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# State of the City Preservation Report 2011

## Submitted by the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

February 23, 2011

### **Responsibilities of the Historic Landmarks Commission**

The Historic Landmarks Commission, (HLC or Landmarks Commission), provides leadership and expertise on maintaining and enhancing Portland's historic and architectural heritage. The Commission identifies and protects buildings and other properties that have historic or cultural significance or special architectural merit. The Commission provides advice on historic preservation matters, and coordinates historic preservation programs in the City. The Commission is also actively involved in the development of design guidelines for historic design districts.

### **Landmark Commission Activity Summary**

The Commission met 17 times during 2010 and conducted a Retreat on January 25, 2011.

The Commission received 12 briefings that addressed a broad spectrum of topics including PSU Framework Plan, Irvington Historic District, Portland Public Schools Historic Assessment, Historic Portland Parks system, Portland Milwaukie Light Rail project, Portland Loos and others.

There were four Type III Historic Design Review decisions. They included 2211 Park Place, the Odd Fellows Hall, the Made in Oregon Sign and the new Blanchet House. Additionally, there were two Type II cases, both in Ladd's Addition, one Type IV case, the Kiernan Building, three Design Advice Requests, and staff rendered 49 Type II decisions. Finally, eight National Register nominations were reviewed.

While the economic shift has reduced our design review applications, it should be noted that the ratio of design review cases to historic design review cases has reduced from 3:1 to less than 2:1. This reflects the growing emphasis on rehabilitation versus new construction throughout the city.

### **Historic Preservation Priorities**

#### **I. Portland Plan**

BPS planners developing the Portland Plan have incorporated protection of historic resources by designating both contributing landmarks and historic districts as "constraints" in the Buildable Lands Inventory. In other words, as planners consider zoned capacity of buildable property in determining potential growth and expanded density within our city, they have acknowledged that protection of historic resources will require constrained growth in these relatively small pockets within the city.

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The Landmarks Commission fully supports that approach. Even with the approval of the Irvington Neighborhood as a National Register District, National Register Districts and individually listed properties comprise only 4.4% of the city's area. Therefore concentrating density outside of historic districts encourages infill and minimizes sprawl but maximizes protection of the character-defining massing and scale that is so critical to these protected areas.

The Chair of the Landmarks Commission is serving on the Mayor's Portland Plan Advisory Group to help focus attention on preservation-related matters.

## **II. Historic Resource Inventory**

While a significant accomplishment at the time, the 1984 HRI is now out of date and in need of revision. Why now? Projected population growth and anticipated housing demands within Portland are anticipated to grow at significant levels over the next two decades. To accommodate this growth, increases in density will inevitably cause redevelopment throughout Portland's neighborhoods – potentially affecting hundreds of historic resources in the process.

Consider this. Even in the economic downturn, jurisdictions across Oregon (West Linn, Lake Oswego, Oregon City, Hillsboro, and Cottage Grove) and the United States (the largest effort being in Los Angeles) are revising their historic resource surveys as a springboard for economic development. Indeed, economic development can actually be spurred by a historic resource survey because it can:

- Provide city, state, and federal agencies (Port of Portland, PBOT, Tri-Met, PPS, Parks and Recreation, Water Bureau, PDC, ODOT, FTA) and private developers comprehensive resource information to better anticipate and plan projects around historic resources identified during the HRI. Agencies and developers currently spend thousands of dollars each year on project specific cultural resource surveys but this information is scattered, not comprehensive, and can complicate project scheduling if “surprises” are found late in the planning process;
- Expand access and opportunities for local, state, and federal incentives and grants for historic preservation activities;
- Provide city planners with comprehensive historic resource information that can be integrated with larger planning initiatives such as the Portland Plan, thus reducing the potential for zoning and project conflicts and thereby facilitating growth;
- Better anticipate the potential for future historic districts;
- Provide the city's downtown and neighborhood residents and commercial enterprises with renewed sense of place and cultural identity;
- Provide city neighborhoods with resource information for use in neighborhood improvement projects and educational materials.

Recent survey efforts in Portland have been funded by city funds, institutional efforts, and neighborhood associations. These projects included:

- East Portland Historic Survey Project that surveyed Mid-Century residential subdivisions developed in the 1940s to 1960s beyond 82<sup>nd</sup> Street (CITY and SHPO).
- Publicly-owned properties (focused on Portland Parks) (CITY).
- Portland State University Architectural Survey – an architectural survey of campus buildings (INSTITUTIONAL).
- Portland Public Schools Survey – relevant for upcoming bond levy (INSTITUTIONAL).
- Irvington Neighborhood Architectural Survey and National Register Nomination (PRIVATE).
- Buckman Neighborhood Architectural Survey and National Register Nomination (PRIVATE).
- Brooklyn Neighborhood completed quite a lot of survey work not long ago (PRIVATE).

A multi-year, phased, comprehensive revision of the HRI would be initially focused on areas with the greatest potential for population growth and re-development. The HLC would look to partner with other City agencies to pool resources and seek additional private, state, and federal matching funds for the HRI revision. A city-wide survey project would potentially range between \$2.5 to 3 million, but costs could be balanced by developing strategic relationships with funding institutions, agencies, neighborhood groups and historians, preservation non-profit organizations, consultants, and city agency staff. Costs would also be spread out over a period of years to balance expenditures across budget cycles. If the Council is interested, the HLC will develop a feasibility study over the next year to further develop funding sources and strategic partnerships, program administration, and project management. The Landmarks Commission asks for your support for this effort by incorporating it into future budgets and strategic planning.

### III. Historic Districts

1. *Skidmore/Old Town* — It has now been 28 months since we forwarded to you our proposed Design Guidelines and Cast Iron Resolution for approval and cases continue to be presented to us that must be reviewed in accordance with woefully antiquated guidelines. We just heard another this month.

It is regretful that this prior investment of public time and resources generated documents that are the paradigm for all historic design review guidelines in this city, yet they sit on a shelf unadopted. To be direct, the controversy blockading the adoption of the Design Guidelines and the Cast Iron Resolution is all centered around the Zoning Ordinance, which calls for inappropriate height and scale in our National Landmark District. Therefore, in order to move the process forward, the Landmarks Commission will be seeking the support of both the Planning and Sustainability Commission and the Design Commission asking Council to adopt the Skidmore/Old Town Historic Design Guidelines and Cast Iron Resolution and deferring any decision on zoning matters to the citywide context of the Portland Plan and Central City 2035.

2. *Antiquated Design Guidelines* — There remain other historic district design guidelines that are inadequate with which to perform fair and predictable design reviews. The standards for review are low, vague and often not currently reflective of neighborhood interests. Please consider allocating resources for such work in the districts of Lair Hill, Yamhill, Ladd's Addition, East Portland/Grand Avenue and the 13th Avenue Historic District.

#### IV. Public Commissions Cooperation

One of our goals for 2010 was to promote improved communication between the Landmarks Commission, Design Commission and Planning Commission, as we are being presented more and more matters that overlap the interests of our separate commissions.

We are pleased to report that code changes were implemented that deleted the unmanageable provision for common members on multiple commissions. Instead, the chairs of all three commissions now meet quarterly to update each other on matters before each and discuss topics that are of common concerns. You recently saw a tangible result when all three commissions testified before you on the City's tree policies

#### V. Threatened Landmark List

Last year we reported 12 different historic resources that were on our Threatened Landmarks List. We can happily report that of those, four of them are being actively addressed.

1. Union Station — PDC, P&C Construction and Architectural Resources Group have teamed for a large scale rehabilitation to be completed this year.
2. Washington High School — PPS is concluding a months long process to select a buyer and redeveloper of this historically significant property that is so critical to the Buckman Neighborhood and our City.
3. Northwest Cultural Center — The Northwest Children's Theater, Waterleaf Architecture and Schommer Construction have teamed and are exploring a rehabilitation plan for this Alphabet District landmark.
4. 511 Building — PNCA has selected a project manager and begun its planning process for the rehabilitation of this historic post office on the North Park Blocks.

The resources that remain of serious concern are:

1. *Skidmore/Old Town* — Proposed Zoning Code Amendments that remain under consideration by Council threaten the loss of National Landmark designation for our city's most important historic commercial district.
2. Centennial Mills — In addition to the lack of visible progress on this project we remain concerned about the lack of stabilization being performed to preclude this complex's further deterioration. PDC has informed us that they anticipate finalizing a DDA this year and beginning adaptive reuse construction in 2012 but rumors sustain our concerns.
3. *Memorial Coliseum* — The National Register protection offers short-term relief but only a commitment to a long-term use can justify the necessary investment to restore and renovate our newest landmark.
4. *Portland Public Schools* — The bond levy's success would certainly push this pool of City treasures off our list.
5. *Morris Marks House/Dori Court Apartments* — 1134 SW 12th Avenue—Low scale buildings in an area zoned for high rises. Discussions of possible relocation have begun.

6. *US Custom House* — GSA has identified a local property management firm which intends to acquire and relocate its offices there. We hope this leads to a re-investment into this property and its availability to the public.
7. *Brooklyn Roundhouse/Locomotives* — While progress is being made since Council approved a new location for our historic locomotives, the roundhouse at SE 18th & Holgate remains a concern, as will the locomotives until funding is secured.
8. *Portland Gas and Coke Building* — 1910 icon on St. Helen's Highway south of St John's Bridge is a superfund site.

#### **VI. 2010 Landmarks/Historic Preservation Successes**

- *Made In Oregon Sign/Portland Oregon Sign* — final change/public stewardship
- *Campbell Memorial* — protected by the National Register
- *Yeon Building/Rose Festival Office* — rehabilitated and protected by the National Register
- *Bull Run Lake Cabins* — 3 log cabins built in 1914 — Water Bureau restoration ongoing

#### **VII. Solar Panels and Conservation Districts**

This past year, the HLC considered a series of “green bundle” amendments to the City Code, known as RICAP 5, including exempting eco-roofs and roof-mounted solar panels from design review, as well as setting standards for the location of water cisterns and wind turbines.

Before adoption of RICAP 5, the installation of a roof-mounted solar array in historic districts required discretionary review by either city staff or the HLC. In conservation districts, rather than being labeled as “mechanical equipment” and subject to screening, solar installs were classified by building permit staff interpretation as “solar heating panels” and thus exempt from review. After adoption of RICAP 5, the installation of solar panels in both districts on flat roofs with a parapet and panels on sloped roofs where the panels faced rear property lines and were not visible from adjacent public streets were exempted from discretionary review.

The HLC did require review of proposals for street-facing solar panels in both historic and conservation districts in order to identify those situations where such alterations would not have a negative effect on the integrity of the district.

After City Council adopted the HLC recommendations, solar industry stakeholders objected to the requirement of review for street facing solar panel installations. Our thanks to the Mayor's office who then invited HLC to directly address these concerns with the BPS staff, solar advocates solar energy providers, Susan Anderson, individual Council members and the public.

This said, the solar panel discussions illuminated that the real rub relates to historic design review mandated in conservation districts. Development in the City's six conservation districts including Eliot, Kenton, Mississippi, Piedmont, Russell, and Woodlawn, may occur either

through discretionary review by City staff or ministerial approval through compliance with a clear and objective series of design standards, approved by the Design Commission, dictating roof pitch, materials, window openings and the like. The HLC understands that these conservation districts were created in 1993 as much as a social, cultural, and economic driver as for the identification of historic structures that work together to tell a story of an era gone by. It is possible that infill development in these areas over time has eroded the historic fabric so far that these areas are no longer suitable for protection or that review powers should switch to the Design Commission where a standard of aesthetics could be assured without regard to impacts to resources. The only way to make informed decisions in this regard would be to inventory the building stock in these areas to determine if the Conservation District classification should remain, if some of these districts should be converted to National Register districts and receive greater protections, or if some of these districts should be wholly de-classified. Again, the HLC renews its request for funding so that this inventory can be completed.

### **VIII. Portland Development Commission**

The Landmarks Commission feels that our communication links with our City's urban renewal agency, the Portland Development Commission, need improvement. PDC interfaces so actively with public historic resources that we feel that a stronger bond would facilitate communication and help influence PDC's planning so as to better ensure that PDC-supported projects can be supported at the HLC level.

Certainly, PDC has reached out on multiple occasions, such as:

- Early involvement in the Central City Westside URA study. HLC was asked to identify historic resources that might be positively impacted by inclusion.
- Landmarks Commission representatives have been asked to participate in RFI selection committees, the Ankeny/Burnside Project and sustainability committees.
- PDC provided a Centennial Mills briefing recently.

Areas where improvement can be made are:

- Early Landmarks Commission involvement in PDC-financed project planning that is within historic district boundaries would be beneficial. A prime example is Japantown/Chinatown, where high-profile projects like Uwajimaya and Blanchet House have been proposed and preliminarily planned, but may be in conflict with historic resource protections.
- Investment in maintenance of some PDC-owned historic resources has been sparse. We believe that PDC is not modeling the type of care that a fragile resource should receive. We worry about potential precedence for cases of demolition by neglect.
- Consideration of a change in PDC policy could preclude the expenditure of public funds to demolish a designated historic resource.
- Ensuring that a Landmark Commission representative is appointed to committees investigating options for a historic resource, such as Memorial Coliseum.