

Chris Warner, Director
Portland Bureau of Transportation
1120 SW 5th Ave #100
Portland, OR 97204

Director Warner:

The Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), the Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest (NARA), the the Concordia Neighborhood Association, Cully Association of Neighbors, and Our 42nd Ave are organizations who deeply care and are committed to our community. We are excited to welcome the new bridge PBOT is constructing on NE 42nd over NE Lombard because it will provide much needed safer walking and biking access for residents living on 42nd Ave.

This letter is to request your support in guiding PBOT and ODOT staff -- and all bridge contractors -- to engage, communicate with, and partner with our community throughout the bridge construction. We believe the bridge construction can honor our community's previous work, support our current priorities, and help create a more resilient and prosperous future.

The bridge construction on NE 42nd Ave. creates the opportunity for PBOT/ODOT to work with us to accomplish the following:

1. Honor and protect the land as construction and staging move forward
2. Create a safer and more livable neighborhood for residents,
3. Infuse Native American art and culture into the bridge and surrounding areas

Honor and protect land as construction and staging takes place:

We are concerned construction staging could occur at the International Grove, a tree-filled, park-like open space at NE 42nd and Lombard. A decade ago, our community worked in partnership with the Bureau of Environmental Services to plant more than 50 trees in the two grassy areas where NE 42nd leads off Lombard at the northern entrance to the Cully and Concordia neighborhoods. The trees have now reached a size where their service to the environment has really started to make a difference.

In addition to helping intercept and slow runoff into the nearby Columbia Slough and Columbia River, the grove's trees serve several other important functions:

1. Trap and filter air and noise pollution coming from the airport, diesel trucks traveling Lombard streets, and diesel trains riding the rails adjacent to Lombard
2. Provide residents with educational opportunities in urban forestry close at hand in a formerly redlined area of the city, making up for past under-investment in green infrastructure in our neighborhoods
3. Welcome people entering the NE 42nd business district from the north with a beautiful, park-like space, whose distinct tree canopy would signal that area residents and businesses take pride in their community and want it to be a safe, inviting space for all
4. Provide shade which helps keep temperatures down, which is extremely important as we've come to understand recently how deadly heatwaves can be

It is extremely important that construction staging not occur at the International Grove as it could permanently damage or kill the trees – even if only a few -- that have been cared for and maintained by neighborhood volunteers for a decade.

Create a safer and more livable neighborhood for residents:

Nesika Illahee, which means “Our Place” in the Chinook language, is an affordable housing development located on NE 42nd Ave and Holman that provides housing opportunities for Native Americans in recovery. NAYA, NARA NW, Community Development Partners, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians partnered to develop the 59 units of affordable housing.

The bridge construction should consider the voices of the 100+ residents living at Nesika Illahee. Nesika Illahee residents are concerned about the speed vehicles are traveling on 42nd Ave, and request speed bumps or other mechanisms to reduce speed. They have also expressed concerns regarding the growing homeless tent encampment directly across from Nesika Illahee located on ODOT owned land managed by PBOT. The homeless camp at this site is creating an unhealthy and unsafe environment to several of the families who are trying to live a drug- and alcohol-free environment.

We request a close partnership with PBOT, ODOT, and other city bureaus to provide housing resources and services to the homeless encampment. We would also like to partner with the city to transform this land into a space that honors Native American culture, art, and feels like a natural extension of Nesika Illahee’s courtyard.

Infuse Native American art and culture into the bridge and surrounding areas:

We want to ensure PBOT contracts with Native American artists to embed Native American culture and art into the new bridge. It is important that Nesika Illahee residents, and Portland’s Native community, feel included and reflected in the City’s development/construction projects. A strong sense of cultural identity and pride is a key indicator to an individual’s self-determination. It is important for the Native community to feel represented and included as they bike, walk, or drive through the new bridge. We want to partner with PBOT as you identify potential artist and work with them to determine the art selected on the bridge.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We eagerly look forward to your response to our request. We appreciate Jamey Duhamel’s (PBOT’s Special Projects Coordinator) time and attention thus far and look forward to her continued engagement throughout this process. Will Miller, NAYA’s Government Affairs Manager, is the lead point of contact on this matter. He will coordinate with the rest of us. His contact info is: williamm@nayapdx.org and 503.288.8177 ext. 306.

Sincerely,

CAN Logo, NAYA Logo, NARA Logo, CNA Logo, Our 42nd Ave logo, Portland Clean Air logo

Cc:

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