



City of Portland

Design Commission

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Date: April 1, 2019
To: Megan Channel (ODOT) and Caitlin Reff (PBOT)
From: Commissioners Brian McCarter & Andrew Clarke
On Behalf of the Portland Design Commission
Re: I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project Briefing on March 7, 2019

On behalf of the Portland Design Commission, we want to thank you for the excellent briefing on March 7, 2019. We also commend you for your continuing work with community members and other stakeholders through the alternatives analysis to-date. It's important that this project accomplish the community urban design goals as identified in the project vision. Below is a summary of our concerns and recommendations to you as you proceed into the next phase:

- 1. Overall urban design:** From our perspective the potential to re-connect and rebuild the community that was lost is paramount. Therefore, the design of the infrastructure is critical and should support these efforts.
- 2. Pedestrian/Bicycle Features:** We commend the effort to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections through this area, but we do note a few areas of concern:
 - Some of the intersection corner radii appear very driven by large vehicle turning criteria and not pedestrian safety. On the preliminary plans, these features seem to coincide with unusually wide pedestrian crossings. Higher potential turning speeds and less pedestrian queueing area could lead to a place that does not encourage walking or a safe walking environment. This project should embody more of PBOT'S urban street standards that have evolved to accommodate multimodal mobility.
 - Street design should employ current best practices used by PBOT in existing street re-design and new street design projects throughout the city. Highway geometric design should not encroach into the surface streets of this project.
- 3. Highway Covers:** The concept of covering over a trenched highway to re-connect urban districts is a strong idea and critical to re-establishing a viable neighborhood structure. However, the cover configuration as currently show is flawed in several ways:
 - Fragmented, staggered lid shapes due to structural span or ventilation constraints (or other?) are not valuable or useable as open space and are not sized or shaped to accommodate new air rights buildings. The way to re-establish continuity of street level experience from east of I-5 to west of I-5 is to provide continuous public sidewalks and commercial uses at street level. We are at a point in Central City Portland where new fragments of landscape open space that are not programmed with activities, don't have an adjacent active use that spills out to occupy, don't have visual cues as to ownership of the space, and don't have a robust management and maintenance program are more liability than asset. Un-housed citizens, substance abuse victims, and a lack of mental health services all produce a population that seeks out unclaimed fragments of public space to set up temporary living. That outcome is not going to advance the re-connecting and re-birth of Lower Albina Neighborhood.

- Central Open Space: the proposed one-block park space shown in the concept simulations is potentially ill-conceived. Active ground floor uses in future buildings are across very busy traffic streets and essentially cut off from activating the proposed park. Passive activities like strolling, sitting, small gatherings, eating lunch, etc., will all be subject to significant noise impacts of both the surrounding surface streets, highway entrances and exits, and the mainline freeway itself. The covers as illustrated aren't extensive or continuous enough to provide effective noise mitigation. An active building use like offices with ground floor retail or common rooms would seem to have a higher chance of providing continuity at this critical block. The project team should look further into structural capacity for a low-rise commercial building here.

4. Noise Barriers: We have a concern about the possibility of noise barriers against sections along the east edge of the freeway as planned. In the effort to re-connect a fragment of an original neighborhood to a larger, intact adjacent district, physical and visual continuity are important. Buildings with active ground floor space, adequate sidewalks, street trees and amenities all contribute to a continuous experience. However, visual continuity of neighborhood on either side of I-5 is also important. More detail is needed, but it should be noted that noise walls are typically 10-12' tall and made of dense material like concrete to provide noise mitigation. These will isolate the two sides of the neighborhood, to their detriment. Consider transparent noise barriers or other alternative configurations that don't cut off views between areas.


The Commission's feedback is based on the Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines, the approval criteria that applies to most of the project area. Specifically:

- A3: Respect the Portland Block Structures
- A5: Enhance, Embellish & Identify Areas
- A7: Establish and Maintain a Sense of Urban Enclosure
- A8: Contribute to a Vibrant Streetscape
- B1: Reinforce and Enhance the Pedestrian System
- B2: Protect the Pedestrian
- B3: Bridge Pedestrian Obstacles
- B4: Provide Stopping and Viewing Places
- B5: Make Plazas, Parks & Open Space Successful
- C1: Enhance View Opportunities
- C4: Complement the Context of Existing Buildings
- C5: Design for Coherency
- C7: Design Corners that Build Active Intersections

We encourage to continue the dialogue with all stakeholders as you move into the project's next phase. We look forward to our next briefing with the project team during the public urban design phase planned for Spring of this year. As mentioned in the briefing, a Design Commissioner may be available to be on urban design panel. Please reach out when this panel is being formed.

Thanks again for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Brian McCarter
Portland Design Commission



Andrew Clarke
Portland Design Commission

cc: BDS Design Review Staff
Portland Design Commission