

Halsey-Weidler Summary Memo

presented to
Portland Development Commission



Image Courtesy of Mid Centry Modern League of Portland—mcmleague.org



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OVERVIEW

Since the fall of 2013, Civilis Consultants, in conjunction with the Portland Development Commission and landscape architects Nevue Ngan Associates, has been studying the Halsey-Weidler couplet with two goals in mind:

- Create positive identity and brand for the district.
- Improve economic performance in the couplet.

In order to gather information about the district and how it was functioning for consumers, landlords, and business owners, we set about quantifying the business vertical markets present in the area. Then, we set up small format group interviews with representatives from each vertical market:

- Property Owners
- Food Retailers/Restaurateurs
- Service/Office Businesses
- General Retailers

After these interviews, an identity framework workshop was held with Gateway stakeholders at McGillicuddy's sports bar on February 19, 2014. This workshop related some of the fundamentals of marketing places to the community, and then participants broke up into groups and helped answer questions about the story framework for the Halsey-Weidler couplet. Attendees shared information about what Gateway's authentic story was in the past, related thoughts on what its story is now, and offered ideas for what they might want it to be in the future. Much of this data was used to generate ideas for improving the district's brand and performance that were shared during the final presentation, which was given on April 8th, 2014 at the Little Chapel of the Chimes.

Acknowledgements

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

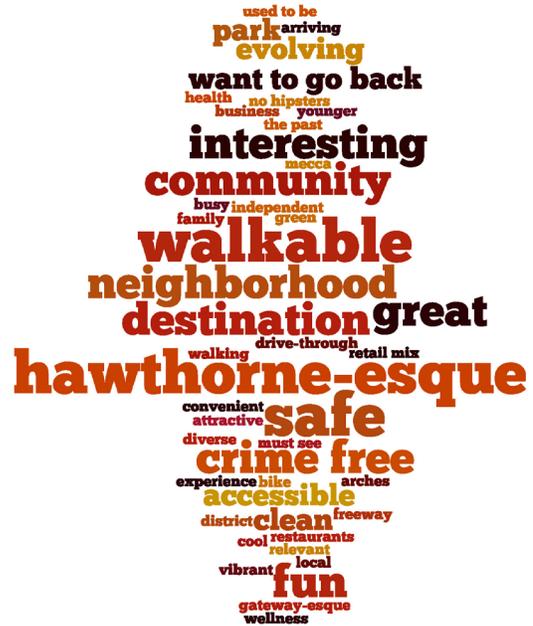
Key Findings

This district is one of the few commercial corridors in the Gateway area that are narrowed down to two lanes of traffic. The couplet also has a very concentrated collection of small, unique, locally-owned businesses. Leveraging these two assets is the key to differentiating the district, building connection with the community, and increasing economic output.

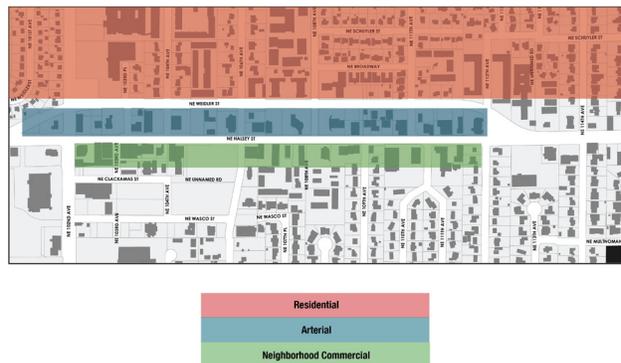
Additional findings:

- The couplet has a profound and distinct impact on the Halsey-Weidler corridor as a commercial district because it negatively impacts circulation and line of sight. It also encourages a type of form that doesn't engage with the street, which is most evidenced by the infrastructure that is in between Halsey and Weidler. The diagram below shows the three distinct physical stories present on the street: neighborhood commercial, arterial, and residential.
- This area was originally a first ring suburb, and suburban retail eschewed one of the most important aspects of the retail experience, which is that the connection with customers happens long before they walk in the door of a business. As a result, it will be beneficial for this district to share their stories and unique identities with the streets and sidewalks, focusing on SHOW, DON'T TELL.
- The district was identified as being dated by stakeholders, which is an essential insight. Retail and restaurant are about reinvention. To stay relevant, they have to adjust to changing market conditions. It's also important to mitigate this perception of being dated because retail and restaurant are two of the uses that bring the greatest sense of connection to a district.

What Do You Want to Hear Describe the Couplet?



Gateway Identity Zones



Halsey-Weidler District Has Three Physical Stories

Recommendations

Faced with the challenge of fostering revitalization in a commercial district, it is not uncommon for cities to focus exclusively on physical infrastructure, things like sidewalk widths and streetlight fixtures, and concentrate solely on how these elements contribute to a place's story. And while infrastructure is important, a vibrant commercial hub must also leverage its contextual strengths, encourage collaboration between stakeholders groups, and offer a cohesive experience for those who are visiting.

GATEWAY'S STORE

- Front Doors
- Aisles
- Fixtures
- Products

A useful way to look at revitalizing a commercial district is to break it down into easy-to-understand components. And, because these districts function much like a single store, we will consider recommendations for it using the same elements as a store: front doors, aisles, fixtures, and products.

In the case of great stores, they generally execute on the same principles that promote success in places: they offer a fantastic experience, both inside and outside. In order to create those experiences, stores must consider their front doors (gateways to town), their aisles and circulation patterns around the store (streets and sidewalks), their fixtures and shelving (buildings), and their product mix and merchandising (businesses).

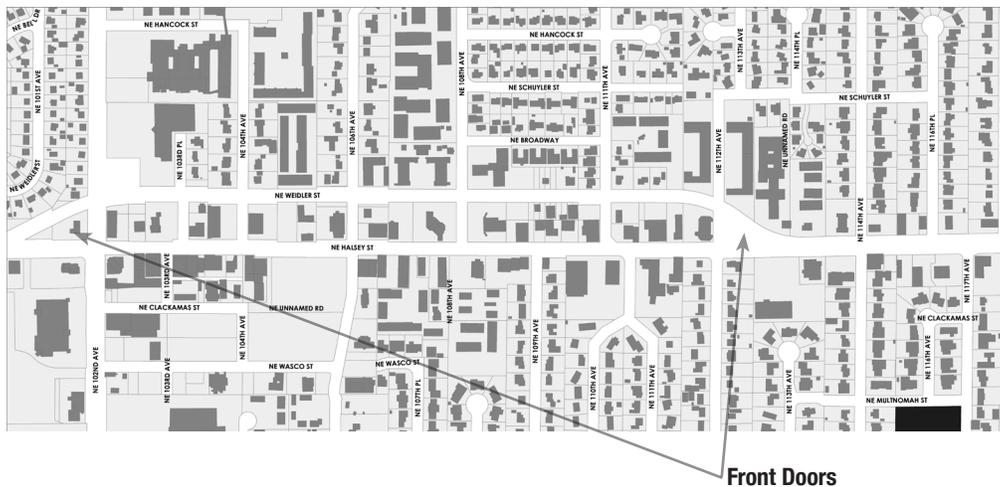
Some of the items we reviewed in Gateway's store included:

- How do customers approach your store?
- How do you get customers' attention?
- What does your storefront look like?
- How do you entice them inside your store?
- How do you keep them in the store, once they are there?
- What are your store's best-selling products?
- What isn't selling so well?
- Are your aisles laid out nicely? Are they easy to navigate?
- Are there compelling products on your shelves?
- Is there something engaging throughout your store?

Front Doors

Before we can discuss a store's front doors, we first have to know where the store is! Presently, there is no agreement as to what "Gateway" actually means. And, GABA is currently focusing on a very wide trade area, as well. In order to achieve economic improvements, any district has to focus all available capacity on a specific area to build a node, and everyone needs to contribute—property owners, residents, business owners, and the public sector. Presently, much of the fantastic organizational capacity and community connections in Gateway are diluted by not focusing on a "store".

In the interest of defining a store, the Halsey-Weidler couplet, shown below, is a great choice because it has only two lanes of traffic, has a sense of history and connection for residents, and is unique! The front doors are located at either end of the couplet.



Front Door	Recommendations
<i>Define the Store</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose the Halsey-Weidler Couplet to focus on because it has only 2 lanes of traffic and a fantastic collection of one-of-a-kind businesses.
<i>Establish Community Garden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 112th St. triangle entry is bucolic and large. Partner with PACS to donate produce/work the gardens. Partner with schools to build greenhouses, maintain, and deliver to seniors. Tie into the district with greenhouse containers.
<i>Bring Back the Arches</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 102nd entry is very auto-focused, and it would be difficult to create an interactive triangle here. Arches were frequently mentioned nostalgically, with great fondness, so bring 'em back!

Aisles

In a store, aisles should be easy to navigate and understand, and there should be items of interest for people to look at, and interact with, while they wander. In a commercial district, the streets and sidewalks serve as the store's aisles, or its circulatory system, and they are vitally important to creating an economically high performing place. If walkers don't feel comfortable on the sidewalk, and drivers don't feel they can easily locate their destinations, then the critical cross pollination between businesses that propels sales per square foot in a commercial district cannot exist.



Take Advantage, There Are Only Two Lanes of Traffic

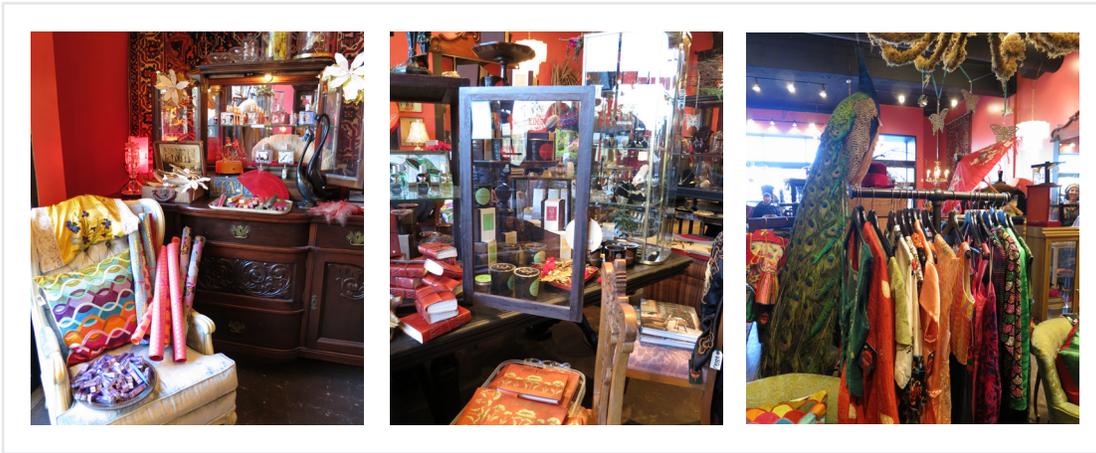
Additionally, the couplet, where you have narrower streets and fewer lanes of traffic, is unique for a commercial district in Gateway, so make it great! Leverage the fact that it has less traffic, and use the streets to tell a story that this is a great and walkable place. There are various tools that will help the district begin to tell a different story, evaluating and prioritizing these will be the second phase of this project.

Aisles	Recommendations
<i>Create a Sanctuary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage the fact that there are only two lanes of traffic in this corridor and make them a respite from the arterial environment to differentiate the district. • Request to have the speed limit reduced on the couplet.
<i>Participate in the Halsey-Weidler Group</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This group will be meeting to create a long-term plan for the district in terms of improving safety and the story the transportation infrastructure tells, and then will be able to prioritize and spend some dollars on immediate projects.
<i>Design for One-Way Line of Sight</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the district works to SHOW, DON'T TELL, keep in mind the line of sight for automobile traffic to ensure that efforts have maximum impact. • The present park plan might render the park largely invisible to traffic on Halsey because of the direction of traffic and the one-way street.
<i>Tell Great Stories at the Sidewalk</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail is about reinvention, and modern retail and restaurant are all about establishing an ambience out into the street, using the sidewalk to tell their story.

Fixtures

In a store, the equipment that cradles, displays, houses, and shows off the products are called fixtures. These display devices can be utilitarian, or they can actually help create ambience and mood, showcasing merchandise in a compelling and meaningful fashion. In the pictures below, every fixture contributes to the experience of being in the store Eden, which is how it should be.

These Fixtures Contribute to Store Brand and Ambience



For a commercial district, all fixtures (the buildings) should be contributing to the experience of being in the Halsey-Weidler store. And it is also true that a store's fixtures (buildings) can either improve, or detract from, its products (businesses). In other words, a great building can uplift a mediocre business, and a horrible building can sink a wonderful business. The physical story that buildings tell is also very important because it is being broadcast by the district 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Additionally, shoppers in a store do not want to see big blank spots with no fixtures or merchandise. Similarly, walkers and drivers in a commercial district do not want to see blanks in the physical environment, such as inward-facing buildings, ugly buildings, or vacant lots. A store with a lot of blanks makes shoppers leave, and so does a district with a lot of blanks.



Empty Walls Create Blanks in the Store Environment

Fixtures	Recommendations
<i>Mitigate Blanks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate, engage, and program parking lots. • Light and decorate empty walls. • Orient buildings/spaces toward the street.
<i>Update Buildings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove/replace under-performing awnings. • Ban beige and introduce some 3 and 4 color paint schemes! • Introduce building lighting and outdoor lighting.
<i>Right Size Spaces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right size interior spaces so buildings are more leasable and attract small local entrepreneurs, a key component to the identity of the district.

Products

The last items we are going to discuss in the Halsey-Weidler store are its products.

When we are inside a store, the experience provided to us as visitors is driven largely by the products for sale, and how they are merchandised. If there is a great selection of products, engagingly displayed, beautifully lit, and inventively laid out in a nice environment, then we are going to have a great experience in that store.

Commercial districts are no different. The Halsey-Weidler Store takes its identity from ground floor businesses, which are essentially the products in downtown's store. What types of businesses contribute to identity? Generally those that are local, active, outward facing and on the ground floor.



Local Businesses Build Strong Brand Identity and Connection

Fixtures

Recommendations

Improve Retail Execution

- Engage the sidewalk.
- Create dynamic storefront windows!
- Highlight local business and expertise.
- Create multi-sensory experiences.

Explore Adjacencies

- Interconnect vertical markets in the district.
- Interconnect businesses physically next to each other.
- Create more events that promote district businesses and neighborhood ethos.

Park Special Product

- Consider line-of-sight and create smaller buildings with permeability along the Halsey corridor for more commercial continuity and visibility.
- Take another pass at the park from the perspective of activation, safety, framing, and catalyzing more market rate residential development.

CONCLUSIONS

Gateway is a wonderful community with a great collection of very unique businesses, including the only fly fishing store with a Portland Address, one of the few people left in this country who knows how to repair boots, a wig shop with a built-in salon, an expert in downsizing, two highly skilled upholsterers, a locally-owned bike store, an acupuncturist, and a hair salon that draws clients from around the region with their coloring skills.

There are great stories here—there is great expertise and passion here. To jump start this district, GABA and other stakeholder groups need to band together and focus all of their efforts in the Halsey-Weidler store. They more all groups can work together to create an outward-facing, well lit, interconnected business district, the more safe and economically successful it will be.