

Bryson Davis: Testimony in Support of Williams & Russell Business Hub Investment

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction – May 9, 2025

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs Girod and Nosse and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryson Davis, and I am the President of Williams & Russell CDC, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring community and revitalizing economic development in NE Portland, specifically the Hill Block.

I'm here to urge your support for authorizing \$8.75 million in lottery bonds for the Williams & Russell Business Hub. We are pleased that [Senate Bill 1110](#), led by Senator Frederick and Representative Nelson, supports this investment and passed out of the Senate Labor & Business Committee.

The Hill Block served as the center of Oregon's Black commercial district from the 1940s to the early 1960s. The City of Portland condemned the site in the early 1970s under urban renewal for an expansion of the Emanuel Hospital campus.

The condemnation displaced 36 businesses, and 171 families, 74% of which were Black. The property then sat vacant for over five decades.

In 2017 Legacy Health and the City of Portland agreed to convene a project working group to give the 1.7-acre block of land back to the community and Williams & Russell was born.

This community development project in the Albina neighborhood has three main components: 85 affordable, one- to three-bedroom apartments with onsite daycare, 20 townhomes for homeownership, and a 30,000-square-foot Business Hub with affordable office, co-working and retail spaces to support entrepreneurs, professional development, and workforce training. We are excited that the Business Hub will be constructed from mass timber, supporting our wood products industry, and connecting rural and urban communities.

Our cost for all three parts of the project is \$129 million and the cost for the Business Hub is \$34 million. We have great news that funding for the apartments and townhomes has been secured and all but \$8.75 million of the cost of the Business Hub remains.

We have come to you only after securing funding from for the Business Hub from other sources including the City of Portland, congressionally directed appropriations, Meyer Memorial Trust, a U.S. Federal Wood Innovation grant, Legacy Health Foundation, and a pending Portland Clean Energy Fund grant.

We are respectfully asking you to provide the final \$8.75 million – which is 7% of the total project cost.

We celebrated the groundbreaking for this catalytic project on February 28, and we were thrilled to have Governor Kotek, Senator Frederick, Representative Nelson, and over 150 community members join us.

With your assistance, the heart of Oregon's historic Black commercial district will beat again with support for small business, economic growth, and entrepreneurs. Together, we can create a thriving community for future generations. Thank you.