

Raina Smith–Roller

Portland State University

Michael Lindberg Scholarship

My name is Raina Smith-Roller, and I am a 35-year-old grad student studying urban planning at Portland State University. I have lived in Portland since 1995, and I absolutely love this city.

Prior to making the plunge back into school, I had spent most of adult life working in social services. From 2008-2014 I worked for a non-profit organization called Human Solutions, managing a rent assistance program for families and individuals who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Through my work at Human Solutions, I was honored to be a board member of the Fair Housing Advocacy Committee (FHAC), where I gained a better understanding of community development efforts in underrepresented neighborhoods. I learned more about how the city of Portland determines where they focus their efforts, based in part on surveying existing communities to determine their needs and desires. Through my involvement with the committee, I was able to gain insight into the importance placed on developing safe and affordable housing, bringing and nurturing thriving business to the area, developing safe roads, and increasing public transportation options.

Looking at urban renewal programs, I am excited to see the city's focus on improving neighborhoods such as Lents as well as others in need of the support. I also feel strongly that community development actions need to take into consideration the needs of residents and businesses already in the area, not just attracting outside business and potential residents. As can be seen with past urban renewal efforts in neighborhoods such as Alberta and Mississippi, efforts to create prosperous neighborhoods can come at the cost of displacing existing communities. This is a complex issue; we see that communities thrive when stable business and housing options are developed, which in turn makes these neighborhoods more desirable, yet it is important to not overlook issues of equity, affordability, and diversity when we look at development. Creating prosperity, while avoiding displacement and some of the other pitfalls of gentrification, is an effort that excites me, and my hope is that I can positively contribute to Portland's growth in a positive way.

