



**Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #8**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**November 18, 2013; 5:30 – 8:30 pm**  
**1900 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Room 2500A**

**Members**

<b>Representative</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Present</b>
Blake Beanblossom	The Standard	Y
Doreen Binder	Transitions Projects	N
Catherine Ciarlo	CH2M Hill	Y
Hermann Colas, Jr.	Colas Construction	N
Ben Duncan	Multnomah County Health Equity Initiative	N
Brian Emerick	Portland Historic Landmarks Commission	Y
Jessica Engelmann	Oregon Walks	Y
Jason Franklin	Portland State University	Y
Jeanne Galick	Willamette greenway advocate, South Portland resident	Y
Jim Gardner	South Portland Neighborhood Association	Y
Patricia Gardner	Pearl District Neighborhood Association	Y
Greg Goodman	Downtown Development Group	Y
Patrick Gortmaker	Old Town / Chinatown Community Association	Y
Jodi Guetzloe-Parker	Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council	N
Sean Hubert	Central City Concern	N
Cori Jacobs	Downtown Retail Advocate	Y
Michael Karnosh	Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde	N
Nolan Leinhart	ZGF Architects	Y
Keith Liden	Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee	Y
Jeff Martens	CPUsage	Y
Marvin Mitchell	Julia West House; Downtown Neighborhood Association	Y
Anne Naito-Campbell	Civic activist and property owner	N
John Peterson	Melvin Mark Capital Group	N
Dan Petrusich	Portland Business Alliance	Y
Steve Pinger	Northwest District Association	Y
Valeria Ramirez	Portland Opera	Y
Tamara Kennedy-Hill	Travel Portland	N
John Russell	Property owner and developer	Y
Bob Sallinger	Portland Audubon Society	Y
Katherine Schultz	GBD Architects, Planning and Sustainability Commission	N
Mary Valeant	Goose Hollow Foothills League	Y
Karen Williams	Carroll Investments	Y
Jane Yang	NW Natural	Y

## Alternates

Representative	Organization	Present
John Bradley	Northwest District Association	N
Dave Harrelson	Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde	N
Rick Michaelson	Alternate for John Russell	Y
Lisa Frisch	Downtown Retail Advocate	N
Martin Soloway	Central City Concern	N
Kevin Myles	Alternate for Jeanne Galick	N
Bing Sheldon	Alternate for John Russell	N
Carrie Richter	Portland Historic Landmarks Commission	N
Len Michon	South Portland Neighborhood Association	N
Raihana Ansary	Portland Business Alliance	N
Peter Bilotta	Portland Opera	N
Chet Orloff	Alternate for John Russell	N
Tony Bernal	Transition Projects	N
Paddy Tillett	ZGF Architects	N

## Project Team/Staff

Representative	Role	Organization	Present
Susan Anderson	Director	BPS, City of Portland	N
Joe Zehnder	Chief Planner	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Sallie Edmunds	Central City Manager	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Karl Lisle	West Quadrant Project Manager	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Nicholas Starin	West Quadrant Project Planner	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Kathryn Hartinger	West Quadrant Project Planner	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Mark Raggett	Urban Design Planner	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Debbie Bischoff	River Planner	BPS, City of Portland	Y
Mauricio Leclerc	Transportation Planner	PBOT, City of Portland	Y
Troy Doss	SE Quadrant Project Manager	BPS, City of Portland	N
Desiree Williams-Rajee	Equity Specialist	BPS, City of Portland	N
Lew Bowers		PDC	Y
Lisa Abuaf		PDC	Y
Kirstin Greene	Facilitator	Cogan Owens Cogan	Y
Alisha Morton	Facilitator Assistant	Cogan Owens Cogan	Y

## Public

Stefanie Becker
Brian Campbell
Allan Classen
Peter Fry
Cathy Galbraith
Rachel James
Marcus Lee
Suzanne Lennard
Rebecca Liu
Lynn Longfellow

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Michael Mehaffy

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Deanna Mueller-Crispin

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Jacqueline Peterson-Loomis

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Wendy Rahm

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Robert Wright

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### **Welcome and Announcements**

Co-Chair **Karen Williams** welcomed all participants. She reviewed the meeting outcomes and commended the SAC for their work to date. She relayed Co-Chair Katherine Schultz' regrets for not being able to attend this meeting. Katherine has been actively participating in development of the agenda and materials.

### ***Overview of Agenda & Calendar Review***

**Kirstin Greene**, Facilitator, reviewed the agenda and schedule for upcoming meetings. She said that the SAC is concluding its discussion of the Concept Layer maps. After the next SAC meeting on December 16, we will be heading into more specific District-level discussions.

**Debbie Bischoff**, River Planner, discussed the Central Reach Working Group and the first public events scheduled for December 4 and 5. She encouraged all SAC members to come as the River has been one of the main organizing principles of the Central City, Comprehensive Plan and West Quadrant updates.

**Karl Lisle**, Project Manager, reviewed the project schedule in greater detail. This can be viewed in the meeting packet online <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/471371>.

### ***ACTION: Approval of Meeting Summary***

**Kirstin** asked SAC members if they had any corrections or comments on the meeting summary. There were none. Kirstin asked SAC members to provide any changes via email and that the SAC Meeting #8 summary will be considered final on Friday and posted to the website.

### **Summary of Feedback Received**

**Karl** gave a brief overview of the Open House Feedback Summary handout. This handout summarizes feedback received from the recent Open House as well as SAC Worksheets. The full handout can be viewed on the project website: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/471494>. There were no SAC member comments.

### **Presentation of additional information requested by SAC and revised Concept Layer Maps**

Planner **Mark Raggett** gave an overview of the four maps on the agenda for this evening: Land Use; Attractions and Special Places; Building Height; Open Space and Parks. The full presentation and meeting packet that includes detailed information on Building Heights can be viewed on the project website here: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/61672>.

## **Public Comment**

A summary of community member comment follows. Where community members submitted their remarks in writing, they are attached to this summary.

**Stefanie Becker:** I am an Urban Design Panel representative and a member of the American Institute of Architects. I would like to focus on a few of the observations in support. First, considering development in the context of downtown, tall buildings are appropriate but it is important to focus on the mix of residential and office. Second, this plan allows for choice which we think is important including housing choice. Third, a fraction of the urban areas develop to the permitted density. Even though we are talking about this density, this does not mean it will happen. We have this incredible design review process in the City of Portland that will serve the city greatly. I would like to quote the NY Times Video *A Short History of the Highrise*, "Vertical living can be modest, affordable and humane in the right conditions. It just needs us to think about what our urban planning can be and to redefine our ambitions."

**Cathy Galbraith:** I suggest that we cease our comparisons with other cities around the world because it is not serving our purpose. This is Portland, let's plan for us. I have expressed concern regarding the potential for new historic districts. My primary concern is that we need these outside of the current districts. I am particularly concerned in West End and PSU area. Susan Anderson mentioned at the last meeting to consider how can we use what we have rather than build, build, build in relation to transit. I think we should be using this for every aspect of planning. I am concerned about heights. We really need to get civic heights in Chinatown and Old Town. One of many comments in the height memo (in the meeting packet) on page 4 the approach is to retain existing patterns and make minor adjustments in some areas. I am not really seeing retaining. Why are there any proposed height bonuses? We are missing context around the height discussion. I do love Mark's graphics.

**Wendy Rahm:** A copy of Wendy's comments on building heights is included with this summary.

**Suzanne Lennard:** A copy of Suzanne's comments on building heights can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Robert Wright:** A copy of Robert's comments can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Rebecca Liu:** A copy of Rebecca's comments on Chinatown / Japantown can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Jacqueline Peterson-Loomis:** A copy of Jacqueline's comments on building heights can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Marcus Lee:** A copy of Marcus' comments can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Lynn Longfellow:** A copy of Lynn's comments on Chinatown / Japantown can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Rachel James:** I was at a party over the weekend and heard about this project. I previously had no idea about this SAC. I heard that you are trying to change the character of the city that we love. Having gone to the website and read the materials, I know this isn't true. South

Waterfront – that is a dead zone. In some areas like South Waterfront we need to cut back density. A lot of people make a lot of money building high rises and there is a place for them. Expect blow back if you go through with this higher density. The height amendments that you see as possible I see as probable. Citizens love this town. Those of us that don't want it to become a Vancouver B.C. will be out there fighting this.

**Michael Mehaffy:** A copy of Michael's comments on building heights can be found as an attachment to this summary.

**Rick Michaelson:** I grew up in New York. The trick with large scale is to do it right. There are issues with the height limit change in Chinatown. First, increasing height will lead to greater expectations of development. Second, the style and bulk of buildings are blocky. Putting tall thin buildings in that area will be out of character. Third, there will be incredible problems for landmark designations. I think at a minimum you need to revisit this more.

## **BREAK**

### **Discussion Building Height Concept Layer Map**

In response to public comment, SAC members took up the Building Height Concept Layer map first.

**Patricia Gardner:** In the Pearl we have had unlimited height limits for some time. Since then, there have been eight buildings being built or planned for: one is a tower, one is going to be 15 stories all the others are six stories or less. This is how it is there. Look at the existing height limits and the new height limits and you will find that a lot of the existing to some degree are worse than what is being asked. No changes are made in the West End from the existing height limits.

**Staff:** That is correct. The concept does not change current height limits in the West End.

**Blake Beanblossom:** If we are not changing anything in the West End then why so much emotion in the room.

**Staff:** Some would like to see current height limits in the West End reduced. You are correct; no change is proposed.

**Jane Yang:** Are we proposing to raise some of the building heights in Chinatown?

**Staff:** Yes we are. We propose increasing in the southern piece from 100 to 175 while lowering the northern end from 425 to 325.

**Jane Yang:** I thank the public for all the comments. I would like to encourage us to not change the character in Old Town. Portland struggles with attracting diversity already without potentially degrading the potential asset.

**Jeff Martens:** I echo Blake and Patricia's comments. There is very little change going on so I'm wondering what we are talking about. The current limits in the West End are not changing. The only increases in this area are along the transit mall down by PSU. My office is in Chinatown. We are removing height from around that area. Chinatown could be sitting amongst high towers, but it isn't. We are potentially making a much more visible area. Just because it's there doesn't mean that every building will be to the maximum height. We know this by history. The US Bank Tower is a prime example. We could build a ton more and wrap all around and it would be this thing that nobody saw. But it's not happening now. We are removing height around it and we need to keep this in mind.

**Catherine Ciarlo:** I was hoping to hear from staff about why the lowering and raising of height restrictions.

**Staff:** What we are trying to do with the height limit is to re-embrace the culture of Chinatown. This is not the future of Old Town. Some few cases could be high rise. We are thinking about it in a more detailed way. Why would we go up in the northern part of Chinatown? There are already long-standing economic development goals that are not met. The idea there is really about encouraging economic development and things to happen that might not otherwise. This decision is not made yet. How do you want to describe the Chinatown district? Skidmore is National Landmark Historic District which is the highest historic status in the nation. There is architectural and cultural significance and there is a fairly broad set of opinions about this. We have heard a lot of opinions about the future of Chinatown and what should happen there. One notion that got traction is that the cultural history story is probably more important than the architecture in that particular area, though of course the stories include the buildings. Is that a starting place for a conversation about this area because it isn't as much about architectural significance? On these conceptual building height maps, it's not that we would change that base height limit – we can link increased heights directly to a preservation objective. For example, we could say the height limit is 100 feet but we're ok with 175 if you agree to preserve and fix a nearby historic building that is important to the community. This is an opportunity to create a new type of preservation tool.

**Staff:** For Chinatown, when we are talking just about height a lot of the story gets left off. The dilemma has been that it has been stymied for redevelopment for some time. Linking where you get your extra development potential (height) to making sure value or funds flow to preserve something around it is important. With the concerns about Chinatown/Japantown, if we do it right the height move could actually be part of a solution. We have heard both ends of this spectrum in terms of talking about the district.

**Brian Emerick:** One thing that would be helpful on the Building Height map would be to draw the historic districts on the map. Overlap between Old Town/Chinatown/Japantown which is only 75 feet and it's not shown on the map either. As Rick Michaelson, a former landmarks commissioner, just said, just because it says something in the zoning book doesn't mean that it can happen with landmarks. Tallest building is the one at 4<sup>th</sup> and Flanders which is probably about 175 feet and that's half of what you can build right now. It creates more conflict if you have a high rise right next to these districts. We would need more clarity on how to link these incentives. Right now the north end of Chinatown is an issue at 425 feet but bringing it down to 325 feet helps. Thinking about it as a unified district is important.

**Jeanne Galick:** In our experience with the South Waterfront we gave them the height and they built to it. Our experiences are very different from the Pearl. I am concerned about why are the bridgeheads all of a sudden having these high buildings? I don't understand the rationale. When coming into downtown from the east side it opens up the city. There has been extensive testimony from the West Enders. Couldn't we lower some of the West End and raise the Pearl which would make everyone happy that way.

**Staff:** A few things are driving the bridgehead height proposal. During charrette there were many conversations about getting more out of the waterfront and making it a more active and vibrant place. One idea to do that is to get more buildings at the waterfront facing the water. There are currently a lot of blank walls, surface parking lots. Small buildings could also help but bigger could help more if they're bringing more people to Naito and Waterfront Park. A lot of those sites are going to be expensive to develop – adding height flexibility on them might help them develop sooner.

**Steve Pinger:** I am trying to understand the building height questions. Portland has a total of six buildings that are greater than 325 feet. If in the next 20 years we have 10 buildings that are greater than 325 feet – how many blocks do we need to have that could meet that height? Seems like an incredible overabundance. There are almost 250 blocks that allow buildings greater than 250 feet and there are 140 blocks that allow 325 feet or greater. We keep slipping between density and height. Height is what we are talking about. Density is the entitlement. Height is the variable. I like tall buildings. There are a lot of places where taking a building from 100 to 425 feet is a major difference. I guess I would like to feel a lot more comfortable before we are asked to assess if this map is right. What is the impact or effect of tall buildings to a person on the street, next to or adjacent to the tall buildings? With the liveliness of this concept I suspect it would be appropriate to have alternative maps.

**Staff:** How many blocks do we need available with the highest height limits is a hard question to answer. There are not that many development sites within the core. You would likely need a whole block to get to 400+ feet and the FAR to go with it. There are not many available blocks were you could get to that level. We haven't seen this in a very long time. There are a lot more 250 or 325 as you can tell from the map.

**Greg Goodman:** Since 1997 we have had 0% net job growth in the core. Once we get more job growth we might get more redevelopment. Even if the Hawthorne Bridge Historic District goes to Clay there are 1.5 blocks that haven't been developed and none of them are in the historic district. If you look at this map in context I think in downtown there is maybe six full blocks that haven't been developed. I don't think there are any full blocks left at 460 foot height. We have a tendency to look at the map and see the big strip of black. We are so far from financially being able to buy a 10 floor building and tear it down. It puts a \$50 million value on a block when you can't develop them at \$12 million.

**Staff:** It's a question we ask every time we look at an initiative like this. I have never seen it quantified. It would be interesting to look back at historical performance. Principle that you raised is the right one. You need at least twice as many sites as you think you need in square feet because it just isn't going to happen to every site. Ultimately there is kind of a shape to the Building Height map, but in actuality there is a great deal of variability within.

**Nolan Leinhart:** I want to push back on livability of tall buildings. I work in a building that is 260 feet. I have been in and around the West End for the last 20+ years. The area around this building was not livable. The building has four floors of office (ZGF) and 220+ residential units. I would remind you that some of it is buzz and the cool factor. There are 400 people who live and work in that building, eating lunch in that area, and spending money in that area. I know it's also happening at the Elliott and the old Safeway. There is energy that comes along with these in-fill projects. If that means that they need to be a little taller than so be it. You don't feel overwhelmed by that high rise. You feel like you're looking at a smaller building because of the feel of the ground level.

**Jason Franklin:** I would like to add a couple things. It's important to not lose sight about the Central City. It is the highest density place in the state. There is diversity of building types, employment and housing types. Height is a minor piece of what we are trying to do here. I would rather see us focus on design and make the Central City an innovation quadrant. Think big and think about why we are here. It is a diversity of building types. We do preserve buildings and that will continue. We need to have the height to balance out those smaller buildings. In general I am ok with the height maps as they are. I am ready to move on from this conversation.

**Patricia Gardner:** Just briefly, my experience is that Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) is way more important than height. You cannot lose density. In the Pearl, we kept our base FAR low and you have to work to get higher. We are not talking about FAR much. FAR is the one that creates the buildings that you don't like. Historic transfer has been done four times in the Pearl. We created a bonus for FAR that specifically uses height off of historic buildings. This hasn't been used yet because there are too many bonuses. Tall buildings such as the Irving Street Lofts, Casey and Elizabeth were built to higher FAR and had to save historic items / buildings.

**Jim Gardner:** I second Steve's comments. In the staff memo and AIA letter that we got it states that regardless of how much area you allow a certain height you will only see development to that height in a small fraction. Do we need more of that or do we have enough already? I personally don't feel that maximum allowance needs to be extended in the arm toward the south to the side of PSU. This area functions almost like the Pearl with lower density and lower intensity area. We should focus the tall buildings in the central core. I'm not convinced that everywhere on the river needs to be a step-down. At the bridgeheads you really get more of a sense of arrival if the bridgehead is low so you get the vista as you approach the city from the east. Keeping the bridge heads low would allow you that sense to see the buildings as the central core develops. I have a lot of problem with increasing the height limit in Chinatown as it would inevitably lead to destruction of buildings in the area. Stagnation in the area has to do with the ownership of the buildings not the heights. Adding to the height will be destructive to the ambiance of the area.

**Marvin Mitchell:** We've been talking about buildings. The central question we should be asking is who lives in those buildings. We have not talked about truly affordable housing. We need to get some people in the middle. Not just expensive and low income/public subsidized. I'm still undecided about building heights. I don't see a lot of problem with the maps that we have. People have brought up isolation in high rise, but there is also isolation in mid-rise. It's how the neighborhood treats it. Look at the 12 West Building. It's amazing how it has changed the area in the last 10 years. It was developed nicely.

**Dan Petrusich:** The reason US Bank is an island and will probably remain that way is because for a long time that area was the old financial district. Most of the 460 building height allowance is in that old financial district. There are very few sites in there that you can actually do that. It was built in 1983 and is still by itself. I think you do have to go block by block in all these areas before you can make the argument that there will be a lot of tall buildings built. Economics of a tall office building is difficult. Where you've really seen new tall buildings are mostly residential.

**Catherine Ciarlo:** I appreciate what Nolan and Jason have said. The Central City is the center. Personally, I'm comfortable with the map with a few big "ifs." I want to understand better policy actions such as design and setbacks. How can we link height and density with affordable housing? I would love to see Historic Preservation Transfer Bonus happen. I want to know more about bridgeheads. I appreciate hearing from the West End. We are not changing it / increasing heights so you are heard. I think we need more conversation about Chinatown before we vote on it because we will get stuck.

**Greg Goodman:** Historic districts are so much a part of our character and who we are but at the same time those are the districts that have languished. The people that need to move into the buildings don't have an appreciation as a lot of people sitting in the room. Nobody is advocating getting rid of historic buildings. But why hasn't something worked? Tax Increment money was spent in Old Town but we are out of that now. Every development in that area has

been subsidized. People want mixed use areas. Pearl has grown because it is a mixed use area. People don't want the single use buildings. Five years ago the Planning Commission recommended allowing buildings above 75 feet to 130 feet just on five satellite sites in the Skidmore Historic District. Landmarks objected. If we are going to do this it has to be residential and has to have setbacks. Unless you get housing in those districts it won't be what you want them to be. Old Town has the lowest rents in the city. Retail doesn't want to be there. It is not because of surface parking lots. What are we going to do so people will enjoy these districts?

**Kirstin** said that there is an extra SAC meeting in December. With the discussion today, it's clear SAC member comfort level is increasing in some areas and decreasing in other areas. **Karl** then said that this isn't the final decision on any of this. We are going to get into all those details that we are hearing about in the sub-district level. Staff is ok if we identify those few places that we know there are reservations – such as Old Town/Chinatown and need for further conversation.

**Jane Yang:** I'm ok with the general concept if we are going to flag some areas to talk about later and specifically Chinatown. We shouldn't dismiss things as minor. You cannot separate the culture focus vs. architecture focus. If you are a stranger in town you know where Old Town is because of the architecture. For economic development we should propose other ways to develop the area beyond raising the buildings or hear more about the balance of raising one and lower others.

**Brian Emerick:** Looking at the heights, the change from 75 to 175 feet is a 230% difference which is a huge jump. Why is there not a finer grain or high stepping tool?

**Staff:** There will be plenty of room for more detailed conversation within each area. These maps are conceptual. We are not giving up the real height map (in the packet) which reflects maximum heights in five foot increments.

**Mary Valeant:** Catherine spoke to my concerns. We haven't done a historic inventory and I feel like it is very necessary.

**Staff:** This could be an implementing action item.

**Kirstin** asked the SAC members if they had general comfort with general concept with a further look at / refinements to this list for further staff consideration:

- Old Town/ Chinatown /Japantown
- Bridgeheads
- Extension of maximum height to I-405

Twenty SAC members had general comfort; four had moderate comfort with some reservations and one did not feel comfortable with the general concept. Kirstin asked SAC members who had some level of discomfort to share their thoughts for the record.

**Steve Pinger:** We need to assure the health and viability of the primary piece of the public realm which is the street environment. My concern is that it is possible for tall buildings to degrade the street and what it's like to be in them. I would like to see a demonstration of the effect of being in the street adjacent to tall buildings which I requested during the last meeting. Without viewing that, then I'm not comfortable with this general concept. Street level view is needed.

**Staff:** We tried to show you with the photos in the packet and the presentation tonight. A model is not likely to happen for the entire central city.

**Jeff Martens:** It's not like buildings have not been built. Any one of us can take a walk downtown. Can staff provide us with addresses so we can go look? Rather than asking staff to mock up a drawing of what it might look like, a real vision/visual is better from the street perspective.

**Jeanne Galick:** How do we make sure that the pedestrian experience is good? I would like much greater setbacks with tall buildings. I know that is more for a detailed conversation, but we need to have that livability assurance.

**Greg Goodman:** Staff has done a good job. The historic districts need to get some economic vitality to them.

**Bob Sallinger:** I have discomfort with way the city is evolving into a glass and steel canyon land. The South Waterfront is a failure and we need protection from more of that. It is in the detail level. We are moving toward an unlivable city. You can still feel the earth in Portland and that separates us from other cities. I don't feel satisfied signing off on this conversation when the work is in the details.

**Jim Gardner:** The thing that still gives me unease was something that was mentioned that I realize is a reality - density vs. heights. Absolute irreversibility of what we end up doing. Height limits never go down once they are increased. There will never be a planning process that says we need to reduce height limits.

**Staff:** We are proposing some height limit reductions in this plan.

**Jeanne Galick:** When will we come back to this discussion about bridgeheads and Chinatown?

**Staff:** During the District-level discussions. We will come back with alternatives that will be at a greater level of detail and will be more informative about what particular areas have concerns.

### **Special Places and Attractions Discussion**

SAC members took up discussion on the second Concept Layer map of the evening.

**Mary Valeant:** I would really like the Vista Bridge put on this map.

**Patricia Gardner:** With the freeway capping plan you can actually cap at Burnside and the freeway. You can cap over Everett. Underneath the freeway north of Johnson there are a bunch of empty parking lots where you could create some great outdoor space. This topic really fits in parks but could be identified here.

**Jim Gardner:** I have spent a lot of time at the beach under the Morrison Bridge. Please add that.

**Kirstin** asked the SAC members if they had general comfort with general concept. One SAC member had general comfort with some reservations while the remaining members all had general comfort indicated by their voting cards. Kirstin asked Bob for clarification on his yellow vote – indicating some reservation.

**Bob Salinger:** I am just reserving the right for further discussion.

**Co-Chair Karen Williams** thanked SAC and visitors for their discussion tonight. She asked SAC members to please let staff know in advance of the December 16 meeting if they have known issues for any of the remaining maps so that we can be sure to have appropriate time for discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:24 pm.

Wendy Rahm  
November 18, 2013,  
WQSAC meeting Comments

I have recently learned that I am a member of the group dubbed “anti-heights advocates.” I had thought of myself as pro-people; pro-livability; pro-saving Portland’s architectural history; pro-preserving the physical human-scale brand that make Portland unique and draws people to relocate here rather than to New York or Vancouver BC; pro-human scale development which promises that people will always be the priority rather than moneyed interests; pro-responsible development that won’t leave Portland like Vancouver BC, which is finding itself full of expensive but empty properties in tall buildings owned by the world’s 1% investment class who don’t live in these properties -- properties that middle class citizens of the city can’t afford; pro-sensible economic development that preserves what over 40 people in the West End indicated they wanted to see in the West End. Notice that much earlier I assembled 40 West Enders who gave input that was largely ignored, yet the most recent SAC outreach only attracted 46 from all over the west quadrant.

This facile “anti-heights” tag comes from a staff member who admits he has not made an exhaustive search of the latest evidence about the negative effects of tall buildings. This drive to raise heights has come from the same staff who selected a committee which largely is pre-disposed to approve a height increase. It comes from the staff who appointed as co-chairs of this committee two employees of development companies. If that isn’t front loaded to support increasing building heights, I don’t know what is. This is the perfect example of – to borrow a term – the *Dollarocracy*, where 95% of people have no influence. In fact increasing building heights beyond human scale, mid-rise buildings in the West End is a decision so important and far reaching, that it should not be left to staff members and this group. It is a decision that should be made by many, many more citizens, and certainly by some residents of the West End of which I don’t believe there is one on this committee. Even New York City according to last week’s NYTimes (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/13/nyregion/support-evaporates-for-bloombergs-plan-to-rezone-east-side.html?src=recg>) has pushed the pause button on increasing building heights. And Toronto has decided to increase density through mid-rise developments instead of high rises. ([http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/01/16/growing\\_up\\_toronto\\_planner\\_jennifer\\_keesmaat\\_pus\\_hes\\_for\\_lots\\_of\\_midrise.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/01/16/growing_up_toronto_planner_jennifer_keesmaat_pus_hes_for_lots_of_midrise.html)) Increasing the heights in the West End has the potential to create an entirely different city that will be unrecognizable to any of us who live downtown at the moment. I urge you at a minimum to postpone your decision or better yet, expand the pool of who decides to many more average citizens who *live* in the West End or the west quadrant. Top down city planning rarely ends up doing good, as we saw in the 60’s and 70’s when Robert Moses and his generation were destroying large sections of cities for cars. May I remind you this is important.

Statement for West Quadrant SAC  
November 18, 2013

Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard, Ph.D.(Arch.)  
Co-founder and Director, International Making Cities Livable Council  
Author & editor of 8 books, including: *Livable Cities Observed*; *The Wisdom of Cities*;  
*Genius of the European Square*; *The Forgotten Child: Cities for the Well-Being of  
Children*; *Making Cities Livable*; etc  
[Suzanne.Lennard@LivableCities.org](mailto:Suzanne.Lennard@LivableCities.org)

I strongly advise NOT increasing height limits in the West Quadrant and not awarding bonus FAR for housing. Increased height limits would encourage expensive construction methods to attain greater heights and returns. It would also encourage high-rise (and luxury) investment condos that increase adjacent land values, make the city increasingly unaffordable, inflate the **gap between the wealthy and the poor**, and lead to what Nobel Economist Robert Shiller recently warned us of -- an approaching [housing bubble](#).

High-rise condos that are [not inhabited all the time do not support local businesses](#) and do not contribute to the local economy. They also detract from the livability of the public realm, which is our "common wealth".

As stated in the 2008 Central City Housing Inventory (available [here](#)) what is needed in the West Quadrant is affordable housing for working families close to downtown jobs, and very low income housing, especially for recently homeless families and those who lost their jobs and homes because of the economy. Housing these groups close to jobs, services and transit routes will greatly reduce automobile use and support the economy.

These more vulnerable population groups should not be housed in high-rise buildings that can jeopardize their mental and physical health. Catering to the needs of resident families downtown will also help protect Portland's world-wide reputation as [one of the most livable cities in the US](#) – a reputation that can easily be lost by further high-rise development.

To protect and ensure housing for these priority groups, height limits should NOT be increased, especially in the West End (to protect existing low income housing in historic buildings) and along the N-S transit routes that provide transit to work and shops. The West End should remain zoned as an RX, residential mixed use neighborhood that is urban, dense and livable.

The Central City 2035 Plan, which is supposed to guide the SAC, states clearly that neighborhoods should be "livable" and "dense" (not high density). This implies livable human scale buildings, not high rises. Livability is a basic requirement. Active ground floors, well designed street facades, affordable housing, open spaces and preservation

of historic buildings should not be optional “ad-ons” funded by high-rise. The stated goal of 180 units/acre can be achieved with the same street level commercial uses, open space, high quality design, and a variety of housing from studio rentals to 3 bedroom condos as in Tanner Place – in 8 floors!

There has been a constant demand by some that we have to increase height limits to achieve density, and a Pollyanna-ish denial that the feared build-out will happen, because it has not happened yet. Even those who advocate high-rise towers do not appear to relish a complete build-out.

I propose that:

- a) We can achieve sufficient density with 6-8-story true urban fabric, instead of towers (see above)
- b) We are guardians of Portland’s livability not merely for our lifetime, but for future generations. Build-out may not happen in the next 10 or 20 years, but if regulations permit it, it can – and probably will - eventually happen.

My name is Robert Wright. I live in the West End.

As Portland grew, the area south of West Burnside Street between the West Hills and the South Park Blocks became a residential mixed use area with modest height multi-dwelling buildings. That historic, cohesive, livable urban neighborhood was severed by the construction of Interstate 405. Now the prospect of very tall buildings will further degrade the West End and Goose Hollow.

A large part of the overall area became the very definition of the highest density multi-dwelling zone in the city: the RX Central Residential Zone. With bonuses and height transfer provisions, residential buildings with heights up to 250 feet have been constructed in the West End over the last decade. I live in one of them. Fortunately, there is lateral breathing room between these residential structures that has mitigated impact on neighborhood livability.

The West Quadrant draft Concept Map Layer for Building Heights shows that tall buildings can be built for a large portion of the overall area after inclusion of all transfer and bonus provisions. The impact of allowing very tall buildings, separated by only the width of a street will result in human warehousing, reducing livability.

For the Building Heights Map Layer, the draft West Quadrant Plan notes, "In all areas, a mix of building heights would be expected in the future – not all new buildings in any area would be expected to reach the maximums." This is an assumption that hopes for the future, instead of planning for the future. Need I remind anyone of the consequences when the City Council removed minimum on-site parking for multi-dwelling buildings? They had hoped banks would not loan money for such buildings and would limit the number of multi-dwelling buildings without on-site parking. The ire of neighborhood residents was loud and clear, and the policy was recently reversed. Neighborhood livability was at stake then, livability is at stake now for the West End and Goose Hollow.

The Building Height Concept Map Layer shows that the northern part of the West End can have very tall buildings! Just as rural farmland is protected by the Urban Growth Boundary, Portland's urban residential neighborhoods should be protected by a defined Central City Growth Boundary, or more precisely a Tall Building Growth Boundary. Without such a restriction, people will be compelled to flee to the suburbs, putting increased pressure on the Urban Growth Boundary. People should be naturally drawn to the urban environment. For the West Quadrant, a Tall Building Growth Boundary should lie east of the South Park Blocks and south of West Burnside Street.

Thank you for listening.

Robert Wright  
(503) 222-6874  
wright-stuff@comcast.net

**West Quadrant SAC Meeting  
November 18, 2013**

**Comment by Rebecca Liu**

Good evening,

My name is Rebecca Liu. I served as the principal of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Chinese Language School, located in the CCBA building on NW Davis Street in Chinatown (from 1991 through 2005). My deceased husband Chi, who most knew as Liu Chi, was the key person responsible for bringing the China Gate to Portland's Chinatown. We both invested a lot of time and energy in the historical district. In 1989 the New Chinatown/Japantown Historical District was designated to honor the history and experience of Portland's original Chinese and Japanese community. The planning Bureau now recommends raising the building height limitation for this district from 100 to 175 feet. Such heights would greatly change or eliminate the character of the place where Portland's original Chinese and Japanese immigrants made their home in the face of strong race prejudice, but finally succeeding in their ambition for American citizenship and inclusion in Portland's society. This national historic district, New Chinatown/Japantown, should be treated equally with the other national historic districts in Portland and it deserves to be protected. Why, among the 5 National Historic Districts in the NW Quadrant of the City were the other four left alone? Why is the new Chinatown/Japantown National Historic District being singled out and threatened by a new height limitation of up to 175 feet? What is the message the City of Portland is trying to send to its communities of color, and nation?

Rebecca Liu

SAC Public Testimony, November 18, 2013  
Dr. Jacqueline Peterson-Loomis  
The Old Town History Project

Joining those from Portland's oldest Japanese- and Chinese American communities here tonight, I am speaking in opposition to the proposed height increase from 100' to 175' of that portion of the New Chinatown/Japantown National Historic District between NW 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and from Burnside to Everett, a portion of which directly abuts the Skidmore Landmark District. This increase is extreme by any measure. It flies in the face of the National Park Service's 2008 letter opposing the Bureau's Opportunity Sites initiative on the basis that the proposed heights challenged the integrity of the Skidmore Landmark District. The Opportunity Sites initiative was subsequently tabled by City Council and there is no reason to imagine that the National Park Service will approach extreme height increases which adversely affect the Landmark differently this time.

Secondly, the proposal to dramatically increase heights in only one of the five National Historic District in the West Quadrant speaks to a fundamental inequity that I trust the City does not intend. Of the five national historic districts in the West Quadrant, four will retain the protection of 75' heights under the Planning Bureau's proposal, including a newly proposed National Historic District along NW 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Pearl whose heights are actually being lowered to 75' as part of the nomination process. For reasons which are not at all transparent, the New Chinatown/Japantown National District is the exception. Under the recommended heights plan, it is denied the protection extended to every other National Historic District on the West Side of the River.

Can the Planning Bureau provide a rationale for this decision and an explanation of what it sees as the fundamental difference between the New Chinatown/Japantown National Historic District, and the other four? I realize that in the last year, two individuals, Bing Shelton and Peggy Moretti, have publicly asserted a distinction between the "architectural" significance of Skidmore and the "cultural" significance of New Chinatown/Japantown, a distinction which was presented at the June, 2013 2035 Charette in Old Town which introduced the West Quadrant planning process to the Old Town neighborhood community. No evidence or explanation has been provided for what seems to me to be a false dichotomy which veers dangerously close to distinctions between "them and us."

Every nomination to the National Historic Register requires a justification based on TWO criteria: architectural significance and historical significance to the nation and/or to the region. These two criteria are met in both the Skidmore Landmark District and the New Chinatown National Historic District nominations; in fact many of the buildings in the New Chinatown/Japantown National Historic Districts were designed by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects whose work is celebrated in the Landmark District. The Landmark District is judged to be historically significant for the early economic development of the city of Portland whereas the New Chinatown/Japantown National Historic District -- the transportation nexus of both river port and transcontinental railroad -- is historically significant for the immigration and contributions of a multiethnic labor

force to Portland and the Northwest. It would be very hard to argue that the architecture and history of New Chinatown/Japantown, which is essentially about the contributions of two Asian American immigrant communities to the growth of the city of Portland, are less important than that of Goose Hollow, Yamhill or the newly proposed NW 13<sup>th</sup> District. As an historian who has studied this neighborhood for many years and who knows well many of its former and current inhabitants, property owners and business owners, I strongly urge the Skateholders Advisory Committee to table the Bureau's recommendation and to reframe its proposed height limits so that they are consistent with those of the other National Historic Districts within the West Quadrant.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

**Testimony before the West Quadrant  
Stakeholders Advisory Committee on November 18**

Marcus Lee

Ladies and gentlemen,

I come here today not as a representative from the various local community and national groups to which I belong, but as a private citizen and concerned member of Portland's Chinese American community; and as the descendant of one member of that initial wave of Chinese immigrants who came to America from the Toisan area of southern China during the era of the Gold Rush.

My great-grandfather, Lee Ging Yip, came to Portland in the latter half of the 1800's; his Chinese general merchandise store – Kwong Sang Wo – was located on SW Second in what was at that time the central area of Chinatown, eventually moving to what is now the northwest corner of NW Fourth and Flanders. That parcel of land is now occupied by high-rise housing.

My father and his family – like many other families in this community - lived and worked in the buildings of this Chinatown, in this designated National Historic District. These historically significant buildings which still exist are the remaining witnesses to the important and significant events, activities, and developments of the past which greatly contributed to the Portland of today which you and I have the honor of enjoying.

The current proposal under your consideration threatens to violate the standards and requirements of the National Park Service in listing this ethnic neighborhood as a National Historic District as well as NPS's ongoing commitment to protect the adjacent .Skidmore Landmark District from adverse conditions created by excessive height. Passage of this proposal could well lead to the stripping of this neighborhood's listing as a National Historic District with all it's attached benefits and would throw open the door to the wholesale demolition of historic buildings which still stand as reminders of the sacrifices and inequities which our ancestors endured in contributing to the growth and success of this city. Instead of burying our architectural and cultural history, we should instead be proudly showing it off to the rest of America by lending a hand in the restoration and rehabilitation of our historic structures.

I personally oppose any action which would threaten to divest this historic neighborhood of its National Historic District status or significantly alter or eradicate its historic character so that future generations will not be able to connect, enjoy and learn from it.

Thank you for your time.

**Lynn Fuchigami Longfellow**

**Executive Director, Oregon Nikkei Endowment**

**Testimony from West Quadrant Plan SAC Meeting #8, November 18, 2013**

My name is Lynn Fuchigami Longfellow and I'm the Executive Director of Oregon Nikkei Endowment. I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Japanese Ancestral Society of Portland, Portland JACL and the Old Town/Chinatown Community Association. I am here tonight with others from the Japanese American community to express our concern regarding the BPS recommendation to raise this historic district's height limitation.

We feel very strongly about protecting the character of the neighborhood and its history, culture and heritage and our museum (Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center) in Old Town and the Japanese American Historical Plaza along the waterfront is a testimony to that commitment of having a visible presence in what used to be a large and vibrant Japantown.

I know that the focus is on revitalization and economics, and there are many models throughout the country of how cities have been able to successfully preserve their historical districts and turn them into destinations for tourists, residents, and businesses that in turn bring income to the area. There is much that has been studied about the positive sides of historical preservation with regards to economic benefits as well as environmental impact. And it is this very character of our neighborhoods that makes them so attractive to the TV and film industry that has brought added jobs and dollars to stimulate our local economy. When I travel, the places that I go as a tourist are the historic districts and historical sights. We are not against development but we need to find a way to do that without destroying the integrity of what makes this area unique to any other part of town.

We care deeply about this neighborhood.....it is where our community got established and started their journey on becoming part of the American Dream. And we take ownership and want to be a part of revitalizing this area to the point that we are working on a vision and project that could be a catalyst to do just that.

This was home to not just the Japanese and Chinese, but many of our immigrant communities including the Greek, Jewish and African Americans. I was speaking to someone about the importance of preserving heritage districts and neighborhoods and she made a comment that has haunted and stuck with me ever since, and that is how she and many of the Italian community have lamented and are still sick today that there is no sign of what was once the heart of their community, or Little Italy. She said quite bluntly, we are now a website with pictures.

We do not want to look back in time to see pictures of what this neighborhood once looked like or what used to be here, so we ask that you strongly reconsider your recommendation for changing the height restrictions.

**Statement for WQP-SAC  
Michael W Mehaffy  
Nov 18, 2013**

Good afternoon, I'm Michael Mehaffy, 742 Southwest Vista, I'm a planner, urban designer, and just to establish my bona fides, an adjunct professor at the University of Oregon and four other graduate schools in four countries. I'm also a researcher in sustainable urban development, an author for The Atlantic Cities, Urban Land, Planetizen and others, and I'm on the editorial boards of three international research journals in sustainable urbanism.

I mentioned previously the world-class asset we have here in Portland's livable urban fabric – a structure that people around the world travel to see and study – and the importance of assuring that new development at the very least does no harm to this great asset. But I do have a concern that more work is needed by staff and by the SAC to assess the impacts of proposed new building heights, and to limit or mitigate those impacts with a much more careful, fine-grained plan.

As one example, there appears to be no effort to identify step-backs, as a way to preserve light and views, and to mitigate the negative impacts of disruptive building forms. Such step-backs helped to preserve some of the livability of Manhattan and create many of its most beautiful building forms. On Portland's famous small blocks, appropriate step-backs are likely to also limit height – and that too would limit any negative impacts. So I suggest this aspect of the plan needs much more careful development.

I already made reference to research that demonstrates a number of fallacies of what I would characterize as tall-building marketing hyperbole – they are not inherently greener, don't meaningfully reduce sprawl, don't promote affordability, and certainly don't help to preserve historic structures – their profitability generally incentives demolition. So may I suggest that best practice demands of us a much more careful, evidence-based approach.

Certainly I understand the private interests who seek to maximize the value of their land, and that's fair enough. But of course we have a planning system precisely to ensure that those private interests are balanced with the interests of nearby residents and the city as a whole. The only remaining public interest that I can find for these greater building heights is the dubious argument that tall buildings might help to make a more varied, iconic skyline. But this is a narrow criterion – essentially an issue of urban imagery and branding – and hardly worth trading away the treasure of our high-quality urban fabric. I'd like to suggest that we've done far too much of that sort of damage in the “modern” era – and I hope we can learn from those mistakes.

Thank you very much.