

To: Susan Anderson and staff, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
From: Mike Houck
Re: Planning and Sustainability Commission Feedback on Portland Plan Draft

Susan, Joe, and Eric

I've read the latest version of the Portland Plan, dated February 22, 2012 and have the following comments to you and my fellow Commissioners for tonight's PSC hearing.

Kudos

First, as I noted at the last discussion regarding the Portland Plan, I am heartened and appreciate the fact that numerous suggestions for improving the Plan with regard to conservation and environmental issues have been incorporated into this latest draft. Specifically, I was please to see the following additions:

p 7. **One size does not fit all.** The Portland Plan presents actions, policies and implementation measures that respect the unique cultures, history and the **natural** environment that Portlanders share.

p 16. **The city continues expanding its green stormwater management infrastructure as an efficient, cost-effective way to control stormwater at its source. Portland's combined sewer overflow control program, completed in 2011, significantly reduced sewage overflows to the Willamette River and virtually eliminated overflows to the Columbia Slough.** This is a new statement.

p 64. Public and private urban innovation: We have valuable experience built on rethinking infrastructure investments. Examples include our active transportation including our transit, streetcar and bicycle systems; **green stormwater system, and the trail-linked open space system**

p 65. **Guiding Policies: Continue to innovate in public projects related to transportation and environmental services including innovative green infrastructure approaches as part of cleaning up the Willamette River; an .innovative active transportation system (transit, walking, biking, car and bike sharing, etc.); and urban parks and natural areas, which enhance the livability of the city and give Portland a competitive advantage in retaining and attracting an educated, productive workforce.** This is a new EPA policy.

p 66. Five-Year Action Plan; Action 54: **Growing green development and ecosystem expertise: Capitalize on the expertise being built by PSU's Ecosystem Services for Urbanizing Regions (ESUR) PhD program. Connect this expertise with the global marketplace. Potential partners: PSU, PDC,**

Greater Portland Inc. Related action areas: Prosperity and Business Success; Design, Planning and Public Spaces; and Sustainability and the Natural Environment

But, did you mean PSU's ESUR or the PSU Institute for Sustainable Solutions' IGERT Program? As partners I'd add The Intertwine Alliance's ecosystem services initiative and Clean Water Services green infrastructure and ecosystem services work.

p. 95 Integrated Strategy: Healthy Connected City; Goal: Improve human and environmental health by creating a safe and complete neighborhood centers, linked by a network of city greenways that connect Portlanders with each other, encourage active transportation, integrate nature into neighborhoods, **enhance watershed health** and provide access to services and destinations, locally and across the city.

p 96-96 **The Healthy Connected City strategy is not starting from scratch. The foundation for this effort can be found in a number of existing collaborative projects.**

The Intertwine establishes a vision and structure to work together on land acquisition, active transportation, conservation, conservation education and regional trail and open space networks.

p. 97-98

Portland Today: 6. Carbon emissions and climate change; climate scientists have determined that reductions of 50-85 percent by 2050 are needed to avoid, **reduce and adapt** to anticipated impacts from climate change such as significant changes in weather patterns, increased flooding, wildfire, drought, disease and invasive plant and animal species. **The City is developing a Climate Change Adaptation plan to help guide future policy decisions and investments in areas of public health, infrastructure and natural systems.**

7. Parks and nature in the city: Nearby parks, streams and natural areas give Portlanders Watershed health: Neighborhoods with generous tree canopy and less pavement have cleaner, cooler air. **Trees and other vegetation also help reduce risks of flooding and landslides. Rivers, streams, and upland habitats support diverse native resident and migratory fish and wildlife. About 33% of the city is covered with pavement or buildings. Most waterways don't meet quality standards. Tree canopy covers 26% the city, but some neighborhoods have few trees. Many beneficial wildlife species are declining or at risk.**

p. 99 Objectives 8 6. Carbon emissions and climate change: Portland's transportation-related carbon emissions

are 50 percent below 1990 levels, **and effective strategies to adapt to climate change are in place and being implemented.**

7. Parks and nature in the city: All Portlanders can conveniently get to the Willamette and Columbia Rivers and are within a half-mile safe walking distance of a park or **greenspace. The regional trail system is substantially complete and is an integrated component of a Healthy Connected City network.**

Question: Why was natural area deleted and greenspace, which is a generic, ambiguous term put in place of natural area? I believe it is due to concerns expressed by park planners and others in the city that there are concerns about the practicality of all residents being within 1/2 mile of a "pristine" natural area and greenspace is meant to include roof gardens, gardens and other areas that may have been "greened up", but are not, strictly speaking "natural". Is that correct?

8. Watershed health: **Watershed health is improved.** The Willamette River and local streams meet water quality standards. Tree canopy covers at least one-third of the city and is more equitably distributed. Fewer homes and businesses are at risk from flooding. A diversity of critical habitats (including floodplains, riparian areas, wetlands, oak groves, native forests and remnant native meadows) are protected, connected and enhanced to support a rich diversity of native and migratory wildlife.

p 100 **What is a watershed? A watershed is the area that catches rain and snow and drains into a specific river, stream, lake or other water body. We all live in a watershed. A healthy urban watershed has the hydrologic, habitat and water quality conditions needed to protect human health and maintain viable ecological functions, including self-sustaining populations of native fish and wildlife. (For more information, see the Portland Watershed Management Plan.)**

I am pleased to see that, rather than avoiding the use of the term watershed that the city is taking this opportunity to educate, rather than dumb down the document. Frankly, I think the term watershed is understood by more citizens than we may think, thanks to years of education by the city, NGOs and the media. Glad you decided to continue the education process. I would make the same argument for "biodiversity", habitat and other terminology that today it may be argued sound like jargon, but with time will become commonly understood terminology.

p. 101 Strategy Element 1 Public Decisions Benefit Human and Environmental Health and Safety

To create a healthy connected city, we must consider the potential impacts of our decisions on the health, safety and welfare of Portland's residents and of **our City's watersheds** and the natural environment.

The natural environment we live in, our education and employment, and the design and affordability of our neighborhoods all influence Portlanders' health. These factors are influenced by a range of public policies and decisions about things like our transportation systems and infrastructure systems, the development and use of neighborhoods, **our ability to prepare for and respond to emergencies**, and the protection **and management** of watersheds and natural areas. We must be aware of the potential impacts to make smarter decisions and to ultimately improve long-range outcomes in human and environmental health **and safety**.

Human health and the health of urban ecosystems and watersheds are interrelated. Protection, restoration, and management of urban natural resources provide many positive benefits to human physical and mental health while simultaneously protecting the intrinsic value of natural ecosystems and biodiversity. Protection of floodplains, steep slopes and fire-prone areas also prevent catastrophic events that threaten human health and safety.

Today, lower-income, communities of color, seniors and children are more at risk for poor health than the general population and experience significant health disparities. These residents may also suffer disproportionately from exposure to pollution, toxics, noise, and environmental hazards **and insufficient access to nature – all of which impacts** physical and mental health.

p 102 **Coordinated planning and investment in a variety of areas:**

- a) **community development**
- b) **green infrastructure**
- c) **public safety and emergency services**
- d) **parks and trails**
- e) **natural areas**
- f) **bicycle, pedestrian and transit facilities**
- g) **stormwater systems**
- h) **hazard and emergency preparedness.**

Maintenance and preservation of existing transportation, **stormwater infrastructure, parks and natural areas.**

p 111 **Habitat Connections** Habitat connections are corridors and neighborhood tree canopy that weave nature into the city and connect to large natural areas, like Forest Park. **The habitat connections include anchor habitats and the**

connections between them. They provide corridors for residents and migrating wildlife. Habitat anchors are places with large, contiguous natural areas that serve as a safe and healthy home for resident and migratory animal species and native plants.

Comment and Question: I am glad to see the diagram has been retained on p 110. However, I wonder why after you have added habitat "anchors", which I strongly support, you did not include "anchor sites" in the diagram key? This is an important ecological concept that distinguishes larger anchor sites from the corridors that connect the anchor sites.

How was this diagram created?

It is based on elements from several different existing plans and studies. Each of these plans, taken individually, addresses some aspect of how the city grows or how we manage public spaces and street networks. The diagram illustrates how these different plans might inter-relate to create a single multi-objective framework to guide the City's physical development. The following plans and initiatives informed the development of the diagram.

Metro 2040 Framework

Parks 2020 Vision

The Intertwine

Streetcar System Concept

Bicycle Plan for 2030

Watershed Management Plan

Comment: Glad to see The Intertwine was added (Intertwine is misspelled, however) and that the city's Watershed Management Plan is referenced as well. I would suggest that rather than referencing The Intertwine, which IS the system of parks, trail, and natural areas that you reference **The Intertwine vision document.**

p 119 Strategy Element 3, Connections for people, places, water and wildlife

This approach depends on and supports continued implementation of the city's existing system plans for multi-modal transportation and watershed health. **It will also provide more Portlanders with access to nature every day.** By aligning resources, it gives us a framework for maximizing the benefit of each dollar. These plans will continue to be implemented as proposed, but with realignment of some projects to help implement the Healthy, Connected City framework.

Key term: Green infrastructure – including natural systems such as trees and natural areas and engineered features like green streets and ecoroofs—can manage stormwater, improve water quality, reduce flooding risk, provide wildlife and pollinator habitat and areas for human recreation and respite while mitigating and improving resiliency

Comment and Question: Good to see a definition for green infrastructure. Why did you delete "**to the impacts of climate change.**" I know the concept of resiliency came up during PSC discussion and the term has been incorporated into this draft but do not see the need to delete impacts of climate change.

Guiding Policies

Preserve and restore habitat **connections and tree canopy** to link stream and river corridors, landslide-prone areaproperties, floodplains, wetlands and critical habitat sites into a system of habitat corridors that provides connections for wildlife, **supports biodiversity**, improves water quality, reduces risks due to flooding and landslides and supports Portland's adaptation to climate change. This is a revision of the fourth policy statement on page 70 of the Proposed Draft.

p 121 Action 113 **Natural resource inventory:**

Adopt an updated citywide natural resource inventory as a basis for updating the City's Comprehensive Plan, including new integrated policies to address watershed health and job goals. Integrate watershed health criteria in the analysis of alternative growth and land use scenarios. Establish criteria and methods to assess the watershed impacts of public policy and investment. Develop policies addressing ecosystem services and the value of natural resources, green infrastructure and related investments.

Action 114 - Natural resources:

Continue efforts to build a system of high quality parks and greenspaces.

a. Acquire and develop high quality parks and recreation facilities in currently underserved areas, such as in East Portland, where residents must travel more than 1/2 mile to a park or natural area. Projects that are already identified, include the the Washington-Monroe Community Center and Thomas Cully Park and unimproved parkland in East Portland.

b. Preserve, enhance and restore high-priority natural resource areas through tools like willing-seller acquisition, restoration projects, regulations, agreements and partnerships.

p 123 Action 118 **Regional and local trails Neighborhood greenways: Work with Metro and The Intertwine Alliance to connect, expand and maintain Portland trails and habitat corridors as part of the regional**

network of trails and habitats. Implement key trail projects to accomplish local and regional connectivity.

Construct the Hillsdale section s of the Red Electric Trail connecting to Hillsdale Town Center

Complete the Sullivan's Gulch Trail Concept Plan and the North Willamette Greenway Feasibility Study

Comment and Question: Good to see integration with The Intertwine regional trail network, but why was the following deleted: **"Implement key trail projects to support Neighborhood Greenway connectivity by supporting the following trail efforts:**

Pursue ways to speed up the trail acquisition process and create additional tools to enable the City to obtain trail easements, so that the regional trail system in Portland can be completed in a timely manner" ?

Concerns

p 5 There is not even a mention of the environment, which seems very strange to me

p 7 Under Resilience I would recommend adding environment to the following: We need a well designed, flexible and strong infrastructure (physical, social, **environmental** and economic) to adapt to an uncertain future.

p 8 Why are there no conservation, park or environmental partners listed as an example?

p 9 I would add regional to the following: "And these improvements must be made in a way that meets federal, **regional**, and state regulations.

p 15 Measures of Success: Why was the word "healthier" used to describe desired condition for the city's watersheds, rather than healthy? A watershed can be "healthier" without really improving to full ecosystem health. I believe previous language referred to **healthy**, not "healthier" watersheds.

I am troubled that the Measures of Success are so limited with regard to environmental measures, the only two being Water Quality Index and Tree Canopy. We spent considerable time and effort with the regional indicators project, none of which has been integrated into the Portland Plan. Why is this? This, in my opinion, is the weakest element of the Portland Plan from an environmental perspective.

This page is confusing in that if you read it literally the Willamette River has already achieved the desired end point with a rating of 67, when the goal appears to be 60 points. Yet on page 166 it's made clear that the Willamette goal is 75, not 60.

There is no goal related to biodiversity, ecosystem health, access to nature (other than access to park or "greenspace." We can do better than this limited measure of environmental health. At a minimum we should be using the regional indicators and set as a five year goal the development of measures of success that get more directly at ecosystem function and biodiversity.

p 62. I would add the PSU Institute for Sustainable Solutions and their IGERT Program to the list of potential partners.

p 110 Diagram: As noted earlier, why is "anchor habitats" not included in the key?

p 120 Key term: Green Infrastructure: As noted earlier, why was "to impacts of climate change" deleted?

p 123 Regional and local trails. Why was the following deleted: **"Implement key trail projects to support Neighborhood Greenway connectivity by supporting the following trail efforts:**

Pursue ways to speed up the trail acquisition process and create additional tools to enable the City to obtain trail easements, so that the regional trail system in Portland can be completed in a timely manner" ?