

American cities fall into two distinct categories. Some are branded, but the majority are generic. For every New York, Boston, New Orleans, and San Francisco, there is also a Dallas, Detroit, Atlanta, and Kansas City. At present, Portland belongs to the branded category, thanks primarily to our well-known scenic landmarks and their visibility from within the city. If unimpeded views of Mt. Hood and of the Vista Bridge in particular are ever allowed to vanish behind a wall of high-rise buildings, Portland will forever cease to be a branded city and will rather become just another anonymous conglomeration of multistory buildings of mediocre design. The time for deciding is now, and the decision will be irrevocable.

Within living memory, the city once planned to install unsightly gooseneck lights on the Vista Brodge. Before this could happen, however, a group of civic-minded citizens persuaded the city to erect temporary toll barriers on either end of the bridge. The revenue collected was used to pay for the attractive lights that we see today. History has a way of repeating itself. The Vista Bridge is under threat once again. It is to be hoped that the city will prove as far-sighted in 2016 as it was when it preserved the aesthetic integrity of the bridge in the past. The current classification of Jefferson Street as a "view corridor" needs to remain in place, and the boundaries of this corridor need to be extended on either side of Jefferson Street, to Howards Way on the south and to Madison Street on the north.

There is nothing to prevent keeping Portland a branded city at the same time as large-scale commercial development is allowed. Cities far more congested than Portland have nevertheless had the foresight over the years to preserve their Greenwich Village, their Back Bay, and their French Quarter, even as canyons of high-rise buildings are allowed in other areas where they belong. In compariison to the likes of New York and Boston, there is still plenty of room left in Portland for accommodating high-rise buildings without compromising the scenic assets on which Portland's status as a branded city primarily depends.

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