



2023 State of the City Report Testimony – Alderway Building

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Intro -

This project is rooted in optimism for downtown Portland.

The historic Alderway building on the northwest corner of Alder and Broadway deserves a brief history lesson to understand our design approach. It doesn't look like it now but originally constructed in 1911, this site was once home to the Pantages Theatre, one of the many vaudeville theatres along Broadway. In 1928 it was purchased by Fred Meyer and transformed into a 4-story office building with retail along the ground level, notably including one of the first Fred Meyer Drug Stores. This renovation resulted in a uniform appearance for the offices but left the ground floor tenant facades empty. Over time, tenants developed their own unique storefronts without guidance from a uniform design language.

When we met with the Design Commission early last year, our client, Melvin Mark Investors, envisioned highly transparent retail spaces, embracing quality and permanence, and building off other recent developments to reinvigorate this portion of downtown.

Our design approach was to strip away the existing ground floor façade, revealing the unique underlying structure of the theatre. In place, a transparent glass “veil” would span the entire ground floor, enhancing the Public Realm and reinforcing connection to the neighborhood. The commission helped solidify this direction by overwhelmingly supporting the use of transparent materials and identified ways in which the rhythm and expression of our proposed design could be more architecturally coherent with the façade above.

This support from the Commission helped simplify the land use approval process and prepared us to address zoning compliance comments when we submitted the set for permits.

