

September 25, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Mayor Ted Wheeler
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly
Commissioner Amanda Fritz
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty
Commissioner Dan Ryan
Portland City Hall
1221 SW 4th Avenue
Portland, OR 972904

RE: A Weak Foundation for Inclusion and Shared Prosperity for Portlanders with Disabilities in the Broadway Corridor CBA

Mayor Wheeler and the Portland City Commissioners:

As Commissioner Eudaly applauds the Broadway Corridor Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) as a “historic accomplishment” and “a gold standard for responsible development,” and Mayor Wheeler celebrates it as an exemplar of “inclusion, shared prosperity, and community leadership,” the disability community looks on with deepening disillusionment. If the Broadway Corridor CBA is to be considered the “gold standard” or a “blueprint for future developments,” then citizens with disabilities must steel themselves for a Portland yet to come where they are still invisible and isolated from economic opportunity.

For persons with disabilities, the Broadway Corridor CBA perpetuates a long history of ignoring their needs. It affords no promise of shared prosperity for workers with disabilities or disability-owned businesses and only shallow commitments for tenants with disabilities seeking accessible dwelling units. The CBA process has repeated a pattern of relying on an equity lens that excludes the interests of people with disabilities, their historical trauma, and history of systemic ableism in Portland.

Commissioner Fritz’s remarks when the City Council authorized the CBA challenged the Council and other city officials to acknowledge the lack of inclusion for persons with disabilities in the CBA process. She emphasized the value of meaningful engagement with disability advocates and recommended that, as the Broadway Corridor moves forward, the City of Portland should “make sure that we are including people with disabilities right from

the start and at every step of every process the city does,” because it is “part of our equity and inclusion responsibility.” We couldn’t agree more.

With respect to workforce equity, the CBA does not extend workforce development standards that it demands for other underrepresented communities to persons with disabilities. Incorporated into the agreement are Prosper Portland’s Business Equity Policy and Workforce Training and Hiring Program—devoid of any reference to persons with disabilities. The CBA’s augmented goals for minority- and women-workers and businesses are laudable and important, but the exclusion of workers with disabilities and disability-owned businesses exacerbates the under-utilization of persons with disabilities in the Portland economy.

Economic opportunities for workers with disabilities continue to lag behind all of those other groups. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is significantly higher than the unemployment rate in either the general population or for persons of color. Unemployment rates by disability and race show a similar trend. Black workers with disabilities, for instance, are twice as likely to experience unemployment as compared to black workers without disabilities.¹

Ambitious projects like the Broadway Corridor have the potential for long-lasting positive impacts on economic opportunities for persons with disabilities. Broadening the equity lens through which the City of Portland and Prosper Portland view projects like the Broadway Corridor requires greater recognition of the intersections of disability with race, gender, sexual orientation, and other oppressed communities who also experience discrimination.

Until the City of Portland comes to terms with the reality that disabled persons of different races, genders, and sexual orientations experience multiple discrimination, those individuals will not be fairly reflected in Broadway Corridor’s construction and services workforce, the project’s use of contractors and subcontractors, its business and residential tenancing, or any other aspect of the development.

Economic opportunity is not a zero-sum game—it is unnecessary to pit one marginalized and oppressed community against another. Without question, historic injustices have been perpetrated against people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, religious minorities, and people with disabilities. Our organization’s mission is built around the idea of our shared humanity and we place these intersections of marginalization at the center of our work. As a disability rights organization we have long rejected the antiquated idea that when we create economic opportunity for people with disabilities it comes at the cost of reducing opportunity for others, because Portlanders with disabilities are as diverse as the city itself.

¹ U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics News Release (Feb. 26, 2020).

If city leaders, Prosper Portland, and its development partners intend the Broadway Corridor to set a new precedent for responsible development, then they must focus more attention on ensuring heightened accessibility and economic opportunity for persons with disabilities throughout the project. Greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Broadway Corridor project will not only help them share in our city's economic prosperity, it will also contribute to a more representative and welcoming civic life for all Portlanders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Serres". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew Serres

Disability Rights Oregon

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