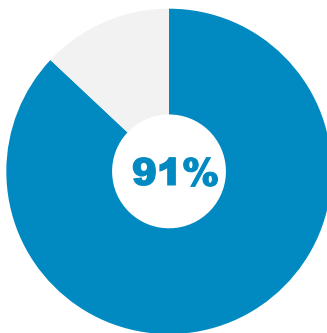
One question about the N/NE Preference Policy has been whether residents are really interested in returning to the 'old neighborhood,' or if they simply need affordable housing in any location. We found that while a need for housing was an acute motivation, residents were motivated by a strong connection to the neighborhood.

*"There's nothing wrong with wanting to be around my people."
~Rutherford resident*

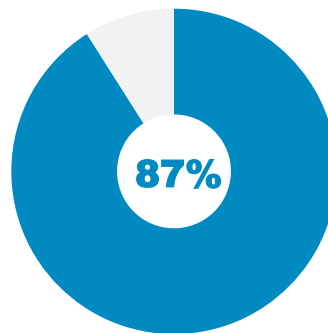
- 80% of those surveyed reported that their connection to the neighborhood was their primary motivation for applying.
- 80% believed that this was their best chance to move from a waitlist into housing.

Residents we spoke to have powerful place attachments. Among those surveyed:

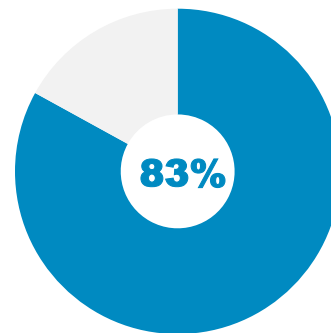
Residents say



"THE HISTORY OF THIS NEIGHBORHOOD MATTERS TO ME"



"I BELONG IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD"



"I HAVE FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD"

These rates are significantly higher than national averages. According to the Survey of National Health Attitudes, 19% of adults in the United States report a strong emotional connection to their community (RWJF and RAND, 2018).

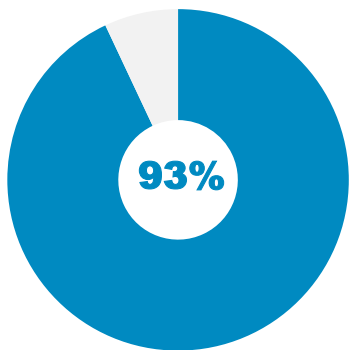
FINDING 3: RESIDENTS ARE GENERALLY EXPERIENCING IMPROVED WELL-BEING.

Overall, residents reported improvements to community well-being since accessing housing through the Preference Policy, particularly related to neighborhood convenience, equity and inclusion, connections to people and the neighborhood and opportunities to be involved.

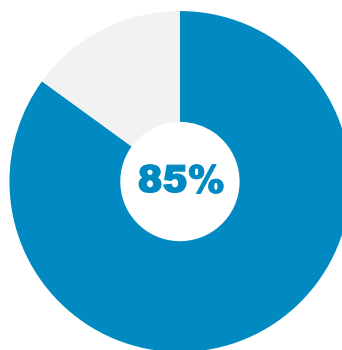
Improved convenience

Residents see their neighborhoods as positive and convenient places to live; 50% report getting to work and/or school is more convenient now. As a Beatrice Morrow resident explained, "It's convenient over here, just about everything I need is like within walking distance. I really appreciate that."

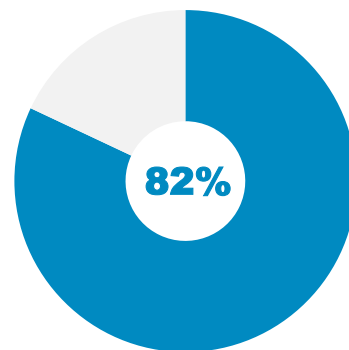
Residents say



THERE ARE MANY STORES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



THERE ARE ACCESSIBLE/ AFFORDABLE PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES



IT'S A GOOD PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY

Greater equity and inclusion

"...I'm not as stressed out. My neighborhood in Gresham was way worse. It was very White out there, and - there was a lot of racism out there, and I didn't feel accepted...if anything, it's improved my quality of life."

~Rutherford resident

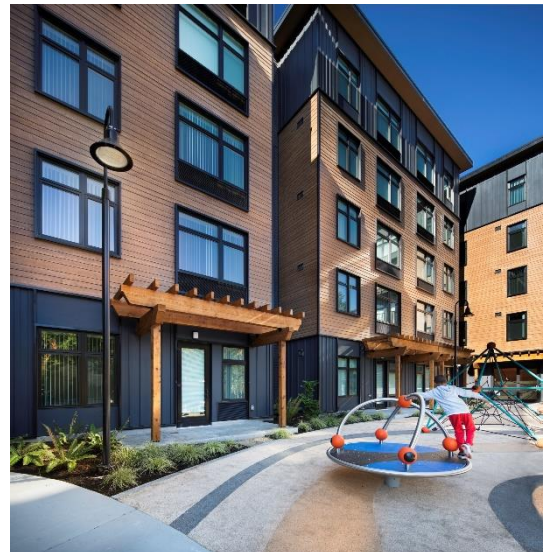
Many expressed appreciation for living in a neighborhood where they experience lower levels of prejudice than elsewhere in the city. 70% of those surveyed agreed that people of different backgrounds get along in the neighborhood.

A number of those interviewed contrasted living in N/NE to other, less racially diverse areas of Portland, particularly suburbs that had been destinations for 'white flight' in previous decades.

A number of parents spoke about the importance of getting back to N/NE for their children. As one mother explained: "I wanted her to be able to see the representation. To be around people that look like her, and to not feel like she was so different. It was so important for me to get back on this side of town, for her."

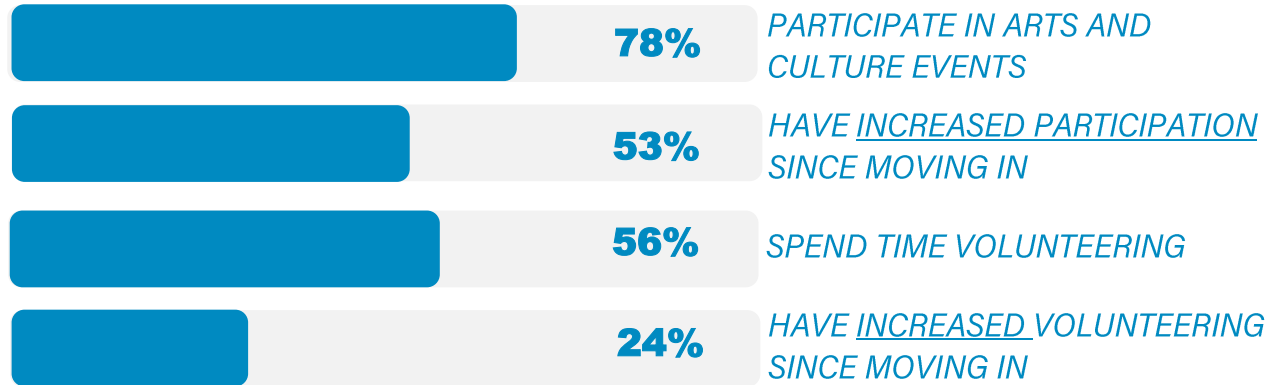
Strengthened connections to people and the neighborhood

Most of those interviewed noted the social benefits of living where they have existing social connections and also feel a broader sense of community. Many residents appreciate living closer to their church, children's school, Black civic and youth-serving programs and preferred beauty supply stores and salons. When asked what it felt like to return to the neighborhood, one resident answered, "Kind of a relief, like a sigh in a way. It just felt comforting to move back to somewhere that- where I've- I know. It's just so close to my family and my friends I grew up with. It's just a really big deal."



Greater opportunities to be involved

Residents reported high rates of community engagement, and many are more engaged now that they are in new housing.



It is noteworthy that Preference Policy residents report higher than average rates of volunteering; in the greater Portland area, 44.3% of adults report volunteering, and nationally the rate is 30.3% (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2018).

Civic engagement is connected to well-being. Communities with engaged volunteers are better prepared to mobilize in response to emergencies or needs, and volunteers often benefit from stronger social connectedness and purpose.



FINDING 4: MANY RESIDENTS ALSO EXPERIENCE THREATS TO WELL-BEING.

Alongside their appreciation of the neighborhood and reported improvements to well-being, many residents also experience a number of threats to well-being, including a lack of community cohesion in their immediate neighborhood, and the persistence of racial and economic inequality in Portland.

Lack of community cohesion

Though many residents reported having strong existing social ties in the area, the most common desire expressed in interviews was for a greater sense of cohesion in their immediate neighborhood, block and building.

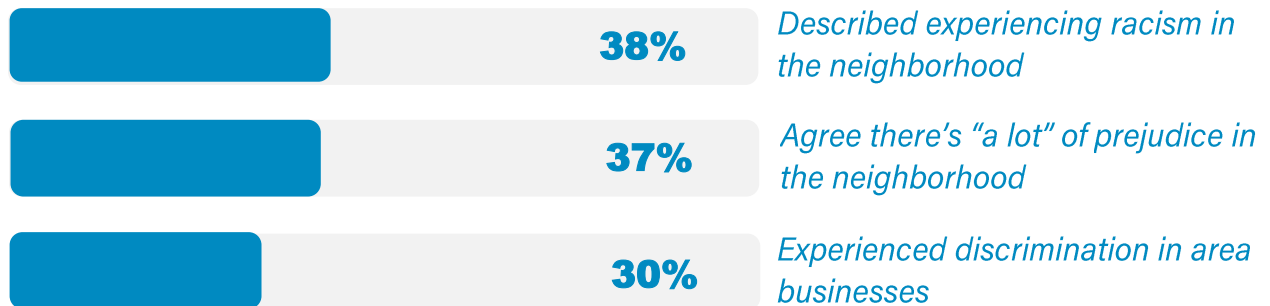
Many residents expressed interest in fostering greater community cohesion at various scales, from Sunday potlucks in their building, to block parties designed to build relationships with immediate neighbors, to broader social, cultural and civic activities.

“I would like to be able to mingle more with the others, with the other people, because I feel like that would make me comfortable...”

Not just like, ‘Oh, I see you at the grocery store,’ but to spend time with each other.”
~Rutherford resident

Persistence of racism and prejudice

While 70% agreed that people of different backgrounds get along, a significant number of residents also described experiences of mistreatment.



“I had a guy, I was carrying a ladder, and I borrowed it from a friend, and this guy came out of his house and had his phone, and he’s recording me walking down the street. He walked with me about five blocks, came in front of my house, and filmed me. I said, “Man, what is up with this? I’m not stealing the ladder; it’s my friend’s ladder. I’ve got to work on the house, I’m painting...”

~Rutherford resident

Several recounted experiences of discrimination at area parks that have been long-standing gathering places for Black residents. One Garlington resident expressed, “It’s crazy. You can’t even go outside and feel comfortable in your own skin.” While most residents described *lower levels* of racism in N/NE neighborhoods than in other areas of Portland, many still experience racial targeting in the area.

The stress resulting from increased racism has negative effects on health and well-being of Black residents and other people of color.

Ongoing economic stress

Some residents reported high levels of economic vulnerability exacerbated by insufficient affordable stores and shops in the neighborhood, as well as the scarcity of employment opportunities. Several of those interviewed are still precariously housed; one resident described spending 90% of his social security income on rent each month.

- Only 48% surveyed agreed that people who want to are able to find a good job in the neighborhood.
- Nearly a third interviewed described needs for more low-cost stores and amenities.

“Affordable shopping would be beautiful...because there’s no way I can go to New Seasons or Whole Foods – I can’t afford it.”

~Beatrice Morrow resident

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

From this initial evaluation, we conclude that the N/NE Preference Policy is, in many ways, serving the intended population, and benefiting both residents and the broader community.

The policy was designed to redress the disproportionate harms to Black residents of N/NE Portland caused by past land-use decisions, and has succeeded in reaching community members with multi-generational ties to Northeast Portland.



Being able to live in the neighborhood where you have strong place attachments and social ties matters deeply to many residents. **Preference Policy residents, in turn, are an asset to the neighborhood.** The vast majority of respondents in this study expressed particularly strong social connections, place attachments and above-average levels of civic engagement.

Residents experience improvements to their quality of life through the Preference Policy, and yet many also experience threats to their well-being. One major implication is that affordable housing is *necessary but not sufficient* for meeting the broader goals of advancing racial reparation and equity in N/NE Portland.

Residents' recommendations suggest the need for a holistic community development strategy that includes, in addition to housing, ways to:

- Restore community
- Build opportunity
- Increase access and affordability
- Address racial bias and discrimination

RESIDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Restore community

- Support neighbors in Preference Policy buildings to create a sense of community with resident activities, potlucks, cookouts and family fun.
- Extend community building to the neighborhoods with block parties and events that focus on gathering, not service delivery.
- Add activities for kids, youth and families.
- Expand the Preference Policy to bring more Black and Brown families back to North/Northeast.



Build opportunity

- Create more pathways to homeownership, with education and finance.
- Support Black entrepreneurship and grow small businesses.
- Provide culturally relevant community education for all ages.
- Link housing access with access to jobs in the neighborhood.

Increase access and affordability

- Ensure available goods and services are accessible for families with low incomes, especially groceries and healthy foods or a Farmer's Market.
- Provide family activities and recreation across all areas of N/NE, restoring parks programs and expanding after-school youth programs.

Address racial bias and discrimination

- Elevate Black identity in the neighborhood while bolstering multi-racial relations through events that honor the community's history.
- Engage in the neighborhood to address racial bias, cross-cultural communication and handle conflicts escalated by racial difference.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THIS STUDY?

In 2021, the research team is launching Phase 2 of our study of the N/NE Preference Policy. During this phase, we will collect survey, interview and focus group data from residents of seven Preference Policy buildings. Findings will allow us to assess changes to resident well-being up to three years into residence in Preference Policy housing.

Support for this research is provided in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Policies for Action program. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Want to get involved?

Our research will be much stronger with your participation. If you applied for the N/NE Preference Policy, there are several ways to get involved:

- Apply to be a member of the *Research 2 Action Team*. Members will work together with neighbors and the researchers to guide the next round of research, share the findings of the study and take action on the results.
- Complete the survey, share your experiences in an interview, and/or participate in a focus group.

Thank you

Phase 1 of this study was made possible by support from Portland State University; collaboration with the Portland Housing Bureau, Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, Central City Concern, and PCRI; and the participation of residents.

CONTACT US!

About the Authors

Amie Thurber, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at Portland State University (PSU) in the School of Social Work, and the Principal Investigator on the N/NE Preference Policy study. Her scholarship focuses on building more just neighborhoods through innovations in policy, practice and participatory inquiry.

Lisa K. Bates, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Portland State University (PSU) in the Toulon School of Urban Studies and Planning, and is the Co-Investigator on the N/NE Preference Policy study. Her scholarship focuses on housing and community development policy and planning, and her research and practice aim to build new models for emancipatory planning practices and to dismantle institutional racism.

Susan Halverson, M.S., is a Ph.D. Student at Portland State University (PSU) in the School of Social Work, and is a research assistant on the N/NE Preference Policy study.



Magnolia 2, photo provided by Innovative Housing Inc.

For more information about this project:

- Learn more online at: sites.google.com/pdx.edu/nnestudy
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- Call us at (503)725-9918

