

## **Section II: Urban Design Framework**

The Comprehensive Plan goals and policies shape how the city will grow. Guided by these goals and policies, the Urban Design Framework provides a structure for Portland’s current and future physical form and layout. The framework describes and maps the city in terms of major elements such as its places, natural features, and connections. The framework establishes a set of terms for the major physical elements in Portland and allows the City to be more intentional in how it directs future change and growth. The Urban Design Framework will be part of the basis for drawing the new Comprehensive Plan Map that guides land use, design, density, and investment decisions.

Because the Urban Design Framework is drawn at the citywide scale, the location shown for specific elements should be seen as general, subject to refinement and more specific plans in the future. Also, the Urban Design Framework fully supports the Portland Plan concept that one size does not fit all. The framework assumes that the specific design of neighborhoods, streets, open spaces, and centers needs to allow for flexibility to respond to differences in local conditions and objectives.

### **What is in the framework?**

The Urban Design Framework describes the high-level physical elements that make up the city and maps the layout of the city in terms of those elements. The list of elements, which builds on the Portland Plan’s Healthy Connected City strategy, includes four major groups: Pattern Areas, centers, connections, and natural features. The map depicts a combination of locations where elements already exist on the ground and locations where they may be developed based on the Comprehensive Plan.

At the largest scale, the Urban Design Framework identifies five distinct Portland geographies, or “Pattern Areas.” Distinguishing these areas recognizes that a “one-size-fits-all” approach does not work, and that each area has unique characteristics, needs, and assets to consider in future planning and development decisions.

The framework depicts a growth strategy that prioritizes growth and change in higher density, mixed-use centers, in Civic Corridors, and in Transit Station Areas. A citywide system of mixed-use areas provides more equitable access to places of focused activity and services. These mixed-use areas will be shaped by the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities presented by each of the Pattern Areas, and they will support the surrounding residential areas and help to create healthy, complete neighborhoods.

The framework also includes an interconnected network of Civic Corridors, Greenways, and Habitat Corridors that will connect people and weave nature into neighborhoods throughout Portland. These connections represent the integration of Portland’s multimodal transportation system to improve accessibility to centers, employment areas, natural areas, and the Willamette and Columbia Rivers.

Finally, the framework highlights major natural features, such as waterbodies and large habitat areas that shape the city’s physical landscape. The Urban Design Framework illustrates how a system of open spaces and streets can connect centers and neighborhoods while bringing the natural landscape into the fabric of the city and the daily lives of residents. The Urban Design Framework supports the idea that Portland’s future growth can be both urban and sustainable—

## SECTION II: URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

---

that it can contribute to vibrant urban districts while enhancing and growing Portland's natural land, water, and habitat elements and connections.

### Elements

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A. Pattern Areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Central City</li><li>2. Inner Neighborhoods</li><li>3. Western Neighborhoods</li><li>4. Eastern Neighborhoods</li><li>5. Industrial and River</li></ol> <p>B. Centers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Central City</li><li>2. Gateway Regional Center</li><li>3. Town Centers</li><li>4. Neighborhood Centers*</li></ol> <p>C. Connections</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Civic Corridors</li><li>2. Neighborhood corridors*</li><li>3. High-Capacity Transit Corridors</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. Greenways</li><li>5. Habitat Corridors</li><li>6. Rivers</li></ol> <p>D. Transit station areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Employment Stations*</li><li>2. Urban Center Stations*</li><li>3. Urban Residential Stations*</li><li>4. Commuter Stations*</li></ol> <p>E. Natural features</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Waterbodies and watersheds*</li><li>2. Major open spaces</li><li>3. Major topographic features</li></ol> <p>F. Residential areas*</p> <p>G. Industrial and mixed employment areas*</p> <p>H. Campus institutions</p> |
|---|---|

\* not shown on the Urban Design Framework map

### A. Pattern Areas

Portland is characterized by five primary "Pattern Areas" defined by characteristics such as topography and physical features; street, land use, and block pattern; type, form, and intensity of development; character, size, and function of natural resource areas; and the period in which the area was developed. Identifying each of these areas serves as a basis from which to consider how policies should apply differently in different parts of the city. The definition of Pattern Areas is based on important common characteristics within a broad area. These characteristics are not intended to capture all the variations and exceptions that exist. (For specific goals and policies related to the five Pattern Areas, see Chapter 5, "Urban Design and Development.")

- **Central City.** The Central City is the region's center of innovation and exchange, with an intensely urbanized built form, high-density residential neighborhoods and employment, cultural institutions, interconnected street and park systems, and location directly along the Willamette River. The Central City includes some of the city's industrial sanctuaries and higher education institutions. (The Central City also serves as a Major Center.)
- **Inner Neighborhoods.** The Inner Neighborhoods are characterized by streetcar-era compact development. This Pattern Area features a highly connected grid of streets with a fine-grained pattern of development and open spaces, main street business districts, and buildings generally oriented toward the public realm.
- **Western Neighborhoods.** The Western Neighborhoods' most prominent characteristics are the hilly topography, streams, ravines, forested slopes, variably sized lots, and curvilinear street patterns.

- **Eastern Neighborhoods.** The Eastern Neighborhoods are defined by a mix of urban patterns, prominent streets, large blocks, and natural features such as buttes and Douglas fir groves.
- **Industrial and River.** This Pattern Area includes varied activities and physical patterns of the city's prime industrial lands, wildlife habitat areas, and the city's connections to the rivers. This area serves as the city's primary area for industrial businesses and jobs.

## **B. Centers**

The city is organized into a hierarchy of different types of centers in which activity and development are concentrated. Each type of center is based on the functions it serves, level of activity, and scale and intensity of development.

Centers serve as anchors to complete neighborhoods, providing concentrations of commercial and community services, employment, housing, and public gathering places. Clustering destinations within compact, walkable areas makes destinations convenient for those living within walking distance, as well as for those using transit or bicycles to meet their daily needs.

Although these areas are prioritized for growth, each center will need to reflect the distinct qualities of its context, with approaches to public infrastructure and development that respond to the surrounding area's unique characteristics, needs, and assets. (For specific goals and policies related to centers, see Chapter 5, "Urban Design and Development".)

- The **Central City** serves as the region's premier center, anchoring an interconnected system of centers. The Central City's concentrations of jobs, services, and civic and cultural institutions support the commercial and cultural life of the city and region. The highest levels of transit access in the city strengthen this role, which also is supported by the Central City's intensely urbanized mix of mid- to high-rise buildings (typically 10 or more stories tall). The Central City includes highly urban residential neighborhoods and plays an important role in accommodating regional growth.
- The **Gateway Regional Center** is eastern Portland's Major Center, serving the area and the region as a hub of employment and community services. Gateway's role is supported by its regional transportation connections, including three High-Capacity Transit lines. Gateway is intended to become a highly urbanized, walkable urban district that has an important role in accommodating growth, with relatively high-density housing and mid- to high-rise buildings (ranging from five to 15 stories tall).
- **Town Centers** are places that serve a broad area and a number of neighborhoods or districts. Town Centers also play an important role in accommodating growth. They provide a wide range of commercial and community services and have a substantial employment component. They are highly walkable urban destinations, with relatively high-density housing and mid-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings (typically five to seven stories tall). They are served by regional High-Capacity Transit connections. Large Town Centers may include several commercial areas that are close to each other. The Urban Design Framework includes places currently designated as Town Centers in the Metro 2040 Growth Concept and also identifies places that have characteristics of Town Centers or could become Town Centers in the future.

## SECTION II: URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

---

- **Neighborhood Centers** are smaller centers that primarily serve adjacent neighborhoods and provide opportunities for additional housing and low-rise commercial and mixed-use buildings (typically up to three to five stories tall). They provide a range of local commercial and community services and transit connections. Neighborhood Centers have a central role in helping us achieve more “complete communities” – where Portlanders have the option of meeting many of their daily needs within walking distance of home.

Smaller neighborhood business districts and small commercial nodes (not shown on the Urban Design Framework Map) fill in service gaps in neighborhood areas located between centers, expanding local access to healthy food and other services. (See Chapter 3, “Economic Development.”)

Note on Town Centers shown on the Urban Design Framework Diagram:

- Circles with solid lines are currently designated as Town Centers in the Metro 2040 Growth Concept.
- Circles with dashed lines are additional centers that have characteristics of Town Centers, as described under Policy 5.22, on the typology of centers.
- The circle with a light line (West Portland) is designated as a Town Center in the Metro 2040 Growth Concept but does not have the characteristics or growth potential of a Town Center as described under Policy 5.22, on the typology of centers.

Note on Commercial areas shown on the Urban Design Framework Diagram:

- Dark red bars reflect the existing neighborhood business districts that represent areas with a high degree of commercial services and may be the basis of Town or Neighborhood Centers.

### C. Connections

Portland’s network of street corridors, regional transit corridors, rivers, Greenways, and habitat connections links major Neighborhood Centers and major open spaces to each other and to the Central City. These connections provide communities with opportunities for way-finding and places that support a sense of identity. (For specific goals and policies related to connections, see Chapter 5, “Urban Design and Development,” unless otherwise indicated.)

- **Civic Corridors** are the city’s most prominent streets, and often the widest. They connect centers, help unify the city and region, and are distinctive civic places of community pride. Some sections of Civic Corridors may serve as the anchor of activity within a Town or Neighborhood Center.
- **Neighborhood Corridors** connect neighborhoods with each other and with other parts of the city. Some Neighborhood Corridors serve as the anchor of activity within a Town or Neighborhood Center.
- **High-Capacity Transit Corridors** form a regional system of connections, providing access to Major Centers and other employment opportunities and destinations throughout the region. They also connect people to the Portland International Airport and other regional transportation connections.
- **Greenways** are a system of accessible pedestrian- and bike-friendly green streets and

trails that link centers, parks, schools, natural areas, and other key community destinations.

- **Habitat Corridors** are a system of habitat connections and linked tree canopies that benefit people and wildlife by weaving nature into the city and connecting large natural areas. Habitat Corridors range from streams and the associated tree canopy to broad swaths of habitat, such as Forest Park. (See Chapter 4, “Watershed Health and the Environment.”)
- **The Willamette and Columbia Rivers** are two of the most prominent physical features of the city. The two rivers serve as major commercial transportation corridors that connect Portland with the world. The confluence of these two rivers represents a unique economic and ecological resource in the Pacific Northwest. These rivers are also scenic and recreational assets, they are important cultural and historical resources, and they are critically important fish and wildlife habitats. (See Chapter 4, “Watershed Health and the Environment.”)

Supplementing these key connections is an extensive network of other streets, trails, connected open spaces, and streams. Together they provide an integrated network of transportation facilities, habitats, green infrastructure, utility connections, recreational opportunities, and shared public space.

#### **D. Transit Station Areas**

Light rail and other High-Capacity Transit stations serve as transit hubs that provide regional connections and are a focus for concentrations of housing and jobs. There are five types of these Transit Station Areas (not delineated on the Urban Design Framework). (See Chapter 5, “Urban Design and Development.”)

- **Employment Stations** provide access to employment areas. They serve areas with concentrations of jobs and commercial uses. Residential development is not an important component.
- **Urban Center Stations** provide access to a mixed-use center or corridor. These Transit Station Areas are the greatest priority for housing development because they provide access to both high-quality transit and services.
- **Urban Residential Stations** provide access to a primarily residential area with high-density housing. Areas within ½ mile of the stations are the focus for housing development to expand opportunities for people to live close to high-quality transit.
- **Commuter Stations** primarily provide multimodal connections to light rail (bus connections, bike access, park-and-ride facilities, and so forth), but do not play a major role in accommodating residential or employment growth.
- **Open space and natural area stations** provide access to regionally important open spaces, such as large parks, regional trail systems, natural areas, or river connections. These station areas may have some housing or employment areas nearby but they are not a focus area for high concentrations of housing and jobs.

### E. Natural features

Connecting people to natural areas and open spaces and linking habitat areas strengthens the human and ecological health of the city.

- **Waterbodies and watersheds.** A watershed is the area that catches rain and snow and drains into a corresponding river, stream, or other waterbody. Geographically, a watershed begins at ridgetops and ends at a river, lake, or wetland. Portland contains five major watersheds, representing the city's largest urban waterbodies: Columbia Slough, the Willamette River, Johnson Creek, Fanno Creek, and Tryon Creek. The design of Portland's built environment and public infrastructure should sustain watershed health and connect people to their watersheds in a meaningful way. (The waterbodies are mapped on the Urban Design Framework. See Chapter 4, "Watershed Health and the Environment," for watershed areas).
- **Major natural areas and open spaces** include regional, state, or large local parks. Major Natural Areas and Open Spaces serve multiple roles for local and citywide communities, such as by providing habitat, scenic value, and active and passive recreational opportunities. (The Urban Design Framework depicts open spaces exceeding 15 acres).
- **Major topographic features.** Portland's geography is shaped by many tree-studded ridges, buttes, and hills that define the landscape and are visible from many local vantage points. These major features offer views and opportunities to gather or celebrate Portland's unique setting. They often provide critical ecological and civic services and functions, such as providing habitat and fostering cultural and neighborhood identity.

### F. Residential areas

Focusing new growth and change within centers and along key corridors allows the general scale and character of many Portland residential areas to continue. Within these areas of stability, there is an emphasis on small-scale infill that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood—especially infill that helps to maintain affordability, accommodate a more diverse range of household types, and achieve a more sustainable built environment. (The Urban Design Framework does not delineate neighborhood residential areas beyond identifying the three neighborhood Pattern Areas.)

### G. Industrial and mixed employment areas

Industrial districts serve as the City's primary areas for industrial business retention and growth. They are critical to the City's competitiveness as a West Coast trade and freight hub and serve as a regional center of diverse manufacturing. They also support a widely accessible base of family-wage jobs. The Central City and the River and Industrial Pattern Areas include industrial sanctuaries for manufacturing and distribution. (The Urban Design Framework does not delineate industrial and mixed employment areas beyond identifying the Central City and the River and Industrial area. For specific goals and policies regarding Industrial and Mixed Employment Areas, see Chapter 3, "Economic Development.")

### H. Campus institutions

Portland's major campus institutions are essential service providers, centers of innovation, workforce development resources, and major employers. Campus institutions include health care

and higher education. Some of these institutions are located within or close to Town Centers or on Civic Corridors, thus strengthening the role of these areas as vibrant places that are a focus of activity. (For specific goals and policies regarding Campus Institutions, see Chapter 3, “Economic Development.”)