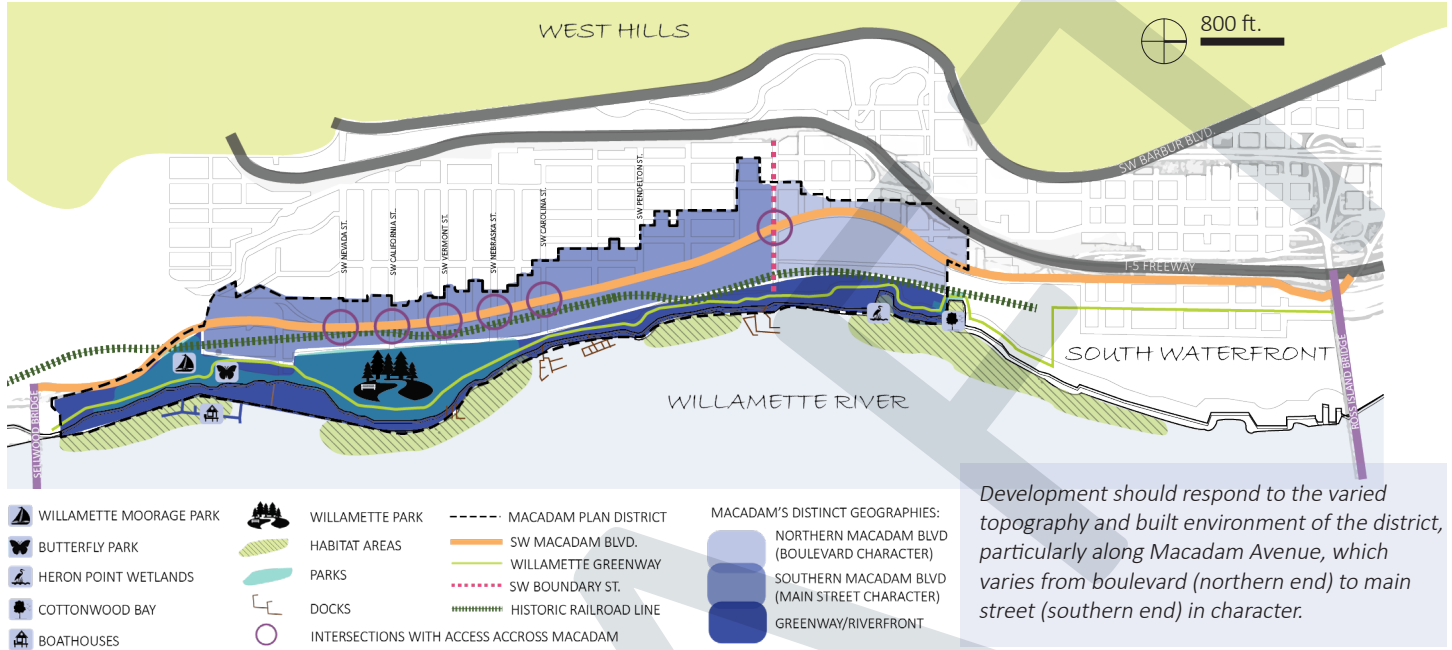


# 02 CHARACTER STATEMENT

## NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER | MACADAM CIVIC CORRIDOR AND RIVERFRONT



Development should respond to the varied topography and built environment of the district, particularly along Macadam Avenue, which varies from boulevard (northern end) to main street (southern end) in character.

## BACKGROUND

### HISTORY & EXISTING CONDITIONS

Located between Portland's west hills and the Willamette River, the SW Macadam area has been shaped by the river, abundant natural resources and its proximity to the Central City. For centuries, native people lived and thrived in this area, sometimes in temporary settlements. They often traveled by river to hunt, gather, fish and trade with others, including at nearby Willamette Falls. These cultural practices are central to native peoples' lifeways and should be honored as this area is restored and protected for the future.

From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, European Americans settled this district along the north-south Macadam Avenue corridor area and a parallel railroad line. During the city's early growth, land between the Willamette River and Macadam Avenue was developed, in part, as an industrial area to take advantage of both river and land transportation. Commercial businesses emerged along the west side of Macadam to support local industry needs. Residential neighborhoods developed west of the commercial corridor, along the hillsides with views of the river.

Following World War II, much of the industry in the Macadam Corridor relocated due to changing technology and demand. New development in the flatter lands between Macadam Avenue and the Willamette River followed a resurgence of development downtown and in other close-in residential neighborhoods. In the 1970s and 80s, former industrial sites were redeveloped into multi-dwelling residential and office buildings.

Planning policies of the period emphasized new commercial and residential uses, while encouraging an auto-oriented, "campus-like" environment with many trees, deep street setbacks and public access to and along the river. This led to the creation of several residential developments, the greenway trail, and Willamette Park. But it also resulted in buildings oriented toward parking lots rather than the street, large surface parking areas and an unwelcoming pedestrian environment.

### CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

The 2035 Comprehensive Plan (2018) identifies Macadam as a Neighborhood Center and SW Macadam Avenue as a Civic Corridor. These designations recognize the area's opportunities for growth and redevelopment, which will provide a safe and attractive pedestrian environment and strengthen its riverfront access.

## STATEMENT OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this character statement is to augment the Portland Citywide Design Guidelines and lead the design review of the Macadam Plan District. Defining the specific qualities of the area shows planners, builders and architects how new development along both Macadam Avenue and the Willamette riverfront can reflect the historical/physical context of the district and provide unfettered access to the riverfront.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources offer some more background information on the history of this district.

- [Willamette Greenway Plan \(1987\)](#)
- [Macadam Corridor Design Guidelines \(1985\)](#)
- [River Plan/South Reach Proposed Draft \(January 2020\)](#)
- [River Plan/South Reach Draft Existing Conditions Report \(May 2018\)](#)

"...help preserve and protect the natural environment that defines this district..."



## COMMUNITY CHARACTER



*Communal open space along greenway at Heron Point.*

The riverfront is significant for the regions' tribal nations, urban native community and others who carry out cultural practices near and on the river, such as launching canoes and fishing. Residents and visitors value the area's nearly two miles of accessible Willamette River shoreline, with an accessible greenway trail, Willamette Park, Heron Point Wetlands and the Cottonwood Bay natural area. Development should recognize the recreational, social and cultural values of the riverfront through onsite features and river-responsive design.

Topography and proximity to the river has led the community to recognize three very distinct geographies: 1) Northern

SW Macadam Avenue; 2) Southern SW Macadam Avenue (south of SW Boundary); and 3) the Willamette River Greenway. Future development should respond to each site's distinct topography, lot size, density, heights and uses that define each geography.

Throughout the area, Macadam Avenue, the train tracks, surface parking areas, and large irregular lot sizes have created east-west barriers to the river. Future development should work to improve the both quality and quantity of physical and visual access within these areas. Access should be strategically sited to follow the typical Portland block pattern of 200 feet.



## ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER



*Adaptive reuse of Water Tower building as a commercial business center.*

Past City policies envisioned SW Macadam as a tree-lined boulevard with safe routes for both pedestrians and cars. Existing development — a mixture of river-oriented businesses, suburban-style shopping centers, office parks and apartment buildings — does not necessarily support a public realm focused on the comfort and safety of pedestrians over cars. Future site and building design should be responsive to this vision for Macadam Avenue and the context of the Willamette Riverfront.

On Macadam Avenue, a few buildings from the area's industrial past have been renovated to feature high quality, durable materials, such as masonry or stucco. In addition, they utilize design features, such

as ample glazing, covered entries, and integrated landscaping or inviting pedestrian pathways that soften the harsh environment along this busy corridor. Future development should incorporate these features, especially on corner locations that can strengthen the connections across Macadam Avenue and down to the river.

Along the Willamette Riverfront, there is an opportunity for development to support eyes on the trails, wildlife and the river. Development should avoid long monotonous facades and preserve access to light and air. Building configuration and orientation should be designed to facilitate east-west connections to the river.



## NATURAL RESOURCES + SCENIC RESOURCES



*Step back development from greenway to preserve resources and views.*

Macadam's location along the Willamette River's South Reach is a key factor in the continued health of local endangered and threatened fish, wildlife and rare plants. This riverine corridor is part of the Pacific Flyway for migrating and nesting birds. Future development along the river and trails should activate the river frontage, while minimizing noise and lighting impacts on the trail and riverfront habitat. Development should include native plantings to enhance wildlife habitat, soften building edges and screen parking areas.

Natural features here and along the riverfront are valuable community assets, with lush vegetation and views of the mountains, hills and river. Any new development needs to protect natural areas by preserving and planting trees along the Willamette River. Future development needs to capitalize on the unique geographic location of this district by incorporating

environmentally friendly building practices and techniques to help preserve and protect the riverfront environment that defines this district.

Residents and visitors value direct access to the Willamette River from neighborhoods and businesses to the west. To strengthen this access, the east side of Macadam should include lush landscaping to emphasize east-west connections toward the river. Visual connections to the Willamette and other features from both sides of Macadam Avenue allow Portlanders to appreciate the area's scenic beauty. Maintaining these connections ensures permeability within the district, which helps with air quality, improving overall health and livability. This includes preservation of public viewpoints close to the river and view streets, as referenced in the Macadam Plan District and the South Reach Scenic Resource Protection Plan.