



South Park Blocks Master Plan

Recommended Draft

Frequently Asked Questions - May 2021

The South Park Blocks Master Plan Recommended Draft provides a comprehensive vision to sustain and enhance the park for future generations. There has not previously been an integrated plan or design to guide the decisions about all twelve South Park Blocks. Instead the park has changed over time and has been shaped incrementally by partial renovations, changes in nearby land uses and cultural understanding. A vibrant vision for the South Park Blocks is now taking shape.

Since April 2019, the planning process has included community engagement throughout for visioning, concept development, concept review, and draft preferred design review. A Community Advisory Committee was established for the project to represent a diversity of expertise, skills, backgrounds, and viewpoints. Community events and outreach were held at major project milestones. The South Park Blocks Master Planning process was funded by a public benefit contribution from a nearby development project. Please visit the project webpage at www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/spb for more details.

1. What is the Recommended Draft of the South Park Blocks Master Plan and why is it needed?

The South Park Blocks Master Plan Recommended Draft provides a comprehensive vision to sustain and enhance the park for future generations. The plan is a high-level, conceptual document to guide more detailed design and construction that will happen when future funding becomes available and system-wide priorities support park improvements. Additional community engagement will be part of these more detailed processes.

There has not previously been a master plan or design created to guide the decisions about all twelve South Park Blocks. Instead the park has changed over time and has been shaped incrementally by partial renovations and changes in nearby land uses and cultural understanding.

The planning process has provided an opportunity to learn about the South Park Blocks' history and existing features, confront new challenges and opportunities, and combine these learnings with public and stakeholder input to enhance the South Park Blocks for current and future needs.



2. What has changed since the Draft Preferred Design?

Community input and technical feedback received throughout the planning process and most recently on the Draft Preferred Design has guided revisions. This valuable guidance has helped produce the Recommended Draft of a Master Plan for the South Park Blocks. Specific refinements since the Draft Preferred Design include:

Throughout all 12 blocks:

- Additional content to improve inclusion of Indigenous history and cultural values in plan content and design recommendations;
- Emphasis on pedestrian priority spaces through recommendations and future considerations for design details;
- Addition of more tree planting locations where possible given tree spacing recommendations to promote a healthy tree canopy into the future; and,
- Reduction in new park features to simplify design.

University District:

- Shifting of evergreen planting locations to promote clear views through the park, space for sunlight, and balance in the overall planting design;
- Emphasis on future partnerships with Native American Student and Community Center (NASCC) and Indigenous Nations Studies Program for native species selection and planting design as well as other aspects of implementation;
- Refinements to Block 2 to allow more space for park users on benches and additional content to explain flexibility of and recommendations for Green Loop alignment; and,
- Refinements to Block 4 conceptual design and future considerations, including deletion of removeable canopy.

Cultural District:

- Removal of central social seating In Block 7 to simplify design and give more space for the Shadow of the Elm memorial and an additional tree planting location;
- Refinement of social seating examples and locations with a focus on emphasizing bench designs that promote social interaction and use of high-quality materials reflective of the Cultural District;
- Reduction in interactive art features proposed for Block 8 to simplify design and further promote flexible space;
- Highlight future opportunity to commemorate history of central row of trees in Block 8.
- Benches oriented towards recommended Madison Street Plaza to naturally activate this new public space expanding and connecting the park;
- Long benches running north-south on Blocks 10 and 11 shortened to be more inclusive of people using wheelchairs and provide more flexible space for community uses;



- Identification of central public art opportunities for Blocks 10 and 11 where the Lincoln and Roosevelt Statues once stood. Future processes centered around Black and Indigenous voices as well as other communities of color will identify potential replacement and new public art representing more diverse cultural identities and histories;
- For the Green Loop concept that maintains a lane of moving car traffic, reduction in the width of the Green Loop shared use path to 12 feet to account for inconsistencies in the street width of Park Avenue West; and,
- Appendix B overview of the Connected Cultural District concept for the Green Loop that emerged from the planning process as an appealing alternative reducing the presence of cars, allowing more space for various non-vehicular modes, and better connecting the park to surrounding Cultural Institutions.

3. How will the park master plan and future implementation respect the historic character of the park?

Portland Parks & Recreation recognizes and respects the historic importance of the South Park Blocks. The consultant team for this project has expertise in historic cultural landscapes and performed initial research and documentation of character-defining features for the [Existing Conditions, Issues, and Opportunities Report](#). Following European settlement, the South Park Blocks were conceived, designed, and developed over many decades. They have been shaped and changed over time, so a rehabilitation approach is most appropriate. Identified character-defining features include the park's spatial organization of linked gathering areas with focal points, the linear arrangement of trees, the linear, promenade-style pathways, and the use of planting beds and turf areas to reinforce this linear movement.

In accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation, the South Park Blocks Master Plan proposals aim to highlight these resources and guide new park development to be compatible, yet distinct from what is historic. The approaches included in the master plan would retain recognizable characteristics of the original and existing design as the future park improvements are designed and implemented. The master plan also highlights the historic and continued contributions to the land Indigenous groups have made since time immemorial.

The [ORS 358.653 compliance process](#) will be engaged when specific, tangible implementation work is funded and goes through more detailed design and construction, as per the stated direction of the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). This process facilitates compliance of projects for historic resources that are either eligible for



listing or already listed in the National Register of Historic Places. During the compliance process, SHPO will review and consider options to minimize adverse effects to the park. Oregon SHPO, the City's Historic Program Manager, and the expert consultant team agree that the master plan can coexist with the 358.653 compliance process and a future listing of the South Park Blocks on the National Register of Historic Places.

4. What is a cultural landscape and what makes preserving them different than buildings?

Cultural landscapes are historically significant places that show evidence of human interaction with the physical environment. Their authenticity is measured by historical integrity, or the presence and condition of physical characteristics that remain from the historic period.¹ The South Park Blocks are considered a cultural landscape. Landscapes are living and changing; therefore, protection and management of ecological, historic, and cultural resources must be considered together.

For example, trees in the South Park Blocks are important historic, cultural, and ecological resources. Preserving the continuous tree canopy as a historic feature requires new approaches that respond to changing growing conditions and promote tree health into the future. The South Park Blocks Master Plan balances these historic, cultural, and ecological considerations.

Additionally, cultural Landscapes have a history reflective of many different cultures, perspectives, and experiences. Our beloved public spaces present a shared responsibility to acknowledge and attend to these diverse realities. The South Park Blocks Master Plan Recommended Draft provides a vision that speaks to our shared cultural history and balances current needs with character-defining park features.

5. What about the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the South Park Blocks?

The National Register of Historic Places nomination for the park initiated by the Downtown Neighborhood Association was reviewed by the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission at their February 8, 2021 hearing. After reviewing the nomination and considering public testimony, the Historic Landmarks Commissioners and City Council sent a letter to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office recommending against nominating the South Park Blocks until substantive revisions to the current nomination are made, including applying a cultural landscapes lens and representing more diverse stories and experiences. City staff are pursuing cultural landscapes and Indigenous expertise to lead revisions and produce a National Register nomination that is accurate, complete, and inclusive. Portland Parks &

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/articles/cultural-landscapes-101.htm>



Recreation is moving forward with a South Park Blocks Master Plan Recommended Draft that works towards balancing requested and necessary changes with historic considerations, while honoring our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and other policy priorities through planning and implementation.

6. Why is a Tree Succession Strategy needed and what does it do?

The Central City 2035 Plan includes an action item to, *“Develop a strategy for inventorying, removing, and replacing trees in the South Park Blocks to eliminate safety hazards while maintaining or enhancing tree canopy coverage and habitat.”*

A certified arborist was part of the consultant team and performed a tree inventory and analysis at the outset of the planning process. She found that newly planted trees are struggling to establish under the shady canopy of the mature trees and recommended planting fewer trees over time for better canopy health and structural development.

The Tree Succession Strategy in the Recommended Draft does not propose proactive removal and instead provides a long-term guide for replacing trees when they naturally reach the end of their life spans. It balances goals for improving the growing conditions and resiliency of the urban forest while maintaining an overlapping canopy and the character and form of large stature elm trees. More detailed design and construction practices will work towards preventing unnecessary removal from park improvements and optimizing planting locations.

Evergreen trees are recommended in the University District due to their excellent stormwater retention capacity, ability to absorb carbon dioxide, and biodiversity value. Evergreen and other native trees like Oregon White Oak are naturally occurring to the Portland landscape and reflect Indigenous cultural values and traditions.

7. What is the Green Loop and why does the South Park Blocks Master Plan include it?

The Council-adopted Central City 2035 Plan Green Loop Concept Report outlines a vision for a linear park that connects key destinations in the Central City. The Green Loop is envisioned to align with the downtown park blocks, reflect park-like characteristics, and provide a slower-moving path for riders, striders, walkers, rollers and strollers of all ages and abilities to travel safely. City Council Resolution 37361 directed all City Bureaus and other public agencies to integrate Green Loop facilities into project planning, design, and construction.

The concepts for the Green Loop shown in the South Park Blocks Master Plan Recommended Draft are located on currently paved area and require no tree removals. The



Green Loop is recommended to eventually cross one park block between SW College Street and Hall Streets where there is an existing pathway. Green Loop users are expected to naturally want to take this diagonal pathway, so it is important to design to support it happening safely. The Green Loop is recommended to continue on the existing shared use pathway west of the park in the University District.

In the Cultural District, the South Park Blocks Green Loop concepts focus on expanding the park experience into the street. The concept in the park master plan expands the five-foot pedestrian sidewalk serving parked cars into the current street parking space to become a 12-foot wide shared use path. The Connected Cultural District Concept that emerged through the planning process selectively eliminates regular moving traffic to expand the park further and give more space to non-vehicular modes. This idea is presented in an appendix to the plan to give City Council an opportunity to tell staff whether they want us to explore it further. All Green Loop concepts will be subject to more detailed design consideration and community discussion.

8. Why is some of my input reflected in the Recommended Draft, but not all of it?

Portland Parks & Recreation endeavors to have community-supported plans for our public park and recreation spaces, but Portland is a growing and changing community with diverse opinions and needs. Community input is collected from a variety of sources and balanced with relevant laws; regulations and policies; all project goals; technical, maintenance, and operation requirements; design guidance; and the needs of future generations. Many tradeoffs must be considered, and hard decisions made that may not fully reflect all community member's desires. Park master plans provide a high-level vision and directions with future opportunities for continued community discussion about details and tradeoffs at implementation phases.

9. What are next steps? When will the plan be implemented?

Park master plans provide a comprehensive vision to guide future park improvements. They are not official land use documents. The Recommended Draft Plan will be presented to City Council for acceptance by Council Resolution. Approval of the conceptual park master plan does not immediately cause changes on the ground in the park. Future changes will feature further community engagement and be subject to required land use or permitting processes, and State required historic compliance.

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Foundation, contributed by Walter C. Bowen, CEO of BPM Real Estate Group to satisfy the approval conditions set by the Portland Design Commission for the Broadway Tower project. The BPM Real Estate Group made a commitment to build affordable housing and provide funding for a South Park Blocks Master Plan and to fund improvements on the specific park block nearest their affordable housing development between SW Columbia and SW Clay Streets. Implementation of a project on this park block will occur first. Although delivery of public benefit contributions was originally expected in 2020, the Broadway Tower owner negotiated a two-year extension with the Bureau of Development Services.

Implementation of the remaining projects recommended for the park will be placed on the Portland Parks & Recreation Capital Improvement List and will move forward for detailed design and construction as funding becomes available. Additional community engagement will be a key part of these detailed design and construction projects in the South Park Blocks.