

3-1-1996

Main Street Handbook: A User's Guide to Main Streets

Metro (Or.)

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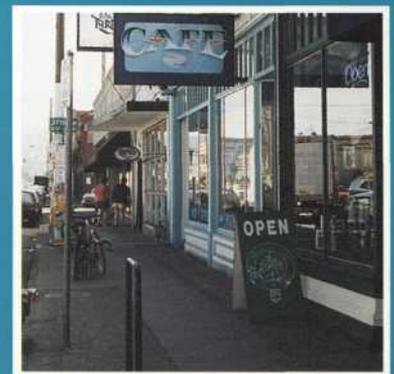
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Main Street Handbook

A User's Guide
to Main Streets

March 1996



METRO

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METRO

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About Metro

Metro is the directly elected regional government that serves more than 1.2 million residents in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties and the 24 cities in the Portland metropolitan area.

Metro is responsible for growth management, transportation and land-use planning; solid waste management; operation of the Metro Washington Park Zoo; regional parks and greenspaces programs; and technical services to local governments. Through the Metropolitan Exposition-Recreation Commission, Metro manages the Oregon Convention Center, Civic Stadium, the Portland Center for the Performing Arts and the Expo Center.

Metro is governed by an executive officer, elected regionwide, and a seven-member council, elected by districts. Metro also has an auditor who is elected regionwide.

For more information about Metro or to schedule a speaker for a community group, call 797-1510.

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Neighbors celebrate at the Hawthorne Street Fair.



Photo courtesy of Hawthorne Boulevard Business Association

I. Introduction

What are main streets?

The term “main street” comes from the center of activity of the typical American small town. Until recently, every city or town – ranging from a city of millions to a small country village – had a main street or center of town where residents and visitors could find a wide range of goods and services. The name itself describes the key ingredients: it is located on a main thoroughfare with good access to the community and its trading area, and it is the main area for conducting nearly any kind of business.

For most of our history, main streets flourished as the community grew. They fell out of favor during the 1960s, when cities expanded greatly, auto use increased and retail stores were redesigned (and relocated) to be dependent almost exclusively on auto access.

In our metropolitan area, many older main streets began to re-emerge in the late 1970s, beginning with downtown Portland. Today, many areas are following that revitalization trend . . . from Gresham to Hillsboro and from West Linn to Vancouver, Wash. Many buildings and shopping centers with auto-oriented designs are now being redeveloped to look and function more like traditional main streets, creating a new and vibrant hybrid for the communities they serve.

Main streets flourish because they provide a variety of goods and services, a pleasant community environment and efficiency for those who frequent them. When people do their shopping at a main street, they simply accomplish more with less travel, and may find the experience more entertaining.

Why study main streets?

Metro's 2040 growth concept (our long-range growth management program – see section II), has embraced this type of development pattern for several reasons. First, main streets help define a community so that a neighborhood or city can develop a unique identity within a larger regional context. Second, main streets are fertile grounds for small businesses to grow, and small businesses are the largest source of new jobs in Oregon. Third, main streets are tremendously efficient in reducing the amount of automobile traffic in the area.

Recent research by Metro shows that residents who live in neighborhoods near a main street walk, bike and use transit at unexpectedly high levels. Preliminary results show that residents of areas with good transit service and a good pedestrian environment *walk four times more, use transit five times more often and drive half as many miles per capita than residents of other areas in the region.* While residents in the rest of the region use cars for 89 percent of all trips, residents of main streets areas drive for only 59 percent of their trips.

In addition, even when people drive to a main street, they typically make several trips within the business district on foot or by transit. They may, for example, visit several stores, walk to lunch from their office or pick up dry cleaning and a few items from the nearby deli.

By focusing growth in new and existing main streets in the region, there will be less auto traffic, less congestion and better air quality. Not inci-

“Rebuilding our cities will be one of the major tasks of the next generation. . . . In providing for new development, you have an opportunity to do a job of city planning like nowhere else in the world.”

Lewis Mumford to the Portland City Club, 1938

*“Remember, no
matter where
you go, there
you are.”*

*Buckaroo
Banzai*

dentally, main streets increase the sense of community so valued by this region's residents and help local businesses thrive.

What difference will it make?

Metro must develop goals and minimum standards for all of the areas designated as main streets in the Region 2040 growth concept. The idea is to uncover tools and strategies for encouraging main streets and centers – and making those ideas a reality. Goals for main street areas will be written as standards and objectives in the Regional Framework Plan, which Metro is required by its charter to adopt by the end of 1997. Cities and counties within the metropolitan area are required by state law to meet the goals spelled out in the Regional Framework Plan. So a shared vision for main streets will be written into the zoning codes and comprehensive plans of each jurisdiction in the area.

But more important than government regulation are the more subtle ways to make main streets successful. Simply changing regulations will not make main streets grow and prosper. Investments and partnerships with the businesses that make up the main streets are more important in the long run. The region will use the Regional Framework Plan to help guide growth management investments, particularly those related to transportation. It is important to focus on what state, regional and local transportation investments will help, not hinder, main street development.

Finally, it is the private, rather than the public, sector that builds the buildings and businesses that make a main street. This handbook strives to ensure that

main street areas have a healthy business climate that encourages investment, provides a secure environment and promotes business growth.

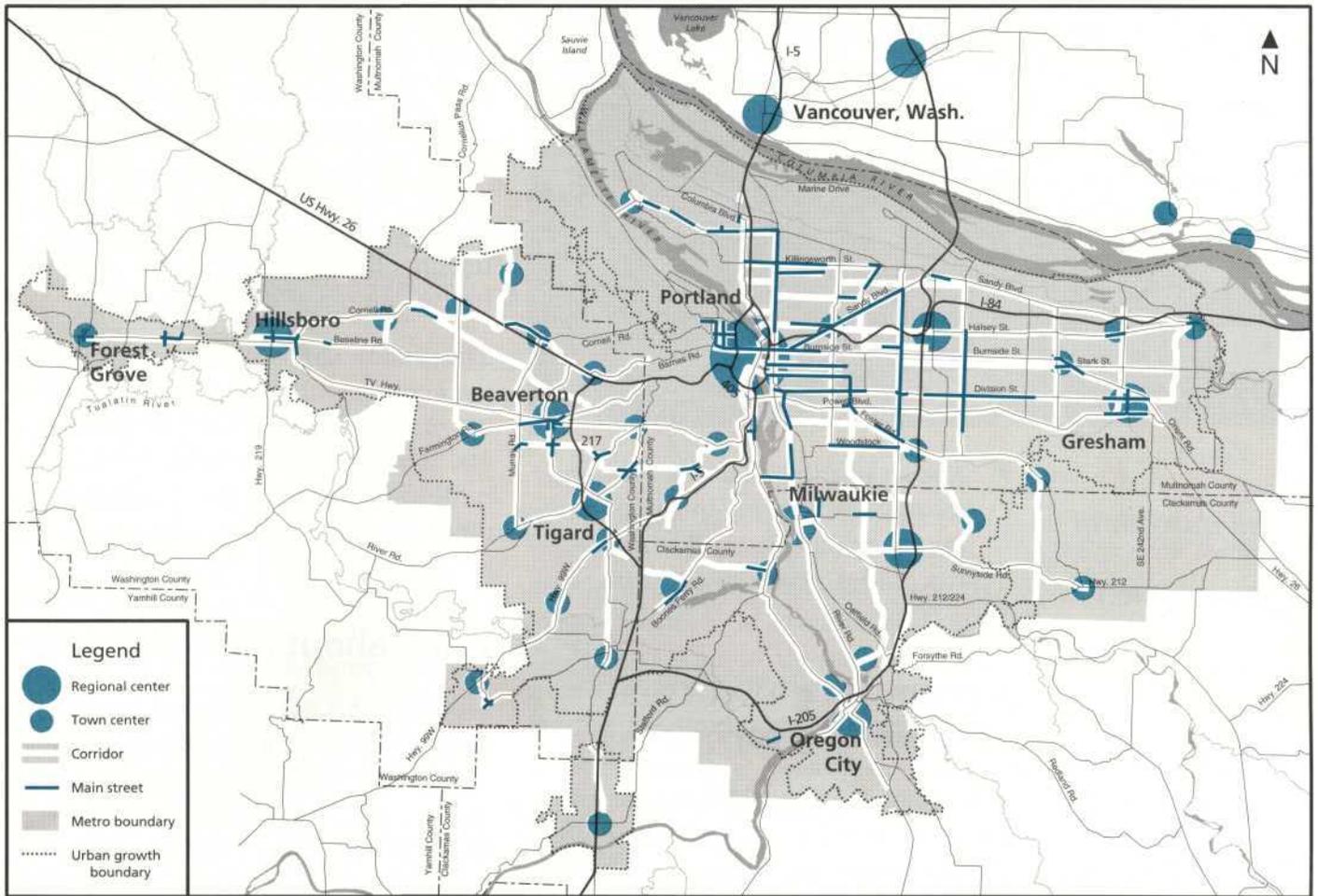
How will this handbook help your community?

In this handbook we study small main streets, both new and old, because a relatively small geographical area is easier to understand. *But it is important to note that the principles in building and managing a small main street also apply to larger commercial areas.*

From downtown Portland to the smaller downtowns of Oregon City, Forest Grove and Lake Oswego to newer centers such as the Lloyd district, Beaverton and Tualatin, the same principles apply, except that larger main streets can specialize or offer a wider variety of services. This handbook explains the regional planning context in which main streets function and how we can best use the lessons learned from studying main streets. Throughout the handbook are sidebars on topics related to main street development and ways to increase densities in retail and mixed-use areas.

Our intention for this handbook is that it be a valued and useful resource for business people, business associations, residents of main streets and centers, community representatives, neighborhood leaders, planners and policy makers.

II. Main streets in the Region 2040 context



What is Region 2040?

Metro launched a program in 1992 to ensure that the region keeps its livability in the face of a rising population and subsequent pressures on land use and infrastructure. This long-range planning project, called Region 2040, will help determine where new jobs, transportation facilities, open spaces and housing will be located in the Portland metropolitan area during the next 50 years.

An important tool for managing this region's growth is the urban growth boundary, created by state law to surround the urban area of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. The purpose of the urban growth boundary is to contain growth

within the boundary and to preserve farm, rural and natural resource lands outside the boundary.

Some key questions of the Region 2040 project were: "Will we need to expand the urban growth boundary in the future? If so, when, where and by how much?"

These questions were developed after Metro conducted extensive public surveys and public involvement opportunities, where citizens were asked about their regional values. The shared regional values included:

- Use the land within the current boundary as efficiently as possible through infill and increased densities to make use of existing infra-

This map shows main streets and centers as designated by local jurisdictions and Metro in the 2040 growth concept.

"This acceleration of sprawl has surfaced enormous social, environmental and economic costs . . . The burden of these costs is becoming very clear."

From "Beyond Sprawl: New Patterns of Growth to Fit the New California," a report sponsored by Bank of America, Greenbelt Alliance, California Resources Agency and Low Income Housing Fund.

structure (sewer, water, utilities, roads and transit facilities).

- Minimize loss of farm, forest and resource lands by keeping expansions of the urban growth boundary to an absolute minimum.
- Retain the high quality of life so valued by area residents (and envied by other communities nationwide) by keeping nature nearby and by having friendly and distinct neighborhoods and relatively little congestion compared to other metropolitan areas.
- Keep a healthy business environment by facilitating infrastructure improvements that will strengthen, not hinder, economic growth.

How much growth are we planning for?

More than 465,000 additional people are projected to be living in the metropolitan area by the year 2015. About one-third of that growth is from natural increase (births minus deaths). The rest of the growth is migration to the area from other places in Oregon, or from other states or countries. To put this in context, the projected increase of 465,000 people between 1995 and 2015 is equivalent to adding a city just smaller than Portland to the area, or adding about six cities the size of Gresham.

Concentrating growth in centers

After extensive public involvement and analysis, the Metro Council adopted a Region 2040 growth concept that calls for directing housing and employment growth into centers and

along major transportation corridors. The centers include the central city of downtown Portland, eight regional centers, light-rail station communities, town centers, transit corridors and main streets (see the glossary on page 35 for definitions of these designations). While many of these centers already provide housing, entertainment, and goods and services to the region, other areas were designated as future centers of development.

The growth concept will strengthen the centers with priority in the funding of planning projects and transit and transportation improvements, infill of vacant sites, and redevelopment of aging underused buildings.

What about main streets?

Although this handbook focuses on main streets, our intention is that the design and promotion principles contained within it will be useful to any type of center. It is clear that this region's ability to manage growth, provide for healthy economic expansion, make wise land-use decisions and maintain the livability of the area can be greatly enhanced by using these ideas wherever possible.

III. A short history of main streets

To revitalize the traditional main street and to help modern shopping areas adapt to new travel environments, it is important to add many of the **functions** of a traditional main street to the modern setting. Understanding how traditional and modern main streets developed and how they differ from each other is helpful.

The shape of cities

Transportation technologies always have dictated the shape and size of cities – from human foot power to horse power to steam and electric power, and finally to the internal combustion engine. As transportation technologies advanced (and population increased), cities have become larger. Faster transportation methods meant businesses could go farther to collect raw goods, distribute finished wares and attract customers. Portland was built when transportation by water was king. In the 1840s, Portland was a rough and ready frontier port town with a grid of streets oriented toward the river.

Street cars

The first horsedrawn streetcar came to Portland in 1871, and the first bridge, the Morrison, crossed the Willamette in 1887. Electric street cars – an important mode of transportation then – began in the 1890s. Avenues radiating from downtown were the routes of these street cars, and the early 1900s saw an explosion of development along those streetcar lines.



Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society

The effect of Portland's early street car lines can be seen even today where there is compact commercial development close to the street along avenues such as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (then Union Avenue), Alberta Street, Belmont Street, Hawthorne Boulevard and Barbur Boulevard.

If you take a careful look at some of the older, close-in neighborhoods, you can imagine how it might have looked 75 years ago when the shopping district was integrated into the neighborhood and was easily accessible by all modes of travel.

Spreading out from the center

Street cars also served "suburban" subdivisions such as Woodlawn and University Park to the north and Alameda, Mt. Tabor and Woodstock to the east. At the time they were built, these neighborhoods were on the outer edges of Portland. Not far beyond their boundaries, particularly to the east, were farms and countryside.

*Back to the future:
a train pulls into
Multnomah Station.*

*“. . . nodes are
the conceptual
anchor points in
our cities . . .
the essence of
this type of
element is that
it be a distinct,
unforgettable
place, not to be
confused with
any other.”*

*Kevin Lynch, "The
Image of the City"*

*“Every car needs
an estimated
4,000 square feet
of asphalt for
parking and
turning at home,
work and
shopping.”*

*Constance Beaumont,
“How Superstore
Sprawl Can Harm
Communities”*

To entice home buyers, developers paid for and built some of the street car lines that served their developments, then turned the operation of the line over to private railway companies. The developer of Rose City, for example, financed the Sandy Boulevard street car line.

Street car lines also served outlying communities. A line ran from downtown Portland to Oregon City, for example, and stopped at places such as Oak Grove. The Springwater Corridor trail, used today by bicyclists, walkers and joggers, follows the alignment of an interurban rail line that served Gresham. The historic Orenco area in Washington County was served by a rail line that continued into downtown Hillsboro. It seems appropriate, then, that Orenco once again will be a community with rail service when the westside light-rail line opens in 1998.

Growth in auto ownership

Many newer main streets developed accommodations for the auto such as common parking lots and limited on-site parking as more of their customers began using cars in the 1920s and 1930s. “Parking in the rear” was a ubiquitous sign in that era. Large, projecting signs were designed to be viewed both by pedestrians and autos. Even with these auto-related changes, main street stores always depended on customers leaving their car and shopping the district on foot.

With the increase in automobile use and the development of suburban housing after World War II, previously rural communities became booming bedroom communities. In 1940 Gresham was a town of less than 2,000 people, Beaverton had 1,052 residents and Lake Oswego had 1,726. Between

1940 and 1944, the metropolitan area added 160,000 people (from 501,000 in 1940 to 661,000 in 1944) a whopping 32 percent increase. Much of the rapid growth in this period was because of the ship-building industry. At their peak in 1943-44, the Kaiser ship yards alone employed close to 100,000 people.

At the mall

In the 1950s and '60s, malls sprang up along arterial roads in suburban communities, and a new form of commercial development was born in response to the automobile. The buildings were pulled back from the street to allow plenty of room for parking. Customers were assumed to arrive by car, not by foot, bus or street car. In contrast to traditional development prior to World War II, modern communities kept residential and commercial areas strictly separated.

Enclosed malls were built in the 1960s and '70s. Malls imitate many things about a main street: many stores are in one place and a coordinated appearance with a pedestrian orientation (once you're inside). But malls differ from a traditional main street in that they are physically separated from the community they serve.

A main street is centrally located so that community residents pass through or near their main street district nearly every day. Although malls have tried to imitate the community gathering function of main street (e.g., holiday events, “sidewalk” sales), many lack public uses such as a school, post office and city hall. This has been changing somewhat, though, with libraries opening branch locations and the state Department of Motor Vehicles offering service counters in malls.

Current studies show people are spending less time in malls today than they once did – an annual average of 1 1/2 - 2 hours a month in 1995 compared to 3 1/2 hours in 1990. Very few new malls are being built. Retailers are reporting a trend toward shopping unique stores downtown rather than the national chain stores found in most malls.

Malls also lack the basic, day-to-day services that bring people to the main street frequently and that foster a sense of ownership and community, such as a grocery store, bank, laundromat or hardware store. Some businesses, such as Fred Meyer stores, have moved to fill this gap and in some cases have prospered in a mixed auto and pedestrian environment.

A new retail type very different in scale from main streets is the “big box” retailers, such as Target, K-Mart, Costco and BiMart. Tanasbourne and Jantzen Beach are examples of “power” retail centers. These popular stores rely almost entirely on both customers and employees arriving by car. There are, however, a few examples of big box retailers moving into a main street environment as a means of reaching the local market.

Main street living and transportation

Higher density housing near light-rail transit – so popular today with both planners and developers – is nothing new. Affordable, compact housing often was built close to the street car line. The Irvington neighborhood in Northeast Portland and close in Northwest Portland have many examples of town homes and multiplexes that were built around the turn of the century when those neighborhoods were served by street cars.

Reuse examples

Reuse and renovation is a way to make the best use of limited land resources. Reuse and renovation can mean recycling an existing building to a new use, perhaps one that is of a very different use than what its architects originally intended.

An example of reuse are the former warehouses in the Pearl District of northwest Portland and lofts used for both living and working that are changing the face of the River District in downtown Portland. In a similar vein, the shopping mall of Johns Landing in Southwest Portland is built in a former factory space in which the original water tower was kept and has become an easily recognized feature.

Metro’s own building, the Metro Regional Center, is another example of reuse. A former Sears and Roebuck department store vacant since the 1980s, it was rehabilitated and remodeled to serve as a regional government center. It also houses other uses as well, such as a contact office for the Portland Police Bureau and the district attorney, and the offices of a private accounting firm.

On Portland’s Belmont Street, the former Carnation dairy that occupies more than two city blocks is being renovated as a mixed-use retail and residential development.

We can also look to our neighbors to the north, where a turn-of-the-century elementary school on the main street area in Seattle’s bustling Wallingford district now is a thriving collection of shops, and restaurants with apartments on the top floor.

Just off Belmont at Morrison and 26th in Southeast Portland, the rails of an old street car line are still visible in the road. An old four-plex apartment building sits at the corner, convenient to the stores just one block down on Belmont. Similar examples of multi-family housing close to transit are evident all over the east and inner west side of Portland.

An important lesson from the past is that the convenience of these street car neighborhoods has carried through to today. Even half a century later, the way these areas were built allows the residents greater transportation options. These dense, older neighbor-

Main streets then and now . . .

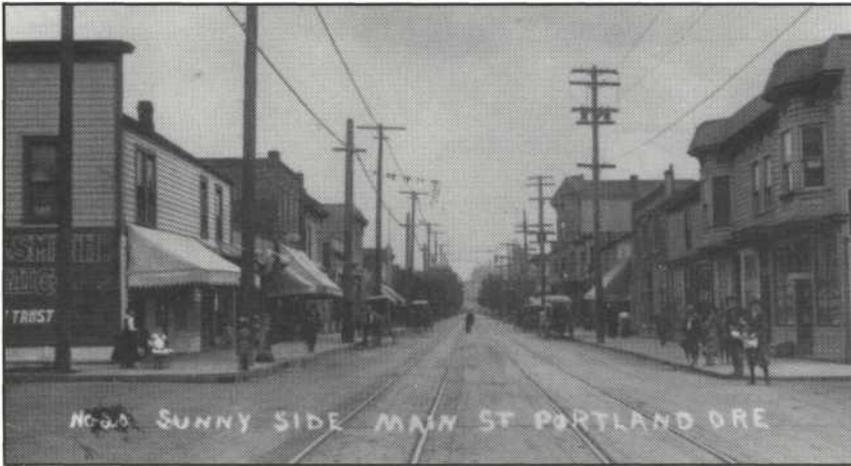
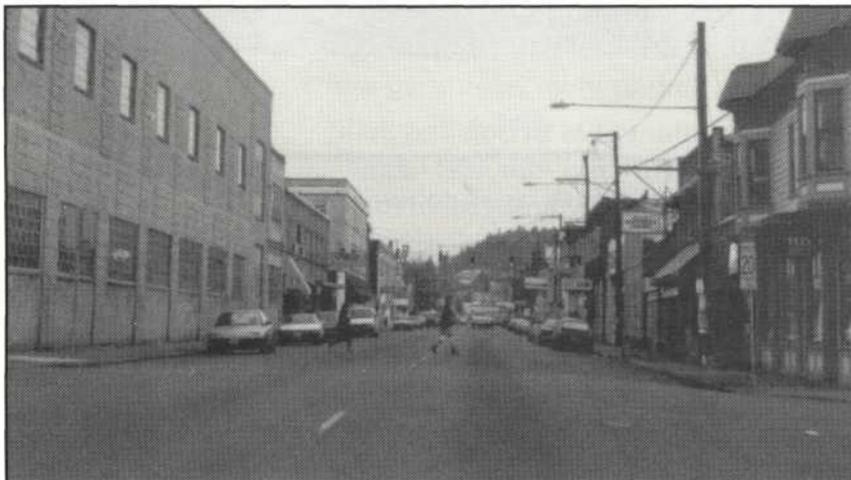


Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society



Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society



Belmont at 33rd in Southeast Portland: 1920 (top), 1941 (middle) and 1995 (bottom). Note the street car tracks. The dairy building to the left is currently being remodeled as a mixed-use retail and residential project.

hoods have the highest percentage of trips by walking, biking and transit. People living there today travel in a manner that is not dissimilar to the residents who lived there when the houses were new. They are able to own fewer cars and contribute far less air pollution than the rest of the region.

This lesson can be translated into useful ideas about how to make suburban main streets and town centers more walkable and convenient to adjacent neighborhoods.

Lessons from the past

While we cannot recreate the development patterns of the past, there are many lessons we can learn from these areas. After all, they have adapted well to the myriad of changes during the past 50 to 90 years.

The older urban main street models of Belmont, Hawthorne, Sellwood, Division and Broadway have a number of similarities. Their orientation is to the shopper traveling by foot. The building line is consistent and close to the sidewalk with little or no setback. Large windows prominently display the shop's wares to attract people from the sidewalk. Every interesting window encourages the shopper to continue walking and shopping; large gaps of parking lots or blank walls do not exist. Every shopper becomes a pedestrian within the retail area, so attention paid to the pedestrian environment is effort well spent.

The older "prototypical" main street was designed in such a way that walking within the area was safe and comfortable, the streetscape was varied and interesting and a number of errands could be accomplished in one trip.

IV. Main street case studies

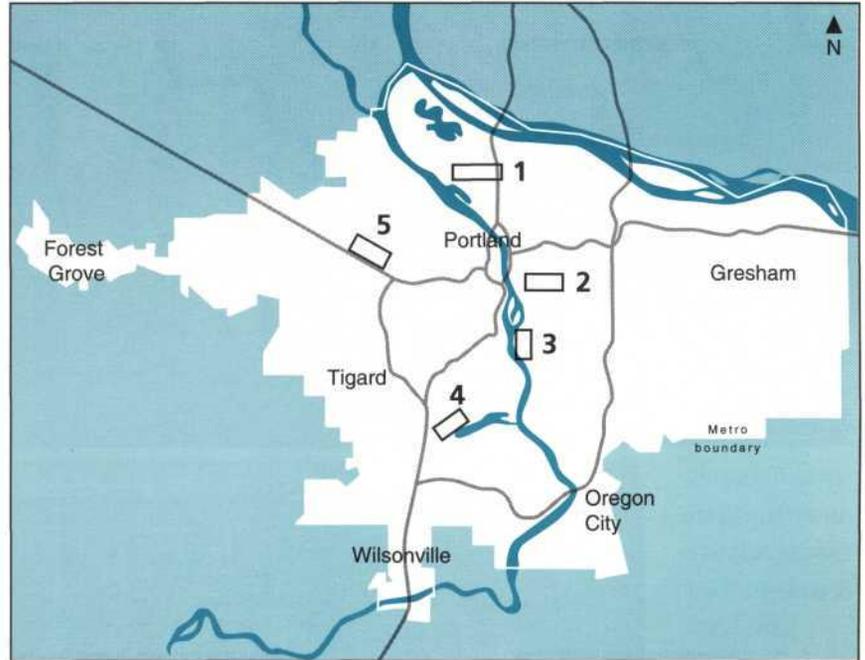
It is valuable to examine some existing successful main streets around the region to see what elements could be transplanted to new, emerging main streets. An in-depth look at a variety of main streets from the region has helped us develop a menu of strategies, actions and regulations to encourage main streets, in accordance with the 2040 growth concept. THIS section details the areas we examined and how we came to our conclusions and recommendations.

The study process

With the help of the Main Street Technical Advisory Committee, Metro and its staff reviewed five main street case study sites. The committee included representatives from the fields of real estate, finance, retail, traffic engineering and architecture as well as policy makers from local jurisdictions (see committee roster on the inside front cover). The sites studied were Lombard Street in North Portland, Belmont Street in Southeast Portland, Sellwood/Moreland in Southeast Portland, Lake Grove in Lake Oswego and Cedar Mill in Washington County.

Collecting information

We reviewed data about each site including demographics, zoning, marketing profiles, traffic counts, densities, property values and projected future growth. In addition to data collection and mapping analysis, staff conducted site visits to note the neighborhood character, building



types, commercial uses, circulation patterns and pedestrian facilities, as well as neighborhood assets (parks, schools, libraries) and liabilities (large vacant parcels, eyesore properties). The committee members helped develop lessons and strategies from both the data and their own experiences.

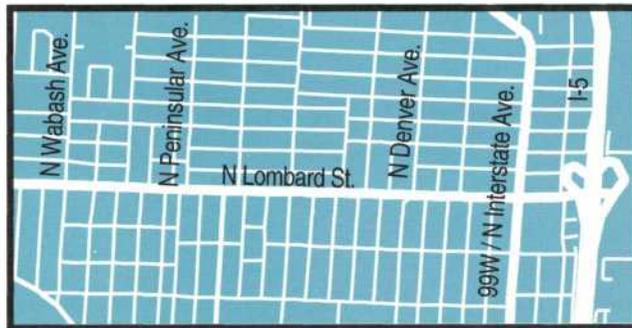
Staff attended neighborhood meetings about community planning efforts in Sellwood and Belmont and met with neighborhood and business representatives in Lake Grove, Cedar Mill and Belmont. We convened two community workshops in Lake Grove and Cedar Mill. Participants at the workshops talked about how they used their main street, what their concerns were and what changes they would like to see. They drew on maps, completed surveys and engaged in discussions with neighbors, business representatives and planners from Lake Oswego, Washington County and Metro. A stakeholder survey also was conducted (in person or by phone) with about 30 neighborhood leaders,

These main streets were chosen as case study sites:

1. Lombard
2. Belmont
3. Sellwood
4. Lake Grove
5. Cedar Mill



Storefronts on Lombard Street.



business owners and local planners representing the five communities.

Case study site descriptions

The following section describes each case study site and highlights the challenges and opportunities of the area. The next section, "Lessons Learned," will detail the insights that were gained from these case studies.

Lombard – North Portland

Lombard is a district with "good bones" that is a traditional, dense, grid-patterned neighborhood well-served by transit, with good pedes-

trian access and connectivity. Lombard offers important lessons for the region as a shopping district in transition. If it is neglected, Lombard could decline and become stagnant, but if the redevelopment and infill opportunities in this neighborhood are acted upon, a vibrant, prospering district serving the North Portland community would be the result.

Physical layout

Lombard Street is a neighborhood business district that also functions as a regional transportation arterial. Many medium-density garden-type apartments are on Lombard itself, surrounded by neighborhoods of fairly dense single-family homes with an average lot size of 5,200 square feet. The area is affordable, with a 1994 median list price in the \$80,000 range. Lombard has a lower household turnover than the Sellwood and Belmont study areas and the highest rate of home ownership of all of the main street study areas, with 65 percent of the housing owner-occupied and 35 percent renter-occupied.

The area grew up around early street car lines and was part of the town of Albina, annexed to the city of Portland in 1891. Many buildings date from the turn of the century, and the area was built out by the end of the 1940s.

Lombard carries a high daily volume of vehicles but has a good pedestrian environment and is well served by transit. The street varies from two to four lanes wide, with frequent stop lights, on-street parking on the north side and turn lanes at larger intersections. Interestingly, the area has untraditional peak times for traffic, with the busiest traffic occurring midmorning and midafternoon. This likely is because of the concentration

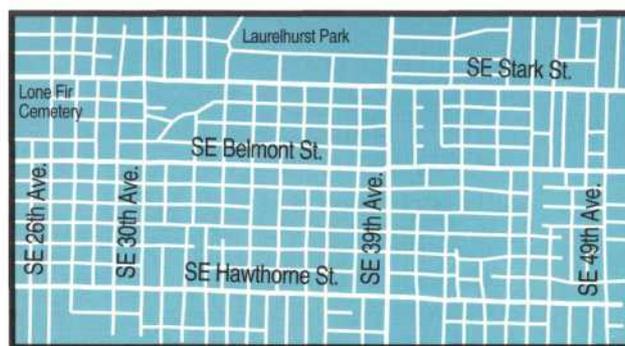
of primary schools in the area and because it serves as a route connecting the Port of Portland and St. Johns areas to Interstate 5.

The Lombard main street does not appear to have a mix of retail that would draw consumers from elsewhere in the region. The services are neighborhood scale: restaurants, medical and dental clinics, banks and convenience retail. Churches, schools and group meeting facilities (Kiwanis, North Portland Neighborhood Coalition) also are well represented.

Planning context

The Lombard main street is within the city of Portland's Albina Plan area, which identifies the Kenton neighborhood (north of Lombard between Delaware and Interstate) as a historic district. New housing or major remodels in this historic preservation zone must comply with detailed design standards intended to retain the architectural character of the area.

The Albina Plan also creates zoning in the Lombard area to allow for significant increases in density through the use of duplexes and other multifamily developments. The code strongly emphasizes compatible design and opportunities for home ownership. The South/North light-rail system could be a major influence on this neighborhood. In anticipation of light rail, zoning was changed in the strip of land between Interstate Avenue and I-5 to allow very high density multi-family development. Lombard's good structure offers significant opportunity for a revitalized community district.



This Belmont shopping area has served the community since the 1880s.

Belmont – Southeast Portland

Belmont was selected as a case study because it presents an interesting mixture of timing, location and ingredients for a main street. Belmont is surrounded by one of the most densely populated areas in the Portland region. Downtown Portland is a stone's throw away and the transit service is superior. The grid layout of the area is quite pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Tree-lined streets, unique gardens and interesting architecture make the area appealing to the walker. Belmont has many apartments and duplexes, as well as single-family homes.

The demographics of the area show the Belmont community to be young (43 percent of the population is 18-39 years old) and well educated (30 percent have bachelor's degrees),

*“Remember,
walking is a
right, driving is
a privilege.”*

*From an Ottawalk
brochure (pedestrian
activist group in
Ottawa, Ontario)*

factors that are very favorable to business development. Despite these statistics, Belmont has a long way to go.

The neighborhood

Belmont is an area on the verge of revitalization, having been until recently the ugly stepsister of its bustling, trendy neighbor six blocks to the south, Hawthorne Boulevard.

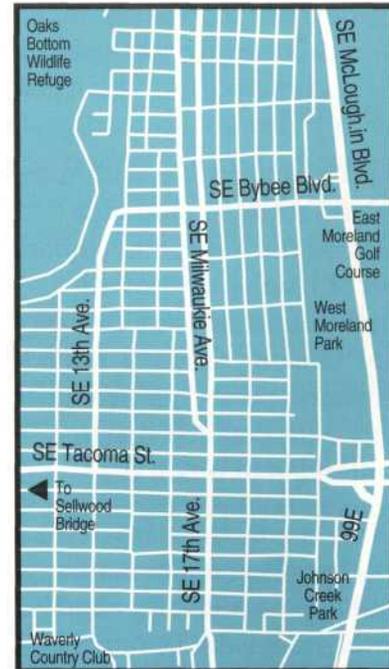
Belmont Street is a two-lane arterial occupied by pockets of commercial and retail activity separated by sections of residential uses. Some of the housing on Belmont has been converted to retail uses. Many are multi-family duplexes and triplexes, but a significant portion of this main street still is occupied by single-family residential uses. The commercial cluster around the Avalon Theater at 35th and Belmont has been experiencing a recent upswing in retail activity though retail vacancies still exist. An important opportunity exists at the Carnation dairy site (33rd and Belmont) where a mixed-use development is being completed.

The neighborhood surrounding Belmont is very dense, about three times more dense than the Portland average. It also has the highest percentage (53 percent) of renters among all the study areas. Real estate values have been appreciating rapidly.

One of the amenities offered by this neighborhood is very convenient transportation. Belmont residents take advantage of the transportation service and have the highest level of non-auto trips of the five case study areas. Belmont and neighborhoods like it also have lower rates of car ownership, with about 1.25 cars per household compared to 2.05 per household in other areas of the region.

Belmont is an old district developed along the street car lines at the turn of the century. Many of the buildings are of historical interest, and many have been lovingly restored. With the general growth of the region and the favorable factors existing in the Belmont neighborhood, this area is one to watch.

Sellwood – Southeast Portland



Sellwood is well known as a restaurant district and an antique shopper's paradise. As a result, it has the greatest regional draw of the five case study sites, attracting patrons from all around the region. The area also functions well as the community shopping district for the Sellwood-Moreland neighborhood. There are two distinct hubs of activity in Sellwood: at Southeast Bybee and Milwaukie and at Southeast 13th and Tacoma.

Sellwood was chosen as a main street case study site because it serves the

region as a whole, as well as a neighborhood, with a street grid and building density characteristic of a historic area.

The neighborhood

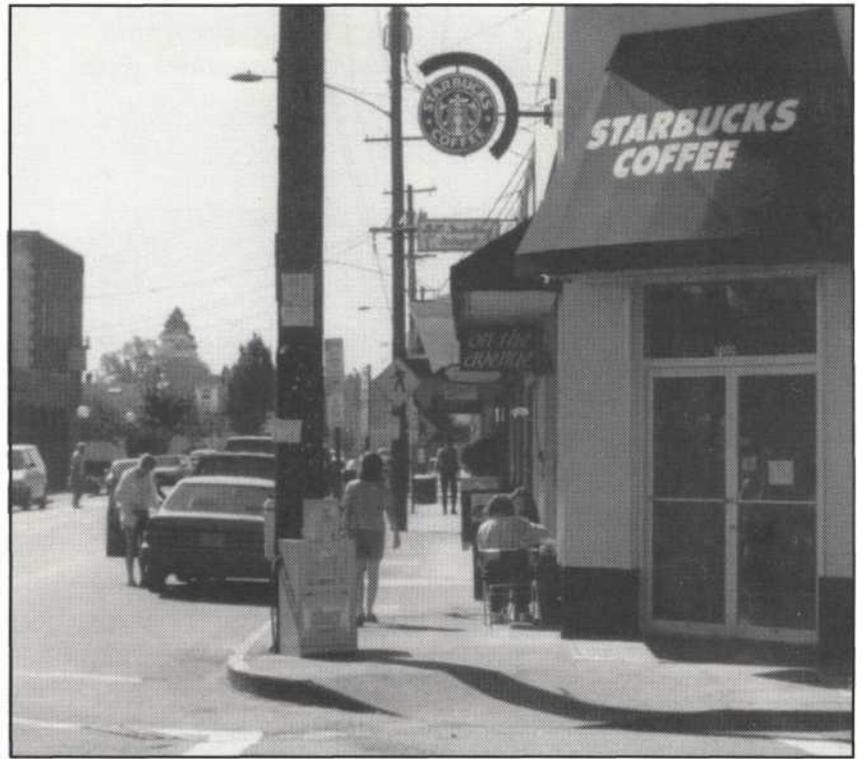
Sellwood is nearly an island with only about 10 streets leading into the several-square-mile community. McLoughlin Boulevard (state highway 99E) wraps around Sellwood on the north and east side, the Waverley Country Club forms an inaccessible southern boundary and the Willamette River to the west offers only one access into the neighborhood via the Sellwood Bridge.

The residential areas are compact with an average lot size of less than 5,200 square feet. A stroll through the residential sections will illustrate the wide variety of housing available, from 1950s in-fill ranch style houses to historic homes from the late 1800s.

Historic community

Sellwood was settled early in Portland's history. The city of Sellwood incorporated in 1887 and was an independent town until it was annexed to the city of Portland in 1893. Sellwood grew significantly when street cars began serving the area in 1892. The Sellwood Bridge was completed in 1925 connecting Sellwood to southwest Portland. A street grid was laid out in the 1880s parallel to the river front. Today, that grid, along with the flat topography and many mature trees, makes the area very pleasant for walking, with many thru-routes available since all the streets connect.

The stores built in the 1880s around the older 13th and Tacoma section have no setback from the sidewalk or from one another, and many are two



story, creating a traditional business district. The Westmoreland "hub" at Bybee and 17th Avenue was developed in the 1920s. The one to two-story commercial buildings also subscribe to no setback but at a lower intensity, with larger individual buildings and fewer upper stories than the 1880s section.

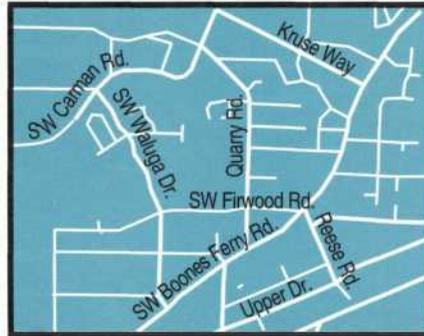
*Southeast Bybee
Boulevard at 17th.*

Sellwood today

The Sellwood-Moreland community has slightly more home owners than renters (51 and 49 percent respectively). The area is fairly well served by transit, and 11 percent of residents get to work by public transit. Sellwood is similar to the Belmont community in terms of educational level, age composition and property values.

Sellwood is blessed with many parks and natural resources. The 160-acre Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge, Sellwood Park and Oaks Park Amusement Park share the riverfront. On the other side of McLoughlin, Westmoreland Park, the Eastmoreland Public Golf Course,

Crystal Springs Rhododendron Gardens and Reed College offer more green spaces.



Lake Grove – Lake Oswego

The Lake Grove district serves the community located at the east end of Lake Oswego. Lake Grove is an example of a suburban main street on a busy arterial. It was selected as a main street case study because there are a number of similarly situated main streets around the region. Lake Grove challenged our presumptions about what elements generally are necessary for a main street: plenty of transit service, a dense nearby population and frequent pedestrian connections. Nevertheless, it represents a neighborhood focus for Lake Grove, and has potential to blossom into a more vibrant main street.

Connections

A sizable stretch of road in the middle of the shopping district has no transit service, although there is service south of the Lake Grove district and a commuter line to the north along Kruse Way. Neighborhood streets adjacent to Lake Grove have a number of cul de sacs and dead ends with few streets connecting through to Boones Ferry. As a result, walking to the main

street may require taking quite a circuitous route.

Residential streets in the area, with few exceptions, have no sidewalks and are narrow (20-30 feet). Residents either walk in the street or along the shoulder, maneuvering around parked cars.

Along Boones Ferry Road, the sidewalk system is fairly complete but often is narrow (two to three feet) with little delineation from the roadway, such as curbs or striping. In the heart of the main street district, on Boones Ferry between Reese and Firwood, there is a distance of more than 1,100 feet between signalized crossings. With that kind of spacing, vehicles gain a lot of speed between stoplights, making midblock crossing a risky proposition for frustrated pedestrians. A mid-block crossing for pedestrians offers a safer and more convenient option.

The workshop

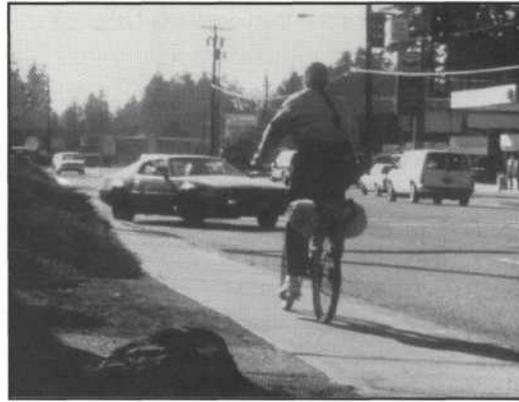
Metro convened a workshop for the Lake Grove community in the spring of 1995 to find out how people used their main street and what were some of the opportunities or constraints to the area's capacity for future growth. We found that residents identified strongly with the Lake Grove shopping district as their community service area, although they expressed a strong desire for better and safer pedestrian access. The absence of sidewalks was mentioned repeatedly, as were the hazards involved in crossing Boones Ferry Road. Comments from residents included, "Crossing Boones Ferry is a trauma," "Boones is driven like the Autobahn," and another respondent only shopped on one side of the street because "I wouldn't dare cross to the other side." Surprisingly, the traffic volumes of Boones Ferry Road are

about the same as Hawthorne, so the problem is obviously design, not traffic volumes.

A frequent comment was that there is a need for a wider variety of shops and restaurants in Lake Grove – “something to walk to.” Having a neighborhood destination, with plenty of shopping and restaurants, is a must for a successful main street.

The neighborhood

The Lake Grove area was annexed to the town of Oswego in the 1950s, and together they became the city of Lake Oswego. Much of the western side of the Lake Grove neighborhood is in unincorporated Clackamas County (the rest is in the city of Lake Oswego). Despite population growth and increased development, many residents think of their area as “rural.” Boones Ferry Road is the “main drag” for this main street and carries about 15,000 cars a day. The area has experienced considerable growth and traffic pressure with the development of Kruse Way, just to the north and connecting to Boones Ferry. Kruse Way was farmland as recent as a decade ago but is now booming with high-end campus-style business developments.



A bicyclist rides along Boones Ferry Road. Riding on the sidewalk is strongly discouraged. Bike lanes would be a better option.

Lake Grove has large-lot single-family homes and very few apartments. The average residential lot size in the study area is about 14,000 square feet (lot sizes in Lombard, Sellwood and Belmont average 5,000 square feet, about three times as dense as Lake Grove). Large lots provide the opportunity for subdivisions or granny flats (apartments above garages), which currently are allowed in this area. They are a flexible addition that can accommodate older relatives, teenagers, college students or provide rental income to the home owners in retirement.

Demographics

The Lake Grove area residents were the most educated (50 percent of the population has at least bachelor's degrees) and had the highest incomes (median household income was \$55,000 a year) of the five main street study sites. The area also enjoys the



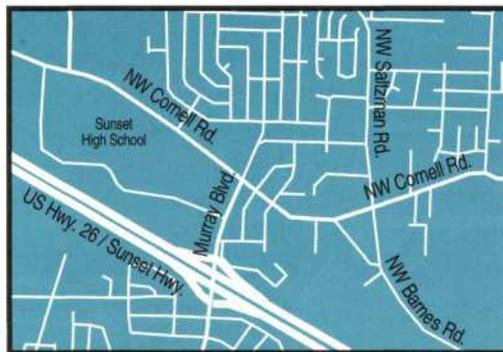
A typical side street in Lake Grove.

“Spontaneous play is becoming a thing of the past in many areas of the country due to sprawl. Children have to be driven miles to play with friends.”

*Constance Beaumont,
“How Superstore Sprawl Can Harm Communities”*

highest property values and the second highest rates of home ownership at 60 percent owner-occupied and 40 percent renter-occupied. About 81 percent of Lake Grove residents reported driving alone to work, the highest percentage of the case studies, while 9 percent car pooled and 3 percent used transit. In general, suburban communities with minimum transit service, such as Lake Grove, have more automobiles per household and travel nearly twice as many miles per capita than urban areas with good transit service and a mix of land uses nearby.

There is strong support from the community to make the main street function better. An obvious strategy to improve the convenience and safety of the main street is to improve the pedestrian environment. With sidewalk and frequent crossings, the shopper could move about the district on foot instead of by auto.



Cedar Mill – Washington County

Cedar Mill was a farming community that grew up in the 19th century around the productive soils that shed from the hills of what is today Forest Park. Situated halfway between downtown Portland and Hillsboro, Cedar Mill remained farmland with scattered housing until suburbs

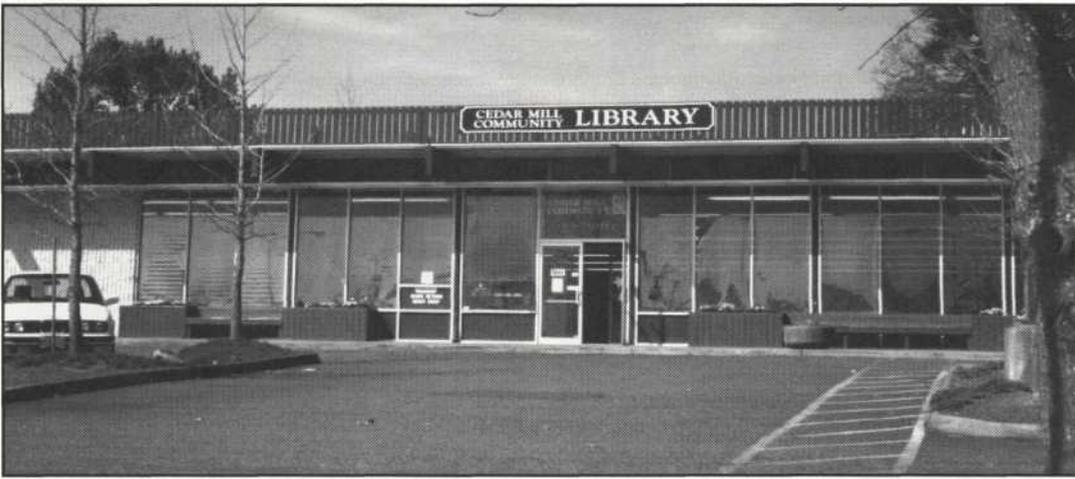
sprang up when the Sunset Highway was completed in the 1960s. Today Cedar Mill is a growing unincorporated community within Washington County providing for many of the neighborhoods' retail needs.

It is primarily a suburban area, yet it contains several medium-density apartment developments (concentrated mostly around the Cornell Road intersection) along with single-family homes. The subdivisions are from a number of different eras – some small lot, compact housing from the 1960s and some low-density, large-lot housing from the 1980s and '90s. The average residential lot size for Cedar Mill is more than 9,000 square feet. New, large “executive” houses are being built in the hills north of Cedar Mill. Cornell Road runs east to west through the community and carries about 22,000 cars a day. Cedar Mill is similar to Lake Grove because of the community's love-hate relationship with a busy arterial that needs to offer more amenities and better serve pedestrians.

Transportation

A lack of connecting streets or pathways in the neighborhoods of Cedar Mill means that most bicyclists and pedestrians must travel on Cornell Road to get beyond their immediate neighborhood. Cornell is a busy arterial poorly-suited for walking, given the potential dangers of the traffic speed and the lack of sidewalks or crossings. There have been pedestrian fatalities in the area, and parents told us they don't feel their children are safe from traffic when walking to and from school and other nearby activities. One parent at our Cedar Mill workshop reported chalking up an average of 150 miles a week on her car even though she took transit to

The Cedar Mill Community Library is a valued resource for area residents.



work each day. The mileage was accumulated by chauffeuring youngsters to and from activities within her own neighborhood.

Transit service in Cedar Mill is fairly good, with 10-15 minute service at the evening peak hours on Cornell Road. However, service is very limited within the neighborhoods, so riders must get on Cornell Road to catch the bus. The Sunset Transit Center is being built about a mile to the west of Cedar Mill where Highways 26 and 217 converge. In the near future, the westside light-rail line will present more commuting and transportation options for Cedar Mill residents.

The workshop

Community members like to use their local shopping area and feel a strong sense of identity with the area and its history but are frustrated that it does not function well.

Cedar Mill residents uttered a near-constant refrain of "more sidewalks" at a community workshop where they were asked what they most wanted for their community. Residents expressed frustration at the piecemeal sidewalk system in their area. They wanted to be able to walk more within the main

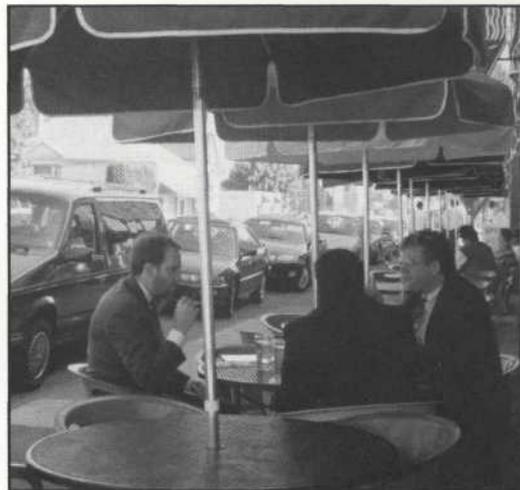
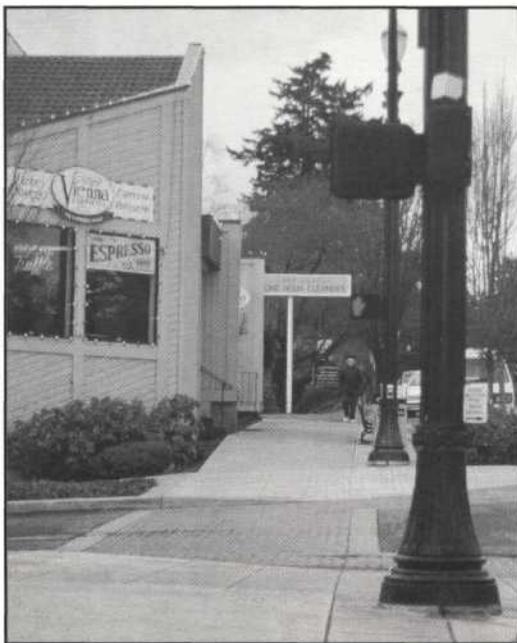
street and, for those living close enough, to *walk to* the main street.

Acknowledging that the community was perhaps too spread out for regular bus service on the neighborhood streets, they suggested a shuttle or van service.

Demographics

Cedar Mill is similar to the Lake Grove area in education, incomes and property values. The median household income in Cedar Mill in 1994 was \$48,000 a year, and the average residential property was valued at \$115,500. More than 40 percent of the population older than 25 have at least bachelor's degrees. About 59 percent of the residents owned their homes, compared to 41 percent who rented. Eleven percent of Cedar Mill residents reported traveling to work by carpool, while 78 percent drove and 4 percent took the bus.

Clockwise from upper left: Making the rounds in downtown Lake Oswego, enjoying lunch on Main Street, shoppers on Northwest 23rd Avenue, and making use of the sidewalk on Northeast Broadway.



V. Lessons learned

After taking an in-depth look at main streets and how they function, some key factors, or common themes, emerge as to why certain main street areas are successful. These key factors should be applied to all main streets so that they reach their maximum potential – both for the immediate community they serve and for the entire region. The primary keys to a successful main street are:

- Design – architecture, urban design, street front appearance, public space
- Transportation – bicycle and pedestrian traffic, automobiles, public transit and parking
- Uses – the types of land uses (retail, office, residential) in an area
- Regulations – zoning and other codes that govern activities in main streets
- Organizations – community organizations that make districts successful.

(I) Design

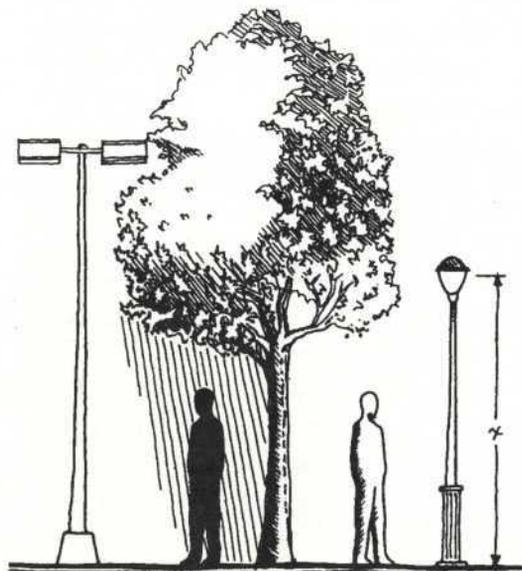
The design and physical appearance of a main street has a great deal to do with the livability and economic success of the area. Is it a visually stimulating area that makes people want to linger and explore, or does the area imply that nothing much is happening and it's best to go elsewhere?

While many people will walk to a main street, eye-catching visuals targeted at the driver are also important. Main streets must be

innovative and appealing to catch customers driving by. Since main streets often are on arterial roads leading to and from larger centers, visual signals can alert drivers that they are entering an interesting community with plenty of activity.

A change in the building intensity in older main street areas such as Belmont, Hawthorne and Sellwood signals the transition from a residential area into the heart of business activity. The buildings move right up to the sidewalk and may gain a second or third story. This “closing in” creates the illusion that the street has narrowed, so drivers tend to slow down and watch for pedestrians and parking cars. On-street parking also accomplishes this perceived narrowing and slowing.

Street trees are very effective visual signals. As they mature, they create a canopy over the street, which has a universal appeal. Other “soft” visual signals include: lighting at the pedestrian level, hanging planters and generally busier sidewalks with display boards, benches, trash receptacles,



*“These visions,
the river and
hills, Mt. Hood,
this knowledge
of what exists
around us, is
essential to our
sense of where
we are,
reminding us
that this huddle
of humans that
we call a city is
not unto itself
but is part of the
land in which it
lies and to which
it owes its life.”*

*Terrance O'Donnell,
“Reflections of a
Streetwalker”*

*Lighting on the right
acknowledges that
pedestrians, as well as
autos, use the area.*

"To walk or take transit is a public act which makes the street a safer component of community; to drive is a private act which turns the street into a utility. The former leads in many ways to a richer public domain, the latter to the world we have come to know, if not love."

Peter Calthorpe, "The Next American Metropolis"

drinking fountains and bike racks. These design elements can play off the character or historical period of the main street.

Lighting geared toward pedestrians can be especially important for encouraging main street activity into the evening hours. Lighting typically used on arterial roads is designed to illuminate the roadway for vehicles, not necessarily the sidewalk or storefronts. Standard road lighting is about 20-25 feet high. Lamp posts that are 10-12 feet high can have a significant effect on the appearance and sense of safety of an area at night. They can be installed in addition to, or in place of, the taller road illuminating fixtures. This type of lighting has been used in Gresham's Main Street district and can be added when other street improvements are being made.

Other visual signals can include signs that let you know you have entered the district, such as the "Welcome to Multnomah Village" or "Welcome to Forest Grove" signs that greet visitors entering these areas. Sign toppers (that sit atop the street signs) have been used throughout Portland to identify distinct neighborhoods, such as St. Johns, Beaumont, Hollywood and Irvington. They also promote the area's identity and sense of place, which businesses can use for cooperative district advertising and event sponsorship.

Public or semi-public spaces such as plazas and squares also can be important elements in a main street or center. Even relatively small areas adjacent to the sidewalk can bring life to the street and nearby businesses. If there is no provision for public maintenance, however, it is best that these remain private property. Whether public or private spaces, successful

plazas and squares can become the most treasured spaces in a business district. Successful spaces are those that are highly visible, adjacent to or bisected by the main stream of pedestrian flow, full of seating, have shade and weather protection, and offer a focal point such as a fountain or outdoor seating.

Many modern main streets use some of these visual signals but still do not get the expected business flow from drivers stopping to shop. These areas would benefit by better defining the sense of entry and modifying street design for a lower driving speed. In addition, some newer centers have the essential "spine" of the arterial street but may lack the "bones" of the local connecting streets to allow a good mix of land uses and a better pedestrian flow. Arterial streets can be improved in some cases by adding signalized pedestrian crossings at mid-block if the intersections are too wide.

What is shared parking?

If several businesses or services share a parking lot, they minimize the land used for parking cars and at the same time maximize valuable real estate. Shared parking acknowledges that people often shop at multiple stores in the same area. The reality of modern, everyday life is that busy schedules require running several errands in one trip. A common parking lot allows the customer convenient pedestrian access to a number of destinations that benefits area businesses as well.

Sometimes the uses being shared are complementary, such as using the parking at different times (e.g., a church and an office building). In other instances, they are collective and provide a simultaneous mix of

uses (e.g., a shopping district). Many areas rely on a casual sharing of parking lots, such as a bank or an office building, in which parking for other uses is allowed after hours or on weekends. Shared parking can be public or private, on street or off street.

One of the challenges to making main streets, corridors, town centers and regional centers function better is finding innovative ways to mix uses and increase densities. A significant amount of land is used for parking. A recent Metro study found that in the metropolitan area nearly 5,300 acres of land are used for commercial parking (not including residential parking). To put that in perspective, that's an area larger than Oregon City (about 5,000 acres) and larger than Forest Park and Washington Park combined (5,100 acres). This land represents a tremendous resource and some of the most expensive real estate in the region that is centrally located, commercially zoned and already served by sewer, water and transit. The value of this land has been estimated at \$12.5 billion dollars! Building on some of this land while still allowing for adequate parking for more jobs and residences will allow the region to grow efficiently with vital and attractive commercial districts.

Zoning codes typically require a minimum number of parking spaces to be provided per use, such as five spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail building space. (The ordinances set minimums but rarely set a maximum number of parking spaces that can be developed for single use.) Minimum parking requirements mean each store or office building must provide a parking lot solely for their patrons and tenants. In a main street area, the customer who is shopping at a book-

Shared parking – how to do it

The most efficient shared parking is public parking. The easiest and most convenient spaces are on-street parking, which allows immediate access to the sidewalk and creates a buffer for pedestrians. However, on-street spaces are limited and often need to be supplemented by public lots or parking structures. These can be purchased by local improvement districts, allowing all property owners in the district to share in both the costs and benefits.

Parking also may be shared among private users. The most common example is a shopping center with a variety of uses, such as office, retail, a theater and restaurants. Shared parking ordinances usually require the applicants to demonstrate that sharing would not cause a parking shortage. Currently written ordinances also tend to discourage private shared parking arrangements by requiring a variance, which acts as a disincentive.

We also strongly recommend that public parking be part of the basic infrastructure for main streets, station communities and all types of centers. In addition, required off-street parking can be greatly reduced, or in many cases eliminated, in centers and main streets. This already is a common practice for the region's successful and growing main streets.

For a handbook on shared parking, call Metro's Growth Management Services Department at (503) 797-1562

"Parking has emerged as the most important regulatory constraint on achieving the more intensive forms of mixed-use development."

"Metro Main Streets: Economic Feasibility Study" prepared for Metro Toronto by the Starr Group



"Pedestrians are the loose fish in the transportation system, moving along private desire-lines that are poorly understood by the traffic technicians."

*Robert Smythe,
president, Ottawalk,
Canada*

store may have parked at the grocery store down the street. After finishing at the dentist, a client may go across the street to the candy store (much to the horror of the dentist) and then to the bank. The result is that there simply may be too many parking spaces for the customer's needs.

Strict per use parking minimums are also inherently inefficient, which creates an oversupply of parking. In a study conducted by the state Department of Environmental Quality of actual peak parking demand in the Portland metropolitan area, most parking lots studied were 20 percent or more vacant even at peak parking times. When a shopping district shares parking, peak uses rarely overlap. When they do, it is during fairly predictable times (such as during holiday shopping), and parking management methods can be used to mitigate demand during those few peak use days.

(II) Transportation

Traffic

Early in this study we realized that contrary to our first impression, the amount of traffic is not necessarily a problem on a main street. *Traffic is not the enemy of a pedestrian district and is in fact a critical element of a busy, vital main street.* But it needs to be managed so that it is an asset, not a liability. If a street seems unsafe or uncom-

fortable to pedestrians, they will take their feet – and their wallets – somewhere else. It is not simply the number of cars that can make an area inhospitable, but the speed and the nature of the trip. The street and building design and the accessibility to adjacent neighborhood streets greatly affect transportation patterns.

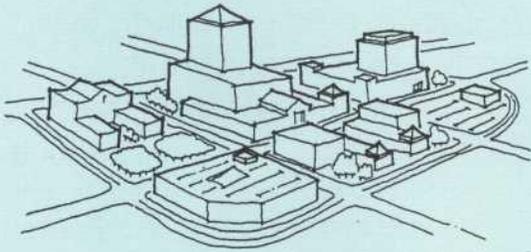
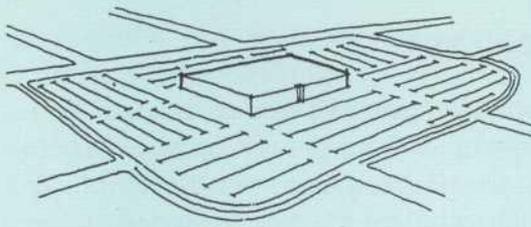
The main street of Northeast Broadway in Portland (at 15th Street), for example, carries 20,000 cars a day, about the same as Cornell Road in Cedar Mill. The pedestrian experience of these two main streets is quite different. Broadway has been experiencing a business boom in recent years. Although traffic is heavy, it is comfortable to move around on the sidewalks and there are street crossings at regular intervals.

In the heart of the Cedar Mill community, between Saltzman Road and Murray Boulevard, there are only two signalized crossings that are nearly 2,000 feet apart. A mid-block crossing with a pedestrian-activated stoplight would be a good addition to this main street. An incomplete sidewalk system also leaves pedestrians feeling vulnerable on narrow pathways, with little separation from the cars.

Another illustration of traffic volumes versus traffic behavior is Hawthorne Boulevard, a very successful commercial area in Southeast Portland that draws people from throughout the region. Hawthorne carries about 17,000 cars a day – as many as Boones Ferry Road in the Lake Grove district, and both Hawthorne and Boones Ferry have two lanes of travel in each direction. The pedestrian atmosphere between the two arterials, however, is quite different. Again, the issue is the difference in facilities provided for the pedestrians.

Pedestrians on Cornell Road in Cedar Mill.





Evolution of a strip mall

Main streets, like all built environments, naturally change and evolve over time. Malls are remodeled and may go through many different phases in our lifetimes. The recent demolition and reconstruction of Tanasbourne and Jantzen Beach Malls are illustrations of the short lives these retail venues sometimes have.

Growth in the region's population, along with rising property values, may make the land now used in large mall parking lots too valuable for automobile storage. The sketches at left illustrate how a strip mall with an abundant parking lot can evolve over time. Developers call this process "padding-up" referring to the development of additional building pads, or foundations.

Over time, parking lots can evolve to other land uses (illustration courtesy of Snohomish County Transportation Authority "Guide to Land Use and Public Transportation").

Broadway and Hawthorne have in common relatively frequent pedestrian crossings and on-street parking that buffers pedestrians from the traffic. Boones Ferry and Cornell, by contrast, have no on-street parking. Many urban main streets are designed to accommodate traffic at 25 mph, while many suburban main streets are on arterials designed for 45 mph traffic.

Main streets in suburban areas can institute many of the strategies that have been discussed on slowing traffic, improving the right of way for pedestrians and signals to the motorist that they are entering a busy district.

The all-important pedestrian

As important as attracting customers is keeping them in the area once they arrive. Gaps in the continuity of the buildings, such as large parking lots or vacant spaces, will deter people from exploring. Studies have shown that pedestrians are willing to walk past only a few blank buildings or vacant spaces. A longer stretch than that

means pedestrians will lose interest and turn around.

Perhaps the element that is most basic to the success of a main street also is the most mundane – a sidewalk. In urban main streets, the existence of sidewalks is taken for granted, but in many newer suburban main streets they are not in place or are sporadic. Sidewalks provide a clear pedestrian space where there is no threat from moving cars.

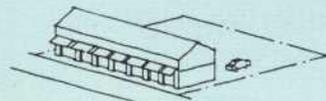
In some areas, the defacto pedestrian space is a ditch or a couple feet of pavement separated from the roadway by only a line of paint. These are unsafe and often uncomfortable situations for walkers to contend with, and those with a choice likely will avoid walking there. People in Cedar Mill and Lake Grove admitted literally driving from one parking lot to another within the shopping area because they felt it was unsafe to cross the street by foot. This practice obviously has negative effects on congestion and on air quality, since short auto trips are among the worst for air quality.

"The best thing to do with blank walls is to do away with them. Blank walls have a message. They are a declaration of distrust of the city and its streets and the undesirables who might be on them."

*William H. Whyte,
"City: Rediscovering
the Center"*



1.00 FAR



0.50 FAR



0.30 FAR

What in the world is floor area ratio?

Floor area ratio, shortened to FAR in developer and planner parlance, is a way to measure how much of a piece of land is taken up with building. In other words, it refers to the ratio of building area to the lot size. Building area refers to the interior square footage of the building itself, while the rest of the site may be used for surface parking lot, roads, paths and sidewalks, landscaping or undeveloped open space.

Local governments can mandate minimum or maximum FARs in the building codes to achieve a certain level of development intensity. A low maximum FAR of .3, for example, would result in an open, low-density building pattern. A high minimum FAR such as .8 would result in a built up, high-density urban pattern.

Pedestrian connections among uses can be as important as the traditional sidewalk route along the street. In suburban settings where the buildings may be set back from the street, a secondary pedestrian system between and in front of the buildings works. Also helpful to the success of a main street is the idea of shared parking and of cross patronage among stores. People who drive to the main street

This walkway in front of the stores serves pedestrians in Tigard.

become pedestrians once they park their car. A shared parking lot benefits all of the land uses involved by promoting walking within the district and making a more efficient use of space.

Customers who travel by bicycle are often overlooked as potential customers. Making your main street safe and convenient for bicyclists can expand your customer base and encourage people to mix errands and exercise.



Transit

Most main street areas are well served by transit. A portion of the market that is often overlooked are the transit users who frequent the district. Recent Metro research has shown that half of work trips are not simple commuter trips, but part of a more complex "tour" that includes another destination between work and home. That means that half of those work trips are potential customers for main streets - and when transit use is high, all of those riders are potential customers. Tri-Met can supply local businesses with information on daily boarding statistics for particular bus routes.

Another benefit to businesses adjacent to transit routes is that their employees can use transit, thereby freeing up valuable parking spaces for customers. Attention should be paid to the distance between the building entrance and the nearest transit stop. For example, if the front door of a business is oriented toward the parking lot, transit riders must maneuver around the back of the building or through a large parking lot. Making sure your business is welcoming to transit riders makes good business sense.

(III) Uses

The land uses (retail, commercial or residential enterprises) that locate in the main street are critical to the area's prosperity. As noted earlier, main streets frequently need to be aggressive in cultivating customers, since the surrounding neighborhood alone may not sustain an adequate customer base. To attract customers, some main streets have developed specialties, such as the Sellwood area's antique stores, which draw shoppers from all over the region who also use the cafes, coffee shops and bakeries while shopping for antiques. Northwest 23rd Street is an example of a main street that is so regional in focus, it no longer caters to many of the neighborhood's daily needs (except, perhaps, for a daily coffee fix and for entertainment).

In addition to a good mix of appealing businesses, main streets benefit when they include public services such as a school, library or post office. People who go to a main street to pick up a child from school or check out a book also are likely to stop for a greeting card, a gallon of milk or a pizza at a nearby shop.

Some jurisdictions have zoning code language that encourages public facilities to locate in particular areas. Other "attractors" include personal services such as a doctor, dentist, dry cleaner, repair service, accountant and other professional services that create trips to the main street.

It is important to recognize that there is no perfect mix of uses for a main street or center, each place must have its own character. They even may be sprinkled with industrial uses or mixed with auto uses, and some main streets serve their communities quite well even though they don't fit the trendy image "main street" often conjures. The most important elements of any main street are density, a mixture of uses and a good pedestrian system.

(IV) Regulations

Zoning

Regulations are an important tool to help main streets and town centers thrive. Under many local zoning codes, however, a prototypical main street would be illegal. The zoning codes require too much off-street parking, deep building setbacks from the street and no mix of uses. A different type of zoning is needed that allows mixing uses but is specific about design standards. The zoning also should be clear and objective and easy for a small business to use. The people who must deal with the zoning on a face-to-face level can ill afford the time or money involved in a complex permitting and approval process. Governmental delays and variances may make the difference between a business being able to get off the ground or not.

"Orienting buildings to public streets will encourage walking by providing easy pedestrian connections, by bringing activities and visually interesting features closer to the street, and by providing safety through watchful eyes."

Peter Calthorpe, "The Next American Metropolis"

"Shopping mall managements do not sit and wait for good tenants to show up. They go out after them. Downtown people should do the same. Some cities are trying to compete with shopping malls by copying the physical form . . . what they should be copying is the centralized management."

*William H Whyte,
"City: Rediscovering
the Center"*



This building on Northwest 23rd accommodates residential and retail uses.

Permitted uses

Finding and implementing the appropriate uses will depend on each individual main street. But all centers and main streets should allow mixed uses outright so that residential units can be developed in centers. Residents on main streets foster a stronger sense of community and provide a regular customer base for the retailers. The convenience of living on a main street is appealing to many people.

Mixing residences and businesses in centers also can create a safer environment and extend business activities into nighttime hours. Local jurisdictions may want to require retail or commercial uses at the ground level, with residential above. Or it may fit the community better to allow purely residential uses, such as an apartment building. Other retail or commercial

uses can use the valuable main street frontage and provide some buffer for the residences.

Prohibited uses

Uses that break up the continuity of the main street should be prohibited in the core area. Examples include uses that are low density, that require a very large parking lot or that would dominate a large portion of the main street frontage. Specific types of commercial or retail uses not particularly suited to main streets include: large warehouse retailers, home improvement stores, auto or large equipment sales, and businesses that are entirely auto-oriented (drive-through-only food outlets, auto parts stores and car rental agencies).

Parking

Shared parking (as mentioned on page 20) is a tool to achieve a higher intensity of land use. By sharing one common lot, the parking needs of a number of different facilities can be met in way that is efficient and saves land. Shared parking encourages customers to shop a district rather than a single store. Shared parking can be on-street or commercial parking lots. With a shared parking program in place, requirements for off-street parking can be eliminated entirely in many main streets.

Accommodating bicycle parking is easy and takes very little space, but frequently it is poorly designed or placed inconveniently. Bicycle racks should be placed under cover from weather, close to the entry and in a visible location. Too often bike racks are relegated to a far corner away from the entry and watchful eyes.

Landscaping and setbacks

Many local codes require that 15 percent of a parking lot be covered with landscaping, which is in conflict with obtaining the higher density needed in main streets and centers. Instead, the required building setbacks should be decreased to not more than 10 feet, and a zero setback should be encouraged where appropriate. Locating the parking to the back or side of the building area also can help create a highly appealing, continuous building line. The landscaping element can accommodate the right-of-way with street trees and potted plants.

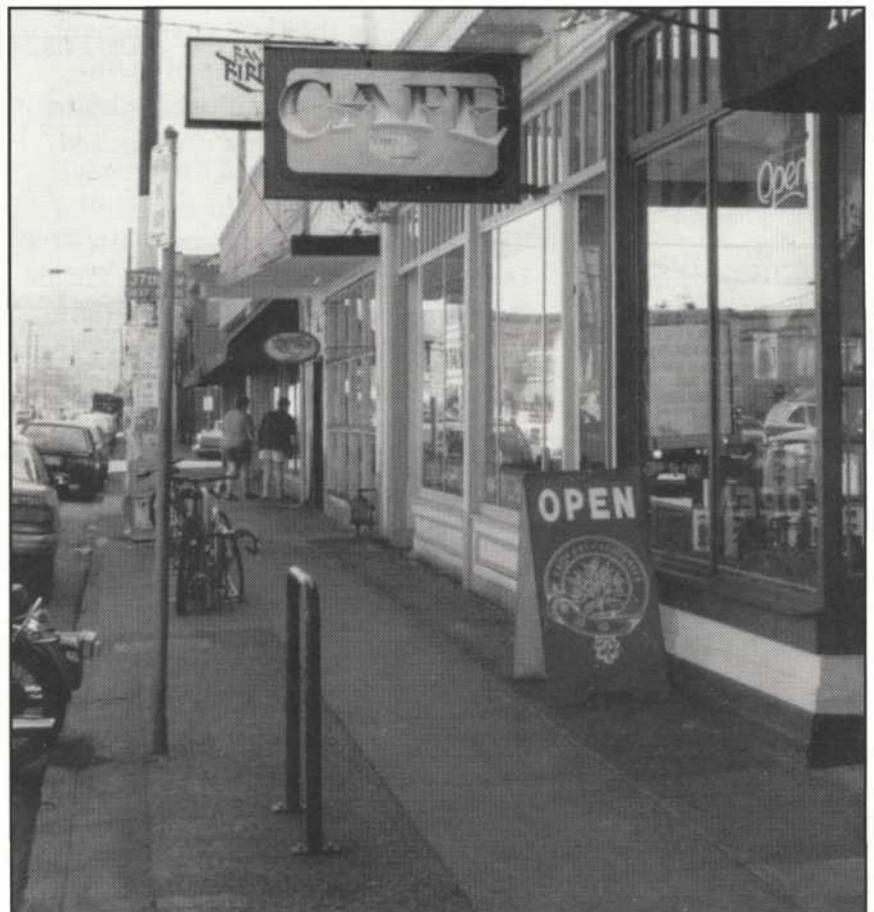
Sidewalk uses

Sidewalks can play an important and aesthetically appealing role for main street businesses. Signs, display tables, book carts, cafe seating, food and coffee carts all add to the visual variety and texture that make a main street appealing and should be encouraged, rather than prohibited. The small businesses that tend to locate on main streets can be overwhelmed by excessive regulation. The best solution is to be careful that the sidewalks work for pedestrians (use the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements as a minimum).

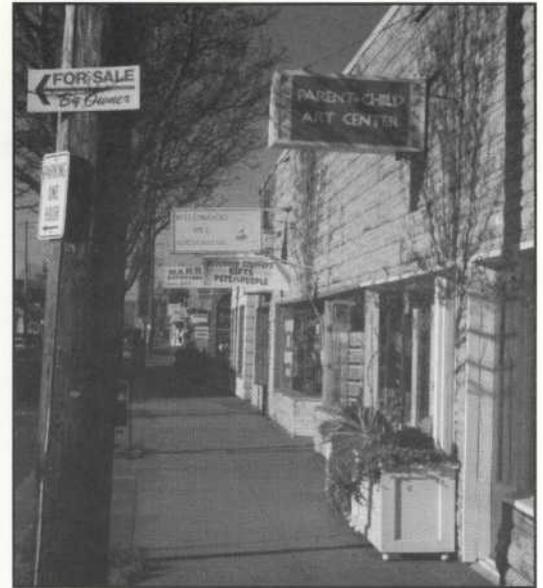
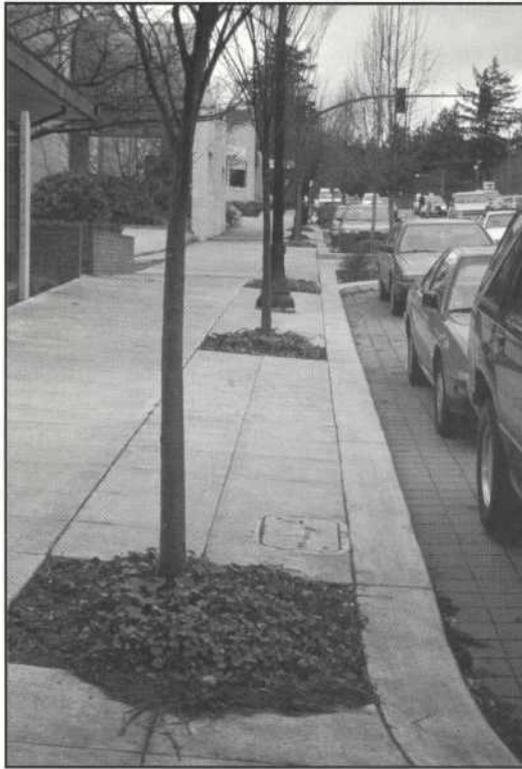
(V) Organizations

Metro's Main Street Advisory Committee recommended that main streets should act like malls to be competitive. That is, main street businesses

Window shoppers and bike parking on Hawthorne Boulevard.



A sidewalk in Lake Oswego on A Street (left) and in Northeast Portland on Fremont Street (right).



should be managed as a cohesive business district, just as malls are managed. Management could be either by a formal manager (perhaps subsidized by the local government and shared by a number of main streets) or, more traditionally, by an association of business owners and operators.

The benefits of a managed main street include a coordinated building facade that is updated periodically or the development of a shared parking lot for area patrons. Main street managers can also devote energy to business recruitment and serve as ombudsmen to new businesses going through remodeling or permitting process. Traditionally business associations have raised funds for street furniture, planters, lighting, seasonal decorations, increased maintenance and additional security. They sponsor districtwide events and coordinate marketing efforts. The benefits of having a well-organized main street are numerous: a cohesive voice from

the community to the city in zoning and regulation matters, updates to the comprehensive plan and wise expenditures of public investments.

In addition to the role of private business associations, government also has a role to play in helping foster main street success. Local governments can assist centers and business districts by implementing local improvement districts (LIDs) so that property owners within a district can jointly finance physical improvements, pay for maintenance and security, or develop public parking facilities.

The National Main Streets Center has an impressive collection of materials to help small businesses on main streets. In Oregon, the program is handled by Livable Oregon, which has a resource library full of information and tools to help mainstreets thrive.

In short, there are a number of issues that must receive attention so that a main street can thrive and attract customers. The best approach, of course, will differ from district to district and city to city.

VI. What next?

Let's make it happen . . .

Throughout this handbook we have touched on the key ingredients for vital, prosperous main streets and centers. We also have tried to drive home the point that these elements are transferable to all types of centers – from a '50s strip mall to a historical downtown. Don't be discouraged if your commercial area doesn't look like the ones we've pictured here – it doesn't have to.

Main streets come in all shapes and sizes – some are trendy, some are very neighborhood-oriented, some have an industrial bent and others are heavy on offices. The key to success is to identify where the district wants to go, identify the obstacles and work on removing them.

Cooperation between the public and private sectors is the most important factor in achieving a successful main street. Without that support and cooperation, the chances of a main street thriving are dismal. The relationship between the public and private sectors must be built on a shared vision among businesses, neighbors and the local government.

Jurisdictions should look at their commercial ordinances and zoning codes to see if they are hampering the very things that the community is trying to achieve. Come up with a dream development for your main street and see if it would survive your local government's permitting process. Bend the rules – do away with parking minimums, get rid of setbacks, allow mixed uses, require transparent building fronts and whatever else your community-minded imagination can create.

Public and private investments need to be linked. They also need to be nurtured constantly. Take a successful partnership for granted, don't pay it the attention it deserves and soon the relationship will sour. Dialogue among public and private partners is essential in developing and maintaining a successful main street. A key public investment often will attract additional private investment. Joint facilities such as public parking lots, for example, may allow private lots to be turned into buildings. Street improvements, when combined with pedestrian improvements, can improve both traffic and pedestrian activity.

The key is to begin – here's a quick checklist to get you started

Public sector

- Take a hard look at your code. Is it stifling the idea or the reality of a main street in your community?
- Create a "mock" mixed-use main street development and send it through the approval process. Where does the project get hung up and how cumbersome and time-consuming is the process? Share the results with the planning staff and with your elected officials.
- Review the zoning for your main street. Do your parking requirements allow for shared parking, and do those requirements need updating? Other elements to examine include the role of drive-through businesses, mixed com-

*"I have seen
nothing so
tempting as . . .
this Oregon
country. . . . You
have a basis for
civilization on its
highest scale . . .
Are you good
enough to have
this country in
your possession?"*

*Have you
got enough
intelligence,
imagination,
and cooperation
among you to
make the best
use of these
opportunities?"*

*Lewis Mumford to the
Portland City Club,
1938*



A busy intersection in Sellwood.

mercial and residential uses, setbacks from the street, and parking lots as they function (or don't) as a connector between stores.

- Talk to neighbors and businesses in the area. See what they want. Tap their energy and expertise for ideas about what will and won't work.

Private sector

- Become the instigator among your fellow business owners and neighbors. Whip up enthusiasm and the resulting ideas that will help get your main street up and running.
- Get the businesses and neighbors together to plant street trees and flower boxes. Work with a local nursery to donate the plants, or have individual businesses spon-

sor the planters. Publicize the effort in local papers.

- Make sure visitors to your main street feel as if they have reached a special destination. Install "Welcome to . . ." signs at the entry points of your shopping district.
- Use business associations or chambers of commerce money to offer no or low-interest loans for storefront remodeling projects.
- Create a local improvement district to fund larger improvements, such as an areawide parking lot or new sidewalks. Talk to your local government about help in funding for these projects.
- Talk with your neighbors, business owners and local government officials to brainstorm ideas about how to make your main street an unparalleled success.

A visual tour of main streets

Here are a few places to see main street principles on the ground. These examples are compact main streets where it is easy to study and experience the basic principles discussed in this handbook. Spend some time in these places and walk around. Get out of your car if you drive there. Notice the details, think about how you are able (or not able) to move around in the area. Does it work? Would you come back again? What would you change? What elements grab your attention or pique your curiosity? How much of the main street was planned and what came about by chance or history?

Good main streets

Beaumont Village, Northeast Fremont Boulevard, between 41st and 51st in Portland.

A classic example of mixed use at the corner of 41st and Fremont with offices above (originally apartments) and retail on the ground floor.

Willamette District on Willamette Falls Drive in West Linn.

The city has an historic overlay zone for the Willamette area that has worked well, it is often hard to tell a new house from an old one. Notice the pedestrian improvements along Willamette Falls Drive.

Multnomah Village, on Southwest Multnomah Boulevard at Capitol Highway in Portland.

Multnomah is a popular, compact community known for its antique shopping. Notice the density of the shops, the upper stories and the absence of off street parking lots.

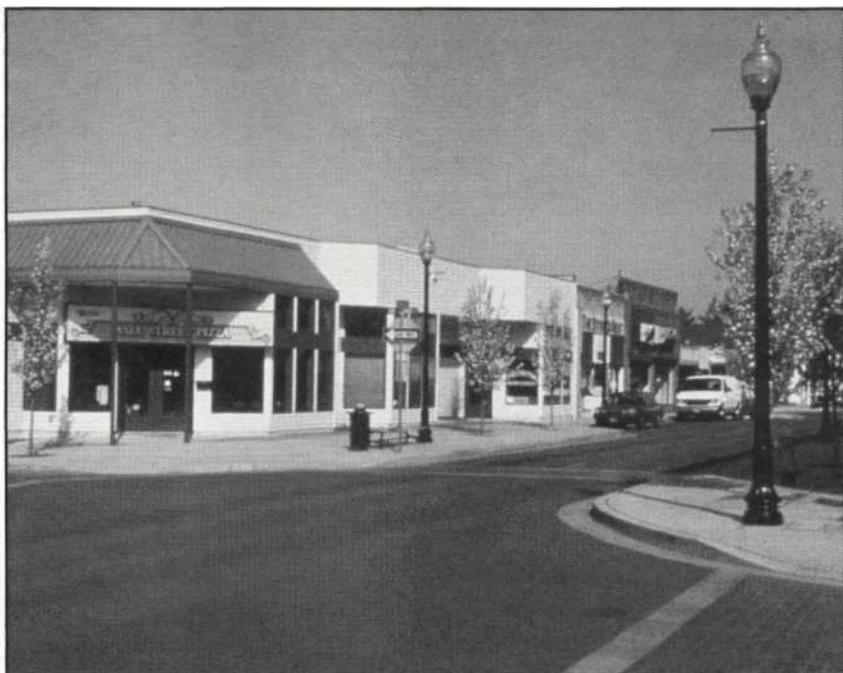


Other places to see

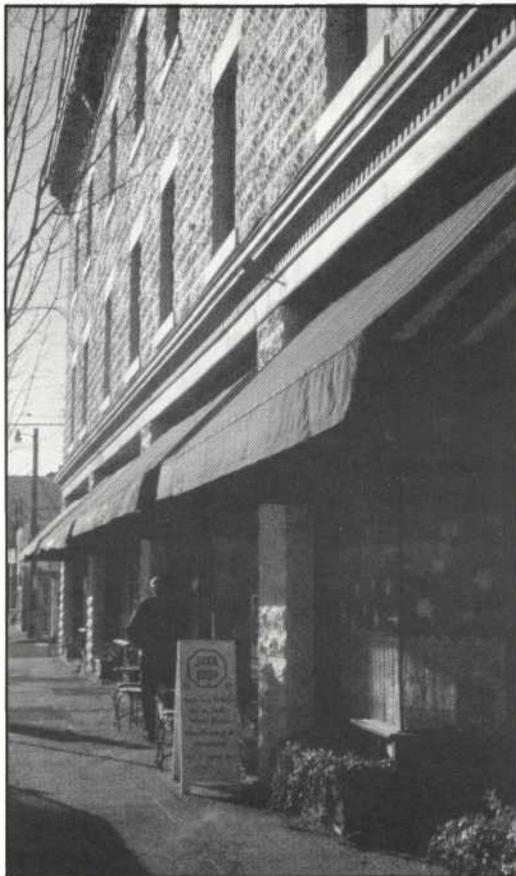
Kenton, North Portland, on North Denver Avenue, just south of Columbia. A very historic area, undergoing recent mixed-use revitalization.

North Russell Street, east of downtown on the Willamette River between I-5 and the Fremont Bridge. Formerly an industrial area with a new winery and expanding microbrewery/pub, restaurants and even a haunted tavern! A great example of reusing older buildings.

Beaumont Village (top), Multnomah Village (bottom).



Gresham downtown (top) and Kenton Hotel in North Portland (bottom).



Gresham's Main Street between Division and Powel. Get there by bike from the Springwater Corridor Trail. Enjoy Main City Park, bookstores, shops and restaurants. The area is capitalizing on the main street image. Notice all the recent pedestrian improvements in sidewalks, crossings, lighting, etc.

Hidden potential

These main street areas have some unmet potential. What are they missing, what would it take for these areas to really thrive?

Hillsdale, on Capitol Highway in Southwest Portland

Hillsdale is intersected by the busy four-lane Capitol Highway and one of the main focuses of the active community is improving pedestrian crossings, safety and access.

Cedar Mill, on Cornell at Murray in Washington County

Cedar Mill was one of the main street case study areas (see section IV Main Street Study Process, page 16). The area is difficult for pedestrians to use, but it has a strong sense of community.

Tualatin Commons in Tualatin

Tualatin Commons is an excellent example of a determined city creating a new downtown for itself. The Commons area, developed in just the past few years, is a great public space with a large lake. More development is following this public investment.

Other places to see:

Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, North/Northeast Portland. Many recent projects are turning the tide on long-neglected King Boulevard. Parking, the median strip and economics remain issues in the area, but energy is clearly there for change.

Tigard Main Street off 99W, a quarter mile west of I-5. This is the historic center of Tigard. The city and the business association have been sprucing up and a new apartment development Main Street Village at the south end of main street may provide the captive market that the businesses need.

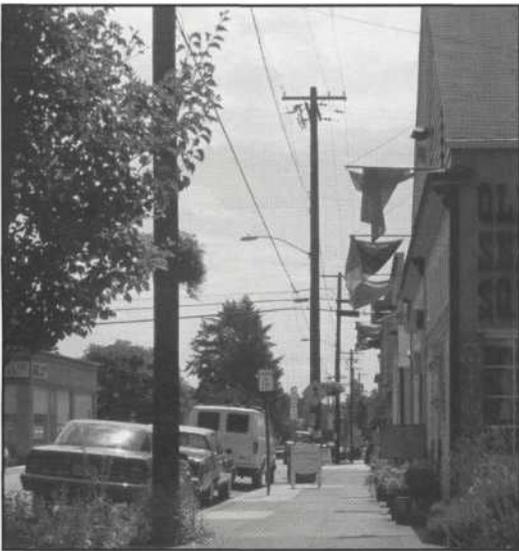
St. Johns, North Portland. St. Johns has a small-town feel, as property values rise the quality of the establishments in this town center will improve and the empty spaces will fill in.



Hillsdale (top), Tualatin Commons (middle) and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (bottom).



Sandy Boulevard in the Hollywood district, Northeast Portland (top), Sellwood (middle/left), Willamette District in West Linn (middle/right) and the Nature's Fresh Northwest store on Southeast Division Street in Portland (bottom).



Glossary

2040 Framework – Also called the Regional Framework Plan, this regulatory document will guide land-use and transportation planning in the metro area during the next 50 years.

2040 growth concept – A concept of land-use and transportation policies that will allow Metro and the metropolitan area cities and counties to manage population growth, protect natural resources and make improvements to facilities and infrastructure, while maintaining our quality of life and preserving the environment for current and future residents.

Central city – Downtown Portland is the region's central city with the highest intensity of employment and business in the region, as well as a center for arts, cultural and community events.

Floor area ratio (FAR) – The ratio of building floor area in relation to the amount of site area. FARs are used to measure to what extent a building covers a site. A one-story 5,000-square-foot building on a 10,000-square-foot lot would have an FAR of .5 (it is using half of the lot). (Also see the sidebar on page 24.)

Main street – A neighborhood or community business district. Main streets are areas of higher density land uses, with concentrations of shopping (such as a grocery store, book store or pharmacy), services (such as a bank, real estate office, upholstery shop or gas station) and entertainment or restaurants. Apartments often are located around the main street district and may exist on second or third stories above retail or offices. Main streets should have high quality transit service and a good pedestrian environment. Some examples of main streets are Alberta, Hawthorne and Division streets in Portland, Boones Ferry Road in Lake Oswego and Farmington Road in Washington County.

Mixed use – Usually refers to the mixing of residential uses with offices or retail uses. Mixed use can be within an area or within a single building.

Parking minimum – The minimum number of parking spaces that a jurisdiction requires to be supplied in off-street parking for a particular land use. The requirements are based on the use (apartment, grocery store, professional office, etc.). Typically the minimum requirement for retail uses is calculated based on the size of the building. For example, a minimum of three off-street parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail space may be required. So a 25,000-square-foot grocery store would require 75 parking spaces.

Parking maximum – A maximum number of parking spaces allowed per development by a jurisdiction.

Regional center – Eight regional centers – Hillsboro, Beaverton, Washington Square, Oregon City, Clackamas Town Center, Milwaukie, Gateway and Gresham – offer services and jobs similar to downtown Portland, in a location that is closer to home for hundreds of thousands of people. Regional centers are very accessible and have high levels of transit service, with most of them on current or future light-rail lines. Regional centers are major destinations for employment, commerce, shopping and entertainment, as well as a focus for the local community.

Setback – Refers to the distance that a building is set back from the street. A zero setback is when a building meets the sidewalk. Deeper setbacks separate the building from the street, and the space between may be used for landscaping or a parking lot.

Shared parking – When two or more separate uses are allowed to share the same parking lot because they will use the spaces at different hours of the day. This happens informally, but jurisdictions are beginning to encourage formal agreements between use to share a parking facility, thus lowering the amount of land that is allocated to parking lots. (See pages 20-21.)

Station community – Station communities are compact centers focused around light-rail stations. They have a core of high-density residential and

commercial development and serve as a transition to lower densities farther away from the station. Nearby neighborhoods have pedestrian connections that enable rail users to walk from home to the station.

Streetscape – Refers to the building line, or the relation of the building fronts to the street and the general appearance of a street. An “urban streetscape” likely refers to buildings set close to the street and close to one another with upper stories. A “suburban streetscape” might be typified by single-story buildings with deep setbacks from the street, more space among buildings and more areas for parking.

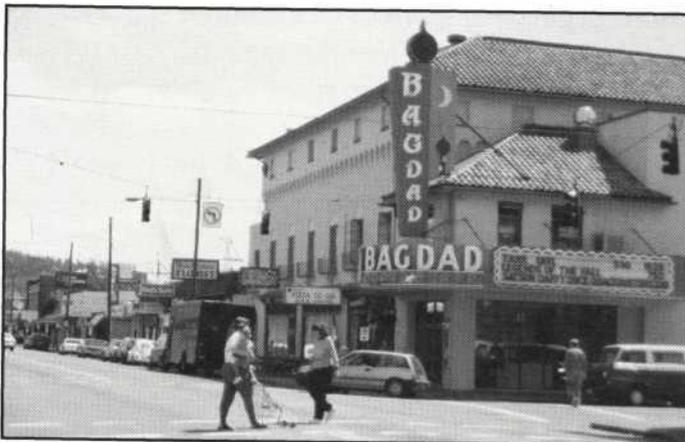
Town center – A larger district than a main street that may serve tens of thousands of people. Town centers are locations for bus transfers and making connections to light rail. Jobs and services located in town centers offer employees and patrons places to go during the day. Apartments in town centers allow residents more transportation choices by placing them near employment, shopping and services and transit.

Traffic volume – A measure of automobile traffic. All of the cars that pass a specified point on a road, traveling in either direction, are counted. Typically traffic counts are reported as cars per day, or are broken down hourly to provide information on peak traffic times.

Transit corridor – Arterial boulevards, collector streets or state highways with linear development at a slightly less intense level than a main street. The development may be continuous or organized around major intersections with sections of residential development in between. Some examples are the Tualatin Valley Highway, Barbur Boulevard, Powell Boulevard and Halsey Street. Transit corridors receive frequent, high-quality transit service.

Urban growth boundary (UGB) – A legally established boundary surrounding a metropolitan area that separates urban areas from forest, farm and rural lands. Oregon land-use laws require UGBs to be maintained around cities. In the Portland metropolitan area, there is one regional urban growth boundary, managed by Metro, that includes parts of three counties and 24 cities.

Hawthorne Boulevard in Southeast Portland.



People waiting for the bus in Milwaukie.

