

MEMO

DATE: February 4, 2022

TO: Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

FROM: Brandon Spencer-Hartle, Lora Lillard, and Cassie Ballew, BPS

CC: Hillary Adam, BDS and Dan Layden, PBOT

SUBJECT: Earl Blumenauer Bridge Belgian Block Deployment Request

We are pleased to return to the Historic Landmarks Commission for approval of a proposal to deploy approximately 2,500-8,000 Belgian Blocks at the north and south landings of the future Earl Blumenauer Bridge. The bridge is a capital improvement project managed by the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) for a bike and pedestrian crossing, currently under construction in NE Portland. The proposal to use Belgian Blocks for the bridge landings is a joint project by PBOT and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), supported by a grant from the Kinsman Foundation. It was first discussed with the Commission in November 2019.

The purpose of this memo is two-fold, as noted by the subsections listed below:

- 1. **Context for Use of the Belgian Blocks**. Provides a brief project and block history for reference.
- 2. **February Work Session.** Clarifies our goals for this work session and for future work.

CONTEXT FOR USE OF THE BELGIAN BLOCKS

Belgian Blocks Background

Belgian Blocks are a part of Portland's rich urban history, first introduced as the city's primary paving surface between the late 1880s and early 1900s. A recent study commissioned by BPS, <u>Belgian Block Report</u>, prepared by Peter Meijer Architect in September 2021, includes a brief history of the paving material detailed in Appendix C.

In the mid-1970s, the City Council recognized that Belgian Blocks (cobblestones) were a significant historic resource worth preserving. Ordinance Nos. 139670 (March 27, 1975) and 141548 (April 7, 1976) established policies and procedures for salvaging and reusing the blocks in new development projects. These policies, now embodied in Portland City Code Section 17.24.130, Preservation of Cobblestones, require that blocks uncovered by City workers or



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contractors in any quantity over 150 must be cleaned and stored by the Bureau of Parks and Recreation (PPR). Until recently, repeat theft of the blocks had diminished the collection and hampered the ability to store and reuse them, but new protocols established by City staff have enabled more secure storage elsewhere, and recent street excavation has replenished some of the stockpile.

Historic Landmarks Commission Role

The 1970s ordinances extend the authority for deployment of stored cobblestones, and establishment of criteria for deployment, to the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission. In 1975, the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission established the following two criteria for approving redeployment of Belgian Blocks:

- 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.

Previous deployments have included pedestrian plazas and walkways at the MAX Clinton Street Station, Portland State University, Tanner Springs Park, and Pittock Mansion. As described in the Belgian Block Report, the 1970s-era criteria did not anticipate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements that aim to avoid hazards of tripping and slipping, and the second criterion, in particular, has created a policy and code conflict. It should also be noted that the criteria are not binding (as opposed to land use approval criteria, such as the criteria for historic resource review, which must be met). Additionally, the 1970s ordinances extend the authority for the Historic Landmarks Commission to reconsider and amend the deployment criteria, such as making changes that would better support the City's goals for equity and inclusion and incorporate Federal requirements for accessibility on public streets and sidewalks. The Belgian Block Report gives several recommendations for updating the criteria to reflect more accessible deployment options.

Kinsman Grant and the future of Belgian Blocks

BPS is committed to advancing the meaningful reuse of the historic Belgian Blocks. In 2018, BPS and PBOT received a \$10,000 grant from the Kinsman Foundation, to support this objective, and to contribute towards the excavation, cleaning, and storage of enough cobblestones for deployment at the bridge landings, pending Historic Landmarks Commission approval. In addition, PBOT has pledged to contribute a \$10,000 match if a pilot deployment of Belgian Blocks is incorporated into the Earl Blumenauer Bridge.

In advancing the Belgian Block Report and the Kinsman grant award, BPS intends to kick off a larger process with the Historic Landmarks Commission to reconsider the existing deployment criteria to ensure that Belgian Blocks will remain a viable historic resource, and that they will be reused, where appropriate, both to recognize and commemorate Portland's nineteenth



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century transportation history and to encourage alternatives to more carbon-intense new materials. The February work session will be an opportunity begin that process and allow for deployment of Belgian Blocks at the Earl Blumenauer Bridge.

FEBRUARY WORK SESSION

Purpose

On February 4, 2022, the Historic Landmarks Commission will review the revised staff proposal for deployment of approximately 2,500-8,000 Belgian Blocks at the Earl Blumenauer Bridge landings. The deployment proposal is time-sensitive as the bridge landings are in motion for construction beginning this summer and the Kinsman Foundation grant funding will expire at the end of the year. The objective of this work session is to receive Historic Landmarks Commission's approval of the blocks at this location, recognizing that BPS will return to discuss amending the approval criteria with the Commission later this year.

Earl Blumenauer Bridge Landings

Reviewed by the Design Commission and now under construction, the Earl Blumenauer Bridge will become the first major piece of the Green Loop (a proposed six-mile linear park and pathway that was adopted with the Central City 2035 Plan) to be built once completed in 2021. The bridge landings provide an opportunity to deploy Belgian Blocks and establish a pattern that could be replicated in many other segments of the Green Loop.

Spanning I-84 between the Lloyd District and the Central Eastside, the bridge will create a new bicycle and pedestrian connection between two dynamic districts in Portland's Central City, with the bridge's landings offering spaces for people to gather, interact, rest and pause. The landings are larger areas that could be paved or edged with Belgian Blocks, adding texture to the experience of biking or walking the Green Loop and honoring the history of the Central Eastside and Lloyd District.

Because of accessibility and safety concerns, deployment of the Blocks is proposed for pedestrian areas at both the north and south bridge landings but not within large swaths in the through lanes for bikes, pedestrians, and those utilizing mobility devices.

November 2019 Proposal and Previous Commission Comments

In November 2019, BPS and PBOT first briefed the Commission on the bridge landing deployment proposal (Option 1, Attachment A). The following is an outline of how BPS addressed each criterion and Commission responses from that previous work session.

1. <u>Criterion 1</u>: BPS staff discussed that Criterion 1 is met because Belgian Blocks were used throughout the Central Eastside and Lloyd District, both as paving material and as blocking for streetcar tracks. Entire streets of cobblestones can be found along the 200 block of SE Ankeny and 300 block of SE Belmont, and photographic evidence shows cobblestones along streetcar lines in the general vicinity. Nearby Historic Landmarks include Benson High School and Northwest Fence & Wire Works, both constructed during the streetcar era.



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Historic Landmarks Commission initial response:

- Agreed that the bridge landings (both north and south) are a good opportunity and appropriate place to use Belgian Blocks.
- Other considerations for appropriateness of Belgian Blocks at these locations:
 - o Significance of Earl Blumenauer as a historic preservation advocate
 - Significance of the bridge as a transportation legacy project and recognizing the blocks as a historic transportation material
- 2. Criterion 2: BPS staff discussed that Criterion 2 is met as the Earl Blumenauer Bridge will be an attraction for residents, workers and visitors alike who will be walking, biking, and stopping at the plazas on both the north and south bridge landings. The use of Belgian Blocks at these locations has the potential to become "public pedestrian spaces where the special character of cobblestone texture would be meaningful". This new bridge connects the districts physically and the deployment of cobbles on both sides could potentially connect them to a shared history. Although accessibility regulations limit the ability to deploy cobblestones across the entire landing plazas, deployment of Belgian Blocks in paved areas will provide opportunity to integrate the stones with less textured pavement material appropriate for bikes and mobility devices.

Historic Landmarks Commission initial response:

- Appreciate the use of the Belgian Blocks where it is serving to separate the bikes and pedestrians, like the triangular piece on L-2 (north landing), but not the curved area leading to the bridge where it feels like leftover space.
- Recognize that Belgian Blocks cannot be used in major areas for walking or on biking paths, per ADA, but they can mark the use of a larger change in grade or the use of the location of something like a boulder (e.g. north of the bridge where it's an oval separation in the path). Cobbles could be used to build up toward the boulders.
- Location of blocks should be meaningful, such as marking the separation of grade or bikes and pedestrians. Not as a "decorative touch" sprinkled throughout.

At the conclusion of the November 2019 meeting, BPS and PBOT agreed to return with a refined design approach to the Belgian Blocks that would respond to the Commission's concerns, specifically regarding Criterion 2.

February 2021 Proposal

After careful consideration of Commission's comments regarding Criterion 2, BPS is returning with two options that propose to use the Belgian Blocks to signify direction, movement and separation at the bridge landings. Rather than using the blocks at every potential opportunity, they are carefully proposed at locations where they will separate bicycles and pedestrians while visually illustrating the flow of movement to and from the bridge. In this way, the paving recalls its original use along streetcar routes that necessarily curved and angled in the direction of traffic while offering a new way to move about the city.



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Two options are presented for consideration, using the rationale above.

Option 2 (Attachment B)

- NORTH: Belgian Blocks separate pedestrians and cyclists along Sullivan's Gulch trail while also physically illustrating northeast-southwest flow.
- **SOUTH:** Belgian Blocks separate pedestrians and cyclists, as well as pedestrians and cars, moving in the direction of north-south flow and the curvature of NE Flanders.

Option 3 (Attachment C). These options build on Option 2 but also use the Belgian Blocks where grade separation occurs, buffering landscaped areas from pedestrians and bicycles.

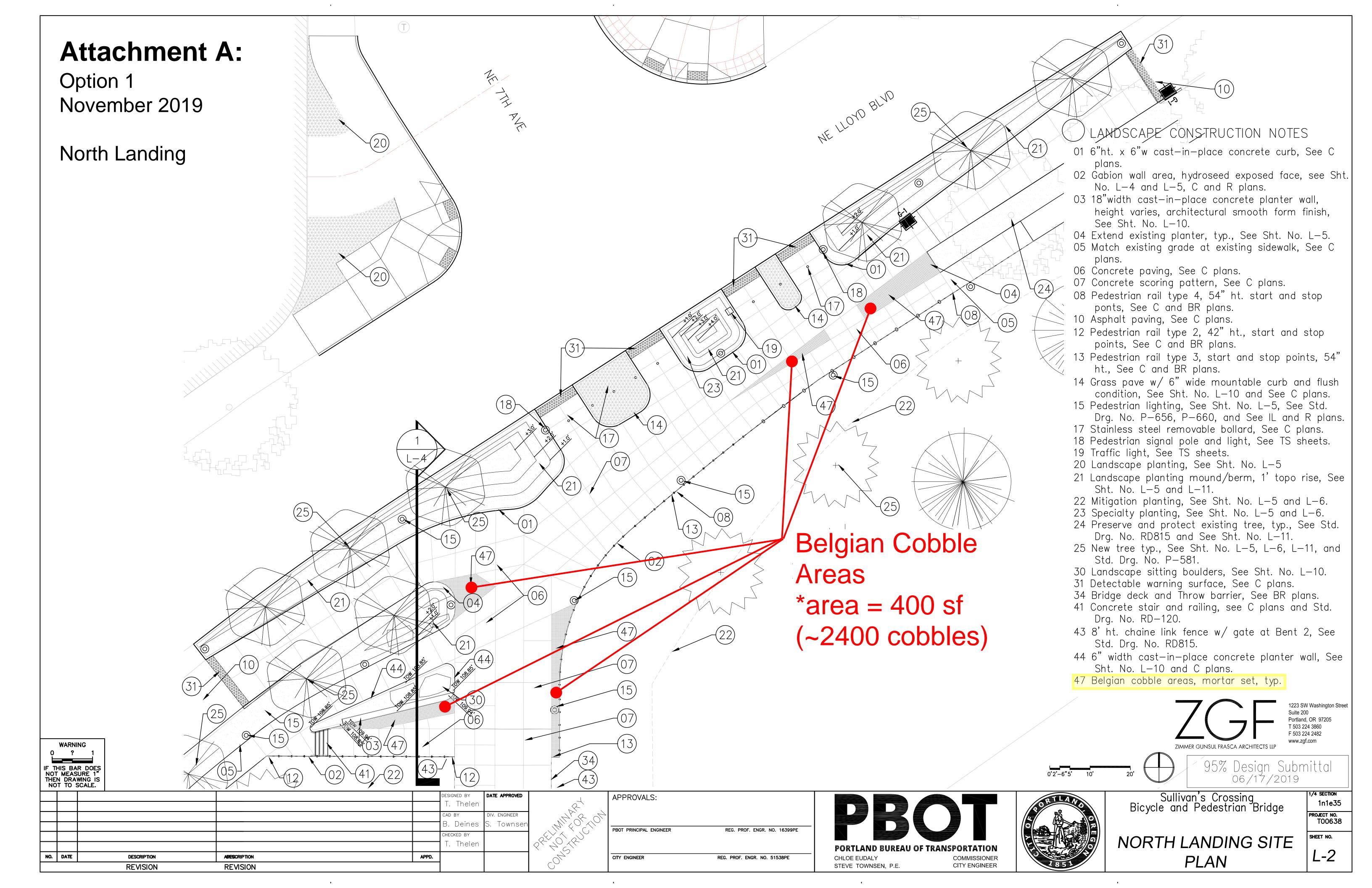
- NORTH: Option 2, plus an additional area that buffers pedestrians from the grade change within the planting area as pedestrians move east-west to and from the bridge itself.
- **SOUTH:** Option 2, plus an additional area along the eastern edge of a raised planting bed that buffers bicycles from the grade change and physically illustrates north-south flow.

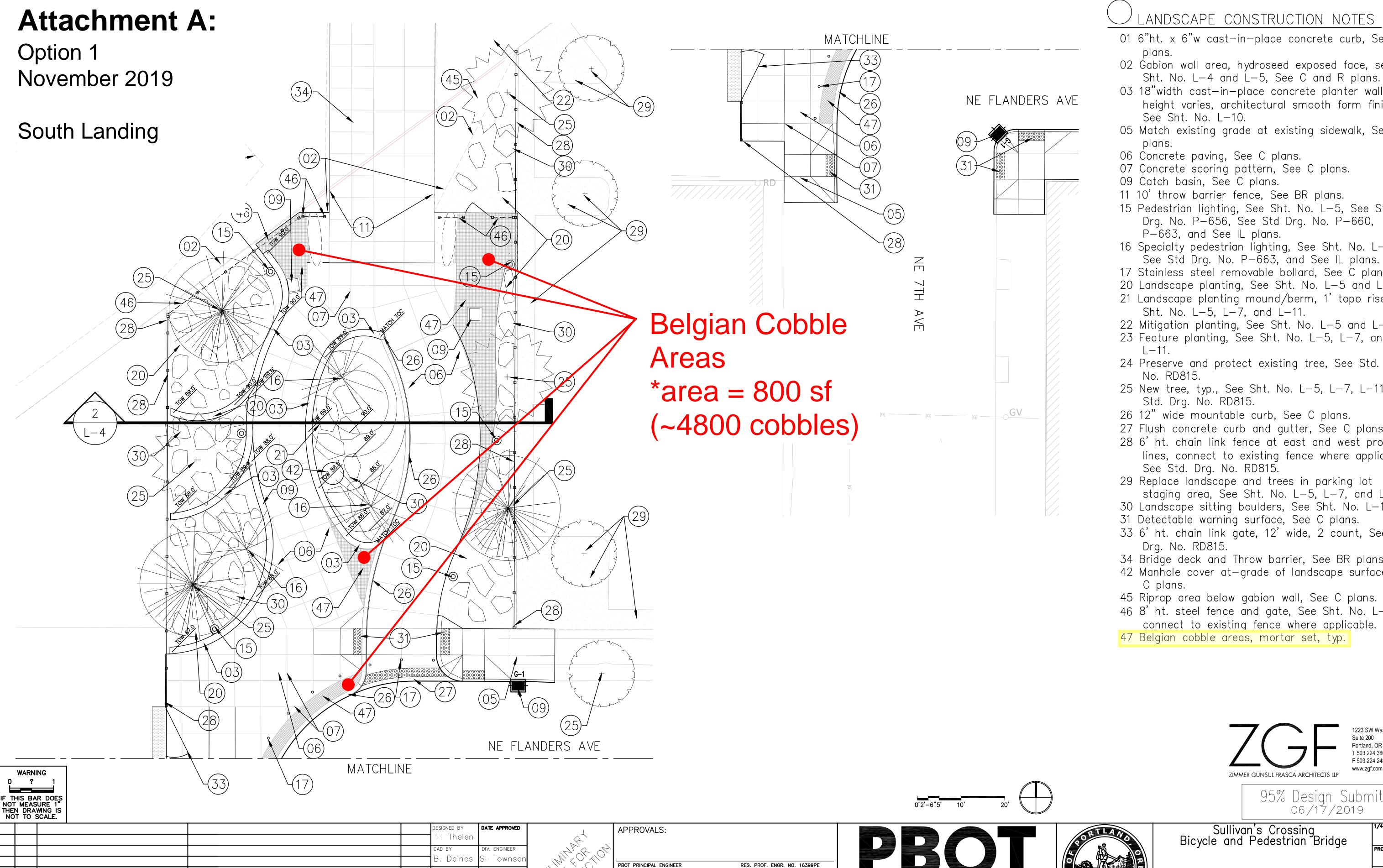
We are eager to discuss these approaches and look forward to your potential approval to deploy the blocks at these exciting new bridge landings.

Next Steps

We anticipate that the Belgian Block Report and this proposal have sparked potential considerations for how BPS and the Commission can move forward on amending the Belgian Block deployment criteria. BPS staff recognize that amending these criteria will take time, and we are committed to working through this with the Commission over the next several months.







CITY ENGINEER

REG. PROF. ENGR. NO. 51538PE

Thelen

APPD.

NO. DATE

DESCRIPTION

REVISION

APPSCRIPTION

REVISION

LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION NOTES

01 6"ht. x 6"w cast-in-place concrete curb, See C

02 Gabion wall area, hydroseed exposed face, see

03 18"width cast—in—place concrete planter wall, height varies, architectural smooth form finish,

05 Match existing grade at existing sidewalk, See C

07 Concrete scoring pattern, See C plans.

11 10' throw barrier fence, See BR plans.

15 Pedestrian lighting, See Sht. No. L-5, See Std Drg. No. P-656, See Std Drg. No. P-660,

16 Specialty pedestrian lighting, See Sht. No. L-5, See Std Drg. No. P-663, and See IL plans.

17 Stainless steel removable bollard, See C plans.

20 Landscape planting, See Sht. No. L—5 and L—11.

21 Landscape planting mound/berm, 1' topo rise, See

22 Mitigation planting, See Sht. No. L-5 and L-7.

23 Feature planting, See Sht. No. L-5, L-7, and

24 Preserve and protect existing tree, See Std. Drg.

25 New tree, typ., See Sht. No. L-5, L-7, L-11, and

26 12" wide mountable curb, See C plans.

27 Flush concrete curb and gutter, See C plans.

28 6' ht. chain link fence at east and west property lines, connect to existing fence where applicable.

staging area, See Sht. No. L-5, L-7, and L-11.

30 Landscape sitting boulders, See Sht. No. L-10.

33 6' ht. chain link gate, 12' wide, 2 count, See Std.

34 Bridge deck and Throw barrier, See BR plans.

42 Manhole cover at-grade of landscape surface, See

45 Riprap area below gabion wall, See C plans.

46 8' ht. steel fence and gate, See Sht. No. L-12, connect to existing fence where applicable.

Portland, OR 9720

95% Design Submittal 06/17/2019

PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION CHLOE EUDALY

STEVE TOWNSEN, P.E.

CITY ENGINEER



1n1e35 PROJECT NO. TOO638

SOUTH LANDING SITE PLAN

SHEET NO. L-3

