

December 17, 2020

Portland Design Commission
Julie Livingston, Chair
1900 SW 4TH Ave
Portland, OR 97201

C: Tim Heron, Portland BDS
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Re: Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge Project
Record No: 20/EF/11994

Dear Chair Livingston and Commissioners:

This written testimony strongly supports making the Willamette River crossing earthquake ready, yet proposes that destruction of the Burnside Bridge will result in missed opportunities to understand stories of Portland's development and opportunities to continue the stories in this unique structure and space.

Introduction

Removing constituent historic bridge elements runs counter to the intent of Title 33, Section 445.010:

"Historic preservation beautifies the city, promotes the city's economic health, and helps to preserve and enhance the value of historic properties."

The Burnside Bridge has been recognized by the County, trained scholars, the City, the State and the Federal Government as significant enough to warrant preservation and protection. More specifically, the bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its engineering, and for its role in Portland's political history.

The existing Bridge has other value beyond that easily measured by most economic models. Connections to ideas of the celebratory "City Beautiful Movement" are mentioned in both the National Register Nomination and in other publications. The Central Library, The Skidmore Fountain, The Fireman's Memorial, the Washington Park Reservoirs as initiated in the Olmsted Plan, and numerous other structures are among Portland's thus celebrated public works. Architectural elements of the bridge also celebrate the importance of transition from the east to the west sides of the city, indeed from the Oregon Coast to Mount Hood. The Bridge also marks Portland's East-West and North-South development. It is the historic and current Center.

The prime Location in the city, a physical scale and character that encourages people using multiple means of travel and aesthetic connection with other structures typifying ideas intended to beautify public works in the city with sympathetic architectural expression all make the Burnside Bridge essential to the unique character of Portland life.

The bridge itself refers directly to its view from the river and its relationship to the banks. The meaning we bring to its character is dependent not only on its artfully analogous qualities, but by their use. Even now, its unique wide, unobstructed physical characteristics allow the bridge to be a venue for peaceful public involvement, as it has been for over a half-century. It continues to provide opportunities for continuing to tell significant, yet potentially overlooked Portland stories.

Options

At least two viable alternatives to destroying the Burnside Bridge exist at this time:

- *Revisit and Implement the Enhanced Seismic Retrofit option* for the existing Bridge.
- *Implement the Long-Span Bascule option* for the Bridge, which does not require destruction of the Bridge Houses or installation of additional supporting structure above the East and West spans.
Integrate the existing Control Houses and piers with the re-structured bridge spans, and re-employ the shape, material, character and architectural detail of the guardrails and related elements.

Historic preservation promotes genuine sustainability. It brings the valuable past into the present and supports its integration with future development.

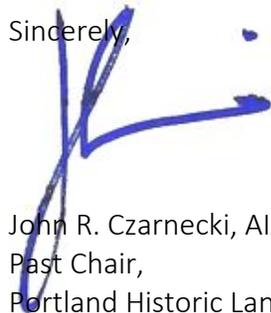
The following points may also inform the Landmarks Commission's decision regarding the Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge Project:

- *The bridge structure has not lost its architectural integrity.*
Even if partially demolished, the exterior can be repaired by understanding physical and photographic evidence of its original character and making strictly compatible improvements.
- *The comprehensively measured cost of demolition is outweighed by the economic benefits of historic conservation that support genuine comprehensive sustainability.*
Included are costs arising from energy consumption required for demolition and new construction. Also included are the long-term costs of an increased carbon footprint and the loss of embodied energy.
- *The value of the Burnside Bridge can transcend its individual characteristics*
With destruction of the Burnside Bridge, an essential element of understanding Portland's history and current useful significance through its interrelated resources is at risk. The structure consciously ties the aesthetic and physical experience of public amenities to the celebration of Portland's character. Public purpose will be well served by maintaining the Burnside Bridge.

We should treat historic resources as we would any other irreplaceable resources. We should understand their extent and qualities, conserve them, and use them wisely to enhance our future environment. I respectfully ask that “Earthquake Ready” proposals requiring demolition of the historic Burnside Bridge not be implemented. Please ensure that the bridge and its context continue to have value worthy of wise conservation and continued use.

Thank you for your stewardship and forward thinking on behalf of us all.

Sincerely,



John R. Czarnecki, AIA
Past Chair,
Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

REFERENCES:

- “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form-Burnside Bridge, Portland Oregon” #12000931 National Park Service, US Department of the Interior 2012
- “Images of America-Bridges of Portland” by Ray Bottenberg- Arcadia Publishing, 2007
- “The Portland Bridge Book” by Sharon Wood Wortman with Ed Wortman – Urban Adventure Press 2006
- “Measuring Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation–A Report to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation” by Donovan Rypkema, Caroline Chong, Randall Mason PhD et al – U. of Pennsylvania 2011

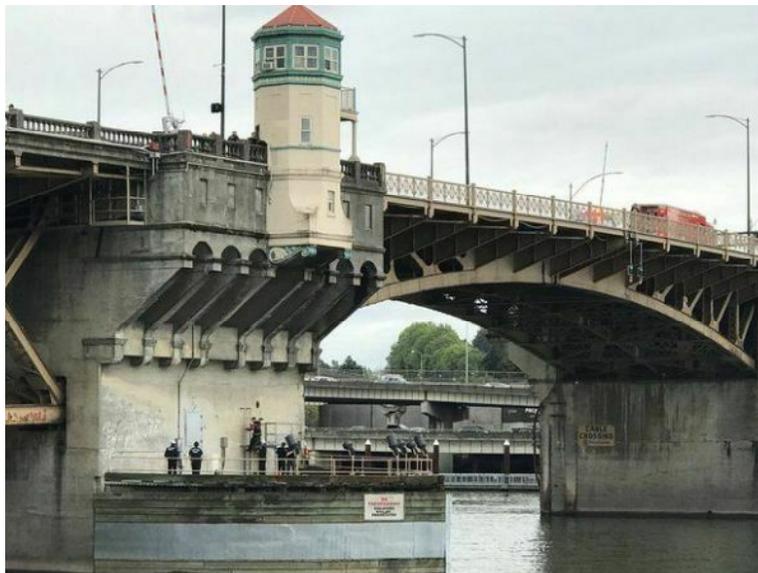
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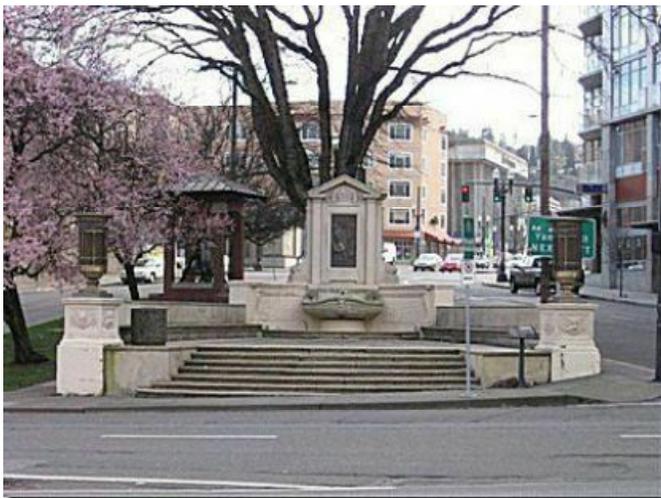
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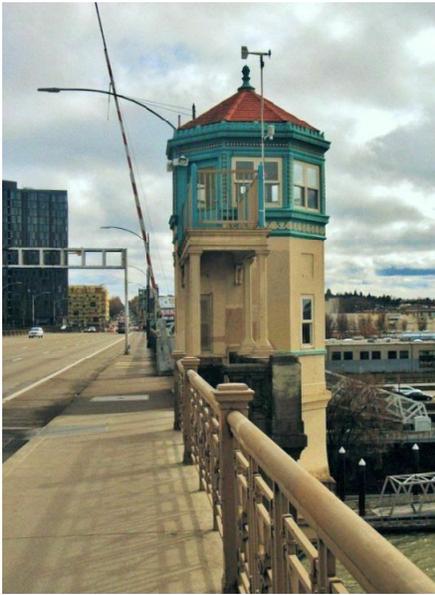
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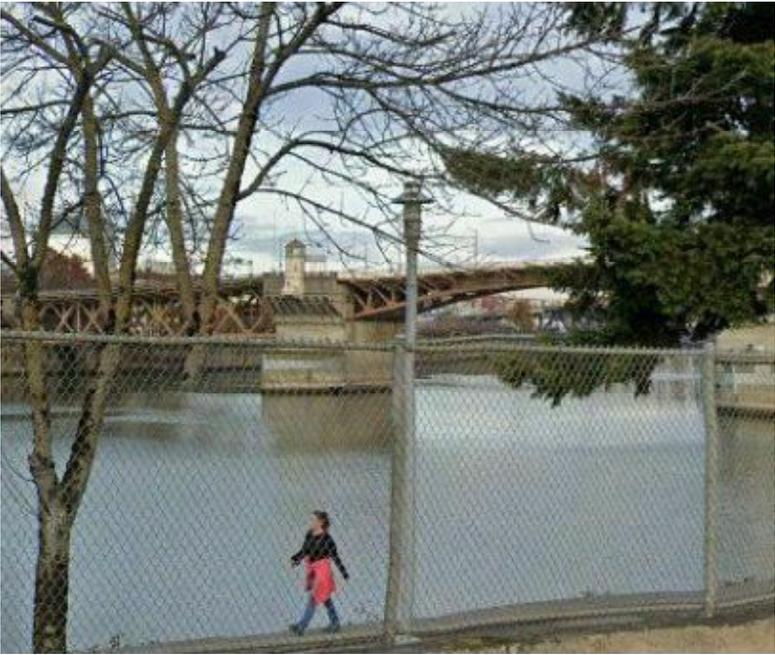
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