



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Innovation. Collaboration. Practical Solutions.

MEMO

DATE: January 14, 2021

TO: Portland Design Commission

FROM: Cassie Ballew, BPS, Urban Design
cassandra.ballew@portlandoregon.gov, 503-823-7252

CC: Ryan Curren, BPS, Project Manager
ryan.curren@portlandoregon.gov, 503-823-4574
Joan Frederiksen, BPS, City Planner
joan.frederiksen@portlandoregon.gov, 503-832-3111

SUBJECT: West Portland Town Center Character Statement and Plan Briefing

The purpose of this memorandum, and attachments, is to provide information in support of the January 21, 2021 briefing to the Design Commission on the West Portland Town Center Character Statement and Plan. The topics covered include:

- Briefing purpose and DC Role
- West Portland Town Center Plan Project Overview
- Summary of Character Statement Proposal
- Process and Outreach
- Next Steps

Briefing Purpose and DC Role.

This briefing will focus on the West Portland Town Center Character Statement. The project is in the Discussion Draft phase, and BPS staff seeks feedback regarding the current WPTC Character Statement draft. Comments received from the Commission during this briefing will be used to revise the WPTC Character Statement for the Proposed Draft. The Commission will later review, take testimony and make a recommendation to City Council on the Proposed Draft of the West Portland Town Center Character Statement.

This is only the second character statement to be drafted under the guidance of the proposed Design Overlay Zone Amendment project, and the process for creating these documents is still new. Unlike the process for the Macadam Character Statement, which came in front of the Design Commission at the end of the Proposed Draft phase, this briefing provides an opportunity for comments earlier in the legislative process. A briefing earlier in the process is intended to allow more time for BPS staff to better integrate and align comments from the Design Commission with those from the community and partner Bureaus. For instance, in addition to this briefing, BPS has also sought comments from BDS during this Discussion Draft phase. The timing of this briefing also presents an opportunity to better understand the process BPS staff is using to gather content for these statements. Staff welcomes Commission's feedback on ways to improve this and other components of the process for similar future efforts.

In addition to providing general feedback on the current draft and process BPS staff hope to gather feedback from the Commission on some of the following questions/issues:

- How to incorporate the Community desire for culturally specific artwork, particularly murals and sculpture, given the limitations of the Design Review process.
- How to encourage authentic multi-cultural spaces and architecture, reflective of the community.
- How to encourage thoughtful transition of development on sites adjacent to lower density zones.
- Other additional resources that should be referenced or investigated.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but hopefully provides some clarity on the issues BPS staff hopes might be discussed as part of the briefing.

West Portland Town Center Plan project overview

Project Plan. West Portland Town Center Plan and West Portland Town Center Character Statement

Project Area. West Portland Town Center (WPTC) is located north and south of the intersection of Barbur Blvd, Capitol Highway and Interstate 5 - sometimes known as the "Crossroads." Other landmarks in the area include the Barbur Transit Center and Barbur World Foods. The study area included the areas roughly between SW Dolph on the north, SW 35th on the east, SW 53rd on the west and SW Pomona on the south. It was designated as a town center in 1995 and the designation was reaffirmed in the City's 2035 Comprehensive Plan process in 2016.



Summary of WPTC Plan Proposal. As one of only two town centers in SW Portland, the West Portland Town Center is expected to accommodate significant growth in coming years. Today, it has the makings of a dynamic, multi-cultural, amenity-rich town center with access to good schools – from primary schools to colleges, good jobs – from OHSU to Washington County, and great open spaces - from Woods Memorial to Spring Garden Park. This plan seeks to guide that growth by considering the existing conditions and challenges, as well as the community’s aspirations and needs. To begin, the plan will center around community desires for:

- *Balanced growth*, with a diversity of housing choices on and off the main corridors, as well as jobs, to ensure a healthy jobs/housing balance within the town center.
- *Affordable housing options* by discouraging redevelopment of existing low-rent apartment complexes and encouraging new construction of affordable housing.
- *Stronger multicultural identity* through placemaking opportunities and a multicultural hub for community gathering and access to commercial and community services.
- *Vibrant commercial areas on both the north and south sides of the town center*, providing walkable destinations and living wage jobs close to homes and areas of employment along Barbur Blvd.

To help achieve this vision, the plan includes the proposal that a West Portland Town Center Character Statement be added to the Citywide Design Guidelines, as part of the Design Overlay Zone Amendment Project, set to be adopted in 2021. The goal is to help ensure that development proposals undergoing design review are responsive to the unique context of this center and its residents.

Summary of Character Statement Proposal.

As you know, character statements supplement Portland’s Citywide Design Guidelines for each designated town center and neighborhood center. They provide more specific (and customized) context within the guidelines. The statements follow a template, structured to align with and support, Guideline 01, *Build on the Character and Local Identity of the Place*. They address community, architectural and urban design character, historical context, as well as natural resources particular to the specific area.

The role of this character statement is to identify WPTC’s unique context by defining its existing and emerging character, as articulated by the community. As new buildings and public spaces in the West Portland Town Center develop, they will contribute to the area’s emerging character, and redefine its existing context. BPS staff conducted outreach efforts to better determine how the community views and defines this character (detailed in following section). The responses received in our initial outreach shaped the character sections around specific themes, as outlined below:



- *Community Character*: Highlight the area’s multi-cultural community and how development can support it. Encourage development to respond to existing community landmarks, such as Barbur World Foods and Woods Memorial Park.
- *Architecture and Urban Design Character*: Improve the area’s existing, auto-centric, public realm through area-specific design responses. Consider how to support the Community’s desire for more welcoming people-centered public spaces, including multi-cultural gathering space.
- *Natural + Scenic Resources*: Build on the area’s existing system of parks and open spaces by providing a series of tree-lined connections within the district. Ensure that future development responds to the area’s unique topography.

Process and Outreach.

Over the past year and a half through multiple engagement opportunities, project staff have worked with the community, including a WPTC Community Advisory Group and community-based partner organizations to co-create a vision for the area, including goals and priorities for the Plan.

The following two engagement opportunities specifically offered a chance to ask questions and gather feedback to help inform the character statement:

1. *Open House, March 2020*. Staff conducted an interactive exercise, asking attendees to respond to the question, “What Characteristics and Features should Future Development Reflect in West Portland Town Center?” What we heard was a desire for future development to be designed to support and foster the area’s diversity, multi-lingual and multi-generational community and consider the topography and nature in the area. This feedback was used, in conjunction with previous plans and city resources, to inform the development Discussion Draft WPTC Character Statement.
2. *Community Survey, November 2020*. The survey, which was open until December 3, included questions intended to gauge the community’s temperature on a number of issues. To help provide more direct feedback for the character statement, it included the following two questions:
 - Are there special landmarks or places (such as social centers, artwork, buildings or open spaces) in the community that should be recognized or referenced by future development?
 - What features, materials or spaces should future development incorporate to foster diversity and inclusivity? Examples could include water features and fountains, murals, or plazas.

There were over 70 responses to these questions from the survey participants. Although they were varied and diverse, some of the main themes included:



- Provide better connections to community landmarks like the Woods Memorial Natural Area, West Portland United Methodist Church, Masjid Assaber Mosque, Holly Farm Park, Capitol Hill Library, Markham School, Barbur World Foods.
- Provide more family oriented, inclusive gathering spaces (on multiple scales): including plazas, marketplaces, community gardens, playgrounds, parklets.
- More representation of multi-cultural community through artwork, public spaces and architecture.
- Provide for views, within publicly accessible spaces, of Mt. Hood.
- Encourage development to properly respond to topography to increase accessibility and inclusivity.

For additional detail of the comments submitted, please see the attached spreadsheet (Attachment B).

Next Steps.

After the briefing on January 21st, BPS staff will revise the character statement to address community feedback discussed above. In addition, the revision will address comments from BDS and BES, and this Commission. The updated statement will be part of the West Portland Town Center Plan Proposed Draft, expected to be released in the Spring of 2021.

We currently anticipate providing the Design Commission with an additional briefing when the Proposed Draft is released. That briefing will be an opportunity to review changes made in response to the commission's and community feedback and provide other relevant updates on the WPTC Plan project. This would be prior to and in preparation for a hearing on the updated WPTC Character Statement.

We look forward to discussing this work more with you at the coming briefing. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Links:

[draft Design Overlay Zone Amendment \(DOZA\) Citywide Design Guidelines](#)

[West Portland Town Center Plan - Discussion Draft - Online Open House](#)

West Portland Town Center Plan - Discussion Draft documents – [Vol 1 – Report and Actions, Vol 2 – Code, Policy, and Map Amendments](#)

Attachments:

A. Draft West Portland Town Center Character Statement

B. West Portland Town Center Community Survey Responses, *for reference*

(The character statement questions are in the columns highlighted in orange.)

C. West Portland Town Center Study Area Map

