

# PARK AVENUE

## URBAN DESIGN VISION

PORTLAND, OREGON



URBAN DESIGN GROUP  
BUREAU OF PLANNING  
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## Introduction

This report summarizes the Bureau of Planning’s urban design thinking on and related development approach to the area now known as the Park Avenue District in downtown Portland.

The Park Avenue Vision as discussed here considers existing development connecting the North Park Blocks with the South Park Blocks. Burnside and Salmon streets and the city blocks fronting Park and 9th Avenues define this area. The area between Block 5 (Taylor and Yamhill) and O’Bryant Square is of special focus.

The area’s urban design, open space, and historic and transportation assets have been key considerations in assessing the opportunities for better expressing a unique and vibrant district.

### URBAN DESIGN CONCEPT

Several urban design elements embody this suggested response. The primary elements of this Vision are summarized as follows:

- Enhance Park and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues’ development and the parks that line them as the attractive pedestrian link between the North and South Park Blocks.
- Consider the development of Block 5 and O’Bryant Square as “bookends” to a specialty retail street along Park Avenue, in keeping with their urban nature and particular setting.
- Strengthen existing street-level retail and promote new retail to encourage more vibrant street-level activity along Park Avenue.
- Add residential development to further diversify street and area activity.
- Preserve and adapt historic buildings that straddle Park and/or 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

- Pursue long-term development opportunities on the larger, underutilized parcels.
- Provide additional parking to support business and retail.

The intent of the above actions is to create an enhanced and vibrant mix of streets, parks, retail businesses and new residential buildings. These character enhancements are intended to build on the area’s current attributes, such as the smaller-than-usual city blocks and narrow, 50’-wide streets.

It is this vein that SW Park Avenue is seen to have potential as a “special character” street lined with restaurants, bars and shops with mixed uses (including residential) above. Such a street should have a distinct identity that functions as an effective and clear link between downtown’s prized green spaces, the North and South Park Blocks.

The current connection between the North and South Park Blocks is compromised by underutilized edges that lack active uses. Difficult pedestrian crossings at Salmon, Taylor, Alder, Washington and especially Burnside Street further disconnect the two ends. Better landscaping oriented to further enhance this special role on SW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue will add to the desired special street character as well.

This report illustrates this concept while identifying potential short- and long-term development opportunities and public investments. The ideas suggested are supported by visual examples from other cities that have similar streets. The illustrations shown are only conceptual in nature and should not be considered developed designs.

The appendix includes a summary of the background analysis used to develop this vision as well as a summary of how the current vision relates to previous plans and studies for the Park Avenue blocks.

## Table of Contents:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Downtown Context – Connections                  | 2 |
| Downtown Context – Urban Design and Development | 3 |
| Street Character Study                          | 4 |
| Urban Design Concept Plan                       | 6 |
| Concept Plan Elements/Themes                    | 7 |
| O’Bryant Square Options                         | 8 |

## Appendix

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Existing Conditions Analysis | 10 |
| Previous Studies             | 11 |

## Acknowledgements

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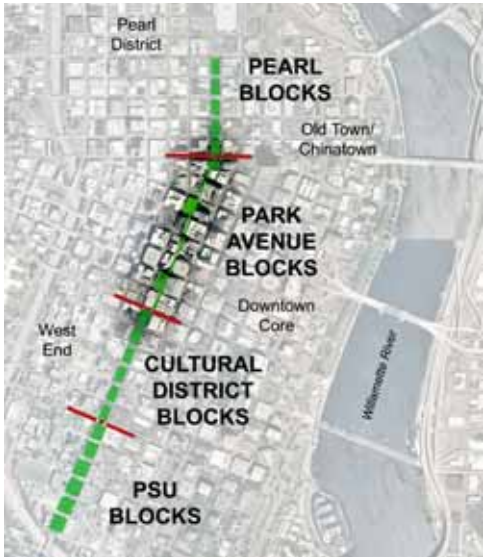


Portland's open space and transportation systems have a very prominent north-south emphasis. This can be attributed to several factors:

- The city's original platting which created 80'-wide Avenues running north-south and narrower, 60'-wide Streets running east-west.
- Block development of the city's 19<sup>th</sup>- century core was platted to run parallel to the north-south flowing Willamette River.
- Infrastructure changes and improvements to downtown Portland have historically tended to follow a north-south orientation. These include the North and South Park Blocks, Tom McCall Waterfront Park, the I-405 alignment, the Transit Mall, and most recently, the Portland Streetcar project (refer to diagram at left).

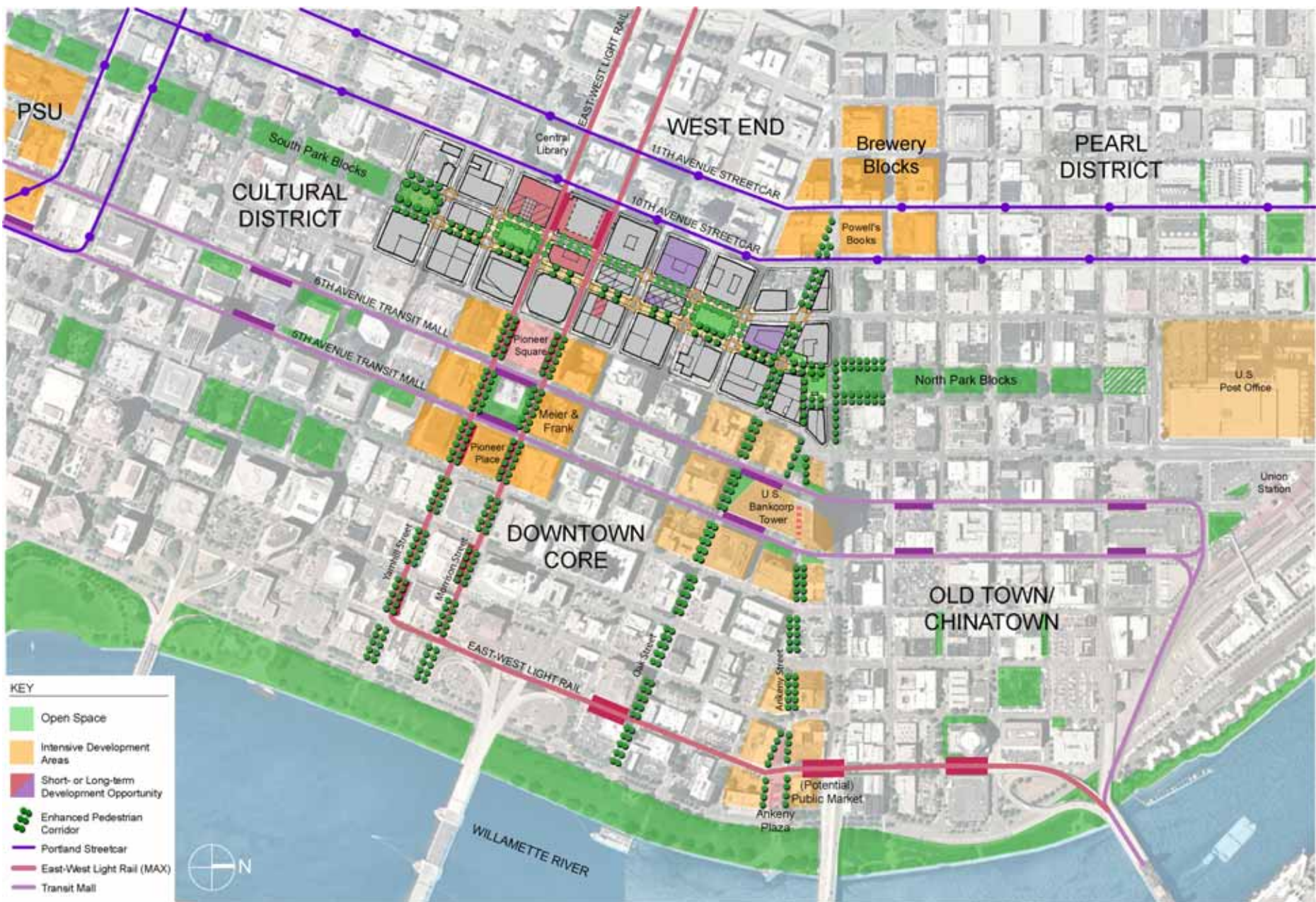
This strong north-south directionality underscores the importance of the few key east-west connections that currently prevail. Without them, access east to the riverfront is undermined, further segregating districts such as the West End and Goose Hollow from the downtown core.

This east-west connectivity concern in the downtown can be better maintained within the Park Avenue blocks by reinforcing the continuity of the built urban fabric within them. Current and proposed buildings should therefore continue to follow the general development pattern of their adjacent blocks.



Subdistricts with differing character form “urban rooms” along SW 9<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenues, helping to emphasize an east-west orientation





The urban design and development strategy for the Park Avenue Vision serves a larger context. It's strategic location adjacent to nearly all of the sub-districts within the heart of the downtown places it at the intersection of several key urban-design opportunities offering better integration. These include:

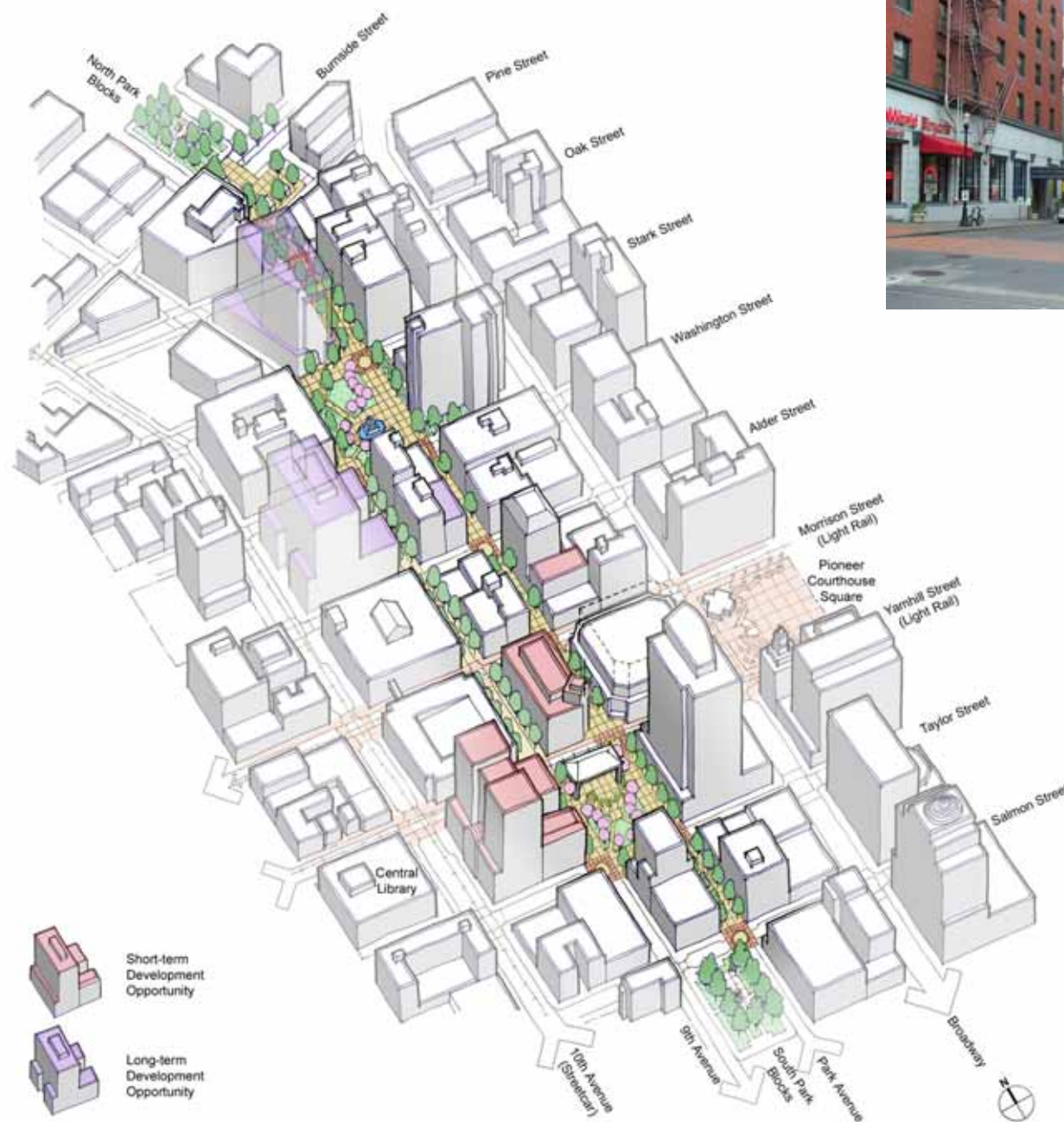
- Bridging the gap between the North and South Park Blocks
- Creating a better link between the Downtown office and retail core and the West End and Pearl Districts
- Improving transit access and regional connections through the introduction of light rail on the Transit Mall
- Increasing proximity to a variety of transit options: light rail, most cross-town bus routes and the streetcar

The proposed urban-design strategy for the Park Avenue Vision allows for a better connection between PSU and the Cultural District to the south and the Pearl District to the north. This is accomplished through significant streetscape enhancements on SW Park Avenue.

The design of the connection across Burnside Street is also significant. Currently the volume and speed of traffic combined with the lack of any traffic signal, prevent safe and convenient access from the downtown core to the North Park Blocks.

Additionally, the east-west connections through the Park Avenue blocks, especially at Yamhill, Morrison, Oak and Ankeny Streets, offer vital links to Pioneer Square and the retail core. Similarly the Transit Mall's light rail stations, the Brewery Blocks, and Ankeny Plaza (with its potential Public Market) offer unique connections.





*Adaptive reuse of ground-floor streetscape (Park/Morrison looking north)*

### Park Avenue Streetscape

The Street Character Study presents ideas for streetscape enhancements to SW Park Avenue - the street that literally connects the North and South Park Blocks - that create a unique urban environment downtown. The goal is to establish a café-and-retail-lined street that becomes a haven for pedestrians without necessarily compromising vehicle access, parking and loading opportunities.

The hope is for the design of SW Park Avenue to be such that for special events, it can be closed to vehicle traffic to allow restaurants, cafes and other retail businesses to spill out into the street beyond the sidewalk. (See real world examples on the following page.)



### Streetscape Examples

The international examples displayed on this page are intended to illustrate the possibilities offered by a unique, pedestrian-oriented street design. All of these streets allow limited vehicle access but are designed to facilitate their complete closure to vehicles depending on the time, day, or season. Additionally, all are narrow and contain historic buildings with ground-floor commercial uses similar to the context of the Park Avenue blocks.



*Covent Garden, London*



*Belden Lane, San Francisco*



*Asheville, North Carolina*



*Chamonix, France*



*Kunming, China*



SW Park Avenue street section looking west





- 1 Enhance the Connection between the North & South Park Blocks**
- a) Block 5 (new development) and O'Bryant Square (renovation) as intermittent urban spaces
  - b) Streetscape Improvements on Park Avenue offer flexibility for a higher level of activity and calm traffic



- 2 Introduce Residential Uses**
- a) New residential buildings with ground-floor retail at block 216
  - b) Renovation of existing buildings, the Esquire and Cornelius Hotels
  - c) Mix of new and renovated buildings on block 219



- 3 Preserve Significant Historic Buildings Throughout the Corridor**
- a) Restore Esquire and Cornelius Hotels
  - b) Redevelopment of buildings on block 219: preserve historic buildings and build residential tower with major retail tenant at ground floor



- 4 Reinforce Ground-floor Retail on New and Existing Edges**
- a) 10th & Yamhill SmartPark retail improvements via a Master Lease by PDC and exterior improvements
  - b) Block 4 retail or mixed-use development project



- 5 Consider Long-Term Development Opportunities**
- a) Block 216 major mixed-use residential development project
  - b) Block 86 property consolidation and redevelopment



- 6 Provide New Parking to Support Business & Retail**
- a) Build 700 new underground parking spaces below Block 5
  - b) Build significant new underground parking below O'Bryant Sq. and Block 86

**KEY:**

- Existing to Remain
- Short-term Development Opportunities
- Long-term Development Opportunities
- Historic Buildings to Remain or Redeveloped
- Historic Landmark to Remain or Redeveloped
- Park/Open Space
- Underground Parking
- Pedestrian Priority Street w/ Cafe Emphasis
- Streetcar Stop



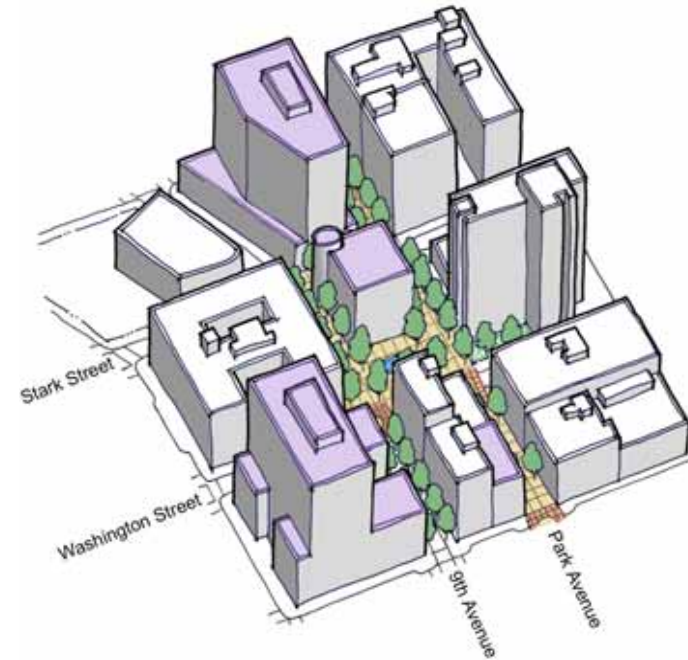


### O'Bryant Square – long term options

The design of O'Bryant square will be considered as part of the next phase of planning for the Park Avenue blocks. In the near term, the city will be designing improvements to the square that will be built with funds from the 2002 Park Levy.

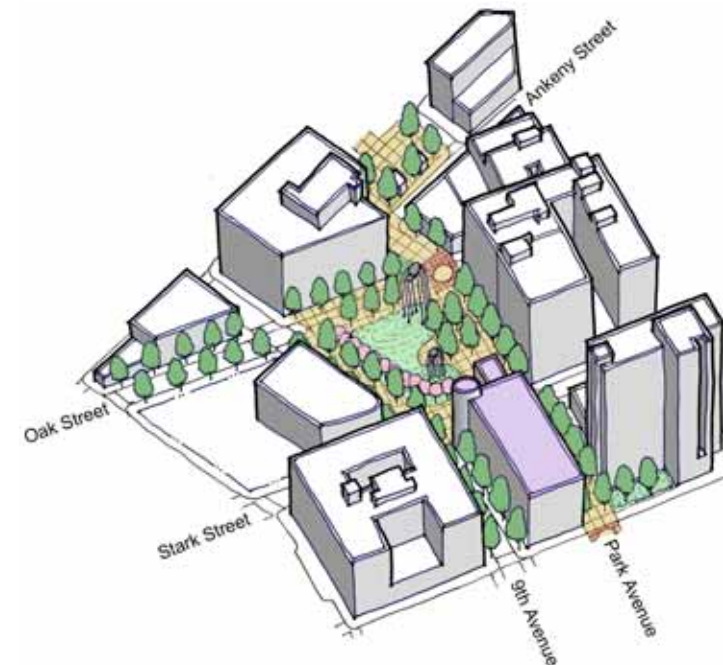
In a longer-term vision, we could consider the design, use and location of O'Bryant Square in the context of the development of the blocks around it. This opens up some new opportunities to consider the multiple roles of the park:

- as an important part of the central city open space system,
- as an element that links the north and south park blocks,
- as a place-making element that benefits the development of its surrounding blocks and the vitality of Park Avenue.



### Option A

- Mid-rise, residential (with ground-floor retail) development project on north half of existing O'Bryant Square
- Urban plaza on south end of the block is focused on the adjacent Bank of California building tower as a *campanile* element



### Option B

- Mid-rise, residential (with ground-floor retail) development project on existing site of O'Bryant Square
- O'Bryant Square relocated one block to the north with enhanced connections to the North Park Blocks and to the Brewery Blocks/Powell's Books along Oak Street



An aerial photograph of a city street grid. The image shows a dense arrangement of buildings, mostly rectangular in shape, with various roof colors including grey, brown, and white. Green trees are scattered throughout the blocks, particularly along the streets. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the city.

# Appendix

## *Park Avenue Analysis & Previous Studies*



Retail Framework Streets Diagram



Approach

- Because retail streets function best when ground-floor active uses are present on both sides of the street, the existence of the "Primary" and "Secondary" retail streets should inform the design strategy of Block 5 and O'Bryant Square. In other words, any retail pavilions within each open space should front a retail framework street rather than sitting within the interior of the park or along a street without a retail framework designation.
- With "Secondary" retail streets surrounding the full-block parking lot between 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>-Washington-Alder (Block 216), loading and vehicle access should front SW Alder Street, while the lobby, retail and other active uses face the other three block faces.

Ground Floor Edge Conditions

Approach

- The quality of the building frontages and the number of existing retail entrances on the street gives SW Park Avenue a better potential for continuous retail activity.
- The north ends of both 9<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenues will always struggle as retail streets due to the lack of retail storefronts on existing buildings.







## PDC and PDOT “Concept Design: The Midtown Blocks” May 1999

### Key Elements

- Envisions the Midtown Blocks as a pedestrian-oriented dining and retail destination street that connects PSU and the Cultural District to the Pearl
- Proposes that both 9<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenues become “Garden Blocks” with phased building improvements, new street lights, curb extensions, new street trees, trellises, planters and hanging flower baskets
- Ensures adequate traffic access, parking and loading areas in addition to the pedestrian improvements
- Advocates for the development of entry/gateway elements to identify the transitions from Park Blocks to Garden Blocks
- Improves pedestrian connections across W. Burnside along with the renovation of Park Block Square, renamed Ankeny Square
- Encourages new retail entries facing 9<sup>th</sup> or Park Avenues and the use of awnings at these entries

## Park Blocks Foundation Concept January 2001

### Key Elements

- Demolition of all Park Avenue District buildings between SW Taylor and Oak Street
- SW Park and 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. replaced by a single, tree-lined boulevard with wide sidewalks between SW Taylor and Stark Street
- New 25'-deep retail frontages on all existing buildings facing the new boulevard
- Public park/plaza spaces between Stark and Oak and Oak and Burnside
- Full-block redevelopment sites facing the boulevard at blocks 219, 218 and 216 and behind the Federal Bank building at 10<sup>th</sup> and Oak
- Four-level underground parking structure between Taylor and Washington Streets and 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue





## Advisory Council of Experts Recommendation April 2001

### Key Elements:

- Historic Park Avenue District buildings between SW Morrison and Washington Street maintained
- Demolition of buildings on Block 4, between Yamhill and Morrison Streets
- New open space on Blocks 5 along with the renovation of O'Bryant Square, streetscape improvements on Park & 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues
- Redevelopment of historic buildings and infill of half-block site at Block 219 and full-block development at Block 86
- Consider mid-term redevelopment of Blocks 218 & 211 as civic uses and provide underground parking & plaza at Block 4
- Create anchor of West End neighborhood via redevelopment of six blocks – higher-density mixed-use new development and adaptive reuse of selected buildings
- Long-term acquisition of all remaining blocks. Access the need for open space in the future as the area develops

## PDC/Allied Works “Crossroads” Concept April 2001

### Key Elements:

- Historic buildings between SW Morrison & Washington Street to be maintained
- New open space on Block 5, a renovated O'Bryant Square
- New pocket parks and small plazas created as part of new development projects including the removal of the Carl Greve building at Park & Morrison
- Full-block development on Blocks 4, 216, and 86 and half-block on 219 (adaptive reuse/rehab on the other half of 219) & Block 3
- Streetscape designs to include curbless streets with bollards on both 9<sup>th</sup> (retail emphasis) and Park (landscape emphasis)
- Anchor West End neighborhood redevelopment on six blocks with higher-density mixed use new development and adaptive reuse of selected buildings





**PDC “Public Squares” Concept**  
May 2002

Key Elements

- Historic buildings between SW Alder and Washington Street maintained
- New open space on Blocks 3 and 5 along with the renovation of O’Bryant Square
- Demolition of buildings on the block between Morrison and Alder, which includes the historic Eaton Hotel, Morrison Park Apartments and Alder Park Building
- Full block development sites at Blocks 4, 216 and 86 and half of Block 219 & adaptive reuse of the other half of 219

**Bureau of Planning  
Urban Design Group Concept**  
September 2004

Key Elements

- Enhance Park and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues’ development and parks that line them as the attractive pedestrian link between the North and South Park Blocks.
- Develop Block 5 and O’Bryant Square as “bookends” to a specialty retail street along SW Park Avenue.
- Strengthen existing street-level retail and promote new retail resulting in more vibrant street-level activity along SW Park Avenue.
- Add residential development to further diversify land uses and promote 24-hour activity.
- Preserve & adapt adjacent historic buildings.