



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

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MEMO

DATE: June 16, 2021

TO: Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

FROM: Lora Lillard, Cassie Ballew and Brandon Spencer-Hartle,
Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

CC: Peter Meijer Architect and Hillary Adam, Bureau of Development Services

SUBJECT: Briefing: Belgian Block cobblestones

The Portland Historic Landmarks Commission will hold a briefing and work session with Peter Meijer Architect (PMA) and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), to discuss findings from their draft technical report, or *Belgian Block Report*, on Belgian Block cobblestones, on June 28, 2021.

On March 22, 2021, BPS briefed the Landmarks Commission on the status of the Belgian Blocks by providing a summary of recent discussions with PBOT regarding the concerns around using the blocks and how resolution of these concerns generally conflict with the existing deployment criteria developed by the Commission in 1975. These criteria state that:

1. Cobblestones should be reused primarily in districts or areas of the City where they were originally used. Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks where cobblestones were originally used as the paving material should receive first priority.
2. That as a general policy, cobblestones should be used for large paving areas, primarily in public pedestrian spaces where the special character of cobblestone texture would be meaningful. The use of cobblestones as small decorative elements in unrelated or isolated projects should be discouraged, as these uses are usually insignificant or inappropriate.

BPS also shared that PMA was contracted to produce a technical report on the blocks which would include the following components: materiality (e.g. nature of the stone and viability for cutting, smoothing or roughing for use in an urban environment); regulatory constraints (e.g. consistency with the Americans with Disability Act and maintenance considerations); and case studies.



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After the briefing in March, PMA prepared a draft technical report outlining their recommendations on how to address concerns related to meeting ADA requirements. The report also provides a series of case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of some practices to manipulate the material itself (i.e. cutting, coating, sealing) vs. designing spaces with them located outside of highly accessible pathways, like crosswalks.

At the June 28 briefing and work session, PMA will share a summary of their findings and recommendations outlined in their report. BPS would like to facilitate a round-robin discussion with the Commission to hear commissioner perspectives on the content and issues outlined in the draft report. The feedback received at this session will be used to finalize PMA's report.

Following the completion of the technical report, BPS staff anticipates returning to the Landmarks Commission with follow-up meeting(s) to discuss potential changes to the approval criteria for deployment of Belgian Blocks, if any, as informed by the technical report. PBOT and BPS also anticipate returning to the Commission to discuss the use of blocks at the Earl Blumenauer Bridge landings.

We look forward to the discussion on June 28.

Attachment: Belgian Block Report

