

Bryson Davis – President – Williams & Russell CDC
Support for Senate Bill 1110 – Senate Committee on Labor and Business
March 20, 2025

Thank you senators for your consideration of Senate Bill 1110 and the funding of the Williams & Russell Business Hub.

You know about the harms of the past, but this project represents the future. Our business hub project is the culmination of a seven year long effort by the Albina community, local nonprofits, and the City of Portland to reestablish economic opportunity that was lost by the City's unjust takings and demolition of many area businesses in the early 1970s – all to leave a block of the central city vacant for 50 years.

This business hub project is more than just the building itself, and it is more than just the economic development and small business-focused programming that will be housed in it.

This project aims to be a model for governments working with communities to build and to rebuild needed facilities. It is not only a model of how governments can work with communities to address past harms but also a model for how government can take a step back and let the community direct the development.

We've had the opportunity to talk to many other folks from around the country who are considering similar projects to aid their communities. While they are all good and needed projects, they are lacking one major component that our project has, community leadership. The general trend around the country is for governments to lead and manage these projects or for them to turn over projects completely to developers and hope that the proposed benefits will be realized. The Albina community has seen projects like that before and has seen the benefits never materialize.

This project started as a project working group made up of representatives of nonprofits who support various aspects of the Albina community as well as community members at large. We worked for over three and a half years to survey the broader community, and really determine the needs and the values of the community before we ever sent out any requests for design proposals.

We also formed a new nonprofit governed by the members of the working group that, through ownership of the project and long term management of the business hub, we could ensure that the benefits of this project are realized without sacrificing benefit for profit. This nonprofit, through its governance structure requires that the oversight and management of our project stays in the hands of community members and maintains a connection to those who were harmed by the original hospital expansion.

We have funding and support from our federal delegation, and a very large commitment from the City of Portland through Prosper Portland. This project is really the confluence of all levels of government, members of the community, and economic development and small business focused nonprofits to rebuild a previously devastated area of the city.

We started this project with the community struggling to trust the government after the past harms and previous broken promises. Why should a community trust a government that does not trust it back? This project won't fully rebuild that trust but because the government is trusting the community to lead and manage the project, it is a step in the right direction.

We greatly appreciate your consideration and support for the Williams & Russell Business Hub, and hope that through your support, our project can be a model for the rest of the country.