



City of Portland
Historic Landmarks
Commission

City of Portland
Design Commission



DATE: January 4, 2023

TO: PBOT - Caitlin Reff & Sharon Daleo

FROM: Portland Historic Landmarks Commission and Design Commission

RE: I-5 Rose Quarter Project & Supplemental Environmental Assessment

The Portland Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) together with the Portland Design Commission (DC) received briefings on the I-5 Rose Quarter project from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) on December 12, 2022 and December 15, 2022, respectively. Projects of this scale, like the original interstate freeway project, are rare in the history of development in Portland. Like past infrastructure projects across the United States, the burden of demolition and destruction required to build the I-5 freeway through NE Portland in 1966 was carried predominantly by Portland's black community. The Supplemental Environmental Assessment report and presentation from ODOT to our Commissions documents an entire black neighborhood being leveled. As such, few resources remain from an historical era and geographic location important to Portland's African American community. Above and beyond our duty to protect what little is left of the traces of that neighborhood is an obligation to consider some broader themes that relate to our City-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Both commissions applaud the rigorous process the agencies and design teams have engaged in including the Independent Cover Assessment and subsequent outreach conducted by Historic Albina Advisory Board (HAAB). These efforts have resulted in a project concept that supports community redevelopment, reconnection, safety and an enriched public realm for neighborhood residents, businesses and visitors. The Portland Historic Landmarks Commission and the Portland Design Commission support the proposed I-5 Rose Quarter Hybrid 3 cover concept. We acknowledge it is the preferred design option and will serve to remedy past harms to both the community and the urban fabric of the City.

As noted above, the background and material provided in the presentation was very informative and helpful in understanding the large infrastructure project. However, given the scale, a second briefing with the Design Commission to provide more detailed feedback is requested. A second briefing will certainly help to provide a smooth and predictable process for the Design Review elements and additional input to supplement the feedback ODOT is receiving from other City Committees and Commissions. Given the pace of the project a second briefing in January or February seems appropriate. Details of this request can be found in Sections 2 and 3 below.

Our recommendations to you are to consider evaluating the design proposal in the context of (1) Repairing Past Harm, (2) Urban Design Aesthetic and Quality, (3) Transportation System Connections and (4) Climate Resilience.

1. Repairing past harm

- It is important that the process has been robust and flexible. As the process continues, community desires should be prioritized in funding decisions.
- The Commissions understand that the lid structures to be built over I-5 may not be appropriate for ownership in the same way a parcel of land could be owned by a private owner. However, there are currently small, irregular parcels of land on either side of the highway that are in public ownership (ODOT rights-of-way). We strongly advocate for these buildable parcels to be returned to private ownership, and specifically given- or sold for a below-market price- to the minority communities that lived in lower Albina prior to the construction of I-5 and the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum. Although a

mechanism to do this would have to be carefully considered, the ownership of these parcels could begin to address the losses the BIPOC community endured and allow for future wealth-building. There are precedents for development over highways and transit tunnels using air rights agreements and long-term building pad leases.

- Future buildings that can be supported on actual, at-grade parcels of land (see above bullet point) should also be created where feasible.
- ODOT's remnant at-grade properties, next to the developable lids, should be packaged with the lids to enhance the feasibility for development for the combined parcels. Additional outreach to the HAAB may be needed to ensure this approach aligns with the scope and projects identified in the Independent Cover Assessment.
- St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church is an important resource in Albina. The Landmarks Commission strongly encourages that it be added to the list of churches in the "Pillars of Albina" list of places, people, events, or industries important to the African American experience in Oregon.
- As one of the few remaining historic buildings in the vicinity of I-5, the Landmarks Commission strongly encourages discussion with the owners of the Left Bank building, so as to potentially list it on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the project.
- "Wall 15" and other surfaces are opportunities for more local black artists and designers.
- Consider ways to celebrate and express the legacy of jazz, and music in general, in the design of embellishments and open spaces as both are relevant to the cultural history of the Albina neighborhood.

2. Urban Design Aesthetic and Quality

- A high level of urban design and attention to detail will be required to weave the new urban fabric back into the old patterns. Placemaking will only be successful if it can go beyond the physical, structural and traffic connection requirements. How all the infrastructure treatments fit together in an overall, coherent urban design concept (spatial location, integration, and detailed design) is critical. To that end, the Design Commission requests:
 - A second briefing in the near future, January or February given the pace of the project, to discuss more detailed information on the embellishments and the urban design elements of the project at both highway and neighborhood-levels. The information provided in the presentation was small and difficult to read and a document that graphically highlights the urban design elements of the project, including plans and cross sections, is needed.
 - A future third briefing that focuses on the Community Framework Agreement and the highway cover development. This briefing needs to occur at the next design milestone for the highway cover that reflects the outcome of the Community Framework Agreement. Summer of 2023 was identified by ODOT and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability as the appropriate time. Items for this briefing to include development parcel size, configuration, on-grade, and on-structure parcels (including location of major structure joint between on-grade and on-structure), block frontages with development edges, open space or open highway structure edges, and massing.
- The project needs to designate a budget to elevate the design so that it is more about Portland and not "anywhere" infrastructure. Areas to focus on include:
 - Elevate the portal designs as one passes from open highway to covered highway.
 - At portals and arrival points look for opportunities to express a sense of arrival in Albina. Focus on "telescoping" the project up through the structure at the portals and at off-ramps.
 - Connecting the edge of the deck to adjacent properties and allowing for unique opportunities for the public to occupy edges and see views.

- Celebrate the structure. Right now, it is a harsh concrete deck and there are opportunities to celebrate it as a healing intervention.
- Street-level embellishments should be prioritized over highway-level treatments.
- The Design Commission notes that large expanses of concrete walls, such as “Wall 15”:
 - Should be minimized to avoid another sea of concrete.
 - Large walls could be terraced to provide room for landscape treatments, however, terracing could increase the footprint of the highway, potentially reducing the size of development parcels flanking the ODOT ROW. An attractive corridor that maximizes both on-grade and on-structure development parcels is the goal.
 - The designs should include changes in plane, details at different scales and culturally meaningful motifs.
- I-5 in the Rose Quarter area was unfortunately not constructed exactly parallel to Wheeler Avenue and the grid west of it along the river, but it may be close enough to that angle so that it will be perceived as the same, once development occurs on the highway lids. The Landmarks Commission strongly encourages the recognition of the two older street grids in the development of the highway covers. Because of the two street grids coming together in this area, development on the new highway covers might be appropriate with two slightly different approaches. The western side of the highway covers will face the river grid and could be developed as angled buildings at the inflection point. The eastern side, however, may be more appropriate as orthogonal buildings, facing the more predominant street grid.
- Durability, vandal-resistance, vandal access prevention to visible surfaces, ease of replacement or repair – are critical for all design elements; future maintenance will be minimal, and Portland has a significant graffiti problem on both private and public property.
- Ensure that the cost of highway cover(s) result in economically feasible development parcels.
- Ensure successful, lively, inviting public open space – location, adjacent uses, access, solar orientation, active programming, character of detailed treatments, etc. – are all critical.
- Support Title 33 Zoning Code Amendments to allow commercial development on future created parcels over and along the existing highway.
- As a footnote to our agency partners, the Design Commission, whether in a statutory land use review for a development proposal or in a courtesy, advisory review for major public works, uses the Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines (CCFDG) as our basis of evaluation and recommendation. Three major chapters of the CCFDGs are Context, Public Realm and Quality and Permanence. You’ll find the language of those guidelines entirely relevant to the I-5 Rose Quarter Project.

3. Transportation System Connections

- The Green Loop as it crosses I-5 is an important part of the design and an important part of the project. The Landmarks Commission notes that the lack of street trees or development for several blocks next to I-5 on these streets is hardly conducive to pedestrian or bike traffic. At a minimum, street trees are critical for the Green Loop to be inviting, and the pattern of trees must extend into the lid design. There are technical ways to integrate at-grade street trees on the local streets crossing the cover, using precast boxes nested between girders. Street trees, streetlights, furnishings in normal urban sidewalk configuration will be essential to giving continuity of the neighborhood fabric as it crosses the cover east to west.
- It will be important to address the Vancouver Avenue intersection with Broadway as it is currently dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- As noted in Section 2 above, a second briefing in January or February is requested for the Design Commission to provide guidance on the local transportation system. Additional information requested includes:
 - Surface street/intersection/block pattern concept within project area.
 - ROW widths, sidewalk width, intersection crossings (signalized/unsignalized), corner radii, pedestrian/bike facilities.
 - Local street design character: urban tree canopy, lighting, furnishings including public art, such as monuments.

4. Climate

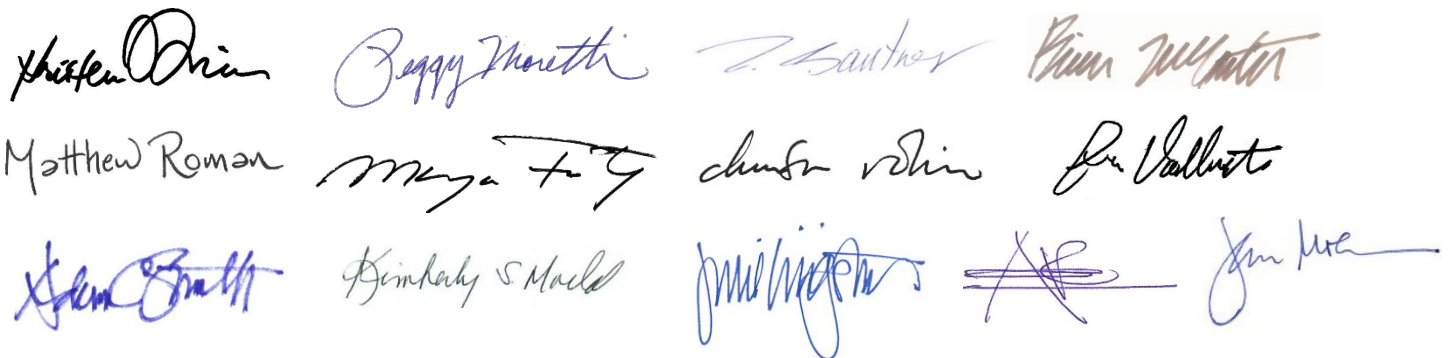
- Mitigation for the negative climate aspects of using a significant amount of concrete in the project might include encouraging white or light-colored surfaces especially at surfaces facing the sun, planning for tree wells and other planters to provide greenery, and to consider shade at the pedestrian realm as a critical design consideration.
- Additionally, innovative concrete mixes that reduce carbon like fly-ash, geopolymers and graphene should be investigated. This project is one that can not only be less impactful on the environment but can also contribute to Portland’s reputation for being ahead of many American cities in terms of transportation and sustainability.

Portland will have few opportunities to make such a significant correction to a historical injustice. The chance to reshape and repair an entire inner-city neighborhood with all the intention of the community fully expressed in the outcome should not be missed. A vision of more than a freeway improvement project has been presented. It is based on a broad spectrum of community engagement. What is needed is further investment by the City of Portland for the duration of the project to ensure we get more than an infrastructure project but rather a chance to address a number of our comprehensive plan goals. We can turn a highway widening project into a place making endeavor where the end result makes a statement about our values and the importance of good civic spaces for all communities.

In closing, both the HLC and DC compliment the agencies and design team for the progress to-date and look forward to reviewing more developed designs in the near future and in the summer of 2023 at the next design milestone.

Sincerely,

The Historic Landmarks Commission and the Design Commission



A collection of handwritten signatures in various colors (black, blue, brown) arranged in three rows. The signatures are:

Row 1: Kristen Orin, Peggy Monthi, [unclear], Kim [unclear]

Row 2: Matthew Roman, Mya [unclear], [unclear], [unclear]

Row 3: [unclear], Kimberly S. Mould, [unclear], [unclear], [unclear]

CC: Rebecca Esau, Director of BDS
 Troy Doss, BPS
 Design & Historic Review Team of BDS