

Public Statement

I am here to discuss the Hawthorne Woodworking site at 18450 SE Stark, purchased by the commission. I would like to start by thanking this Commission for supporting the purchase of that property, and to echo Vice Chair DiNucci's statement that "this opens up an opportunity to have a community hub in that area." The Commissioner also stated support for "having services that support the community right where many people live."

This property was brought to the attention of the GRDC by members of this organization to help an aging community business transition their resources and significant experience into a community resource. We recommended the use of GRDC funds because we believe the City of Gresham can deliver something innovative to our community through collaboration with community partners. We are proud to be a part of this city, and excited for the possibilities that this public asset presents.

I would also like to thank Mr. Ivory and Mr. Monberg for their ongoing collaboration with community partners on development plans for this site. Both of these civil servants have been generous with their time and attention, and Mr. Monberg's leadership has been extremely helpful in developing a path forward. We wish Brian the very best in his future endeavors. We would also like to warmly welcome Mr. Gonzales to this ongoing development process as Interim Urban Renewal Manager.

We had several initial conversations with GRDC staff and Chris Jones—owner and operator of Hawthorne Woodworking at the time. Leading up to the purchase of the property and in following weeks, we were encouraged as a Community-Based Organization to seek partners for this space according to our shared vision of a collaborative use agreement that supports established and upcoming community organizations and educational programs with a different kind of shared resource: an operational woodshop and collaborative learning center. Nearly a dozen organizations and over 150 neighbors we have spoken to have registered their support for this model. Rockwood Common submitted a proposal on April 16th for a multi-use space that would host youth programming, adult enrichment, workforce development, and tool lending with additional small business incubation through shared-use opportunities. This proposal was developed with input from several key partners and supported by neighborhood needs assessment work.

In August, we were invited to discuss the leasing process, and were told that the city's current plan is to find a single tenant who can cover all liability for the building, the machinery and systems contained therein. The leaseholder will also be expected to pay rental fees commensurate with a commercial warehouse space. We believe that this does not align with the Gresham West Renewal Plan Article V. Section E. regarding **Community Buildings**. I will now read that section.

The Plan authorizes the development of public facilities to provide public meeting space, cultural and recreational facilities, public safety facilities, educational facilities and social service facilities.

These facilities will serve and benefit the Area by addressing the inadequacies in recreational, cultural and social service facilities that slow the rate of private investment in housing, commercial space and employment uses. It will also address the need for an enhanced public safety presence to help ensure an environment that promotes investment.

It is important to note that Hawthorne Woodworking is not an "underused, deteriorating property" as defined by the Rockwood-West Gresham Renewal Plan. It was an active business until the day GRDC purchased it in April 2024.

The proposed leasing process outlined above would favor a financially-driven business model as primary leaseholder and manager, due to its high financial barriers. We believe that turning over this property to the management of a single business with these requirements for income-generation would be a missed opportunity for our city. This commission has the potential to establish a radically unique community center in this neighborhood that would stabilize community based organizations, develop workforce, and provide essential recreation opportunities. While we understand liability concerns, our proposal greatly reduces that risk through distributed liability through partnerships. Utilizing a shared-use agreement, many partners would be able to steward skill and resource sharing programs which will grow community, enrich resident experience, and support individual and collective economic advancement for ALL residents equitably.

Workforce Development has been the stated priority of the GRDC on this project. We urge the Commission and city officials to maintain a holistic understanding of what a future ready workforce means. Lifelong learning and integrated STEAM opportunities are vital in these dynamic times as the nature of work changes rapidly. We firmly believe that the most important step to growing workforce capacity in a community is exposure to tools which builds confidence. It is never too early or too late to unlock the potential within each individual through access to these resources. A narrow focus on only high school and early college students would limit the impact on our city. By empowering individuals to make and maintain their homes and possessions, a community workshop could provide transformative economic and psychological benefits to Gresham residents. Ensuring access for equity-based community organizations would also develop a more equitable workforce, thereby reducing economic disparities within our community.

In walking distance from the Hope Center, Neighbors Park, Roc10 Farm and Downtown Rockwood, this shared third-space would connect overlooked community spaces and support the commission's stated goal of an "attractive, pedestrian-oriented" Rockwood while supporting public safety priorities with increased community presence day and night. To activate this space and realize this vision, the Hawthorne Woodworking property needs to welcome a broad range of learners in our community with a wide range of experience and interest levels. Most importantly, programming must include low- to no-cost learning opportunities for low-income residents and diverse programming to meet the cultural backgrounds that compose our neighborhood. We believe that tax revenue generation should not be an incentive for development strategies on this site, which was purchased with taxpayer dollars. Building a high barrier of entry to programming providers—or placing that authority in the hands of a single, private liability holder with a significant financial obligation—runs the risk of reduced opportunity, reduced equity, and reduced impact. Rockwood Common and our Advisory Council strongly advocate for a partnership model that empowers existing CBOs in Rockwood to steward this property for maximum community benefit. Thank you for your time.