February 14, 2020

RE: Lents Urban Renewal Audit

Dear Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Council,

The new audit of Lents urban renewal reveals what Prosper Portland critics have known for a long time – the city’s redevelopment agency could care less about low-income residents, people of color, and neighborhood businesses. The title of the audit, *Lents Urban Renewal: 20 years of investment with minimal evaluation*¸ reflects the agency’s decades of back-room dealing and lack of accountability to the community that it professes to serve.

The evidence after twenty years of Lents urban renewal:

* Median household income is down 24%. Lents’ median income was comparable to the city’s twenty years ago and is now more than $20,000 behind.
* Poverty in Lents is up 7%.
* Nearly two-thirds of Lents residents can’t afford their rent.
* Homeownership among people of color dropped sharply.
* Only 0.7% of funds went toward grants and loans to small businesses.
* More than one dollar in five went to Prosper/city staff and overhead.

Virtually the only bright spot in the audit is the creation of 627 affordable housing units. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of this housing was built after the Portland Housing Bureau was split off from the Portland Development Commission in 2009.

Prosper Portland is currently negotiating a billion-dollar redevelopment of the downtown post office and is angling to extend or create new urban renewal districts. **In the strongest possible terms, we urge City Council to demand that the agency fix the transparency and accountability issues called out in the Lents audit immediately.** There’s too many critical projects that Prosper Portland is facilitating and engaging community to shape in a manner which explicitly names departing from the ways of doing business which has resulted in dismal outcomes. From the Broadway Corridor redevelopment to prospective urban renewal districts on the eastside or along the Southwest Corridor, Portland communities need Prosper Portland and the City Council’s commitment to do better. Further, we believe that Prosper Portland is acting in violation of the city’s adopted policy that requires anti-displacement impact analysis in advance of major projects.

As community-based organizations that rely on Prosper Portland as a partner, we unfortunately are not surprised by the auditor’s findings in Lents. We know that low-income people and neighborhoods are not the ones who “prosper” from huge handouts to wealthy developers. After six decades, it’s time for a change.