

Fostering Local Awareness & Action to Support Indigenous Communities

by Heather Flint Chatto

A recent press release from the Oregon House Democrats “Confronting Oregon’s Racist Past and Committing to a Truly Equitable Future” is an important statement on race, injustice, and action at the state legislature addressing Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). With growing awareness of current and historic social and racial injustice gaining greater local, state and national attention, we must each wrestle with how to foster the change we wish to see. How do we plan to take action?

The Richmond Neighborhood Association (RNA) is engaged in an effort to foster greater education, and increasing our diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) - a term you may be seeing more frequently. As a starting point, we are raising consciousness about history, actions and support for indigenous communities.

Portland is home to the ninth largest Native American urban population in the country.

The Portland metro area rests on traditional village sites of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other tribes and bands. These groups created communities and summer encampments along the Columbia and Willamette rivers and harvested and used the plentiful natural resources of the area for thousands of years.

According to Travel Portland, “Oregon’s population was largely Native American until relatively recently. The Oregon Donation Land Act of 1850 and accompanying legislation removed tribes and offered free land to white settlers, who laid claim to 2.5 million acres of tribal land — including all of what is now Portland — over the course of just seven years.” (source: www.travelportland.com/culture/native-american).

Land Acknowledgements are starting point to recognize the injustices inflicted on Native Americans since the colonization of their land and as the United States of America took shape as a political entity. Unfortunately, for many of them these injustices continue to happen. Recognizing our communal role in the past as well as the plight of native communities at present represents a common approach towards correcting the past wrongs and an invitation to work towards just reparation. There are some excellent resources available to learn more about how to create land acknowledgements and making this work more meaningful than a simple statement. A great place to start is here: nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment

As part of fostering action and awareness, the RNA has been working to develop our own Indigenous Land Acknowledgement statement and shared our research on history, precedents and actions we can take at our November Land Use & Transportation meeting. We also shared our work with the Hawthorne Boulevard Business Association in December, which inspired further con-

versations around equity and diversity actions they can take.

The work of learning and creating a land acknowledgement has been a deep journey (and one that made me discover a small connection in my own ancestry research - discovering my own Choctaw family roots and spurring me to dig deeper. What I have learned is that land acknowledgment is merely a starting point in knowing about the place we inhabit, the diverse cultures that have shaped and cared for this place and that continue to thrive here today.

How do we support, involve and connect with our indigenous communities? Some examples to take action:

- Support indigenous organizations by donating your time and/or money.
- Support indigenous-led grassroots change movements and campaigns. Encourage others to do so.
- Commit to returning land. Local, state, and federal governments around the world are currently returning land to indigenous people.

An inspiring story is the Yale Union building in inner SE Portland (photo below) where a local arts foundation is transferring ownership to the Native American Arts & Culture Foundation in recognition of their historic tribal ownership of land. Another commendable leadership effort, championed by Planning Commissioner Amanda Fritz, was adopted by the City of Portland passing several resolutions including support of land acknowledgements for native communities, increasing staff diversity and other support services.

Next steps for RNA will include continuing to learn about the many wonderful tribal communities in the Columbia River area, finalizing our draft acknowledgement for community input, and continuing the discussion of ideas for how we can support more diversity and equity work as an organization, in our community education and outreach, and future projects and partnerships.

To share ideas, get involved in helping Richmond’s equity work, or to help with our land acknowledgement, please reach out!

