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**City of Portland, Oregon**  
**Bureau of Development Services**  
**Land Use Services**  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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## DISCUSSION MEMO

**Date:** December 4, 2023  
**To:** Historic Landmarks Commission  
**From:** Hillary Adam, Design & Historic Review Team, BDS  
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Brandon Spencer-Hartle, Historic Resources Manager, BPS  
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**Re:** Briefing – Johnson-Kearney Belgian Block Deployment Request  
December 11, 2023

This memo provides background related to the upcoming Briefing on December 11, 2023, regarding a request by the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) to deploy Belgian Blocks (cobblestones) along a section of NW Johnson Street between NW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NW Station Way. The following supporting documents are available as follows:

- Presentation by Portland Bureau of Transportation – attached

### INTRODUCTION

Bryan Poole and Nicholas Morell from PBOT will introduce the deployment proposal and respond to Commission questions.

### BELGIAN BLOCKS CONTEXT

Belgian Blocks made of basalt were used as a primary paving surface in the City of Portland during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Over time, asphalt replaced Belgian Blocks as the primary road surface, often being applied directly over the blocks. During street repair projects, Belgian Blocks are often rediscovered. In the 1970s, City Council passed ordinances (139670 and 141548) to plan for the recovery, storage, and redeployment of Belgian Blocks. Since 1975, the Historic Landmarks Commission has been responsible for reviewing and approving deployment requests.

### DEPLOYMENT REVIEW PROCESS

The Historic Landmarks Commission adopted criteria for the deployment of Belgian Blocks in 1975. Those criteria remain in effect today and are copied below:

1. Cobblestones should be reused primarily in districts or areas of the City where they were originally used. Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks where cobblestones were originally used as the paving material should receive first priority.
2. As a general policy, cobblestones should be used for large paving areas, primarily in public pedestrian spaces where the special character of cobblestone texture would be meaningful. The use of cobblestones as small decorative elements in unrelated or isolated projects should be discouraged, as these uses are usually insignificant or inappropriate.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In 2021, the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability commissioned a study on Belgian Blocks to better detail the opportunities for and constraints of deploying the blocks in a manner consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The report is available online: <https://www.portland.gov/bps/historic-resources/news/2021/9/17/new-report-offers-strategies-reusing-portlands-historic>

### **REQUESTED COMMISSION ACTION**

The Commission will be asked to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the proposed deployment.