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Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

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January 12, 2014

Mayor Charlie Hales and Portland City Council
Portland City Hall
1121 SW 4th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Subject: CC2035 West Quadrant Plan

Dear Mayor Hales and City Commissioners,

The Planning and Sustainability Commission strongly supports the West Quadrant Plan and the sustainable, vibrant, urban development vision it lays out for the Downtown, Old Town/Chinatown, Pearl, West End, Goose Hollow, South Downtown/University and South Waterfront districts. The West Quadrant Plan builds upon the previous successes of the Downtown and Central City plans and charts a course for the continued success of the Central City as the economic, cultural and civic heart of the city and region.

Building upon the high-level guidance provided by the adopted Central City 2035 Concept Plan, the West Quadrant Plan's district-specific policies and actions lay out a detailed roadmap for the long-term development and growth of the western half of the Central City. The plan also includes proposed Central City-wide goals, policies and actions that, together with the Concept Plan and the other two quadrant plans, will be integrated into the final CC2035 Plan.

Among the West Quadrant Plan's key ideas that the Commission supports:

- **Healthy and vibrant 21st century urban riverfront:** Bring more people and activity to the riverfront while improving habitat and river health
- **Green Loop:** Create a signature 10-mile walking and biking parkway that connects open space, public attractions and employment centers
- **Mixed-use quadrant:** Build on the distinctive qualities of the quadrant's unique districts while allowing a broader mix of uses and accommodating new diverse development, residents and businesses
- **Low carbon Central City:** Respond to climate change with a new generation of innovative buildings, green infrastructure and energy systems

At a September 9, 2014 public hearing, the commission received a range of testimony both supportive and critical of the West Quadrant Plan. The testimony and subsequent commission deliberations centered around four main issues:



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Housing Diversity and Affordability. The Central City offers a uniquely broad array of housing types and plays a critical role in providing affordable housing close to services, jobs and amenities. The commission worked with staff to refine the plan’s housing policies and actions to continue to support and encourage housing opportunities affordable to a broad range of households, prioritizing public investments in housing for those households in the 0-50% MFI bracket. At the request of the commission, a Central City-wide affordable housing target was incorporated into the plan, stating that in 2035, 30% of all Central City housing units should be affordable to households in the 0-80% median family income bracket. The Commission supports developing zoning code tools to allow height increases through bonuses to help achieve other public benefits including affordable housing.

Environment and the Willamette River. The Commission thought that the initial Proposed Draft did not sufficiently address issues related to environmental health and the Willamette River, specifically related to river flooding, metrics and impacts on Ross Island. The commission worked with City staff to substantially strengthen the plan’s policy language and add action items to address flooding and consider impacts related to climate change. Staff provided the Commission with information about Ross Island-related issues and some strategies that could address them. Staff also clarified the approach to setting targets for tree canopy and river bank enhancement. Staff will continue to work on strategies, approaches and targets through completion of the CC2035 Plan.

Maximum Building Height. The Commission heard considerable testimony about appropriate maximum building heights, particularly in the West End, Old Town/Chinatown and at the Morrison and Hawthorne bridgeheads. Although the plan does not recommend any changes to maximum building heights in the West End, commissioners received much testimony requesting that maximum building heights there be reduced to 100 feet. The Commission believes that the existing allowable heights in the area are appropriate for this highly urban, transit-rich, mixed-use residential area. While heights in a part of the Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood are proposed to be reduced, the proposal to allow taller buildings through transfers from historic buildings in a three block area of the New Chinatown/Japantown historic district was controversial. The Commission recommends making this provision effective only after an update of the historic district’s national register nomination and the creation of new historic design guidelines, to help ensure that new development is compatible with the district’s unique character. In addition, the Commission expressed concerns about wind impacts on the pedestrian environment and shading on adjacent parks and open spaces and requested that mitigation measures be addressed through Zoning Code language.

Historic Preservation. The Commission received a good deal of testimony on the important role that historic resources play in shaping the quadrant’s urban character and telling its social and cultural history. The plan proposes a number of actions that would help document and protect historic resources, including updates to historic inventories and historic design guidelines and new zoning tools such as expanded opportunities to transfer of development rights from historic structures.



Redevelopment on Surface Parking Lots in the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District. The Commission heard from several stakeholders about the need to find new ways to stimulate redevelopment on surface lots in Portland's oldest neighborhood. The plan includes an action item to develop a strategy to achieve this goal, and the Commission supports further efforts in this area.

At a public meeting held on December 9, 2014, the Planning and Sustainability Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council adopt the Resolution that adopts the West Quadrant Plan as non-binding City policy (pending completion of final Central City 2035 Plan package).

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the review of this plan and for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Andre Baugh, Chair
Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

Cc: Members of the Planning and Sustainability Commission

