



**Azalea Renfield – Williams & Russell CDC
Testimony in Support of Williams & Russell Business Hub
Ways & Means Capital Construction Subcommittee
February 13, 2026**

Senator Girod, Representative Nosse, and Committee Members—My name is Azalea Renfield and I'm CEO of Williams & Russell CDC.

Your support for \$15.96 million for the Williams & Russell Business Hub is critical for ensuring the timely and cost-effective completion of the economic cornerstone of a 2.99-acre development that includes home ownership, affordable apartments, and a community plaza on the Hill Block in Portland's Albina neighborhood.

Even in a tough budget environment, targeted investments with strong returns are crucial for Oregon's economic prosperity. **State funding leverages tens of millions of dollars already secured for the site** and our \$15.96 million request is just 9% of the total \$168.1M project cost. **This state investment is the final funding required to begin construction of the Business Hub and ensure that the project moves forward without delay.**

[ECOnorthwest's January 2026 report](#) establishes that **the Business Hub during construction will create 205 jobs, \$19 million in labor income, and \$46 million in economic output, and during annual operations will create 145 permanent jobs, \$14 million in labor income, and \$27 million in economic output.**

In the early 1970s the City of Portland condemned the Hill Block and surrounding area for expansion of Emanuel Hospital, displacing 36 businesses and 171 families, 74% of whom were Black. Expansion to the Hill Block was cancelled in 1973 and the land sat vacant for over 50 years until transferred to Williams & Russell CDC in 2025.

Our work on the Hill Block is no ordinary project. This is an innovative, reparative development that directly responds to historic harm by restoring business anchors, social gathering and event space, and pathways to economic stability and wealth creation.

The cross-laminated timber Business Hub will have affordable office and retail space for small businesses, community event space, and business-support organizations providing technical assistance and professional services to entrepreneurs in Portland and across Oregon.

The Business Hub will be owned and managed by Williams & Russell CDC, ensuring community connection and long-term stability and economic opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

One of our key partners for the site is Micro Enterprise Services of Oregon (MESO) which provides support and training to small business clients located across the state. They will lease office space and relocate its Makers Market to the Business Hub providing 70+ small businesses ground floor retail space to sell their products.

North and Northeast Portland is 5.4 percent of the state's population with over 230,000 residents – essentially Oregon's second largest city. A proportional allocation of the \$572 million in lottery bond capacity this biennium would be \$31 million. We are asking for only half that amount.

Your support for the Williams & Russell Business Hub is not just about a building; it is a vital investment in the economic foundation necessary to restore prosperity to a community.