



**City of Portland, Oregon**  
**Portland Permitting & Development**  
**Land Use Services**

David Kuhnhausen, Interim Director  
Phone: (503) 823-7300  
TTY: 711  
www.portland.gov/ppd

## Work Session

# DISCUSSION MEMO

**Date:** August 22, 2024  
**To:** Portland Design Commission  
**From:** Benjamin Nielsen, Design / Historic Review Team  
(503) 865-6519, benjamin.nielsen@portlandoregon.gov  
**Re:** Montgomery Park Area Plan & Character Statement – Design Standards Follow-up  
Briefing Memo – September 5, 2024

This memo is regarding the upcoming work session on September 5, 2024, to discuss results of Bureau of Planning & Sustainability (BPS) staff's exploration in adding prescriptive design standards to Zoning Code Chapter 33.420 in support of the Montgomery Park Area Plan Character Statement. BPS staff would like to discuss revising the Design Commission's recommendation on the Montgomery Park Character Statement to City Council to remove the sentence which requests that City Council direct BPS staff to develop prescriptive design standards that relate to the goals of the Character Statement.

This work session serves as a continuation of the joint Planning Commission/Design Commission hearing that was held on May 21, 2024, and the Design Commission work sessions held on June 6, 2024, June 20, 2024, and July 18, 2024.

- A recording of the 5/21/24 hearing may be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/live/ReUC0eA4vbY?si=iAX8qjc4XFZ3y51n>.
- A recording of the 6/6/24 work session may be found here: <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/16901286/>.
- A recording of the 6/20/24 work session may be found here: <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/16917733/>
- A recording of the 7/18/24 work session may be found here: <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/16946184/>

At the end of this work session, the Design Commission may vote to revise the Transmittal Memo and recommendation to the City Council or retain the Transmittal Memo as adopted on July 18, 2024.

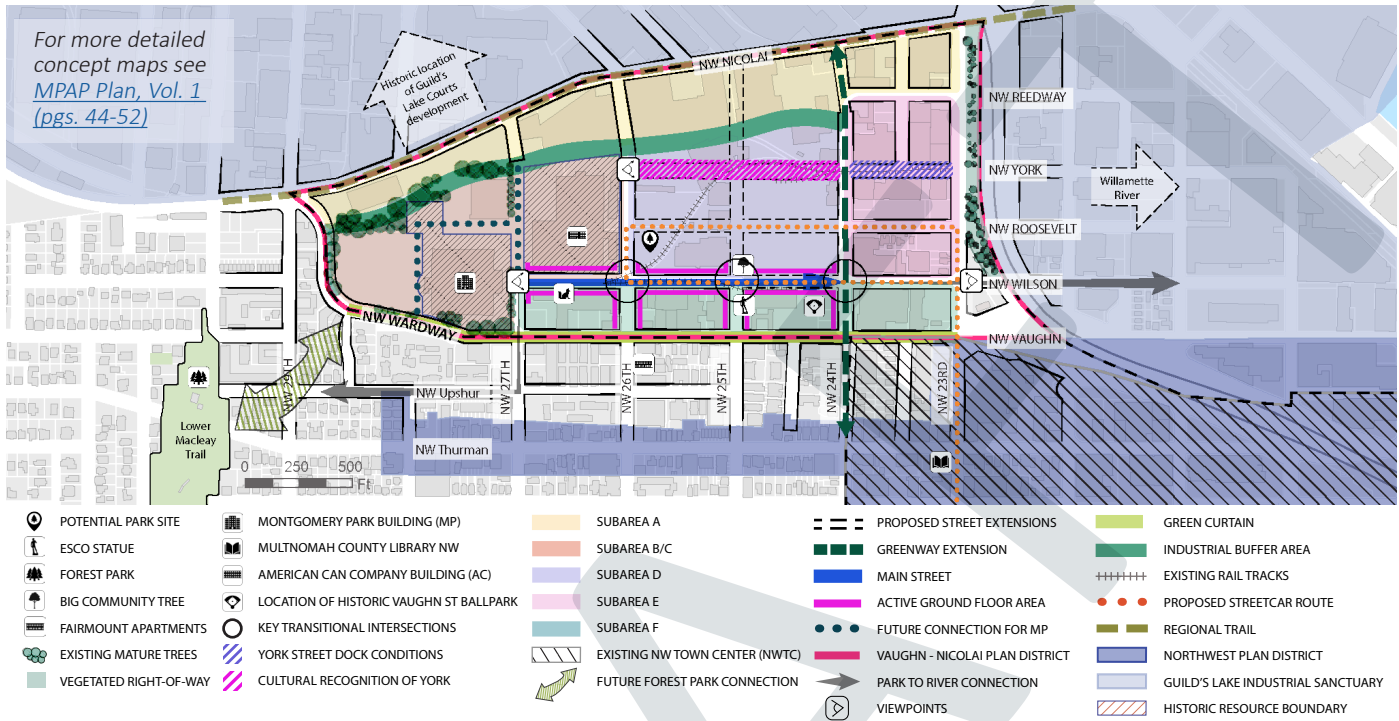
Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Attachments:

1. BPS Staff Memo, dated 8/22/24, plus BPS attachments

# CHARACTER STATEMENT: Montgomery Park

## TOWN CENTER



## BACKGROUND

### HISTORY & EXISTING CONDITIONS

Framed by the Guild's Lake Industrial District to the North and the vibrant mixed-use communities of the Northwest District to the South, the Montgomery Park Area Plan (MPAP) is an eclectic mix of land uses and building types. The designated Vaughn Nicolai Plan District (VNPd), within the expanded Northwest Town Center, has been an area of continual transition and transformation. The area's variety of lot sizes, building types, and history of industrial and manufacturing uses created a dynamic built environment but has also resulted in a disconnected, difficult to navigate, street grid resulting in an urban heat island with little trees or green space.

Once home to a lush marshland and the low-lying Guild's Lake, this area was part of a larger ecosystem which contributed to the vibrancy of nearby Indigenous villages on Sauvie Island and across the Willamette River. Before significant changes to the landscape began in the late 1800s, Chinese immigrants lived and farmed on land around the lake.<sup>2</sup> Plans for industrialization led to their displacement and to the filling of the lake in the 1920s to create a robust industrial center. Today, hints of this wild landscape remain in the nearby hills of Forest Park, Balch Creek watershed, and Willamette River, including an opportunity to connect Forest Park trails to the Willamette River Greenway. Connected to this legacy are Portland's extant Indigenous and Chinese communities, though little acknowledgment of them or the natural environment exists in this location.

The area was the site of the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition which showcased Portland's community, industry, and innovation. Industry and innovation was later carried on in the Montgomery [Ward] Park office building (1920), the American Can Company complex (1921), and the former ESCO steel foundry. Portland's Black community has strong ties to this area, including connections to the since-demolished WWII-era housing development Guild's Lake Courts (1940s/50s) and the Portland Rosebuds, a minor league baseball team that was part of the short-lived West Coast Negro League, which played one season (1946) at the Vaughn Street Park. More recently, NW York was renamed in honor of York, the enslaved man who was an essential member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Despite this, other recognition of the Black Community's contributions to NW Portland has been limited.

### CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Located at the edge of both an Industrial/Employment hub and the NW District Town Center, the VNPd is close to jobs, transit, parks, and shops and services. While encouraging elevation of its employment roots and future, the MPAP leverages new development and public benefits to create an inclusive, vibrant, low-carbon mixed-use neighborhood served by the Portland Streetcar. A Public Benefits Agreement<sup>3</sup> outlines important public benefits, including the commemoration of York on NW York Street<sup>1</sup> to be done in partnership with the Office of Arts and Culture and community organizations who carry forward the lived experiences of communities of color with roots in the area.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [NW District Plan](#)
- [Guild's Lake Industrial Sanctuary Plan](#)
- [Montgomery Park District Transportation Plan](#)
- [Preliminary Racial Equity Analysis](#)
- <sup>1</sup> [Indicates terms featured within the MPAP Plan, Vol.1, Pgs. 45 & 46](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Oregon Historical Society, Photo Essay](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Public Benefits Agreement within the MPAP](#)

"...celebrate proximity to Forest Park by extending trees and open space into the neighborhood. 'Green Curtain' instead of the 'Steel Curtain'..."

- Community Members, 2023

The following sections align with, and are derived from, content in the Portland Citywide Design Guidelines, specifically Guideline 01. They each focus on characteristics specific to this Town Center and suggest ways character could be incorporated into development.

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER



*The use of color, art and outdoor gathering spaces provides a sense of creative energy and vitality.*

Home to a mix of residents, businesses, and institutions, this district takes immense pride in its industrial heritage and variety of uses. Public spaces that acknowledge the contributions of Portland's Black, Chinese and Indigenous communities are needed to support these various communities and reflect the multitude of histories of the area. Future development should celebrate the district's rich industrial character and provide spaces that allow for a true mix of uses, reflecting a history of ingenuity and innovation.

A few ways to support these goals include:

- Designing ground floors with views into maker spaces along NW Roosevelt and/or providing historic markers indicating the history and sites of the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition.
- Framing terminating vistas such as Montgomery Park on NW Wilson St and American Can on NW Roosevelt and NW York.
- Integrating historic railroad track remnants in Subareas E<sup>1</sup> and D<sup>1</sup> within, or as a connection between, contiguous open spaces.
- Integrating intimate, multi-functional and accessible gathering spaces to encourage intergenerational community gathering, especially in Subareas F<sup>1</sup> and D<sup>1</sup>.
- Acknowledging and celebrating contributions of Portland's Communities of Color. Consider working with Black, Chinese or Indigenous artists to incorporate design elements such as color, patterns and/or artwork.
- Programming open spaces with elements such as playgrounds, performance spaces, historic markers and/or passive recreation areas.
- Referencing context on specific Streets:
  - On NW Wilson, incorporate neon signage as a nod to the neon MP sign.
  - On NW York, commemorate York with physical storytelling elements such as art or historic markers.<sup>1</sup>
  - On NW York, preserve historic dock conditions and reference them westward.<sup>1</sup>

## ARCHITECTURE + URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER



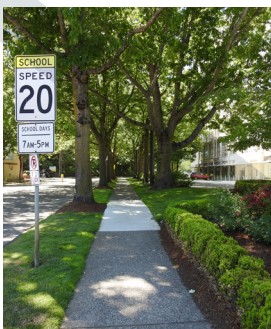
*Development on NW Wilson which repurposed an existing industrial building with an updated form and new materials.*

A century of transition has created a diverse landscape of urban forms and uses in this Center, dividing it into five distinct subareas<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps most distinct is Subarea B/C<sup>1</sup>, home to the historic Montgomery Park (MP) and American Can (AC) sites, whose size, in combination with the former ESCO Steel site in Subarea D, creates a challenging, disconnected street network between NW 24th and NW 27th. The Portland Streetcar<sup>1</sup> on NW Wilson and NW Roosevelt provides an opportunity for each subarea to preserve, emulate and celebrate its rich industrial context, while fostering a vibrant, safe and resilient mixed-use center.

A few ways to support these goals include:

- Referencing industrial materials (i.e. concrete, steel) and characteristics, such as the longer, regular facades and roof forms of industrial warehouses, the large scale operable windows and brick detailing of MP and AC, and re-purposing existing industrial buildings, materials and features.
- Improving urban heat island conditions in Subareas E<sup>1</sup>, F<sup>1</sup> and D<sup>1</sup> with climate-responsive design approaches, like lighter building colors and roofing materials, and green features such as eco-roofs.
- Buffering development from noise pollution, particularly on sites near Hwy 30 and in the buffer area<sup>1</sup> along Subarea A by utilizing sound absorbing materials, landscaping and careful building orientation.
- Complementing industrial context adjacent to, and across the from, new development through aligning belt courses, roof lines and forms, repetition of bays and windows, and continuity of setbacks.
- Encouraging NW Wilson as a main street<sup>1</sup> with large openings at the ground floor offering views into flexible spaces with active uses<sup>1</sup>, set-back frontages with hardscaped areas to accommodate large crowds, trees, and weather protection near transit stops.
- Supporting NW Vaughn, Roosevelt, and York as multi-modal, pedestrian-oriented streets by incorporating inclusive and accessible seating and weather protection, especially at key intersections, and by locating utilitarian uses toward and along NW 24th, 25th, and 26th.

## NATURAL + SCENIC RESOURCES



*Large, mature trees and vegetation along the public right-of-way on NW Wardway offer links to nature and relief from heat.*

At first glance, this transitioning industrial district offers no connection to nature. Yet, a maturing tree canopy in the western Subarea A, an abundance of scenic views (West Hills, Mt. Hood and the Fremont Bridge), and rich natural history, provide this district with a foundational framework of natural and scenic resources. New development should reference, preserve, and build on this framework and address the community's desire for a more verdant- district one with easy access to its own green spaces, as well as improved and direct connections to nearby Forest Park and the river.

A few ways to support these goals include:

- Creating a "Green Curtain" on NW Vaughn to identify it as an access path to Forest Park by preserving trees around Montgomery Park and widening sidewalks through building setbacks to support the planting of trees.
- Strengthening pedestrian connections and way-finding to the NW 24th Greenway, Forest Park, and the Willamette Riverfront.
- Reducing heat island impacts and easing stormwater system demand by preserving and adding large canopy trees, native vegetation, and open spaces on sites within Subareas E, F, and D.
- Designing prominent surface stormwater facilities that are functional, attractive, and celebrate the Balch Creek Watershed.
- Orienting shared spaces and pedestrian pathways to provide access to natural and scenic resources, parks and open spaces, including views of Mt. Hood and Fremont Bridge in Subarea D, and highlighting NW Vaughn as an access path to Forest Park.
- Mitigating impacts from pollution by utilizing a landscaped buffer<sup>1</sup> and setbacks, particularly on sites along NW 23rd and in Subarea A.
- Incorporating elements referencing the former ecological and agricultural landscape of Guild's Lake. Consider utilizing water, native flora and first foods into landscape designs.

July-September 2024

Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Mingus Mapps  
Commissioner Carmen Rubio  
Commissioner Rene Gonzalez  
Commissioner Dan Ryan  
Commissioner Mary Hull Caballero

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners:

The Portland Design Commission (DC) offers our support of the Montgomery Park Character Statement Recommendations that will be coming before Portland City Council in the Fall of 2024 as part of the Montgomery Park Area Plan Recommended Draft.

The Montgomery Park Character Statement Recommendations include:

- Application of a *Montgomery Park Character Statement* within the Vaughn Nicolai Plan District
- Incorporation of the *Montgomery Park Character Statement* and related updates, including an updated Table of Contents, within the Citywide Design Guidelines. The Citywide Design Guidelines are a tool used by applicants, the public, PP&D staff, and the Design Commission during the Design Review process.

Background/Process

- The Montgomery Park Area Plan includes an expansion of the Design 'd' Overlay. This expansion means that the Portland Citywide Design Guidelines will now apply to projects undergoing Design Review in the area within the Vaughn Nicolai Plan District as part of the expanded Northwest Town Center. The *Montgomery Park Character Statement* will provide further guidance for development on how to support community goals, such as referencing the area's industrial context, creating a more verdant district and commemorating York on NW York Street.
- The Design Commission is the recommending body for the discretionary Citywide Design Guidelines and *Montgomery Park Character Statement*.
- On July 18, 2024, the Design Commission supported the *Montgomery Park Character Statement*, and related updates to the Citywide Design Guidelines, with a unanimous vote (7-0), with one Commissioner absent.

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 were tailored to reflect the specific characteristics and desired character of the Vaughn Nicolai Plan District as expressed by all communities within the district as well as those with historic and cultural connections to the area. In an effort to achieve this goal, the Commission requested



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the incorporation of language that directs developers and designers to work in partnership with both the City Arts Program and community organizations, when incorporating commemorations of York on NW York Street. Language added states that these commemorations should be done in partnership with organizations who carry forward the lived experiences of communities of color with roots in the area. An additional change was to add the Montgomery Park Area Plan's Public Benefits Agreement to the Additional Resources section to help connect users to more detail about which organizations could or should be involved, such as the York Street Work Group.

Other key changes made by the Design Commission during the June and July 2024 work sessions included:

- Added language to connect character sections to the background statement.
- Amended the Current Policy Framework section to better inform development how to involve community in any commemorations of York on NW York Street.
- Strengthened guidance for how development can support the "Green Curtain" Concept on NW Vaughn.
- Strengthened guidance for acknowledging and referencing the area's historic and industrial context, particularly the Montgomery Park and American Can buildings.
- Amended the Background section to highlight the opportunity, within the district, to improve connections between Forest Park trails and the Willamette River Greenway.
- Amended the Urban Design Framework diagram, along with references to it in the text, to reflect renaming the Subareas with letters and align with Plan District Subdistrict names.

#### Design Commission Recommendation

We recommend that the City Council:

- Adopt the *Montgomery Park Character Statement* as amended, and related updates to the Table of Contents, to be applied with the Citywide Design Guidelines. The effective date will coincide with the effective date of the Montgomery Park Area Plan.
- Since the Character Statement will only be used for projects that go through discretionary design review, the Design Commission also recommends that the City Council direct staff to explore adding prescriptive standards to the code amendments that relate to the goals of the Character Statement in order to achieve better parity between projects that choose the prescriptive track over the discretionary design review track.

**Commented [BC1]:** Staff request that this language be removed if there is no need for further exploration.

Sincerely,



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Brian McCarter  
Chair



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