

The Oregonian

Portland's vision for Pearl District post office could include skyscrapers, Union Station plaza

By Andrew Theen
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Portland doesn't yet own the U.S. Postal Service's 14 acre mega property in the Pearl District, but the city is already looking at five potential redevelopment options.

Whatever is built, Portland wants to go up — creating a dense, urban neighborhood with thousands of new jobs and residents, public open spaces and thousands of parking spaces.

Development officials stressed that the concepts are preliminary and "the approach to parking is continuing to evolve as the concepts are refined."

Related: Learn more about the city's plans and take a survey on which of the five options you prefer.

Two of the concepts include new skyscrapers that, if built, would be Portland's tallest, eclipsing the 546 foot Wells Fargo Center. Other sketches include embracing Union Station as an icon and creating a new public plaza surrounding the train station.

Earlier this year, the Portland Development Commission entered formal negotiations with the postal service to buy the 14 acre site, which city leaders long pined for and describe as one of the most high-profile pieces of land in the city. The development agency is in the due diligence phase, and the city is attempting to find a new home for the postal service.

Here's a breakdown of the five options on the table (in no particular order). The development commission's board and the City Council are expected to vote on the proposals in October.

1) "Cascade"

Concept: Extend the North Park Blocks into the heart of the 14 acre lot, connecting with planners' vision to create a "Green Loop" throughout the city (The Green Loop is a multi-use separated pathway that would span both sides of the Willamette River).

Parking: 2,971 spaces

New Residents: 3,077

New Jobs: 6,348

Tallest building: 282 feet

2) "Station"

Concept: It's all about Union Station. A public plaza in front of train station will be a centerpiece of the district. Jobs would center on the city's "maker-doer culture."

Parking: 4,863 spaces

New Residents: 1,923

New Jobs: 12,446

Tallest building: 584 feet, at the northeast corner of the property

3) "Innovation"

Concept: This plan would limit open space options while maximizing the development footprint on the 14 acre lot. City officials envision an anchor tenant, perhaps a Silicon Valley namesake company, grabbing one or more of the large buildings.

Parking: 3,854 spaces

New Residents: 1,232

New Jobs: 9,588

Tallest building: About 132 feet. This is the least dense of the five options.

4) "Stitch"

Concept: One of the key challenges of the post office site is connecting the new buildings to both the Pearl District and Old Town Chinatown. This plan would do so with a focus on open space, water features and better views of the Willamette River.

Parking: 4,004 spaces, but parking will be primary revenue generator for city

New Residents: 2,091

New Jobs: 8,945

Tallest building: Several buildings of roughly 415 feet (roughly the height of the PacWest Center)

5) "Weave"

Concept: Pathways and open space are meant to dominate this potential development plan, which includes extending the Green Loop bike path through the property.

Parking: 4,984 spaces

New Residents: 2,006

New Jobs: 12,084

Tallest building: 575 feet

The development agency is deep in the weeds on a plan for a 24 acre area known as the Broadway Corridor, which encompasses the post office land, nearby Union Station and other city-owned lots.

The post office property at 715 N.W. Hoyt Street was appraised in 2007 at \$45.5 million.

You can vote on the five proposals or attend the final public meeting on the ideas on September 8 from 5 - 7 p.m. The meeting location is still undetermined.

The Portland Tribune

PBOT's Treat hones vision behind Vision Zero

By Jennifer Anderson
08/04/2015

Two months after Portland City Council adopted Vision Zero, pieces continue to fall into place.

Portland Bureau of Transportation leaders will announce another project milestone on Aug. 17 in the effort to eliminate all serious traffic injuries and fatalities within 10 years.

"We're starting to develop momentum," PBOT Director Leah Treat told the Tribune in an interview last week. "Portland has gone to (adopt) Vision Zero in less than two years. It's remarkable."

Treat, 44, is Portland's vision behind Vision Zero, having brought the idea with her when she took the top job in July 2013.

She had just come from Chicago, where she served as managing deputy commissioner of the Chicago Department of Transportation.

There, she worked with Mayor Rahm Emanuel to roll out one of the first Vision Zero initiatives in a major U.S. city.

In fact, the city used a public campaign Treat thought was "brilliant," consisting of putting mannequins wearing Vision Zero T-shirts at locations that saw a lot of fatal crashes.

"People paid attention," she says, noting that it wasn't her idea. "It was really well received."

Washington, D.C., where Treat worked in transportation prior to Chicago, launched its Vision Zero last year, as did New York City and a growing number of U.S. cities.

Last month more than 1,000 people turned out to a Vision Zero rally in New York City, to call for more action and to pay tribute to those who died in recent traffic collisions.

Sweden to Stumptown

Sweden started the now-multinational initiative in 1997, with the idea being that through increased enforcement, engineering and education, government agencies must work together for greater traffic safety for all users.

"I see it as a public health issue," says Treat, who has four children, ages 10, 9, and 6-year-old twins.

While she walked and biked her young children to school in Chicago, she says, they had to cross a major arterial and "it was frightening."

When Treat arrived in Portland and settled into Northeast Portland's Sabin neighborhood, she found it shocking that the number of traffic fatalities in Portland was more than twice the number of homicides each year.

"I was really surprised people weren't outraged," she says. That data gave the Vision Zero concept "a new level of prominence."

Right away, Treat announced that implementing Vision Zero in Portland would be a top priority.

As she dug into the numbers, she found that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention puts a pricetag on traffic safety.

Crashes cost the city \$125 million per year in loss of work, responders, medical costs and treatment for victims' families.

Statewide, the figure is \$422 million each year.

“There are so many angles to come at this — economic, from the victims’ families, concern about traffic,” Treat says.

While her focus is on the big picture, Treat can’t help but be influenced by her own experiences.

She and her husband are walk and bike fanatics; Treat bikes to work every day, either downtown or to the PBOT maintenance yard on North Kerby Avenue, which she tries to be at once or twice a week.

She makes it a point for her kids to walk and bike to school at Sabin Elementary.

Last summer, however, her now-9-year-old son was hit by a car while riding his bike.

“It made me a lot more cautious,” Treat says. “He was in the right, in the crosswalk; the driver didn’t see him and slammed on the brakes, knocked him off and he flew under the car.” Her son was all right but it was “very traumatic,” Treat says. She sent him to a couple of bike camps to regain his confidence, and he’ll ride to school with friends this fall.

“When you’re with a group of people, you’re much more noticeable,” she says.

Lofty goals

Early on, PBOT posted language about Vision Zero on its website, and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance and other groups worked on parallel tracks to push it to the forefront.

It wasn’t until Mayor Charlie Hales convened a transportation safety meeting on June 2 — in response to a string of high-profile crashes — that activists, city officials and other stakeholders got together to talk about how to respond.

Hales, along with transportation Commissioner Steve Novick, emerged from the meeting as champions for Vision Zero, and advocates since then have been eager to hold them accountable.

More than plans, advocates want tangible action.

PBOT has been touting their progress: Winning authority from the state to use photo radar safety cameras in high-crash corridors, laying down new bike lanes, and installing Rapid Flash Beacons in East Portland.

PBOT also is working on hiring a consultant to help shape the Vision Zero plan.

Treat has been attracting her share of the public spotlight.

She’s been asked to speak at the national Vision Zero conference in New York City next January.

Last week she filmed a segment for “Portlandia,” playing a character in charge of a city bureau, but not the transportation bureau. She was “starstruck,” she says.

Treat also was featured on PBS NewsHour in a spot about how the drop in federal transportation funding is affecting local cities.

She took the crew to Southwest Barbur Boulevard, notoriously sidewalk-deficient, and spoke about the 300 miles of missing sidewalks in the city.

And last month she was part of a Portland delegation to Copenhagen to study their multimodal street infrastructure.

“I thought I was going to find their secret sauce,” she says of the Danish. “It’s not like that — they’re just like everybody else. But their biking is safe, fast and convenient,” thanks to their engineering and education efforts.

When it comes to raising awareness about Vision Zero, Treat says she wants to keep a positive message, and encourage all road users to be more vigilant.

She wants to expand the effort to include Multnomah County, the state and advocacy groups.

She's already begun an effort to look at data from the Portland Fire Bureau and see how it can be incorporated into a database for Vision Zero use.

"We want better, more comprehensive reporting on crashes," she says.

There have been cynics who've said the city is just setting itself up for failure by aiming for zero traffic deaths within 10 years.

Treat says that's the only way the audacious scope could be framed. "If you don't focus," she says, "you don't put intentionality behind the policies you work on."