

AIA/APA/ASLA Urban Design Panel

Portland and Oregon Chapters of the American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association and American Society of Landscape Architects

Date: August 8, 2016

To: Planning and Sustainability Commission
Portland, Oregon

Central City 2035 – PROPOSED DRAFT

The Urban Design Panel is sponsored jointly by the Oregon and Portland chapters of the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association and the American Society of Landscape Architects, and composed of urban design professionals from those 3 organizations.

The Panel has been closely following the development of the Central City Plan, has received several briefings by staff, and UDP members have participated in many CC2035 events over the last few years. We have also testified and made written comments concerning various aspects of the Plan as they have surfaced in that time period directly to the City Council and to Stakeholder Advisory Committee members. Specifically, we have commented on building heights in the West End and other areas, and on the Green Loop initiative, generally supporting the work of staff as they have tried to navigate the difficult issues involved.

The UDP is strongly committed to the adoption of the Central City Plan. It is of critical importance to the city and its citizens to have clear guidance for the continuing re-development of our regional center, and the goals and policies articulated in this draft address the right priorities. We do have some specific comments and suggestions, listed below:

The only major gap we see in the Plan is that it does not address the biggest long term infrastructure issues facing the central city, specifically the rail and freeway conflicts with increasingly dense living and working environments. The future of the Eastbank freeway has long been a flashpoint issue, but of equal importance is the increasing congestion caused by at-grade rail crossings from SE 11th/12th to SE Stark. This section of track is part of the primary rail route on the west coast and as more freight and more passenger rail (including high speed trains) use this corridor the situation has the potential to become untenable in the not too distant future. It's already causing major traffic headaches at the SE 11th/12 crossings, and these were just improved as the result of the MAX Orange Line project. And there are other major problems that will also need to be addressed. Our suggestion is that these and other similar issues be acknowledged in this plan and that the City commit to helping initiate a regional study led by Metro to analyze long range strategic infrastructure challenges city- and region-wide and make recommendations on ways to address them.

As we have testified previously, we strongly support the new proposals for height limits throughout the central city. They make good sense and deserve full support from the Commission. We also fully support the Green Loop concept proposal.

We are very supportive of the proposal to focus virtually all bonuses on addressing the city's affordability crisis. It is too early to determine how the yet-to-be-developed inclusionary zoning proposal will affect the need for density bonuses, but it is possible that the two features could be designed to work together to greatly enhance the affordable housing supply in the city. It may also be necessary to complement the density bonuses with targeted incentives, for instance to encourage family scale apartments.

Density transfers are a great tool for ensuring that most of the central city's potential capacity can be developed appropriately, and we generally agree on the transfer parameters in the document. However, we believe there may be certain cases where cross-district transfers should be allowed, such as among the 5 designated master plan sites. We could envision, for instance, the need to transfer much of the allowed density at Lincoln H.S. to the Blanchard site, which could benefit both areas.

The eco-roof requirement for all buildings with over 20,000 sq. ft. of roof space seems timely.

In order to effectively meet policies 5.18-5.20 the City needs to update its historic resource inventory for the built environment (that includes buildings, structures, landscapes, objects, etc.) so that it is accurate (includes mid-century modern) and defensible (everyone knows what the playing field is).

The South Park Blocks are noted for preservation (Policy5.DT-4), but not the North Park Blocks (they should be listed in The Pearl section). They are part of the same design and open space system even if they are separated by blocks that were built upon.

The empty blocks surrounding the Halprin Open Space Sequence should be prioritized for development since that was district's original intention. The open space system, which is intact, was designed to be surrounded by buildings, but not all of the blocks have been developed.

Finally, there are several instances where the policies become too specific (a dog park in a specific district?). Policies should set general direction, not call out individual projects.

Sincerely,

Executive Committee of the Urban Design Panel

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