



**HISTORIC RESOURCES BACKGROUND REPORT 4:
ADDITIONAL EAST PORTLAND DOCUMENTATION**

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PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT



City of Portland Bureau of
Planning and Sustainability
Sam Adams, Mayor | Susan Anderson, Director

The Portland Plan

Acknowledgements

Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

Mayor Sam Adams, Mayor, Commissioner-in-charge

Susan Anderson, Director

Joe Zehnder, Chief Planner

Historic Resources Program

Steve Dotterer, Principal Planner

Liza Mickle, Historic Resources Program Specialist

Nicholas Starin, City Planner

Technical Assistance

Kevin Martin, GIS Analyst

Carmen Piekarski, GIS Analyst

Ralph Sanders, Graphic Designer

Leslie Wilson, Graphic Designer

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OVERVIEW

A key finding of the Portland Plan *Historic Resources Background Report* was that historic resources play a vital role in defining Portland's sense of place and the character of its neighborhoods. Portlanders show strong interest in older buildings and the culture and history of the city, not only designated landmarks and districts, but buildings, structures and places that may not (yet) be recognized as historic, but are central to the City's distinctiveness and quality of life.

The Portland Plan *Historic Resources Background Report* acknowledged that one of the main challenges to recognizing and preserving historic resources citywide is an inadequate inventory of buildings, sites and landscapes. Portland's adopted Historic Resource Inventory (HRI) is more than 30 years old. Since 1984, many resources from the 1940s to the early 1960s have become "historic" and potentially eligible for historic designation, including modern-style buildings and developments constructed after World War II. Collectively, these represent new historic resources that merit special attention.

Key recommendations of the *Historic Resources Background Report* included pursuing preservation projects in East Portland, which has few protected historic resources, lacks an adequate inventory, and has had little preservation planning. East Portland has a substantially different history, identity, and built and natural environment than the inner Portland neighborhoods and Central City, which have long been the focus of preservation efforts. The report called for new preservation initiatives, such as inventory and research, historic designation projects, and developing preservation policies and strategies that respond to East Portland's distinctive attributes. The report also called for identifying and evaluating some of these newer historic resources by using targeted evaluation tools such as mapping and selective surveys.

The following summary presents highlights of two projects that have responded to Portland Plan recommendations for East Portland. Together, the *East Portland Historical Overview and Historic Preservation Study* and *Modern Historic Resources of East Portland: A Reconnaissance Survey* provide significant additional documentation about the history and built environment of East Portland and expand the knowledge base.

- The *East Portland Historical Overview and Historic Preservation Study* (Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, March 2009). This study outlines the historical contexts in which East Portland grew and evolved and provides a preliminary analysis of existing conditions, issues, and action alternatives that can guide future historic and planning efforts in the area. A separate appendix document supplements the historical overview with maps, aerial photographs, and other data.
- *Modern Historic Resources of East Portland: A Reconnaissance Survey* (Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, April 2011). This survey project focused on the neighborhoods of East Portland. It examined approximately 600 structures constructed between 1935-1965 within 28 study clusters that were chosen as potentially distinctive examples of architecturally and chronologically coherent subdivisions or neighborhoods. Some non-residential properties were also surveyed.

I. EAST PORTLAND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW & HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDY

Completed by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) in 2009, this study outlines the historical contexts in which East Portland grew and evolved and provides a preliminary analysis of existing conditions, issues, and action alternatives that can guide future historic preservation and planning efforts in the area. It has three primary sections: 1) an outline of East Portland's social and developmental history; 2) a summary of development trends and policies, and their implications for historic resources; and 3) options for future historic resource research, policy development, and other preservation activities in the area. An appendix contains maps, aerial photographs and other supporting information. This study was funded in part by a grant from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

Purpose of the study

As buildings and places that connect the past to the present, historic resources support community pride, shape neighborhood character and sense of place, improve livability, and enrich our lives. East Portland's character and community identities—developed in part in distinction from “Portland”—are very much rooted in its citizens' appreciation of their history, landscapes and built environment.

The history and built heritage of East Portland have not been as comprehensively documented or protected as in many other parts of the city and there have been relatively few historic preservation projects and activities. For example, just one of Portland's more than 650 historic landmarks, and one of its 14 historic districts, lie east of 82nd Avenue. So too, East Portland's developmental and social history has not been as well documented or synthesized as for many other parts of the city, making it more difficult to contextualize its built environment and demonstrate the significance of its resources. These issues, combined with the continuing pace of change, make the area ripe for more extensive efforts to document its history and architectural heritage and to develop strategies for their preservation and protection for ourselves and future generations.

The *East Portland Historical Overview and Historic Preservation Study* is a starting place for addressing this imbalance by providing an overview of East Portland's history, a preliminary analysis of preservation related issues and trends, and suggestions for possible approaches to more comprehensive or focused preservation work in the future.

Summary of findings

- East Portland is a special and complex part of the city. Its history, landscapes, and built environment differ in important ways from Portland's urban core and inner-ring neighborhoods. From the White settlement era to World War II, this large area remained for the most part unincorporated, generally rural in character, and developed identities distinct from those parts of Portland that had urbanized in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- In the post-war era, development accelerated with new subdivisions, a profusion of “suburban-style” single-family housing, car-oriented development patterns and uneven extension of urban infrastructure and services. The transition from lower to higher intensity land uses continued through succeeding decades.

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- In the 1940s and 1950s, architectural styles and building forms changed significantly. Ranch houses and two-car garages became popular, and planned developments, the large-scale speculative developer, and industrial-scale residential construction methods were introduced. Some of the modern architectural types introduced after the war were the Ranch, Split-Level, and Contemporary forms.
- Large tracts of land were annexed by the City, bringing changes in governance and zoning. Massive infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the I-205 freeway and the MAX light rail line profoundly altered the landscape and the relationships between East Portland communities and the rest of the region.
- In the past decade, growth has continued in many neighborhoods, with increasing densities through new “green field” development, land conversion, infill projects, and new multi-family housing.
- East Portland's neighborhoods retain distinctive physical and civic characters that are better understood through an appreciation of the area's history. The legacies of the area's unique history continue to define East Portland's complex rural/suburban/urban identity—from its generally newer building stock, variable street and lot patterns, notable natural resources and landscapes, abundance of fir trees, and many unimproved roadways, to its multiple school and service districts.

Summary of conclusions

- From a historic preservation perspective, East Portland presents both challenges and opportunities. Its buildings and cultural landscapes have not been well surveyed and inventoried. It has relatively few nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings, such as those that fill historic resource inventories of closer-in areas. Its prevalent post-war era architecture does not often fit popular notions of what constitutes "historic" structures.
- Beyond the structures themselves, much of the potential significance of East Portland resources lies in the post-war street, block and lot patterns that differ so markedly from those in inner Portland; for instance, subdivisions characterized by curvilinear streets, cul-de-sacs, and irregular lot dimensions.
- The *East Portland Historic Overview* identified potential alternatives for additional preservation work, including additional historic context research, survey and inventory projects, public education, and preservation policy development. It suggested some initial ideas for geographic or thematic focus areas for future work, noting that much of the area's character derives from the structures and development patterns of the post-WWII era.

II. MODERN HISTORIC RESOURCES OF EAST PORTLAND: A RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY

The *East Portland Historic Overview* identified potential alternatives for additional preservation work, including survey and inventory projects. A recommended focus area was post-World War II resources, based on the finding that much of the area's character derives from the structures and development patterns of that period. This project is timely because buildings dating from the World War II and Post-War eras are just now becoming eligible for historic designation, according to the National Register's 50-year cut-off. The survey was funded by a grant from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. The consulting firm Historic Preservation Northwest (HPNW) was contracted in summer 2010 and completed the project in April 2011.

This project focused on the neighborhoods of East Portland, a broad area generally east of 82nd Avenue. East Portland occupies approximately 20 percent of the City of Portland. Most of this area was annexed to Portland in the 1980s and 1990s.

Survey work concentrated on properties constructed between 1935-1965, a time period that coincided with the widespread development of East Portland and the introduction of new architectural styles and building forms.

Historic Preservation Northwest surveyed approximately 560 properties, grouped in 28 selected clusters in neighborhoods throughout East Portland, along with some non-residential buildings on major thoroughfares. The survey was selective due to the large size and diversity of the study area. The clusters were chosen to provide a wide distribution across the entire survey area. Most of the properties surveyed were single-family residences that represent a range of development eras and patterns, along with architectural types and styles of construction prevalent between 1935-1965. Because the survey was selective and generally focused on representative examples of residential buildings, the statistics and findings below represent the study clusters in general, although not East Portland as an entity.

Summary of findings

- The evolution of architectural styles in the 1935-65 period began with a wave of period revivals, often English or Tudor Cottages, that peaked in popularity in the late 1920s. With the economic depression of the 1930s, construction slowed. New houses tended to be small in scale, including the World War II-Era Cottage, popular from around 1935 to 1945.
- There was a substantial increase in size from the immediate post-war small houses and the houses of the 1950's. The Ranch style emerged from California in the 1930s and proliferated across the suburban landscape in the late 1940s, becoming the standard for residential construction until the 1970s. With time, Ranches began to sprawl, assuming their classical shape with a strong emphasis on the horizontal plane. A full 70% of properties in the survey group are classified as Ranch style, including its various sub-styles.
- During 1935-1965, garages started out as detached, single-car structures. After 1945 small, attached, single-car garages were common. By the 1950s, attached two-car garages were often present, and by the late 1950s to early 1960s, two car garages became standard.

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- The typical footprint of a house continued to stretch between 1961 and 1965. Split-levels became popular. The Contemporary style (popular around 1960-1970) represents a fusion of the Ranch style with International Modernism. Approximately 10% of properties in the study group could be labeled as Contemporary.
- The survey found considerable variety of house forms and styles among and within the subdivisions. Within the clusters that had a very limited number of plan designs there was less diversity. Overall, however, multiple developers/builders were often at work within one cluster, adding their individual stamp. Where development was more uniform, multiple plans were often available to choose from.
- The construction of new suburbs involved a swirl of real estate companies, developers, contractors, builders, designers and architects as well as individuals that combined these professions such as builder-developers and designer-contractors. All of these, as well as future new home owners could be aided by a large selection of plan books. Builders often used plans from books or tweaked plans to meet their needs. Local material availability and cost and a builder's desire to make each house unique in some way drove the end result.
- In addition to single-family residential housing, the core of this study, a few other 1935-65 resource types were surveyed. These provided services to the new suburban population and were generally located along major thoroughfares. The buildings tend to be one story in height and to sprawl horizontally. The latter is reinforced by the most common roof forms, which are flat or low-pitched gable and shed roofs.
- Alternate residential resources include multi-unit dwellings, mobile home courts, and motels or motor courts. The multi-unit dwellings, apartment buildings, tend to be one or two stories tall and are scattered along major arteries. As evidenced by the subdivisions in this study, few multi-unit dwellings from the 1935-1965 time period were incorporated into the fabric of the community.
- Other types of non-residential resources include commercial and professional structures such as shops, restaurants, automotive resources, banks, and office buildings. In general, the commercial architecture has not retained its original appearance or historic integrity, as many buildings were remodeled over time to accommodate new businesses. Also, the construction materials and detailing were often of poor quality, which further contributed to the loss of original appearance. Notable exceptions include bank buildings, which appear to have embraced modernism whole-heartedly and which remain externally intact even when converted to a new interior use.
- Where the development of Portland's first suburbs was fueled by streetcar networks, their post-war equivalents were automobile-oriented. There is a significant number of car-related resources in East Portland, primarily along SE 82nd and 122nd Avenues. Signage to attract motorists, drive-up windows, and/or large parking lots are typical features of these resources.
- In general, places of employment and commerce are scattered throughout the area rather than being clustered in districts as they are in traditional urban settings. They also tend to be one story in height and have single uses rather than combinations of commerce, office, and residential. When small offices cluster, they are often expressed as office courts, a parallel to residential apartment courts.

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- Residential development was generally planned to accommodate the car. Of the 28 residential clusters surveyed, 10 had sidewalks or partial sidewalks, and the remaining 18 had none or only along major traffic arteries. Although some promotional materials for subdivisions advertised they were “walkable,” and the land being developed in 1935-65 was some of the flattest in Portland, the subdivisions were not designed to be pedestrian-friendly. Most of the clusters are within walking distance of major arteries and commercial opportunities and services, but they aren't internally connected via smaller, less trafficked roads. Many elementary schools, however, are located within easy walking distance of the clusters.

Other survey conclusions

- The survey reported that a remarkable number of the subdivisions were planned and completed within a narrow period of time, and also that many retain their original character. In general, residential subdivisions that were subject to a greater amount of initial planning and set a higher starting price-point were more likely to retain their characteristic architectural features.
- Within the 28 clusters studied, the survey found 10 are worthy of more intensive survey, research, and potential listing on the National Register as historic districts. While these areas have the architectural integrity to be potentially eligible for the National Register, the process prior to listing would have to include a significant amount of additional research plus the input and support of residents.
- This report recommended this selective reconnaissance survey should be seen as the beginning of a continuing process, with further research and survey as the next step. There should be an intensive-level survey of one of the study clusters that were found to have high integrity. The choice of which cluster could be determined by strong neighborhood interest. Alternately, the report recommended an intensive survey of the adjacent Argay Terrace and Devonshire Additions in Northeast Portland. This area is composed of highly intact, well constructed Ranches of various forms and styles. There is a diversity of design that is nevertheless cohesive. Additionally, many different builders and contractors were active in the subdivision, making it a somewhat representative example of the nature of the housing market in the late 1950s through the 1960s.
- Finally, another topic recommended for research is builders and contractors that were active in the East Portland area during the 1935-65 time period, some of whom may still be able to contribute memories and plans. Other interested groups, for example Mid-Century Modern aficionados, may be willing to do related research and interview work.

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