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Clinton Street MAX Urban Vision

Darryl Abe
Portland State University

Allison Duncan
Portland State University

Sheri Fisher
Portland State University

Jay Higgins
Portland State University

Shawn Petch
Portland State University

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Darryl Abe, Allison Duncan, Sheri Fisher, Jay Higgins, Shawn Petch, Susan Rosenthal, Joel Stein, and Huifu Xu



Clinton Street MAX Urban Vision

Portland State Urban Design
Workshop 2011

Introduction

This document is the product of the 2011 Urban Design Workshop at Portland State University which worked to develop an urban design vision for the future Clinton Street MAX Station, part of the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail line. This project follows two previous years of PSU workshops that investigated the urban design potential of Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail stations within the Hosford-Abernethy and Brooklyn neighborhoods in southeast Portland.

While previous efforts were broad in scope, our project specifically addresses two oversized blocks immediately adjacent to the Clinton Street Station, referred to as the Powell Triangle. The blocks are bordered by 12th Ave. on the west side, 17th Ave. on the east side, Powell Blvd. on the south side, and Gideon St. on the north side and is bisected by 13th St.

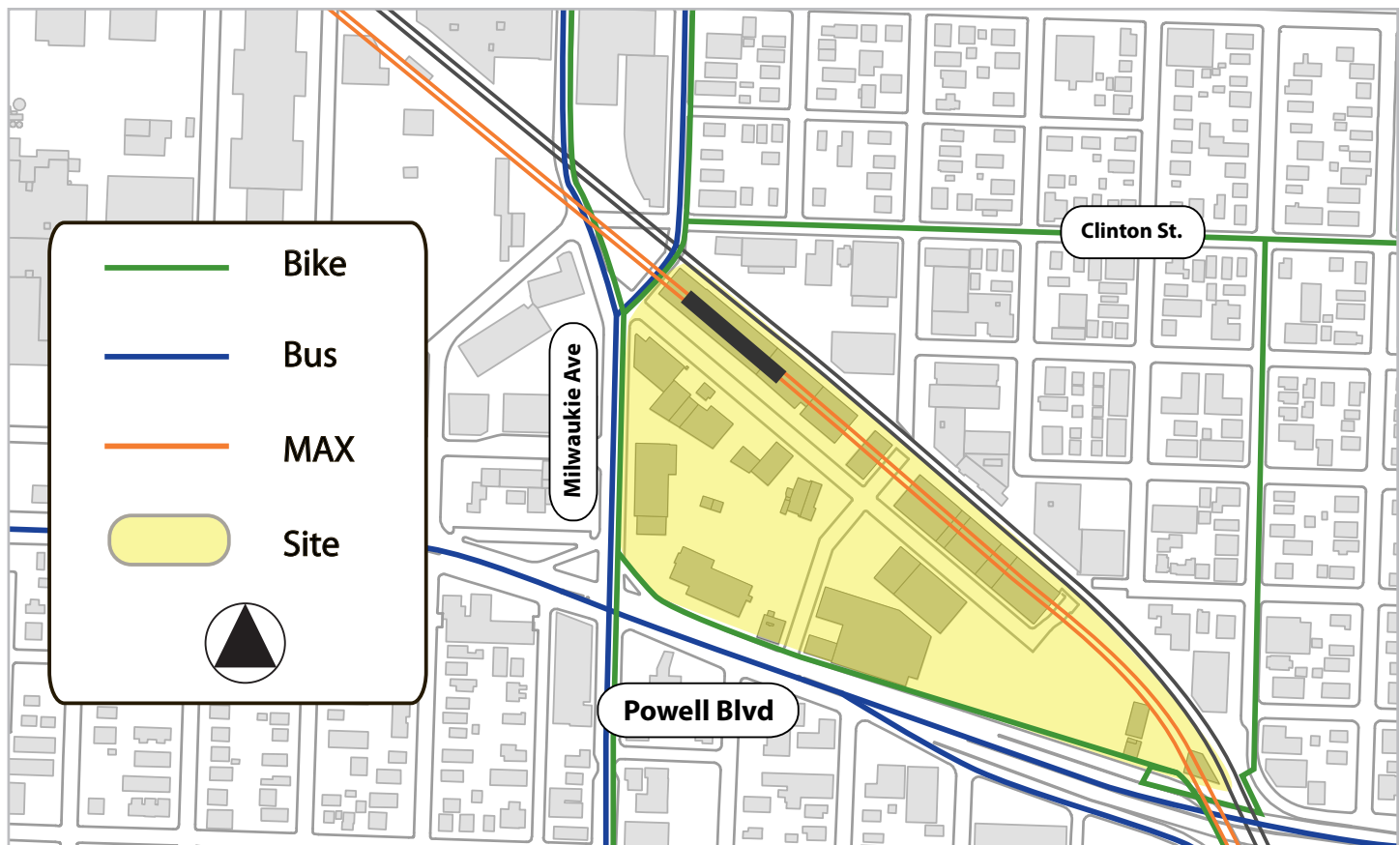
The Clinton Street Station is located on Gideon St. and will be bordered on the west side by 12th Ave., on the north side by the Union Pacific Railroad

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Tracks, on the south side by Gideon St., and on the east side by 13th St., providing some challenging access issues.

Currently the land is zoned light industrial and is held by relatively few owners. Occupying uses are a lumberyard, a maintenance garage owned by the City of Portland and light warehousing and production. The tallest feature on the site is an abandoned fire tower that was once used for training purposes.



Urban Design Principles

Urban design is about the relationships between a place's architecture, landscape and planning. Urban design principles properly applied to a site can enhance appearance, transportation, public space and private property. Our project began by adopting the following design principles:

Green /Open Space – Create a green/open space that enhances wildlife habitat and is available for community use and enjoyment. The area should be a destination for the inhabitants of the area as well as the surrounding community.

Soft Edges/Transparency – Use soft edges to define zones through the planting of shade trees, grasses, and other natural features that create seamless transitions from one area to another.

Multi-generational – Support multi-generational living and activities through affordable and diverse housing options to ensure residential diversity.

Memorable Places – Create spaces that feel good to visit and create incentives to return. Consider the senses; sight, sound smell and touch, that one uses to experience the place.

Mixed Uses – Encourage a variety of uses that will compliment and support each other as a destination. Prioritize local businesses that provide workers the opportunity to live and work nearby. New development should be a starting point for employees, residents and business owners.

History/Art – Include focal points that highlight the history of the area and well placed art that enhances the experience of place.

Connections – Accentuate the connections between the different transportation systems (bike, car, train, light rail, pedestrian) to emphasize the safe flow of all modes. Make important connections to enhance modal networks.

Community Needs – Reflect the local community and provide opportunities for interaction. Business and residential growth should accommodate the community's needs for community spaces, parks, restaurants, and other daily necessities.

Human Scale - Use design to promote human interaction. Design for the human scale in streets furnishings and intimate spaces for semi-private conversations in the public realm.

Solar access - Ensure solar access and exposure to create attractive settings for pedestrian gathering in streets and plazas. Plan for shadowing effects from groups of buildings, trees and landforms on open spaces such as streets and plazas.



A mixed use building with housing over store front retail.

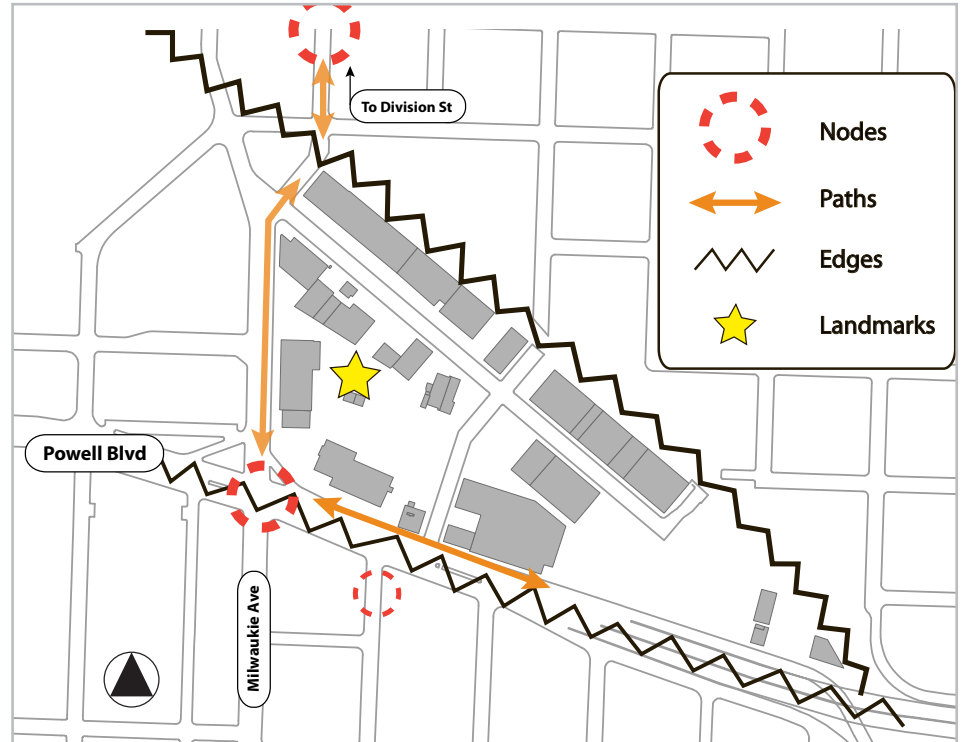


Assessment

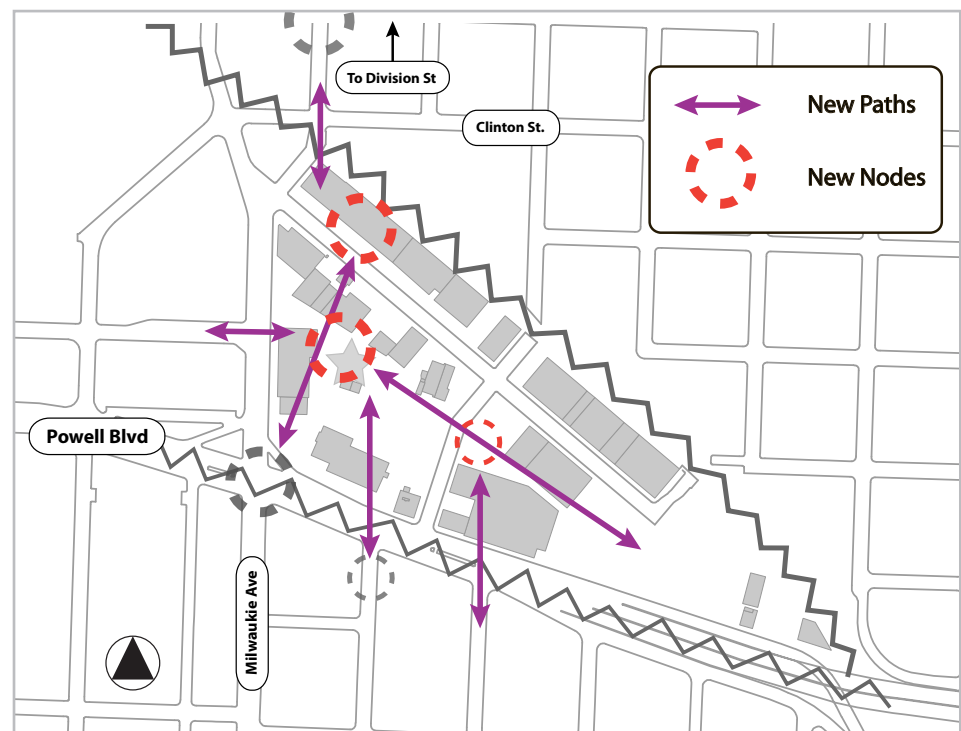
A walking tour of the site revealed strong edges both to the north and south, which we felt separated the site from its surroundings. The Union Pacific Railroad tracks prevent crossing into the site from the north, except at three points, 12th Ave., the Powell Blvd underpass and the pedestrian bridge at 16th Ave., which is scheduled for demolition. To the south Powell Blvd. also has only three points for pedestrians to cross, while vehicles are prevented from crossing Powell north or south and must make a right turn. Making access to the site easier for all users will be a key component of redevelopment.

Major activity nodes are located at the intersection of Milwaukie Ave. and Powell Blvd. and two blocks north of the site at Division St. and 12th Ave. Minor public activities are also generated by the retail businesses along Powell Blvd. Notably, there are no activity nodes located on the site, though this will change with the opening of the future Clinton Street Station. The location of the station will help generate visitors to the site and must be capitalized on for future development.

The site also lacks any open space or any green space where public interactions can take place. To foster community and increase activities some public space, preferably green space, should be created.

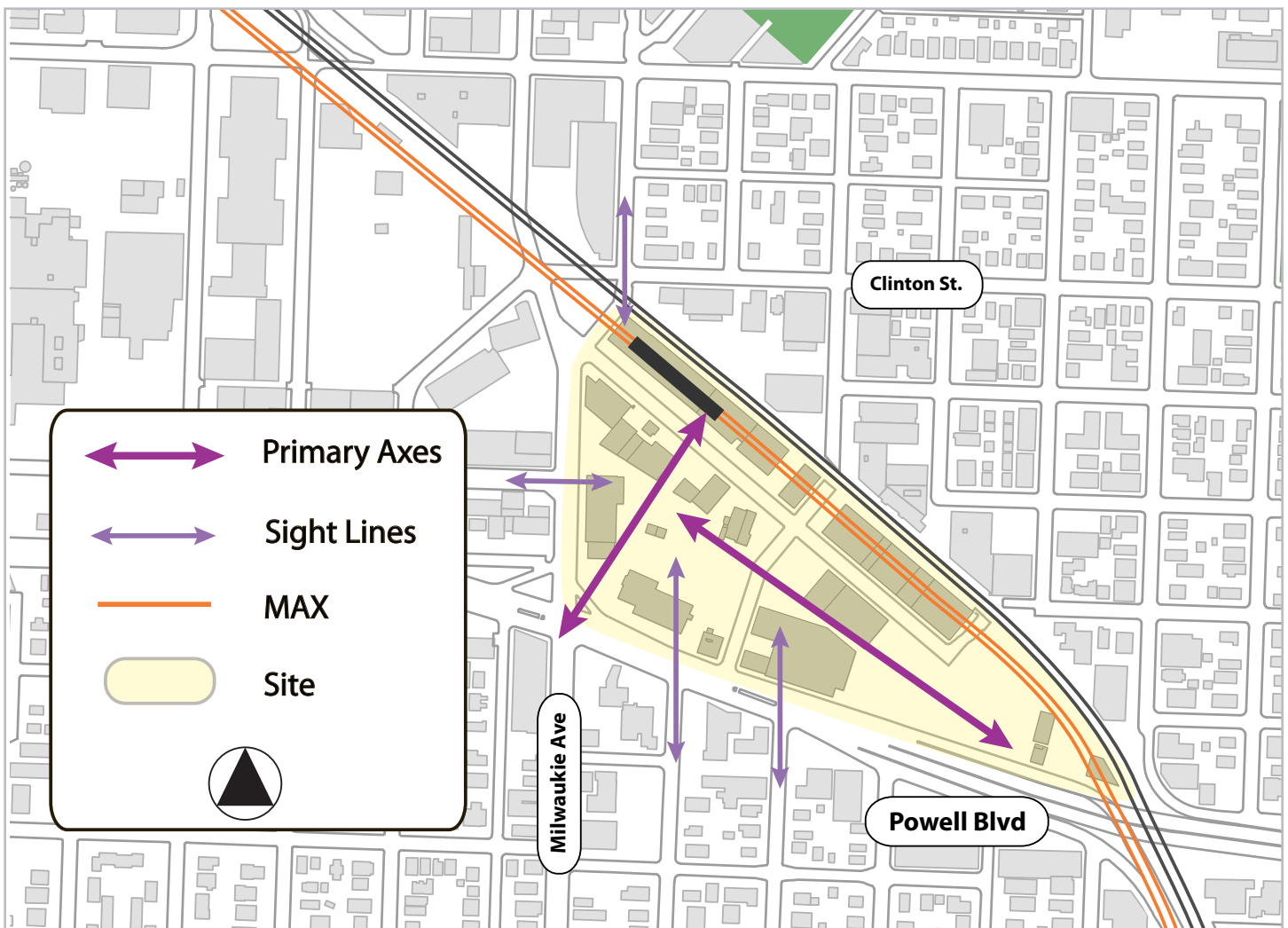


The diagram above helps to identify both the positive and challenging attributes of the site.



Our urban design concept involves moving activity nodes onto the site and encouraging connections to neighborhoods.

Visual Axis



One challenge of the Clinton Street Station is the location set back from Milwaukie Ave. out of sight, due to a shift in the street grid. Our goal was to create a visual connection between the main intersection of Milwaukie and Powell and the station area. This is the primary visual axis noted on the map above. By creating this visual access across the site we reveal the Clinton Street Station and invite people into the interior of the large blocks.

When considering the long triangular shape of the site we felt that a second axis should run along the length of the site. We believe this visual connection will provide a sense of unity between the two blocks and enhance pedestrian movement along this axis.

We also looked at how sight lines can help create visual connections across Powell Blvd. and Milwaukie Ave. We wanted these sight lines to penetrate to the interior of the site and create a sense of transparency for these large blocks. By lining up these visual connections with existing streets they can help to knit the site back into the existing grid.

When considering the existing fire tower landmark we noticed that it exists roughly at the intersection of our site's visual axes. The tower could present an opportunity for a unique landmark if rehabilitated as a lookout tower, providing a focal point for activities on the interior of the blocks. One challenge presented by the tower is its location in a hollow, approximately 20' below Powell Blvd.

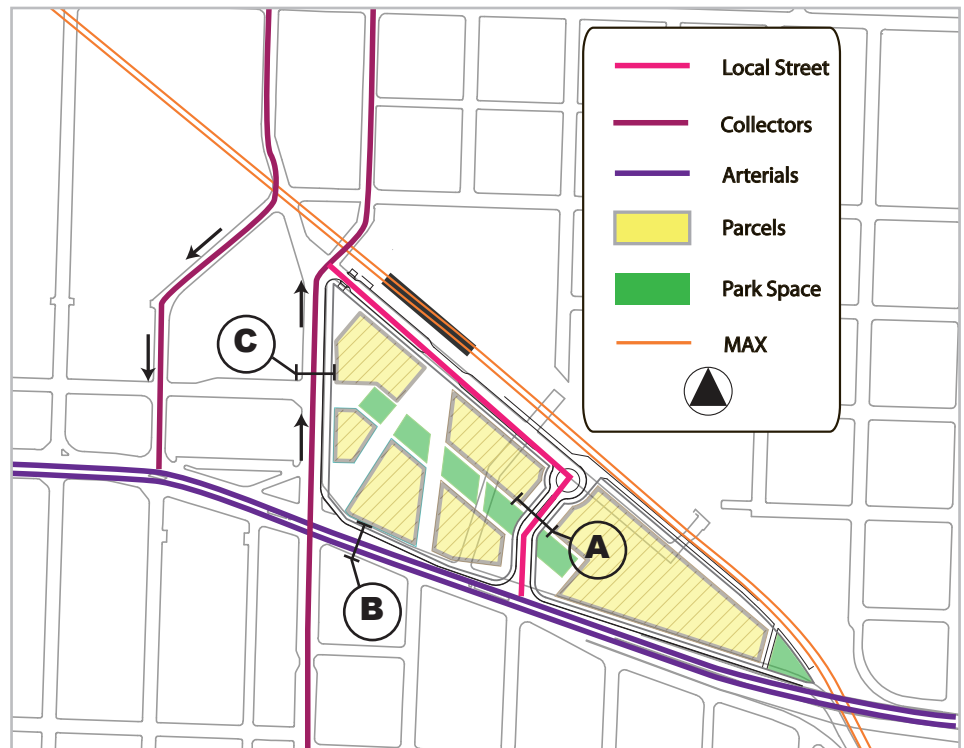
Street Network

In determining the street hierarchy we were concerned with the high volumes of traffic on Powell Blvd. We believe that a road diet, which shrinks the lanes, could provide enough right of way for a true boulevard effect. Redesigning the street with parking, bike lanes and a second row of street trees will help buffer pedestrians from traffic and make the street more enjoyable.

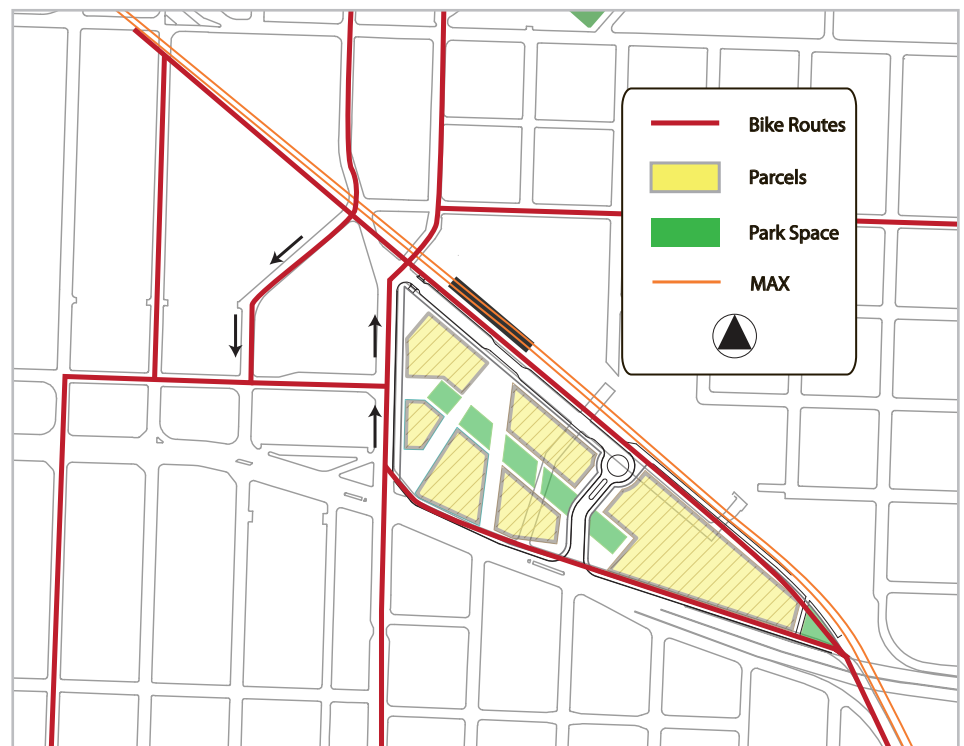
Milwaukie Ave. and 10th Ave. could become a one-way north-south couplet, easily connecting to 12th and 11th Aves. This would allow for a road diet on Milwaukie Ave. and a linear wooded walkway on the west side of the site.

We also propose realigning 13th Ave., which bisects our site, with the exterior street grid to the north and south. This aids with establishing lines of sight deeper into the center of the site and could make future pedestrian bridge connections over the tracks at 14th Ave. easier.

While money for the new pedestrian bridge at 14th Ave. has been put on hold within the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail project, we believe that a crossing here will be very important for the site's future viability. A unique option is to use future development as a private/public partnership that would incorporate public ramps or elevators, and possibly even the bridge itself, into new development projects.

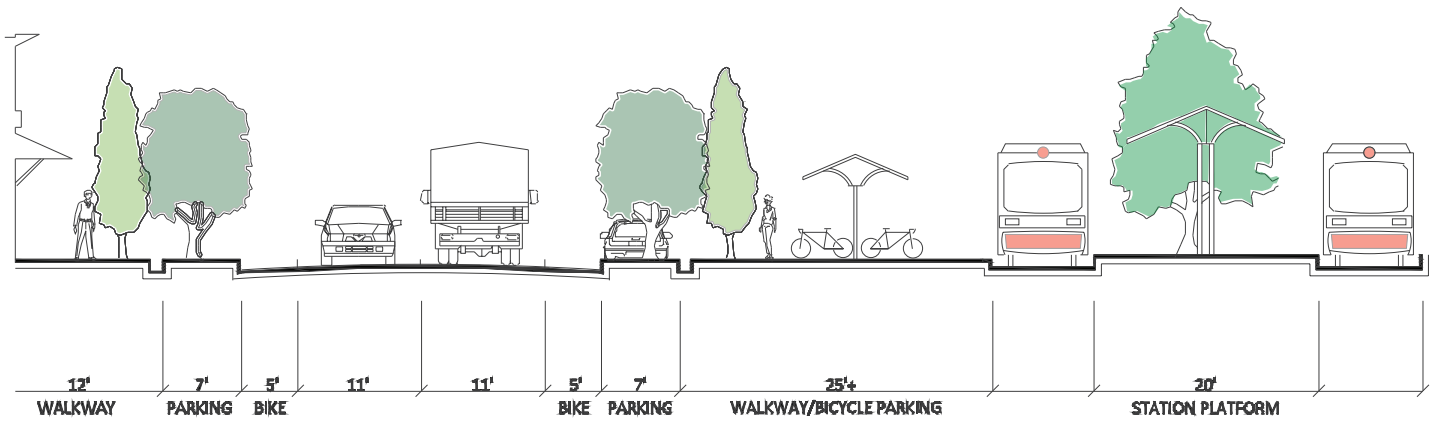


Designating a street hierarchy determines the feel of a street to its many users.

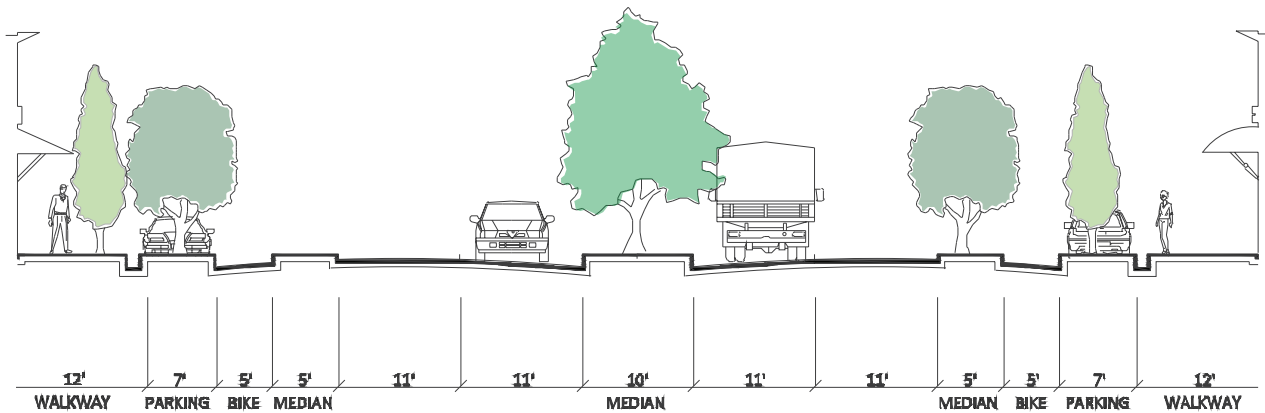


Bike access to the site is increased through connections at the north and south end of the site.

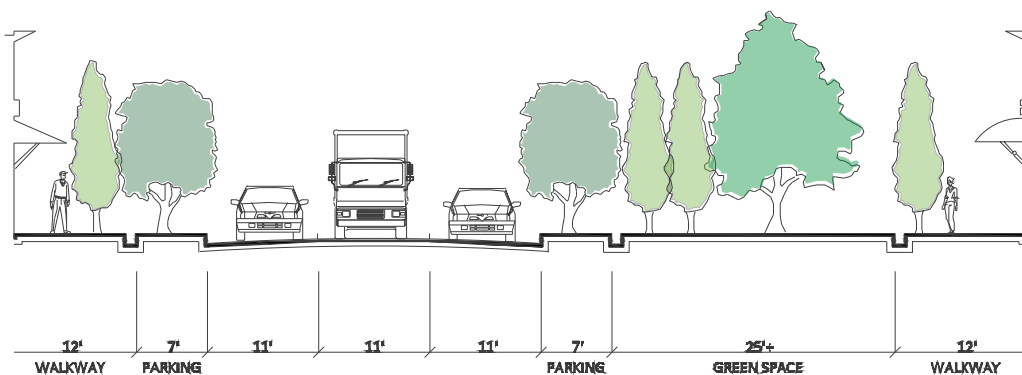
Street Network



Proposed cross section of Gideon St. (A) on facing page.



Proposed cross section of Powell Blvd with parking and protected bike lane. (B) on facing page.



Proposed cross section of Milwkie Ave. as a one-way northbound street. (C) on facing page.

Open Space / Public Realm

The site sits between several open spaces, though none is particularly close. Conversations with the Hosford-Abernethy Neighborhood Association revealed that more open space and public space would be desirable. As the site is located between two neighborhoods it provides an excellent opportunity for accessible open space.

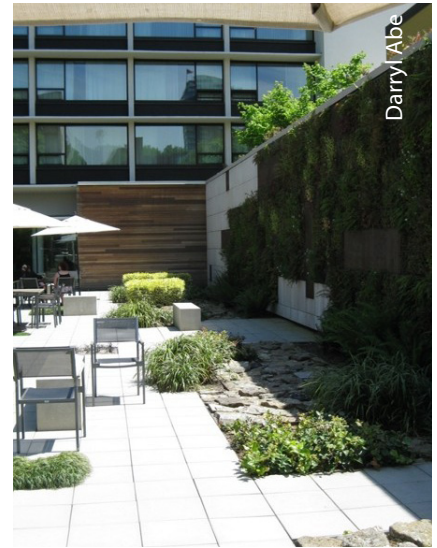
Open spaces play a vital role in cities. Their environmental importance is underlined by their potential to mitigate adverse effects of climate change, which are likely to be especially marked in urban areas. We want to emphasize the need for open space. Open space provides opportunities for people to intermingle. It has health benefits for the resi-

dents and employees of the area. It has environmental benefits and can provide habitat for wildlife. Some forms of open space, such as bioswales, can absorb runoff and mitigate the negative effects of human activity.

Creating an attractive public realm supports all possible uses on the site. A high quality public realm encourages walking, which benefits the active feel of a place and store front retail. Well scaled plazas and small nooks for lunch time allow employees space for lunch and breaks.

By encouraging walking as an attractive alternative to travel by car and that it is a great solution to the current challenges of climate change, fossil fuel depen-

dence, and pollution. In order to create the sustainable cities of tomorrow, we propose pedestrian walkways that facilitate easy connections between the buildings.



**Living wall,
Hotel Moderna.**



**Community gardens provide
multi-generational activities.**



Pedestrian Experience

The pedestrian experience happens in three different types of environments. The first occurs along the busier streets of Powell Blvd. and Milwaukie Ave. The second type of experience occurs along Gideon Ave., a calmer street. The third occurs within the site on wide pedestrian pathways.

The pedestrian experience on Powell Blvd. could be enhanced by creating a pronounced vegetative edge and a 10 foot wide sidewalk. This results in a greater sense of security for pedestrians and focus pedestrians toward the building facades and the businesses within.

Traffic and pedestrians along Gideon St. moves at a slower pace due to the addition of street parking and active use of the light rail station. This pedestrian experience can be enhanced through the use of street trees and planted pots displaying seasonal color.

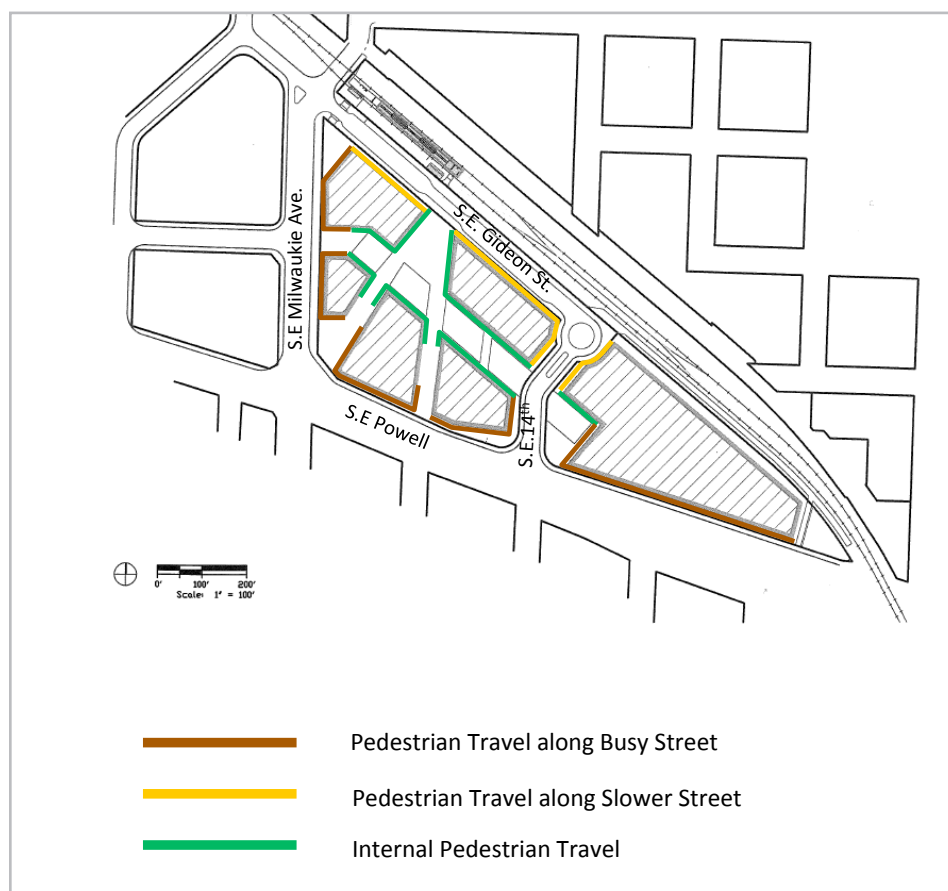
The third level of experience is the internal pedestrian realm which includes a variety of experiences resulting from the function of the spaces and isolated from the surrounding traffic noise.

The expansive plaza offers the opportunity for community interaction which could include live music or a farmers market.

The space offers the opportunity to see and be seen by café style seating at the edges, and an area of grass to kick off your shoes and enjoy laying in the sun.

The central green space corridor is more intimate in scale with overhanging tree canopies creating dappled sunlight and greater focus between the pedestrian and professional offices along the edge. From an architectural perspective, the green space is a double loaded corridor enhanced by vegetation in various forms, scales, color and fragrance. Occasional benches offer a change of pace for people to rest and enjoy the sound of birds or the supple sound of an intimate water feature.

Although there are diverse pedestrian areas, defined by use and scale, they can be unified by architectural elements of form and materials in facades of buildings, signage, lighting, park benches, water fountains, paving, trash receptacles and bike racks.



Development Parcels

Currently, the property adjacent to the Clinton Station is zoned IG1 – which is General Industrial. Most IG1 areas tend to be the city's older industrial areas having high building coverage and buildings which are usually close to the street. The challenge to future development is that IG zoning precludes mixed uses.

It is our recommendation that the developed parcels of this property should be rezoned to a mixed commercial/residential zone (CM). This would allow for development that combines commercial and housing uses on a single site. CM zoning allows increased development on busier streets without fostering a strip commercial appearance. This development type supports transit use, provides a buffer between busy streets and residential neighborhoods, and provides new housing opportunities.

Development is intended to consist primarily of businesses on the ground floor with housing on upper stories. The emphasis of the nonresidential uses could be locally oriented retail, service, and office uses. Development is intended to be pedestrian-oriented with buildings close to and oriented to the sidewalk, especially at corners.

Further we believe the site can be developed as a job TOD (Transit Oriented Development), following on last years report. Research shows that job TODs can serve the needs of working families by providing affordable housing and/or better access to jobs.

TOD projects improve transit options in two senses. Residents have easy access to trains, street-cars and buses for commuting to work, while the commercial components create jobs that are easily reached by public transportation.



Proposed development parcels with realigned 13th Ave.

Frontages

Frontage refers to the approach a commercial, mixed-use or multifamily development takes towards the street. The parameters of frontage include the placement of the building on the site, the location of primary entrances, landscaping provided along the front of the property, and the location of parking. Frontage is a fundamental urban design attribute, as it governs the relationship between private investment on private land, and the public's investment in the public realm.

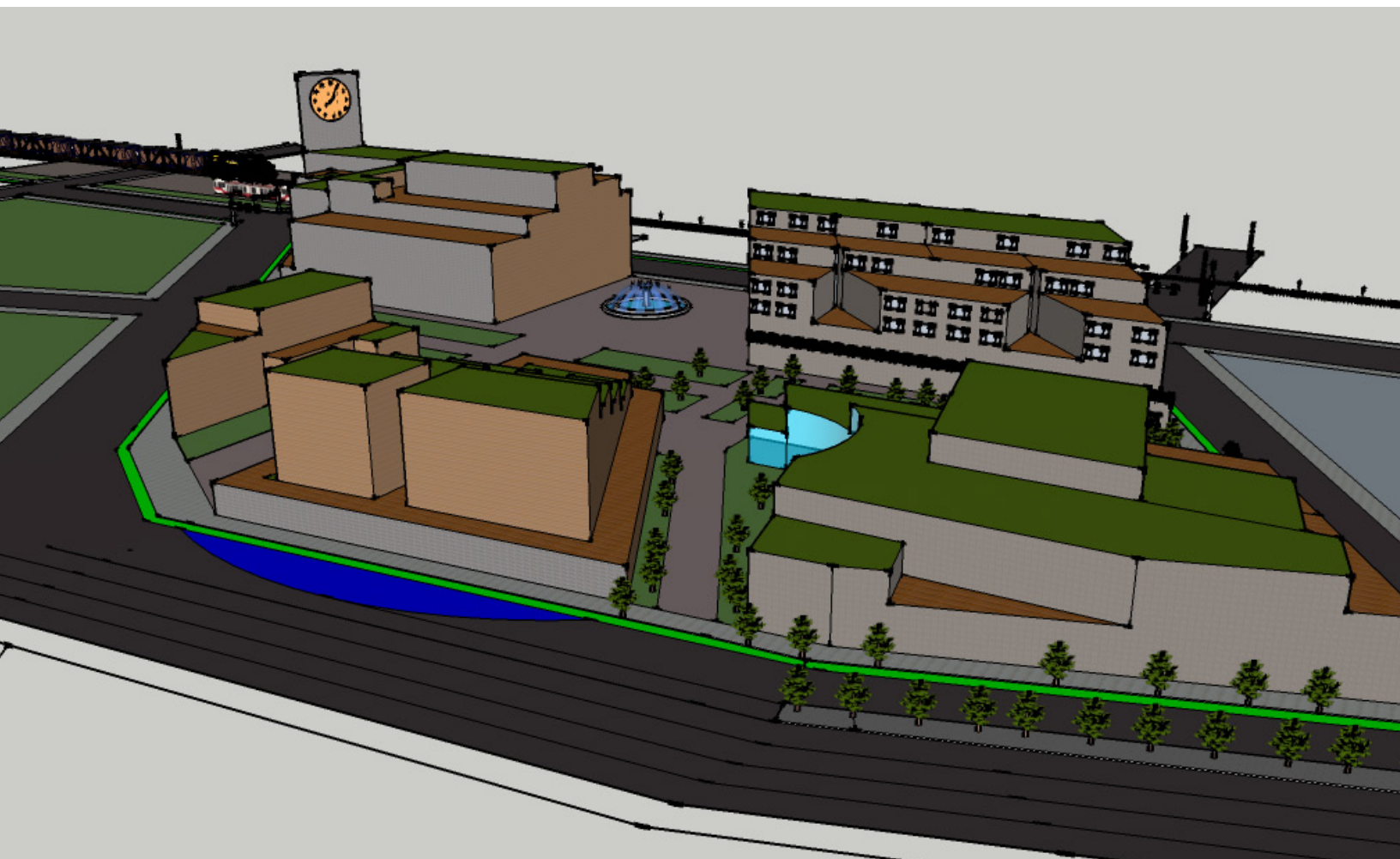
Urban frontage should create street walls and a sense of enclosure for an enjoyable pedestrian environment. In these contexts, vehicular access and front door parking is accommodated on-street. Off-street parking should be located at the sides or rear of buildings, but never between the building and the street.

A mixture of different frontage should be used in growing suburban areas, particularly where on-street parking is not an option for front-door access. In such areas urban frontage, if used at all, would be confined to side or interior streets where on-street parking is an option. Elsewhere, off-street front door parking would be available but limited in depth so that pedestrian connections remain convenient and direct. Pedestrian access and circulation should be accommodated.

The buildings along Powell Blvd. should meet the sidewalk. Stoops should be constructed for people to congregate. The frontages should be colorful and interesting. The frontage of the buildings on the interior should also include stoops and porches for people to congregate. The buildings should reflect the history and character of the neighborhood.



Frontage designations direct where first floor uses occur on the site.



Design Team:

Darryl Abe
Allison Duncan
Sheri Fisher
Jay Higgins
Shawn Petch
Susan Rosenthal
Joel Stein
Huifu Xu

Instructors:

Ed Starkie
Don Stastny

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