

July 13, 2021

To: City Council

Re: South Park Blocks Master Plan

Dear City Council Members:



Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the South Park Blocks Master Plan. Portland Farmers Market (PFM) has been operating in the South Park Blocks since 1996. On Saturdays at Portland State University, our year-round market supports over 150 farmers and small businesses and draws attendance from shoppers around the globe. The Wednesday market at Shemanski Park supports the success of about 40 vendors and is an important point of food access for downtown residents of all income levels.

As an active participant with the Community Advisory Committee since April 2019, PFM supports the South Park Blocks Master Plan submitted by Portland Parks and Recreation (PPR). We feel that the plan reflects the needs and preferences of community members and stakeholders while balancing historic, cultural and ecological considerations.

Elements of the plan that we feel are particularly important for the long-term success of our markets are outlined below.

### **Improvements to access and safety**

The operation of our markets relies on spaces that are accessible, functional and feel safe and welcoming for all. Despite our best efforts to create workarounds to improve physical access and safety during market days, we regularly provide basic first aid for trip-and-fall incidents as a result of the flaws in the current park design, and we have ADA compliance concerns.

The plan promotes an inclusive design that unifies the 12 unique park blocks and prioritizes pedestrian and bicycle safety. Our market-goers would particularly benefit from wider walkways, enhanced access for park users with mobility considerations and improved physical safety at streets and street crossings.

### **Viking Pavilion Flexible Event Space (block 2)**

The addition of flexible event space adjacent to the Viking Pavilion will connect this popular venue to the park blocks, alleviate congestion in walkways on busy market days and protect landscape by converting a portion of the lawn to an accessible hardscape.

The addition of a comfortable and accessible gathering space will allow park events, such as our PSU farmers market, to enhance community-building by effectively coordinating with Viking Pavillion events such as PSU commencement, Naimuma Pow Wow, Viking sporting events, and the annual Lu'au.

## **Smith Plaza (block 4)**

The renovation of this plaza will include improved performance space with seating while addressing safety and accessibility concerns. The current Smith Amphitheater design raises issues of accessibility and physical safety. Tapered brick steps are notable trip hazards while steep sloping walkways and long continuous benches can be barriers for individuals with vision or mobility impairment.

The plan also proposes a canopy structure and covered study space adjacent to the Smith Student Union to improve user comfort in all seasons and further connect student activities and the building's amenities with the park.

## **Tree Succession Strategy**

We believe that the plan provides a long-term vision that will enhance the experience and safety of our shoppers and vendors while ensuring the longevity of this unique urban forest. As a weekly and year-round permittee of the park blocks, we benefit greatly from the shelter, microclimate and ambiance provided by the beautiful trees in the park. We also recognize the potential hazards without intervention, having witnessed destruction caused by falling trees and limbs.

We understand that a strong strategy is needed in order to sustain a healthy canopy and a thriving understory for future generations. The plan considers efficient maintenance and strives to preserve the tree canopy while increasing ecological diversity and native plantings.

## **Green Loop**

The Green Loop is to provide multi-modal access in the park blocks for people of all ages and physical abilities. We support the incorporation of the Green Loop because the path extends the boundaries of the park, improves access to our markets and utilizes the current sidewalks and parking spaces in blocks 5 through 12 without impacting existing trees or green space.

As the Green Loop will eliminate all parking on the west side of the park, it will be important to coordinate logistics and access for loading and unloading from Park Avenue (East) in the cultural blocks where access to our Shemanski Park Farmers Market is needed at the same time that parking spaces on Park Avenue (East) are reserved for bus parking for adjacent cultural institutions.

Implementation of the Green Loop as a shared path in blocks 2-4 will need careful implementation and education to ensure safety of all park users. On market days and during other events, bikes, scooters and other modes of transportation that could pose a safety concern to pedestrian park users would be required to dis-mount and walk or be redirected to an alternative route.

We trust that PPR, PBOT and Friends of the Green Loop understand our concerns and will support PFM in ensuring safety and logistic access in this regard.

**Summary**

Overall, we support the SPBMP and the ways that it will improve safety and access to our markets and the park blocks in general, while conserving the tree canopy and increasing biodiversity. PFM has a unique perspective as the only regular operator in the outdoor spaces that are included in this plan. The plan is not without its logistical challenges to market operations, but any inconvenience PFM and its vendors may experience is surmountable, and there are no obstacles in the current plan that would cause us to withdraw our full support of its implementation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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