

July 26, 2016

Dear Planning and Sustainability Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed draft of the Central City 2035 Plan. It is a formidable document with important, lofty goals, supported by powerful “big ideas.” The big idea we would like to focus on is the most concrete of the six: The Green Loop.

The Green Loop is particularly inspiring not only because its physical manifestation is the easiest to envision, but because it would seem to have the genuine potential to advance the other five big ideas as well. A well-implemented Green Loop really could celebrate Portland’s civic and cultural life; foster creativity, innovation and productivity; enhance the Willamette for people and wildlife; make streets Great Places; and increase the resilience of the Central City.

The Green Loop is a concept worthy of a city widely known for its great public spaces. These spaces are rightly celebrated for their vibrance, but we often forget how contentious and protracted the processes for creating them can be. Planning for what was to become Pioneer Courthouse Square, for example, started in 1961. It didn’t open until 1984 after a generation of political conflict and indecision.

At the pace of growth that it is currently experiencing, Portland simply cannot afford to wait decades for the Green Loop to be built.

A project of this scale will require a high level of collaboration, coordination and community desire to be realized. A coalition of diverse stakeholders will have to be built around a common vision for the future of the central city. That vision must be infused with all the qualities that make Portland great: productive engagement, environmental ambition, and creative innovation.

Fortunately, Portland is also known for its culture of community involvement and grassroots placemaking. Organizations such as Better Block PDX and City Repair have shown how coalition building and a DIY spirit can quickly transform public right-of-way into vibrant, multi-use places.

Portland is full of creativity, energy and community spirit just waiting to be harnessed.

So given the scope and urgency of the Green Loop, the Central City 2035 Plan should specifically consider what implementation strategies will yield a successful, world-class design and a productive public engagement process. **The Portland of the Future needs a Process of the Future that will inspire stakeholders, reduce friction and improve communication.**

To that end, we suggest that alongside the technical feasibility study called for in the Plan, the City should commission a **GREEN LOOP DESIGN GUIDE** that presents a coherent design vision in a single, easy-to-understand reference. It should be printed in large quantities and available online. It should be richly illustrated, concise, and not wonky! **The intent of the Green Loop Design Guide is to articulate a vision that refines the “language” of urban design into a compelling “dialect” of**

locally-relevant placemaking. This document can be used to persuade and inspire stakeholders, to lend guidance to demonstration project organizers, and lend unity to incremental improvements along the alignment. **It will further support the Comp Plan guiding principle of equity, by making the vision more accessible and concrete to the general public, and by making it clear how all Portlanders can participate in the realization of the vision.**

The Green Loop Design Guide should include:

- design principles and standards
- physical requirements [sample street sections]
- physical elements [consistent furnishings, bike parking, kiosks, landscape elements, integrated wayfinding, etc.]
- experiential “patterns”: public art [permanent, temporary, static, participatory, etc.]; performance spaces [programmed, impromptu]; seasonal markets; seasonal amenities [water features; shelter]; “easter eggs” [acoustic phenomena, curated views, photo ops, coded messages, etc.]
- resources and tips for how to hold demonstration projects [Better Block, City Repair, etc.]
- interactive features [comments, Q&A, project event calendar, etc.]

Finally, we would like to highlight a potential synergy between The Green Loop and another priority of the Central City 2035 Plan: District Energy.

Nearly all of the 2000+ buildings in Portland’s central business district lie within a half-mile of the Green Loop alignment. Collectively these building owners spend roughly \$180M [based on City of Portland building data (via CivicApps) and US Dept of Energy Buildings Energy Data Book] on energy every year. A district energy system results in much lower energy costs over time. The prospect of these savings represents a tremendous opportunity to finance district energy investments, some of which would need to be spent on physical street work anyway (to install distribution pipes). **Aligning these underground investments with streetscape and active transportation goals turns a District Energy plan into a potential engine to fund the Green Loop.**

Two key challenges of establishing district energy are the significant financial and regulatory hurdles for implementing systems that include multiple property owners and infrastructure in the public right-of-way. The Green Loop concept could provide the framework and inspiration to drive the planning and policy changes urgently needed to implement District Energy.

Sincerely,


Adrienne Leverette
on behalf of Fat Pencil Studio