

**Board of Directors  
RiverPlace Planned Community Association**

Planning and Sustainability Commission  
City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability  
1900 SW 4th Ave, Suite 7100, Portland, OR 97201  
Attn: CC2035 Testimony

August 9, 2016

**Dear Planning and Sustainability Commissioners –**

The RiverPlace Planned Community (RPPC) is a neighborhood association representing the residents and businesses of the RiverPlace community, located downtown on the west shore of the Willamette River, between the Hawthorne and Marquam bridges. The Directors of the RPPC respectfully request that the CC2035 Plan designate 850 feet of the RiverPlace Esplanade – between the RiverPlace Hotel and the McCormick & Schmick's Harborside Restaurant – as a **Pedestrian-Oriented Waterfront Commercial District**.

**Our vision:** The RiverPlace Esplanade is less than 850 feet long (see map on p.3) and is Downtown Portland's only waterfront commercial district. It hosts a beautiful marina, has spectacular views of the Willamette River, Mt Hood, and Portland's iconic bridges, and is the only place along Portland's waterfront with shops and restaurants right on the Willamette.

The residents and businesses of RiverPlace believe the best use of this particular stretch of Portland's downtown shoreline is as a pedestrian-oriented waterfront commercial district, where people are encouraged to slow down, relax with a glass of wine, dine under the shade of the trees, and take in the beautiful views of the marina, river and bridges. The doors of the businesses open right onto the Esplanade, and yet it is managed as a transit thoroughfare, with an emphasis on making sure people can travel unimpeded and as quickly as possible from A to B. This is exactly the wrong approach.

Almost every other major city located on a river, lake or ocean understands the economic and livability benefits of having a pedestrian-oriented waterfront commercial district, where residents and visitors can bring their families, young and old, to stroll, shop, dine, and enjoy time by the water, without having to worry about being hit by automobiles or bicycles. On the West Coast one thinks of the vibrant, scenic waterfronts of Vancouver, BC, San Francisco, and San Diego, as described in this USA Today article: [Great waterfronts to visit across North America](#).

**Safety issues caused by bicycles speeding on the RiverPlace Esplanade:** Unfortunately, the presence of cyclists riding their bikes (often very fast) through the pedestrians totally changes the atmosphere, from a dining and shopping district to a transit thoroughfare. There is no speed limit, only signs saying "Yield to slower traffic" which most cyclists think means shouting "on your left" and/or ringing their bells as they weave through the pedestrians.

To those on foot, the bells and shouts mean "Move over, I'm coming through", so they scramble to get out of the way. This is hardly conducive to an enjoyable shopping or dining experience. We believe it is reasonable to ask bicyclists to walk their bikes on these two blocks, especially given that there is an

alternative for those who prefer to stay in their saddles. Every year pedestrians are hit by bicyclists on the RiverPlace Esplanade. Our neighborhood has a large population of retired and elderly people, many of whom are afraid to walk on the Esplanade because of the risk of being hit by a bike. For them, even getting bumped by a bike could result in a life-altering injury.

When safety concerns were brought to the attention of Portland Parks (which owns and manages the Esplanade as part of Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park), instead of asking cyclists to walk their bikes or even to slow down, their solution was to require the businesses on the Esplanade to reduce the number of outdoor restaurant tables so that bikes could travel through less impeded. Because of the Esplanade's current designation as a 'Multi-Use Path', Parks is compelled to enforce a 15-foot-wide no-obstruction clear zone so cyclists can ride through the commercial district unhindered.

**The CC2035 Plan as it now is proposed:** The CC2035 Plan designates the RiverPlace Esplanade as a City Bikeway on the Bicycle Classifications map, indicating the city's apparent desire to continue using this unique section of shoreline as a bike corridor for another 20 years. New kiosks are proposed in Waterfront Park to attract visitors and give them something to do. Meanwhile, our RiverPlace businesses struggle to make it through the winter and then are throttled back during the busy summer season to make sure they don't block the way for bicyclists wanting to circle the waterfront without getting off their bikes.

Decades of planners for Portland and the Willamette River – from the Willamette Greenway Plan to the River Renaissance and CC2035 – have talked about making Portland's waterfront more lively and inviting, generating jobs and economic activity for the City, providing a greater variety of uses and thereby attracting a more diverse range of residents and visitors. What could fulfill that vision better than a truly pedestrian-oriented waterfront commercial district?

**Alternate bike paths:** There are 5 miles of wonderful shoreline multi-use bike trails between Tillicum Crossing and the Steele Bridge, and another 4.5 miles south of Tillicum Crossing, comprising the central city portion of the Willamette Greenway Trail, all of which is available for bike riding. We question whether bicyclists really need to be able to ride on 100% of Portland's waterfront, or would 97% be enough, particularly if they have an alternate route around RiverPlace (Montgomery St and SW Harbor Way) for this unique 3%?

We hope that the CC2035 planners can share our enthusiasm for creating a vibrant waterfront commercial district at RiverPlace, and can recognize the value it would bring to the people of Portland and the visitors who, frankly, have come to expect a modern, hip city with a waterfront to do something more than make it a bike path. We want people with bikes to come to the waterfront and enjoy it with everyone else, but we feel strongly that the public would be better served if people were asked to walk their bikes for this particular 850 feet of shoreline.

In addition, could CC2035 support the development of a separate, designated bike path on the water side of the RiverPlace Esplanade? There is room for such a path, and we would encourage that it also be considered in the CC2035 plan.

**Our request:** If Portland is serious about encouraging commerce on and along the river (CC2035 goal), and wants to increase the diversity of river-oriented activities for ALL of its residents as well as the hundreds of thousands of visitors that come to Portland each year, an effective and inexpensive way of

doing that would be to designate the already existing (but currently struggling) waterfront commercial district at RiverPlace a pedestrian-oriented destination instead of a thoroughfare.

Please include a **Pedestrian-Oriented Waterfront Commercial District** designation for the 850 feet of waterfront along the RiverPlace Esplanade in CC2035, so Portland can provide its residents and visitors a pedestrian-friendly, diverse and thriving river-front destination worthy of our great city.

Thank you for your consideration.



John Raaf, Chair  
Board of Directors, RiverPlace Planned Community Association

