



Disability  
Rights  
Oregon

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## Broadway Corridor redevelopment project fails to deliver on promise of jobs, business opportunities for people with disabilities

### Agreement guiding massive redevelopment project leaves out workers with disabilities, disability-owned businesses

Portland, Oregon—Today, in a letter to Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and City Commissioners, Oregon’s leading statewide disability rights organization warned that the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) guiding a major downtown Portland economic redevelopment project excludes people with disabilities. On Wednesday, Portland City Council voted unanimously to approve the agreement designed to ensure the economic benefits that flow from the project reach historically under-represented communities.

The Broadway Corridor project, a major economic redevelopment undertaking, spans 34 acres of land in the heart of Portland, connecting Old Town Chinatown, the Pearl District, Union Station, the Pacific Northwest College of Art, and the U.S. Post Office. For more than a year, the project developer, Prosper Portland, and a coalition of community groups, called the Healthy Communities Coalition, negotiated the agreement.

For more than a year, Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) advocated for a CBA that included workforce equity and heightened accessibility standards that would benefit persons with disabilities. Citing its failure to deliver on those promises, DRO refused to become an official signatory to the CBA.

“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

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disabilities or disability-owned businesses and only shallow commitments for tenants with disabilities seeking accessible dwelling units,” wrote Matt Serres, staff attorney for Disability Rights Oregon in the letter to city leaders.

In the letter, Disability Rights Oregon pointed to these facts:

- 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 excludes disability-owned businesses.

“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,” wrote Serres in the letter to city leaders.

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.<sup>1</sup>

## Resources

- [Letter to Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners](#) (September 25, 2020)
- [City Council Testimony from Matt Serres, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Oregon](#) (September 15, 2020)

## About Disability Rights Oregon

Disability Rights Oregon upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more than 40 years, the organization has served as Oregon’s Protection & Advocacy system.

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