

RETAIL HUB

INVESTMENT

Historic central Houston farmers market sold to local investment group

BY JOE MARTIN

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The corporation behind a long-standing Houston farmers market has been sold to a local investment group that has big plans for the historic organization.

Houston-based MLB Capital Partners has closed on a deal to acquire a controlling interest in Farmers Marketing Association of Houston Texas Inc. The deal closed May 22, according to Todd Mason, co-founder of MLB Capital Partners. One of the key assets of the Farmers Marketing Association is a large farmers market located at 2520 Airline Drive, southwest of the intersection of Interstate 45 and Loop 610.

Final plans for the property are still being ironed out, but the plan is to keep things as-is for now, Mason told the HBJ.

"We want to keep this a farmers market, to allow small businesses to afford to pay rent and be in this space," Mason said. "We're not trying to compete with new contemporary retail space."

Mason added that over time, the plan is to bring in more retail and food service tenants. Additionally, the space could host barbecue contests, small live music acts – although not as a venue for concerts – and



opportunities for local chefs to showcase their skills through demonstrations.

"We'll use the resources we already have to create some opportunities that will make this a more interesting place to shop and be involved," Mason said.

Some physical upgrades are in the works to help bring in more business for tenants, Mason added. MLB Capital has signed an architect for the deal, but Mason declined to disclose the team for the project.

Coinciding with the deal closing is a \$22.04 million capital raise filed by MLB-Farmers Market LLC and MLB-2520 Airline LLC, of which Mason, Jeff Lindenberger and Fred Baca are listed as the managers. The money was used to both make the acquisition of the corporation, but also to fund future plans, Mason told the HBJ. Mason and Lindenberger are also principals at commercial real estate firm Avison Young, but say this deal is not connected to that brokerage.



The Farmers Marketing Association of Houston originally started as a co-op in 1942 for Houston-area farmers to peddle their produce. Eventually, it incorporated but kept true to its agricultural roots. There were 104 shareholders – all descendants of original members – in the co-op at the time of the deal, some of which sold their shares to MLB Capital as part of the deal, while others decided to remain in place. The corporation is expected to remain in place going forward, Mason said.