



URBAN
DESIGN
STUDIO

Design Central City

Volume I
Discussion Draft
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City of Portland Bureau of
Planning and Sustainability

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Preface

This report is part of a trio of documents prepared for phase one of the *Central City 2035 Plan*, which will update the existing *Central City Plan*, adopted in 1988. Each document provides a foundation for discussion of key issues to be addressed in the creation of a new plan for Portland's Central City. Together, the three documents provide a wealth of essential facts, figures and ideas to help start the in-depth, citywide conversation and spur further ideas.

The *Central City 2035: Introduction* is the main document, supported by two specialized companion documents, *Design Central City* and *Central City 2035 Subdistrict Profiles*. The purpose of each is summarized below.

Central City 2035: Introduction

- Orients the reader to the *Central City 2035* (CC2035) planning process — including study boundary, schedule and planning approach
- Suggests provocative policy concepts to initiate community discussion
- Identifies potential regulatory changes to strengthen connections between policy concepts and implementation strategies

Design Central City

- Frames and assesses the existing urban design context of the Central City
- Identifies current urban design issues, tools, challenges and opportunities
- Suggests three guiding themes — reclaim the river, elevate the east side, and transform the public realm — to stimulate public discussion on the development of a new urban design concept for the Central City

Central City 2035 Subdistrict Profiles

- Provides an “Encyclopedia” of information on existing conditions, historical background and evolution of the Central City as a whole and its eight existing planning Subdistricts
- Provides a policy review of current plans and policies
- Identifies current and future trends for the Central City and each subdistrict

The Central City plays a crucial, unique role in the health and well-being of the City of Portland and the region. New challenges now confront the Central City. To continue to reinforce its key role for the regional economy, land use planning, and air quality, these challenges need to be addressed. They include climate change, jobs and housing for people of all incomes, educational and workforce training to provide economic opportunities for a growing and diverse population, and providing services for those in need.

To address these challenges, the *Central City Plan* needs to be updated now. It has been more than 20 years since it was adopted and about 88 percent of the *Central City Plan* recommended “action items” have been completed (or at least begun). The time is now for recalibrating the policies and objectives to meet the Central City's needs for the next 25 years. City staff has been gathering background information, recording issues to be addressed in a new plan, and producing the documents listed above to start the community discussion for updating the *Central City Plan*.

WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT

This document, *Volume I*, is intended to establish the existing urban design context for the Central City and propose new guiding themes to help frame the Central City 2035 planning process.



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The introduction includes the purpose of the document, assumptions, and a description of urban design in the Central City.



CHAPTER 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

This chapter identifies and describes the existing urban design context in Central City: the starting place for considering future urban design concepts. It concludes with a diagram identifying the Central City's urban design opportunities and constraints moving forward in the *Central City 2035* planning process.



CHAPTER 3: EMERGING ISSUES

Based on the information described in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the major urban design issues facing the Central City today and proposes three guiding themes for future urban design concept development work. These issues are organized around the river, the east and west sides of the river, and the public realm.



CHAPTER 4: URBAN DESIGN TOOLS

This chapter describes and explores the current urban design tools as a way to address the preceding issues.



CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter describes the primary findings from the report. It also offers preliminary Urban Design concept ideas.

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Executive Summary

The success of Portland's Central City as a place is the result of coordinated and intentional urban design, land use and transportation planning. Future urban design efforts in the Central City must be built on the solid structure of this past work while embracing new techniques, approaches and strategies to address a series of new challenges and opportunities. Acknowledging and respecting the existing urban design context of the Central City while boldly envisioning the future will focus the community on a renewed set of shared objectives. Testing and implementing new urban design methodologies for proactive and cost-effective place-making will once again set Portland ahead of the nation as global climate change forces communities to reconsider priorities for investments.

This staff report is *Volume I* of a two-part series of urban design products that are part of the *Central City 2035* planning process. This volume contains a summary of existing urban design issues facing the Central City today, and recommends a set of guiding themes to guide subsequent discussions on urban design. *Volume II*, to be released later, will offer new concepts and a series of provocative ideas to prompt discussion on tradeoffs and priorities during the later and more site-specific phases of the *Central City 2035* process.

Key Findings

1. One size does not fit all.

The Central City's current urban design strategies include a singular "red crescent" of development density stretching across the Willamette, a unilateral step-down-to-the-river policy, and a single center located on the west side of the river around Pioneer Courthouse Square. While these strategies were critical in the mid to late 1980s to get the community galvanized around basic principles, they are no longer adequate to address the complexity of today's urban design challenges.

2. There are opportunities for 'intervention' and 'invention'.

Within the Central City's extensive existing built fabric of districts, neighborhoods and places — and even many of the oldest parts of the Central City — there are numerous infill sites ready for new, developed interventions. In addition, larger unbuilt portions of the River, South Waterfront and Lloyd Districts (among others) remain, offering broader landscapes within which new urban design paradigms — inventions — should be encouraged and tested.

3. Urban design implementation tools should be recrafted.

Currently, the public agencies working in the Central City feature an arsenal of regulations, guidelines, incentives, review procedures, standards and public and private partnerships crafted to achieve urban design objectives. Over time, many of these have naturally become out of date, overly complicated, redundant, ineffective or irrelevant, and require a re-assessment of the most strategic and cost-effective methods to implement public resources to achieve new urban design objectives in the Central City.

Guiding Themes

This report recommends three design themes for the development of a future urban design concept in the *Central City 2035* process. These are intended to be used as the starting place for a community discussion about the future of urban design direction and priorities in the Central City. Evolution of the urban design issue topics will help direct further analysis and concept alternative development. Specifically, the guiding themes are to:

1. RECLAIM THE RIVER.

The Willamette River is the Central City's primary urban form-giving element, and needs to be engaged with a more diverse set of urban relationships and responses. The Central City's generally parallel orientation to the river must be turned 90 degrees at key locations and corridors, and opportunities need to be explored for new water-based activities, waterfront events, environmental enhancements, and urban places that sensitively frame and reflect the significance of the river.

2. ELEVATE THE EAST SIDE.

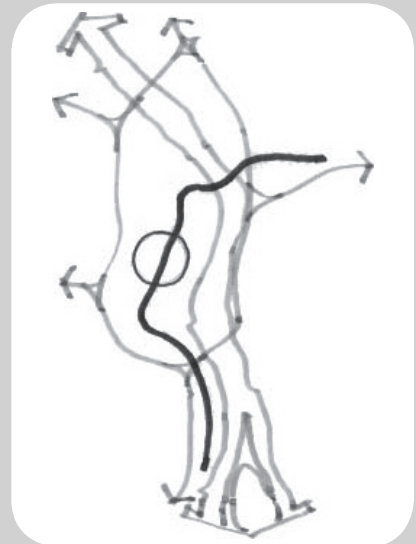
While the west side of the Central City will continue to strengthen its districts and redevelopment centers, the east side is poised to take advantage of its unique connections, urban patterns and land use opportunities. Major transportation investments in streetcar service will connect the Rose Quarter to the Powell Triangle area, and a light rail extension will connect PSU, OHSU and OMSI to the City of Milwaukie. Focusing on the creation of a true "center", a new public open space system and a high density residential neighborhood in the Lloyd District will capitalize on the extensive existing network of transportation infrastructure. This will offer an east side counterbalance to the west side Central City mixed use districts.

3. TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC REALM.

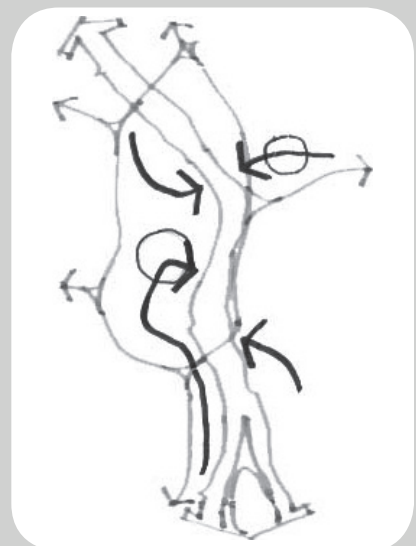
Enhancing and clarifying the different roles of streets and open spaces will strengthen the Central City's public realm. A clear hierarchy for the Central City's street network will build on the character and functions of the existing street system and better target complementary land uses. Identifying new opportunities for distinct and spatially organized urban open spaces and linking them to the existing system will enhance the livability for future Central City residents, workers and visitors.

BIG IDEAS

Before



After



Moving forward, the Central City's urban forms and activity must more directly engage the Willamette River, the different qualities of both sides of the river must be acknowledged and strengthened, and a new hierarchy for the City's streets and open spaces must be implemented.



Moving Forward

This document, *Volume I*, is intended to establish the existing urban design context for the Central City and propose new guiding themes to help frame the *Central City 2035* planning process.

Building on the response and direction of *Volume I*, *Volume II* of *Design Central City* will refine new urban design concepts and ideas, as well as implementation strategies. The purpose of the new ideas and concepts is to spark discussion and debate over the merits, tradeoffs and issues related to one urban design concept versus another. An iterative refinement process will yield a new urban design concept for the Central City. The implementation strategies will be provided as ideas for near-term realization of the urban design themes, consistent with the larger vision.

1. INTRODUCTION

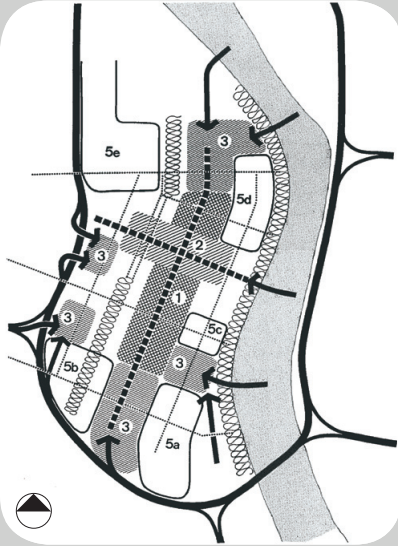
This staff report is intended to help frame many of the anticipated urban design and urban form discussions as part of the *Central City 2035* planning process. It identifies the Central City's existing urban design context, new opportunities for distinct places and connections, as well as the key current urban design issues. Much of this report builds on the work of two preceding documents, the *Central Portland Urban Design Assessment* of 2008, and the *Central Portland Development Capacity Study* of 2007.



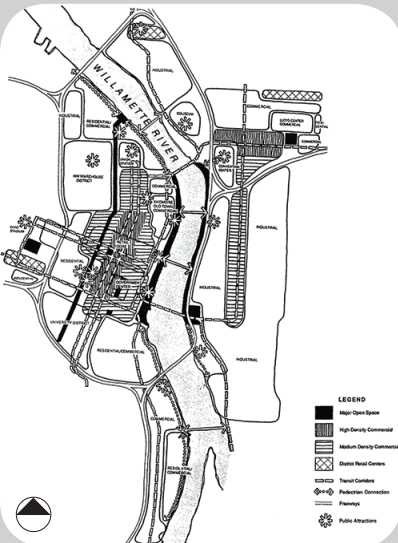
CONTEXT

1972 DOWNTOWN PLAN CONCEPT

The *Downtown Plan* prioritized citizen involvement, pedestrian activity, and the creation of a core that fostered a variety of activities.

**1988 CENTRAL CITY PLAN CONCEPT**

The *Central City Plan's* "Concept Plan" is intended to illustrate and summarize the major elements of the plan. It spreads the 1972 *Downtown Plan's* conceptual thinking north, south, west, and across the river east to include the larger Central City Plan area.

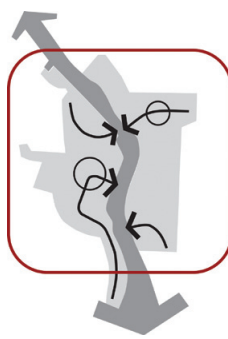
**Purpose**

This document, *Design Central City, Volume I*, is a staff report produced by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's Urban Design Studio. It outlines the urban design background and existing context in the Central City and identifies key urban design issues affecting the area today. Initially, this document is envisioned to be used as a guidebook for the *Central City 2035* stakeholder groups, with eventual distribution to a broader citywide audience. This document is intended to help focus the discussion on the major urban design challenges and opportunities in the Central City today, to be explored during the *Central City 2035* planning process.

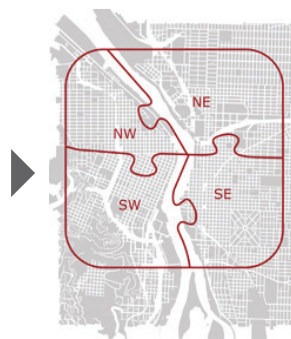
Anticipated Outcomes

Design Central City, Volume I proposes a set of guiding themes intended to frame public discussions that will result in a new urban design concept for the Central City.

Design Central City, Volume II, produced later in the Central City urban design concept development phases, will compile specific design strategies and concept alternatives for targeted sites and districts around the Central City. These more specific visions will be tested and refined during the quadrant plan work, resulting in an individual urban design framework plan for each quadrant. Combining all four quadrant plans will yield an urban design framework plan for the entire Central City, with a strategic list of urban design implementation projects and place-making improvements to follow.



1

Central City
Urban Design Concept

2

Integrated Quadrant
Framework Plans

3

Strategic Implementation
and Placemaking

Urban Design in Portland's Central City

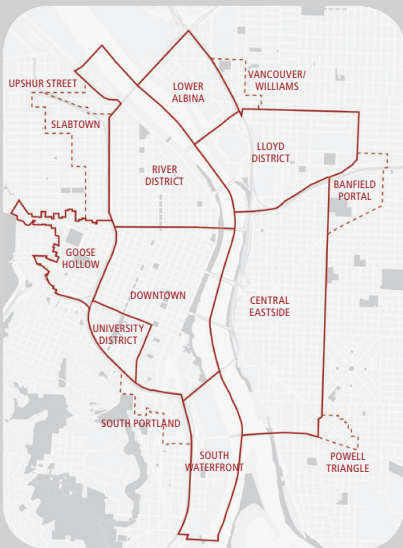


The concept for Portland's 1972 *Downtown Plan* used urban design to strengthen and build the downtown around a shared set of objectives. This concept became Downtown's fundamental guide for form and policy, and it remains a powerful influence on Portland's Central City. Through the *Downtown Plan* and subsequent plans, urban design has provided an effective

approach for stakeholders — public agencies, property owners, and the community — to describe and shape the future of the Central City's districts and neighborhoods.

The *Downtown Plan* embraced and built on its unique urban pattern. The Central City's iconic character is defined by 200' by 200' blocks — the smallest of any major metropolitan area in the United States — and a tight network of streets. This special urban fabric has helped to cultivate the Central City's international identity as a compact, walkable and human-scaled center, defined by a vibrant pedestrian environment.

THE CENTRAL CITY



The area currently defined by the Central City Plan District boundary. The *Central City 2035* planning process will set policy for this area as well as the possible addition of some to-be-determined study areas.

As new districts begin to emerge in the Central City with opportunities for more flexibility in the urban form and public realm, future decisions will need to balance this existing urban pattern while responding to long-term aspirations and values. *Central City 2035* presents an opportunity to build on the successes of past urban design tools, such as the concept plan, and to consider the implementation of new tools to carry out shared urban design objectives.

SETTING

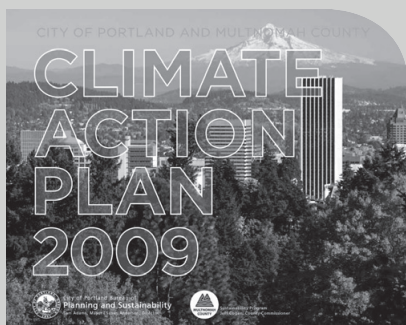


Portland's Central City includes the oldest parts of Portland, which are concentrated around the Yamhill and Skidmore/Old Town Historic Districts along the waterfront. The first settlers from the east coast strategically sited the city along the banks of the Willamette River, at the farthest point upstream attainable by the deep draft ships of the mid to late 19th century. It is also at the northern edge of the Willamette River Valley, a vast agricultural resource to this day, and at a key junction between multiple rail lines, facilitating the transfer of goods from one mode of transport to another.

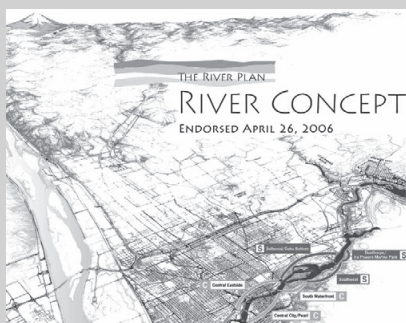
The Central City is nestled against the green backdrop of the West Hills, which frame the last reaches of the Willamette River before its confluence with the Columbia River. Its tall buildings, active streets and urban parks are juxtaposed against expansive natural areas, such as Forest Park, Ross Island, Oaks Bottom, and the Willamette River. Signature views of iconic mountains, including Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens are also essential ingredients of this rich context.

Much of the rest of the city radiates from the Central City. This "hub and spoke" pattern is consistent with the Central City's scale of development and evolution into Oregon's densest center for commerce, entertainment, and residential living.

INTEGRATED PLANS



Central City 2035, and *Design Central City* are guided by the global objectives outlined in the *Climate Action Plan* adopted in 2009. The *Climate Action Plan* is the result of collaboration among members of the public, businesses, non-profit organizations and public agencies. The Plan builds directly on the work of prior climate-protection plans, adopted in 1993 and 2001, and on the 2007 recommendations of the Peak Oil Task Force. In 2007, Portland City Council and the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners adopted resolutions directing staff to design a strategy to reduce local carbon emissions 80 percent from 1990 levels by 2050.



Central City 2035 integrates the Central Reach of the *River Plan*, which roughly stretches from the Fremont Bridge to the Ross Island Bridge and includes the South Waterfront District. The River Concept, adopted in 2006, states:

"The Central Reach will continue to be a highly urban, regional center with a waterfront that is the city's main civic space and a regional attraction. Access to the river and public use of the waterfront will improve through new development and transportation improvements, eventually including changes to Interstate 5."



Assumptions

The current recession, the significant downturn in the housing market, and the ongoing loss of jobs have all had widespread detrimental effects on the economic climate of the city. The factors below suggest that building on the existing fabric will strengthen the overall character of the Central City and its distinct neighborhoods. The design themes and direction described in this report are based on the following assumptions.

- **The ongoing trend of compact, urban infill development will continue.** As policy continues to discourage an automobile-dominated environment within the transit-rich Central City, a compact, high-density urban environment organized around signature places and transit will take its place. Further, focusing on urban infill at key locations along the river will facilitate the creation of more distinct urban place-making opportunities befitting a true “river city”.
- **Prominent infrastructure is expected to remain.** The I-5 Freeway along the Eastbank Esplanade, as well as the Union Pacific Railroad mainline, are unlikely to move in the timeframe of the *Central City 2035* planning process. These two elements are defining characteristics which limit direct connections to the river from the east side districts. Because of them, there is little development pressure to sufficiently motivate a complete re-envisioning of the Central Eastside Industrial District at the current time. New development of public and private land should embrace this remaining infrastructure, instead of working against it. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to acquire public lands for later redevelopment of the east side that focuses on connecting the river east to Portland’s neighborhoods.
- **Underdeveloped areas have room for more growth.** There is enough development capacity within the current mixed-use zoned portions of the Central City to accommodate projected growth (at the rates experienced through 2007) over the next twenty to thirty years. Growth can be concentrated in under-developed sites currently within the Central City on the west side of the river and in the Lloyd District.
- **Previous public investments have yet to fully leverage private redevelopment.** Central City has not yet realized the full potential enabled by its existing and extensive public investments. Redevelopment on the west side of the Willamette River has been ongoing since the early 1990s, most notably in the River and South Waterfront Districts. However, large swaths of both areas remain to be redeveloped or re-purposed, as well as large swaths of Downtown, Goose Hollow and the West End. On the east side, the Lloyd District and Rose Quarter, despite significant public investments in facilities, infrastructure and planning since the 1980s, have yet to truly exhibit a ‘critical mass’ of redevelopment.



DRAFT FRAMEWORK



A draft Urban Design framework for Central Portland was developed in 2008 as part of the *Central Portland Urban Design Assessment* to begin the discussion of the city’s most important urban design features.

Urban Design Principles

The Urban Design Studio's approach to urban design includes an analysis of existing conditions, the identification of opportunities and constraints, and the development of concept alternatives.

The development of concept alternatives employs the application of the following set of urban design principles. Use of these principles yields the enhancement of existing special places, and the identification of potential new places to be created. Specifically, these principles are:

1. MAKE PLACES FOR PEOPLE.

Develop well-defined public spaces and places created by an integrated design approach to both the public and private realms. A series of distinct places offers residents, workers and visitors a wide range of options and strengthens the diverse character of the Central City.

2. STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS.

Link places for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motor vehicles with compelling, safe and direct connections. Expand the system of green corridors to and through the Central City, offering unique recreational and transportation connections to other citywide destinations and attractions.

3. ENHANCE THE EXISTING.

Strengthen the character of the Central City's existing geography, places, districts and structures. Sensitively integrate new development in historic areas that complements and celebrates the identity of existing resources.

4. EMBRACE THE FUTURE.

Capture and animate new places within the existing urban fabric. Add to and shape the Central City's eclectic skyline and urban form with new uses, buildings, block patterns, structures and densities.

5. LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

Foster Portland's international identity as the premier green city, where vibrant, active neighborhoods are the foundation of a sustainable city. Target pilot projects that integrate Central City's rich urban design heritage with global climate initiatives.

6. MAKE IT HAPPEN.

Provide big picture visions for the future of the Central City and its neighborhoods, but also offer smaller-scale strategies and partnerships for near-term urban design implementation. Build flexibility that is grounded in the big picture.

2. EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Portland's Central City has changed significantly in the 40 years since the 1972 *Downtown Plan*. These evolutionary changes have been shaped by past planning efforts, ever-shifting market forces and trends, and most importantly, the people who live, work and play in the Central City.

Today, the Central City's existing urban design context is made up of multiple elements including distinct places and districts, signature parks and open spaces, attractions, and major corridors and transit infrastructure. These features, when coupled with existing natural systems such as the Willamette River and local topography, comprise the urban design fabric upon which new concepts will be developed.

This chapter discusses the components which make up the urban design context of the Central City. An opportunities and constraints diagram summarizes the principal issues while highlighting new areas for the Central City to target as it continues to evolve into the 21st century.



Primary Urban Design Components in the Central City

The Central City features a series of urban design components that support its existing uses and provide a framework basis for future growth. They are the pieces that fit together to form the existing urban design context of the Central City. They are largely in the public realm, though some, such as “distinct places” or “attractors and icons” may include privately-held properties and buildings. Specifically, these components include:

1. Distinct places.

These places or districts are distinct through a combination of both public and private realm characteristics. Some of the areas feature smaller imageable places within them, such as the NW 13th Avenue Historic District within the larger Pearl District. Others have consistent natural or built characteristics, such as the Willamette River or the Central Eastside Industrial District.

2. Attractors.

These are destinations or features that can be visually or cognitively prominent. They often define the place or district they inhabit. Some of these landmarks are iconic in nature, such as the Tram Tower or the US Bancorp Tower (Big Pink). Others are culturally, historically or architecturally significant, such as the Chinese Classical Garden, Memorial Coliseum, or the Portland Building. Still others draw people from around the region, such as the Oregon Convention Center or Lloyd Center Mall.



NW 13th Avenue Historic District



Portland Aerial Tram tower

3. Major open spaces.

These are prominent and visible parks and open spaces, providing some of Central City's most powerful spatially organizing features. Some Central City neighborhoods, like the Pearl or South Auditorium Districts have developed around them. In other cases, such as Director Park or Pioneer Courthouse Square, the park was reclaimed from a future as a parking facility, to become the focal point for the surrounding urban context.



South Park Blocks

4. Major corridors.

These are the most visible corridors in the Central City, offering powerful community wayfinding features, strong neighborhood identity, and distinctive, busy urban environments. "Major corridors" include large city streets, notable urban views, as well as important pedestrian/bicycle-oriented pathways.



SW Naito Parkway facing north

5. Major transit infrastructure.

These are the light rail (MAX), streetcar system, the transit mall, as well as future high speed and regional rail, and heavy rail alignments. They connect both sides of the Willamette River to other parts of the state and region. This transit system, along with associated station areas, are integral components of the public realm. Station areas in particular offer opportunities in the Central City for local identity, a sense of place, and gathering places.



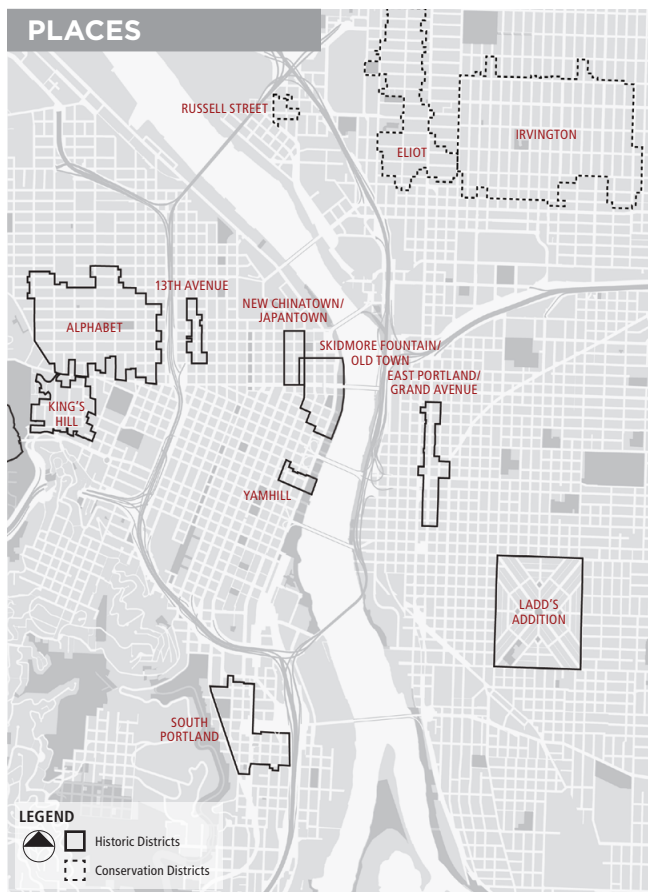
Light rail station at Pioneer Courthouse Square

Places and Attractors

Historic Resources

The Central City has five historic districts within its current boundary: Skidmore/Old Town, New China/Japantown, Yamhill, NW 13th and East Portland/Grand Avenue. The Russell Street Conservation District is also within the Central City, and several other historic and conservation districts can be found clustered at the edges of the boundary, including Ladd's Addition, South Portland, Alphabet and Eliot, among others. All of the Central City's historic districts possess numerous buildings expressing highly distinctive character(s) and a strong sense of place and history.

Most of the Central City's districts do not feature substantially contiguous building frontages along any one (or more) streets. While many of the buildings and/or other important resources have been saved, almost the same amount have been lost, resulting in a prevalent pattern of freestanding or a few clustered buildings surrounded by vacant surface parking lots.



Historic Resources Map

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- A challenge moving forward is the integration of new buildings within these largely incomplete historic urban streetscapes. Recent redevelopment interests in some districts have raised questions about potentially conflicting policy directions regarding historic preservation and the encouragement of high-density infill development. More examples and new strategies are needed for the effective and respectful development of contemporary works of architecture and development that positively enhance the unique character(s) of these vital districts.
- A new generation of places, specifically modern-style and post-WWII designed structures, are now eligible for historic status. Identifying, evaluating and protecting these resources is important to preserve the historic fabric of Central City.
- Since 1988, inner-Portland areas dedicated to industrial use have contracted, putting industrial structures and areas potentially at risk. This is an opportunity to protect and celebrate Central City's shrinking industrial heritage.

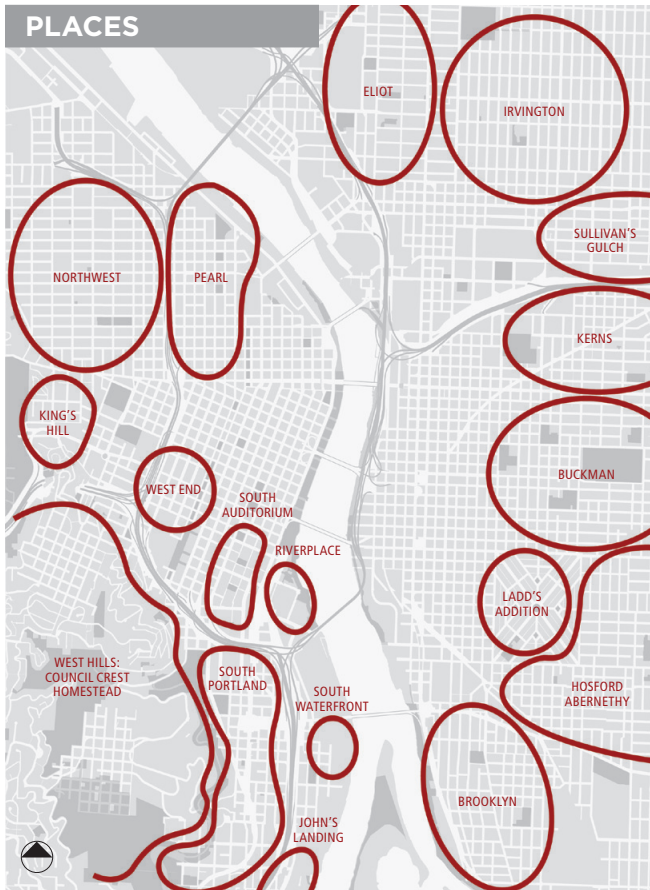
ATTRACTORS



Pietro Belluschi's Equitable Building



Centennial Mills



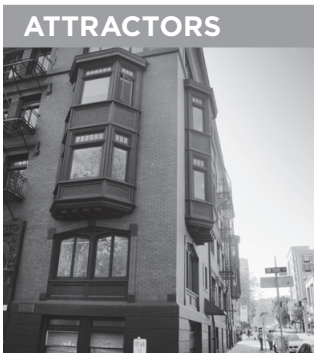
Residential areas in and around Central City

Residential Neighborhoods

The Central City is flanked by streetcar-era residential neighborhoods. In contrast to many of the adjacent neighborhoods, the Central City contains primarily multi-family buildings. It is also much more compact and dense than outlying neighborhoods, with easy access to employment centers and other amenities.

Although mid to high rise residential buildings are scattered throughout Central City, with larger concentrations in the West End, the Pearl District, and South Waterfront, each subdistrict has distinct characteristics which make it stand apart from other neighborhoods. For instance, South Auditorium is comprised of superblocs bisected by pedestrian pathways with dense tree canopy, while the West End's compact blocks line the South Park Blocks.

Besides their open spaces, neighborhoods are often identified by major icons or attractors. Within the Pearl District, for instance, Centennial Mills and the Brewery Blocks help to define the place. Centennial Mills is a future redevelopment site that will take advantage of its location along the river and its industrial heritage. The Brewery Blocks, in addition to local attractors, Powell's Bookstore, is a major retail hub and center of activity.



Older multi-family housing



Industrial building converted into housing



Indigo 12 West residential tower



Contemporary multi-family housing

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Lloyd District, with its extensive transit infrastructure and employment, lacks a strong residential component.
- There is interest to provide community building amenities within the Central City's residential neighborhoods to support the growing number of families. These include community centers, daycare facilities, a K-8 public school facility, and more affordable 3-bedroom units.

Retail and Entertainment

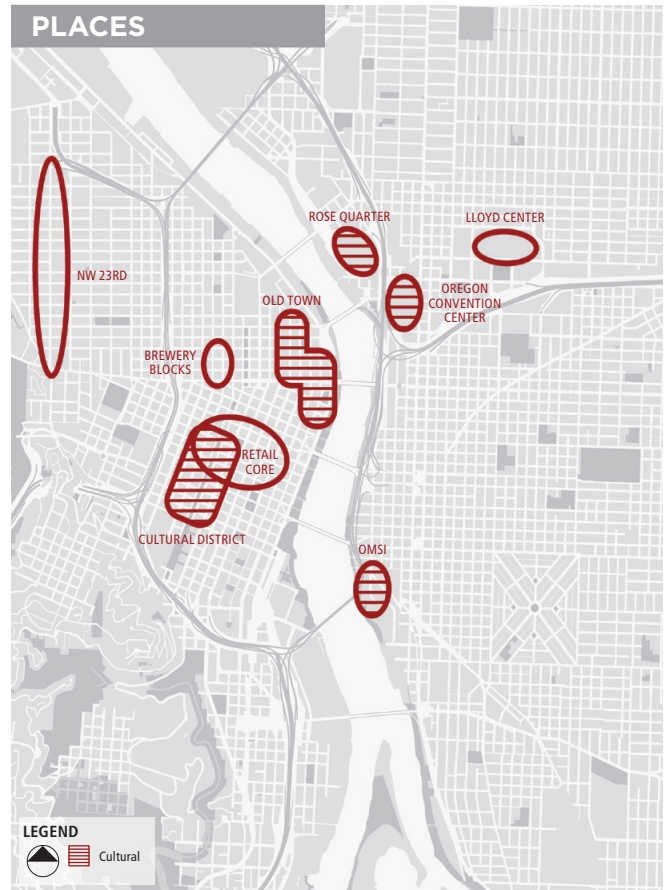
The Central City is a major retail and entertainment hub for the city. The Retail Core in downtown and the Lloyd Center Mall remain regional attractors, while the emergence of the Brewery Blocks in the Pearl District has shifted retail energy northwest of the retail core. Adjacent to the Pearl District is Old Town/Chinatown, which is a destination point with a lively cluster of nightclubs, music venues, restaurants and bars.

The Cultural District in the Central City contains a number of 'high' art institutions, including the Portland Art Museum, Portland Center for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Hall, and the Oregon Historical Society.

Across the river, the Rose Quarter and Lloyd District attract crowds with their tight concentration of major sports, and entertainment and event venues, such as Memorial Coliseum, the Rose Garden Arena, and the Oregon Convention Center.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Large venues in the Rose Quarter and Lloyd District present barriers separating neighborhoods and the Willamette River.
- New activity centers are emerging in the north Pearl District along NW Lovejoy and in the Central Eastside along portions of E Burnside.
- The future Willamette River Bridge, along with OMSI and Portland Opera redevelopment efforts have the potential to reinvigorate the southeast corner of the Central Eastside.



Retail, cultural, and entertainment areas in Central City

ATTRACTORS



Oregon Museum of Science and Industry



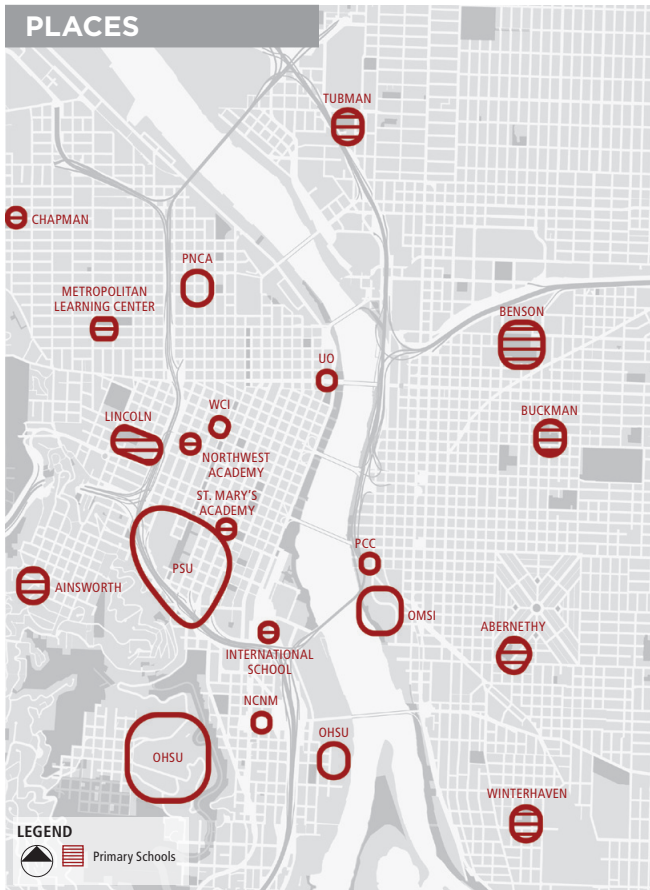
Portland Art Museum



Berbaty's Pan music venue



Rose Garden Arena



Schools in and adjacent to Central City

Education

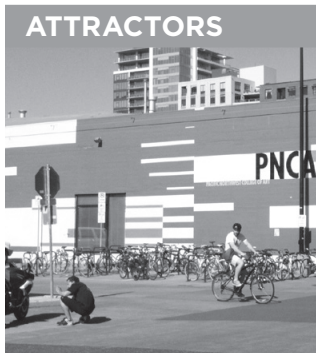
The Central City is surrounded by a series of public elementary schools, but has a shortage within its boundary. However, it does contain a number of private primary schools, such as the Northwest Academy, the International School, and St. Mary's Academy.

Educational institutions are large employers and are highly valued because they often spur economic development activity. Many of them are undergoing planning efforts to expand their campuses, such as Portland State University (PSU).

There are also a number of higher education and specialized schools in Central City, such as the National College of Natural Medicine (NCNM), Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), a branch of the University of Oregon (UO), and Western Culinary Institute (WCI) which all cater to specialized interests.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Since 2000 there have been 1,400 births in the Central City. As this number is expected to continue to rise, more public grade schools may need to be built in the Central City.
- OHSU and OMSI are growing and will be connected by a new multi-modal transit bridge. This will further expand the opportunities for connections and collaboration between Portland State University (PSU), OHSU, OMSI, and Portland Community College (PCC) which together comprise the so-called "Innovation Quadrant".



Pacific Northwest College of Art



Portland State University



Portland Community College
Central Portland Workforce
Training Center



University of Oregon campus



Lincoln High School



National College of
Naturopathic Medicine clinic

Employment

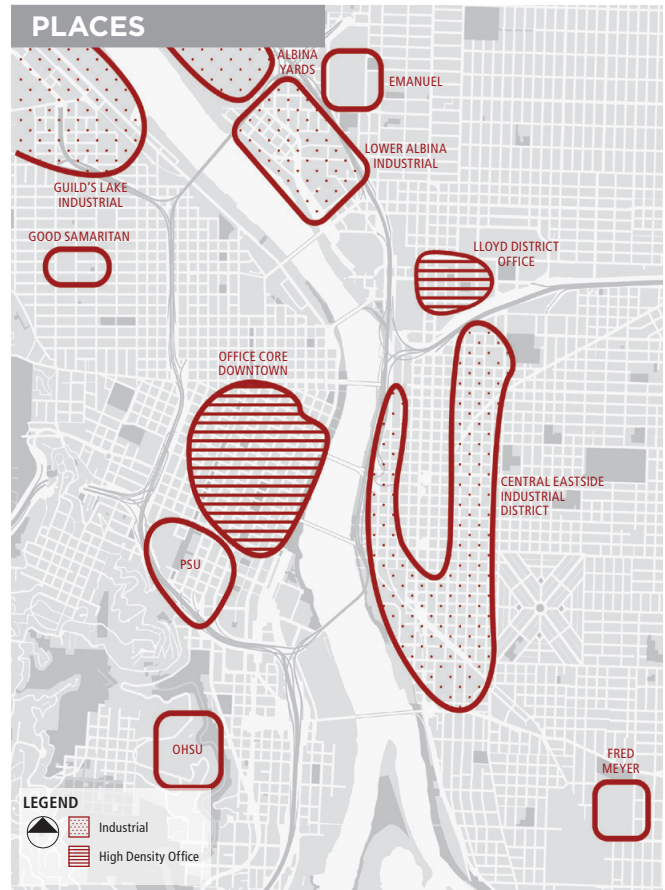
The Central City is a critical employment center for the region. It offers a rich mixture of job choices, including office, retail, and industrial employment.

Large portions of Lower Albina and Central Eastside Subdistricts are part of the city's industrial sanctuary. The Central City is also directly adjacent to two busy industrial districts: Guild's Lake and Swan Island. These industrial districts offer numerous opportunities for living wage jobs.

Legacy Emanuel Hospital, Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital, and the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) are examples of medical centers either adjacent to, or within the Central City. In addition to being large employers, many of these institutions are expanding.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- The Lloyd District has seen slow, but steady, high density office development largely south of Holladay and east of the Convention Center since 1988. This trend will allow more diverse development in coming years, which will meet the needs of new residents and focus the Lloyd District as the hub of the east side.
- Since 2000, many new smaller businesses have been locating in the River or Central Eastside Districts and retrofitting or renovating older buildings.



Office and industrial employment areas in Central City



OHSU Center for Health and Healing



Pioneer Place Mall



US Bancorp Tower also known as Big Pink



New Olympic Mills Commerce Center



Open space in and adjacent to Central City



Tanner Springs Park in the River District



Jamison Square Park in the River District



Pioneer Courthouse Square in Downtown



South Park Blocks in the University District



Caruthers Park in South Waterfront



John Ross Courtyard in South Waterfront

Major Open Spaces

The Central City has a number of signature open spaces. Recent construction of open spaces has added Tanner Springs Park and Director Park, which is entirely hardscaped and will add to the South Park Block system. Aside from Tom McCall Waterfront Park, there is not a significant amount of flexible active recreation space larger than a block. However, numerous schools around the Central City have outdoor fields or other recreation areas.

The Willamette River is surrounded by a three mile Greenway Trail loop that connects Tom McCall Waterfront Park and the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade via the Steel and Hawthorne Bridges.

Overall, the east side of the river has fewer open spaces than the west side. Holladay Park and Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade are the only notable open spaces on the eastside within the Central City.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- A large site north of the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) identified in 1988 to fill the “open space deficiency” in Central Eastside is still available.
- When completed in 2010, the Fields Neighborhood Park in the Pearl will become an active recreational open space.

Major Corridors

In the Central City, “major corridors” include large civic streets, special urban views and important pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

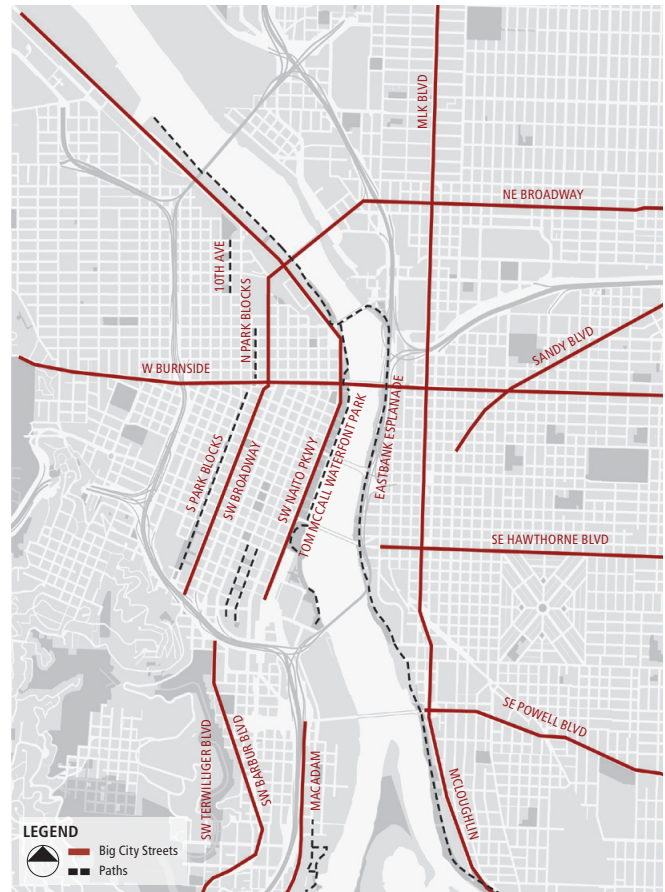
Bigger city streets offer key connections throughout the public realm. They are some of the most central, visible and subsequently active streets in the city. They are part of Central City’s major organizing, prominent, and continuous wayfinding features.

Smaller-scale corridors, such as Central City’s pedestrian pathways, sidewalks, trail facilities, and bike lanes create opportunities for more human connections at an intimate scale.

“Urban views” are smaller-scale views down streets or corridors that offer wayfinding and distinctive visual cues for pedestrians moving through an urban environment. These views help break up the apparent distances of walking paths in the Central City. They also provide visual termini down straight streets and create destinations that help to reinforce a community-scaled sense of place. Examples of urban views include a prominent church bell tower along the Park Blocks, a strategically-located sculpture in the middle of a street, or a building facade that catches sunlight at a different angle due to a shift in the street grid.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Bigger city streets, many of which have “Boulevard” in their name, such as SW Barbur or SE Hawthorne, have little presence inside the Central City’s tight network of narrow streets. Increasing the prominence of these streets could offer clearer hierarchy in Central City’s system of streets.
- The city’s increased interest in the use of green infrastructure in the public right-of-way offers an opportunity for more distinct character.
- The 2030 Bike Master Plan has the potential to further enhance Central City’s system of bike connections.



Major corridors in Central City



Pathway in South Park Blocks



Major corridor W Burnside Blvd facing east



Urban view of the historic Thompson Elk statue and fountain on Main Street



Urban view facing First Congregational United Church of Christ

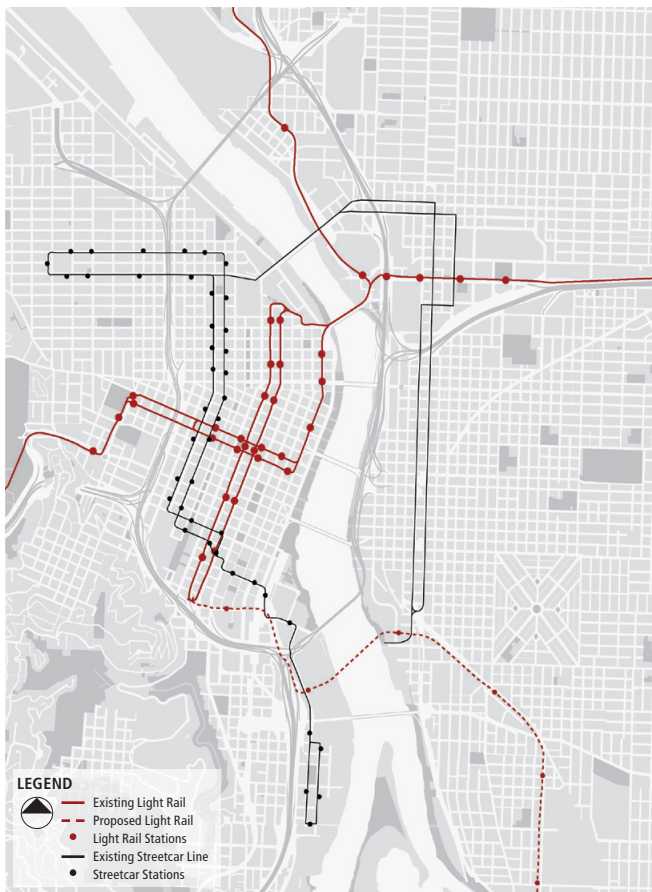
Major Transit Infrastructure

The Central City has benefitted from ongoing improvements to its public transit system. The Portland Transit Mall serves as the region's transit spine for MAX and bus service and as one of the most powerful organizing features in the Central City's urban form.

Major transit infrastructure includes MAX light rail, Portland Streetcar facilities, as well as potential expanded regional and intercity rail connections. Along with the movement of people, transit offers unique placemaking opportunities. Although episodic in nature, transit stations are places where people congregate throughout the day.

Since the 1986 opening of the MAX light rail system over 20 miles of new light rail lines have been added, expanding service to the region as well as to and through the Central City. Pioneer Courthouse Square and the Rose Quarter Transit Center offer transfer opportunities to regional destinations. New and future destinations include service to Milwaukie and Tigard.

In 2001, Portland Streetcar connected Portland State University to the Pearl District and Northwest Portland. Soon thereafter the line was extended to the southern edge of South Waterfront, and will soon cross the Willamette River with the eastside loop that will connect the Lloyd District to OMSI via the MLK/Grand corridor. In addition, the Streetcar System Plan of 2009 identified multiple new potential streetcar lines through the Central City, including Burnside/Couch, SW Columbia/Jefferson, and a NW extension along NW 18th/19th or NW 21st.



Light rail and streetcar alignment and stations in Central City



Transit Mall and MAX at Portland State University's Urban Center

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

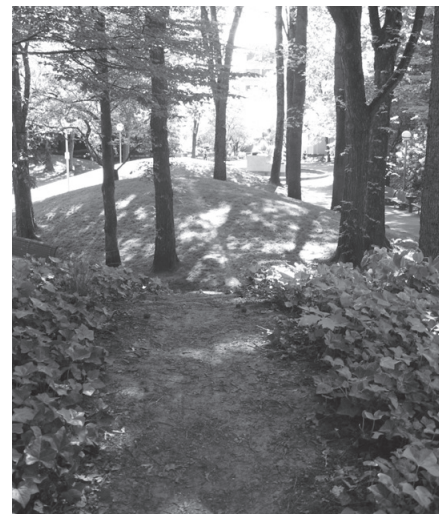
- Regional and intercity rail traffic is expected to increase, as Amtrak and TriMet look to expand service that builds on the regional Amtrak Cascades line and WES facilities. In addition, interest remains in new “high speed rail” service in the Cascadia corridor, between Eugene, OR and Vancouver, B.C., which could mean increased service and activity in the Union Station area of the Central City.
- The possibility of new Bus Rapid Transit service citywide, in addition to expanded light rail and streetcar lines will offer opportunities to create a complementary approach to bus service in Central City.
- The creation of new streetcar lines will create more public space opportunities at station areas and the potential to spur employment oriented development adjacent to OMSI and commercial development along East Broadway Blvd.

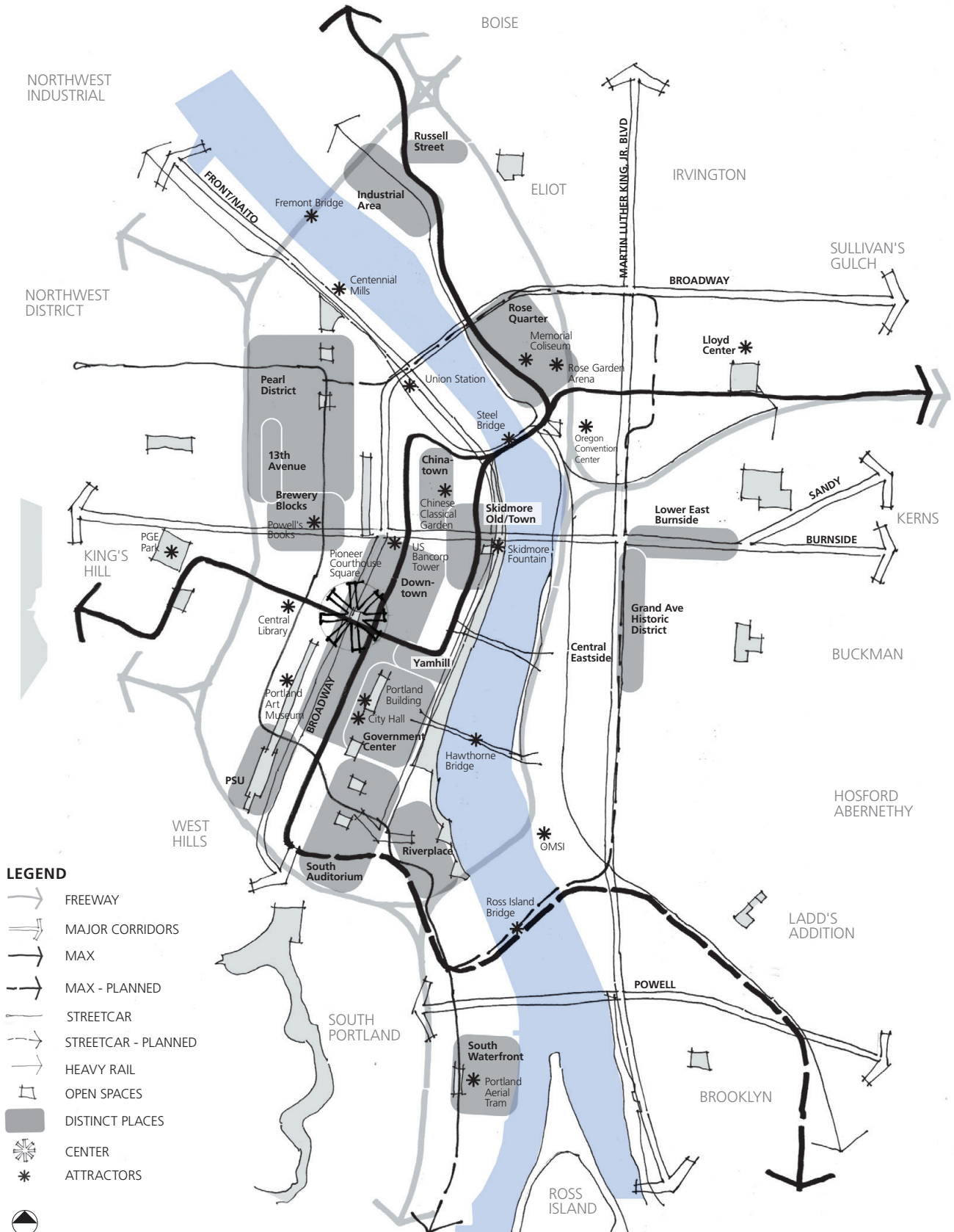
Central City: Existing Urban Design Context

The Central City's current urban design context map shows a synthesis of all the components that help to shape and define the Central City. These elements contribute to the urban design fabric and illustrate the starting point for a discussion on future urban design aspirations.

Since the *Downtown* and *Central City Plans*, the urban design structure of Central City has continued to evolve. Key pieces of the Central City's public infrastructure include places such as the Rose Quarter, South Auditorium, the Pearl District and Lower East Burnside. Many of these areas include opportunities to grow and expand as well as enhance the character that currently exists. Investments in these places will ensure that they will continue to serve as primary framework elements.

The Central City has been shaped by past plans and its own physical characteristics, including block sizes, building sizes, street dimensions, and overall urban form. New urban design concepts will be built and tested on this existing urban design structure, proposing complementary new places to these established districts, areas, open spaces and connections.





Development Capacity

The *Development Capacity Study* identified areas with potential to change. In 2007, this study established that there was sufficient land to satisfy the rapid development rates in the Central City for many years to come. Using the development capacity model, the Bureau identified key sites most likely to develop. A consortium of local architects and developers met in September 2007 to pinpoint an additional set of opportunity areas (areas circled on the map on the far right and listed below). Many of these sites have the potential to affect Central City's future urban form and character. Areas identified are the US Post Office site, land south of OMSI, and the Morrison Bridgehead.

Areas that should be planned for growth as identified on the left

1	River
2	Bridges
3	Con-Way Properties
4	Fremont Bridgehead (West)
5	Centennial Mills
6	US Post Office Site
7	Intersection of SW 10th/Oak
8	Steel Bridgehead (West)
9	Burnside Bridgehead (West and East)
10	Morrison Bridgehead (West and East)
11	Hawthorne Bridgehead (West and East)
12	Innovation Quadrant (IQ): PSU
13	Harbor Blvd and Naito Parkway
14	Rose Quarter/Memorial Coliseum
15	Oregon Convention Center
16	Lloyd Center
17	NE Sandy and NE Burnside
18	IQ: OMSI-Portland Opera
19	IQ: OHSU-Marquam Hill
20	IQ: OHSU-South Waterfront
21	SE Powell Blvd and SE Milwaukee Ave
22	SE Light Rail Transit Crossing
*	I-5 Freeway (Eastbank)
*	Burnside Corridor
*	Martin Luther King Jr. and Grand Corridor

** not shown on map*



The United States Postal Service redevelopment site in the River District



OMSI in the Central Eastside Industrial District along the new Willamette bridge



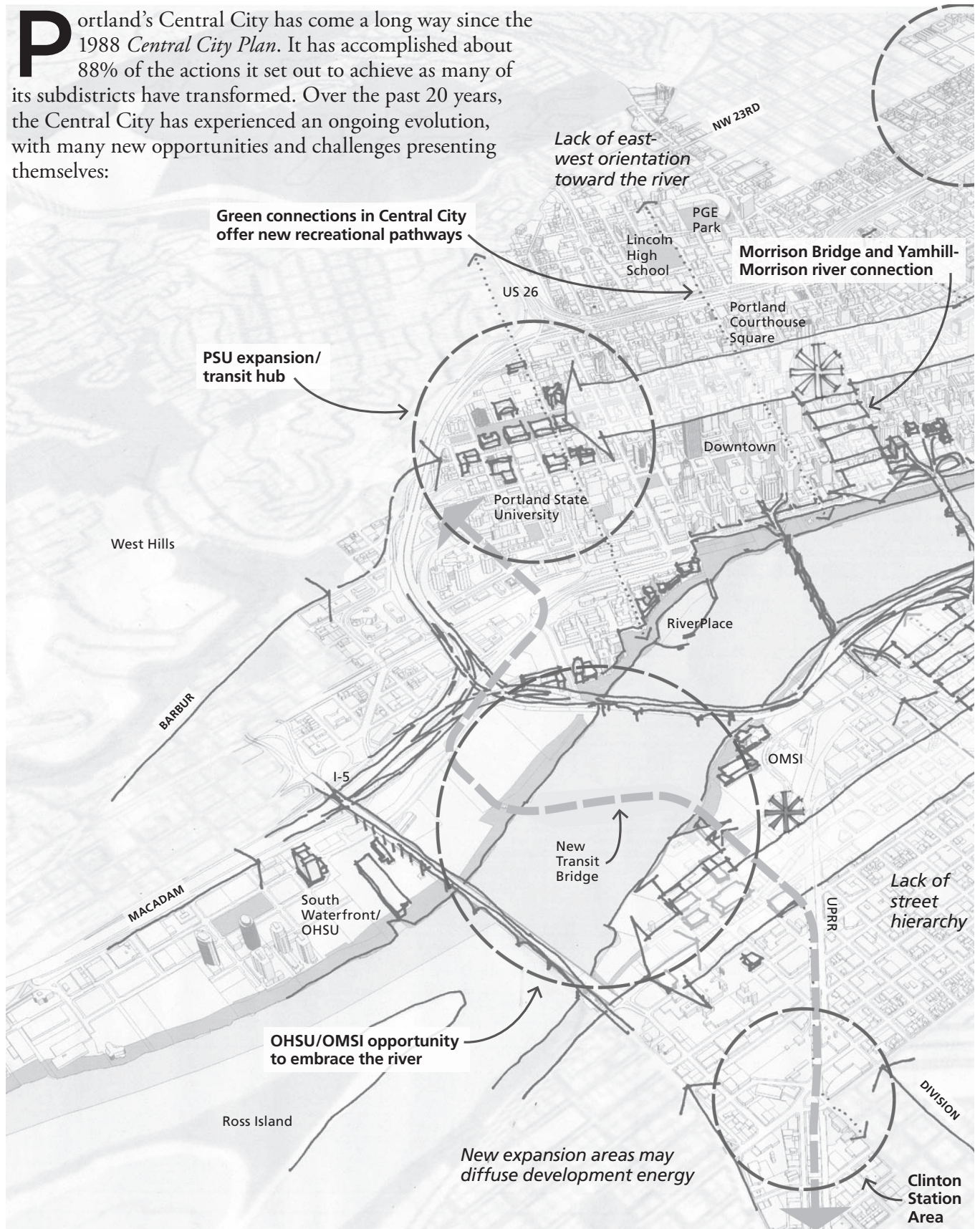
Redevelopment site on the west side of the Morrison Bridge

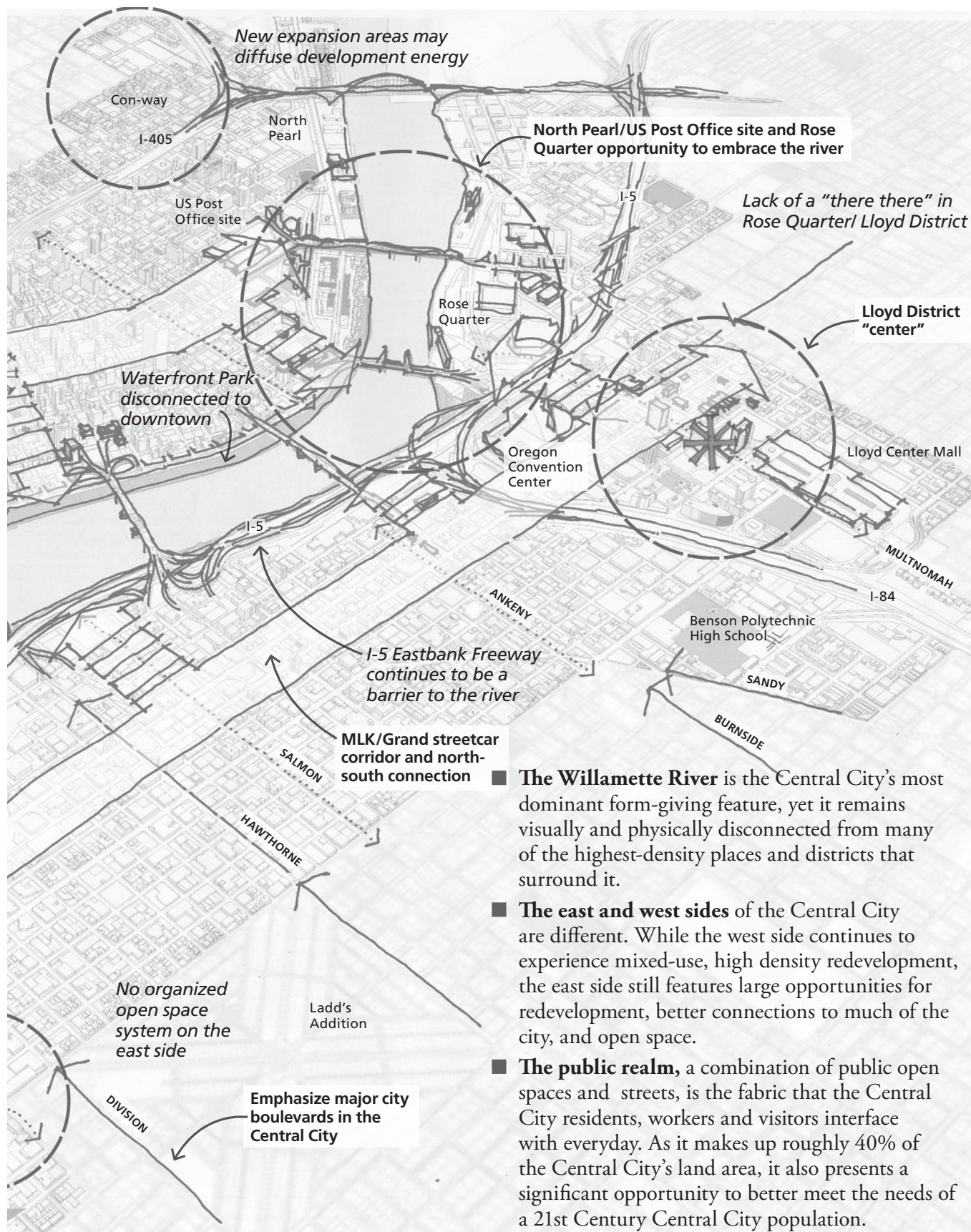


Opportunity Areas

Opportunities and Constraints

Portland's Central City has come a long way since the 1988 *Central City Plan*. It has accomplished about 88% of the actions it set out to achieve as many of its subdistricts have transformed. Over the past 20 years, the Central City has experienced an ongoing evolution, with many new opportunities and challenges presenting themselves:





- **The Willamette River** is the Central City's most dominant form-giving feature, yet it remains visually and physically disconnected from many of the highest-density places and districts that surround it.
- **The east and west sides** of the Central City are different. While the west side continues to experience mixed-use, high density redevelopment, the east side still features large opportunities for redevelopment, better connections to much of the city, and open space.
- **The public realm**, a combination of public open spaces and streets, is the fabric that the Central City residents, workers and visitors interface with everyday. As it makes up roughly 40% of the Central City's land area, it also presents a significant opportunity to better meet the needs of a 21st Century Central City population.

3. EMERGING ISSUES

Following the ideas presented in the Opportunities and Constraints map, this chapter will investigate overarching issues facing the quality of places in Central City, by describing and illustrating current conditions. The issues fall into three topics:

The River

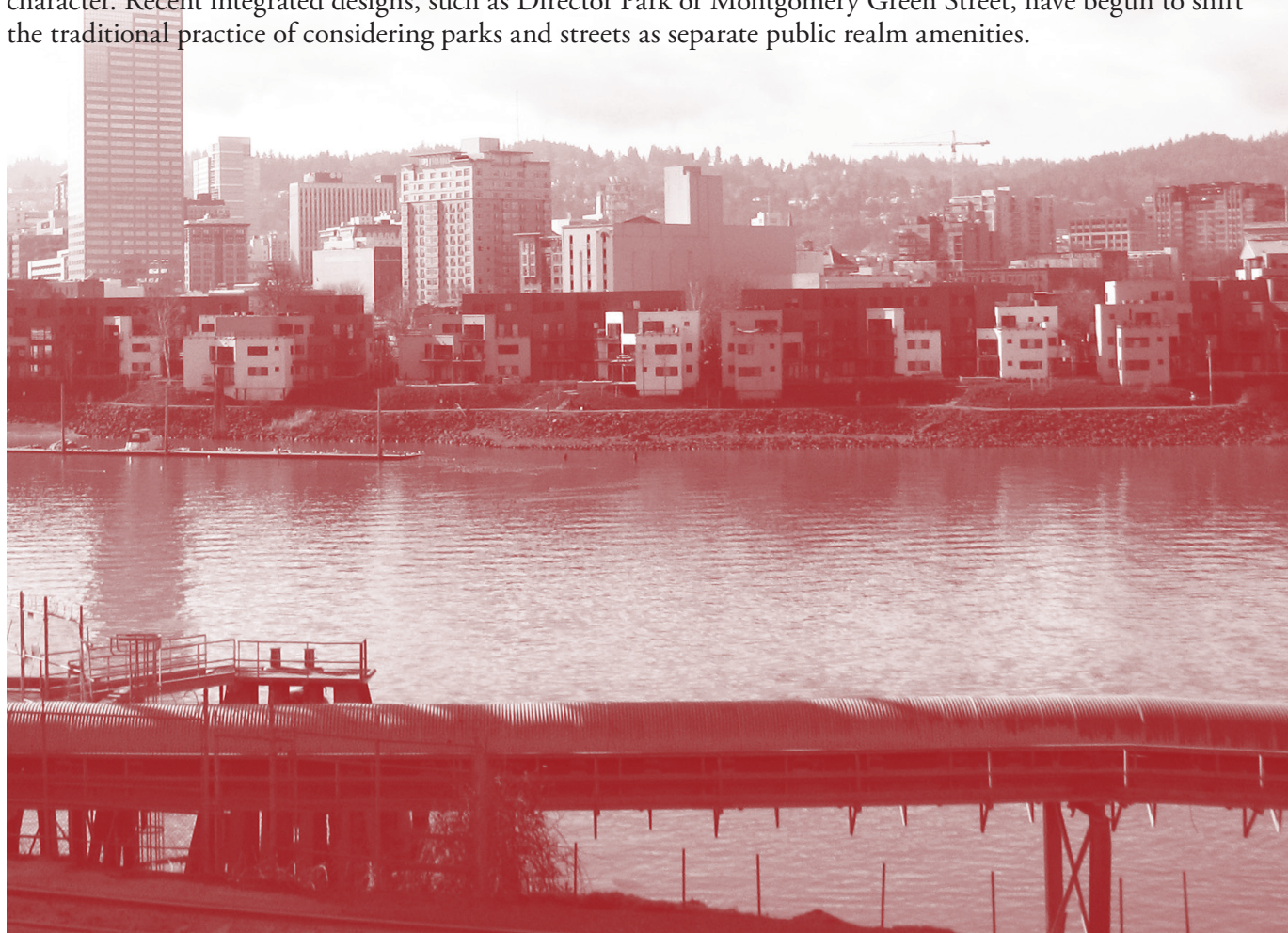
The Willamette River is the Central City's most significant form-giving feature, though it is not the Central City's primary focal point. The river's expansive width of approximately 1,000 feet, its relatively low elevation from Tom McCall Waterfront Park, and the visual and physical barrier of the Eastbank Freeway have made seeing and getting to the river challenging. In addition, the pronounced north-south orientation of Central City, reflected in most major street corridors and the high densities and height allowed along the Transit Mall, emphasize movement parallel and away from the river instead of toward it.

East and West

Most of the planning and development activity since the 1988 *Central City Plan* has occurred on the west side of the river, occurring most notably in the River District and South Waterfront. The Lloyd District on the east side offers roughly 70 acres of redevelopable parcels, representing significant opportunities for potentially transformative changes that would capitalize on the existing network of public transit infrastructure.

Public Realm

The city owns more than 1,000 acres of land in Central City in the form of parks and rights-of-way. However, open space deficiencies identified in the 1988 *Central City Plan* still exist today, such as the Central Eastside. Streets comprise roughly 40% of the Central City, and there is little differentiation in width, function and character. Recent integrated designs, such as Director Park or Montgomery Green Street, have begun to shift the traditional practice of considering parks and streets as separate public realm amenities.



How to Navigate this Chapter

Chapter 3, *Emerging Issues*, is organized around three topics which have been derived from a synthesis of past plans, existing conditions and trends, and opportunities discussed in Chapter 2. Each topic will explore related issues that have an impact on the future urban design of the Central City.

A guiding theme concludes each topic area as a starting point of discussion and concept-building that will evolve as a part of the *Central City 2035* planning process.

ISSUE SUMMARY SIDEBAR:

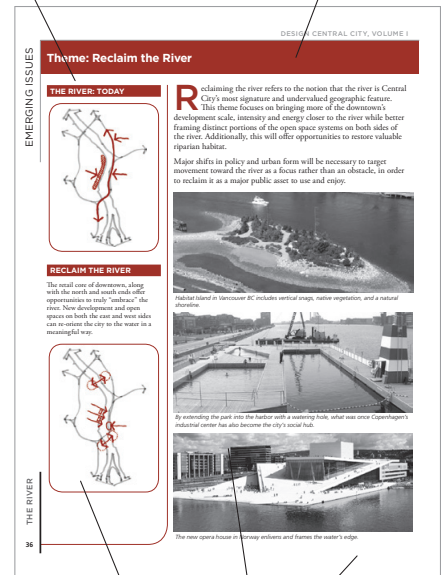
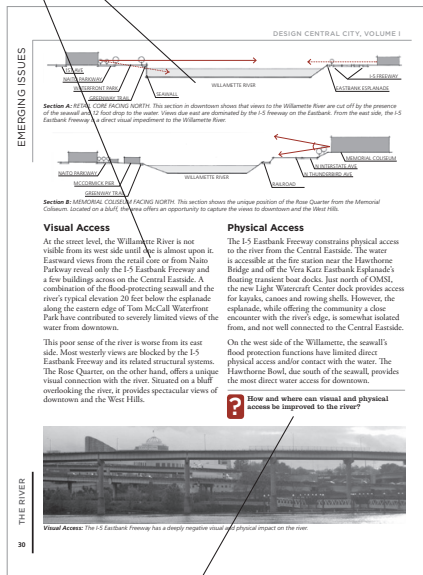
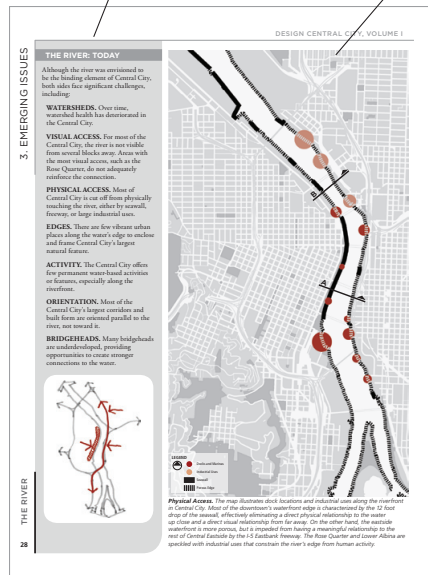
How the Central City is organized around the issue topic today

Issues and images to illustrate the text

GUIDING THEME SIDEBAR:

Describes each guiding theme and proposed concept

GUIDING THEME for each topic



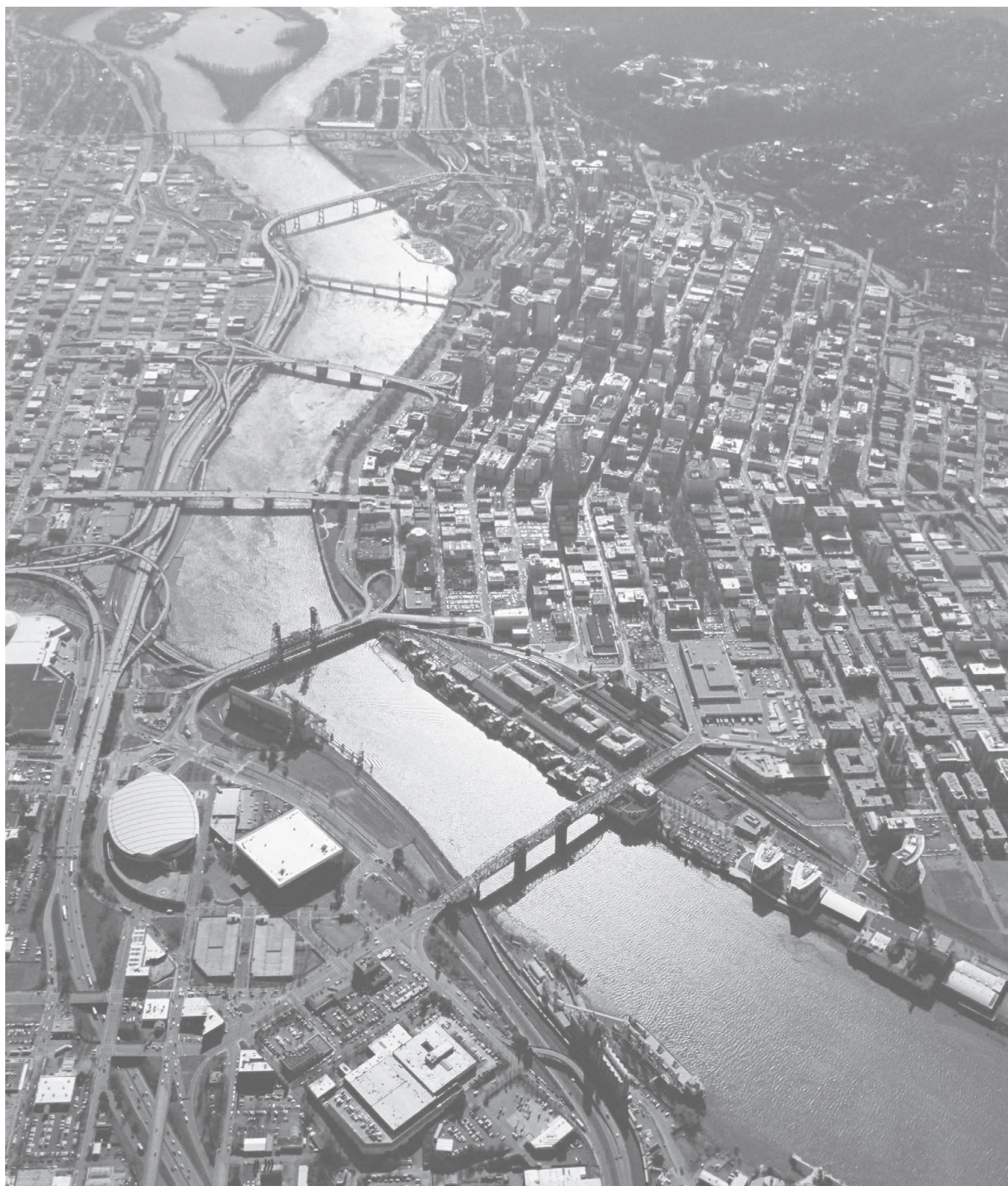
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROPOSED CONCEPT for each theme

Ideas and examples from other cities

The River

The 1988 *Central City Plan* envisioned the Willamette River to be “the City’s focus, with development and activities using and enhancing its significant features.” The river, with approximately four miles of shoreline on each bank, is the most significant urban form-giving geographic feature of Central City.



THE RIVER: TODAY

Although the river was envisioned to be the binding element of Central City, both sides face significant challenges, including:

WATERSHEDS. Over time, watershed health has deteriorated in the Central City.

VISUAL ACCESS. For most of the Central City, the river is not visible from several blocks away. Areas with the most visual access, such as the Rose Quarter, do not adequately reinforce the connection.

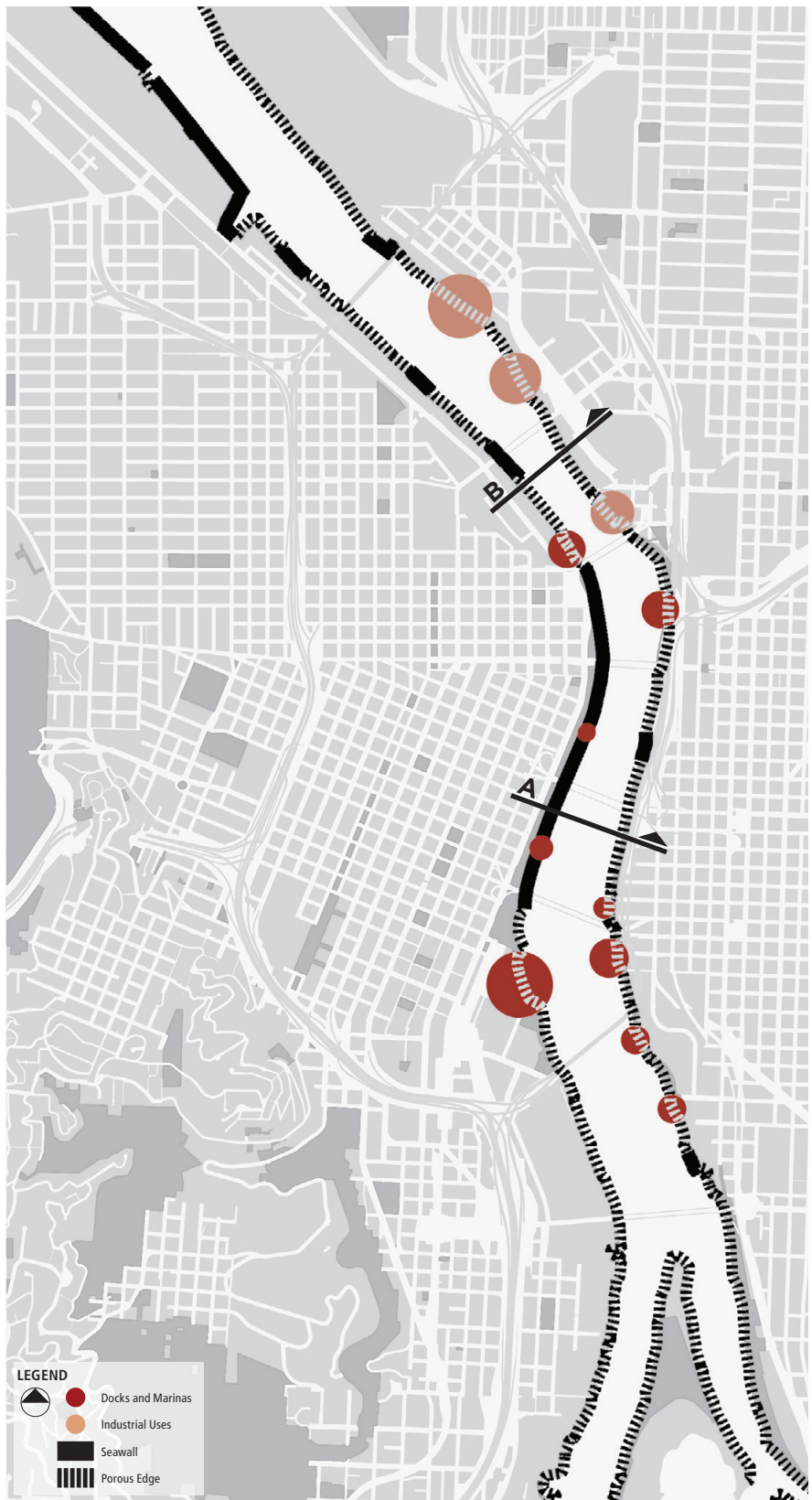
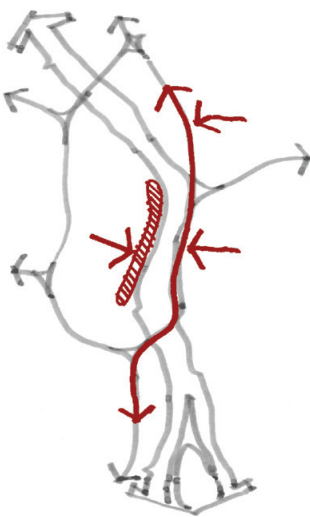
PHYSICAL ACCESS. Most of Central City is cut off from physically touching the river, either by seawall, freeway, or large industrial uses.

EDGES. There are few vibrant urban places along the water's edge to enclose and frame Central City's largest natural feature.

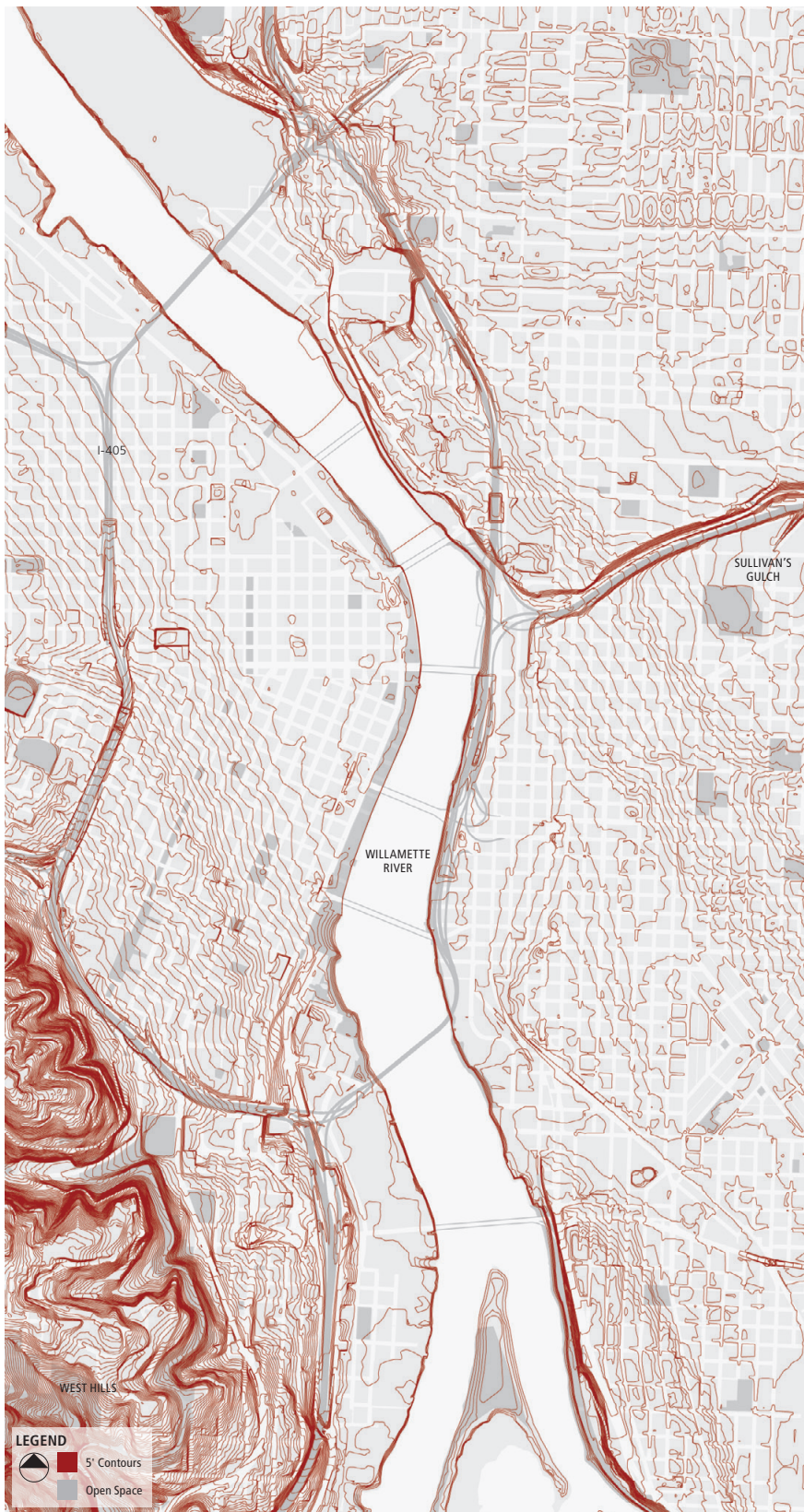
ACTIVITY. The Central City offers few permanent water-based activities or features, especially along the riverfront.

ORIENTATION. Most of the Central City's largest corridors and built form are oriented parallel to the river, not toward it.

BRIDGEHEADS. Many bridgeheads are underdeveloped, providing opportunities to create stronger connections to the water.



Physical Access. The map illustrates dock locations and industrial uses along the riverfront in Central City. Most of the downtown's waterfront edge is characterized by the 12 foot drop of the seawall, effectively eliminating a direct physical relationship to the water and a direct visual relationship from far away. On the other hand, the eastside waterfront is more porous, but is impeded from having a meaningful relationship to the rest of Central Eastside by the I-5 Eastbank freeway. The Rose Quarter and Lower Albina are speckled with industrial uses that constrain the river's edge from human activity.



Topography

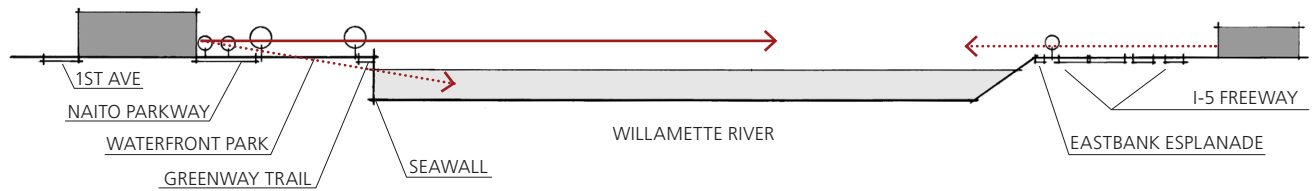
Watersheds

Within the Central City, the Willamette River is approximately 4 miles in length and occupies approximately 470 acres of area, or almost 20% of the Central City Plan District. The Central City includes six subwatersheds that drain to the Willamette River.

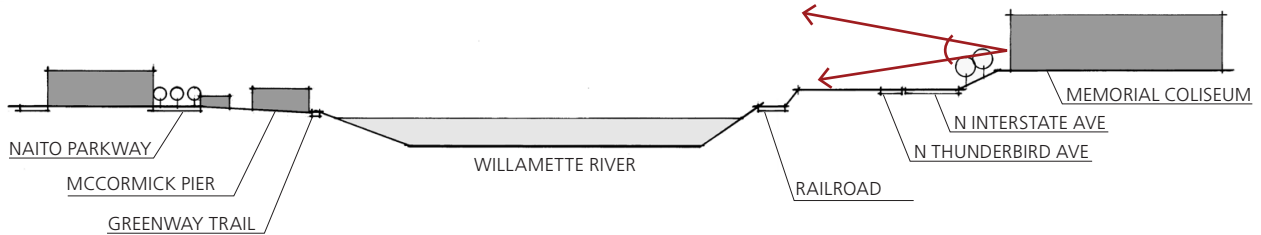
Over time the Central City's developed areas cover approximately 30 to 50 inches of fill where the original soil has been removed by cutting or grading. Highly impervious surface conditions dominate the Central City.

Within the Central City and harbor areas, the river's banks are typically steep and are primarily composed of bank stabilization and fill materials such as sheet pile, riprap, seawall and concrete fill. Less than one-third of the mainstem Willamette's banks in the Central City are in a natural condition; the rest have been hardened with concrete or other materials or developed with docks, piers, and other human-made structures that limit watershed functions. Riparian vegetation is generally sparse to absent and frequently consists of non-native plants and shrubs.

? How can the Willamette's natural health be improved along the most urban reach of the river?



Section A: RETAIL CORE FACING NORTH. This section in downtown shows that views to the Willamette River are cut off by the presence of the seawall and 12 foot drop to the water. Views due east are dominated by the I-5 freeway on the Eastbank. From the east side, the I-5 Eastbank Freeway is a direct visual impediment to the Willamette River.



Section B: MEMORIAL COLISEUM FACING NORTH. This section shows the unique position of the Rose Quarter from the Memorial Coliseum. Located on a bluff, the area offers an opportunity to capture the views to downtown and the West Hills.

Visual Access

At the street level, the Willamette River is not visible from its west side until one is almost upon it. Eastward views from the retail core or from Naito Parkway reveal only the I-5 Eastbank Freeway and a few buildings across on the Central Eastside. A combination of the flood-protecting seawall and the river's typical elevation 20 feet below the esplanade along the eastern edge of Tom McCall Waterfront Park have contributed to severely limited views of the water from downtown.

This poor sense of the river is worse from its east side. Most westerly views are blocked by the I-5 Eastbank Freeway and its related structural systems. The Rose Quarter, on the other hand, offers a unique visual connection with the river. Situated on a bluff overlooking the river, it provides spectacular views of downtown and the West Hills.

Physical Access

The I-5 Eastbank Freeway constrains physical access to the river from the Central Eastside. The water is accessible at the fire station near the Hawthorne Bridge and off the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade's floating transient boat docks. Just north of OMSI, the new Light Watercraft Center dock provides access for kayaks, canoes and rowing shells. However, the esplanade, while offering the community a close encounter with the river's edge, is somewhat isolated from, and not well connected to the Central Eastside.

On the west side of the Willamette, the seawall's flood protection functions have limited direct physical access and/or contact with the water. The Hawthorne Bowl, due south of the seawall, provides the most direct water access for downtown.



How and where can visual and physical access be improved to the river?



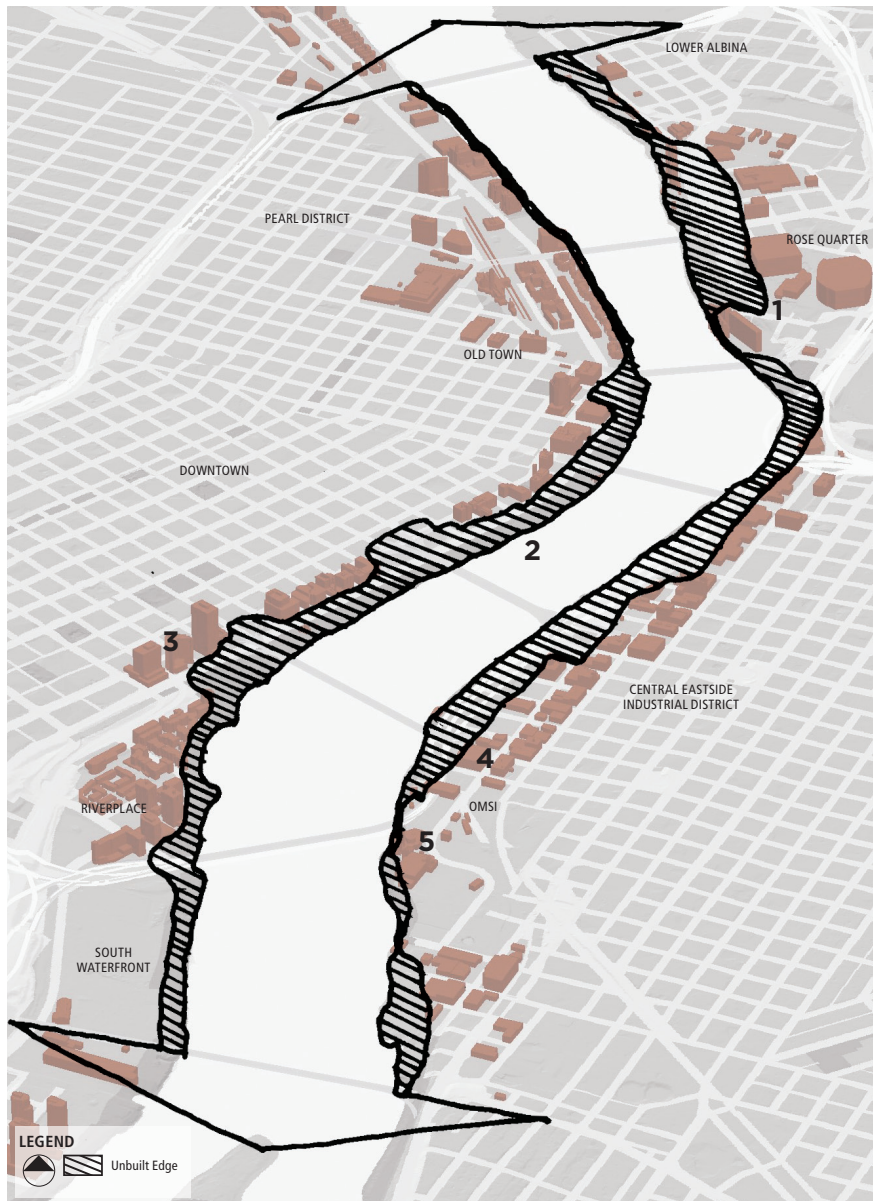
Visual Access: The I-5 Eastbank Freeway has a deeply negative visual and physical impact on the river.

Edges

The Willamette River's edges are framed by Tom McCall Waterfront Park and Naito Parkway to the west and the I-5 Eastbank Freeway to the east. In addition, the *Central City Plan* introduced the policy of “stepping down to the river”, where building heights step down in scale close to the river.

Because the Willamette River is a wide river — it is typically close to 1,000 feet from bank to bank — its large scale, along with lower building heights and open space, Naito Parkway, and the freeway along its edges have further expanded its width.

In effect, the city's built form has limited its ability to reach the river and effectively frame it, creating vibrant urban places.



River Urban Form. This diagram illustrates how a lack of enclosure of built form on the river throughout most of the downtown (and Central Eastside, due to the freeway) widens the perceived span of the river. It also limits the amount of people having daily contact with the river other than recreationists because there is no other formal use to generate critical mass and activity along the water.



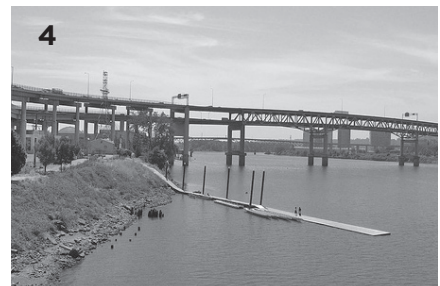
Louis Dreyfus grain elevators



Seawall north of the Morrison Bridge



Marina and Hawthorne bowl



Dock



USS Blueback submarine (OMSI)

Photos above illustrate some of the various edge conditions along the Willamette River in Central City

Activity

People are attracted to active, vibrant, and healthy waterfronts, creating the need for a variety of activities on the river itself and edge uses that compliment such activity. The range of functional and recreational activities all contribute to the river's cumulative appeal. Despite having a long stretch of the Willamette River as its front yard, few locations respond directly to river activity.

Though Tom McCall Waterfront Park frequently hosts a variety of events, its limited physical access to the river results in a somewhat introverted program with few water-based events that specifically engage the river. This large expanse of programmable open space along the water is an opportunity to refocus Central City on the river.

There are also few concentrations of mixed-use development that fully engage the river, where a critical mass of people and activity can help better activate it. Some of this is impeded by Central City's current policy of stepping down the height of development to the river. In other locations, it is the presence of large infrastructure such as Naito Parkway to the west and the Interstate 5 Freeway to the east that keep access or activity from the river.

Developing more connections to maritime activities on the Willamette would also strengthen Central City's relationship with the river and reflect its river-based industrial heritage. Few dock locations offer transient and long term berthing. These include the Portland Spirit docks, the RiverPlace marina, and the Light Watercraft Center docks.

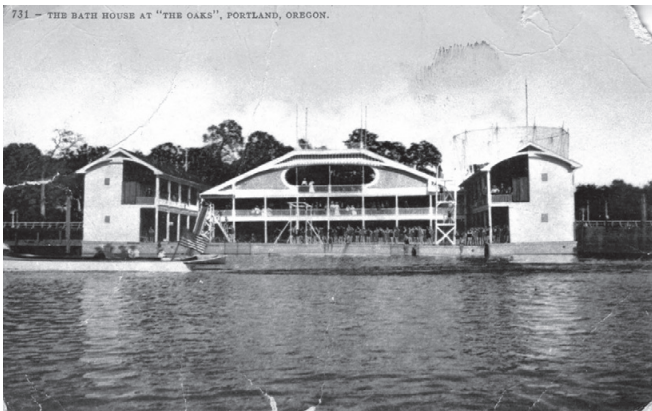


Although the seawall does not allow direct physical contact with the water, it allows ships to dock during Rose Festival and other events. More marine activity at the seawall could attract people toward Waterfront Park and the river more regularly.

In addition, creating more opportunities to integrate enhanced habitat for fish and wildlife would promote watershed health. There are many areas along the waterfront where current restoration and habitat enhancement efforts could also serve a more prominent education and outreach function.



How can the forms, activity and energy of the Central City better enclose and engage the river?



At the turn of the century, and in addition to numerous industrial docks and warehouses, Portland featured public-oriented facilities on the river's edge, such as this bath house and boat dock at "The Oaks" for swimming and light watercraft. These and other kinds of public amenities encourage more activity at the water's edge (as well as on it), while helping to cultivate a broader community stewardship of the water.





Orientation. The map identifies the north-south orientation of major geography and infrastructure in Central City. The West Hills, I-405, North and South Park Blocks, Transit Mall, Tom McCall Waterfront Park, Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade, the I-5, and the MLK/Grand corridor are all oriented north-south and parallel to the river. The retail core stretches east-west toward the river but stops short of reaching the river by a few blocks, and the MAX line follows suit, turning north along SW 1st Avenue.

Orientation

The Willamette River in Central City has a north-south orientation. Many of the defining features, natural and built, of Central City are oriented north-south, like the Willamette River itself. The river, West Hills, the I-405 Freeway, the Park Blocks, the Transit Mall, Tom McCall Waterfront Park, and even the Martin Luther King Jr. and Grand Avenue couplet, are all powerful organizing features in the city. They all have resulted in the Central City's form that largely suggests movement parallel to the river rather than perpendicular toward it.

Further, few, if any, of the east-west streets on either side of the river, actually terminate at the river. The east-west streets on the west side are stopped at Naito Parkway. Only SW Salmon and SW Columbia provide a deliberate visual marker and destination in Tom McCall Waterfront Park. SW Columbia terminates into an understated bicycle and pedestrian entry into the park featuring a large planter.

SW Salmon connects two iconic parks and terminates at the river, extending from Washington Park at the west to Salmon Street Springs in Waterfront Park. This water feature encourages the easterly movement of pedestrians from interior blocks toward the river. Emphasizing SW Salmon into an organizing corridor, similar in character to the Park Blocks, could better orient downtown Portland to the river and create an east-west green "cross-axis" with the park blocks themselves.

The downtown retail core presents another opportunity to create an east-west axis to the river. Arranged around Morrison and Yamhill Streets and currently spanning from approximately SW 2nd to 9th Avenues, the retail core is the strongest east-west organizing element in Central City. This corridor is arguably Central City's highest visibility spine and flanks both the Pioneer Courthouse and Pioneer Courthouse Square.

On the Eastside, the east-west streets are terminated by the Interstate 5 Freeway before they reach the river. Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade, like Tom McCall Waterfront Park, offers a parallel trail along the river, but its relationship to the greater Central Eastside is lackluster. The Rose Quarter's relationship with the river lacks a clear orientation to it though a future public trail has been identified along the waterfront.



How can the urban form of the Central City strengthen connections to the Willamette River?

Bridgeheads

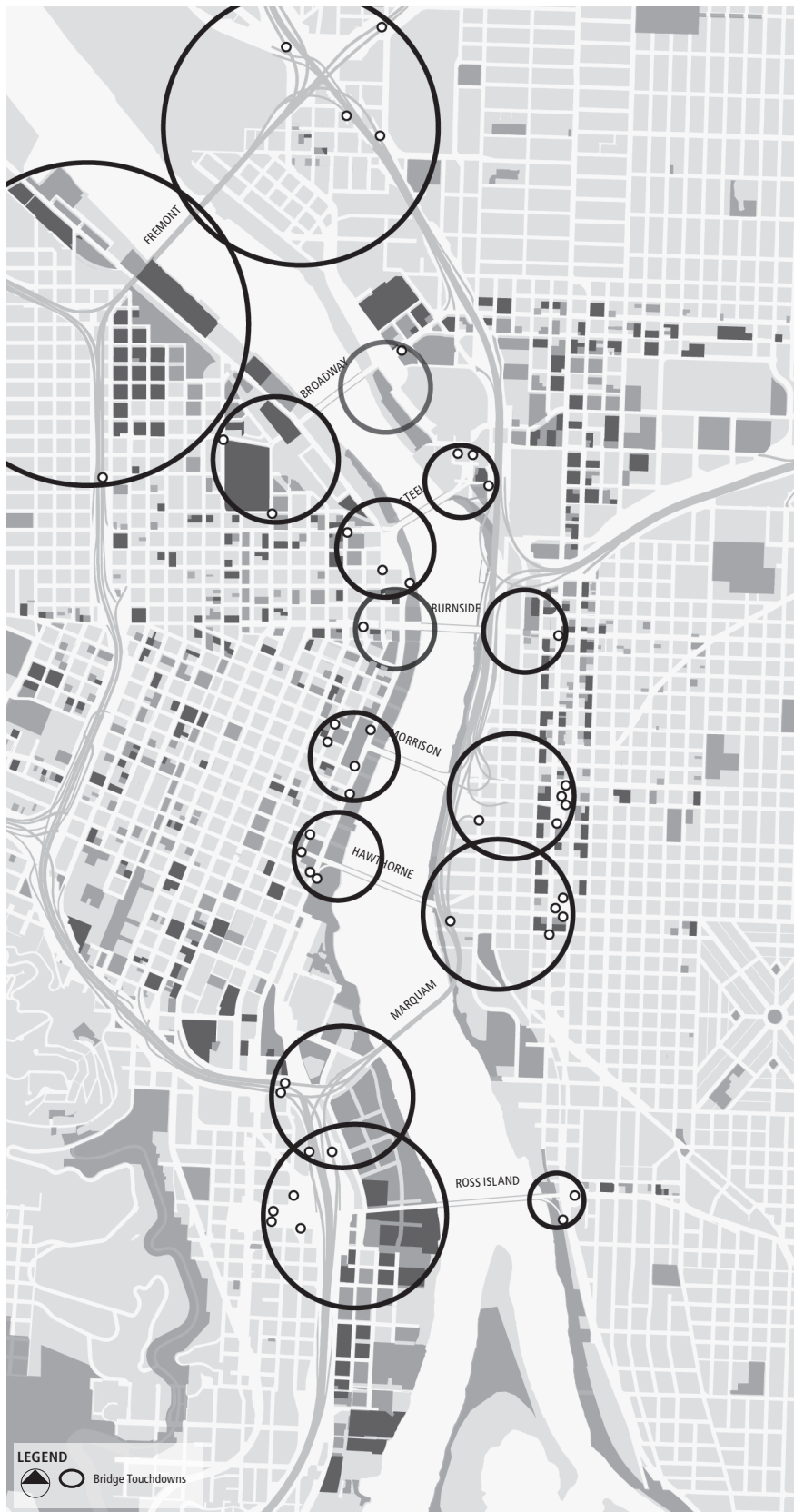
Bridgeheads — the area surrounding touchdown points for bridges on each side of the river — stand out as many of the most visible underdeveloped areas in Central City. Although they sometimes are difficult to develop due to access and challenging parcel configuration, bridgeheads serve as Central City's gateways on both sides of the river. Currently, these locations are also some of the most underdeveloped areas of the Central City. The 1988 *Central City Plan* (right) had pinpointed many bridgeheads as either future “gateways” or “attractions”. Implementation of the “gateway” designation has remained incomplete, as the experience at each site was not specifically defined.

Central City 2035 presents an opportunity to identify the desired form and character at each bridgehead. Corresponding bridgehead development or landmarks on both sides would further the notion of embracing the river and stitching the sides together.

? How can development at the Central City's bridgeheads take better advantage of their special place and highly visible gateway locations?



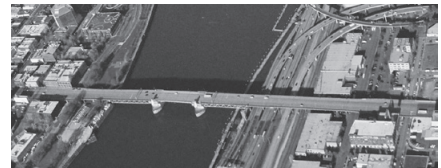
The 1988 Central City Plan showed attractions at most of the bridgeheads



Bridgeheads and redevelopment opportunities identified by the Development Capacity Study in 2007



Steel Bridge



Burnside Bridge



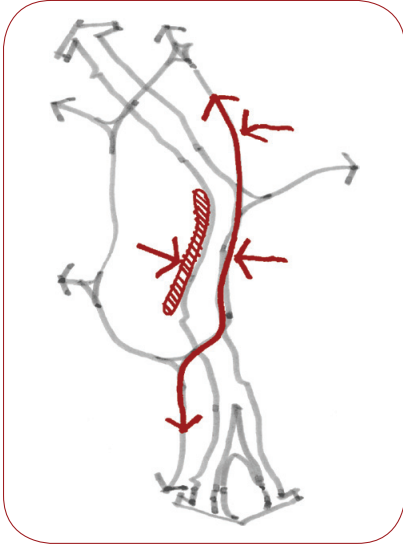
Morrison Bridge



Ross Island Bridge

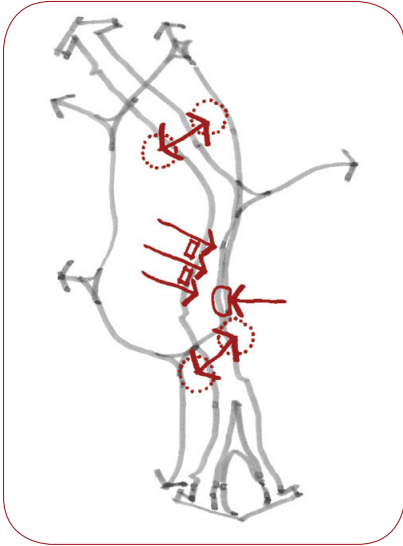
Theme: Reclaim the River

THE RIVER: TODAY



RECLAIM THE RIVER

The retail core of downtown, along with the north and south ends, offer opportunities to truly “embrace” the river. New development and open spaces on both the east and west sides can re-orient the city to the water in a meaningful way.



Reclaiming the river refers to the notion that the river is Central City’s most signature and undervalued geographic feature. This theme focuses on bringing more of the downtown’s development scale, intensity and energy closer to the river while better framing distinct portions of the open space systems on both sides of the river. Additionally, this will offer opportunities to restore valuable riparian habitat. Major shifts in policy and urban form will be necessary to target movement toward the river as a focus rather than an obstacle, in order to reclaim it as a major public asset to use and enjoy.



Habitat Island in Vancouver BC includes vertical snags, native vegetation, and a natural shoreline.



By extending the park into the harbor with a watering hole, what was once Copenhagen’s industrial center has also become the city’s social hub.



The new opera house in Norway enlivens and frames the water’s edge.

East and West

The *Central City Plan* and subsequent updates identified eight subdistricts (described in detail in the Subdistrict Profiles report) to break down the scale of the Central City. Most of the planning and development activity has occurred on the west side while the east side retains two largely industrial districts. Though the *Central City Plan's* vision to “embrace the river” is still compelling, the reality is that the two sides of the river are very different. Further, new distinct places have emerged, and there is now a need to rethink how the urban form and implementation of urban design can respond to and address the unique qualities on both sides.



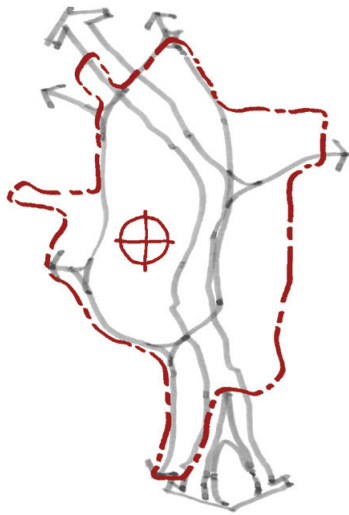
EAST AND WEST: TODAY

The *Central City Plan* expanded beyond downtown, embracing the river from both sides. Twenty years later, several issues need to be addressed to realize the unique features that each side represents.

DISTINCT PLACES. The east side's predominantly industrial and employment districts offer distinctly different opportunities from the consistently mixed-use areas on the west side.

CENTERS. The Lloyd District features many of the center-like uses and infrastructure present on the west side, while still missing an identifiable "there there."

EDGES. While the west side is framed by, and engulfed in some cases, by the verdant west hills, the east side features much stronger connections to a larger percentage of the city's population arranged around the east side's series of major corridors and arterials.

**Analogues**

Each side of the river has evolved and continues to evolve in unique ways. The future of each side will require different responses to use, building form, character, and available land mass.

West

Since 1988, and in some cases earlier, almost all of the west side of the river has been under a high density mixed use zoning pattern, encouraging new redevelopment within and around the existing districts and buildings. It currently includes high concentrations of office, residential, and educational uses. The relative clarity for its future has provided designers and developers with enough confidence to move forward with dynamic building plans, most notably within the Pearl District and South Waterfront.

Because the west side has seen more development in the last 20 years, many smaller areas west of the river have started to establish a character and identity of their own. Although downtown is largely built out, the North Pearl District, South Waterfront, and Goose Hollow still offer larger redevelopment areas. In addition, many other redevelopment parcels on the west side are small infill sites with a strong built context. The handful of large redevelopment parcels are located along the river or bridgeheads.



West: block pattern



East: block pattern

East

The east side features two industrial districts within Lower Albina and Central Eastside. The Lloyd District, sandwiched between these two, was envisioned in 1988 as part of the “Red Crescent” of high-density, mixed-use development, stretching across the river and south to South Waterfront. In the Lloyd District, new high density residential could support existing office development and would take advantage of its proximity and connectivity to downtown. The Rose Quarter, with its large-scaled event venues and transit centers, is characterized by episodic activity, with poor connections to the Lloyd District and adjacent neighborhoods.

East of the river, the uncertainty of the area’s redevelopment capacity is due to status of the industrial sanctuary and the location of the I-5 freeway. However, large redevelopment parcels within the Rose Quarter and OMSI represent potentially transformative changes to the east side that would capitalize on large investments in public infrastructure while supporting the working industrial uses. The Rose Quarter provides an opportunity for riverfront urban densities on the east side without being interrupted by the freeway barrier.

COMPARING BOTH SIDES (REFER TO NEXT PAGES)

The sequence of maps on the following pages illustrate the relationship between the east and west sides of the river, focusing on the downtown and Lloyd District. In some cases, similar functions such as office, retail, government centers and transit hubs set the two sides of the river as analogues to each other. However, comparing the amount of adjacent industrial uses or the relationship of the freeway to each side highlights some of the challenges that the east side faces. Plan updates reflect that little development activity has motivated the east side to refine the *Central City Plan’s* vision from twenty years ago. In contrast, on the west side, much of the area has been reexamined, in some cases multiple times.

Given that one size does not fit all, new opportunities on each side will require location-specific responses. *Central City 2035* presents an opportunity to identify where strategic redevelopment “interventions” can leverage the most public benefit from areas that are working well, and where whole-scale “inventions” are necessary to create new places or enhance the places that exist.



How can each side of the river respond to future opportunities while supporting each sides existing character?



Freeways

WEST. On the west side of the river, the freeway acts as an edge separating parts of Central City from its adjacent neighborhoods. Toward the southern end, the freeway and west hills are a buffer to the residential districts that abut Central City.

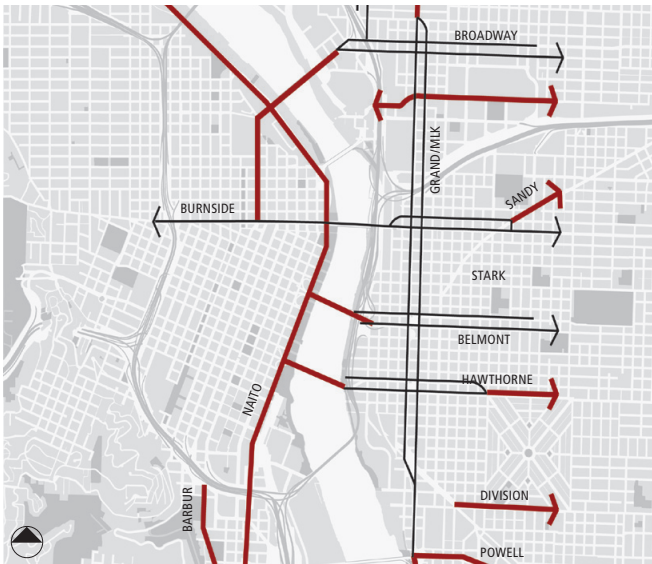
EAST. The I-5 and I-84 freeways function as barriers on the east side, truncating much of the east side from the river, bisecting subdistricts from each other, and further separating it from downtown visually and physically.



Industrial Sanctuary

WEST. Most of the industrial zoning on the west side of the river has transitioned to more flexible zoning. Key industrial areas still exist on the north and west sides of the North Pearl, and industrial operations still continue in South Waterfront today.

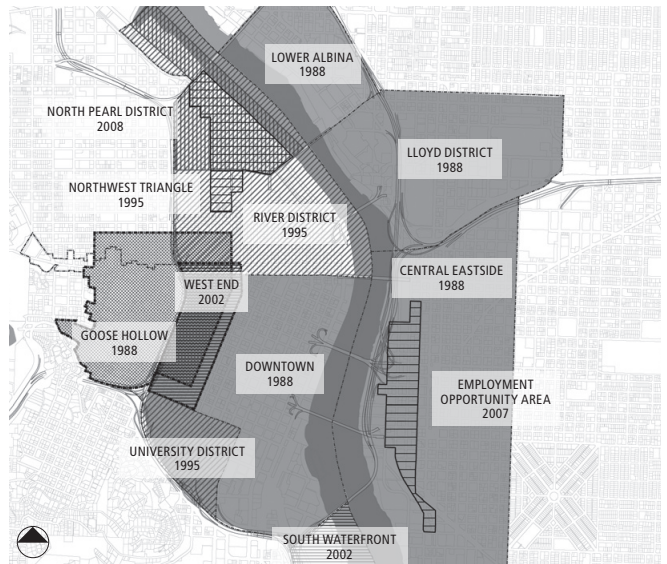
EAST. Lower Albina and most of the Central Eastside remain within the industrial sanctuary. Only the Lloyd District, the Martin Luther King Jr./Grand corridor, Burnside, Sandy, and OMSI areas do not feature industrial zoning.



Boulevards

WEST. Most of the notable boulevards on the west side are oriented north-south, with the exception of Burnside. This is predominately due to the presence of steep topography that makes east-west movement difficult beyond the West Hills.

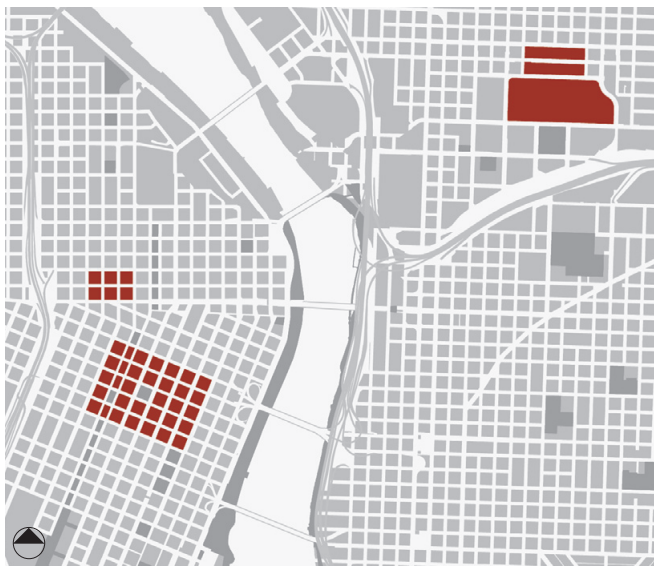
EAST. East of the river, Portland is relatively flat. Signature corridors run mainly east-west into downtown, before they intersect the freeway or river.



Plan Updates

WEST. West of the river, many of the subdistricts have undergone updates and boundary redefinitions since 1988, reflecting active development energy. Downtown has not updated its urban design plan since 1988.

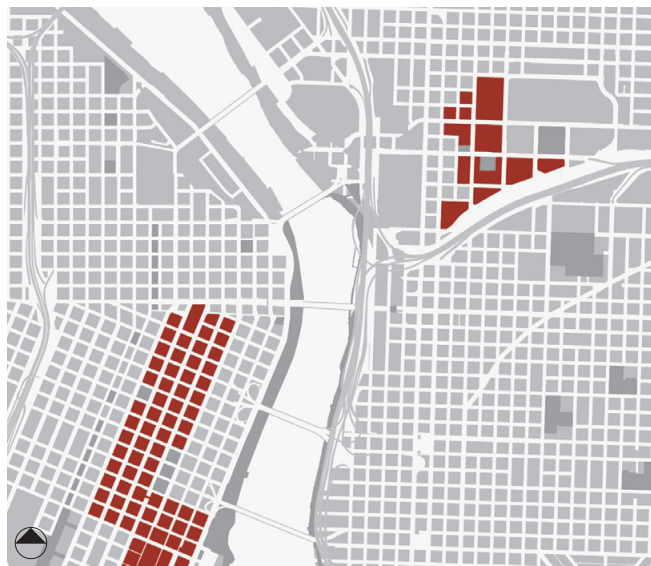
EAST. Unlike the west side, the east side of the river has had no plan updates, with the exception of the Employment Opportunity Area. This area was created in the Central Eastside in 2007, but it did not include an update to the urban design map.



Retail Centers

WEST. The retail core, identified in the 1972 *Downtown Plan* is roughly bounded by SW 10th, SW Washington, SW 2nd and SW Salmon. More recently, the Brewery Blocks along W Burnside and NW Couch have created new, complementary retail energy.

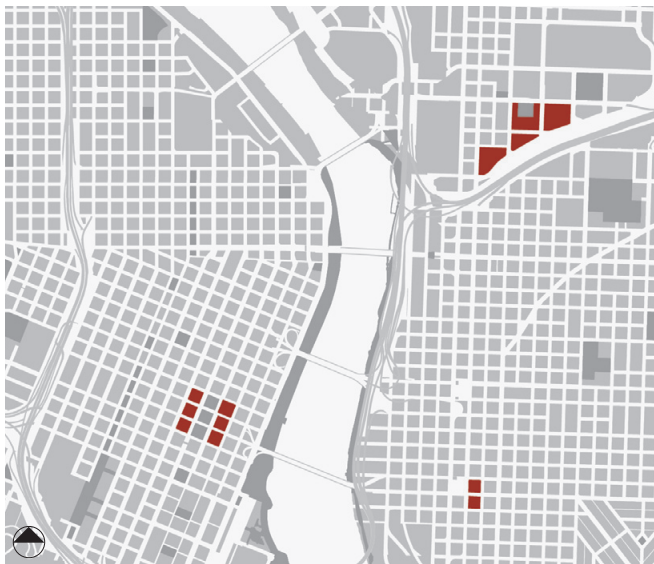
EAST. The Lloyd Center shopping mall, at the eastern edge of the Lloyd District, continues to be the strong focus of retail energy on the east side since its opening in the 1960s.



Office Cores

WEST. The downtown office core extends roughly from W Burnside at the north to SW Market at the south, flanking the 5th/6th Avenue Transit Mall.

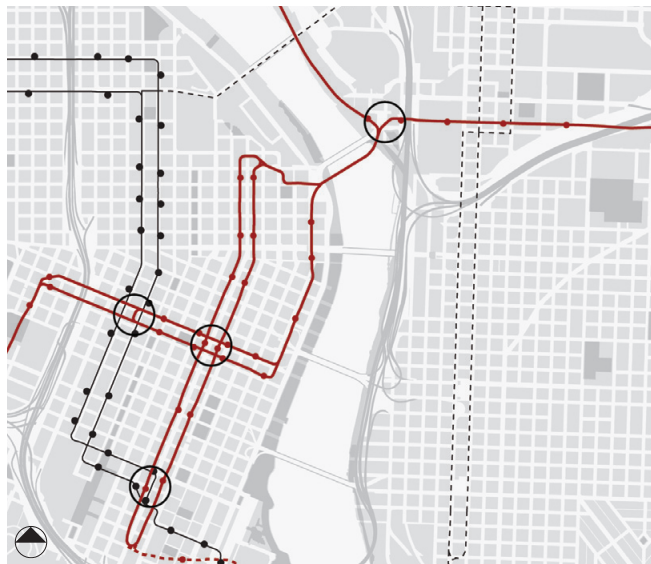
EAST. A concentration of both high and lower density office buildings is between the Lloyd Center mall and the MLK/Grand couplet, with the largest amount south of the light rail corridor along NE Holladay.



Government Centers

WEST. In downtown, city, federal and county facilities are clustered around Chapman, Lowndale and Schunk parks.

EAST. In the Lloyd District, state and regional agencies and the Bonneville Power Administration are clustered south of the NE Holladay light rail corridor. In the Central Eastside, the county buildings are located around the end of the Hawthorne Bridge viaduct at MLK / Grand.



Transit

WEST. Downtown features three prominent transit hubs: at SW Morrison/Yamhill and 10th/11th, SW Morrison/Yamhill and 5th/6th, and at SW 5th/6th and Montgomery at Portland State University. South Waterfront offers an emerging transit hub where the future light rail to Milwaukie will connect to the streetcar and the OHSU aerial tram.

EAST. The Rose Quarter Transit Center, between the Oregon Convention Center and the Rose Garden Arena, is currently one of the system's busiest hubs.

Distinct Places

The *Central City Plan* and more recent updates divided the city's largest plan district, the Central City, into eight subdistricts: 1) River, 2) Goose Hollow, 3) Downtown, 4) University, 5) South Waterfront, 6) Lower Albina, 7) Lloyd District, and 8) Central Eastside.

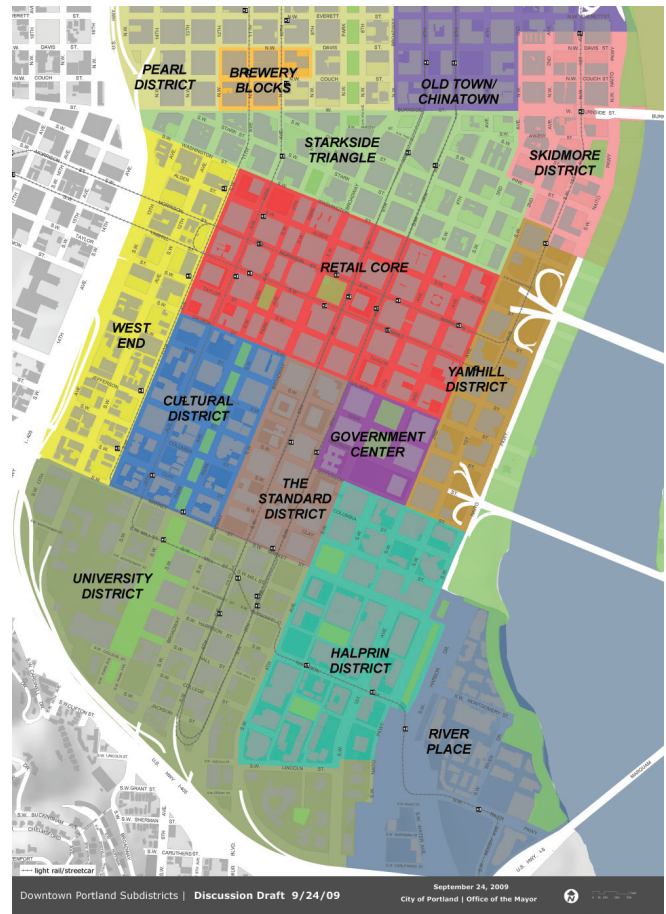
Since 1988, three subareas have also been designated within subdistrict boundaries: Central Eastside Employment Opportunity, North Pearl and West End. These subareas have more tailored development regulations and implementation strategies to respond to area-specific issues. Today, the west side features five of the eight subdistricts and two subareas, while the east side has three subdistricts — two of which are in primarily industrial areas — and one subarea. Subdistrict boundaries do not necessarily reflect perceived neighborhood boundaries. While the original intent was to break down the Central City Plan District into more distinct sections, most of the subdistricts are comprised of areas that are smaller and more identifiable to the people that live or work there.

Over the last 20 years these smaller areas varying in scale have emerged within Central City's larger subdistrict boundaries, especially on the west side. As these areas have evolved, their boundaries, edges and centers are more perceptible to Portlanders than the official planning subdistrict boundaries. Each area has a unique character and specific function that it provides for the Central City and the City of Portland. Part of Portland's success is the quality and imageability of these areas throughout the city.

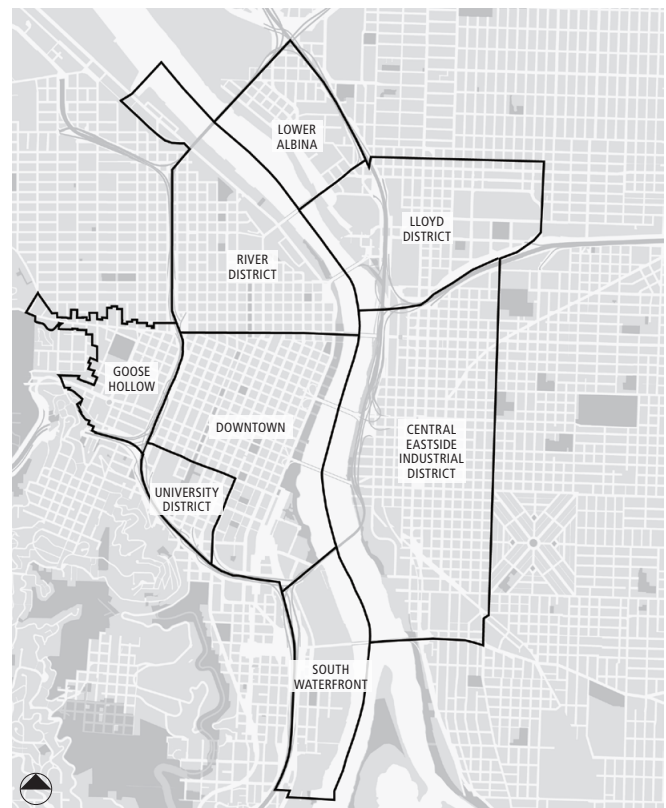
Conversely, where fewer distinct areas still exist, a renewed focus on place-making should occur. For instance, despite considerable public investments in event facilities and transit infrastructure, the Lloyd District still feels made up of large office buildings and large expanses of parking areas. It continues to lack human-scaled public gathering spaces and more intimate, urban street environments.



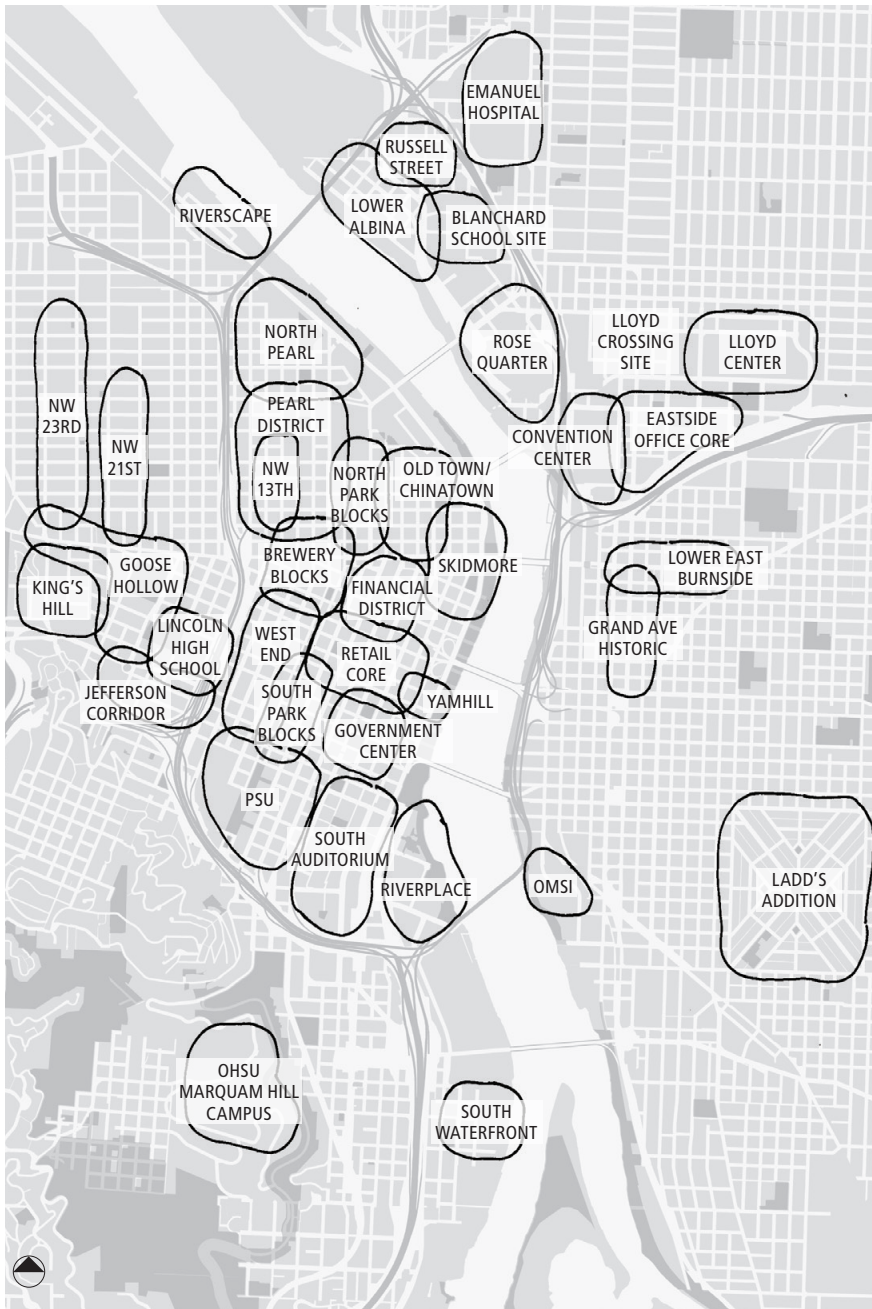
How should the Lloyd District be made more human-scaled?



Retail Study map, Office of the Mayor



Planning subdistricts



Distinct places



Lower Albina industrial area



Union Station in Old Town



Central Eastside Industrial District



West End



Tom McCall Waterfront Park



RiverPlace Marina

Centers

The *Central City Plan* firmly established the center of the west side of the river around the downtown core. The goal was to have the largest buildings stretching from South Waterfront to the Lloyd District following the high-capacity transit facilities along the 5th/6th Avenue Transit Mall.

Supported by the retail and office cores and bisected by the transit mall, the downtown continues to serve as the Central City's most visible center with the highest densities in the city.

East of the river, the "Red Crescent" granted the Lloyd District the potential for the second-highest densities of the city. A strong retail and employment base in Lloyd Center Mall and surrounding office development, coupled with a high concentration of transit infrastructure, a collection of government offices and entertainment venues, gives the Lloyd District the potential to serve as the "center" of the eastside. While it provides many of the same functions as the downtown core, there is still much more available land with large parcels and also very little residential development to help activate the district. With the growth of Central City overall, the Lloyd District could be better suited as the primary hub east of the river.



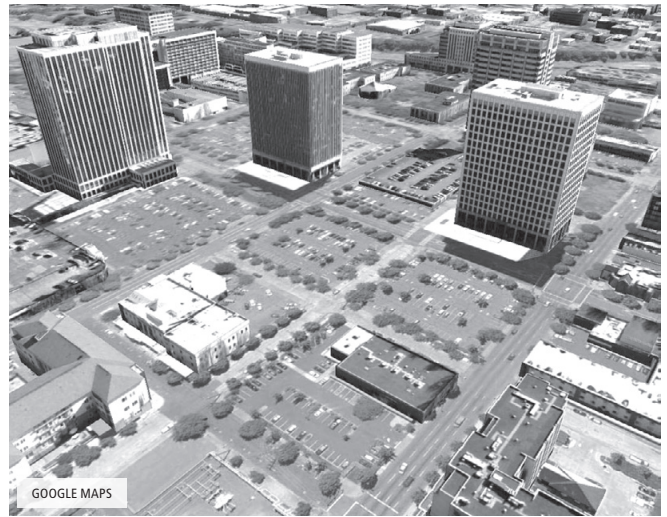
How should future development strengthen identity and place making in the Lloyd District?



What additional features or amenities should be added to enhance the Lloyd District as the eastside's "center"?



Downtown



The Lloyd District

Zoned to be the second highest densities of the city, the Lloyd District has the potential to be the analogue center of the east side. Currently, much of the district contains underutilized parcels or surface parking.

Edges

The Central City features two general types of edge relationships with adjacent areas. On the west side, most of the Central City's districts slope up from the river and bleed into Marquam Hill, Washington/Forest Park and the larger topographical background of the West Hills. On the east side of the river, the boundary is more pronounced as reflected in an abrupt shift from larger parcels and buildings to smaller lots and structures. One location where this is highly evident is along the 11th/12th corridor that separates the built forms of the Central Eastside Industrial District from adjacent lower density residential neighborhoods such as Buckman, Ladd's Addition and Hosford Abernethy.

Experientially, the edge conditions illustrate the transition of entering the Central City from the periphery. From the west, the experience along many of the winding corridors is one of being in a lush, green environment, such as Barbur, Burnside, or Lovejoy, and then emerging into the urban edge neighborhoods of the Central City. From the east, the corridors into the Central City pass through streetcar-era neighborhoods, most of which feature smaller buildings and structures that suddenly shift to larger buildings.

Current development regulations in the Central City transition building forms down to historic districts and adjacent lower-density residential neighborhoods. These transitions are intended to preserve the smaller scale character of more sensitive areas from the higher densities and heights of Central City's core buildings.



How can the Central City strengthen its relationships with adjacent communities and neighborhoods?



Distinct edge between industrial and residential area on the right



Built edge between SW Hills and Central City

Block Sizes

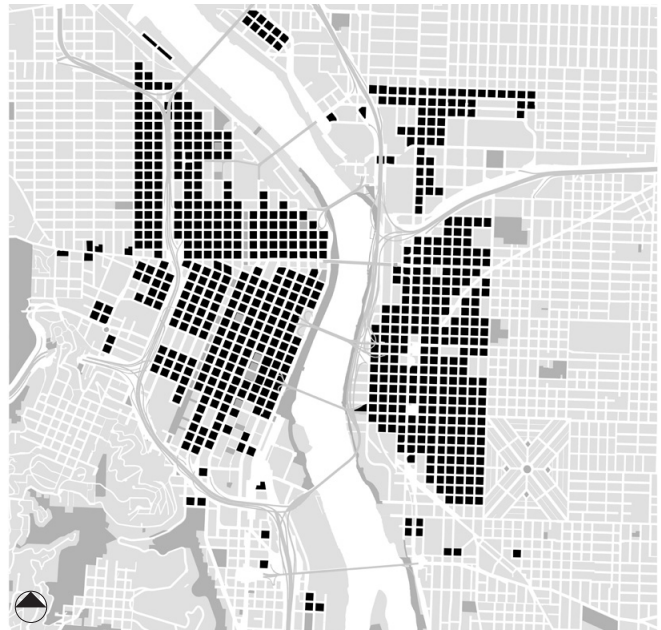
The west side of the river is mostly defined by the small 200' by 200' block pattern characteristic of the Central City. This block size (the smallest of any major U.S. metropolitan city) is the foundation for the city's form-giving character and walkability. Its small size makes it relatively easy to walk from one end of the block to the other. Additionally, it allows more light to filter through the blocks and frequent views to the surrounding areas from the intersections. The west side also features two park block systems, which are half the normal block size, at 100' by 200'. Due to its small-scaled block pattern and lack of as many 'superblocks', the west side feels very fine-grained in texture. East of the river, the Central Eastside Industrial District also contains the quintessential 200' by 200' block pattern.

The Central City's tight network of small streets surrounding small blocks provides a readily accessible and significant amount of pedestrian connectivity, as well as good access to sunlight and air for adjacent buildings. This unique network also reflects the City's founding fathers' occupations as mercantile store owners and retailers. The small square blocks feature more egalitarian corner store opportunities for good merchandise visibility. They also offer a high number of crossing street intersections for even better storefront visibility. Portland's small block size was born at a time when building footprints were generally smaller.

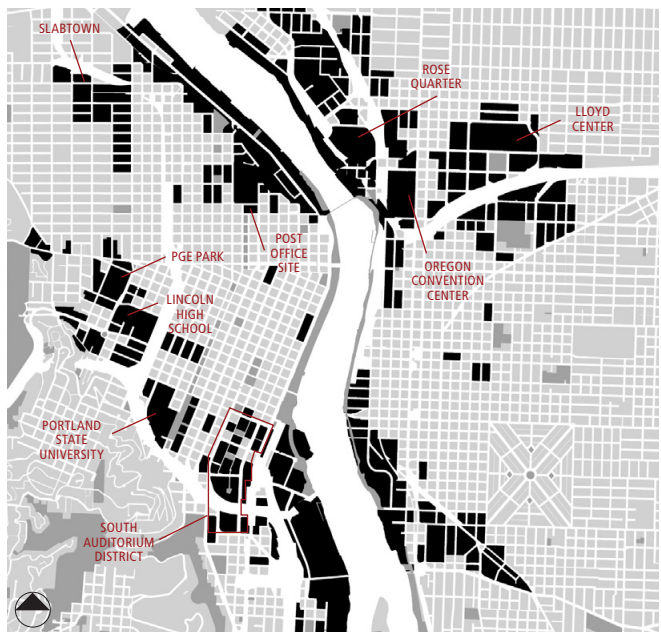
The small block size does offer some constraints for land efficiency and movement. More intersections result in more frequent interactions between pedestrians or bikes and vehicles. Further, areas with larger block sizes offer flexibility for areas that cater to specific uses. Portland State University is a good example of an institution with a larger block size that fares well as a self-contained entity, but also integrates well into the adjacent grid. South Auditorium also features large blocks and less formidable building footprints. The buildings are separated by pedestrian pathways and open spaces that connect back to the grid.

This balance of block size and pedestrian comfort and scale is experiencing some difficulty on the east side. Notable for its highly irregular superblocks, the Lloyd District contains massive entertainment and retail venues and large parking structures. The street character, meanwhile, faces challenges at the pedestrian and bicycle scales.

It is possible to have a convenient pedestrian network, access to lots of sunlight and a healthy development environment on blocks larger than 200' by 200'. Barcelona's iconic, chamfered square blocks are more than four times the size of Portland's, and feature high density development around the perimeter of the block with a central open space roughly the size of a Portland square on the interior. Creating more flexible block sizes could accommodate greater diversity of development types and activity.



Blocks and lots at 40,000 SF in Central City



Blocks and lots larger than 40,000 SF in Central City

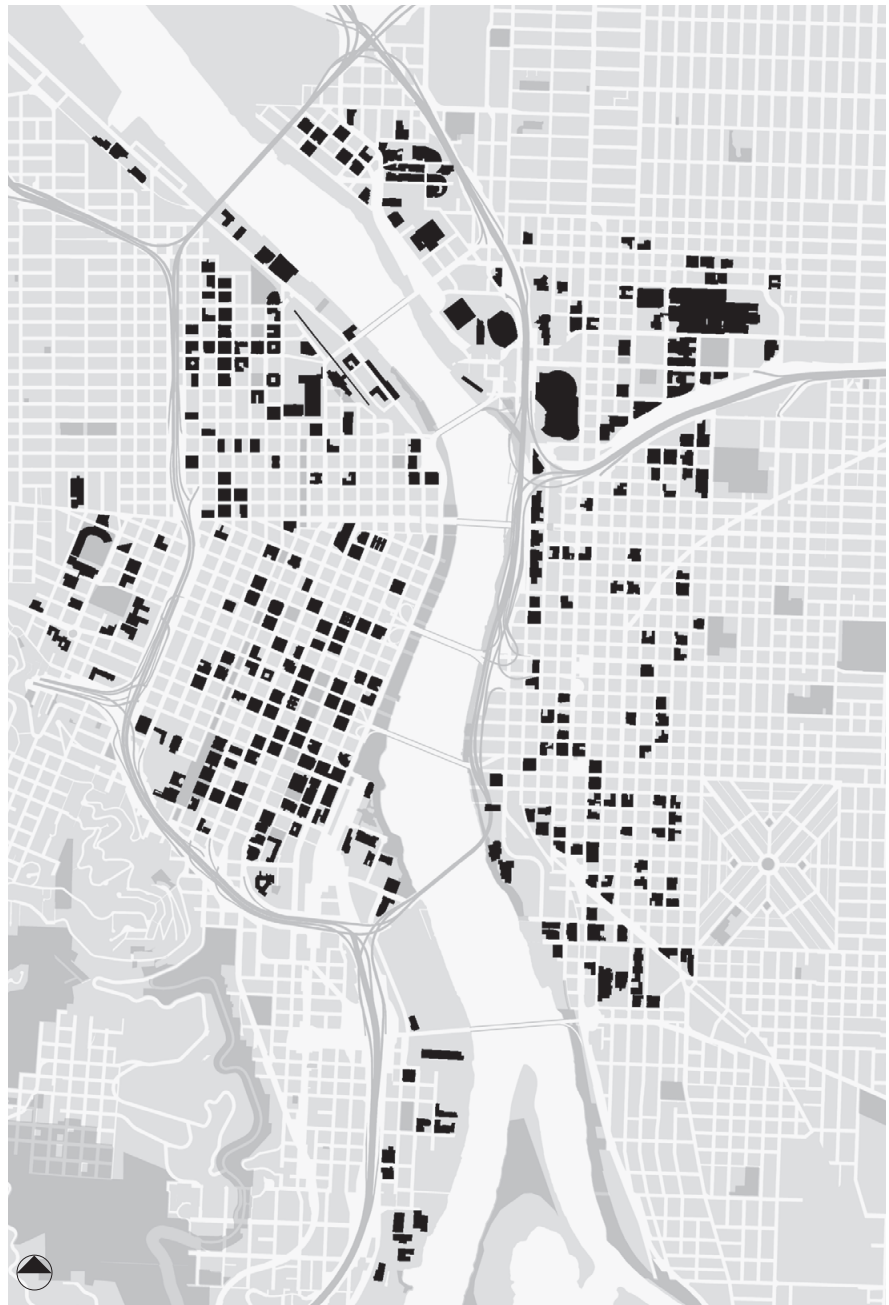
Building Footprints

Historically, many small buildings were built on Central City's small blocks, creating highly textured building walls enclosing the narrow streets. Over time, both development economics and construction practices have evolved, resulting in a period of full-block building development.

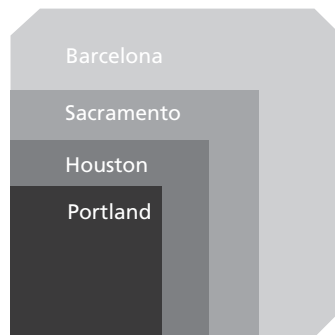
Full-block buildings in the Central City typically front streets on four sides. It is not always clear which of the four streets is the "main street." Further, some of these buildings have one main entrance with a lobby and three "backs" making these block faces less formal. Some of the small building texture is lost with full block buildings that lack architectural detailing.

On the east side of the river, the Lloyd District and Rose Quarter contain several large blocks and lots. When inhabited with large, monolithic, internal-facing structures such as the Oregon Convention Center and the Lloyd Center, these large building footprints on large blocks can act as impediments to activating an area.

? How might the integration of alternative block sizes allow greater development and open space flexibility while enhancing the pedestrian scale?



Building footprints larger than or equal to 40,000 SF



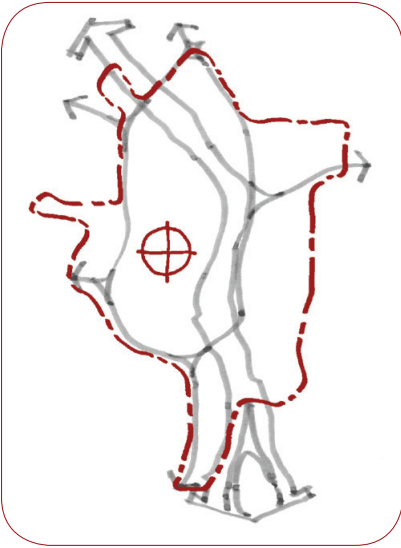
0 200 Feet

Block size diagram

Douglas Pollard and Fanis Grammenos, *Beloved and Abandoned: A Platting Named Portland*

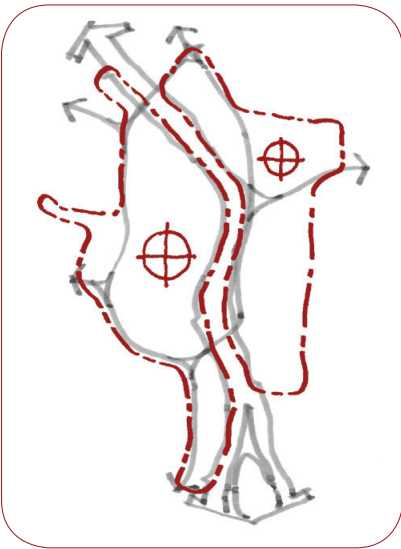
Theme: Elevate the East Side

EAST AND WEST: TODAY



ELEVATE THE EAST SIDE

Future development should reinforce the distinct places that compose each side, particularly the 'centers'. Creating two vibrant centers in the Central City will strengthen the identity of both sides of the river. A well defined hub on the east side will focus development and further shape distinct neighborhoods. Building on the public investments in the Rose Quarter and Lloyd District while making a meaningful connection across the river will strengthen the Central City as a whole while recognizing these two separate sides.



The east side has its own distinct character, with multiple industrial areas, more block sizes and variety, and stronger connections via corridors to more of the city. Current and future public investments in the east side should strengthen the relationship between Portlanders east of the Central City to the river, add vitality and mix to the Central City as a whole, and complement the successes on the west.



As part of the Lloyd Crossing Sustainable Urban Design Plan and Catalyst Project, this rendering shows one possible development that would help to enliven the Lloyd District.



Central to the design scheme of this redevelopment of Kumutoto Wharf in New Zealand was the creation of two connected plazas linking the city to the water.

Public Realm

The public realm is made up of public parks, open spaces, and streets. These features provide critical recreation, contemplative respite, and movement functions for the entire Central City. Together, streets, parks, and open spaces, comprise almost half the land area of the Central City.



OPEN SPACES: TODAY

While the Central City appears to have a generous amount of parks, there are several challenges regarding its open space system, including:

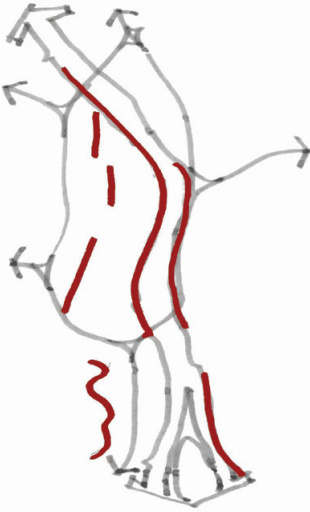
DEFICIENCIES. Many park deficiencies identified in 1988 remain today.

FLEXIBILITY. Overall, the Central City lacks large enough acreage of park space for active recreation.

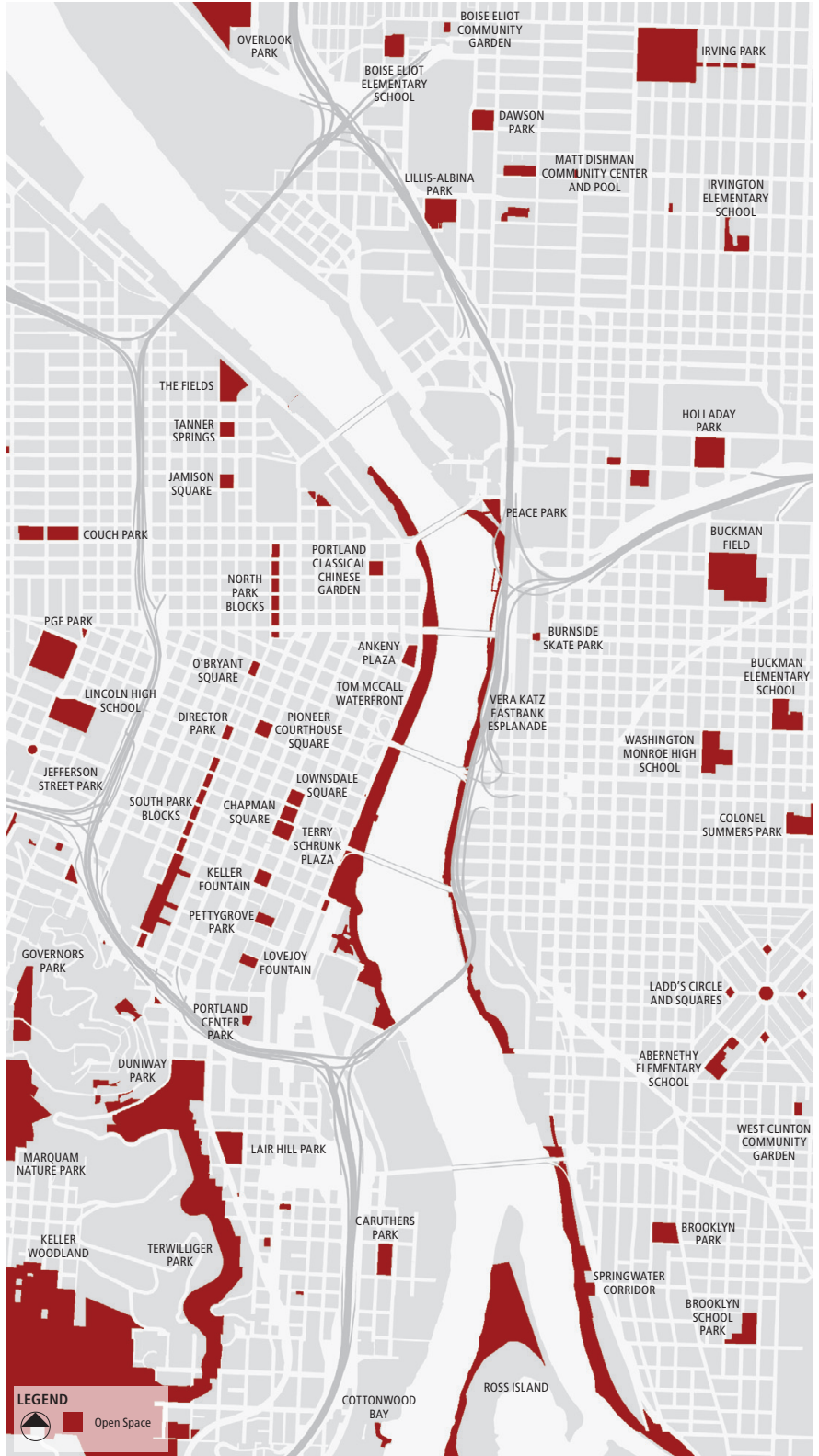
CONNECTIONS. The Central City's parks are not well connected to each other.

HABITAT. Viable habitat opportunities within the Central City are scarce.

GREEN AND GRAY INFRASTRUCTURE. With a large percentage of the Central City considered impervious, the conversion of grey infrastructure to green is needed to address air and water quality issues.

**Open Space**

Currently, parks and open spaces occupy approximately 126 acres of the total land area within the current Central City plan boundary. Most places within the Central City are located within a half-mile of an open space or park amenity.



Open space in Central City

Deficiencies

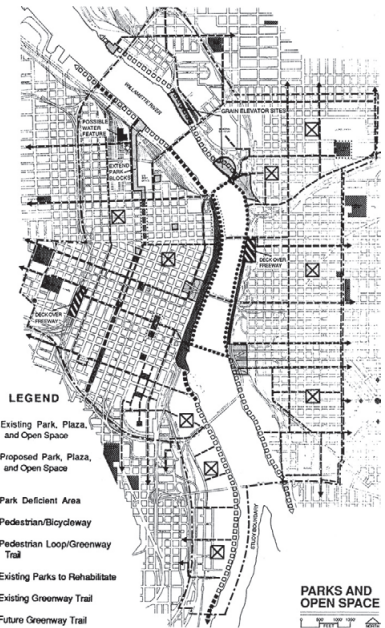
The Central City is relatively well-served with open spaces west of the river. East of the river, many open space deficiencies that were identified in the 1988 *Central City Plan* still remain. As the map below suggests, most of Central City is located within one half-mile of open space. Almost all of the west side is located within one quarter of a mile of open space. As the Central City continues to grow in the next twenty years, it will need to develop innovative, non-traditional recreational and open space amenities to supplement what is already in place to meet these deficiencies.



Where should new land be acquired for new parks/open spaces?



Proximity to open space



Park deficient map from 1988 plan

PUBLIC REALM

52



LEGEND

- Passive Space
- Active Space

Active and Passive Open Spaces. The map identifies open spaces in the Central City that are either active or passive. Active is defined as open spaces that either include lawn area greater than 10,000 square feet or are intended for specifically programmed activity, such as Burnside Skate Park or the basketball courts in the North Park Blocks.



Linear open space connections



Left: This map from the recently updated River District Design Guidelines illustrates a guideline to deliberately strengthen and enhance the Tanner Creek Parks as an extension of the North Park Blocks, a notion that existed in the 1988 plan. **Right:** The South Park Blocks and Halprin Parks are shown to exhibit habitat value. As discussed in Chapter 2, contiguous open space with significant tree canopy, if planned deliberately, could contribute to enhanced habitat over time.

Connections

Arguably, the Central City's signature open space system, the park blocks, date back to the original platting of Portland. These half-size downtown blocks include the North Park Blocks, between Burnside and Hoyt, and the South Park Blocks, from Salmon to I-405. Recent planning efforts have provided new visions for how to compellingly connect these park block segments through a built-out segment between Salmon and Burnside. As the park block segments are all north-south, what is still needed is a signature east-west analogue to this iconic Portland park system. The Lawrence Halprin designed system of parks and pedestrian paths in the South Auditorium District represents another unique and renowned open space system, not well connected to its surroundings. Montgomery Green Street is looking to draw the green character out of the Halprin system to make broader connections between the West Hills and the River.

These open space systems, among others, need better connections to and from their surrounding contexts to provide the maximum amenities for Central City residents and workers, as well as the organizing framework for future redevelopment.

A citywide plan that stitches these open space systems more deliberately would reestablish and strengthen Portland's long standing approach towards open spaces. It could also address many of Central City's challenges related to open spaces in general, such as deficiencies on the east side, lack of access to active recreation facilities, as well as responses to watershed protection, neighborhood identity, and transportation. These networks could also further enhance the pedestrian experience in Central City and achieve contiguous habitat value through tree canopy.



How can stronger connections be forged among the existing parks and open spaces in the Central City?

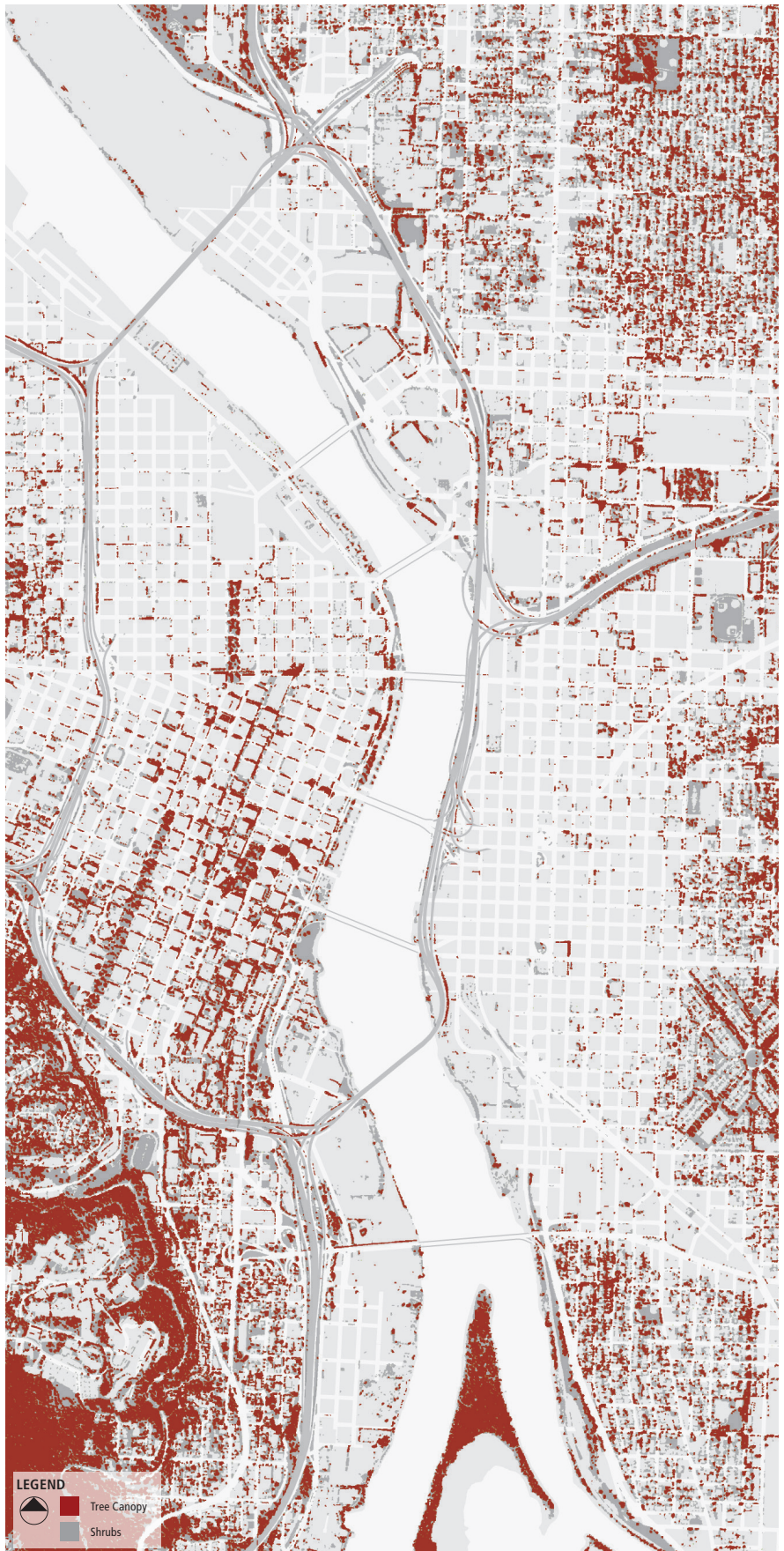
Habitat

Historically, the Willamette River in the Portland area comprised an extensive and interconnected system of river channels, open slack waters, emergent wetlands, riparian forest and adjacent upland forests on hill slopes and Missoula Flood terraces. Connectivity of habitat was high both along the river and from the vegetated riverbanks to the upland forests.

Gradually, habitats along the Willamette River have been altered through construction of dams and from fill and development. Connectivity and maintenance of habitats have been reduced or eliminated, except for small habitat remnants, which include Ross Island, Oaks Bottom, and the Forest Park watersheds. In addition, vegetated areas along the Willamette River shoreline provide opportunities to restore lost floodplain and riparian wetland habitats.

The Central City contains roughly 308 acres of tree canopy. Of these trees, many are non-native, with maples being the most abundant types. Built areas rich with canopy include the South and North Park Blocks, Government Parks, and Holladay Park. Outside the Central City, Ladd's Addition features an impressive ratio of tree canopy, contrasting starkly with the Central Eastside, which has almost none.

Over time, some of these areas that were planned and planted deliberately have begun to contribute in small ways to naturally occurring habitat areas. Well designed and planned contiguous riparian and tree plantings could strengthen habitat in the urban environment.



Tree canopy and shrubs

Green and Gray Infrastructure

Gray infrastructure is impervious, forcing water to runoff, which requires management and cleaning before entering the Willamette River. 56% of Portland's Central City is impervious surface.

Furthermore, the westside contains approximately 27 miles of piped streams and about 133 miles that flow in open channels, primarily those that drain Forest Park. All of the Forest Park streams flow through culverts or pipes before reaching the Willamette.

Daylighting these streams could provide opportunities for additional green infrastructure in the Central City. Stormwater facilities such as landscaped planters, swales, rain gardens, and ecoroofs reduce and filter stormwater runoff. Currently, there are 278 green street facilities in the entire city.

? Where and how can the Central City's public realm enhance riparian habitat areas, increase tree canopy, and improve water quality?



Impervious surfaces

The physical infrastructure of a city can be divided into green and gray. Green infrastructure are areas covered with trees, shrubs, and grass; gray infrastructure are areas of buildings, roads, utilities, and parking lots. Green infrastructure is porous, allowing water to soak into soil which naturally filters pollutants before the water eventually enters the rivers.

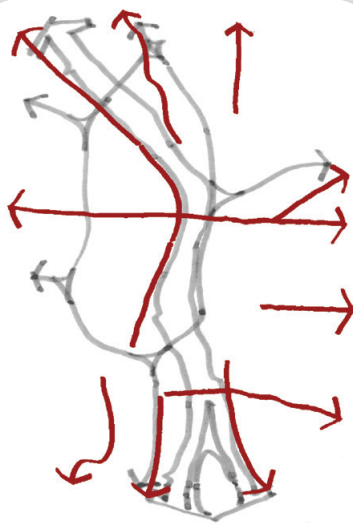
STREETS: TODAY

The Central City's existing street network has long defined its small-scale character. However, a few issues to be resolved include:

HOMOGENEITY. Most of the streets in the Central City look, feel, and function the same.

DISCONTINUATION. Most signature corridors outside Central City have no presence in downtown. In addition, most of the wider streets in the Central City are oriented north-south, further emphasizing the dominant urban pattern parallel along the river rather than perpendicular toward it.

GROUND FLOOR USES. Over time, requiring ground floor active uses in some areas, allowing it almost everywhere, and prohibiting it nowhere have all contributed to a dispersed pattern of retail storefronts in the Central City. There is little clarity as to which, among the numerous streets, are the primary retail corridors.

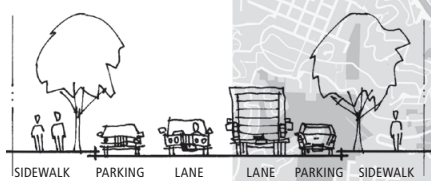


Streets

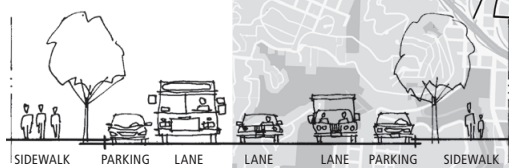
Central City is known for its dense network of smaller streets among small blocks which are enhanced to cultivate a vibrant pedestrian environment. This network of streets, in conjunction with regulations that sculpt adjacent development, has yielded a significant amount of light and air on the city's streets.

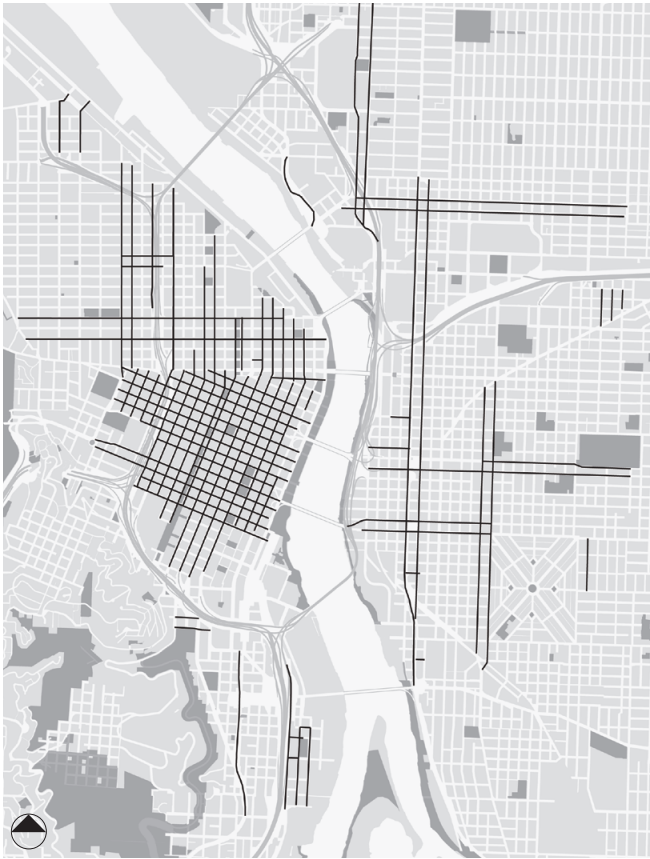
The land dedicated to streets alone is almost 40% of Central City's total land area. This amount of streets, combined with Central City's small 200' by 200' blocks, has created a large area defined more by a pattern of intersections than by a set of different streets. The pedestrian movement pattern could be thought about as moving from one intersection to another as opposed to along a singular linear street or path.

60 foot ROW in Central City



80 foot ROW in Central City





Current one-way streets



SW Madison/SW 5th



SW Taylor/SW 5th

Homogeneity

While the Central City boasts an expansive grid of streets offering numerous choices for getting between point “A” and “B”, it lacks a compelling hierarchy of streets. Over time, driven by interests to discourage trips through the Central City, larger boulevards were phased out in favor of paired one-way streets, or “couplets”. Coordination of the traffic signals in a one-way grid system allows for controlled vehicle speeds and increased transportation-mode flexibility.

While this shift in approach to street traffic operations made sense in the 1970s and 80s, today many cities are removing one-street segments to reintroduce hierarchy, create more distinctive places for residents, and encourage more visibility for retail and other commercial businesses. The preponderance of the Central City’s one-way system has added functional homogeneity of the street network that already features a fairly consistent design aesthetic. Most of the Central City’s streets — with some exceptions — have a similar width, design, lane configuration and mixture of ground floor uses facing them.

A new, clearer street hierarchy in the Central City would offer residents, business owners and visitors a more distinct set of options around which to organize residential communities and business districts. A differentiated set of streets and street functions, such as prioritized pedestrian/bicycle facilities, stronger orientation to the river and its ecology and improved wildlife habitat could allow for a more targeted response with adjacent land uses and the development of distinct places.



How can a stronger/clearer street hierarchy be developed within the tight grid of narrow streets?



SW Salmon/SW 5th

“Very similar” streets are 60 foot rights-of-way, have two 12-foot sidewalks, two parking lanes, and two travel lanes.

Discontinuation

Major city corridors that radiate away from Central City, such as Hawthorne, Division, Belmont, Powell and Barbur Boulevards, have no presence in the core of the city, though outside of the Central City they are iconic. Most of these streets unceremoniously fizzle out into “couplet returns” or one-way street configurations. Burnside, Broadway and Naito/Front Avenue are the only corridors that continue into Central City. Burnside is an example of a street that has powerful wayfinding elements. It is physically distinctive and because of its continuous span, it has high visibility and prominence.



How can the character of citywide signature boulevards be extended into and through Central City?

Ground Floor Uses

Much of the Central City west of the river is zoned with a ground floor active use requirement including, but not limited to lobbies, retail, residential, commercial and office. This is intended to achieve spaces for people at the ground levels of new buildings, limiting blank walls and parking areas. It reinforces a continuity of pedestrian-level activity and a healthy mixed use urban district, and it has contributed to a robust street life in Central City.

While the regulation allows many different uses, it requires the construction of space that is mostly suitable for retail. In addition to the areas where the ground floor active uses regulation is required, it is allowed everywhere else in the Central City and prohibited nowhere. This generous allowance is somewhat different to the pattern found in some of Portland’s most active retail districts, such as Hawthorne, NW 23rd, or North Mississippi, where the retail use is allowed only in a very specific area, and not allowed everywhere else.

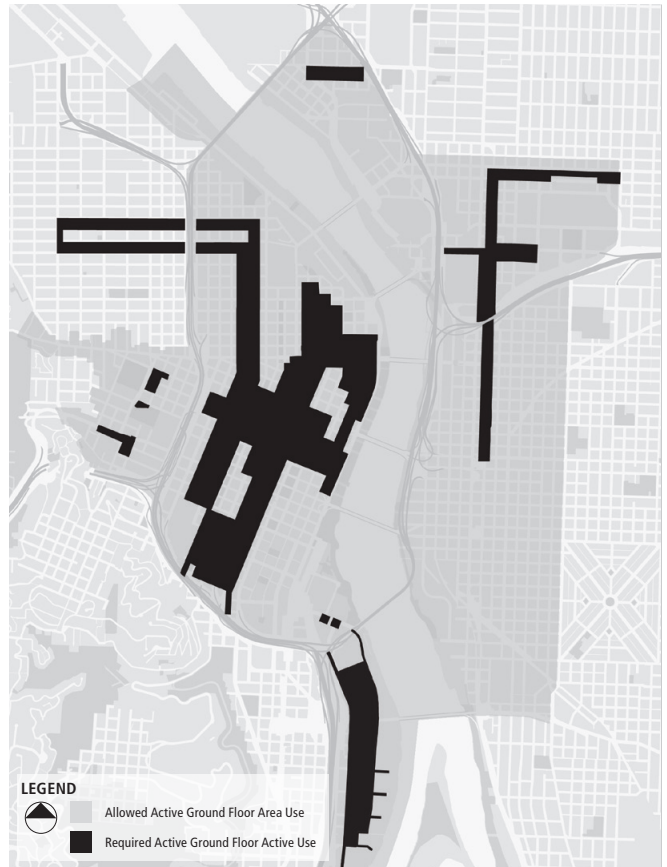
While retail is generally supported by the presence of adjacent retail, concentrating retail in strategic locations may prevent oversaturation of the market. Distinction among streets should be strengthened by reinforcing ground floor uses, such as retail, on streets where it is well-established and most viable, and prohibiting retail or discouraging it elsewhere.



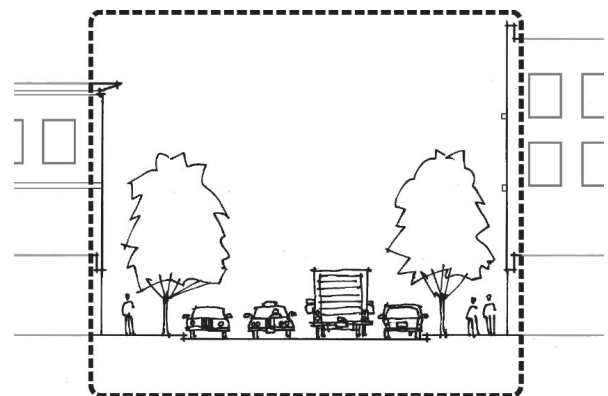
How might the ground floor active use requirement be more strategically deployed to support a more distinct street hierarchy?



SE Hawthorne is a major city corridor outside of the Central City. As SE Hawthorne approaches the Central City, it ends anticlimactically into a couplet return with SE Madison.



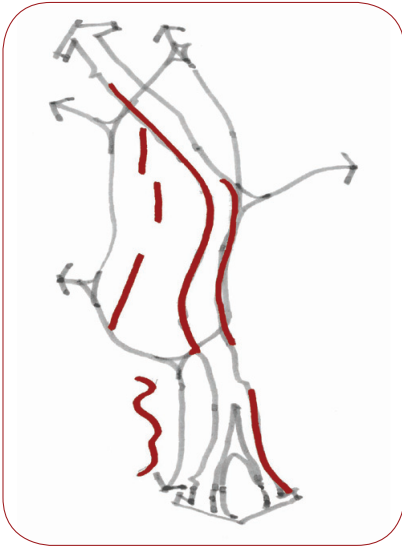
Ground floor active areas



The public realm includes the relationship of the street and sidewalks to the adjacent building architecture. Ground floor uses should be coordinated with the design of the street to cultivate more consistent character and a clearer street hierarchy.

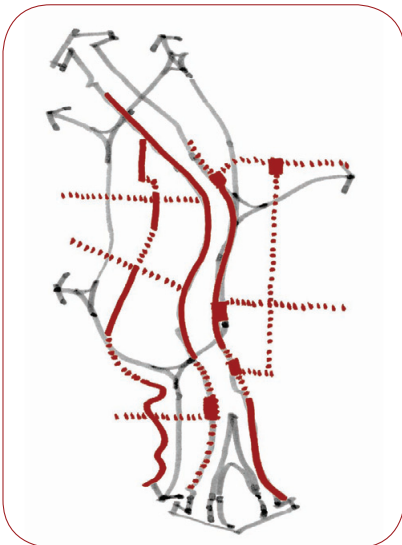
Theme: Transform the Public Realm — Open Spaces

OPEN SPACES: TODAY



TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC REALM

Developing a green network could link active and passive open spaces together, provide safe and accessible routes for pedestrians and bicyclists, encourage water resource protection in the Central City, and add value to Portland's open space system.



Transforming the public realm would include a clearer street hierarchy and the creation of new open spaces throughout Central City to serve new, high density Central City communities.

Creating street typologies that place equal importance on placemaking, sustainability, and traffic circulation will enliven the public realm. Through this effort, attention can be focused on the character of city streets, which will strengthen their identity. Additionally, identifying street types within Central City can fortify the connections with the arterial and boulevard systems throughout the city.

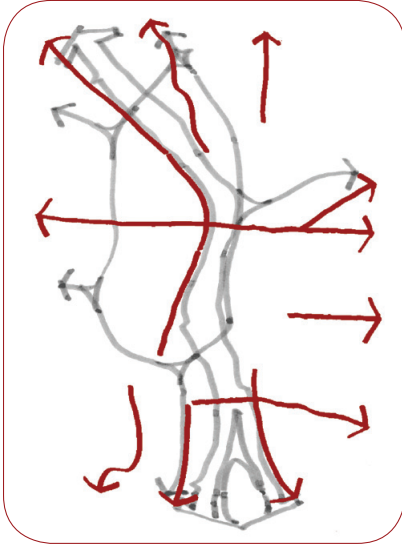
The public realm can further be enriched by connecting major open spaces through a highly synthesized “green network.” This network should focus on non-vehicular, open space, and environmental attributes to create a vibrant series of linked spaces. It should also link many Portlanders to active recreational facilities just outside its core and should meet environmentally appropriate needs and aspirations such as stormwater, food production, tree canopy, and urban habitat.



A clearer street hierarchy map would identify opportunities for large scale public art such as the top photo in Prague, and for unique stormwater collection systems, such as the one in Malmo, bottom photo.

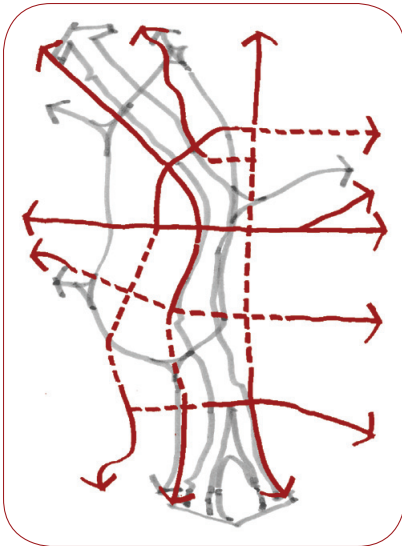
Theme: Transform the Public Realm — Streets

STREETS: TODAY



TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC REALM

Emphasizing the Central City's major corridors into new street typologies along with focusing the active ground floor requirement to specific streets would offer a clearer hierarchy to the Central City's dense street network.



Cal Anderson Park in Seattle was designed by the Olmstead Brothers and built in 1901. In 2005, four additional acres were added, which provide active recreation in close proximity to downtown.



A West 8 design of a former motorway in Madrid, Spain (top), and (bottom) a pedestrian walkway along the water in Olympic Village, Vancouver B.C., illustrate an integrated public realm.

4. URBAN DESIGN TOOLS

Today, Portland's Central City features an assortment of public sector “tools” that have the ability to implement urban design objectives and/or issues. Since the 1988 *Central City Plan*, the City's toolkit has expanded and evolved in response to shifting urban design directions, market forces and community priorities.



Density



SW Washington looking west from 3rd, City Archives photo

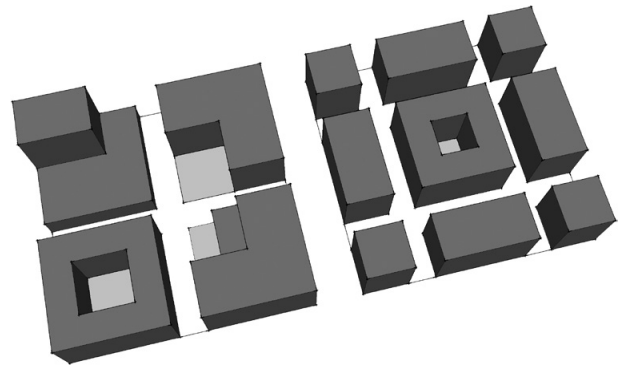
A higher population density enables many urban design objectives. More people in a given urban area usually increase opportunities and demand for smaller businesses, such as bookstores, restaurants and cafes. Residents can also inhabit and activate an increased number of parks or open spaces during a greater part of the day. A higher population density in the Central City would encourage more pedestrian-oriented buildings and storefronts, increase the activity and indirect surveillance of the public realm, maximize existing investments in public transit and other infrastructure, and enhance the visibility of the urban center, attracting more amenities, such as farmer's markets. All of these would lead to more demand for "downtown living."

Increased population density would de facto achieve many of the objectives described in the preceding paragraph, requiring less involvement from the public sector in creating or regulating the best "place." As the character of an urban place can be almost equally derived from social as well as physical qualities, simply introducing more people has the potential to significantly change the nature of a given place. However, the physical attributes of the place, both existing and envisioned, need to be carefully considered to ensure that the appropriate improvements necessary to support the population density have been identified and are achievable.



How should densities be more strategically targeted in the Central City?

Block Pattern



Larger block sizes could potentially offer more flexibility for courtyard/open space opportunities, building uses, and consistent street edge character while still maintaining a high level of connectivity and good pedestrian access.

Currently, and though it is the densest location in Portland and the State of Oregon, from a built development perspective, the Central City is not a particularly high density urban environment.

Part of the Central City's challenge with regard to achieving high densities can be traced back to the urban block pattern of 200' by 200' blocks, surrounded by narrow streets. From a land utilization perspective and with the overall goal of developing densely, the Central City's block pattern is not very efficient, as almost one half of the available land is consumed by streets used to access the other half.

Less land to develop yields less development, which presents inherent challenges in meeting regional density targets and achieving vital, active urban neighborhoods. Across a given area with a constant height, more development potential is possible with 30% of the land given over to streets as opposed to 40%. In addition, the high percentage of undeveloped land in public rights-of-way is the City's fiscal responsibility, presenting a challenge for adequate ongoing operations and maintenance funding.



Where should the city explore alternative block patterns to the small 200' by 200' blocks?

Urban Form Regulations

The City regulates maximum limits for both Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and height. This was intended to facilitate the “sculpting” of buildings as a way to mitigate the impacts of high-density, large buildings on the pedestrian environment.

In most cases, a building’s use is the primary factor in determining its final form. Office buildings typically feature simpler or blockier forms, larger floorplates, and less façade articulation. Residential buildings in the Central City (on whole blocks) usually fall into three categories: courtyard buildings up to 100 feet, slab buildings up to 200 feet, and tower buildings beyond 200 feet — up to 325 feet today. These categories are not actually regulated by the City but are more the result of building code, development and/or construction factors, such as the number of elevators, egress requirements, secondary structural systems and floorplate efficiency. Depending on the amount of FAR available, a developer would have to reduce the size of building’s floorplates to get a taller building, making it thinner, and full-block building volumes would result in a shorter building.

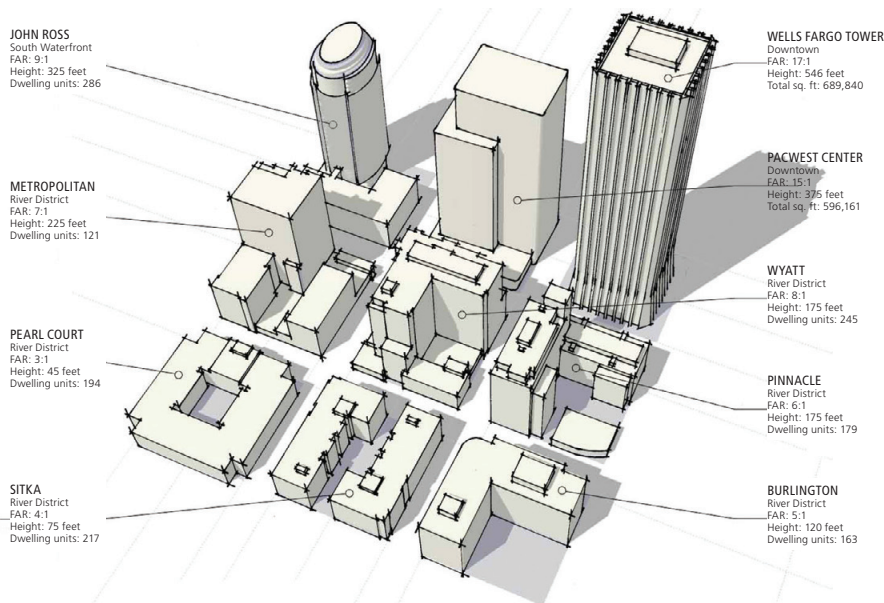
In South Waterfront, concerns over “visual permeability” and some uncertainty about the (then less known) point-tower building type led to the most aggressive building sculpting regulations.

The regulations address maximum north-south floorplate dimensions, maximum streetwall heights, and minimum tower spacing among others. Based on issues previously described for each use, many of the objectives in South Waterfront might have been achieved by FAR limitations alone.

The *Central City 2035* planning process offers an opportunity to reexamine the City’s policy to regulating urban form. An approach that identifies key place-defining qualities of new buildings may require fewer and less-restrictive regulations. While potentially providing more flexibility, a new approach could also serve a greater public benefit. For instance, regulations could be calibrated to achieve access to open space, preservation of existing historic structures, or other district-specific goals.



How could the City consider changing maximum building heights and/or other building form regulations in the Central City?



This comparison shows the diversity of the Central City's high density residential building forms, and the more monolithic shapes of larger Class "A" office buildings in downtown. Differences between where the highest densities are allowed and where they actually exist were extensively analyzed in the Central Portland Urban Design Assessment of 2008.

Review Procedures

The Central City features a robust discretionary design review process typically with the Portland Design Commission that considers every new building proposal carefully against a set of design guidelines. This process is implemented to ensure that each new building will meet the goals for Central City Design Review, as well as become a positive addition to the active and varied urban fabric of the Central City.

Development proposals in the Central City's historic districts are reviewed by the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission. Proposals for alterations, additions (or otherwise) to existing historic landmarks in the Central City are also reviewed by this commission. Due to the generally noncontiguous nature of the existing historic contributing buildings and structures, there will be a large percentage of new development built in most of the Central City's historic districts.

Today, applicants with building proposals in the Central City come in for design review or historic design review at or near the end of the relatively-late "Design Development" phase in the architectural design process. This means that the urban design scale issues, such as the placement of building volumes, the distribution of program, allocation of available entitlements, and the key public realm

relationships have largely already been determined. Therefore, the focus is frequently more on the building's smaller architectural details, such as color, material quality, and landscaping.

The relatively recent creation of the voluntary Design Advice Request (DAR) process addresses this challenge somewhat. The DAR begins a feedback discussion with Design Commission within the earlier "Schematic Design" phase of its architectural development, where the review body can spend time on a proposal's contextual urban design response, such as the proposal's relationship with the geography, surrounding development, and the neighborhood setting. Although the intent behind the DAR is sound, it remains voluntary and there is no clear "big picture" urban design concept or framework diagram for the review bodies to use as a guide. Design review could place a greater emphasis on the urban design benefits of each development, how it contributes to the greater Central City context, and how it responds to an area's special characteristics.

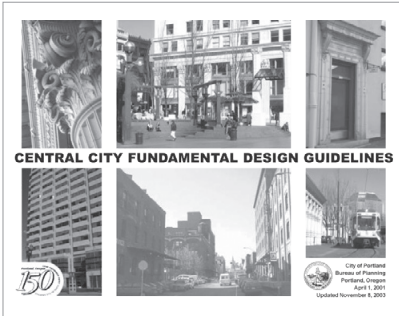


How could the city's review procedures be enhanced to better address larger urban design objectives?



A concept-level urban design diagram highlights issues that to be addressed at the Central Citywide scale, whereas an individual site and building plan does not.

CENTRAL CITY FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN GUIDELINES, 2001



Because the Central City includes a “design-overlay” zone, design review is required throughout the area. The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines (CCFDG), serve as a base set of design guidelines for the Central City. The CCFDG describe the urban design vision as a “livable, walkable, urban community that focuses on the Willamette River.” They provide a framework for how to implement this vision through a discretionary design review process, with the Portland Design Commission.

The design guidelines are intended to state broad design objectives and to provide guidance for development. The design review process requires evaluation against the design guidelines applicable to the area and type of proposal.

The primary set of guidelines used in Central City design review are the CCFDG. These are augmented with district or area-specific guidelines such as the greenway design guidelines or historic district guidelines, to best tailor the design responses of each new building proposal to local design priorities.

Design Guidelines

The Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines, the base set of guidelines upon which the design guideline system of the Central City is built, has not been updated significantly for content since 1990, resulting in a large number of overlapping and out-of-date guidelines. This important keystone set of guidelines needs to be reconsidered and updated for clarity, structure, relevance and approach.

Clear direction for the character and design of new development within historic districts remains elusive. Most, but not all, of the Central City historic districts have their own design guidelines. Some of the historic districts lack specialized design guidelines, while others feature development entitlements that appear disingenuous to the character and scale of the remaining historic structures. A targeted look at development aspirations and the potential for new design solutions embodied in many of these districts is needed to align and clarify the City’s and historic preservation community’s objectives.

Of the district-specific guidelines, only a few — all on the west side of the river — have been updated recently. As each district-specific set of guidelines has been updated, each has moved closer together while moving farther from the CCFDG. More recent issues addressed by new guidelines include integrated landscape designs, sustainable features or “high performance architecture” components, and more specifics addressing structured parking. Design issues such as these that appear consistently across multiple guideline documents should be consolidated into a recrafted set of fundamentals that would apply Central City wide.



How can the City’s system of design guidelines be recrafted in response to current goals and priorities?

Location	Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines	District-Specific Design Guidelines	Date last updated
Downtown			
River District			2008
Lower Albina			
Lloyd District			1991
Central Eastside			1991
South Waterfront			2010
University District			
Goose Hollow			1996
Yamhill Historic District			1987
Skidmore/Old Town Historic District			1987
New China/Japantown Historic District			
NW 13th Avenue Historic District			1996
Russell Street Conservation District		*	
Grand Avenue Historic District			1994

* Community Design Guidelines apply

Street Plans and Standards

The Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) owns and operates most of the public streets through the Central City. It manages the system for capacity, traffic flow, multi-modal access and design. To date, and as land uses change over time, the design of many of the Central City's public streets has not been directly linked to specific land uses or development on the adjacent properties. To effectively compete with other parts of the City and outlying suburban areas, considerable effort has been made to ensure good and relatively traffic-free access into and through the heart of the Central City for motor vehicles.

As a result, much of the Central City's street system functions well as a system of signalized intersections regulating the flow of traffic through the area. This traffic engineering approach, while effective at efficiently and equitably utilizing the large amount of public streets available, has not yielded a compelling design hierarchy of streets.

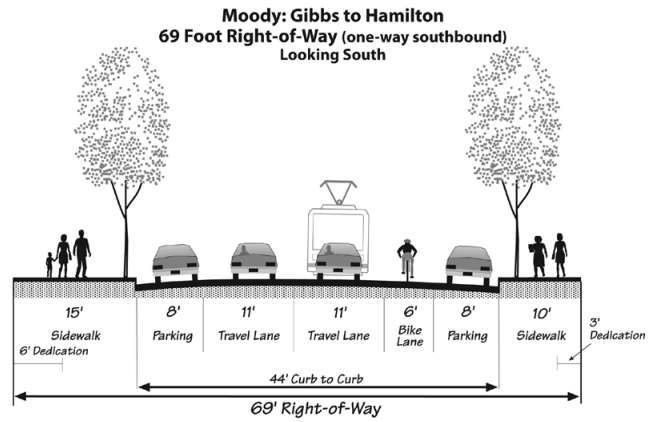
Since the street system makes up such a large percentage of the land area of the Central City — some 40% that is publicly-owned and managed — there exists a considerable opportunity to affect change in the public realm. A new street plan for the Central City could illustrate a clear hierarchy such as specify a relatively compact set of different street types, map the system, describe the transportation functions they accommodate, and illustrate their designs for future improvements. The designs of these streetscapes could be carefully coordinated with the land use and development aspirations for the areas, districts or adjacent properties served by the streets.



What would the system components and approach be for the development of a new street hierarchy in the Central City?



How can a clear design hierarchy be developed in the Central City's systems of similar narrow streets?



Street sections from the South Waterfront District Street Plan



SW Moody Avenue in South Waterfront



Festival street in Chinatown

Public Financing

Urban Renewal

The Portland Development Commission (PDC) administers a series of Urban Renewal Areas (URAs) within the Central City and has the ability to create specialized developer agreements with parties planning on property redevelopment.

Most, but not all, of the Central City is in one URA or another, though they all have different lifespans and anticipated expiration dates. These URAs offer the ability to generate tax increment financing (TIF) used in the River District to help build the first Portland Streetcar line, develop an open space master plan for the new community, and remove and replace previous industrial road and freight infrastructure.

Developer agreements vary, but using the River District example from above, the agreement specified the timing of the improvements and linked an increase in residential development densities to the completion of a specific improvement. URAs and developer agreements offer relatively near-term, site-specific urban design implementation options, though available funds are highly sensitive to the current status of the development markets. Reconsidering the prioritization of urban design projects funded by URAs and linking these to a new urban design concept for the Central City could help to ensure that a broader range of urban design objectives are addressed.

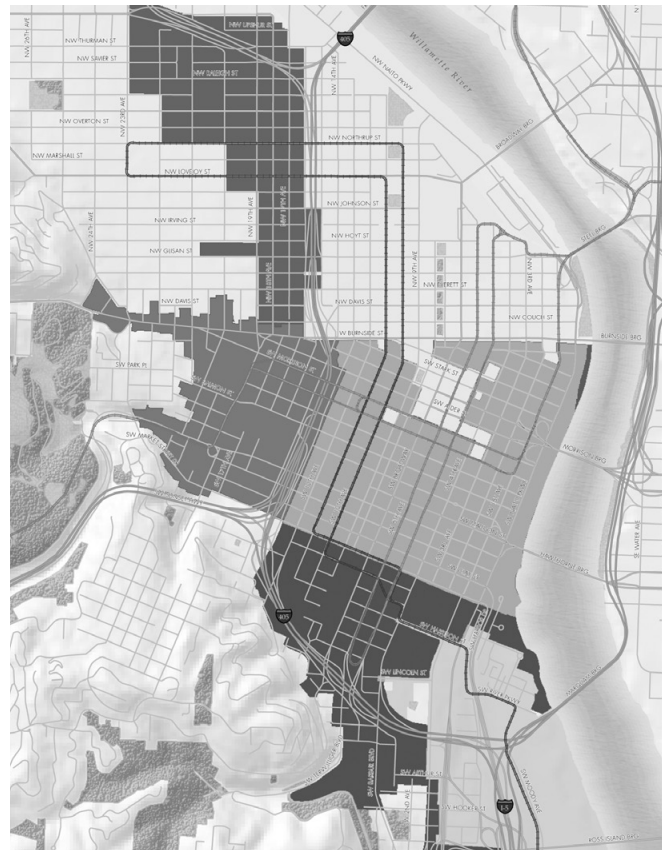


Portland's Classical Chinese Garden

Other Public or Financial Incentives

Other public or financial incentives exist to encourage private developers to implement broad urban design goals. Density and/or height bonuses can be awarded for incorporated public amenities such as public art, water features, roof gardens or bike lockers (to name a few) in a given development. Due to a shifting set of priorities and inadequate economic return for incorporation of the amenity, many of the available bonuses have not been used extensively. Tax credits and/or abatements are possibilities for different types of projects, typically those that preserve and reuse older buildings or propose affordable housing, respectively. Many of these incentives or financing options need to be reconsidered or readjusted to ensure that they are attractive to developers while achieving their intended objectives.

? What types of public/private partnerships or other public incentives should the City consider to further urban design goals?



Portland Development Commission Urban Renewal Study Areas

Explore New Urban Design Tools

The current set of tools that help to implement urban design objectives are based on an outdated paradigm. Overall, a comprehensive and organizing urban design concept, and subsequently a more specific framework, is needed to address the current situation where many of the incentives, processes or programs are implemented in isolation, on a project-by-project basis without clear direction on larger Central City wide objectives. For example:

- Efficiently achieving regional density targets may be undermined by over reliance on the prevailing urban pattern of 200' by 200' small blocks
- More flexibility on building form regulations — height, setbacks and loading, for example — should be explored in some parts of the Central City
- Design guidelines, street design standards and the design review process should be updated to address new issues and priorities
- Public financing, incentives and other partnerships need to be recalibrated to ensure they will leverage the maximum private investment and result in the desired public amenities

The *Central City 2035* process will analyze more directly the multiple tools available in the public sector's "toolkit" which are intended to achieve not only urban design standards but also a range of other broad policy objectives. This analysis will yield a more strategic approach to the identification and deployment of the appropriate tool to achieve a given issue.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Central City's growth and development have come a long way since the 1988 *Central City Plan*. Numerous public investments in transit facilities, parks and open spaces, pedestrian paths, bike ways and other civic amenities have leveraged considerable private development that have helped shape and activate Portland's core. In the 22 years since the *Central City Plan*, new challenges have emerged, new priorities need to be identified and new opportunities now present themselves to the Central City's growing and shifting population of residents, workers and visitors.



Key Findings

1. One Size Does Not Fit All.

The Central City's current urban design strategies include a singular "red crescent" of development density stretching across the Willamette, a unilateral step-down-to-the-river policy, and a single center located on the west side of the river around Pioneer Courthouse Square. While these strategies were critical in the mid to late 1980s, they are no longer adequate to address the complexity of today's urban design challenges, as listed below.

- The Central City's urban form approach of "Step down to the river" (in concert with the high-density transit mall on 5th and 6th) has resulted in a disconnect between the movement and activity of the downtown and the river. In addition, with much of the urban vitality five blocks west and parallel to the river, is not the active focal point envisioned by the *Central City Plan*.
- The East side of the river, while it has enjoyed considerable public investment in transit, open spaces, event facilities and targeted redevelopment over the years, faces unique challenges and has yet to emerge from the shadow of the west side as its counterpoint.
- The Central City's small block pattern and its multiple narrow, traffic flow-oriented streets may not contribute to enough public realm diversity to serve the changing Central City population and address citywide climate change goals.

2. There Are Opportunities For 'Intervention' And 'Invention'.

There are opportunities for 'intervention' as well as 'invention'. Within the Central City's extensive existing built fabric of districts, neighborhoods and places — and even many of the oldest parts of the Central City — there are still numerous infill sites ready for new, developed interventions. These have the potential to enhance the qualities of these existing urban landscapes while adding new approaches, technologies, movement facilities and gathering spaces to the Central City's context.

Larger, unbuilt portions of the River, South Waterfront and Lloyd Districts (among others) still remain, offering broader landscapes within which new urban design paradigms should be encouraged and experimented. These opportunities for invention may provide the Central City with new block patterns and street systems that cater more directly (and be more attractive) to the area's shifting and expanding populations of residents and workers.

3. Urban Design Implementation Tools Should Be Recrafted.

The current set of urban design implementation tools should be recrafted. Currently, the public agencies working in the Central City feature an arsenal of regulations, guidelines, incentives, review procedures, standards and partnerships crafted to achieve urban design objectives. Over time, many of these have naturally become out of date, overly complicated, redundant, ineffective or irrelevant. Based on the series of new challenges and an ever-limited pool of public resources, developing a strategy for prioritizing future investments and becoming more strategic with the public sector's set of tools will be critical in achieving the vision for the 21st Century Central City.

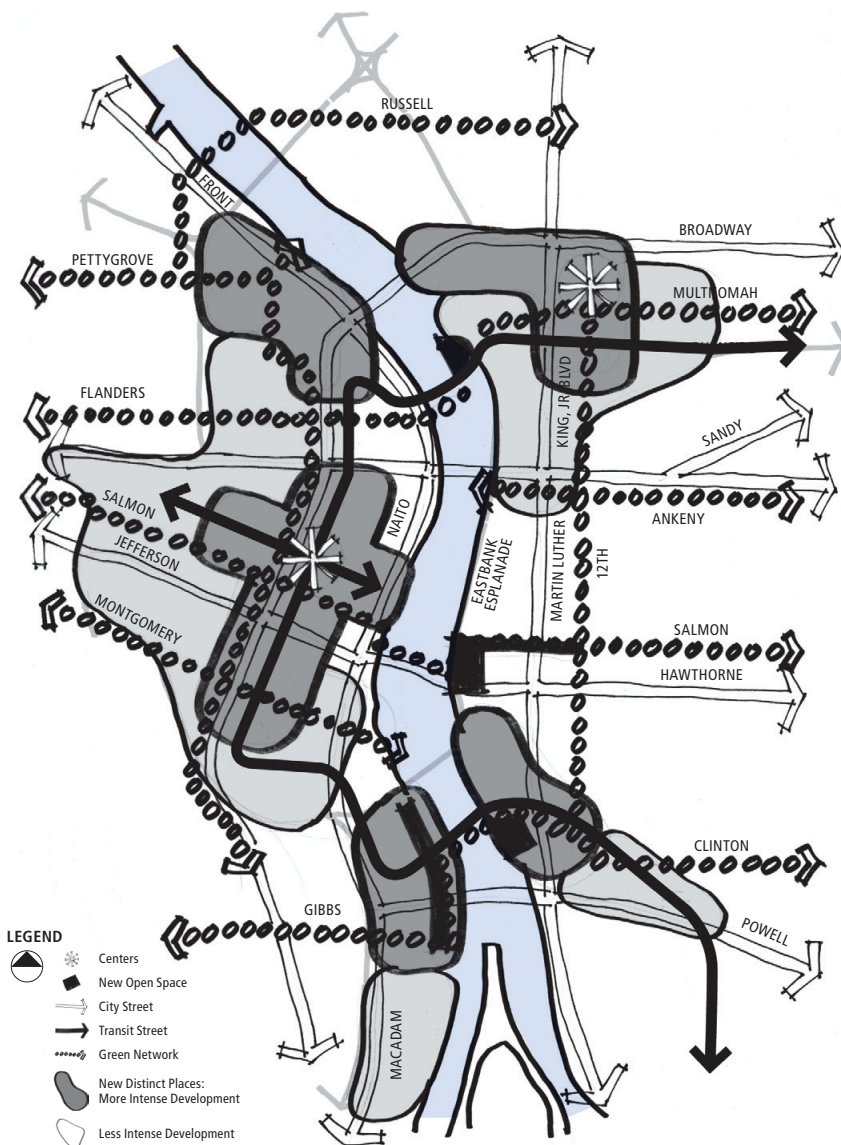
Guiding Themes

To address the findings described above, and to help frame discussions as part of the *Central City 2035* planning process, this report recommends three guiding urban design themes:

1. Reclaim the River.
2. Elevate the East Side.
3. Transform the Public Realm.

These themes will be further explored and tested in *Design Central City, Volume II*.

Preliminary Urban Design Concept



Moving Forward

This report recommends the development of a new Central City urban design concept, to update and illustrate the major organizing urban design features of the Central City for the next 25 years. Next, at the district scale, more specific urban design guidance will be developed during the planning of each of the Central City's four quadrants. When combined, the quadrant urban design concepts will reveal a more comprehensive and detailed Central City urban design framework plan. Finally, implementation of more site-specific and place-making projects will follow, building on direction derived from the Central City concept and quadrant plans.

In addition to a new urban design concept, it is anticipated that the *Central City 2035* process will yield a new land use concept diagram that describes potential future land use concentrations across the Central City. Clearer ideas about future uses will provide better direction for the design, character and function of the public realm infrastructure necessary to support each area. The quadrant level planning work will provide a venue to test and refine these ideas and concepts at a much more specific scale.

A primary product of the Central City 2035 process will be a new urban design concept, similar to the example shown at left. The concept will illustrate the primary urban design components for the entire Central City including major corridors, transit links, and open spaces, new development concentrations and centers of activity.

A Refocused Vision for the Central City

The comprehensive vision from the 1988 *Central City Plan* called for one downtown area that “embraces the river.” *Design Central City* builds on this vision while proposing a refocused approach to truly embrace the river.

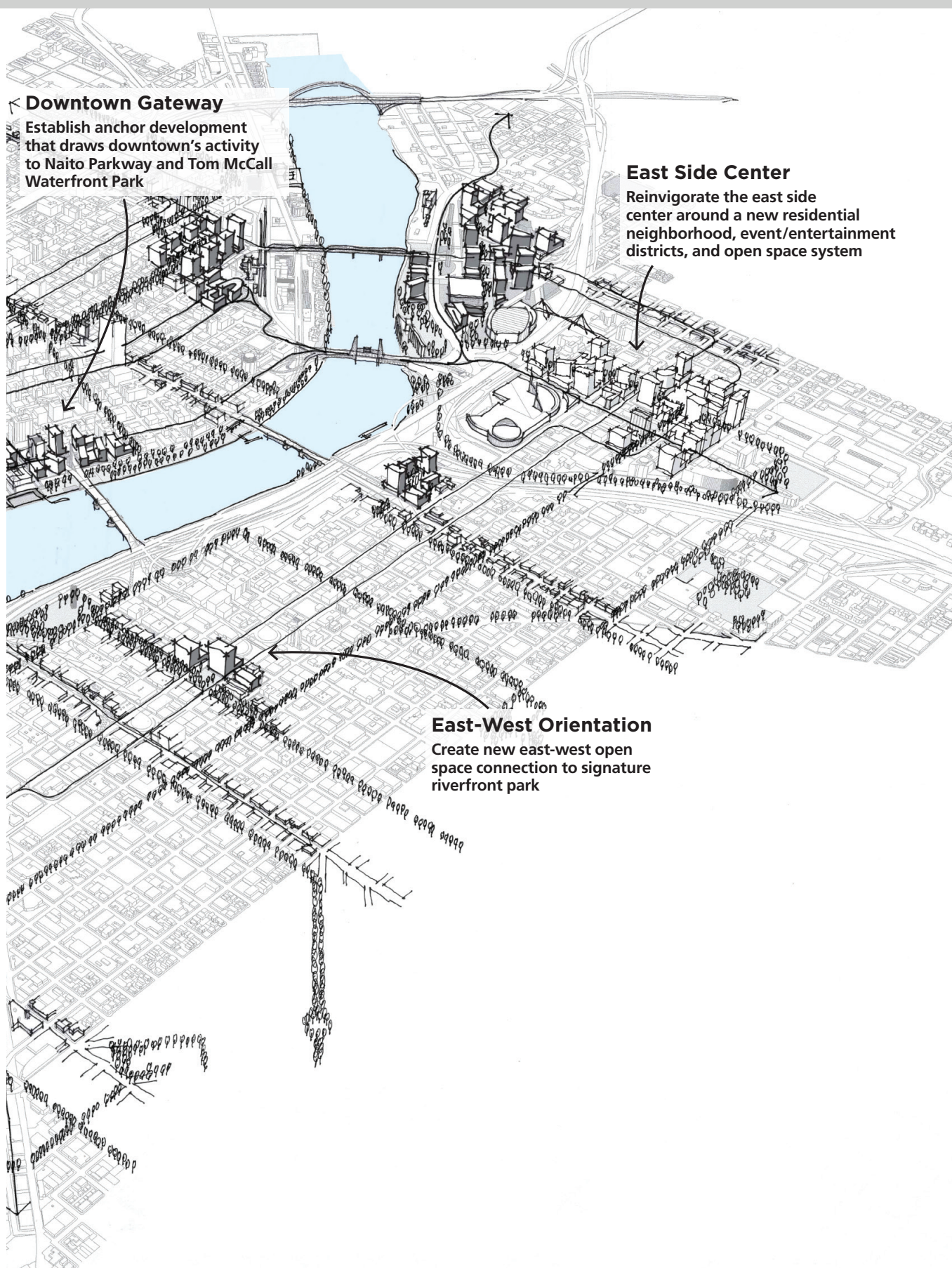
The Willamette River has become the true focal point of the Central City with a series of new water-based activities, riverfront attractions and more specifically-tailored open space and environmental design solutions. The east side now benefits from a strengthened north-south spine in MLK/Grand; the Lloyd District has blossomed into a premier high density residential neighborhood; and the area around OMSI has become a southern anchor to balance the Lloyd’s transformation. The Central City’s robust public realm system now features a more pronounced east-west orientation toward the river and features a clear design hierarchy that offers more choices for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit rider and motorists.

Open Space Connections

Reclaim portions of the public realm to extend the greenway’s character into the downtown core

Southeast Anchor

Organize new employment and education hub around catalytic river amenity



The mission of the Urban Design Studio is to explore, develop, and implement urban design visions, concepts and approaches for the ongoing and intentional evolution of the City of Portland.