



**City of Portland, Oregon**  
**Bureau of Development Services**  
**Land Use Services**  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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## Briefing

# DISCUSSION MEMO

**Date:** August 27, 2021  
**To:** Portland Design Commission  
**From:** Benjamin Nielsen, Design / Historic Review Team  
(503) 865-6519, [benjamin.nielsen@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:benjamin.nielsen@portlandoregon.gov)  
**Re:** West Portland Town Center Character Statement  
Briefing Memo – September 2, 2021

This memo is regarding the upcoming Briefing on September 2, 2021 for the West Portland Town Center Plan and Character Statement. The following supporting documents from the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability are available as follows:

- Memo from BPS plus four attachments (including the Character Statement), dated 08/26/2021
- *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines* (for reference)  
([https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/citywidedg\\_working\\_version\\_aug01\\_optimize\\_d.pdf](https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/citywidedg_working_version_aug01_optimize_d.pdf))

## I. OVERVIEW

The West Portland Town Center (WPTC) Plan is centered on the intersections of SW Capitol Highway and SW Taylor's Ferry Road, including the existing Barbur Transit Center site, in southwest Portland. This area was to include a light rail station on the proposed Southwest Corridor MAX extension, which was voted down this past November, though the area is still planned to have a high-capacity transit route and station in the future. In addition to increasing development allowances through amendments to the city's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code, creating a new West Portland Multicultural Plan District, the WPTC Plan "leads with a health and racial equity lens" to help prevent displacement of existing low-income residents and residents of color, many of whom are part long-established Arab and East African Muslim communities in this area.

Zoning code amendments include the expansion of the Design Overlay along primary corridors through the town center area. As part of this expansion, the WPTC Plan includes a new Character Statement for the district that will be used in combination with Guideline 1 from the new Citywide Design Guidelines.

The Design Commission will be attending a joint hearing with the Planning and Sustainability Commission on September 28, 2021 to hear public testimony related to the WPTC Plan and Character Statement. Work sessions on the Character Statement will be held later this fall.

## II. STAFF ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDED BRIEFING DISCUSSION TOPICS

### ***Character Statement***

Attached to this memo is a summary from the January 2021 briefing on the West Portland Town Center Character Statement to the Design Commission as well as BDS staff's memo to the Design Commission for the briefing (for reference). Staff believes that the Character Statement is now providing more background about the existing communities who currently live within the district and more-directly incorporates some of the goals these communities' hope to achieve with development in the WPTC, though additional specificity should still be provided before the Design Commission recommends the Statement for adoption.

The second page of the Character Statement breaks these contextual cues out into three topic areas which align with the "design approaches" listed in Guideline 1 – "Build on the character, local identity, and aspiration of the place" of the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines*. These topic areas are Community Character, Architecture + Urban Design Character, and Natural Resources + Scenic Resources.

### Community Character

- The Community Character topic area now incorporates more context- and community-specific guidance than was present in the January 2021 version of the Character Statement.

### Architecture + Urban Design Character

- The recommendations in this section are still rather broad and generally represent good architectural and urban design practices. Furthermore, many of these recommendations are addressed by public realm and quality & permanence guidelines in the rest of the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines*.
- Recommendations in this section should focus on place-specific issues of the WPTC and relate more directly to its proposed urban design framework. Bullet points two and three begin to do this, though they could be more direct in citing sites that front SW Barbur Blvd and/or abut Interstate 5, as an example.

### Natural Resources + Scenic Resources

- Of the three sections, this one seems to have the most place-specific guidance about the plan district's character.
- Reference is made to the "'Green Ring' and 'Green Scape' facilities" of the WPTC's urban design framework, though the descriptions in the plan of these two features lack specific details as to what their urban and landscape design character entails. Either more detail is needed in the plan, or bullet point three should provide additional guidance beyond "building off" these elements.

The Character Statement now also includes a guide instructing applicants and staff on how to use it (Attachment B). This document will be placed ahead of all character statements in the Portland Citywide Design Guidelines and will be adopted through the WPTC Plan process.

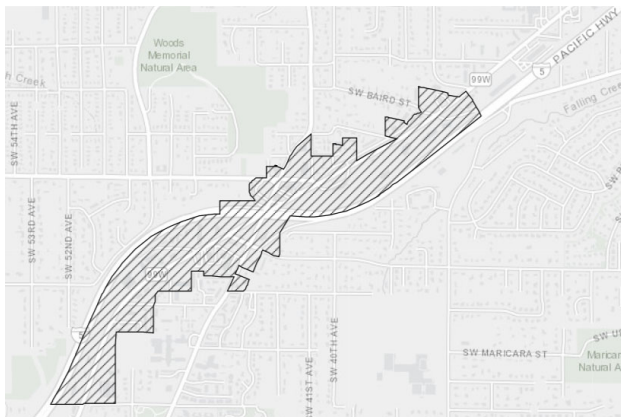
As the recommending body for new and amended design guidelines (PZC 33.720.030.D), the Design Commission will provide a recommendation to the City Council for both the WPTC Character Statement and the guide on how to use the character statement documents.

### **Zoning Code Amendments**

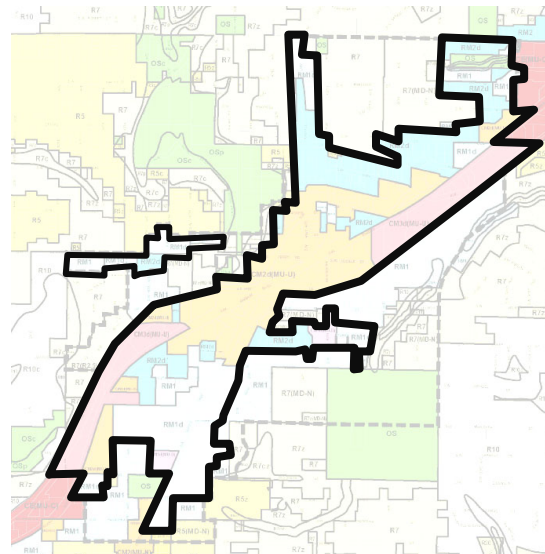
The Design Commission may, at its discretion, provide public testimony to the Planning & Sustainability Commission on proposed zoning code amendments (and, for that matter, the overall plan) for the West Portland Town Center Memo. BDS will also be submitting testimony on the proposed zoning code amendments.

The Design Commission may be most interested in the expansion of the “d” design overlay zone and upzoning of low-density residential properties within the WPTC. Currently, the design overlay zone hugs SW Barbur Blvd and lies only on commercially-zoned properties.

In addition to expansion of the design overlay, new required design standards, complementing those recently adopted by DOZA, are proposed for new development in the design overlay zones of the WPTC. These are copied directly from the DOZA design standards in zoning code chapter 33.420 but are made required rather than optional.



*Existing location of the design overlay in the West Portland Town Center area.*



*Approximate boundary of proposed design overlay zone.*

Also attached to this memo is the last round of BDS comments on proposed zoning code amendments to the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, for your reference.

Files pertaining to this briefing may be found here (document-specific links provided below, along with additional information): <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/record/14621343>

Please contact me with any questions you may have.

#### **Attachments:**

- WPTC Character Statement Summary Memo from 01/22/2021 briefing
- BDS comments to BPS regarding the WPTC code amendments
- BPS Staff Memo on the WPTC (<https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14640617/>)
- West Portland Town Center Character Statement (Attachment A) (<https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14640616/>)

Guide to the Character Statements (Attachment B)

(<https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/record/14621343>)

BPS Staff Responses to BDS and BES Comments (Attachment C)

(<https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14640614/>)

Proposed Zoning Map (Attachment D) (<https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14640613/>)

Additional information:

West Portland Town Center Proposed Draft Overview (<https://www.portland.gov/bps/wpdx-town-center/wptc-proposed-draft-overview>)

West Portland Town Center Plan Proposed Draft – Report & Actions

([https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/wptc\\_propdraft\\_report\\_v.1\\_final\\_8.10.21.pdf](https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/wptc_propdraft_report_v.1_final_8.10.21.pdf))

West Portland Town Center Proposed Draft – Code, Policy, & Map Amendments

([https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/wptc\\_vol2\\_pd\\_final\\_8.10.21.pdf](https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/wptc_vol2_pd_final_8.10.21.pdf))



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## Briefing

### SUMMARY MEMO

**Date:** August 27, 2021

**To:** Joan Frederiksen, BPS (Project Lead)  
Cassie Ballew, BPS

**From:** Benjamin Nielsen, Design / Historic Review  
503-865-6519, [Benjamin.Nielsen@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:Benjamin.Nielsen@portlandoregon.gov)

**Re:** Briefing on West Portland Town Center Character Statement  
Summary of 1/21/21 Design Commission hearing

Thank you for taking advantage of the opportunity to hold a preliminary briefing with the Design Commission regarding your project. I hope you find it informative and valuable as you continue with your project development. Attached is a brief summary of the comments provided by the Design Commission at the 01/21/2021 hearing. This summary was generated from notes taken at the public meeting and a subsequent review of the public meeting recordings. To review those recordings, please visit: [efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14334196/](https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/14334196/).

These Design Commission comments are intended to guide you in further design exploration of your project. These comments may also inform City staff when giving guidance over the course of future related land use reviews. It should be understood that these comments address the project as presented on 01/21/2021. As the project design evolves, the comments, too, may evolve or may no longer be pertinent.

Preliminary briefings are not intended to substitute for other Code-required land use or legislative procedures.

Please continue to coordinate with **Benjamin Nielsen**, as necessary as you prepare your formal land use application and as you prepare your application.

Encl: Summary Memo  
Cc: Design Commission

This memo summarizes **Design Commission** design direction provided on 01/21/2021.

Commissioners in attendance on 01/21/2021 include: Julie Livingston, Jessica Molinar, Sam Rodriguez, Chandra Robinson, Brian McCarter, Don Vallaster

Design Commissioners were appreciative of the chance to comment so early on in the development of the Character Statement. They noted that they agreed with all the issues raised in the BDS staff memo for this briefing.

### **Community Character and BPS's question re: culturally-specific artwork**

Commissioners agreed with comments provided in the BDS staff memo for this briefing related to building programming-- "Some of the references in the Character Statement discuss elements of a building's program that would be difficult or impossible to regulate through Design Review..." --and noted that focusing on specific business types is a short-term vision.

Commissioners had a vigorous discussion on how to create an adaptable, multicultural district. They underscored the need to first understand the essence of the different cultures currently living there and then develop guidance based on that understanding (and also noting that Portland has developed in a very Euro-centric manner so far). On that subject, commissioners said the Background Statement needs to include information about the Middle Eastern and East African communities who have come to live in the neighborhood in recent decades. One commissioner noted that the *intention* needs to be very clear in terms of the character the city is trying to achieve, and that the details can be figured out later.

It is important not just to understand the background of the communities living in the district, but also how members of these different communities use and interact with public space. How can artists and developers incorporate the vernacular of these cultures into public spaces and buildings? Would there be any distinction between public and private development, and how can these ideas be implemented?

Commissioners questioned how to "list" the cultures represented in the WPTC, and how will the list be updated as the cultural mix of the neighborhood changes. They believed it could be problematic to create such a list or to cater to a specific population only.

Commissioners asked if there was a way to work with RACC to identify artists from predominant cultures in the WPTC community. One commissioner specifically remarked that you don't want an unskilled artist to translate an East African theme. Art (and development) in the district needs to be authentic.

### **Architecture & Urban Design**

Commissioners said this section should be much more explicit about what the community wants—a public realm that serves pedestrians. The current wording walks around that concept. The language in the Statement so far also represents standard good placemaking concepts. What helps to distinguish this district (see also the discussion above)?

One commissioner suggested that one of the ideas that could be incorporated in the desired urban design character is the use of pedestrian alleys lined with shops, which she noted are very culturally appropriate for Mid-East and East African communities.

#### *Regarding BPS's question on thoughtful transitions between densities*

Design Commissioners discussed the need for appropriate code tools for managing transitions in height, scale, and massing of buildings adjacent to existing buildings and planned areas of lower height, bulk, and density, rather than relying on the Character Statement to address these issues.

Language in the Character Statement requesting façade articulation and breaks, step-downs, and set-backs cannot be counted on to manage scale transitions when FAR and height are unable to be reduced through Design Review and when most development will likely use prescriptive design standards anyway.

Language within the Character Statement itself should be clear and direct with clear photographic examples showing desired characteristics of transitions between height, scale, and massing of new development to existing development.

### **Other comments**

Commissioners thought there should be some language in the Character Statement that addresses how development should respond to the freeway.

One commissioner asked how the multimodal street system will be built out, and noted that it will take decades to develop a safe transportation system—including adding sidewalks where they are currently missing—on an incremental basis.

Commissioners asked about the statements in quotes, such as the one which reads “build WOOFERFS to keep the streets calm”, and asked where they came from and what they mean. If they remain in the Character Statement, it needs to be clear what they are.

Files related to this Briefing can be found here: [efiles.portlandoregon.gov/record/14122980](https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/record/14122980)

Please contact me with any questions.



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**MEMO**

**Date:** June 29, 2021

**To:** Joan Frederiksen and Ryan Curren  
Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

**From:** Kimberly Tallant  
Bureau of Development Services

**CC:** Andrea Durbin, Director  
Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

**Re:** BDS Comments on West Portland Town Center Plan – Preliminary Proposed Draft

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the West Portland Town Center Plan preliminary Proposed Draft. This project will help to advance Portland’s equity goals in this area of Southwest Portland while creating a more-walkable and bikeable district surrounding the planned future light rail station, all while maintaining and enhancing the unique and place-specific attributes that help to distinguish this neighborhood from others in the city.

The comments below highlight our primary areas of concern and provide detailed comments on the proposal. We look forward to working with BPS staff to address our concerns and to providing additional feedback as the project develops. Please direct questions about these comments to Benjamin Nielsen ([Benjamin.Nielsen@PortlandOregon.gov](mailto:Benjamin.Nielsen@PortlandOregon.gov)) on my staff.

**Primary Areas of Concern**

***Potential Implementation Issues***

1. BDS planners remain concerned that the proposed plan district development standards add complexity to the code that is disproportionate with the benefits that could be achieved relative to existing base zone and overlay zone standards.

**Detailed Comments**

We offer the following additional detailed comments.

Item No.	Page	Code Section	Comment
1	7	33.595.030	The Neighborhood Contact project aimed at simplifying and unifying the Neighborhood Contact requirements and



Item No.	Page	Code Section	Comment
			<p>process across zones, overlays and development types. There is concern that the specific notice procedure within the Plan District may be confusing to customers and staff and may lead to delays in the permitting and land use review process.</p> <p>Does the OCCL currently maintain contact information for the coalition manager? If not, how will the WPTC require it to begin maintaining and distributing this information?</p>
2	13	33.595.110.B	Staff remains concerned that it will be difficult for staff to verify that 50% of the net building area will be sale of food items.
3	13	33.595.120.B	Consider explicitly excepting shared parking from Commercial Parking limitations, as it helps to result in more efficient use of land and may reduce the need for parking spaces in the district.
4	15	33.595.130	<p>Shouldn't the entire Barbur Transit Center area be included in the 'm' overlay rather than being called out separately here?</p> <p>It may be useful to include a reference to the 'm' overlay Ground Floor Active Use standard in this section.</p> <p>BDS interprets the language "25 percent of any ground floor area located within 100 feet of the lot line that abuts the corridor or street..." to be exclusive of floor area that lies beyond 100 feet of the referenced lot line and to require that these active uses be located within 100 feet of the referenced lot line. Notably, the standard does not include mention of requiring these be located along the building edge facing the street, which seems to be one of the primary purposes of the standard.</p> <p>This section needs a purpose statement.</p>
5	17	33.595.200.B.3	Some commas would be helpful in this sentence to set off "if residential uses are proposed".
6	19	33.595.210.C	The standard is written to apply to only new development. Confirm that BPS is comfortable with allowing alterations to existing development that reduce floor area (however unlikely that may be).
7	21	33.595.210.D.1	Grammar comment: Sentence two should use a semicolon rather than a comma at "...Table 595-1; however, the..."
8	21	33.595.210.D.2	Grammar comment: The date needs a comma between January 31 and the year 2032 rather than a period.
9	23	33.595.210.D.3	Grammar comment: An apostrophe is needed in the first sentence to indicate the possessive: "...subject to the <u>sites'</u> base zone..."

Item No.	Page	Code Section	Comment
10	29	33.595.230.C	It may be helpful to have a table for the bonus height section, to help make it clear what the overall maximum is allowed since this section supersedes Table 130-3, except for the PD bonus. It may be worth adding the following, to the end of the first sentence..."for each of the following paragraphs" to follow the format of Title 33. If my understanding of this section is correct, the maximum height allowed in the CM2 zone can be up to 95 feet (exceeding the PD bonus). In the CM3 zone the maximum would be 115 feet, which is only 5 feet less than the PD bonus option. It may be worth looking at whether these bonuses should supersede even the PD bonus.
11	31	33.595.240.C	The language may be simplified by rewording the paragraph to state "when new development or alterations to existing development will add more than 10,000 square-feet of net building area in commercial uses, a minimum of 1,000 square feet of affordable commercial space must be provided."
12	33	33.595.250.D	<p>Requiring only medium and large tree species in a narrow setback between the building and sidewalk may not be appropriate for the long-term health and vitality of the trees.</p> <p>The 5-foot depth corresponds to the minimum area required for medium-size trees in development situations, but large trees need at least 10 feet of depth, per Table 50-3 in Tree Code section 11.050.D.2. If you haven't already done so, consider consulting with Urban Forestry on this standard or reduce the tree sizes.</p>
13	33	33.595.250.E	Grammar comment: This sentence should use a semicolon rather than a comma at "...base zones <u>apply; however</u> , the percentage..."
14	33	33.595.250.F	Should these be "main entrances" since that term is defined in our code?
15	35	33.595.270.C	In 33.595.270.C, they clarified in the commentary that required trees in the 20-foot-deep L3 area don't necessarily have to be in a single row. But the L3 standard referred to in this section also requires a continuous row of 6-foot-tall evergreen shrubs. Since so many large, evergreen trees would be planted in these 20-foot setbacks, is there any benefit to having the row of evergreen shrubs as well? If not, consider re-wording this section to require large, evergreen trees in the quantities required by the L3 standard, but not requiring the L3 standard itself.

Item No.	Page	Code Section	Comment
			The standard is clearly worded, otherwise, for implementation, and no mapped lines are needed to designate the freeway ROW.
<b>16</b>	37	33.595.275	<p>33.595.275 should be reviewed carefully against DOZA. I don't understand subsection B saying that .E through .G are required design standards for some sites. Wouldn't everything in .C through .G be required for all RM1 and RM2 sites in the plan district anyway? Even if this makes sense with DOZA regulations, I think this sentence will seem confusing to our customers.</p> <p>I think this needs revision to clarify that the standards in E through G are "required" in the sense that they earn no points for the 'd' overlay design standards track.</p>
<b>17</b>	37	33.595.275.C	The first sentence in 33.595.275.C doesn't make sense and should be reworded.
<b>18</b>	33	33.595.275.C	Similar to subsection D, should there be an exemption for flag lots and lots that slope 20%? Maybe move that sentence to subsection B.
<b>19</b>	37	33.595.275.E	If 33.595.275.E is not supposed to apply to the ground floor, that first full sentence should be clarified to repeat the reference to upper level units only.
<b>20</b>	37	33.595.275.E	I believe the building code requires at least one (likely more) operable window for a dwelling unit. May be good to verify with Life Safety reviewers if operable windows are allowed, or are more complicated/challenging to provide for non-residential spaces (there may be a conflict with the energy code). Although I acknowledge this is already part of DOZA so may have already been addressed.
<b>21</b>	39	33.595.275.F	The first sentence in 33.595.275.F doesn't makes sense and should be reworded.
<b>22</b>	39	33.595.275.G	We will need to double-check the reference to Table 420-3 in this section to ensure that it is correct once DOZA takes effect.
<b>23</b>	41	33.595.280.B	Please clarify: does the standard apply to all new development or only new development with more than 10,000 SF of floor area?

Item No.	Page	Code Section	Comment
24	41	33.595.280.C.1	In 33.595.280.C.1, the reference to the Portland Plant List is misspelled.
25	41	33.595.280.C.1	<p>Joan asked: “Does this new language ‘with dimensions less than 30 feet <i>in any direction</i>’ help clarify the minimum area? And does it also help clearly show that with those dimensions they would have to meet 33.248.020.A.2.b, which includes shrubs?”</p> <p>Answer: Yes; however, the language should be worded to be consistent with a similar standard in 33.120.240.C.2.a. Doing so would change the language from “in any direction” to “in all directions”. The answer to the second part of the question is also yes.</p>
26	57	33.284.020.B.2	<p>One sentence in this section reads: “Parking areas are not included in active floor area.” This is a vague sentence. Does it mean that parking areas are not included in the floor area used to calculate the minimum required Ground Floor Active Uses? If so, shouldn’t structured parking (and loading) that is located within 100 feet of one of the referenced corridors still be included in the calculation to best meet Comp Plan goals?</p>