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Multnomah County Commissioners
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd, Suite 600
Portland, OR 97214

Dear County Commissioners,

As you consider how to proceed with the future of the Morrison Bridgehead property, I would like to take this opportunity to voice my strong support for the James Beard Public Market.

Since 2005 Hacienda CDC has operated MicroMercantes, a microenterprise initiative that gives low-income Latinas the opportunity to gain skills for self-sufficiency by selling homemade tamales at Portland Farmer's Market locations. Through this experience we have seen the transformative power that markets can have for the well-being of minority communities. MicroMercantes participants learn necessary skills to be successful in the U.S. economy, while simultaneously increasing their household income by 20% or more. The resulting gains we have seen in our participants' welfare and self-confidence have been truly inspiring. A public market would be a wonderful way to extend these opportunities for empowerment to a wide range of ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

Equally inspiring has been seeing the power of food to break down cultural barriers. Preparing food and sharing meals are such fundamental cultural experiences, often providing the initial contact for understanding a new culture. For many of our MicroMercantes participants, for instance, the markets provide their only regular interaction with people outside the Latino community; vice versa, many customers would not otherwise interact with Latino immigrants were it not for the markets. I envision the James Beard Public Market as an exciting meeting space where people of all cultures can come together to learn and share one another's culinary traditions. Certainly all Portlanders would benefit from experiencing the vibrant diversity of our city.

I am confident that the James Beard Public Market would be a powerful engine for economic equality among Portland's communities of color, as well as a showcase for the rich variety of cultures that call Portland home. I urge you to give full consideration to the James Beard Public Market proposal and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about my support for the project.

Sincerely,

Pietro Ferrari
Executive Director