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## Big builders partner with NAMCO to restore North Portland Elks club

Project volunteers prepare to begin renovation of 1921 building this week

BY [LIBBY TUCKER](#)



The Elks club is easy to miss driving north on the way to the new condominiums and businesses a few blocks up Williams Avenue. There's little indication that the run-down building at 6 N. Tillamook St. still serves as a social club and meeting space for North Portland's black community.

Paint is peeling from the cedar siding and the windows were boarded up over a decade ago after vandals repeatedly broke them. The front door is held closed with a padlock, and the roof hasn't been replaced since the club was built as a temporary classroom space in 1921.

But this week volunteers from the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon and some of Portland's largest commercial contractors will begin tearing off the old roof and laying new shingles. And over the coming month, more skilled volunteers will replace the siding, build a wheelchair-accessible ramp and open the windows to the street once again.

"Let the light shine in!" said Brenda Alexander, a project manager with Hoffman Construction Co., which is overseeing the \$1 million renovation along with CJ Jackson Construction.

The exterior work is the first phase of a project aimed at restoring the historic building to its original condition using mostly donated materials and time. NAMCO, which holds its monthly meetings at the club, decided to pitch in for needed repairs; then the effort took off as members recruited their business partners to participate.

"It's nice to see a building neglected for so long come alive again," said Jennice Jackson, a co-owner of CJ Jackson Construction and NAMCO member who remembers visiting the club when she was young with her mother and grandmother. "It'll open the door for more community meetings."

The building once housed a YWCA for black women and it later became the home of the Billy Webb Elks Club number 1050. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, teen dances were held in the

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gym, which also served as a meeting place for the NAACP and the black USO. The same space is now used for wedding receptions and community meetings, but it has fallen into disrepair.

NAMCO and its partners, including Hoffman Construction Co., Walsh Construction, the Port of Portland, Skanska and Slayden Construction, will refresh the exterior, overhaul the plumbing, HVAC and electric systems, upgrade the kitchen and bathrooms with new fixtures, and restore the front entry to an inviting community space. The Portland Bureau of Development Services has also agreed to waive building permit fees amounting to \$9,000 for the project.

“There’s not many places left (in the neighborhood) where you can hold meetings,” said Jennifer Dishman, manager of the Billy Webb Elks Club, which currently lists 57 members. “We want to open up to the community, to increase membership and attract younger folks.”

The project team’s goal is to complete the outside work in time for “The Gathering,” an annual reunion event on Aug. 22, with the interior remodeling scheduled to finish late this fall.