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City Council Agenda item 611: Emergency Ordinance to close SW Ankeny between SW 2nd & SW 3rd

My name is Michael Moore and I am on the Board of Directors of Sisters of the Road.

Commissioner Fritz and Mayor Adams, you conducted last month's well-attended public forum about the new Office of Equity. I hope you were able to convey to the other Commissioners the palpable sense of frustration in the room over longstanding city policies and practices that continue to promote inequity. These policies continue to push low-income Portlanders and people of color out of their neighborhoods at alarming rates, as documented in 2010 Census, and are responsible for the 17-year decline in affordable housing stock in the central city – a decline that even the opening of the Bud Clark Commons does not stem. Time and again that evening, one message came through loud and clear: Promoting equity starts with city government policy itself, which must put equity foremost in all applicable decision making. We at Sisters do not believe this ordinance, as currently conceived, does that.

Our concern about the ordinance as proposed is that it walls off what is currently public space for the exclusive benefit of a handful of business owners, while making no provision for the benefit of anyone who can not afford to patronize these businesses. We're concerned that we will see the same problems here we see in Pioneer Courthouse Square, one of the three locations where people experiencing poverty and homelessness are most frequently cited for violating the Sidewalk Management Ordinance. We're concerned because of the classist message that the city will send when signs indicate that sitting or lying anywhere along the rest of SW Ankeny is forbidden, while this stretch will provide outdoor seating and relaxation only for those of economic means. We're concerned that this will be another in a growing list of ostensibly public spaces around Portland in which the Equity Forum's message is lost,

and a different message comes through loud and clear: "If you don't have money, you aren't welcome here."

I'd like to quote from the conclusions of Commissioner Fritz's September 10, 2009 report on the Sharing Public Spaces Community Forum:

"The Council cannot solve the problems alone. Multiple agencies, community partners, and individual citizens are needed to participate constructively. In fact, every Portlander, every business owner and worker, and every visitor must be part of the solution, to support actions that allow sharing public spaces equitably, compassionately, and responsibly. "

We feel strongly that it is not too much to ask that the City Council live up to the goals identified in that report. To support actions that allow sharing public spaces equitably, compassionately, and responsibly, we request that the Council require that a portion of the seating in this revamped public space be made available for the use of anyone who would like to use it, even if they cannot afford a gourmet crepe, and that it suspend enforcement of the Sidewalk Management Ordinance for people using that seating as a place to rest.