

Comments on HNA at Planning Commission:

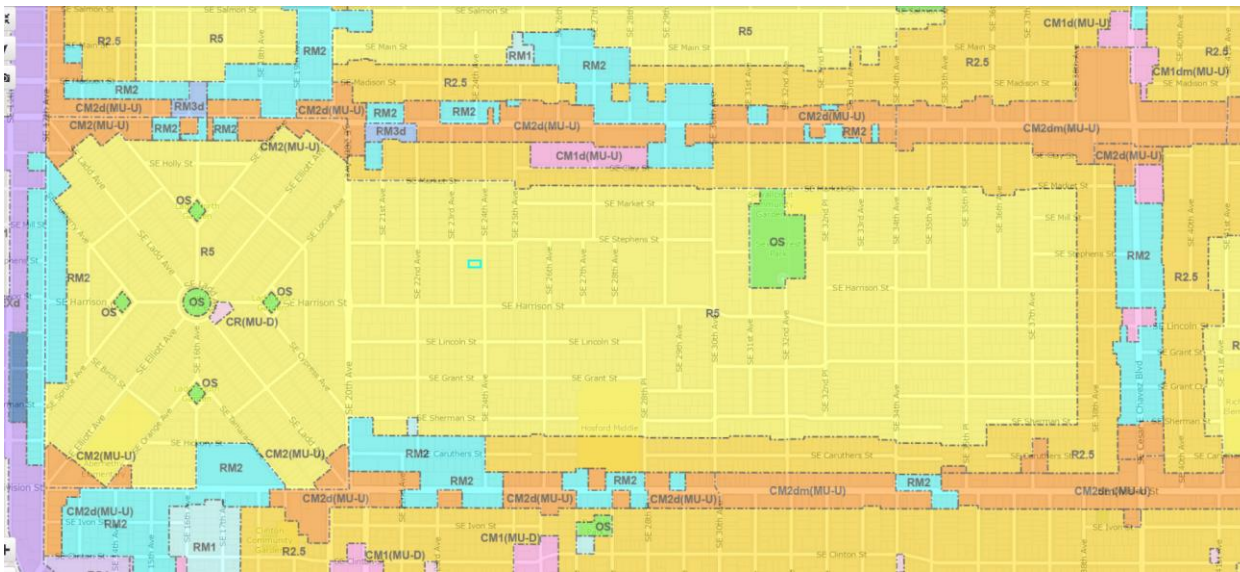
Thoughts on Zoning Patterns and HNA and HPS

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Chair O'Meara and Planning Commissioners

I support the adoption of the HNA document, and look forward to the work on the Housing Production Strategy, which I have some thoughts on!

In mapping out a strategy, the tool of rezoning may be discussed. This is an appropriate time to raise the issue of the way Portland's zoning patterns are laid out, with denser Multi-family and Mixed-Use Zones only a 100' deep (each side) strip directly abutting busy street corridors. Often there's then a 100' to 200' strip of R-2.5 rowhouse zoning. The rest of the blocks and square miles of land are zoned "single-family", or as Portland now calls it, "Low density residential", shown in yellow:



Why do we only allow single-family houses (and recently 3-4 plexes) in so much of our city? Why are e.g. 4-story apartment buildings not allowed in quieter, healthier areas away from the arterial streets? Is this a natural result of building patterns, or was it dictated by the city. And if so, why?

The answer most often given is "to preserve property values". How? By limiting "renters" living there? I didn't watch all of the PC "trainings", so maybe this was explained. But I'll try a different take on it. My main reference is the Richard Rothstein book *The Color of Law*, published in 2017, (plus BPS's Historical Context of Racist Planning from 2019). Rothstein's book describes the myriad blatant and less obvious laws, rules and practices that enforced racial segregation in America through much of the 20th Century and continuing today.

As you may know (but I didn't), many cities had zoning prohibiting Black people from living in the "detached house" areas where wealthier white people lived. Before 1917, cities specified that Black and sometimes Asian people were prohibited from certain areas. After *Buchanan v. Warley*, cities looked at other ways to accomplish this. With the affirmation of zoning in 1926, city leaders (and the federal government) figured out that they could legally keep Black people away from the White districts, by prohibiting apartment buildings

within those districts. Since the Black population was less well-off, and often lived in apartments, limiting apartments to areas near busy streets, near commercial and industrial areas, accomplished the desired end. And thus you see this pattern, **to this day**, in cities throughout the United States, including Portland (as shown above)

The racist (and classist) implications of this practice are not often mentioned by planners. Instead you'll hear about the "transect" where cities gradually get less dense away from the center. Here's the idealized Transect



drawing:

But if it were a decrease of density from the center, we'd have progressively less dense circles. Instead, outside of downtowns, we have (as do most US cities) lines of density and broad low zoning, as in the first map.

Thus we have maps like Portland's, at top, with apartment dwellers (and yes condo owners too) are limited to street corridors or downtowns, where, like Portland, apartments were allowed, and mixed neighborhoods (like the NW Portland "Alphabet district") that largely developed before zoning.

So I ask you to consider that the city could substantially change the zoning map, for instance in closer-in SE Portland, to one that allows multi-story apartment or condo buildings throughout the area, like from Powell at the south and across Burnside, and as far north as Fremont street, and as far east as Mt. Tabor. This geography, which Portland Neighbors Welcome is suggesting, would allow medium-sized (3-5 stories?) multifamily buildings to be built here and there, in this area where little to no displacement is expected in these already gentrified areas. This could result in the sort of mix of buildings that accommodates more residents, encourages walking, biking, and transit use (and makes it feasible). The results could echo the Alphabet district, but also across much of Southeast. Thank you for your consideration of these ideas!

