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## MEMO

**DATE:** September 10, 2012

**TO:** Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

**FROM:** Joe Zehnder, Chief Planner

**CC:** Susan Anderson, Director; Steve Iwata, Central City Planning Manager

**SUBJECT:** Response to Comments from Mike Houck on Proposed Draft Central City 2035 Concept Plan

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The Planning and Sustainability Commission will hold a public hearing on the Proposed Central City 2035 Concept Plan on September 11, 2012. We received advance comments from PSC member Mike Houck, which are reproduced below along with staff responses.

Mike Houck initial take on Central City 2035 Concept Plan:

### Overarching Issue:

#### Urban Design Direction concept map (pp 16-17)

I really like the inner "New Trail Loop" a lot and supports its being a major element of the urban design map. I would emphasize, however, that great bicycle and pedestrian "spokes" are critical to make the "New Trail Loop" truly accessible to bikes and peds. In other words, the loop should be connected by a finer grained network of greenways (City GreenWays) - green streets and pathways - both within the Central City and to destinations beyond.

My greatest concern, however, is the lack of emphasis to significant local and regional connections outside the CC. In Urban Design Direction it's stated that "urban design involves the physical features of the built and natural environment that define the character of a place.....it works at a variety of scales..." Two scales lost in this concept map is connections of the CC to the rest of the city and to the Portland-Vancouver region, and beyond.

I have attached two pdf's of the maps on page 16 and 17 of the CC2035 Concept document on which I've inserted examples of local and regional connections that should be emphasized on a final version of the Urban Design Direction map.



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Connectivity within the CC, from the CC to the rest of Portland and beyond is critical both as an aspiration for the CC and the larger aspirations of The Intertwine---the regional system of Parks, Trails and Natural areas. On page 11 (Policy 6. Tourism, retail, and entertainment) it's stated that tourism should be incorporated to complement CC's economic success, vibrancy and livability, including retail, cultural events and institutions, arts and entertainment venues.

Nowhere is there mention of the importance of the system of parks, trails, and natural areas to the local and regional economy through attraction of businesses to Portland and the region nor do I see connections to the economy through tourism. When people fly into the PDX the first image they should see when they approach the baggage area is a map depicting The Intertwine, with an inset of the Central City, showing the plethora of recreational opportunities in the CC, nearby and throughout the region. Portland should be seen as an active and "passive" recreational mecca where you can attend a meeting and rent a kayak or bicycle and access recreational opportunities literally from your downtown hotel throughout the city an into the surrounding rural landscape-----to wineries in Washington County; Mt Hood; up the Willamette; north to Ridgefield and Mt St Helens; and into the Columbia Gorge. The vision conveyed by the concept map is too CC-centric and should be expanded to embrace a much larger vision for how the CC fits into the regional parks, trails, natural areas and recreational context. No other major city I am aware of has made such an explicit statement.

### **Staff Response:**

**Trail Loop:** The proposed trail loop is fully intended to be connected with the regional "spokes" that Commissioner Houck refers to in his memo, as this loop is intended to be an additional piece of the existing system within Central City that better connects the city center with the region.

**Connections to Region:** Commissioner Houck notes that the urban design diagrams "lack of emphasis to significant local and regional connections outside the CC." Although the diagrams do not identify all possible open space features or specific districts and other urban features that would be better connected to the Central City, the intent of concept is to improve and expand these connects over the life of the plan. Further, making these connections on a city-wide and regional scale is a key issue to be addressed by the Comprehensive Plan.

However, staff recommends adding text to the diagram to address these larger connections since they are consistent with the point raised by Commissioner Houck and the message the diagram intends to send about better connecting the Central City with the rest of the region.

**Importance of Parks and Open Space:** Commissioner Houck expresses concern that the Concept Plan does not properly elevate the importance of parks and open space to the local economy and as a basis for why people choose to live, work, and visit Portland. Although the plan does not address this issue in great or specific detail, references to



major parks, the Willamette River, and the connection of the Central City to surrounding natural landscape are found throughout the plan. Further, goals and policies regarding Housing and Neighborhoods, the Willamette River, Urban Design, and Health and the Environment note the important role parks, open space, and recreation play in addressing issues related to the economy, human health, urban character, community development.

**Ross Island:**

During the initial CC2035 advisory meetings I expressed a strong desire to include Ross Island if South Waterfront was to be included. South Waterfront was included and Ross Island excluded. Given the importance of Ross Island to South Waterfront and potential impacts as well as opportunities between this new community and the Ross Island archipelago, I continue to have strong misgivings that this plan will not explicitly address potential recreational opportunities and, just as importantly the potential for degradation of a resource that is as iconic to Portland as Forest Park. Ross Island is not even identified on the concept map.

**Staff Response:**

The South Waterfront District, previously known as North Macadam, had been a subdistrict of the Central City since the adoption of the 1988 Central City Plan. Although visual and environmental connections between South Waterfront and Ross Island will soon be enhanced, especially with the completion of the first phase of greenway improvements in the district, Ross Island was not proposed to be incorporated into the plan area or regulatory plan district associated with the Central City. This is not to imply that there is not a relationship between these areas; however, staff feels there are even stronger connections between Ross Island and areas such as Oaks Bottom, and that these relationships and importance of Ross Island to the region are better addressed through the Comprehensive Plan and subsequent River Plan - South Reach planning process.

**Specific Comments**

Page 1: Intentional and Participatory

I would say that we have partially "reconnected downtown to the historic waterfront."

When referring to a new recreational amenity and transportation network, if park, trails and natural areas are considered amenities, I'd strike the word amenity and replace it with parks, trails, and natural area and transportation networks. Parks, trails, and natural areas are an essential element of the urban infrastructure, not amenities.

**Staff Response:**

The text on page 1 stating that moves made in 1972 and 1988 "reconnected the downtown to the historic waterfront" are intended to convey that the actions such as



the removal of the Harbor Freeway and development of Tom McCall Waterfront Park and Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade significantly improved the ability for the public to access and enjoy the waterfront. This is not to say that this work is complete and the plan makes numerous references to a need to improve and diversify how Portlanders engage the riverfront.

With regard to the reference to "recreational amenity" staff recommends replacing this phrase as follows:

These moves reconnected the downtown to its historic waterfront, helped to preserve neighborhoods and communities, and established ~~a new recreation amenity and transportation network~~ new parks, trails, natural areas, and transportation networks that continue to serve people throughout the region.

Page 4:

Legislative advocacy at the state and federal levels is referenced. I would urge the city to join with The Intertwine Alliance to work toward acquisition, restoration, and O & M funding at both the state and federal levels. I would like to see a reference inserted as follows: *Work collaboratively with The Intertwine Alliance and the national Metropolitan Greenspaces Alliance to seek federal support, both financial and staff, to bring additional resources to Portland and the metropolitan region for expansion and management of the region's system of parks, trails, and natural areas.*

I assume the reference to statewide planning goals under Comprehensive Plan refers to, among others, Goals 5 (fish and wildlife habitat, open space, historic resources, etc), 6 (water quality), 7 (hazards), and 15 (Willamette Greenway)? I see references to Goal 5 and 15 in the Concept but not to Goals 6 and 7 explicitly. Both these goals need to be included in the Comp Plan update and I assume they will be.

**Staff Response:**

The proposed language directing staff to work with others to fund and coordinate efforts to address regional open space concerns reads like an action item. In that no action items or language specifically directing this level of coordination exists elsewhere in the plan, and the issue raised by this text is important at a city-wide scale, staff recommends including language addressing this as part of the Comprehensive Plan update.

As for the assumption that all applicable statewide planning goals be addressed, yes, this is the intent of this effort.



Page 6:

In the paragraph leading off with To keep the CC the economic center.....the word amenities appears again. If this is reference to parks, trails, and natural areas I'd offer the same comment as above with regard to these being essential urban infrastructure, not amenities.

Under Mobility last paragraph, I'd rewrite to read:

"Opportunities to increase the use of the Willamette River.....an access way for people and commerce should be pursued....consistent with improving the river's health and addressing habitat restoration and protection.

**Staff Response:**

**Amenities and essential public services:** The text referred to does not mean to imply that parks are an amenity, and elsewhere in the plan such infrastructure, as well as schools, and community centers, are referred to as "essential public services." The language in this case uses amenities as a reference to a range of urban elements that make the Central City an attractive place to work, shop, and visit (cafes, entertainment venues, housing, retail, transportation options, etc.).

**Mobility and the Willamette:** Language similar to the amendment suggested was considered by the Steering Committee but was rejected as the committee felt that the goals of CC2035 Concept intended to be addressed as a whole. We tried not to add balancing cross references to individual goals since we would need to add such cross references to all of them. The goal of increasing access to the river for recreational and commercial uses and the goals referenced elsewhere in the document to improving river health and restoring habitat both apply to actions affecting the river. Thus, staff suggests retaining existing language as recommended by the Steering Committee.

Page 7, Urban Design

While access to the Willamette is discussed there is no mention of the importance of an interconnected system of parks, trails, and natural areas as essential elements of good urban design. I don't think use of the generic term "open space" captures that.

**Staff Response:**

This section of the plan references key issues raised during the issue identification phase of the project. The policy framework and urban design concept do mention the importance of open space, parks, and improved connections in enhancing the urban form of the city.



Page 11

6. Tourism, retail, and entertainment (see my comment under overarching issues) for lack of mention of parks, trails, and natural area system to contribute to tourism and local/regional economy.

**Staff Response:**

As noted previously, other elements of the integrated policy framework make this point, thus, it is not repeated in this section.

Page 13, Willamette River, Goal G Policies:

22. compliance with regional, state and federal laws and goals is essential, but so too is compliance with the city's which may complement and in some cases exceed regional, state and federal law.

**Staff Response:**

The intent of this text was not to under value existing City policy, regulations, or goals but to note that beyond these local provisions the City must also address regional, state and federal mandates.

23. I would rewrite to read, "Portland's commons. Promote improvements.....Support recreational use, enhance the *interconnected* system of parks, trails *and natural areas* and destinations, and increase public awareness of the river's historical, *ecological*, and cultural importance.

**Staff Response:**

Staff recommends adopting the suggested amendments above.

Page 14, Policy 30, Signature Open Spaces: I'd rewrite to read, "Advance the CC's iconic interconnected system of *parks, trails, and natural areas* by offering a wide range of social, recreational, *contemplative*, and respite functions to serve an increasingly diverse population of residents, workers and visitors."

Rationales: The importance of areas for contemplation is specifically called out in Parks Vision 2020 and is, in my opinion, especially important in the Central City. I assume the work "respite" might have been intended to convey that function, but I see them as complementary functional terms.

Portland is renowned nationally and internationally for its outstanding landscape architecture and landscape design: the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade, rain garden and Buster Simpson's "analog" at the Convention Center, Tanner Springs Nature Park (a national finalist in Urban Land Institute great public spaces), Chinese Garden, Park Blocks, Willamette Park, among others. These are all critical to Portland's livability and economic prosperity.



**Staff Response:**

Staff recommends adopting the suggested amendments above.

Page 15, Health and Environment, Policy 35, Watershed Health. I'd rewrite to read, "Improve watershed health by reducing effective impervious surfaces, increasing the quality, diversity (*both species and age distribution*) of the tree canopy, and protecting and restoring riparian and upland *fish and* wildlife habitat."

Rationale: With regard to urban forest canopy, as with the Park Blocks, both species diversity and age distribution are critical to maintaining a healthy urban forest canopy.

**Staff Response:**

Staff recommends adopting the suggested amendments above.

