

City of Portland Historic Landmarks Commission Design Briefing

Date: Monday, November 12, 2024
To: City of Portland Landmarks Commission **From:** Megan Neill, PE, Design Phase Project Manager, Multnomah County
Cc: Tim Heron, Senior City Planner
Subject: City of Portland Historic Landmarks Commission Briefing for Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge
Attachments/Enclosures: Site/Vicinity Plan Map

INTRODUCTION

As discussed at the June 10th Briefing, and August 19th Design Advice Request (DAR) meeting, since 2016, Multnomah County has been working to create an Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge (EQRB). The proposed project would replace the existing Burnside Bridge with a new movable bridge in approximately the same location and with approximately the same length as the existing bridge.

Because the existing Burnside Bridge is a historic landmark, its removal requires a Type IV Demolition Review for which the HLC will be providing a recommendation to the City Council. At the August 19th DAR, the HLC provided the Project Team with helpful guidance regarding the approach to the application and applicability of the approval criteria. The HLC also expressed interest in exploring in greater detail the mitigation proposed for the Project for the loss of the historic landmark.

The November 25th Briefing is intended to provide a more in-depth discussion of historic resource mitigation topics, including:

- Historic resource impacts that require mitigation
 - Why the Burnside Bridge is listed on National Register of Historic Places
 - Relationship of the bridge to the Skidmore/Old Town National Historic Landmark
- West End Design Progression
 - The design concepts for elements of the bridge within the Historic District based on the 30% Design
- Section 106 Mitigation Commitments and the Consulting Parties Advisory Group Progress
 - Background on the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement
 - Advisory Group work to date and into the future
- Other Historic Resource Protection Commitments

HISTORIC RESOURCE IMPACTS AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Burnside Bridge (east of SW/NW Naito Parkway and west of the eastern edge of SE/NE 2nd Street) was listed individually in the NRHP in 2012 as a part of the Willamette River Highway Bridges

Multiple Property District, meeting the eligibility requirements under Criterion A and Criterion C¹. The Burnside Bridge has been determined eligible under Criterion A for its statewide significance for its association with the development of Portland and its transportation network, especially in contributing to the development of the central business district since its construction in 1926. The Burnside Bridge is also of statewide significance under Criterion C as one of the heaviest bascule bridges in the United States and as the first such bridge to rely upon a concrete deck surface for its movable span.

The Burnside Bridge west of the sea wall is within the Skidmore/Old Town National Historic Landmark District (NHLD). The resources in the NHLD span 1857 to 1929 in age and represent one of the best surviving historic-period groupings of commercial buildings in the western United States, especially buildings of cast-iron architecture. The Skidmore/Old Town NHLD was listed on the NRHP in 1975 and designated an NHLD in 1978. However, the bridge itself not a contributing resource. Moreover, as noted in the *National Historic Landmark Nomination Form for the Skidmore/Old Town NHLD*, the district was significantly detrimentally impacted by the 1926 construction of the bridge. For example, the *Nomination Form* notes the following:

- *[Skidmore Block (White Stag Block) (# 72):] Major alterations on the south façade occurred in 1926, when the rounded stone arch over the corner on Burnside Street was removed as part of street widening for construction of the Burnside Bridge.*
- *[Bates Building (# 56):] A 1925 record states the building was altered, and it is likely that several changes were made to accommodate the 1925 construction of the Burnside Bridge and street widening.*
- *In the late 1920s, and continuing into the 1970s, a wave of large-scale public works projects and accompanying building demolitions significantly altered the physical and economic fabric of the district. The first of these was the completion in 1926 of the new Burnside Bridge and the related widening of West Burnside Street. This resulted in the removal of significant portions of the district's Burnside-facing buildings and turned the street into a major auto arterial that bisected the district and complicated access to its businesses.*
- *Before the 1920s, periodic flooding, the loss of shipping activities, and other economic and social trends contributed to the decline of Front and First streets as preeminent commercial streets and Skidmore/Old Town as an economically vital part of the downtown. With construction of the new Burnside Bridge in 1926, the pace of change quickened. West Burnside Street was widened for several blocks requiring major alterations to commercial buildings at the center of the historic district, many being essentially chopped in half. The widening also increased Burnside's role as a major east-west thoroughfare and as an attractive location for automobile sale and service businesses. Its left-turn restrictions and elevated bridge ramps, which completely passed over Front and First Avenues, complicated and reduced access to Skidmore/Old Town, further isolating it from the rest of downtown and constricting its attractiveness as a retail and office district. A direct result of the rapid rise and popularity of the*

¹ Criterion A: Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and

Criterion C: Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

automobile, the new bridge symbolized the transition of the nineteenth century village, horse and pedestrian-accommodating street plan towards twentieth-century automobile-centered layouts. Less than forty years earlier, Olin Warner had sculpted the Skidmore Fountain in a diminutive size allowing it to better harmonize with the surrounding two- and three-story structures that were the city's norm. The Burnside Bridge dwarfed not only the fountain, but the buildings themselves, as this characteristically twentieth-century piece of urban infrastructure loomed-over and bypassed half the neighborhood.¹³⁰ Suffering a symbolic indignity, a one-way traffic sign was actually affixed to the fountain itself for a time.

- *The Burnside Bridge project was just the first of a wave of large-scale public works projects and accompanying building demolitions that significantly altered the physical and economic fabric of the district.*

WEST END DESIGN PROGRESSION - MITIGATION BY DESIGN

Many of the elements of the new bridge design are in themselves intended to mitigate the loss of the historic landmark. For example:

- When the Burnside Bridge was constructed in the mid-1920s, the southern façades of the Skidmore Block and Willamette Tent and Awning Building were truncated and rebuilt. In this process, the new western approach span was physically attached to adjacent buildings. The new bridge would eliminate this attachment and create an opening between the approach span and the adjacent buildings. Separating the bridge approach from the building would be conducted according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, including minimizing material loss and visual changes to retain historic character. Creating this separation would enhance the ability of the White Stag Block to survive a major earthquake (the White Stag Block has been seismically retrofitted). It would also provide greater public visibility of the ground-level façade of the Skidmore Block, which has been obscured under the existing bridge approach span since 1926.
- Girder bridge type for the West Approach, which is about the same width as the existing bridge. It avoids an adverse effect on the Skidmore/Old Town NHLD associated with tall, above-deck structures, and would maintain many of the existing, important views of the west side for travelers and park users including the iconic view of the historic White Stag sign.
- Improved bicycle and pedestrian environment within Waterfront Park. The new bridge will have one set of larger columns (10' shafts) in Tom McCall Waterfront Park (versus four with the existing bridge). They will be located to provide the necessary horizontal offsets from Naito Parkway and the Willamette Greenway Trail that each traverse under the bridge.

SECTION 106 PROCESS

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (54 United States Code [USC] § 306108) and its implementing regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] part 800) require federal agencies to consider the effects of their undertakings on historic properties (districts, sites, structures, objects or archaeological sites that are determined eligible or potentially eligible for listing under the National Register of Historic Places [NRHP]) before the expenditure of any federal funds or before the issuance of any federal permit, license, or approval. Federal agencies must consult with the State

Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and conduct government-to-government consultation with the appropriate federally recognized tribes before undertaking projects that would adversely affect historic or cultural resources.

The EQRB Project conducted a multi-year consultation involving over 20 consulting parties including regional Tribal representatives. The consultation occurred in tandem with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental impact statement process and allowed participants to discuss and provide input on the cultural and historic resources, potential alternatives, avoidance of impacts, and mitigation of unavoidable impacts.

There was a robust discussion around mitigation options, and important feedback from National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) resulting in inclusion of twelve actions to mitigate for the adverse impact (full replacement of) the Burnside Bridge.

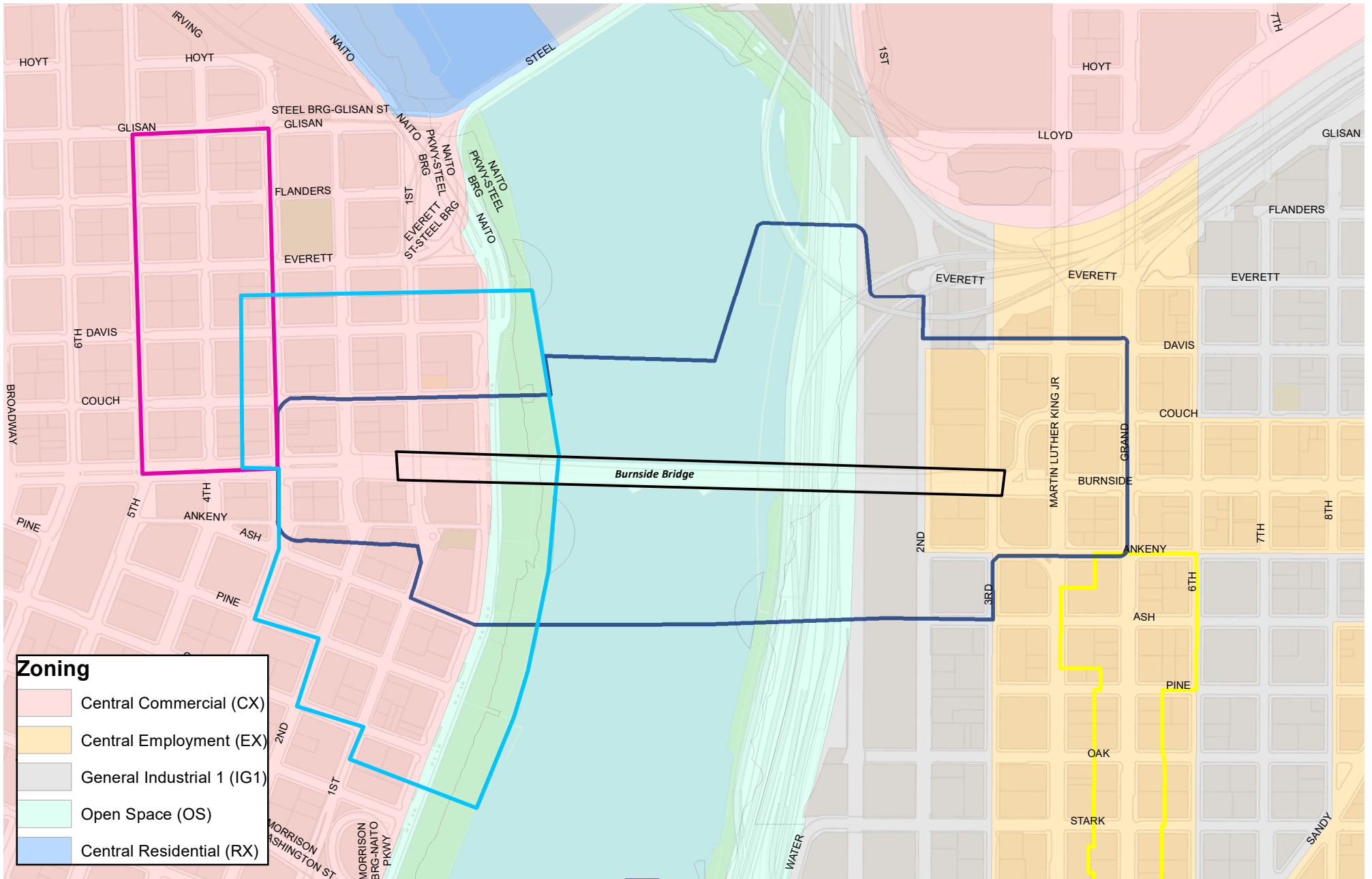
SECTION 106 MITIGATION COMMITMENTS

The Programmatic Agreement provides mitigation to resolve the adverse effect to the Burnside Bridge described in Stipulation II, consisting of the following twelve items:

- i. Archival records
- ii. Documentation
- iii. Publication
- iv. Video documentation
- v. Interpretive displays
- vi. Book update
- vii. Public event
- viii. Salvage and reuse
- ix. Three-dimensional model
- x. Three-dimensional scanning
- xi. Wikipedia entry
- xii. Oregon Encyclopedia entry

FHWA and the Oregon Department of Transportation are ultimately responsible for compliance with Section 106, and have an obligation to ensure Multnomah County implements the mitigation to meet the intent of the Programmatic Agreement. Part of this effort includes the Consulting Parties Advisory Group (Advisory Group), convened as a stipulation of the Programmatic Agreement to help Multnomah County and ODOT determine how the mitigation is carried out.

The Advisory Group has met five times in 2024 and provided input on salvage and reuse, three-dimensional scanning, and interpretive displays. The work plan for the Advisory Group extends through 2028 and will cover all aspects of mitigation for the replacement of the Burnside Bridge. The mitigation addresses the aspects of the bridge considered eligible for listing and goes beyond documentation by including salvaging physical components, creating educational interpretive displays on the new bridge, providing valuable research resources through archival records digitization, and creating a physical three-dimension model.



Zoning

- Central Commercial (CX)
- Central Employment (EX)
- General Industrial 1 (IG1)
- Open Space (OS)
- Central Residential (RX)

- New Chinatown / Japantown Historic District
- Skidmore / Old Town Historic District
- East Portland / Grand Avenue Historic District

Project Area



EQRB
HISTORIC DISTRICTS