



# City of Portland Design Commission

**Date:** September 1, 2022  
**To:** Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Mingus Mapps  
Commissioner Carmen Rubio  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty  
Commissioner Dan Ryan  
**Cc:** City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero  
**From:** Portland Design Commission  
**Re:** Recommendation on the West Portland Town Center Character Statement

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners:

The Portland Design Commission (DC) offers our support of the West Portland Town Center Character Statement Recommendations that will be coming before Portland City Council in the Fall of 2022 as part of West Portland Town Center Plan Recommended Draft.

The West Portland Town Center Character Statement Recommendations include:

- Application of a *West Portland Town Center Character Statement* within the West Portland Multicultural Plan District;
- Incorporation of the *West Portland Town Center Character Statement* within the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines*. The *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines* are a tool used by applicants, the public, BDS staff and the Design Commission during the Design Review process; and,
- Incorporation of *A Guide to the Document* page within the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines* to inform users how to utilize the character statements.

Background/Process

- The West Portland Town Center Plan includes an expansion of the 'd' Design Overlay. This expansion means that the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines* will apply to a broader area within the West Portland Town Center, on projects undergoing Design Review. The *West Portland Town Center Character Statement* will provide further guidance for development on how to support community goals, such as improving connectivity throughout the Center for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as the creation of a multicultural hub.
  - The *A Guide to the Document* page is a proposed improvement to the Design Guidelines and is separate from the *West Portland Character Statement* work. It is a user guide providing additional context and will be added to the Character Statements introduction section in the appendix of the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines*.
  - The Design Commission is the recommending body for the discretionary *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines* and *West Portland Town Center Character Statement*.
  - The *West Portland Town Center Character Statement*, and the *A Guide to the Document* page, passed on a unanimous Design Commission vote (6-0), with one commissioner absent.
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### Application of the Portland Citywide Guidelines and Character Statement

The Design Commission's goals for this project were to ensure that the information and guidance provided in the document was tailored to reflect the specific characteristics and desired character of the West Portland Town Center as described by all communities within the Center. To achieve this goal, the Commission requested that staff conduct additional community engagement, specifically with the area's well established East African and Islamic communities to ensure their voices were reflected. Commissioners also stressed the importance of tying guidance provided to the Plan's larger urban design framework and transportation action plan, since these were also closely followed and vetted by the community. This additional work was done during the Design Commission review phase to ensure that the statement successfully conveyed the qualities that contribute to the West Portland Town Center's unique context and local character.

At the March 2022 Design Commission work session, Commission members discussed overall support for the recommendations and changes to the *West Portland Town Center Character Statement*.

Key changes made by the Design Commission during the Fall 2021 and Winter 2022 work sessions included:

- A revised "Additional Information" section, which includes a link to the glossary within Volume 1 of the project plan's report for easy reference.
- Revised language to align with the Plan's Urban Design Framework, as well as transportation elements proposed as part of this plan.
- Incorporation of feedback received at a December 2021 East African Community Placemaking Focus Group. The focus group's input helped strengthen the character statement language to reflect the community's desire for multi-generational gathering spaces and ways to foster community and cultural connections.
- Revised language to be more place specific, speaking to how development should respond along the area's high transit corridors like SW Barbur Blvd., within its distinctive neighborhoods, steep topography, and near its natural resources, like Woods Memorial Natural Area.

### Design Commission Recommendation

We recommend that the City Council:

- Adopt the *West Portland Town Center Character Statement* and the *A Guide to the Document* page, to be applied with the *Portland Citywide Design Guidelines*. The effective date will coincide with the effective date of the West Portland Town Center Plan.

Sincerely,

Sam Rodriguez  
Chair