



City of Portland, Oregon
Bureau of Development Services
Land Use Services
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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MEMORANDUM

Date: October 11, 2019
To: Design Commission
From: Benjamin Nielsen, Design / Historic Review
Benjamin.Nielsen@portlandoregon.gov, 503-823-7812
Re: Briefing on Green Loop
Staff Memo for October 17, 2019 Design Commission hearing

Greetings, Commissioners:

Representatives from the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability and their consultants from Mayer/Reed will be presenting an update on ongoing work to further define and refine the Green Loop concept, which was approved as part of the Central City 2035 comprehensive plan. The documents sent to you yesterday contain an explanation of the schematic design work undertaken so far on two segments of the Green Loop (Central Eastside and Lloyd District).

Background

As a reminder, the Commission has had a previous briefing on the Green Loop concept in August 2018, which was scheduled to coincide with the Design Advice Requests of the Block 216 project. That project was the first to interact with the Green Loop concept and the current Green Loop-related building line standards in the zoning code.

At the August 2018 briefing, the Commission was very supportive of the overall concept. Commissioners had the following more-detailed comments:

- Commissioners said that the Green Loop needs “elements of continuity” and “elements of distinction” to help make the Loop a successful addition to the Central City. “Elements of distinction” help to make specific places along the Loop. “Elements of continuity” help to define the connections and alignment of the Loop and create a universal language that residents can easily recognize as the Loop.
- There was not yet a statement or strategy for the rights-of-way along the Loop, such as reducing vehicle lanes/traffic or parking to create the connecting pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Commissioners asked if PBOT had a strategy yet to help create the needed linkages.
- Commissioners encouraged that space be made for food carts to help keep them in the Central City as its vacant lots redevelop.
- Commissioners questioned whether the required building line standard along the Park Blocks was appropriate. Commissioners stated that the narrowness of the streets and closeness of the buildings in the Midtown Park Blocks, especially, made those streets special and further stating that the “eddies” of O’Byant Square and Director Park were sufficient.

Commissioners also addressed a complete modification to the Green Loop required building lines standard in the Design Review for Block 216 in fall 2018. To better meet the relevant design guidelines and approve the modification, the Commission required the developer to completely redevelop the full block of SW 9th Ave adjacent to the property to be more oriented to pedestrians and bicycles, forming what could be the first completed segment of the Green Loop. The Commission also required a highly-porous ground floor retail space facing the street. Excerpts of Findings from that decision may be found at the end of this memo for your review.

New Materials

The package prepared by Mayer/Reed contains analyses of two segments of the Green Loop, in the Central Eastside and Lloyd District, and provides recommendations for alignments and design of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in each as well as identifying potential new public and private open spaces. The study of the Central Eastside segment also begins to identify potential “elements of continuity” at the Green Loop and Central Eastside/District scales.

Recommended Discussion Points

Although the proposals in the document are still very schematic, staff has the following thoughts:

- The 6th Avenue alignment through the Central Eastside makes the most sense due to the zoning pattern in the area. Both Options “A” and “B” on page 14 place the alignment next to EX-zoned land that can host uses that would best support the Green Loop.
 - “Option A” on page 14 (and shown as “Option B” on page 13) utilizes the substantial landscape strip to provide a buffer between pedestrians and bicycles, which provides better support for the pedestrian realm. Ideally, a second row of trees and/or landscaping could be planted between the bike track and street travel lanes as well to provide a measure of buffer for bikes and to create a greener streetscape.
 - Similarly, “Option B” on page 14 (and shown as “Option A” on page 13) places large canopy trees between the ped/bike zone and travel lanes. A second row of trees and/or landscaping could be planted (or retained) between the bike track and the sidewalk to provide additional buffer between peds and bikes and to create a greener streetscape.
- “Option B” on page 14 correlates well with the proposed street section for NE 7th Ave through the Lloyd District. Additional street trees aligned with the existing planting strip/decorative light fixtures could further green the Loop and create additional buffer between peds and bikes.
- For the Design Review of Block 216, Commission deliberations regarding the design of SW 9th Ave included discussion of creating “garden-like” landscaping in the street over more typical trees and ground cover. The same concept should be utilized as an “element of continuity” along more of the Loop. Should these gardens help to define the entire Loop or specific districts/segments?
- Consider the “elements of continuity” proposed in the document:
 - In addition to uniquely-designed but otherwise-standard street furnishings, space should be provided within rights-of-way (where available) to allow for unique “elements of distinction.”
 - While all of the elements shown could be used in the right of way, are there opportunities for unique “elements of continuity” that could be used as part of adjacent private development?
- Jumping off from past briefings regarding the proposed Culinary Corridor in Downtown, are there opportunities (should there be?) to allow for small private commercial ventures, such as food carts/trucks, to locate in the rights-of-way?

Please consider the following potential topics of discussion during the briefing to provide guidance to the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability and PBOT as they work to develop and refine the Green Loop concept further:

- Consider recommendations on possible zoning code standards and new design guidelines (which would become part of the revision to the *Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines*) that would help achieve the vision and concepts set forth in the concept plans for the Green Loop.

Upcoming Dates for Further Discussion

The Design Commission, in a combined meeting with the Landmarks Commission, will be receiving a briefing on the South Park Blocks Master Plan work to-date on December 5, 2019. This will be another opportunity to discuss the Green Loop and how it can integrate with the existing park system.

Excerpts from the Design Review approval for Block 216 (LU 18-210124 DZM AD)

A4. Use Unifying Elements. Integrate unifying elements and/or develop new features that help unify and connect individual buildings and different areas.

D1. Park Blocks. Orient building entrances, lobbies, balconies, terraces, windows, and active use areas to the Park Blocks. In the South Park Blocks, strengthen the area's emphasis on history, education, and the arts by integrating special building elements, such as water features or public art. In the Midtown Park Blocks, strengthen the connection between the North and South Park Blocks by using a related system of right-of-way elements, materials, and patterns. In the North Park Blocks, strengthen the area's role as a binding element between New China/Japantown and the Pearl District.

Findings for A4 & D1: Portions of the proposal successfully integrate unifying elements and enhance and support the Park Blocks in the following ways:

- A linear retail space is proposed at the ground floor along SW 9th Ave. Glazed, fold-up overhead doors along the east elevation of this space allow for indoor activities to flow outside, and vice versa, helping to activate this section of the Midtown Park Blocks. This retail space also extends the intermittent ground floor retail spaces found on other blocks of SW 9th Ave in the Midtown Park Blocks.
- Three of the proposed fold-up, operable, glazed windows along SW 9th Ave provide accessible access from the street into the retail "food hall" space inside the building. These at-grade transitions functionally blur the delineation of the interior and exterior space along this street. To best achieve this effect and strengthen the connection of this space to the Midtown Park Blocks and Green Loop street segment outside, the applicants presented additional plans at the December 13, 2018 Design Commission hearing demonstrating how the paving pattern will extend from the street into the retail space.
- Several proposed elements of the streetscape of SW 9th Ave could be extended to the north and/or south along SW 9th Ave and SW Park Ave to the east to create a series of unifying elements for the Midtown Park Blocks segment of the Green Loop.
 - The proposed SW 9th Ave paving pattern consists of light and dark gray Willamette graystone concrete pavers arranged in a herringbone pattern across the traditional sidewalk, parking, and driving lane sections of the street. Dark gray pavers are proposed only to run in the east-west direction, to afford opportunities to incorporate a gradient-type pattern in the street paving system. This system of pavers avoids complications that could arise from using a more-specialized paver system, increasing its replicability for other property developers and PBOT along the Midtown Park Blocks—and potentially beyond. Additionally, the pattern proposed is generic enough to be extended along both streets without conflicting in its patterning and styling with existing (often historic) buildings along both streets.
 - Trees species proposed in the right-of-way of SW 9th Ave include the tall-growing, large-canopied *Zelkova serrata*. This species has an upward-branching, vase-shaped crown, much like the American Elm trees found in

the North and South Park Blocks. This species and its canopy, therefore, integrate this important element of the Park Blocks into this block segment of the Midtown Park Blocks.

- The proposed street light standard is a simple column fixture that, like the pavers, essentially becomes a background element to activity on the street itself, yet it is distinct from the city's standard twin ornamental fixture. The fixture system has a fairly large kit of parts available to serve different lighting situations. This fixture could be extended along the whole Midtown Park Blocks segment of the Green Loop or even the entire loop, due to its flexible kit of parts and simple design.

Some aspects of the proposal do not yet successfully meet this guideline:

- Overhead hanging lights are proposed over the segment of SW 9th Ave adjacent to the subject site. In drawings submitted to the Design Commission for the December 13, 2018 hearing, the pendant luminaires are approximately 41" in height—these do not appear to be rendered with the correct height on Exhibits C.107 & C.108—and are connected to wires that span the street, anchoring into the proposed building on Block 216 and the existing historic landmark structures across the street. At the Design Commission hearing on December 13, 2018, the applicants presented another luminaire for consideration, which was a thin and flat downlight. Conceptually, the idea of stringing lights or other ornamentation across the street would help to support and strengthen the character of the Midtown Park Blocks and help to connect the North and South Park Blocks. Since the connection details to the historic landmark structures require historic resource review approval (for exterior alterations to a landmark structure), and since connection details to the proposed building at Block 216 should also be evaluated through design review, this element of the streetscape needs further study through the aforementioned follow-up land use reviews. Additionally, due to the size of the luminaires originally proposed and the relative narrowness of the street, these fixtures seem to be scaled incorrectly for this narrow street. Commissioners also reacted negatively to the proposed flat light fixtures, finding that that luminaire type was not visible from afar in the same way as was the pendant luminaire. Additionally, the sparseness of the pendant luminaire placement also does not lend the same festive atmosphere evoked by precedent images on Exhibits C.94 and C.118. As an important element of the overall streetscape design, a condition of approval should be added to ensure that further design development takes place.

With a condition of approval that, if approved by the Public Works permit, the proposed overhead hanging lights (or other hanging ornamentation) shall be further studied and developed, including connection details to the proposed building at Block 216 and to the landmark structures on the east side of SW 9th Ave, through a follow-up Type Ix and/or Type II land use review(s) prior to main building permit submittal, these guidelines will be met.

B5. Make Plazas, Parks and Open Space Successful. Orient building elements such as main entries, lobbies, windows, and balconies to face public parks, plazas, and open spaces. Where provided, integrate water features and/or public art to enhance the public open space. Develop locally oriented pocket parks that incorporate amenities for nearby patrons.

Findings: The retail “food hall” space along SW 9th Ave includes glazed, operable overhead doors which open the interior space, and its activities, sights, smells, and sounds within, directly to the sidewalk along that street, which forms a segment of the new Green Loop.

Modification #3: 33.510.215.B.5 – Required Building Lines, Standards for the Park Blocks.

The applicants request the Modification to allow the building to extend to the street lot line for its full length along SW 9th Ave, instead of setting back at least 12 feet from the lot line for at least 75% of the lot line's length. Instead, the applicants propose to create a retail “food hall” space along SW 9th Ave that will be open to the street and to redesign and rebuild SW 9th Ave with non-standard right-of-way improvements, such as traffic calming measures, curbless transitions between active and vehicular travel modes, visual and textural material changes of ground lane,

bollards, special overhead lighting, street furnishings, and shifting the planting zone out into the street.

Purpose Statement: The required building line standards ensure that buildings in certain parts of the Central City are built to the sidewalk's edge unless landscaping or an extension of the sidewalk is provided. The standards support the street and development character objectives of the Central City 2035 Plan by creating diverse street character, promoting active uses, pedestrian movement, and opportunities for stopping and gathering. Extensions of the sidewalk may incorporate trees, landscape planters, groundcover, and areas for stormwater management between the building and the sidewalk.

Standard: 33.510.215.B.5, Standards for the Park Blocks. On sites with frontage on a street shown on Map 510-22, and on sites that are adjacent to an open area shown on Map 510-22, buildings must be set back at least 12 feet from the street or adjacent lot line along at least 75 percent of the length of the lot line. At least 50 percent of the space between the building and the street or adjacent lot line must be landscaped with ground cover plants and shrubs, and contain one tree per 400 square feet. All plants must be selected from the Portland Tree and Landscaping Manual. This standard applies to new development. Exterior walls of buildings designed to meet the requirements of this Paragraph must be at least 15 feet high measured from the finished sidewalk at the building's edge

A. Better meets design guidelines. *The resulting development will better meet the applicable design guidelines; and*

Findings: One of the objectives of the required building line standard is to create “opportunities for stopping and gathering”. This is accomplished in the standard by requiring 12-foot deep setbacks along at least 75% of the length of the lot line. For the 200-foot long lot, this would result in 1,800 square feet of stopping and gathering areas.

The applicants propose to partially mitigate the loss of this stopping and gathering area by designing and reconstructing SW 9th Ave as a woonerf-type street—curb-less and with a design that will allow for free pedestrian movement across the breadth of the street. A kit of parts consisting of fixed, elevated, custom steel planters with wooden benches, new light standards, concrete pavers, and hanging pendant luminaires serve to define the character and spaces of the street, which will be one of, if not the first, segment of the new Green Loop to be constructed. Combined with the removal of parking spaces and the “woonerf”-type street design, large areas for stopping and gathering will be created in the street itself.

It is also important to consider that the subject site lies in the Midtown Park Blocks, between Director Park and O'Bryant Square. The right-of-way along SW 9th Ave through the Midtown Park Blocks is only 50-feet wide, as compared to 60- to 80-foot right-of-way widths for other streets downtown. This narrower width gives the Midtown Park Blocks a unique development character in the Central City. Additionally, the applicants point out in their written narrative that only three of the 54 Green Loop block edges on the west side of the river currently have setbacks of any kind, and all are located in the South Park Blocks area. The proposal sets development at the street lot line edge of SW 9th Ave, rather than setting back by 12 feet.

Considering all of these design elements and contextual characteristics, allowing the proposed development to extend to the street lot line helps to maintain the unique development character of the Midtown Park Blocks, better meeting *Guidelines A5 – Enhance, Embellish, and Identify Areas* and *C4 – Complement the Context of Existing Buildings*. The proposed street design and reconstruction goes well beyond what would ever be required for a similarly-scaled development that met the standard in terms of design of the pedestrian realm in providing additional space for pedestrian movement, stopping, and gathering. This street design, therefore, better meets *Guidelines B1 – Reinforce and Enhance the Pedestrian System* and *B4 – Provide Stopping and Viewing Places* than a standard street design would.

The required building line standard also requires additional planting areas and trees within the setback areas. The Green Loop volume (Volume 5B) of the *Central City 2035 Plan* describes a “connected canopy” as one of the design principles of the Green Loop. Central City 2035 Policy 5.12 also describes the Green Loop as providing “tree canopy, innovative, park-like pedestrian environments, and wildlife habitat connections.”

Rather than providing for required (and desired) trees and plants in a setback area off the street, the proposal instead provides these plantings in the proposed raised planters in the street. Pushing the planters into what was formerly the parking lanes of the street allows for the planting of larger-canopy trees in the street, such as the proposed *Zelkova serrata*, and the Design Commission reaffirmed at the December 13, 2018 hearing that these larger canopy trees were an important part of the proposed design. In addition to this particular species’ similarity to the American Elm trees found in the North and South Park Blocks, planting trees in the right-of-way more closely approximates the tree-lined character of the Park Blocks than shifting plantings onto private property would.

Additional plantings in the form of ornamental, flowering trees and shrubs and flowering plants and groundcover go beyond the basic code requirements for planting in the setback and begin to establish a more park- or garden-like character in the pedestrian environment on the street. Like the canopy trees, the Commission reaffirmed that this is an important part of the proposed design. Taken all together, the proposed planting plan both supports the goals of the Central City 2035 Plan for the Green Loop while also better meeting *Guidelines A1 – Integrate the River* (by providing additional habitat), *A2 – Emphasize Portland Themes*, *A4 – Use Unifying Elements*, *A7 – Establish and Maintain a Sense of Urban Enclosure* (with larger tree canopy), and *D1 – Park Blocks*.

The podium on the proposed building terraces down to O’Bryant Park on the site’s eastern half. These terraces are proposed to be planted with trees and other significant plant species, some of which have a tendency to drape or cascade over the sides of their containers. These landscape elements will be visible from O’Bryant Square, will help to extend the sense of the Park Blocks past this site, and will provide some additional mitigation for the lack of trees and landscaping within the otherwise required setback area, moving it to the roof instead of the street level. This landscape strategy will better meet *Guidelines A4 – Use Unifying Elements* and *D1 – Park Blocks* than would a roof without these features.

Since this segment of SW 9th Ave will be redesigned as mitigation for the standard, and since this segment of the Green Loop is the first in the city to be designed and, likely, the first to be built, it is likely that at least some of the elements proposed for the street design could or will be replicated elsewhere on the Green Loop, creating elements of continuity for the system. While it is not the responsibility of the applicants to design additional segments of the Green Loop, they have proposed how the design elements of the street could be extended to the north and south along the SW 9th Ave and SW Park Ave segments of the Green Loop in the Midtown Park Blocks. This is described in greater detail in Findings for A4 & D1, above. These design elements and strategies for extension, therefore, better meet *Guidelines A4 – Use Unifying Elements*, *A5 – Enhance, Embellish, and Identify Areas*, and *D1 – Park Blocks*.

Finally, in addition to design and reconstruction of the street, the applicants also propose to mitigate the standard by providing a very porous edge at the ground floor along SW 9th Ave. The ground floor here, which is programmed with a retail “food hall” space along the 9th Ave frontage, creates a unique interface between the street and the interior of the building. This is accomplished with a combination of clear-glazed, folding overhead doors which extend from floor to ceiling in three of the six storefront bays along SW 9th Ave. This affords opportunities for pedestrians and activities to move seamlessly from inside to outside (or vice versa), functionally extending the sidewalk into the building. This blurring of inside and outside is further enhanced by extending the pattern on the street into the interior of the retail “food hall” space, which the applicants demonstrated at the December 13, 2018 hearing.

The other three storefronts along this frontage are programmed with six walk-up food service windows which open into small work spaces inside the building. These walk-up windows are then reflected onto the interior side of these work spaces, creating two-sided retail food service spaces. The walk-up windows facing the street provide for more activity on the street than a standard storefront and also retain some sense of the current, and beloved, food cart character found on the block today.

Taken all together, these design elements better meet *Guidelines A2 – Emphasize Portland Themes, A8 – Contribute to a Vibrant Streetscape, B1 – Reinforce and Enhance the Pedestrian System, B5 – Make Plazas, Parks, and Open Space Successful, C6 – Develop Transitions Between Buildings and Public Space, and C9 – Develop Flexible Sidewalk-Level Spaces*, than typical retail spaces would.

Although the Public Works permit Concept Phase (30%) approval has not yet been granted for this project, the proposed street design combined with the proposed building frontage along SW 9th Ave better meets several applicable design guidelines. To help address concerns of the Public Works permitting bureaus, a condition of approval was added to ensure that there can be no issuance of the excavation permit for the building until at least the 30%/Concept Phase Public Works permit has been approved and until any additional land use reviews required for revisions to the street design of SW 9th Ave (for those that are subject to review), and/or to evaluate additional details as conditioned in the Design Review Findings, above, have been reviewed and approved. The former provision would allow the Public Works permitting bureaus additional time to complete their reviews and ensure the proposed street design is conceptually buildable. The latter provision would ensure that revisions to the proposed street design, which may be required to obtain 30% Concept Phase Public Works approval, would still face Design Review scrutiny if necessary (and Historic Resource Review scrutiny for any impacts to the landmark structures across SW 9th Ave). Furthermore, since the overall building proposal rests on approval of the Modification to this standard, reconsideration of the Modification must be included as part of any future land use review associated with revisions to the design of SW 9th Ave, to components of the street, and/or to components of the ground floor frontage of the building along SW 9th Ave.

It should be clearly noted that the Public Works permit review process may yet raise significant issues that require redesign of elements of the proposed street design and/or interface with the building. The expectation implied within the conditions of approval recommended for this modification, and stated explicitly here, are that any such revisions achieve the same level of design and activation both on the street and within the ground floor building frontage along SW 9th Ave as currently proposed. There is also the expectation that any additional land use reviews occur in a timely manner. Finally, it should also be explicitly stated that these conditions of approval do not imply assurance of Public Works permit approval, nor do they imply assurance that future land use reviews and reconsideration of this Modification will result in approval. Design Commissioners reaffirmed these findings at the December 13, 2018 Design Commission hearing, stating clearly that these conditions of approval place risks that are borne by the applicants and not the Public Works infrastructure bureaus. Additionally, the Design Commission requested, and staff and the applicants verbally agreed, to provide a courtesy briefing to the Design Commission if the Public Works permitting process requires significant changes to the SW 9th Ave design proposal.

B. Purpose of the standard. *On balance, the proposal will be consistent with the purpose of the standard for which a modification is requested.*

Findings: The purpose statement for the Required Building Lines standard states that the standard is intended to support the street and development character objectives of the Central City 2035 Plan by creating diverse street character, promoting active uses, pedestrian movement, and opportunities for stopping and gathering. As described in the Findings for this Modification above, the proposal will meet this purpose through a variety of interventions, and, with at least 30%/Concept Phase approval of the Public Works permit, will be consistent with the purpose of the standard, on balance.

With the condition of approval that there can be no issuance of the excavation permit for the building until at least the 30%/Concept Phase Public Works permit has been approved and until any additional land use reviews requiring revisions to the street design of SW 9th Ave, and/or to evaluate additional details of elements related to the streetscape and SW 9th Ave building frontage as conditioned in the Design Review Findings have been reviewed and approved; and,

With the condition of approval that reconsideration of the Modification to zoning code standard 33.510.215.B.5 must be included as part of any future land use review associated with revisions to the design of SW 9th Ave, to components of the street, and/or to components of the ground floor frontage along SW 9th Ave, this Modification will merit approval.