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▶ Multi-cultural, high density district planned in SW Portland

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Multi-cultural, high density district planned in SW Portland

👤 Courtney Vaughn 📅 September 22 2021

The city's vision for the westside includes high density housing, transit focused development as part of the West Town Center Plan.



COURTESY PHOTO: PORTLAND PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION - Multnomah Station, an apartment complex on Southwest Capitol Highway, showcases the type of development within shopping and walking districts that Southwest Portland could see much more of in the future.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003715155973-0773.jpg>)A plan to transform Southwest Portland with more high-density housing and mixed-use development is inching closer to approval. With two September hearings for the West Portland Town Center Plan (<https://www.portland.gov/bps/wpdx-town-center>) held by Portland's Planning and Sustainability Commission, the commission aims to send the plan to City Council for approval in early 2022.

The plan is a transformative vision of growth around Southwest Portland, addressing everything from added transit lines, housing and commercial corridors. The planning area focuses on the intersection of Barbur Boulevard, the I-5 freeway and Capitol Highway—an area city planners have dubbed the area "the crossroads."

City officials say they're putting residents at the core of the plan.

"There's a very strong public health component to the plan, which many community members were valuable contributors to," Eden Dabbs of Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said. "This heightened focus on social determinants is a new approach for us â€" one that we're excited to realize the vision for."

The next public hearing is schedule for Sept. 28.

As reported by Pamplin Media Group last year, the plan has already hit bumps in the road. Last November, voters rejected a major Metro transportation funding package that would have helped pay for a MAX high speed rail line from Southwest Portland to Tigard and Tualatin. Transportation access and expanded routes are a key part of the Town Center Plan, but efforts are moving forward, with or without the promise of a MAX line.

"High capacity transit is still a central part of the plan - though it may come somewhat later when funding is secured," Ryan Curren with the planning bureau told The Connection last year. "TriMet and Metro are exploring other funding options."

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In a nutshell, the West Portland Town Center Plan aims to re-zone areas within the plan's boundaries, to allow for higher density and more affordable housing, new commercial corridors and transit-oriented development.

The draft plan's concepts include a development code aimed at attracting and retaining cultural diversity with a new multi-cultural subdistrict at the heart of the town center. The subdistrict would require affordable housing and small commercial retail space.

Three core areas define planning goals.

The north side of Barbur Boulevard up to Dolph Street is envisioned with new apartment complexes, like two-to-four-story multi-dwelling buildings that support nearby shopping hubs.

Draft planning documents note the growth concept for the area hopes to transform the single-dwelling area severely lacking in pedestrian and stormwater infrastructure into walkable neighborhoods with multi-dwelling buildings.

Along central Barbur Boulevard, city planners envision a "multi-cultural transit-oriented district with two pedestrian-oriented commercial nodes." Future developments around the Barbur Transit Center would include mixed-use commercial and residential development, but city planners recognize that the Barbur area may "take time to realize and may evolve as funding and development partners are secured."

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South and east from Barbur, near Jackson Middle School, Islamic School of Portland, Capitol Hill Library and Markham Elementary School, the plan zeroes in on the Muslim community and anti-displacement efforts.

"A primary goal of this Plan's growth concept is to prevent the displacement of this community while making improvements to the neighborhood that raise the quality of life for residents and strengthen the multi-cultural identity of the area," the plan document states.

Like any major overhaul, long-range plan, there will be growing pains.

The city has already heard from neighborhood associations and residents concerned about how the plans will affect existing properties.

"I didn't receive any notice that the planning of this project ... until August of this year, when I got the notice that my property was subject to being rezoned," David Gunn said during a Sept. 14 public hearing of the Planning and Sustainability Commission. "I noticed that affordable housing was mentioned in the plan, but in past experience, I see little evidence of it actually occurring in developments around the city."

Gunn said he worries that if he stays in his home, the surrounding property could be developed into two- or three-story apartment buildings, blocking out sunlight and privacy for his home. Gunn said he supports the plan and understands the necessity for it, but worries developers will be given "free reign to do whatever it is they want."

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"This area is where I live, work and also recreate," Nuhamin Eiden told the commission. Eiden served on the Southwest Corridor Equity Coalition, which had an integral role in the plan's development.

"It's one of the most racially and culturally diverse places in Southwest Portland," Eiden said. "Thousands of our neighbors are paying thousands in housing costs, leaving very little leftover for food, healthcare and other essential needs."

She said the apartments near Markham Elementary are some of the last remaining affordable apartments in the city.

"Our communities need bold and visionary investments that prioritize equitable development and center impacted communities."

The planning bureau expects to hold additional work sessions on the plan in October and November.



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