

Lents 5-Year Action Plan:
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis

STRENGTHS: What does Lents do well?	WEAKNESSES: What could Lents improve?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and youth. Lents is more ethnically diverse and younger than the Portland area as a whole, with strong presence of Latino and Asian communities and more residents age 25 to 44. • Accessibility. Lents is centrally located in the region. It has easy access to freeways, the regional light rail system, the airport, and strong bus service on most east-west arterials. • Affordable real estate. Median home values are lower than that of the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area, which provides affordable home ownership opportunities. Commercial lease rates are also low, which offers affordable spaces for new businesses. • Capacity for growth. Neighborhood commercial land capacity is adequate, particularly for commercial infill development on commercial corridors and vacant parcels. • Workforce development services. Providers such as Portland Community College, Southeast Works, Worksource Metro East, Portland Youthbuilders, Impact Northwest, Human Solutions and Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization deliver training and job-placement services within or close to Lents. • East Portland Action Plan. EPAP provides an economic and community development vision for all of East Portland, as well as an ongoing governance structure for public involvement that reflects the diversity of East Portland’s residents, businesses and community organizations. • Connection to natural amenities. Lents’ natural area destinations include the Springwater Corridor trail, Foster Floodplain Natural Area, Beggar’s Tick, Leach Botanical Garden and Zenger Farm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance. Many of Lents’ commercial areas are indistinguishable, “tired” in appearance and/or lack character or identity. • Auto orientation. Lents commercial corridors are pedestrian unfriendly and/or auto oriented in urban form. Street frontages dominated by parking lots, fast food drive through lanes, and large signage contribute an uncomfortable walking or biking experience. • Uneven retail services. Lents neighborhood commercial corridors, such as SE 122nd and SE Foster, suffer from retail leakage. Lents Town Center lacks an anchor commercial tenant. • Stagnant commercial and office market. The area has a weak office market that is most likely to capture local services such as medical and dental offices, or insurance and real estate agents, rather than large headquarters. Rents do not cover the cost of new construction, making new commercial construction very limited. • Existing building stock. Lents suffers from commercial building stock that are in poor condition which do not meet code and/or require expensive, and could be cost prohibitive, improvements for property owners and small business tenants. • Concentrated housing market. Lents’ housing market provides a concentration of low and moderate income housing. Market conditions for townhomes in the near term are poor, due to large existing inventory and lower sales prices. This housing stock lacks the mix that signals an economically diverse community. • Existing housing stock. The housing stock are lower quality and/or in poor condition. The combination of low rents, high maintenance costs, and lack of potential rent escalation are disincentives to housing stock improvements.

OPPORTUNITIES: What trends & opportunities could Lents take advantage of?

- **Local industries.** Existing and emerging business strengths include home improvement (plumbing, countertops, recycled building materials), ethnic/specialty foods (bakery, meats, small grocers), entertainment (theaters/dance, restaurants, bars), and recycling & supply (landscape supply, auto wrecking, composting) and professional and medical services. Support and expansion of these industries provide opportunities to create more living wage jobs.
- **Retail demand.** Retail opportunities are greatest for neighborhood-serving services and stores along the Foster corridor west of I-205; including apparel, electronics, building supplies, restaurants, and grocery stores. Tenants seeking 500-2,000 sq. ft. spaces can select between existing vacant buildings and newer spaces as a result of recent investments.
- **Strong rental housing market.** The rental vacancy rate for Outer Southeast submarket is low, at 3.9 %, which indicates a high-demand for these moderately priced rental units. Measured but positive rent escalation has been observed.
- **Residential use intensification.** Demand for housing in the area indicate that the Foster corridor west of I- 205 could fill higher density residential development if “up zoned;” this would also support the commercial corridor.
- **Industrial use intensification.** Flex/industrial space in and around Lents is limited, especially for tenants seeking less than 4000 square feet. Floodplain mitigation efforts would increase the value of the land in this area, spurring intensification of the existing industrial businesses in the area.

THREATS: What could harm Lents?

- **Income.** Residents of Lents tend to have lower incomes than the region, with a significantly larger share of households earning less than \$15,000 per year. This affects the amount of disposable income available to support businesses, as well as contributes to a negative perception among developers and lenders.
- **Traffic Safety.** SE Foster Road, between 50th and 82nd Avenue, is one of seven high crash corridors in Portland, with frequent pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Other Lents arterials are also in need of safety and connectivity improvements.
- **Perception of crime.** Lents continues to suffer from a reputation as a high crime area, although crime rates vary depending on neighborhood.
- **Education levels.** Lents and East Portland have lower post high school education attainment than the city as a whole, which affects ability to earn higher wages, and attract a variety of commercial establishments.
- **Developer/market competition.** For all market types, developers are turning their attention to areas of Portland where rents are stronger and rent escalation is greater. Also, developers relay that lenders will lend only in areas with proven market strength and they believe this excludes the Lents area.