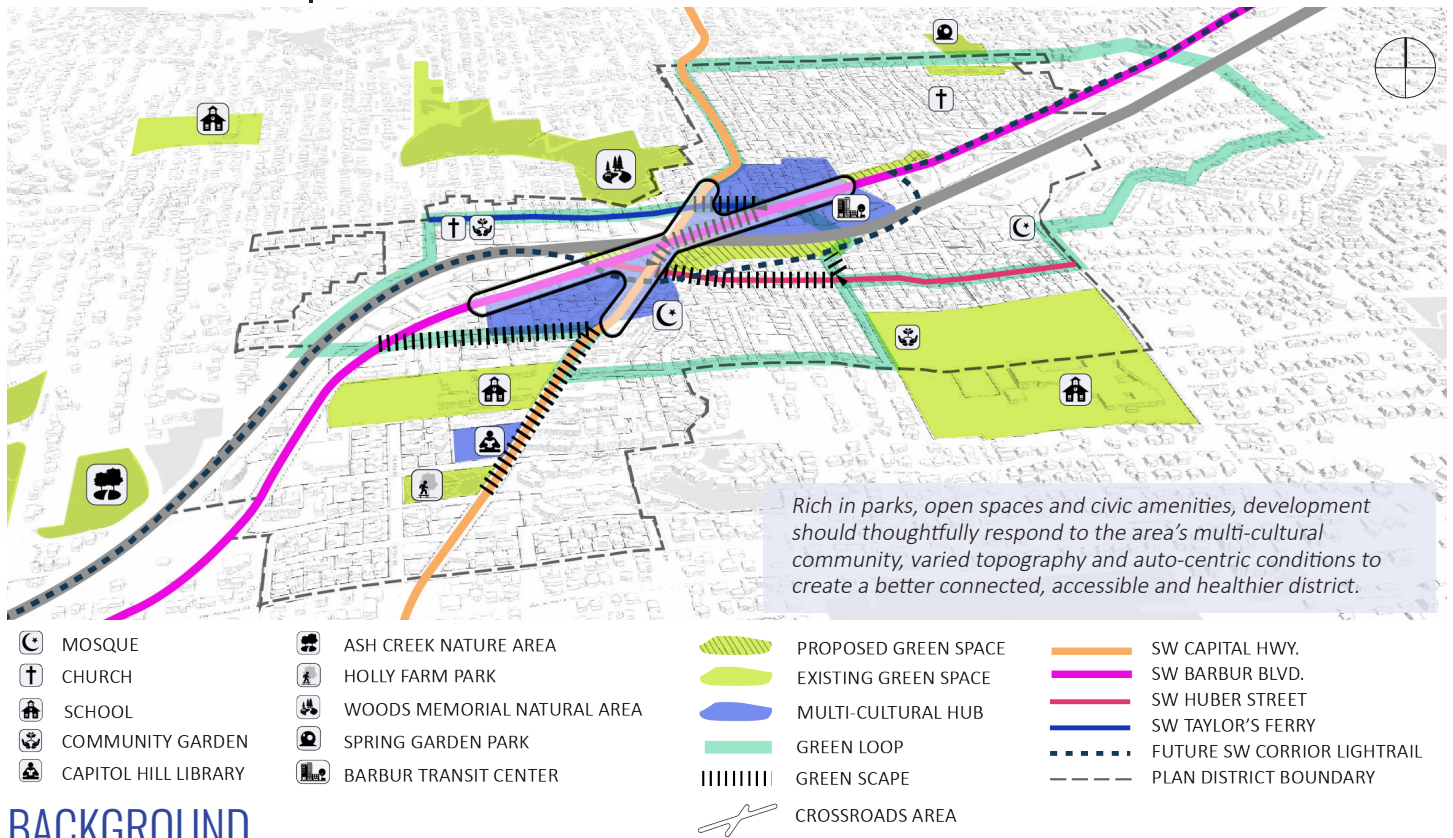


# CHARACTER STATEMENT: WEST PORTLAND & BARBUR BOULEVARD TOWN CENTER | CIVIC CORRIDOR



## BACKGROUND

### HISTORY & EXISTING CONDITIONS

West Portland Town Center (WPTC) is home to diverse communities, nationalities and lived experiences, including long established East African and Arab Muslim communities. Located in outer southwest Portland, it is centered by the crossing of SW Capitol Highway and Barbur Boulevard, extending north and south of that intersection. South of the intersection is West Portland Park, the district's most racially diverse neighborhood and home to several important community resources that serve the Muslim and African communities in the area. Many of these resources are inaccessible by walking or biking due to the area's poor network of safe and comfortable pedestrian connections.

Originally, this area was home to the northern Kalapuyan peoples and adjacent to one of the largest collections of independent villages on the nearby Tualatin Plains (modern-day Beaverton, Hillsboro, Mountaindale, Forest Grove). When the Kalapuyan Treaty was ratified in 1855, it forced the Kalapuyan peoples out. Today there is little to no indication of this history or the presence of this community in the area.

Less than 10 years after the treaty, the Oregon California Railroad began plans for the South Pacific Railroad. This eventually became Barbur Boulevard in 1934, and commercial activity began developing along it and SW Capitol Highway. Later construction of Interstate 5 divided the area physically and visually, contributing to a more disconnected and uninviting place for people on foot.

Barbur remains the key arterial for southwest Portland and the character of the commercial areas continues to be defined by the roadway. This has resulted in designs that prioritize automobile traffic and separate businesses with large parking lots and driveways. Commercial activity remains concentrated around the intersection of Barbur and Capitol Highway, an area known as the crossroads. Nearby parks and natural areas, (i.e Woods Memorial Natural Area) while abundant, lack safe connections for pedestrians and cyclists.

### CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Portland's Comprehensive Plan identifies West Portland as a Town Center, Barbur Boulevard as a Civic Corridor, and Capitol Highway as a Neighborhood Corridor. These designations give WTPC a key role in accommodating future development, recognizing that its terrain and system of trails and habitat areas can physically set the stage for how to shape future growth. Additionally, the plan directs future development to consider health equity outcomes at the intersection of social and physical elements of place, recognizing that opportunities for healthy lives are directly impacted by both social and physical surroundings and systems.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources offer more information on the history and community that define this center:

- Southwest Community Plan vision (2000)
- Barbur Concept Plan (2013)
- West Portland Plan (2022)
- SW Corridor Tenant Engagement Project Report (2020)

"...Mitigate impacts and bridge the divide caused by I-5 and Barbur to reconnect neighborhoods and improve the environment..."

The following sections align with and are derived from content in the Portland Citywide Design Guidelines, specifically Guideline 01. They will each focus on characteristics specific to this Town Center.

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER



*This courtyard entryway creates an inclusive space allowing for colorful artwork and community connection.*

West Portland Town Center is home to ethnically, racially and economically diverse communities but does not offer enough diverse public spaces to support them. Design of the area's architecture and public spaces should reflect the community's pride in its multi-cultural and multi-generational identity, particularly within the future Multi-Cultural Hub.

A few ways to address these issues include:

- Providing public spaces with age friendly amenities (low benched seating, spaces for strollers) and flexible spaces allowing for a variety of uses (vendors, markets or large informal gatherings).
- Incorporating art on sites adjacent to high traffic corridors (SW Barbur Blvd.), pedestrian and bikeways (green scape

and ring) and open spaces, to highlight the area's indigenous history and current multi-ethnic communities.

- Integrating water features within the design of sites. Often found in Islamic gardens and public spaces, these would recognize the area's Islamic communities while also offer a reprieve from the impact of the area's urban heat island.
- Considering designs that emulate (not imitate) the vernacular reflective of the current multi-cultural communities.
- Fostering inclusion with the use of multi-lingual signage.
- Improving the quality and quantity of connections to local institutions (i.e. Markham Elementary) which are valued as landmarks by the community.

## ARCHITECTURE + URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER



*Multnomah Station steps back and up to create a prominent, covered entry with seating, at curved corner site.*

An abundance of large roadways, surface parking, narrow sidewalks, inactive facades and little to no protection from the elements, has created a harsh and unwelcoming pedestrian experience within the Town Center. As the area transitions away from auto-oriented development, and addresses issues of health equity, architecture and urban design should respond by creating an inclusive and comfortable public realm for people, particularly on sites within the crossroads area.

A few ways to address these issues include:

- Providing opportunities for stopping and waiting on sites adjacent to transit stops and stations by designing safe, well-lit areas with accessible seating, leaning rails and weather protection.

- Encouraging pedestrian activity along major arterials by providing space adjacent to the sidewalk for businesses to utilize (café seating, produce markets, vendors), views into active spaces, covered areas and recessed entries with seating to foster interaction.
- Improving conditions caused by noise and pollution by utilizing sound absorbing materials, and orienting buildings towards views or public spaces to reduce impacts to residential units.
- Effectively managing negative impacts from massing on adjacent properties.
- Supporting the creation of an informal circulation network with accessible connections on larger sites within the town center.

## NATURAL RESOURCES + SCENIC RESOURCES



*Multnomah Village uncovered and restored Tryon Creek headwaters, while supporting the area's natural habitat and functions.*

Along with its varied topography, abundant tree canopy and significant woodland remnants, the Town Center has many parks and open spaces; however, connections to these places are often not accessible nor intuitive. New development should address the desire of community to, "weave in parks and nature into development" and "integrate buildings with topography", to improve health equity outcomes for it's most vulnerable communities.

A few ways to address these issues include:

- Responding to changing grades with stepped or layered siting of buildings.
- Incorporating abundant vegetation to provide people a buffer from the noise and pollutants along main traffic corridors.
- Strengthening visual and physical connections to nature, parks and open

spaces by orienting shared spaces, views and pedestrian pathways to these resources, and by building off the Green Ring and Green Scape facilities.

- Enhancing natural resources and habitat value by adding trees, native vegetation, and open spaces, while also reducing heat island impacts and easing stormwater system demand.
- Planting larger canopy trees, particularly along and near Barbur Boulevard and the freeway, to offer better habitat linkages, provide greater shade and create a "green lung" in the heart of the center.
- Designing prominent surface stormwater facilities that are functional, attractive and improve the ecological health of the Tryon and Fanno watersheds, mitigating the impacts of water runoff and pollution.