

River Plan/South Reach Natural Resources & Development Meeting

Summary Notes

Sept 18, 2018 – Center for Equity & Inclusion

Approximately 30+ members of the public attended the meeting. City staff from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), Parks and Recreation (PP&R) and Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) were present to facilitate the meeting, hear public comments and respond to questions from participants.

After a welcome and introductions, BPS staff provided a project overview, described the purpose of the meeting and the materials for discussion. Attendants then participated in two table discussions where example sites along the river were used to discuss a range of development-related topics. The following highlights the comments made by members of the public pursuant to topics: river setback and design compatibility; landscaping and habitat compatibility; and nonconforming development.

Example Site #1 – River Setback & Design Compatibility

Table 1

- Setback
 - Increase the setback (e.g., 100 feet)
 - Does the setback have to be consistent along the whole extent of the Greenway? Is there potential for setback averaging or variation in setback, depending on adjacent development type?
- Design Compatibility
 - Buildings should angle out/away and/or have an interface with the trail/river. This will make the development interface more pleasant along the waterfront.
 - Need clearly-identified ways of exiting (legally) from the greenway areas when crossing private property (e.g., easements, public rights-of-way, signage, etc.).
- Greenway Trail
 - Rules should allow for curves replicating the river. No right angles – allow the Greenway Trail to follow natural curves (river)
- Floodplains/Land Adjacent to the River
 - City should be looking at opportunity sites for acquisition. Vancouver, BC, is doing a much better job on their waterfront.
- Misc
 - A lot of concrete debris along/in the river.
 - City needs to implement the Climate Action Plan along the river.

Table 2

- Setback
 - Habitat continuity is important.
 - Development within the setback is a concern
 - Desire: Wider greenway setbacks
 - If top of bank (TOB) is surveyed by the City, it would strengthen protection options
 - Desire: New development outside 100-foot setback/buffer
 - Good to have a buffer for high/medium resources
 - Some areas have very narrow setback & are close to the river. Could retaining walls be replaced?

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- At 45 feet of allowable height, a 100-foot setback and stepdown to river is desired.
- Expanding green areas improves user experience
- River and riverbank habitat
 - Lack of implementation of existing landscape requirements; require planting/replanting
 - Migratory birds and other species frequently use this stretch of the river
 - Proximity to river (alone) could be argued as a criterion to demonstrate that these areas are medium value (rather than low).
 - Non-river-dependent uses infringing on Greenway and could be redeveloped into green space.
 - Shift and re-emphasize the resource value to recalibrate priorities/how development occurs near river.
- Design
 - The river is a bird flyway/corridor. Strict lighting standards are needed, as well as bird-friendly window standards
- Misc.
 - Map the existing riverside access easements.

Example Site #2 – Landscaping & Habitat Compatibility

Table 1

- River and riverbank habitat
 - Landscaping/trees
 - Concerns were raised about tree roots damaging trail and continual maintenance needed as a result.
 - Black cottonwood is native to Oregon; causes issues with air conditioners.
 - Remarkable lack of trees along the river. Almost all of this portion of the river (John's Landing riverfront) is a viewpoint (cleared of vegetation)
 - Discussed topics related to different categories of trees and their associated canopy types.
 - People come to John's Landing riverfront area to watch fireworks. With trees blocking view, this will not be possible. (2018 was first year where people couldn't see the fireworks.)
 - Shrubs can be good habitat.
 - Riprap
 - Is there a distinction between a natural bank and riprap bank, as far as vegetation requirements?
 - Questions were raised related to tree stability in riprap areas.
 - South Waterfront riverbank (5 or 6 blocks) – have taken out riprap and planted trees and added viewpoints
 - Salmonids
 - Juvenile salmon follow the banks and don't generally cross the river
 - Powers Marine Park has the best habitat quality for juvenile salmon

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- Property values
 - Concern was raised related to the effect on property values and resulting reduction in City property taxes received if views are taken away from adjacent properties.
- Greenway Trail
 - From an original Greenway Plan committee member: Viewpoints along the Greenway weren't intended to be continually planted; open spaces (areas free of trees) were part of the plan.
 - Trolley right-of-way – should be a bikeway (extension of trail)
- Misc
 - Butterfly Park
 - Beavers remove trees; Do these types of issues create conflicts between wildlife management and tree preservation?

Table 2

- River and riverbank habitat
 - Landscaping/trees
 - There must be a way to achieve the goal of making existing development come into compliance with landscaping requirements: willows (lower height), etc.
 - Address terrible landscape
 - Cluster between buildings to add trees?
 - Address terrible landscape maintenance and prevent spraying – enforcement
 - Give a window for coming into compliance
 - Loophole: current code allows nuisance plants to be removed without requiring replanting; should require native plant/tree replacement
 - Make sure mitigation happens next to river
 - Salmonids
 - Balance desire for swimming and shallow water habitat
 - Riprap
 - Bank is all riprap/fill – incompatible with trees?
 - What if sediment builds land out?
- Greenway Trail
 - Trail is biggest use – in 1 hour, 200+ people use it on a regular (non-sunny) Saturday.
 - With trail use growth as Portland population grows – need to preserve natural resources
- Development
 - Can upgrades be held up until property comes into compliance?
 - Require non-conforming upgrades to include landscape improvements for properties in Greenway overlays

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Example Site #3 – Nonconforming Development

Table 1

- Nonconforming development
 - Be careful what you do in SW Miles Place neighborhood so that property owners are still allowed to sell/improve their property.
 - Tension exists between private interests and public good.
 - There are potentially significant costs associated with existing development in the floodplain – like SW Miles Place – resulting from a future 100-year flood.
 - Question: Are these riverfront houses on SW Miles Place having an impact on high value natural resources?
- Misc
 - Autowerks NW is venting toxic fumes resulting from painting, etc. – air quality issues; potential water quality issues

Table 2

- Nonconforming development
 - Future willing seller buy-up program for flood-prone properties? Federal grants?
 - Limit nonconforming rights to require building outside of Greenway river setback.
 - Create no-rebuild rule in the flood zone if you are destroyed (east coast disaster examples)
 - Is there a way to flag when a property sells?
 - Adapt and try to work with property owners of nonconforming uses
- Riprap
 - Will this plan address how much “protective measures” (e.g., riprap) property owners can install? Disallow fortifying and armoring of bank.
- Floodplain management
 - Regardless of Federal decisions (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency National Flood Insurance Program Biological Decision), City of Portland should say flood-prone areas go back to open space/public use