

Date: September 28, 2021
To: Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission
From: Marianne Fitzgerald, resident
Re: Proposed Draft West Portland Town Center Plan

I've lived near the West Portland Town Center since 1979 because it is a great community, although the neighborhood is very car-dependent. I have been active in neighborhood issues for many years and these are my personal comments, informed by my involvement in developing the SW Capitol Highway Plans (1996, 2016), Barbur Concept Plan (2013), Southwest Corridor Plan (2020) and West Portland Town Center Plan (CAG).

I want to "second" the comments submitted by Rob Gardner and others that lay out some of the community's frustration with the Proposed Draft West Portland Town Center (WPTC) Plan. I fully support affordable housing but am concerned the extent of up-zoning in the plan will displace many of the economically diverse households that are needed to support businesses in a prosperous town center, and the lack of commitment to funding needed transportation safety improvements in the plan will lead to more people getting seriously injured or killed.

The 2013 Barbur Concept Plan was developed to guide land use associated with the proposed SW Corridor Light Rail Plan. The Barbur Concept Plan recognized that the "West Portland Crossroads" area is dominated by regional motor vehicle traffic attracted by the four I-5 freeway ramps within the proposed borders of WPTC. This urban highway creates dangerous conditions for people walking and biking and trying to access transit.

The Barbur Concept Plan recommended that the Town Center Plan "Address the deficiencies that are preventing the Crossroads from achieving its potential as a Town Center" (p. 49). Fortunately, the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) did a preliminary analysis that laid out a framework for improving stormwater systems with future development. The Tryon-Stephens Creek Neighborhood Street Plan recognized the serious stormwater deficiencies in the area that led to innovative stormwater management and treatment system designs in the SW Capitol Highway improvements under construction between Multnomah Village and West Portland. Unfortunately, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) did not conduct an access and circulation study in conjunction with the draft plan (Barbur Concept Plan p. 49) although I requested this multiple times during the development of the WPTC plan.

The Proposed Draft West Portland Town Center Plan proposes incentives to preserve the existing two- and three-story apartments along SW Barbur and SW Capitol Highway that were built in the 1960s and 1970s, and preserves RM1 zoning on these transit corridors. For the most part, these multi-family dwellings have sidewalks, bike paths and transit service 7 days a week, except as discussed below. The WPTC proposes new multi-family RM1 and RM2 zoning for properties currently zoned R5 and R7 in greatly expanded boundaries a half mile into neighborhoods like mine that do not have sidewalks, bike paths or transit service outside of commuter hours.

The WPTC plan seems to ignore all of the recommendations in the Barbur Concept Plan and will not transform Crossroads into a safer and more pleasant place to live, work, shop and attend school and other services within SW Portland.

What about the Future of SW Barbur? SW Barbur is a high crash corridor with serious safety concerns. ODOT must be willing to work with the City of Portland bureaus, TriMet and the community to discuss the many safety issues on Barbur and near I-5 freeway ramps located between Burlingame and Tigard, and fund needed improvements. The WPTC plan was developed assuming the SW Corridor Light Rail Plan would be funded and constructed, including the transportation and stormwater improvements needed on SW Barbur, and that ODOT would transfer jurisdiction to PBOT. There is no Plan B following the failure of the November 2020 Transportation Measure and the status quo does not support the density proposed in the WPTC plan.

What about the future of SW Capitol Highway? The sidewalks between Portland Community College's Sylvania Campus and SW Huber were constructed decades ago and need to be brought up to standards for a "main street". SW Capitol Highway between SW Taylors Ferry and SW Huber has a significant gap in the bicycle lane and ODOT and PBOT recently funded a "multi-use path" as part of ODOT's "jughandle" project that will direct more motor vehicle traffic on WPTC roadways. This is a cheap alternative to design standards for "main streets" and one of two multi-use paths that PBOT recently said was all they could afford to construct in the town center (SW Capitol Highway and SW 26th) despite the safety concerns expressed by community members that will be walking and biking on these multi-use paths in the future.

Specifically:

1. Amend the Transportation Elements (beginning on page 101) to commit specific agencies to completing the plans and studies in the near term (1-5 years) before recommending changes to the Transportation Systems Plan (TSP).
2. Partner with TriMet to improve the transit service network and connect WPTC transit service with town centers and regional centers nearby, including Tigard and Washington Square.
3. Support the concept of the Green Ring to improve safety and connectivity throughout the West Portland Town Center, and use the results of the plan to recommend changes to the TSP in the near term.
4. Support improvements to the high crash corridors (SW Barbur, SW Capitol Highway) that bring them up to design standards envisioned in the plan as soon as possible. Modify the descriptions of Projects 90017 and 90027 to include wider sidewalks and protected bike lanes and crosswalks in the commercial corridors.
5. Do not support proposed changes to the TSP that are intended to minimize the costs of future development and are not needed for safety improvements until the high crash corridors are made safer for people to walk, bike and access transit and other services in WPTC (i.e. SW Baird, SW Plum, SW Collins, Old Taylors Ferry Baird to 40th).
6. Support the modified description of TSP Project 90064.1, SW Taylors Ferry Road, to build sidewalks and bicycle facilities rather than widened shoulders in WPTC, and fund it in the near term consistent with BES recommendations.
7. Support constructing the Markham/Luradel Ped/bike Overcrossing of I-5 that is in the Financially Constrained 11-20 year TSP (the WPTC plan is in error) and key to the "Green Ring" that connects neighborhoods that were torn apart by I-5 in 1960. Do not remove this project from the financially constrained TSP.
8. Amend Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Maps to concentrate higher density RM1 and RM2 zoning on streets with transit service (i.e. SW Barbur, SW Capitol) and retain more single family zoning in areas that lack nearby transit service outside of commuter hours (i.e. south of SW Taylors Ferry Road and SW Dolph).

9. Amend Zoning Code 33.595.010 to add a bullet, “establish safe and comfortable conditions for active transportation” (Barbur Concept Plan p. 48). The current language is not strong enough.
10. Amend Zoning Code 33.595.040 to ensure that the needed stormwater and transportation system improvements are funded before properties are rezoned and developed, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Chapter 10.
11. Amend 33.595.260 and 270, residential corridor standards, to protect people’s health from noise and air pollution associated with I-5. On rainy days like today the noise is deafening, and the daily motor vehicle traffic contains toxic air pollutants that cannot be filtered by trees.
12. Strengthen tree planting, preservation and maintenance requirements in both the zoning code and character statement.
13. Protect public viewsheds.
14. Residential internet and electric service needs to be sufficient to support online learning, electronic technology and electric vehicle use. Some of the existing multi-family units in Subdistrict D have not been issued electrical permits in over a decade.
15. Residential unit doorways and windows need to connect with public sidewalks and streets as a way to create public spaces where people throughout the community can interact, as recommended by pioneer planner Jane Jacobs decades ago.
16. Support community gathering spaces throughout WPTC where people can get to know and learn from each other, such as the proposed Multicultural Hub.
17. The city’s policy that limits off street parking does not serve car-dependent communities very well if there isn’t a transit network that allows them to meet their needs without a car. The multi-family units in my neighborhood have a lot of cars parked on the street, and car-sharing services add to the motor vehicle traffic on our streets.
18. The city’s carbon reduction goals are not discussed in the plan. See recommendations for alternative transportation improvements and tree preservation and enhancement above. Cleaner fuels might reduce carbon emissions but continued reliance on personal motor vehicles, even if electric, exacerbates existing unsafe transportation safety concerns.
19. The Barbur World Foods grocery store (constructed in 1936) is key to the success of a denser West Portland Town Center and every project needs to support its prosperity. Unfortunately, ODOT’s upcoming “Barbur Safety” Jughandle project will jeopardize access of customers and vendors to the grocery by redirecting motor vehicle traffic around its building, and make conditions less safe for people walking and biking. Please de-fund ODOT’s jughandle project; this is one case where the status quo seems safer than the upcoming project.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the Proposed Draft West Portland Town Center Plan. I look forward to discussing the plan in more depth in the future.

Sincerely,
Marianne Fitzgerald
10537 SW 64th Drive
Portland 97219