

Willamette River Symposium #1 Summary

The first of two Willamette River Symposiums was held on February 4, 2011. The goals of the symposium were to

1. Review existing conditions, policy and the endorsed 2006 River Concept;
2. Identify ways to achieve development, access and vibrancy, and at the same time protect and restore natural resources and watershed health; and
3. Build on the 2006 River Concept policy guidance to address ways to meet Goal 2 above.

This summary includes general comments and questions that were discussed during the background section of the meeting, as well as specific comments that were discussed during the River Concept section.

I. Welcome, Introductions, and Background

Identify one thing that the table can generally agree on and one thing the table disagrees about.

- Table 1 (Pete Mayer, Bob Sallinger, Mike McCabe, Wayne Kingsley, Patricia Gardner)
Agree: We agree on all the goals at the 10,000 foot level.
Disagree: Differences in opinion will come up at the detailed use / taxlot level.
- Table 2 (Nancy Stueber, Kate Ross, Lloyd Lindley, Clark Balcom, Randy Henry)
Agree: Access and connectivity are important.
Disagree: On the complete range of issues and how we should address them. The focus on central and south reaches is a problem when there are problems are upstream. Swimability is a global issue, not a specific reach issue.
- Table 3 (Susan Anderson, Linda Nettekoven, Lisa Bluelake, Chet Orloff, Julie Weiss)
Agree: Jobs and access are both critical.
Disagree: Disagreement might come up in regards to what to do with land if the freeway is removed.
- Table 4 (Mike Houck, Kim Kranz, Andy Jansky, Tom Shimota, Joesph Readdy)
Agree: They agreed that they disagreed with the mapped boundary of the Central Reach.
Disagree (with Central Reach boundary): Can't talk about the South Waterfront area without talking about Ross Island.

General Questions and Comments:

- How is this effort different from other various river planning efforts? In this process we are trying to get down to detail level, building on the previous planning work.
- Keep in mind Portland Plan concepts during concept discussions: Economic Prosperity, Health, Education and Equity.
- It would be great to have a series of cross sections of the existing regulations/ building envelopes along the river.
- We shouldn't keep planning at the 100,000 ft. level. We've already been discussing at this level. How do you make this conversation useful, so that implementation is relevant to the current conditions, not dragged out? How do we get to implementation sooner?
- Is the intent of this plan to get down to the level of different types of jobs?
- How does this plan relate to the comprehensive plan or the Portland plan processes?

II. Review 2006 River Concept Guidance

The draft policy language in the River Concept was endorsed by City Council in 2006 as a guide for the update of the Willamette Greenway Plan. **First**, the group discussed what has changed since the River Concept language was endorsed in 2006.

- Build out of North Pearl and South Waterfront
- Another bridge over the Willamette
- One more Steelhead listing (actually 2006)
- Major global changes such as collapse of economy
- Climate change...potential for river rise over the years
- Marine Highway Program...regionally getting materials off of trucks and on to barges (applies locally to the water route that parallels I-84 along the Columbia River)
- Ross Island coming into partial public ownership
- OHSU waterfront campus plan
- OMSI district concept
- Completion of work in Tom McCall Park @ Ankeny
- Population increase, more diverse at the younger ages (40% of school kids are of color and more cultures)
- Diverse cultures and languages
- Revitalized corridors and increased density
- Reduction of median incomes
- Light rail / street car
- Peak oil – increase in cost of fossil fuel
- Role of streetcar in Eastside
- Improved water quality
- Invention of electric auto
- Shift in the City's perspective on green infrastructure and value to adjacent properties in central district (vs. another big pipe solution)

Next, the draft policy language from the River Concept was discussed section by section, responding to two questions:

- Are we in agreement with the overall direction articulated in 2006?
- What additions, deletions, or changes would you suggest to the draft policy language? How could it be refined to address ways to achieve development, access and vibrancy, and at the same time protect and restore natural resources and watershed health?

Note: For the symposium discussion, staff proposed initial amendments to the text; statements that are more relevant for the quadrant plans appear in light grey type and statements added from the area-specific narrative in the River Concept are appear in underlined type.

The Central Reach: The Region's Gathering Place

The Central Reach will continue to be a highly urban, regional center with a waterfront that is the city's main civic space and a regional attraction. Access to the river and public use of the waterfront will improve through new development and transportation improvements, eventually including changes to Interstate 5.

- “The Central Reach will continue to be a highly urban...” The word “continue” is an overstatement, as the Central Reach has not achieved that status yet. “Evolving” is a better word.
- The words “urban” and “regional center”...are these words good things? The statement doesn't embrace diversity/vibrancy between economic opportunities / attractions and dense housing. A

diversified urban environment is what we want to achieve and is what makes the Central City different and special. The statement should say that the central reach will continue to evolve and make sure that diversified urban environment includes jobs, dense housing, civic access to water and equity.

- Big evolution is that rather than just viewing the Central City as a place to visit, many people now live there.
- The definition of “highly urban regional center” has and will change over time. It will mean something different today than in 2006 and again in 5 years.
- Watershed health is missing from the statement.

Clean and Healthy River

1. Opportunities to protect, conserve and restore fish and wildlife habitat will be explored and implemented through public and private actions. Mitigation required of public and private parties will improve habitat function.

- The word “explored” is a weasel word. Be more specific. Use wording such as “identify and implement improvements”
- If this means taking out the built environment, then there is disagreement.
- Is there mitigation required?
- Focus on identification of opportunities
- Is the expectation that required mitigation alone will improve habitat functions?
- When this was written, there was no City-required mitigation. Mitigation goals may not be the same as the City’s goals.
- A variety of strategies should be listed, including public/private actions, not just mitigation. The statement is too narrow.
- Is the goal to restore/mitigate habitat to existing conditions vs. improving beyond the existing conditions? This needs to be spelled out. Define connections to the goals we are trying to achieve.
- What is the standard or level of enhancement we are trying to get to? Specified metrics are needed to define improvement. The problem is there aren’t universally agreed upon metrics. How much better than excellent can we get?
- There is a fundamental problem with phrasing. It feels like a stop loss statement. We should start from an investment approach and show how it can make things better rather than stop the loss. Investment brings improvement and economic benefits.
- Punitive vs. aspirational statement

2. Stormwater quality and quantity will be managed at the source where practicable, using approaches that suit the site conditions and the type of development. In the Central City this is often achieved through landscaping, stormwater swales, pervious pavement, and roof gardens.

- This statement itemizes techniques when we should be using a systematic and inclusive-of-stormwater approach.

3. Innovative bank treatments and plantings that allow for flood protection and fish and wildlife habitat will be achieved through public and private investment.

- What are innovative bank treatments?

4. **Riverfront and watershed actions achieved through public and private investments will improve water quality and help make the river swimmable.**
 - It is hard to deal with issues such as E. coli and swimability within a reach. We can't address all the issues on our own. Need to partner with the whole Willamette River.
 - Governor Kitzhaber said urbanites aren't willing to step up the plate but are telling rural dwellers what to do. We need to demonstrate that we as a city are willing to make efforts, and we expect others to do that too. This gets to the education piece in terms of educating our partners.
5. **Sustainable development practices will provide stormwater management and energy efficient design.**
 - This item needs to be vetted. Also include bird and wildlife friendly design, eco roofs, living walls. Flesh out #5 to go beyond stormwater. Include wildlife, integration of habitat, reduce urban heat island effect (eco-roofs).
 - Be more descriptive with terms such as sustainable
 - Is it assumed that through sustainable practices, fish and wildlife will be improved, or does it mean something else?
6. **Other comments related to Clean and Healthy River.**
 - A look at cross sections will show that much of the riverfront is already built out. The opportunity to keep existing dock at Centennial Mills would be contrary to improving habitat.
 - There is a gap about public education. Key to all of this is helping people understand basic science about the health of river and developing a sense of ownership. Education component needs to be included throughout.

Prosperous Working Harbor

1. **Brownfields and unoccupied sites will be recycled into productive use through public and private investments and partnerships.**
 - The term "productive use" should be replaced with language that talks about jobs and the economy.
 - Is there a systematic approach to brownfield redevelopment along the river in place now? The City should explore that more. The brownfield statement is too bland. We need to move beyond just hope, into more activity. Maybe we are talking about incentivizing brownfield cleanup, moving toward implementation rather than exploring ideas. The west side has urban renewal funding that could be used for remediation.
2. **Freeway congestion and at-grade rail crossings that hinder truck and rail movement will be addressed.**
In particular, the I-5 / I-84 interchange will be improved to operate efficiently.
3. **The Central Eastside will continue to evolve, through private development, into a center for employment that includes a successful and innovative mix of new urban industries that complement the other industrial and employment districts in the Central City.**
4. **Other comments related to Working Harbor**
 - There is no mention of marine use or infrastructure in this category. Marine use would be a ferry, not rowboats.
 - Why isn't Lower Albina included in the Central Reach? It is important to think about connectivity with North Reach. Should we move the Central Reach boundary to include Lower Albina?
 - Another boundary question is whether we include Ross Island in the Central Reach. South Waterfront looks right across at Ross Island. In South Waterfront planning it was argued to include Ross Island.

- The Louis Dreyfus grain terminal probably won't be operating in 20 years, so we need to think about what will be there. Do we want to see something in its place? We don't want to send a message that we want them to discontinue operations.
- What kind of marine industry do we want to see? The Seine River in Paris has a lot of active uses on the river, such as boats and barges that could serve as a good example.
- Jobs and the economy need to be referenced more than just in relation to the Central Eastside.
- Transit is important to mention, especially in these centers, because it can be useful to move employees in and out of the area by trains, buses and potentially ferries.
- If we are successful in creating a clean and healthy river we should expect to see more sport fishing, boating and other components of a recreational economy. This gets back to valuing the economic benefits of having a healthy functional river. A healthy river leads to recreational economy.
- Should there be more information about in-water facilities? Are we trying to create new docks or beaches? Do we want a facility to dock larger vessels?

Portland's Front Yard

1. **The reconfiguration of the I-5 / I-405 freeway loop to improve transportation functions and access for eastside businesses may provide the opportunity to create a signature civic space that better connects the east and west side waterfronts in the Central City. In the interim, short-term improvements will strengthen connections to the river and improve access and circulation in the adjacent industrial district.**
2. **The Central Eastside waterfront will grow as a hub for water recreation activities as new land-water connections are established.**
3. **The gaps in the existing greenway trail system on both sides of the river will be filled, making this continuous loop one of the Central Reach's most distinctive features.**
4. **The area along the river in the South Waterfront will have a unique combination of public parks and plazas, restored riverbanks for fish and wildlife, water recreation opportunities, and a riverfront trail. Connections between South Waterfront and neighborhoods to the west will be improved through a new pedestrian bridge over I-5 and other public investments.**
5. *The Centennial Mill riverfront will add to the waterfront park network. This may include redevelopment of the Centennial Mill buildings for public and/or private use.*
 - *The Centennial mill text is grayed out, but the North Pearl and South Waterfront should be mentioned here in terms of creating places. Perhaps something like, "The area along the river in North Pearl will have a unique combination of urban areas, broader recreation opportunities and a riverfront trail for the entire region."*
6. *New pedestrian bridges over the rail line will connect the Pearl and Northwest Districts to the river.*
7. *Pedestrian and bicycle routes through the Central Eastside, along with future Sullivan's Gulch Trail, will provide links among neighborhoods, the Eastbank Esplanade, Tom McCall Waterfront Park, and other parts of the Greenway Trail.*
8. **Implementation of the Waterfront Park Master Plan will improve the park and result in better access to the waterfront from downtown.**

9. Other comments related to Portland's Front Yard

Waterfront Character

- The Central Reach is a suburban front yard that serves an ornamental function instead of having a sense of place.
- It needs to be more comfortable and inviting for people to get to the river, like the festival in Venice where the boats are covering that water almost like a real bridge.
- The front yard section is not just about outdoor spaces, but also about creating places. Urban is not just grass, it can also be a plaza.
- Thinking more broadly, this isn't just one place; in terms of urban design it is a series of small spaces or places both upstream and downstream, like beads of a necklace. Front yard is not the right concept/term. What about "commons".
- We need to define urban. Historically when someone says urban that means the built environment. Now, I hope we are talking about integrating nature and built environment, not precluding natural areas. Maybe we need a different term than urban.
- Portland started out as natural. Over the last 150 years it became urbanized. Tanner Springs is an example of nature integrated into an urban experience. An osprey dashed into the springs and grabbed a koi at one point; even if it isn't a real wetland, it evokes the same experience and reaction.
- Urban wildlife needs to be functional, not just experiential. There is a tendency to treat natural areas as Disney-esque. Do we want trails everywhere? Think of Ross Island; it would not be appropriate to have trails running throughout.
- Is a commercial use allowed with civic space in the greenway? Centennial Mills is an example of how the current framework is hard to work within. Zone has mixed uses where people can go enjoy the spaces year round.

Specific v General Statements

- Portland Parks and Recreation wants to see an objective that talks about recreation and open space in the entire central city instead of focusing on the specific areas along the river in each objective.
- The comment about being more global (central-city wide) is good. OMSI isn't mentioned in this section, but the access to water is good and natural areas and a civic plaza or other type of place that is envisioned for OMSI is not just under the umbrella of Central Eastside, but the entire central city. This area is now an opportunity that didn't exist and should be strategically addressed.

Water Access and Recreation

- There needs to be improved access to the river. Continue the front yard down to the water, such as swimming areas and beaches that bring people down to connect with the water resource. Design Central City gets to that with physical access.
- Access is not just physical access, but also emotional, visual and conceptual.
- We are missing the perspective from the water here. We are focusing mainly on the perspective from the riverbanks. There are animals that spend their entire lives in the river water. Include a perspective that focuses on activities that occur in the river.
- Tribal members want to fish in the river for subsistence purposes, which requires actually getting into the water. There aren't enough access points for this activity.
- The river should be fishable and drinkable in addition to swimmable. There is a legal nexus with the Clean Water Act when you say "fishable".

Vibrant Waterfront Districts and Neighborhoods

1. **New commercial and residential uses will cluster around commercial corridors and bridgeheads in the Central Eastside.**
2. **South Waterfront will become one of Portland's most distinctive Central City neighborhoods with high density mixed-use towers, a riverfront trail in a wider greenway setback, green streets, and a possible river ferry stop.**
 - The second policy statement should say South Waterfront, River District, OMSI and the Rose Quarter. It's not just South Waterfront.
3. **The two sides of the river will be connected by a rich multi-modal transportation network, including auto, bus, streetcar, light rail, and pedestrian and bicycle links. A river ferry or taxi system would improve access between waterfront districts and neighborhoods.**
4. **A cruise ship terminal in the Central City would enliven the downtown area and create new revenue for the city.**
 - A cruise ship terminal seems too specific for this section.
5. **The Rose Garden and Convention Center will serve as regional attractions.**
 - By calling out the Rose Quarter and Convention Center as regional attractions, is it at the exclusion of other areas?
6. **The reconfiguration of the I-5 / I-405 freeway loop to improve transportation functions and access for eastside businesses may create an opportunity to reclaim the east side waterfront for civic space and stimulate a new waterfront district in the Central City.**
7. **Public and private investments in housing development around Ankeny Plaza and strong connections to Waterfront Park will infuse Old Town with new life and character.**
8. **The Rose Quarter waterfront will be redeveloped in a way that better connects adjacent neighborhoods to the river.**
9. **Investing urban renewal funds into the rehabilitation of historic unreinforced masonry buildings in the district will allow for intensification of production and distribution activities in the industrial sanctuary, bringing more employees to the Central Eastside.**
10. **Other comments related to Portland's Front Yard**
 - Urban Design**
 - It is important to think about ways to design a dense environment that is not overwhelming (e.g. setbacks, view corridors, height).
 - Traditional step-down zoning does not result in vibrancy. Maybe we should consider a tall building at the river's edge.
 - Pushing back on that comment, the Pearl District has a much different setback than in South Waterfront; we need to move away from setbacks. Using setbacks and scale is not necessarily the best way to get good design.
 - You never get the full envelope.
 - I agree with the concept that it is not a one size fits all thing. You are going to have setbacks, beach and a trail, and then you lose the connectivity. So perhaps a jagged edge is better.

- This section focuses on building types, and other things, but it doesn't focus on people. There needs to be mention of people and cultural diversity.
- Comparing this point to Oregon's beach laws, I would be reluctant to see us build right on the shore so people have to move away from the river when using the trail. I wouldn't want to see that in the Central Reach. Maybe at the bridgeheads.
- A working waterfront is vibrant, with access for people or view corridors to the working waterfront. Shouldn't have to go four blocks out of the way to get around commercial enterprises.

Other

- The inner eastside neighborhoods want a view or access to the river, so there can't be tall buildings on the riverfront.
- Can we redefine the definition of riverfronts neighborhoods? Are Kerns, Buckman, Brooklyn, Corbett/Lair Hill waterfront neighborhoods? Can we connect them so we get greater stewardship?
- Art and other features built into the landscape could describe the history of area.

Partnerships, Leadership, and Education

- 1. Relationships that foster positive change will be developed among property owners, businesses and business associations, neighborhood associations, environmental groups, recreation groups, cultural organizations, and agencies.**
- 2. The City will strive to make its regulations flexible, streamlined, and cost-effective and work with other agencies to simplify the overall river related regulatory process.**
 - Not sure that the second policy statement is what we want. We always say that's what we want, but then we fight about what it means. Do we want simplicity or flexibility? We also want regulations that are enforceable, effective, and not necessarily consistent with state and feds because we have different goals. I'm not convinced that what is here is the ultimate end goal.
 - I disagree. I want to figure out a way to achieve some of these goals, rather than just talk about it. The City should encourage these goals – be more positive.
 - Bob agreed to draft some alternative language for this point because it keeps coming up. This has implications throughout the Central City as we use the idea of "simplify".
- 3. The City will seek incentives, community partnerships, and facilitated development processes to encourage property owners and others to achieve the River Renaissance Vision.**
- 4. Other comments related to Partnerships, Leadership, and Education**
 - Need to add stewardship to this section.
 - The Central Reach should be a place to inform and educate Portlanders and visitors about a range of topics from hydrology to natural/human history.
 - There must be a connection that deals with context and hierarchy of other watershed plans and regulations. Connect to upstream and downstream efforts.
 - Education should include using the river as a living laboratory, not just kiosk style education, such as getting people out on the river with Riverkeeper.

III. Public Comment

- Maritime Heritage Coalition representative. We are just getting going. Would like to talk about connections, a river museum, and want to get into ecology.
- Not so much focus on the north reach development. Consider needs of other reaches and not just on industry.
- This process and physical layout is difficult for observers. It is difficult to hear. Look at different room layout for next time.
- It is essential to include options for nature play, addressing issues in our community such as nature deficit disorder.
- There is minimal connection in the policy language to the areas outside the immediate adjoining areas like farther east and west. Make sure to include the west/east sides of the City in the discussions, especially in terms of equity.
- We should consider other tools to use for land acquisition and other implementation actions, and how to incentivize better access and habitat. Regarding larger development along the waterfront, we can think about nodes of bigger development such as at the bridgeheads. Get money in others ways.
- Key thing we forget is that the river has been used for years for paddle boats and water recreation. Don't forget to look at diversity of uses/users and allowing incidental or casual interaction with the river.

IV. Final Thoughts and Next Steps

- The public will forward these initiatives; money, leadership, and compelling proposals need to be pulled together in a strategy.
- Coordination piece with property owners is very important too.
- We should look at districts in the water, such as no wake areas and areas of more active/loud uses.
- There is nothing in here about hierarchy of landscape. Everything we are talking about is in conflict, so there has to be some way to deal with the hierarchy and planning context.
- The cultural aspects of the river have not been addressed.
- Heavy infrastructure in the Central Reach is extremely important. Really getting down and dealing with strategies to address these necessary obstacles is missing.
- Bring in implementation steps in the next discussion.
- Provide cross-section drawings along the river, including the freeway.
- A TriMet / transportation overlay map would be good for next time.
- Provide a chart that shows the various planning efforts and their relationships/hierarchy (Portland Plan, Comp plan, etc.) next time.
- Infrastructure existing conditions would be useful for next time.
- People should read the materials before the next symposium.