

PURPOSE

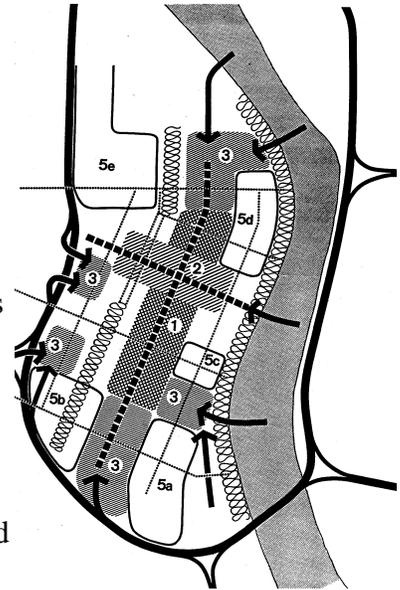
In 1972, the adopted Downtown Plan envisioned the Midtown Blocks as a retail commercial district that would provide transitional scale between east and west Downtown. The Central City Plan, adopted in 1988, reinforced the earlier vision by placing pedestrian and bicycle emphasis on Park and 9th Avenues, creating a north and south link through downtown.

Minimal development occurred in the Midtown Blocks between 1972 and 1988. The Alder Park Building and the Pittock Block renovations in the early 1980's signaled a response to public projects such as Morrison Park West and O'Bryant Square. However, it was not until recently that four private development projects turned attention to the Midtown Blocks. Two of the most influential projects included the Fox Tower between Taylor and Yamhill on Park Avenue and a proposed parking garage on Block 5 between Park and 9th and Taylor and Yamhill. The parking garage proposal drew considerable attention. Citizens objected to the garage and envisioned a park block as recommended in the Downtown and Central City Plans. Eventually the block was privately purchased and donated for park and retail uses. During the same period, the City also received applications for two hotels that would rise on Park and 9th Avenues. This development activity also created significant funding for public art within the Midtown Blocks.

In anticipation of these projects, the Portland Design Commission recognized an opportunity to develop design standards and criteria for SW Park and 9th Avenues between Salmon and Burnside. The Commission also sought to identify public art opportunities. Developers for each of the new development projects committed to integrating the design standards and criteria into their projects.

PROCESS

There is consensus for creating a commercial and retail destination that is different from the North and South Park Blocks. In February, 1998, the Office of Transportation and the Portland Development Commission formed a Steering Committee to oversee an open public vision and design process that included two open houses, a charrette, workshops and preparation of design standards for both streets. The developers of adjoining new projects committed to delaying their designs and implementing the Steering Committee's recommendations.



1972 Downtown Concept Plan



New development activity is occurring between Taylor and Yamhill.



Steering Committee members participated in the design charrette and other public meetings.

The Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Committee were convened, background work completed and the first Public Open House generated many comments, ideas and responses in anticipation of a design charrette. Also prior to the charrette, one-on-one interviews with adjacent businesses and property owners framed issues and local desires. Local design professionals and community members participated in a day-long charrette that produced several design concepts. The charrette team summarized a preferred concept.

For a brief time, the design work paused after the donation of Block 5 between Taylor and Yamhill for open space. It was important to consider the implications of block 5 to the direction of the Midtown Blocks work. While many of the design guidelines, such as reduced awnings and building and street lighting reinforce the vision, the prospect of creating an open space park block would potentially change the character and scale of both streets. After considerable discussion with the management team and steering committee, the conclusions preserve the vision and concepts developed through the project's process while recognizing that the Taylor to Yamhill section will undergo its own final design process.

HISTORY

Before the turn of the century, Asa Lovejoy and Francis Pettygrove envisioned Portland's downtown park blocks stretching continuously from Marquam Hill to the Willamette River. An 1853 plat identified a series of narrow blocks, about half way between the river and 18th Avenue, as public reserves intended for parks, schools or public markets. They are also shown continuous on a map illustrating the extent of the fires of 1872 and 1873. The Olmsted Brothers who incorporated them into a city-wide parks plan identified them but said little about them. Early on, because of unclear language in the original deeds, several blocks became privately owned. An 1866 plat map shows 18 park blocks north of Salmon dashed in the Nancy Lowndale Addition. Initially with houses, and later with commercial buildings, these blocks were built upon. The North and South Park Blocks, however, eventually developed into parks and provided open space for the surrounding residential neighborhoods until mid-20th century when institutional and commercial buildings substantially replaced residences and began urbanizing this part of Portland.



A day-long design charrette held at the Galleria created concepts of the Midtown Blocks.



The Fox Tower along with the Paramount and Westin hotels renewed public interest in the Midtown Blocks.



Historic Downtown Portland



The Olds and King department store between Morrison and Alder is now the Galleria.

Park and 9th Avenues between Salmon and Burnside became service streets. They provided back-of-house shipping and receiving for department stores, theaters and commercial buildings that lined Broadway and 10th Avenue. Many buildings continue to use sidewalk elevators and delivery chutes through basement extensions under the sidewalks on both streets. In the late 1970's, construction of the bus mall required relocation of water, sewer, communications and power services from 5th and 6th Avenues. The utilities fill both Park and 9th Avenue right-of-ways.



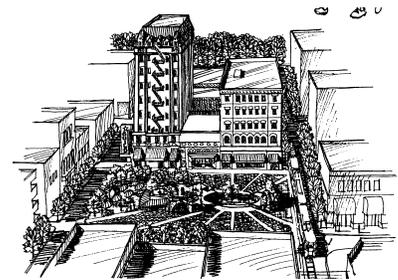
The Bill Roberts Transit Mall.

Over the past 150 years, Portland evolved from simple maps and big dreams to one of the most livable cities in America. Portland's history is rich with stories of the early beginnings and with great accomplishments of this century. From the 1940's to the 1970's, the downtown fell into decline. Over the past 25 years, Portland remade itself. Based upon a vision to be more like its European predecessors, Portland rejected suburban expansionist trends of the post World War II period and adopted a centrist approach. The approach emphasized a compact form with a dense urban core. The 1972 Downtown Plan became the strategy for building Portland's vision, where subjective design guidelines stood equal to code requirements. The articulation of building corners, creation of active ground level space, historic preservation, developing a "street wall," public art, making safe and enjoyable streets for pedestrians and special districts provided the basis for reviewing development proposals.



South Auditorium Urban Renewal District provided many lessons as to how Downtown should develop.

The 1988 Central City Plan envisioned an open plaza on Block 5. It recommended a park on block 86, pedestrian and bike improvements on Park and 9th, the blocks as a corridor for public art and an opportunity for special lighting.



The 1988 Central City Plan envisioned a plaza on Block 5 between Park and 9th and Taylor and Yamhill.

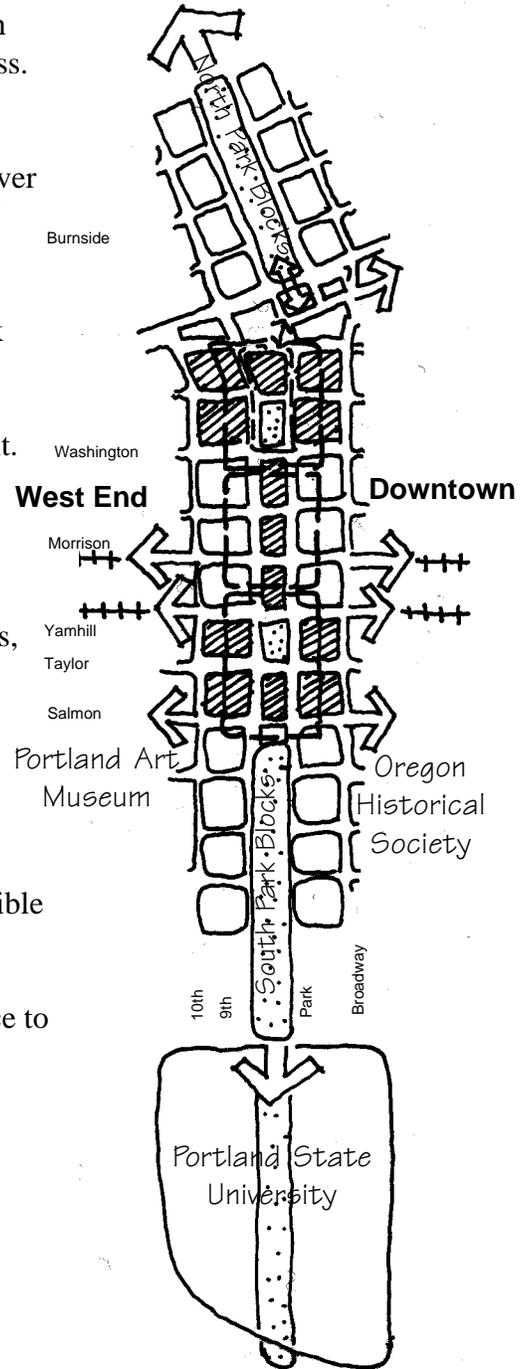


The Midtown Blocks are on the west edge of Downtown's financial and retail center as seen at the left edge of the above photograph.

VISION

The following are vision statements developed over a six month period by the Steering Committee and through the public process.

- Act as a north/south pedestrian link to the art and cultural spine, University District, Park Blocks and the Pearl and River Districts while encouraging people to move through to east/west destinations.
- Enhance and embrace the intimacy and unique scale of Park and 9th through a unified streetscape.
- Create a pedestrian engaging, safe and pleasing environment.
- Ensure adequate parking and loading zones to support local businesses.
- Create a distinct and lively destination which serves workers, visitors and residents 24 hours a day.
- Enhance the special characteristics of each street, creating variety and interest that invites people to stay and discover new, active and exciting places.
- Develop affordable concepts and solutions that allow a feasible implementation strategy.
- Create entry features to identify the transition from one place to another, i.e. South Park Blocks to Midtown Blocks.



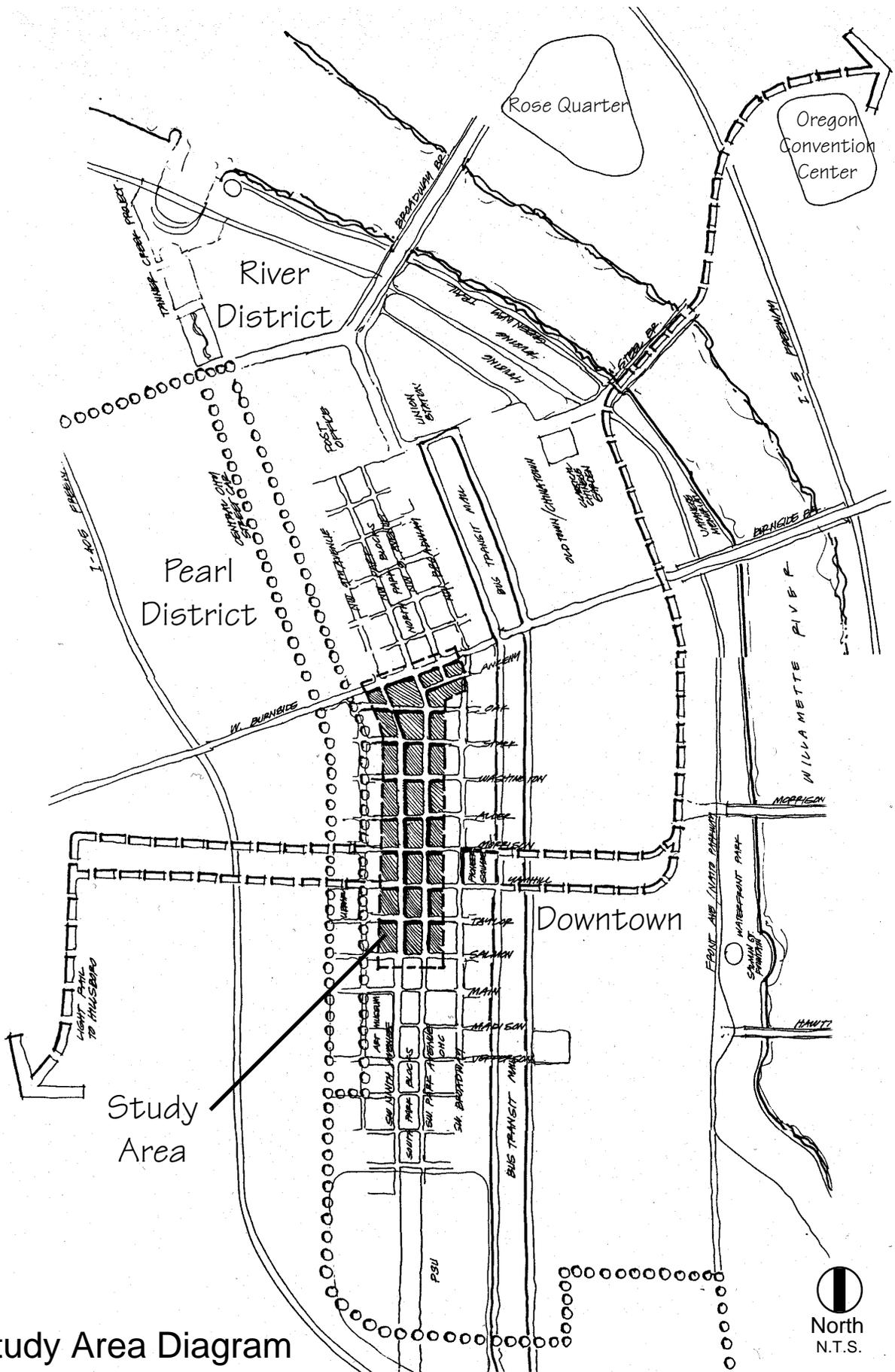
Looking north on 9th Avenue above Morrison.



Looking north over Block 5 at center.

The Midtown Blocks

North/South pedestrian link connecting Portland's downtown arts, education and living districts.



Study Area Diagram



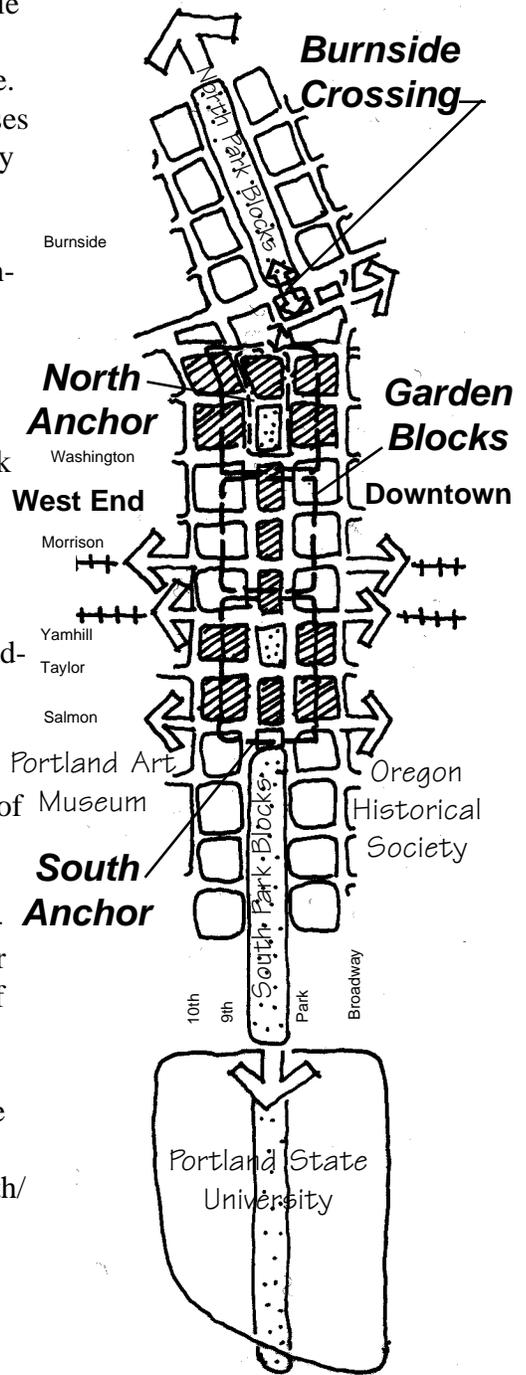
The Midtown Blocks

MIDTOWN BLOCKS CONCEPT

The charrette and public workshops focused on the European scale of Park and 9th and the narrow pedestrian quality of the streets emphasizing the enhancement of modern and historic architecture. The vision was predicated on enhancing retail and commercial uses between Salmon and Washington and improving the urban quality and connections north of Washington.

Today, midtown Portland is more important than ever in its potential to influence where and how new development takes place. Much of the newest retail and commercial development has occurred east of Broadway. In comparison, the West End of downtown remains somewhat stagnant, and culturally and architecturally underdeveloped. The kind and amount of investment on Park and 9th Avenues between Salmon and Burnside will likely influence the West End's future. If Park and 9th become an edge to Downtown retail and commercial activity, westerly development may come more slowly. If, however, these Midtown Blocks are enlivened and renewed, and commercial investment west of Broadway is stimulated, they can provide a valuable link between the primary downtown retail, financial districts and development opportunities to the west. The concept creates a south "anchor" with the Fox Tower, Paramount Hotel and future redevelopment of Block 5 between Taylor and Yamhill. The "Garden Blocks" between Morrison and Washington provide an active retail and dining destination in downtown with low level plantings of annuals, perennials, small shrubs and ornamental trees in containers or planters. The north "anchor" centers around the redevelopment of O'Bryant Square and Block 86 between Stark and Oak.

The Midtown Blocks vision and design concept provide guidance for enlivening Park and 9th and connecting the west end to downtown. It is envisioned that the Midtown Blocks act as both a north/



Concept Diagram

The Midtown Blocks contain three interconnected places: the "South Anchor" at Block 5, The Garden Blocks between Yamhill and Washington, and the "North Anchor" at O'Bryant Square.



The Midtown Blocks looking north.



Block 5 at center.

The Midtown Blocks

south pedestrian link and a destination in their own right. These streets should connect the art and cultural centers, Portland State University and the South Park Blocks with the North Park Blocks, Pearl and River Districts. At the same time they should encourage people to comfortably move through to east and west destinations. Ultimately, the goal is to create a great place in downtown that is engaging, safe and pleasant for shoppers, diners, residents, and employees. The intimacy, architecture and unique scale of the two streets should be enhanced and unified by improving building facades and the streetscape.

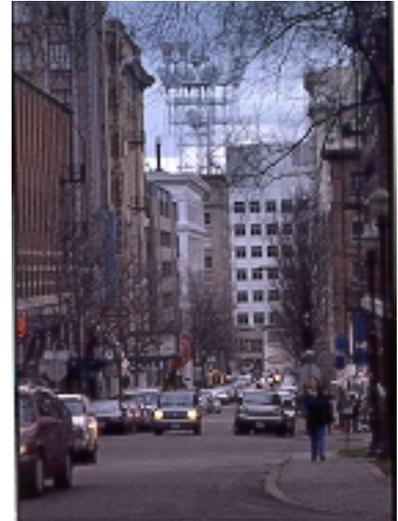
The design charrette generated many ideas for creating a special place in the center of downtown. Concepts included phased removal of parking and curbs, eventually creating a pedestrian and service street. Removable bollards and paving patterns would define use areas with hanging and potted plants providing a low level garden landscape. Specialty and art lighting on the streets and buildings was prevalent in all of the concepts. Many participants also suggested that blank walls become opportunities for public art. Some thought that Block 86 between Stark and Oak should be redeveloped in conjunction with revitalization of O’Bryant Square.

The proposed concept incorporates many ideas from the charrette such as planting concepts, redevelopment of Block 86 between Stark and Oak, specialty building lighting and provisions for involving artists in public and private projects within the Midtown Blocks.

Ultimately, the Midtown Blocks should be an exciting destination that invites people to stay and discover active and entertaining places and healthy businesses.



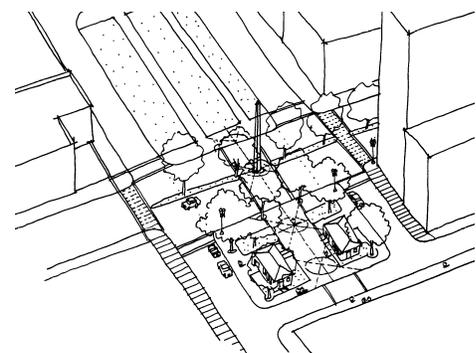
The “Garden Blocks” would be bright and open with low plantings in terra cotta pots.



Both Park and 9th are the narrowest right-of-ways in Downtown



Building lighting and facade improvements create an attraction for shoppers and diners.



An enhanced pedestrian crossing at Burnside would create a more inviting link between Downtown and the Pearl and River Districts.

The Midtown Blocks

CONCLUSIONS

During our 1998 celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Downtown Plan it is appropriate to enjoy the many successes that have been realized. It is equally appropriate to look to the future of not only the downtown but also to the future of the entire Central City. These Midtown blocks represent a piece of downtown's future. They are unique. Both Park and 9th Avenues are narrow (50 foot right-of-way) and lined with small shops and restaurants, more "European" in scale than other streets in the downtown core. The architecture that lines them represents over 100 years of Portland history. Many of the retail and restaurant businesses that line both streets also have a long history in their location. In many respects Park and 9th are a seam that may unravel. This architectural and commercial seam should be reinforced and strengthened. The east and west roadway and pedestrian connections in the retail core are as important as north and south connections.

The original 1853 concept of the Park Blocks was to connect south Portland north to the Willamette River. O'Bryant Square is currently open space and Block 5 will provide new open space. In view of the desire by some for a continuous open space corridor from Marquam Hill to the Willamette River, it is anticipated that proposals to create more open space would not be precluded by implementation of the concept plan.



The Guild Theater's architecture is unique to Portland.



Architecture along Park and 9th presents a cross section of styles and periods.



It is possible to imagine a connection to the Willamette River in the north.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *In the long term we should create provisions and criteria to allow blocks to transition from their current status to a creative mix of urban, park, commercial and residential uses.*
- *We believe that the new park block should be supportive of downtown retail and the west end. There is concern that an extension of the Park Blocks, as found to the north of Burnside or to the south of Salmon will potentially end the retail core at Broadway.*
- *A definitive policy should be adopted that defines the conditions for which future change would occur on remaining privately held Midtown Blocks on Park and 9th Avenues.*
- *Today, businesses along Park and 9th are fragile. There are vacancies on upper floors of several buildings. It is important that policy decisions regarding the future of remaining blocks between Park and 9th be made soon to avoid a potential decline in this part of downtown.*
- *Safety and security issues currently arise in nonactive places. There is a need to address these issues in the near term. A long term safety and security strategy and program should be implemented.*

REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

O'Bryant Square and Block 86 between Stark and Oak represent an opportunity to create a mixed use residential and retail development that integrates open space. The parking under O'Bryant Square is underutilized and the park could be better configured to engage the surrounding buildings.

Block 86 is also underutilized with surface parking lots and potentially redevelopable buildings.

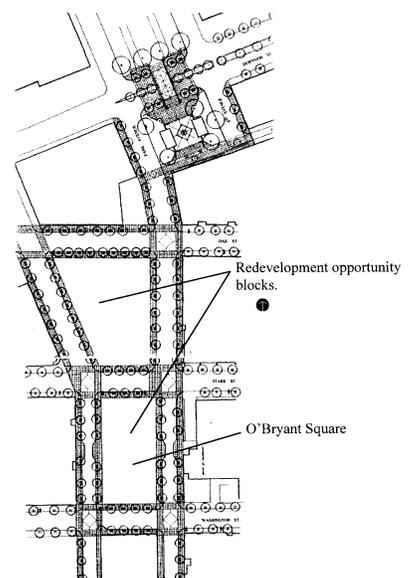
- *The two-block redevelopment of O'Bryant Square and Block 86 provide a significant opportunity to strengthen the Midtown Blocks and activate buildings and public spaces. The concept envisions these blocks as a mixed use development with a significant housing component that integrates open space to establish a clear link to the North Park Blocks (see diagram at right).*



Pioneer Courthouse Square at the heart of Downtown.



Some buildings are vacant above ground level but have potential for new tenants.



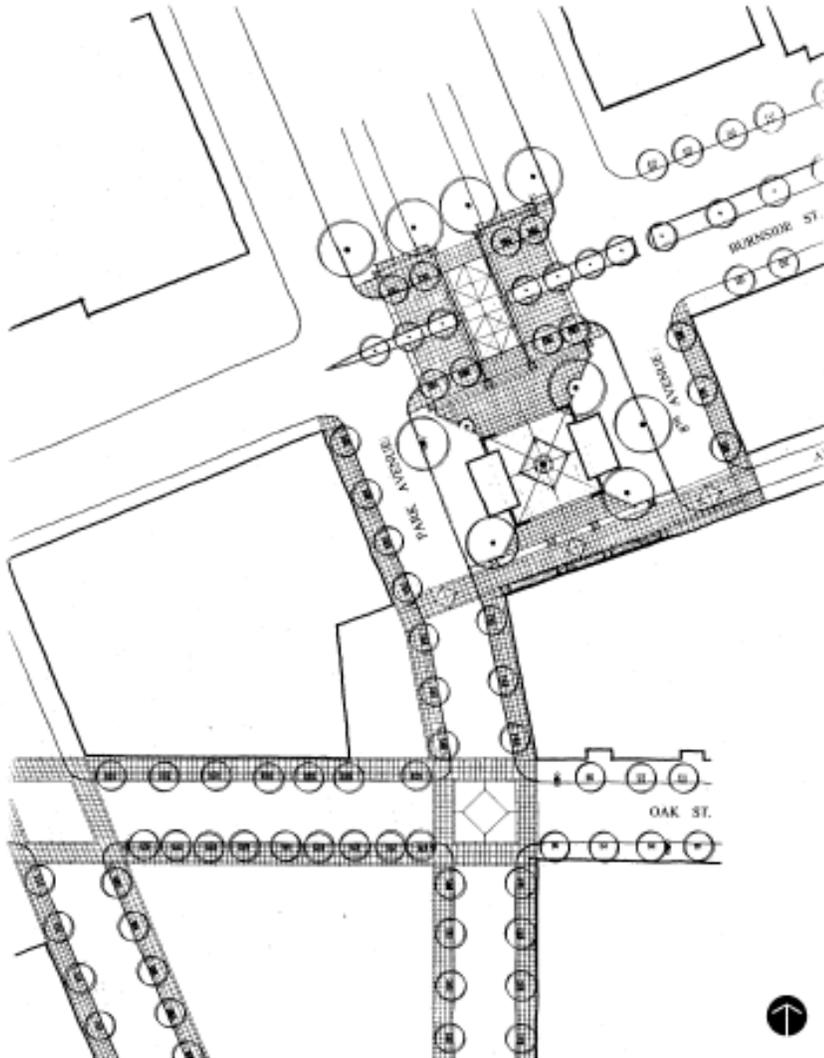
BURNSIDE CONNECTION

The intersection where Burnside crosses the North Park Blocks is out of balance and highly favors automobile traffic. Pedestrians desiring to cross Burnside are confronted by few gaps in traffic. A steady flow of cars limits crossing during peak traffic hours. High traffic speeds during off-peak periods create potentially risky pedestrian crossing conditions. Burnside also creates a visual barrier because of its width.

- *The Burnside connection to the North Park Blocks should provide a continuous and identifiable connection to the North Park Blocks and reinforce connections east and west. The concept would bring park continuity and pedestrian accessibility into balance with the auto-dominated Burnside corridor.*



The connection between the Midtown Blocks and the North Park Blocks is through a narrow gap in the buildings at Oak and Park Avenue.



Plan

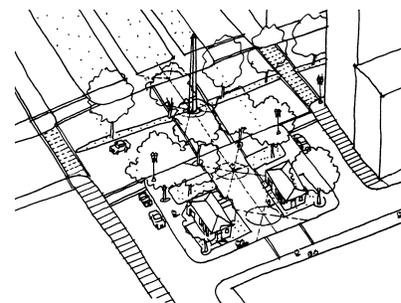


Diagram showing park and Burnside crossing improvement concepts.

WEST END PLAN

Today, a development pattern has evolved that favors properties east of Broadway to the river. Reinvestment in the West End has stalled. With completion of Pioneer Place 2, the retail core will shift to the east. The area bounded by Market, I-405, Burnside and Broadway looks similar to the downtown of 1972 with numerous surface parking lots and underutilized buildings. A West End Study is currently looking at the potential for focusing more activity west of Broadway. The west end will establish its own retail identity. The anticipated Central City Streetcar connection to North Macadam and the Northwest neighborhood will be part of the catalyst for stimulating economic investment in the area.

- *The Midtown Blocks between Salmon and Burnside should contribute to new economic successes of the West End. The blocks should become an important destination for visitors, students and tourists. The blocks should also be a popular streetcar stop on the way to and from North Macadam, Northwest Portland, the Pearl and River Districts.*
- *The West End study is an important effort and the Midtown Blocks, adjacent to that study area, should continue to strengthen and bind the downtown retail and financial core to the West End.*



DESIGN GUIDELINES

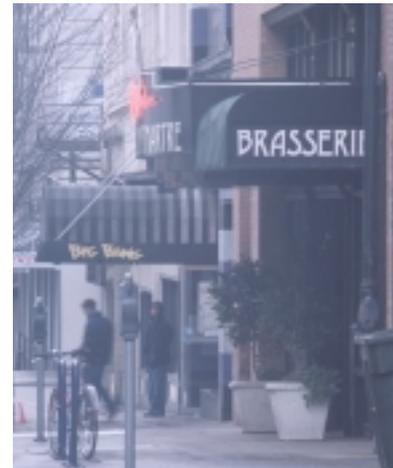
Many of the buildings that front Park and 9th either have underdeveloped entrances or have entrances located on side streets.

- *Underdeveloped building entrances should be enhanced with lighting, awnings and signage that is welcoming and attractive.*
- *New entrances to buildings and businesses should be encouraged to locate on Park and 9th. Awnings should be used to mark entries and building corners.*
- *Views to architectural detail above should be strengthened and emphasized by restoring and refurbishing facades and by installing specialty lighting that accentuates architectural details.*
- *Property owners on Park and 9th Avenues should be encouraged to take advantage of the Portland Development Commission Building Facade and Building Lighting Programs.*
- *Awnings should be used to accent building entrances and street corners. Continuous awnings should not be required on Park and 9th Avenues.*
- *Create street level storefronts with entrances on Park and 9th Avenues.*

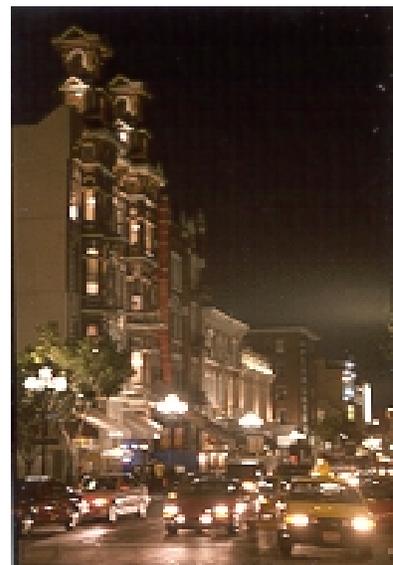
The special characteristics of the two streets, such as the eclectic collection of architecture, human scale of the streets and existence of long-standing businesses should be enhanced with storefront improvements, special building lighting, public art and signage. The varied facades of the buildings that line both streets present a cross section of Portland's architecture. Contrasts in architectural character create visual excitement. Examples include looking north along the face of the Esquire Hotel to the Bank of California Building in the distance or looking along the facade of the Italianate Pythion Building toward the Arlington Club with the Hilton Hotel and the top of the 1000 Broadway Building in the background. Continuity is currently lacking between buildings. Building access, maintenance and lighting vary from building to building and from block to block. The Bank of California tower and the Heathman Block are brightly lit while the Esquire Hotel, Pythion Building, Pittock Block and many others are dark at night.



Multiple business entrances.



Awnings that mark business entries.



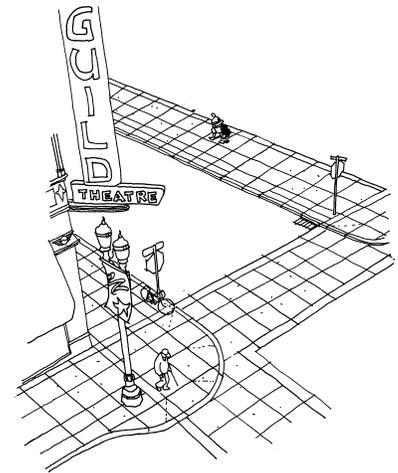
Building lighting enlivens the night.

DESIGN CRITERIA

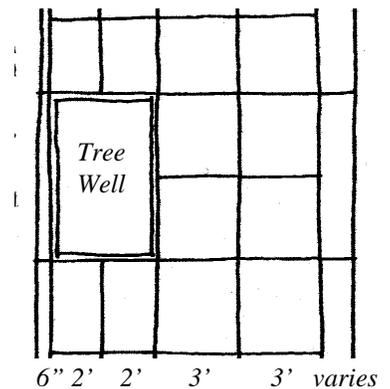
The following summarizes the recommended Design Criteria.

STREET

- On street parking and loading shall remain as currently configured accommodating travel lanes and parking on both streets.
- Streets will be paved with black asphalt. Install concrete pedestrian crossings at intersections at such time that full streets may be scheduled for reconstruction.
- Use the 3 foot by 3 foot paving pattern as shown in Concept 1 of the sidewalk section.
- Mid-block curb extensions should be installed when a full block is developed initiating street reconstruction or when full street construction occurs.
- Corner curb extensions should be installed when a minimum of a half block face is developed initiating street reconstruction or when full street construction occurs.
- Three single ornamental street lights will be required per block face.
- Street trees, where used on Park and 9th Avenues, will support views of building facades and architecture.
- Street trees with cast iron tree grates will be considered as part of the planning and design process now under way for the new park block between Taylor and Yamhill.
- Street trees with cast iron tree grates are required on both sides of Park and 9th from Washington to Burnside.
- New developments and redevelopment projects on Park and 9th Avenues between SW Yamhill and Washington must provide street trees with cast iron tree grates at designated locations as shown on the street design maps. Street trees shall be installed in clusters of 4 having two trees per block face at a maximum of 24-feet on-center or as indicated on the map when properties are redeveloped to the extent where tree vaults are required.



A 24 inch band defines the right-of-way line and reconciles the 3 foot by 3 foot scoring pattern at corners and curb extensions.



Typical midblock curb extension.



Terra cotta pots with ornamental plantings.

The Midtown Blocks

- Street trees shall be spreading to 25-feet with an open habit. Leaves shall be small up to 3 inches maximum in any one dimension. Branching shall be conducive to limb removal up to 14 feet minimum from the top of curb. Species shall be shade tolerant, hardy to the local climate and pest and disease resistant. Installation of larger caliper (minimum 4-inch caliper) trees is encouraged.



Typical 4 foot by 6 foot tree grate, Urban Accessories - "North Star".

- In accordance with plans adopted by the Office of Transportation and Bureau of Planning for the area between Yamhill and Washington on Park and 9th (The Garden Blocks), in addition to designated required street trees, low level plantings of annuals, perennials, low shrubs and ornamental trees in containers or in planters are required along building facades and at entrances. Additional planter designs, materials, shapes and quantities supplemental to the plan shall be approved by planning and transportation staff.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

- Paint and clean building facades. Painting should highlight and compliment building architectural style and details.
- Use exterior building lighting to accent architectural style and detail. Integrate building facade lighting into new development proposals.
- Include artists in projects at the onset. Consult with the Regional Arts and Culture Council to integrate works of art into public and private projects.



Sketch looking north on 9th Avenue.

NEXT STEPS

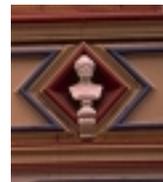
The following questions arose from the project and require further study.

How do we maintain and enhance retail energy? Retail trade on Park and 9th is diverse and in many areas, fragile. Much of the most recent retail development has located east of Broadway. How does retail extend west beyond the Park Blocks? Retail uses are important to the downtown. Retail in the downtown core supports residents and attracts trade from surrounding neighborhoods and the region. East-west and north-south improvements along Park and 9th should not create a barrier to continuity at the retail core.

How is economic and social vitality between Broadway and 10th preserved during an extended period of land use uncertainty? The unanswered questions about whether additional park blocks will be acquired creates uncertainty for property and business owners.

The following are recommended Next Steps that include items that forward the completion of standards and criterion as well as implement elements of the document.

- Analyze zoning and land use in conjunction with the West End Planning Project.
- Develop building design guidelines and standards for Park and 9th as shown under Design Guidelines page 12 of this document.
- Create planting area requirements for the “Garden Blocks” between Yamhill and Washington on Park and 9th. Include guidelines for sizes and shapes of planters and criteria for plants.
- Investigate and create a method for uniform maintenance of potted plants between Yamhill and Washington on Park and 9th Avenues.



- Invite property owners, designers, landscape architects, architects, artists, contractors, and developers to propose mixed use-open space projects for the two blocks between Washington and Oak including O’Bryant Square. Proposals should also include the AT&T parking lot on the northwest corner of Park and Oak. The intent is to create a significant development project with housing and active uses that will complement and enhance the north end of the Midtown Blocks.
- Conduct a traffic analysis for the proposed lane reductions on Burnside, Ankeny street closure and addition of a traffic signal on Burnside.
- Continue discussions regarding public art for development projects currently underway.

