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The Landscape: Beaverton

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The Landscape

Beaverton

by J.R. Estes

With a current population of 79,010 residents, Beaverton has outgrown its identity as a railroad stop and small farming community. Located just West of downtown Portland, the Beaverton area saw its population grow from 5,937 residents in 1960 to 76,129 in 2000, a 1,182 percent increase! Such growth came with its own set of growing pains, especially for Beaverton's historic downtown. Rather than write off its downtown though, Beaverton is working not only to revitalize it, but to transform it into an urban center.

Mayor Rob Drake says the city is "redefining its downtown," and using the Beaverton Comprehensive Plan (BCP) to guide the process. The BCP actively encourages development contributing to the area's livability through more balanced land use planning. The goal of this planning is to improve property values, improve traffic flow and safety, and enrich the long-range stability of the city. In addition, the plan mandates consideration of Beaverton's "natural environment, amenities, views, and the appearance of its buildings, and open spaces." BCP projects include a new library, a farmers' market in a refurbished city park, wider sidewalks, trees and lighting along arterials, bike lanes, and a street level fountain where hundreds come to cool off on hot days.

While the community of Beaverton is enjoying its new amenities, with more residents coming downtown to shop, dine, and spend time, the city has not attracted the type of development it expected. It was thought that the combination of zoning changes and population increase would lead to high-density, mixed-use development. "The Round," Beaverton's first high-density, mixed-use project, survived its early challenges and setbacks, but other similar forms of development haven't occurred. The city's next challenge is to identify barriers to development and methods to remove them.

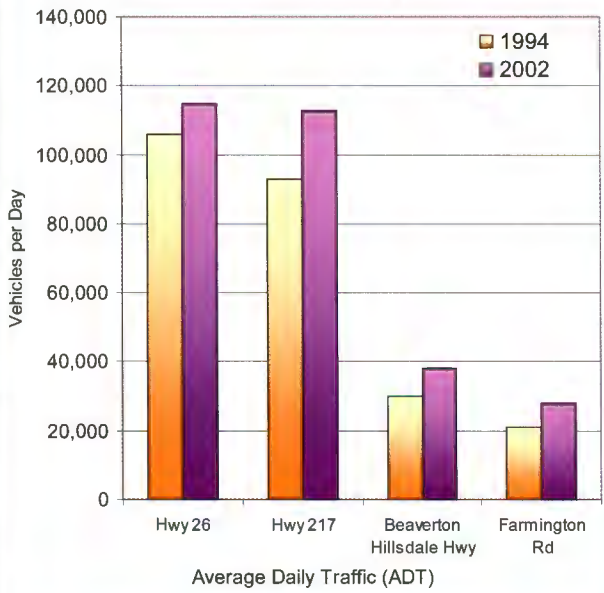
Beaverton is not alone in the region with its unexpected pattern of development. Several areas sur-

rounding Portland, such as Hillsboro and Milwaukie, find themselves in similar situations, and this has led Metro to begin a Regional Centers Pilot Study. Beaverton was selected over five other regional applicants, in part for its ongoing commitment to improving its city core. According to Metro program supervisor Sherry Oeser, the study's purpose is to compose, over the course of a year, a development strategy more comprehensive than the BCP. As part of the process a consultant will work with Metro and Beaverton to identify barriers to high-density, mixed-use development. Once barriers are identified and examined, strategies for overcoming them and creating development opportunities will be included in an action plan.

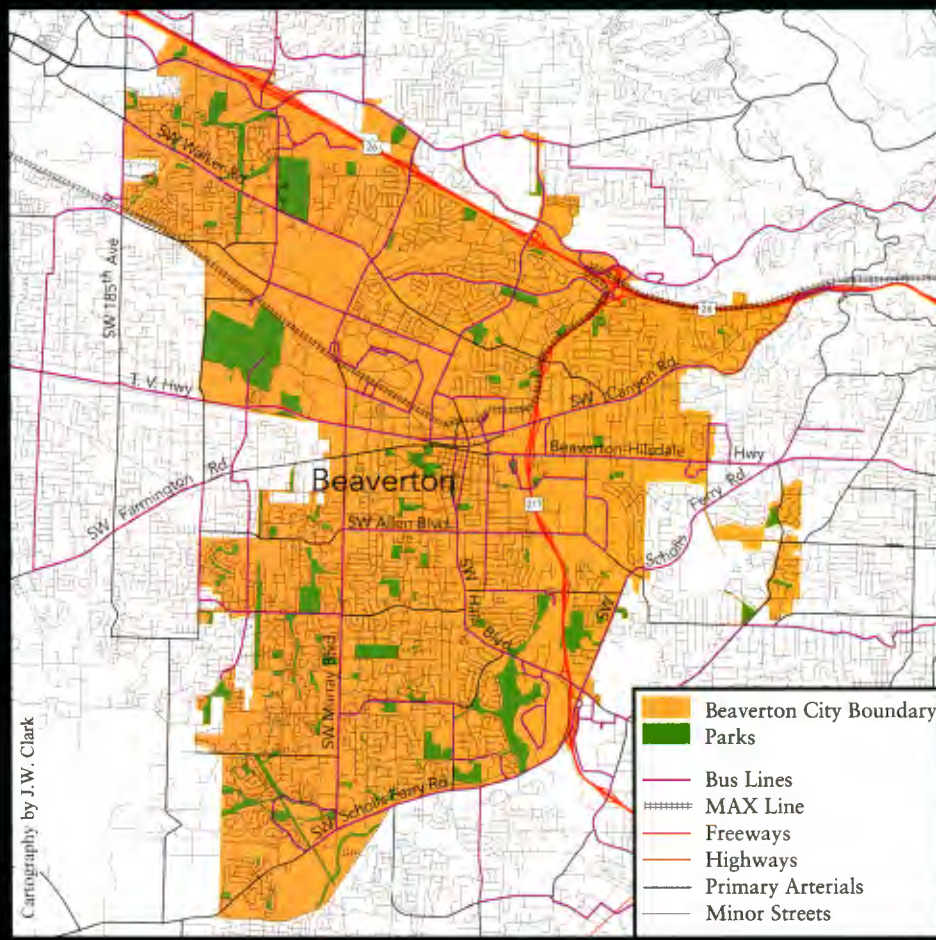
Metro selected Beaverton in November, 2003 and is in the process of choosing a consultant to assist with the pilot study. But one barrier to development is already suspected: the highways and traffic arterials that border and dissect the city. Bounded by Highway 26 to the North and 217 to the South, and bisected by Highways 8, 10, and 217, there is no convenient East/West or North/South access to the downtown core centered around Broadway Street. Consequently, downtown Beaverton has found itself isolated from much of the area's growth. The city has already planned 18 capital improvement projects this fiscal year to improve traffic flow and safety, with many of the projects clustered around Broadway Street. Improving traffic flow and safety includes more than connecting cars with Beaverton's downtown, it also includes providing pedestrians, bicyclists, and mass transit users with safe access as well.

Partnered with the city's commitment and determination, Beaverton's Comprehensive Plan and Metro's Regional Centers Pilot Study, promise to give Beaverton the coordinated growth and vibrant downtown it desires-ensuring Beaverton's future as a regional urban center.

Traffic Volume



Source: ODOT



Cartography by J.W. Clark



Horse and buggy in front of Doc Allen's on Broadway. Courtesy of the City of Beaverton.

Broadway in downtown Beaverton, 2003. Photograph by Nathan Meszaros