This is an excerpt from:

Breakthroughs

RE-CREATING THE AMERICAN CITY

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and
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View full book

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CHAPTER 2

Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan: Rebirth of the Public City

There is a rare magnificence to Portland's setting in the Northwest rain forest of America. Sited at the head of the lush green valley of the Willamette River, just before it reaches its confluence with the mighty Columbia, the Oregon city is all but surrounded by mountains. To the west rises the Coastal range and to the east the Cascades. On a clear day, Portlanders have a stunning view of Mount Hood, rising serene into the heavens. Oftentimes mist settles in a band below Hood's summit, leaving the mountain's great white peak floating, as it were, on the horizon.

Traditionally, Portland was viewed as a prim, proper city, true to the New England roots of its first settlers. It was from its early years a town of independent farmers, loggers, and seamen, along with captains of business and industry, but Portland never took on the character of a San Francisco with its Gold Rush or a Seattle with its Klondike adventurers and bitter labor wars. Asians and blacks joined Portland's New Englanders, but contentious ethnic politics never took root here. Oregon became a kind of pilot station for early-twentieth-century Progressive-era governmental reform, and as environmentalism became a recognized national value, Portland was ready to embrace and even embody it.

There are, in fact, few cities so at home with their natural world. Trees grace almost every Portland street; greenery adorns most buildings. There are ten parks in downtown Portland alone. The city has some 7,000 square miles of parkland, including wilderness areas and wildlife sanctuaries and the trails of a forty-mile loop that was proposed back in 1903 by the famed park planner brothers, John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

Along the loop, all within the city's borders, one can find nature refuges teeming with more than 140 species of birds, from belted kingfishers to song sparrows to red-shouldered hawks to black-billed magpies. Portland's official bird is the great blue heron. Two heron rookeries are within the city. With their long plumes and blue-gray plumage, the adult herons add special excitement as they soar over the Willamette and past downtown skyscrapers.

Vegetation flourishes in the moist coastal climate zone, and Portland, for each June since 1909, has celebrated its now famous Rose Festival. The city's taste for naturalness extends to its public places: consider "Ira's Fountain" (after civic leader Ira C. Keller), a place that a wandering *New Yorker* correspondent chose to call "neither entirely a park, nor merely a fountain." It consists of a series of man-made "waterfalls" in which 13,000 gallons a minute cascade over rocklike cliffs into a sunken pool. There are terraced steps and platforms to draw the pedestrian even behind the falls. Great trees overlook the scene. This park, one of two San Francisco architect Lawrence Halprin executed in downtown Portland, was described by the *New York Times'* Ada Louise Huxtable as "one of the most important urban spaces since the Renaissance." Whatever its national accolades, it is most surely one other thing: a shared delight of Portlanders of all ages and backgrounds.

Neither "Ira's Fountain" nor the Rose Festival nor the forty-mile loop nor Portland's hospitality to blue herons has any official link to Portland's receipt of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. The award went officially for the city's 1972 Downtown Plan, the process by which Portland gathered broad community consensus and set its vision for two decades of remarkable inner-city planning and progress. Portland's civic culture, with its traditions of quiet respect between players on the urban scene, of openness to experimentation and planning, of outdoor naturalness, and a sense of conserving the best of physical and social environments alike, would prove to be fertile soil in which the Downtown Plan could grow and succeed.

The 1972 Downtown Plan had its roots in crisis: deep concern that Portland was losing its traditional commercial and residential markets to fast-growing suburbs and that it might cease to be the economic, cultural, and social center of its region. In the words of Gregory Baldwin, an urban planner/designer and major player in Portland developments of the past two decades:

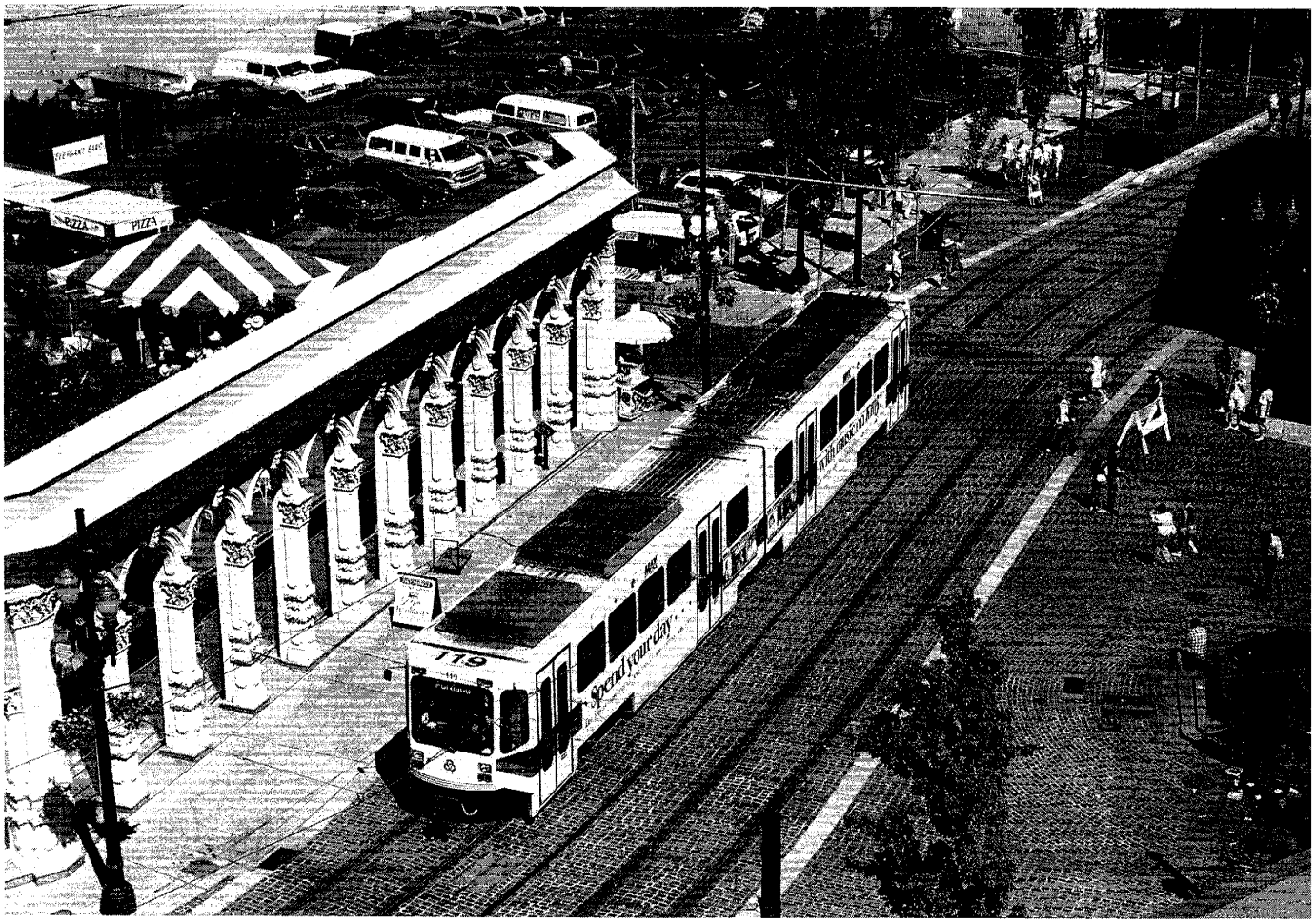
> The specific object was to create an urban community sufficiently attractive as a place to encourage citizens and activities in the immediate region to concentrate their energies and resources in the downtown. [The goal] was simply to make downtown Portland the best place to be.

Numerous achievements are claimed for the plan, and they are hard to dismiss:

- The $500 million of public investment made between 1972 and 1986 leveraged $1.7 billion of private investment in downtown Portland.
- Downtown employment grew by 30,000 and total assessed property value increased 382 percent.
- The downtown retail district increased its penetration of the regional retail market from 7 percent to more than 30 percent of dollar volume sales—the diametric opposite of the trends almost everywhere else in America.
- A handsome expanse of green waterfront park, running from the edge of downtown buildings to the shores of the Willamette, replaced an ugly riverside expressway that had isolated the river from the city.
- To meet the plan goals of increased public access to downtown, historic transit advances were made. A bus transit mall, completed in 1978, opened along Fifth and Sixth avenues, serving the city's high-density spine. Then, in September 1986, came the first line in a regional light rail system, passing through downtown and extending to Gresham, fifteen miles to the east. Cumulative results: transit trips into downtown increased from 79,000 daily in 1975 to 128,000 daily in 1985. Transit's share of commuter trips into downtown went up from 28 percent to 52 percent.
- Radically revised planning guidelines required a "terracing" of building heights from the center of downtown to the river. To stop the forbidding blank walls of new buildings and their dehumanizing effect on the streetscape, new structures were required to have shops or cafés at street level. Historic preservation was advanced. A gregarious, intensely social architecture and form of city planning emerged. The friendlier new urban face was enhanced by excellence in new streetscape and building design plus an imaginative, sometimes whimsical outpouring of public art on the streets of the city.
- The downtown is lively again at night and so popular that the new light rail system initially carried more passengers into the city on Saturdays than on weekdays.

Catalysts for Change

The prospects for downtown Portland were not altogether bright toward the end of the 1960s and at the start of the 1970s. There had been spurts of fresh construction—a Hilton Hotel twenty-three



Bucking the national trend, downtown Portland increased its retail market share with the help of a regional light rail system opened in 1986.
(Photograph courtesy of the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon)

stories high, a Georgia Pacific structure soaring 375 feet, a 536-foot bank building ominously described by its architect's press agent as rising "40 stories into the air, a towering challenge to Mt. Hood." However, critics were noting that virtually all these megastructures, with their blank walls and dull corporate entrances, lacked sophistication and created such fantastic parking demand that stretches of the city were being turned over to parking lots and garages. At the same time, there were serious concerns about air pollution along the Willamette corridor.

Retailers were worried that a major chunk of their business was being lost to the Lloyd Center, the city's first major shopping mall, about a mile from downtown on the east side of the Willamette. Shoppers were getting weary of fighting downtown parking problems. The number of downtown housing units plummeted from 28,000 in 1950 to 11,000 in 1972. People freely talked about the center city as "a wreck." "We're definitely under the gun here. Many downtown blocks have become ugly parking lots or disused old buildings," a department store executive told a visiting reporter

from Seattle (David Brewster, "Sweeping Downtown Plan Unites Portland," *Argus,* March 3, 1972).

Political discontent was building, too. Terry Shrunk, a decent but not terribly imaginative man, had been mayor for more than a decade. There had been little turnover among the five elected "commissioners" who doubled as city council members and executives of specific departments of the city government. In 1969, a young legal aid service attorney, Neil Goldschmidt, told us he considered Portland's entire city government old and out of touch with real problems (interview with Neal R. Peirce, July 2, 1969). There was no substantive effort, he complained, to "humanize" redevelopment plans or stem an alarming decline of public transit caused by suburban commuters' indifference to the center city.

By 1970, however, the chain of longevity among Portland's commissioners was broken as death and retirement opened the way for the election of three aggressive young commissioners—Goldschmidt among them. In 1972, he swept to election as mayor and moved immediately to elevate both professional city planning and neighborhood voices to a much more prominent role than they had ever before enjoyed. He shifted the focus—but exploited the powers—of the Portland Development Commission, created by Mayor Shrunk in the late 1950s, to push forward aggressive urban renewal projects.

It was a classic case of conflict between "old" and "new" forms of reviving troubled cities. Mayor Shrunk and the people he put in charge of the Downtown Commission represented the strong pro-development voices of the time—business interests that proved themselves quite ready, in the name of progress, to bulldoze and "renew" marginal neighborhoods on the fringe of downtown. They also tended to be strong backers of continued superroad construction.

Goldschmidt, by contrast, worried about urban renewal projects that "devastated the inner city." He developed a strategy to wed downtown promotion, protection of neighborhoods, and the advancement of public transit rather than superhighways. As Portland State University Professor Carl Abbot would later observe:

> Goldschmidt shared the ideas about the value of density and variety in healthy neighborhoods that Jane Jacobs articulated in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* He hoped to use improved public transit not only to reduce air pollution along the Willamette corridor but also to serve well-preserved everyday neighborhoods, and to focus activity on the downtown. A vital business center would protect property values in surrounding districts and increase their attractiveness for residential investment. Neighborhood planning would focus on housing rehabilitation and

on visible amenities to restore confidence in older residential areas and make them competitive with the suburbs.

(In *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.)

It would prove to be a brilliant political strategy, a vital backdrop to the 1972 Downtown Plan, but the plan itself was not originated by Goldschmidt. Indeed, most of the critical events preceded his election. Of these, the most critical had to do with a parking garage.

For two decades, Meier and Frank, one of downtown Portland's major retail anchors, had owned a two-story parking garage in the block diagonally across from their store. The structure, operated by Union Oil, was painted gold and blue and ranked among the Northwest's ugliest urban structures. Then, in 1971, a Tacoma, Washington, developer approached Meier and Frank suggesting construction of a twelve-story parking structure on the site. The department store executives, anxious to kick their way out of sales doldrums, thought it was a great idea. (Explanation of one of the civic leaders of the era: "All retailers want parking within one block of the hosiery counter—that's their conception of how far a woman will walk.") Meier and Frank went public with the new garage proposal, seeking city approval, and all hell broke loose.

The problem was that the site, the block running between Sixth and Broadway, Morrison and Yamhill, was not just any old downtown block. The parcel was purchased in 1849 by shoemaker Elijah Hill for $24 and a pair of boots. In 1858, it became the site of the first public school in Oregon. In 1883, the Northern Pacific Terminal Company purchased the block for $75,000 as the site for a new hotel. The Portland Hotel, a $1 million Victorian extravagance designed by Stanford White, opened in 1891. For sixty years, its verandas, ballrooms, and restaurants would be the center of Portland's downtown life. During the hotel's glory days, virtually every president of the United States stayed there once.

In 1951, though, succumbing to the so-called business wisdom of the day, the grand old hotel was razed and replaced by the two-story parking garage. Loss of the hotel generated public outrage. People began to talk of reclaiming the block as a public square. Thus, when Meier and Frank came forward with its idea of a twelve-story parking skyscraper, citizen reaction was instant—and negative. The city's planning commission found citizens carrying antigarage signs at its hearing. The city council decided the political price was too high, and the garage was a dead letter.

Rebuffed on the garage, Meier and Frank and its business

friends approached Mayor Shrunk to ask for a comprehensive parking plan for the downtown, but as they got into dialogue with the professionals at city hall, they soon learned the problems of the downtown's future ranged far more broadly than where cars were to be parked.

Some elements of Portland business were well primed for a debate on downtown issues. With Richard Ivey of the engineering/urban planning firm of CH2M playing a key role, the idea of a "Downtown Plan" was advanced and a committee of some twelve top business leaders formed into a so-called Portland Improvement Committee. The group, in short order, tapped the business chieftains for $110,000 for a study. (The critical fund-raising meeting was held at the First National Bank boardroom, with a key executive from Georgia Pacific going around the table extracting money from the assembled executives. "Some didn't know why they were there; they found out in a hurry," Ivey recalls.)

The city and business group recruited Robert Baldwin, the widely admired planner for Multnomah County, to head the effort, and got Rod O'Hiser, one of the city's senior planners, along with Carl Buttke, another transportation planning consultant, to work with the CH2M consulting team. The velocity of this effort and its close ties to city hall raised concern in some quarters, however. A number of vocal citizens, including civically concerned architects and neighborhood activists, expressed alarm about business interests' dominant role. They worried that major planning for the city's future might go forward with minimal public involvement.

In response to those concerns, Mayor Shrunk—at Baldwin's urging—decided to appoint a broadly based citizens committee. As its chair, he designated Dean Gisvold, a young lawyer who just happened to be a supporter of the mayor's sometimes rival—liberal city commissioner Neil Goldschmidt.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), which then took form, was a far cry from your standard blue-ribbon committee to address some city problem. Among its seventeen members were representatives from the general public, from business, and from environmental and arts groups. It divided itself up into subcommittees on such topics as transportation and parking, housing, retailing, and the future of the city's waterfront—and then let any citizen of Portland join any one of those subcommittees. Gisvold recalls:

> The first thing we did was set up a range of meetings, downtown and in the neighborhoods, to see what people would like the downtown to be like. We went to Southwest, to Northeast Portland, all over the city, with at least one meeting in every neighborhood. All our meetings were well publicized in advance. We got *The Oregonian* to run a questionnaire we

devised. We held six meetings downtown for workers there too. We talked to 1,000 or more people. We maintained close communication with a proliferation of groups that sprang up in response to the planning process, such as Citizens for a Car-free Inner City, Save the Forecourt Fountain, and a group promoting electric transit. As a result of this dynamic grassroots process, a community's attention was focused on a fading downtown, and a commitment made to revitalizing it. It seemed that everyone was interested and excited, including the media.

Over the course of fourteen months of intensive activity, the CAC worked closely with the professional planning team to frame the city's Downtown Plan goals and guidelines. A project office was opened downtown, a kind of "neutral turf" neither the territory of city hall or the business interests. "It was a nice ground-floor space downtown with a tree coming out of a pot and through the roof," Ivey remembers. "People could come in and were welcomed to bring in their ideas."

Through this highly collaborative process, with every camp from the major businesses to city hall to architects and neighborhood voices intimately involved, a far-ranging plan evolved. The process was so inclusive that virtually every group could claim some part of the authorship. In contrast to traditional, highly prescriptive master plans, the initial document was basic and "doable," not highly detailed. In fact, such basic longer term issues as light rail were not addressed at all because they did not seem reachable during the early stages of plan development.

The plan focused less on specific solutions than general guidelines for approaching each issue area. It went through a seven-month approval process. First the City Planning Commission worked it over, and then, just before Goldschmidt became mayor in 1972, the city council approved the plan with remarkably little dissent. The council members were in fact relieved to receive a plan on which the major players had already reached such broad consensus.

Accessing Downtown

Portland during the late 1960s and late 1970s was experiencing grave air pollution problems—indeed, its air was so dirty it violated federal standards one of every three days. It was becoming overwhelmingly clear that any automobile-first solution to downtown Portland's access problems would be gravely flawed.

Yet any approach centered on *restricting* access to the downtown would have encountered near-frantic opposition from business and its allies. Public transit thus emerged as the compellingly logical

alternative. The Downtown Plan came down resoundingly in its favor and for the restriction of single-person auto use.

Subsequently, a major contribution was made by a review panel headed by Betty Merten, a long-standing citizen activist working closely with such figures as Ron Buel, Goldschmidt's chief assistant. They were involved with STOP (Sensible Transportation Options for People), which was lobbying for transit and for the defeat of the Mount Hood Freeway. Building on the 1972 plan's recommendations, these activists were able to reconceptualize the problem from one of *parking* to one of *access*. They also exchanged the rhetoric of controlled growth (as a way to achieve cleaner air) to a focus on controlled means of access.

Two inefficient private bus firms had been providing transit to the city and its suburbs—a situation remedied in 1969 by the Oregon Legislature's creation of the public Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District. Tri-Met *did* improve downtown's bus service. Critical problems remained, though—chiefly, how to provide efficient bus service when private autos competed so vigorously for available road space. The answer that emerged was the transit mall, a major north-south couplet (Fifth and Sixth avenues) devoted almost exclusively to buses. (The city council visited Minneapolis, viewed the Nicollet Mall there, but decided ultimately for the two streets in the belief they would make a much more forceful statement for transit, as well as impacting twice the property that a single malled street would.)

As critical as the *whether* of a transit mall was the *how*. The eleven-block-long mall stretch was devoted primarily to bus use. Portlanders found themselves treated to widened sidewalks paved in handsome brick with granite curbs, fountains, benches, historical light standards, public art, and special glass and bronze bus shelters. Big sycamores and London Plane trees were selected to give a special Northwest feeling to the scene.

The transit mall's art was robust, depicting Northwest themes as common as rain and indigenous animals. Norman Taylor's Nordic nude, *Kvinneakt*, evoked particular notice. (*Kvinneakt* later won national notoriety when a poster was published showing a man, from behind, spreading open his raincoat in the statue's direction with the poster title "Expose Yourself to Art." The human posing in the poster, Bud Clark, was at the time proprietor of Portland's Goose Hollow Inn; he would later become mayor of Portland.) Roger Shiels, whose firm was retained by the city and Tri-Met to direct the mall's architectural/design/engineering components, recalls that procurement officers at UMTA (the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration) were extraordinarily nervous about letting some of

Along the eleven-block transit mall, Portlanders are treated to wide sidewalks of handsome brick. Sycamores and London Planes add the Northwest touch. *(Photograph courtesy of the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon)*

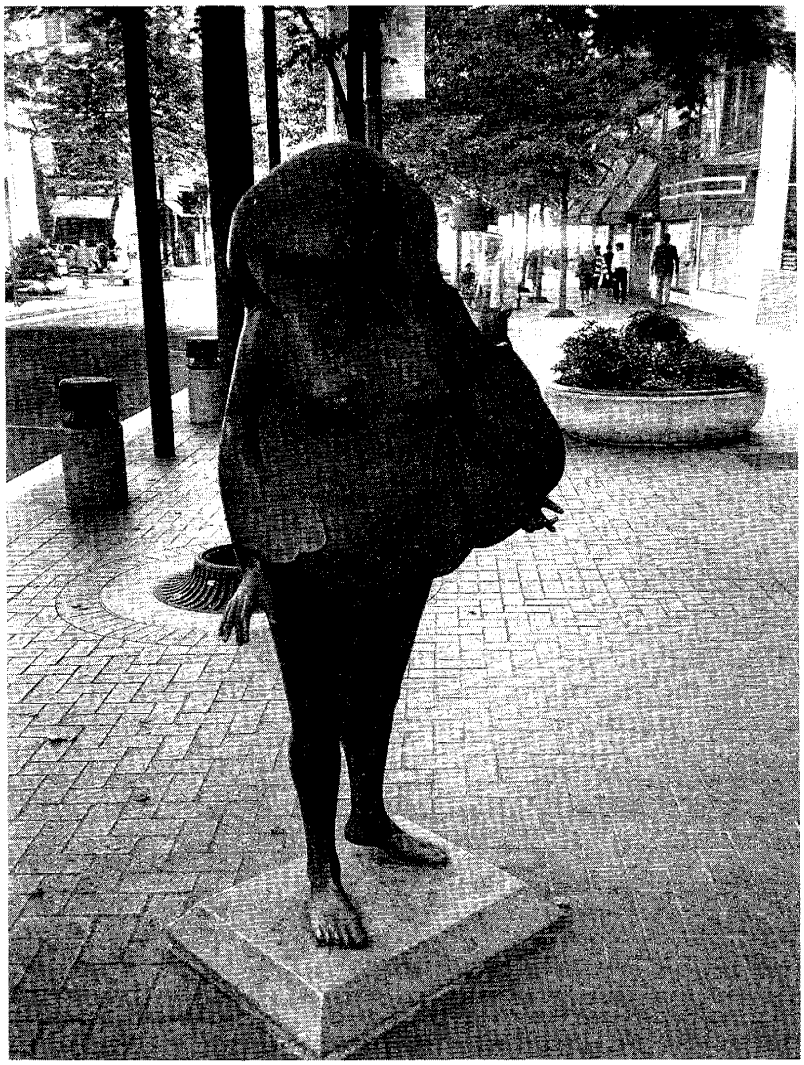
the federal grant monies go for the art on the Portland mall. "They agonized for months over it. I finally went back to Washington and said I'll stay here until you approve it. As it turned out, I only had to wait three or four days."

UMTA paid, in fact, 80 percent of the Portland transit mall's $15 million costs. For its money, the federal agency got not only excellent design but some notable innovations in mass transit. The mall emerged with the world's first closed-circuit television system to provide riders at each of the thirty-one stops with around-the-clock arrival and departure information plus route information to any part of the three-county Tri-Met service area. A second television system, at eight locations on the mall, permitted riders to punch a particular route number and see locations and times of buses along the route. A third part of the information system provided a series of color-coded photographs to identify the seven geographic areas covered by Tri-Met.

There was a degree of political risk associated with the mall: for two years, right up to his 1976 reelection campaign, Goldschmidt had to explain a torn-up downtown. (He was reelected easily any-

way.) Nor did the mall's physical plan work out entirely smoothly. As Shiels acknowledged a decade after the opening: "Some of the ceramic pieces had to be taken away. With the very heavy use, the whole project now needs restoration. Buses have incredible wheel loads and beat up the street badly. Granite has had its problems. Design-wise, it's been a very controversial project."

Public acceptance of the mall, however, was high at the start and remained that way. With the addition of the light rail connection in 1986, downtown transit ridership achieved a cumulative *50 percent increase* over fifteen years. By one estimate, if those downtown trips had not been served by transit, nine forty-story garages would have been needed to accommodate an equal number of trips. As it was, the total number of downtown parking spots scarcely changed.



Norman Taylor's Nordic nude,* Kvinneakt, *evokes particular notice. Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration funds helped bring art to the mall.
(Photograph courtesy of Rodney O'Hiser, Portland, Oregon)

Though the 1972 plan did not specifically mention light rail, the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) system was a logical outgrowth—and, needless to say, a key Goldschmidt project. Its roots lay in controversy over the proposed eastside Mount Hood Freeway (named for its view, not its destination). Funded with interstate highway monies, the road would have benefited suburban commuters while eliminating 1 percent of Portland's housing stock and diverting substantial traffic to neighborhood streets.

Predictably enough, the Mount Hood Freeway proposal gave birth to a strong Portland antifreeway revolt. Goldschmidt took up the fight against the road as soon as he became mayor and through a long series of maneuvers eventually won the support of Republican Governor Tom McCall, an avid conservationist, and, just as critical, the state's powerful Transportation Commission chairman, Glenn Jackson. The Mount Hood Freeway project was withdrawn, most of the scheduled federal matching funds ($85.7 million) diverted to the light rail system. (On repeated occasions, requisite political and budgetary support for the trade-in of the interstate segments for the light rail system appeared to be in serious jeopardy. One of the critical clearances was made by President Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Transportation just before Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency and put most major transit projects on ice. That cabinet secretary was none other than Neil Goldschmidt, who had left Portland in 1979 to accept the cabinet post for the last phase of the Carter administration. Later, Goldschmidt returned to Oregon, serving as governor from 1987 through 1990.)

The fifteen miles of the MAX system were planned to connect downtown Portland with the suburban city of Gresham, fifteen miles to the east. For downtown, the decision was made to put MAX's tracks at street level. Like the transit mall, brick sidewalks, trees, attractive street furniture, fountains, and art were included, but the decoration was more muted. Most of the "stations" were simple curbside stops, marked by a series of coordinated brick pavers. (The cobblestones used, according to Shiels, were ships' ballast from times past.) Nothing more obtrusive than a dark stone block separated the transit loop from an adjacent vehicle lane, yet however "simple" the design approach, MAX gained instant and continued ridership support.

By the late 1980s, yet another Portland transit innovation was being planned: vintage trolleys to run at nonpeak hours on the light rail tracks. The trolleys, connecting the downtown shopping district with the new Oregon Convention Center and Lloyd Center on the opposite (east) side of the Willamette, underscored a growing Portland concern to connect, in tangible ways, the interests and activities

of both the west and east sides of Portland. The ritzier west side, with the downtown proper, most of Portland's vast parklands, and several handsome residential sections, had perennially seemed favored. The east side was the scene of more industry and a great polyglot of neighborhoods, ranging from poor black to wealthy white Protestant to a number of Catholic communities (including a flourishing beer-drinking pub culture). The city fathers' clear intent was to achieve more balance by awarding the east side such desirable facilities as a convention center, following a coliseum and federal office buildings sited there earlier.

The trolley project was the brainchild of a group of business leaders headed by Bill Naito, a remarkable Japanese-American and entrepreneur/civic leader whose role reminds one again of how it is people, not official programs and bureaucracies, that propel a city forward. Starting in the 1960s, Naito, sometimes with the assistance of his brother Sam, took the lead in repeated investments and innovations to make downtown Portland strong and resilient. He purchased and rehabilitated numerous buildings in the Skidmore/Old Town District, helping transform that downtown neighborhood from "skid row" to a community of restored nineteenth-century elegance with safe streets, fine shops, and some of Portland's best restaurants. While most of downtown was in the doldrums, Naito also swam against the tide to purchase the dilapidated 1920s vintage Rhodes Department Store on a key downtown corner. He removed the center sections of each floor to take advantage of the building's skylight, filled the building with small shops and restaurants, renamed the whole "The Galleria," and proclaimed it America's "first vertical atrium shopping center."

As if all that were not enough, Naito in the 1970s got control of a chunk of riverfront close by the center city, put in 302 units at his McCormick Pier Apartments, and popularized the idea of middle-class downtown living. He was also a chief backer of Art Quake—Portland's annual downtown outdoor festival; any important Portland civic board seemed to feature a Naito family member.

Every statistic seems to affirm that the increased access to Portland's downtown, the goal so fervidly sought by business leaders and the citizen planners of the early 1970s, has happened, that the system is working. Total downtown retail space has risen to five million square feet, including 120,000 in Naito's Galleria. Two new department stores have opened, including the much sought after Nordstrom chain. Construction began in the late 1980s on what boosters predicted would be the most important project in the history of downtown—Pioneer Place, a major four-block project, with a value set at more than $100 million, being developed by the na-

tionally known Rouse Company. The first phase was to include a 280,000-square-foot office tower, a 60,000-square-foot Saks Fifth Avenue department store, and 174,000 square feet of specialty retail.

Not every project has succeeded. The Yamhill Marketplace, a festival market financed in part with city and federal Urban Development Block Grant moneys, opened with much fanfare in 1982 but was in receivership by 1989. City officials hoped positive spillover from Pioneer Place's one hundred shops, opening nearby, would be enough to stem the red ink.

Pioneer Courthouse Square

It was a sure bet that the 1972 Downtown Plan would mirror Portlanders' opposition to anything even faintly resembling the parking high-rise that Meier and Frank had planned for the historic Sixth and Broadway site; and so it was. The plan endorsed open space development of the block, saying this should be Portland's "central space," dedicated neither to commerce nor governance. It set in motion the lengthy negotiations necessary for the city to purchase the block.

It would take years, though—another twelve, to be exact—for the ultimate solution, a grand public space known as Pioneer Courthouse Square, to emerge. Up to the end of the 1970s, attention focused on the city's new transit mall. Finally, in 1980, the Portland Development Commission announced an international design competition. No less than 162 design entries were received. The jury's ultimate choice was the proposal of an interdisciplinary team, headed by Portland architect Willard Martin, for a great brick plaza that people could get to easily from surrounding streets and buildings. It would be an intensely open, public space.

The concept of the piazza, the grand public space, is far more European than American, and it was an idea that did not, initially, sit well with downtown businesses. With all that exposure and lack of security, said many, all manner of undesirable "types" would be attracted to Portland and to its very heart. Architect Martin said the square would become the "living room for the city"; businesses feared the living room might be socially repelling. Frank Ivancie, a politician close to the business crowd, became Portland's mayor and in January 1981 declared Pioneer Square dead.

There followed yet another public outcry. A citizens' fund-raising committee, Friends of Pioneer Square, went to work to convince the city to keep the project moving. This proved a strong grass-roots

movement. The committee stumbled onto a gimmick that turned out to be a brilliant idea—selling personalized bricks at $15 a piece. Some two hundred volunteers were involved in selling bricks in person and on the phone and mailing share certificates. (No other city had tried this idea before; afterward, a number of cities, New Orleans included, would copy it.) The Friends group also launched a major gifts drive, "selling" such architectural features of the square as columns, drinking fountains, trees, trash receptacles, and grates. In all, some $1.5 million was raised. It was enough to convince city hall, which then began to commit public funds, commence construction, and appoint a nonprofit organization to manage and operate the public square. More individual bricks were sold—eventually more than 60,000.

Finally, on April 6, 1984, the 107th anniversary of the opening of the Portland Hotel, Pioneer Courthouse Square was officially dedicated. Residents streamed in to discover a vast central space—one that William H. Whyte, America's foremost advocate of sensitively planned center cities, pronounced to be the largest urban downtown space to have been built in the United States in many years. Yet, added Whyte,

> the important thing is not the size. Nothing is more unifying for a city than a lively central square where the city can come together. The creation of this new one sets an example that cities everywhere should heed.

Within the square were large and small amphitheaters, a bronze and glass pavilion with a "bistro-style" restaurant, an open-air market, a lectern for public addresses, a monumental colonnade, a dramatic fountain, and an enclosed lower level housing retail shops and Tri-Met's customer assistance office. From the past, there was a special reminder: the wrought-iron gate of the Portland Hotel, placed precisely where it had originally stood.

Supporters noted that Portland was bucking a prevalent urban development theme of the 1980s—cities allowing the erection, at their very hearts, of mammoth private structures walling off street life. (One example is architect John Portman's massive hotel complex on New York City's Times Square.) Instead, Portland seemed to be rededicating itself to its role as a street town. On its central square, the most valuable piece of real estate in Oregon, it had replaced a parking garage with a place for the city's people.

Whimsically, socially, politically, at lunch, and on grand occasions, Portlanders have since made Pioneer Courthouse Square their common space.

The square's yearly operational funding of some $200,000 also

reflected the public-private partnerships that have evolved in "post-Plan" Portland. Some 35 percent of the $200,000 came from city grants, 40 percent from rents paid by the restaurant, bookstore, and vendor carts on the site, 15 percent from commercial establishments in the nearby downtown, and 10 percent from special fund-raising events. Virtually none of this richness was explicit in the original plan; it was negotiated as the plan evolved over the years.

Waterfront Park and the Design Ethic

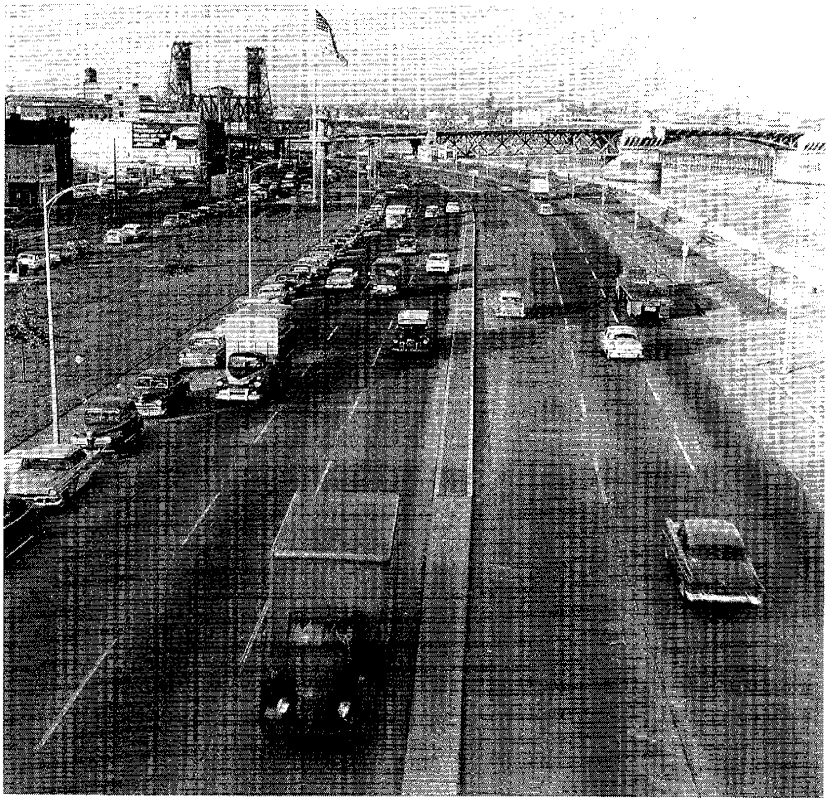
As critical as any element in the 1972 plan—and Portland's eventual image to the outside world—has been the expansive Tom McCall Waterfront Park. Bordering downtown, it was appropriately enough named for the governor who led two great battles—one for the cleanup of pollution along the entire Willamette River and a second for creating a park at this location.

A high-speed waterfront roadway had, as in too many cities, placed a roaring concrete artery between Portland and its waterfront. There were even proposals to broaden Harbor Drive, as it was called, to ten lanes.

Again, alert Portlanders objected and demanded this part of their city inheritance be returned to them in the form of a park. The 1972 plan took their side, and McCall, Oregon's governor from 1967 through 1974, happily signed onto the park crusade and pushed it over the qualms and objections of highway engineers who predicted monumental traffic tie-ups if Harbor Drive were closed down. As it turned out, alternative traffic routes were available and there was scarcely a ripple when Harbor Drive passed into oblivion.

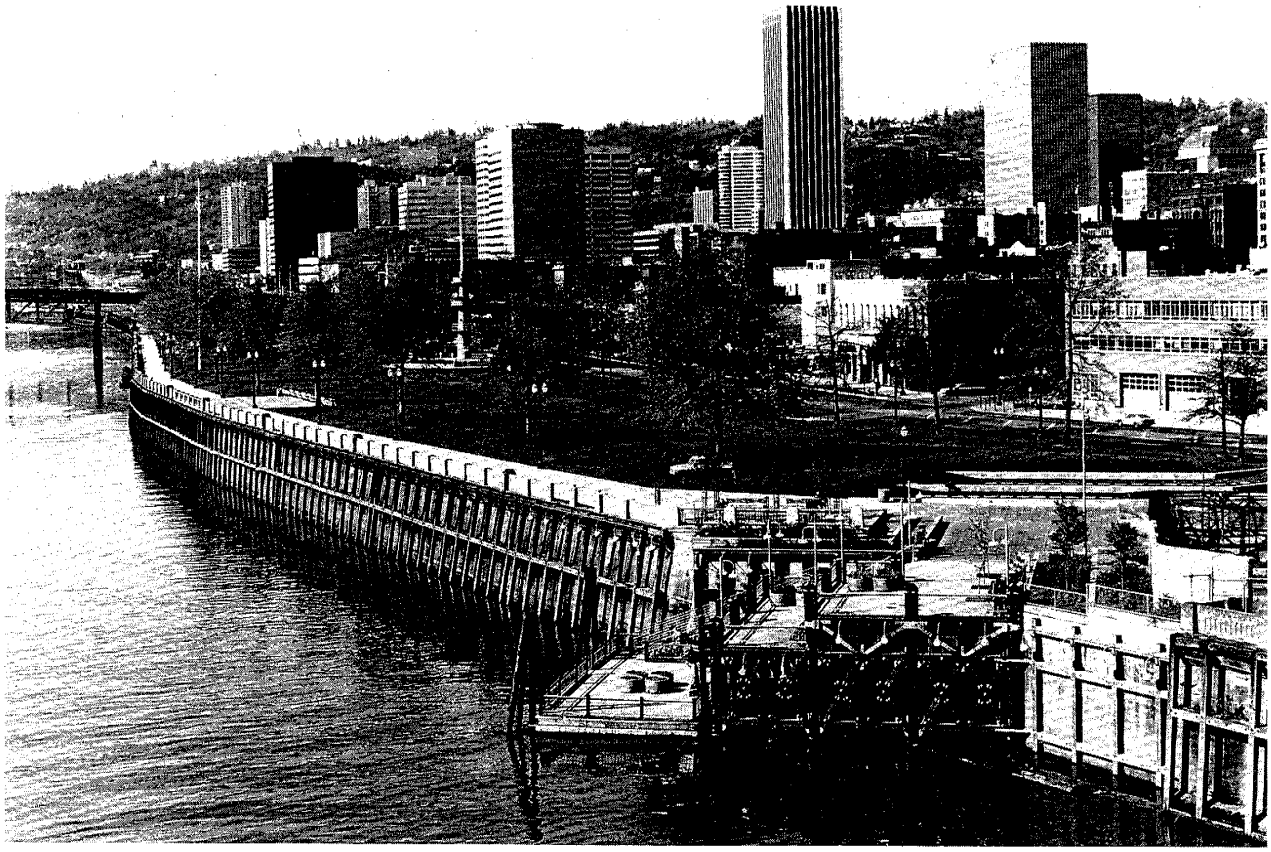
In its place, Portlanders got a handsome park, bordering the downtown's buildings on one side, the river on the other, with winding paths, fishing piers, and, in recent years, twinkling strings of white lights strung along the bridge superstructures. It is yet another of Portland's distinctive *people* places, as well as a site for a variety of city festivals.

A spirited competition emerged for the rights to develop a big chunk of waterfront land directly south of the park. On one side was the Naito brothers' development firm, on the other Cornerstone Development, a Seattle, Washington, firm owned 80 percent by Weyerhaeuser and run by Paul Schell, a former candidate for the mayor of Seattle. It was a happy circumstance in which the city was likely to do well, whichever side won. Cornerstone was eventually selected and built a handsome complex, "RiverPlace," which features a waterfront esplanade, including the Alexis Hotel, 190 up-



In 1958, getting access to the Portland waterfront was no picnic. *(Photograph courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society, O.H. 57776)*

When Harbor Drive was transformed into a park, monumental traffic tie-ups never materialized. *(Photograph courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society, O.H. 87453)*



scale condominum units, an athletic club, and a floating restaurant and two hundred-boat marina (constructed by the Portland Development Commission).

The waterfront's handsome appearance is no exception in today's downtown Portland. Looking for reasons, one could say that the appearance of quality, of cleanliness, and of orderliness stems from controls imposed by the city's official Design Review process. (Chief among these are the bans on forbidding blank walls and the carefully negotiated rules on stepped height limitations as the city slopes down toward the river.) However, there is so much else. The city's plethora of fountains and greenery adds to the pleasant image. The public art adds a quality of sheer delight—you can touch the beaver, rub the seals' noses, play with the fountains. (The public art is not so esoteric as to require a college education to appreciate what one is seeing—all the pieces can, in fact, be read at several levels.)

Historic preservation, grievously ignored through the 1960s when many valuable buildings were lost, now flourishes in Portland

Rubbing a seal's nose is an irresistible tradition. Much of the transit mall's art depicts Northwest themes. *(Photograph courtesy of Rodney O'Hiser, Portland, Oregon)*

and enhances the scene materially. Rehabilitation has focused, appropriately, on the Yamhill and Skidmore/Old Town historic districts, which encompass the largest assemblage of Victorian cast-iron building facades east of the Mississippi. Some forty downtown historic structures have been rehabilitated, at a cost of some $125 million. Among them are the 1869-era Pioneer Courthouse, across the street from Pioneer Courthouse Square.

Some new buildings of real distinction have also risen in recent years. Among them is the 1983 Justice Building, the most humanized court and jail buildings we have seen in any major city anywhere. Among the Justice Building's features are hanging basket copper light fixtures and reflected glass windows designed by Edward Carpenter and, on the sixteenth floor, the Portland Police Museum, designed to look like an old-fashioned police precinct house. The structure practically everyone truly notices, though, is the Portland Building (1982), designed by Michael Graves as one of the nation's first postmodern structures. With its beige, blue, and maroon tiles, the Graves design has variously been called electric, imaginative, precedent-shattering—and an oversized jukebox. Outside is Raymond Kaskey's thirty-five-foot-high *Portlandia* statue, trident in hand. It is said to be the largest hammered copper sculpture since the Statue of Liberty. Ten thousand Portlanders lined the river and streets to watch *Portlandia*'s triumphant trip to her pedestal. Author Tom Wolfe chose to call the happening "the greatest public art event in the last 90 years."

Portland is not only a pretty city, it is a clean and welcoming one. For visitors accustomed to the typical banes of the latter-day American cityscape—street filth, overbearing design, and occasional surliness—Portland offers a magical antidote. Easterners liken Portland to a Disney set, all clean, all perfectly polite, and they are not altogether wrong. Downtown merchants even hire their own Disney-like "helpful people" to walk the streets answering questions, reporting problems, and assisting those in need. These young folks, in green uniforms, get training in "friendness" at a local community college. They are intended to reassure shoppers and to be a quick helping hand if someone has a sudden health problem, is victimized by a pickpocket, or gets badgered by rambunctious teenagers.

To please the eye, Portland offers not only public art (1 percent on all city projects since 1980) but scenes anyone anywhere would have to enjoy. A handsome Chinatown Gate and Dragon were constructed in the 1980s, for example, and there are hanging flowers on the cast-iron street lamps of the historic districts. To please the ear and eye alike, there is the two-block-long Portland Center for the

Performing Arts, home of the Oregon Symphony Orchestra and two theaters.

"Promote downtown as the entertainment and cultural center of the metropolitan area," urged the 1972 plan. The counsel has clearly been followed.

Housing

Portland is not simply a happy Disney stage set. It is also a real, gritty city with its share of such deep social problems as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and even gang activity spreading up the West Coast. It is a city in which low-income housing units have oftentimes seemed an endangered species. The 1972 plan addressed the decline in downtown housing stock as well as the flight of the middle class from downtown and called for a one-for-one replacement of low-income housing units removed from development projects. With foresight, the plan also called for new middle- and upper-income units in downtown to help provide a base for a true twenty-four-hour-a-day inner city.

The housing goals have been tough to fulfill—especially on the lower income side. By 1980, the city faced a serious decline of housing for the poor. The League of Women Voters conducted a thorough survey and reported many old apartment buildings were closing down due to fire and building code violations and that the downtown business community, exerting pressure to expand, was tempting owners of old hotels and apartment buildings to sell out for a profit. In a follow-up study nine years later, the league found the loss of low-income housing downtown was continuing, exacerbating the problem of homelessness, the new ingredient in the housing crisis. By the mid-1980s, in fact, some two thousand to three thousand Portlanders, many of them alcoholic or mentally disturbed men, were roaming the streets. Rare was the night that every one of the 114 cots at the emergency night shelter were not occupied.

The league in 1989 also reported that actual housing abandonment was increasing, the problem compounded in some neighborhoods by the infiltration of drug dealers and gangs "who occupy the vacant houses, degrading and terrifying whole neighborhoods." Despite the 1972 plan's goal to protect downtown's stock of low-income housing, the actual count of rooms in SROs (single-room occupancy hotels—downtown's only significant source of housing for the poor) fell by 59 percent, from 4,128 in 1970 to 1,702 in 1986.

Portland's social services advocacy group, Central City Concerns (CCC; formerly the Burnside Consortium), became particu-

larly vocal in urging creative response to the growing homelessness issue. It insisted that *permanent* low-income housing was needed, that a shelter was *not* a home. CCC itself began in the late 1970s to buy up imperiled buildings, especially SROs. By 1988, it was administering 737 units, with hundreds more soon to come on-line. Step into the lobby of such establishments as the Estate, the Palace, the Rich, or the Broadway—some seventy or more years old—and you meet kindly but worldly-wise managers trying to provide the SROs' gnarled residents with a better alternative to the street. In the words of Ron Van Rheen, a Portland SRO manager: "We do lots of parenting. Wake tenants up for doctors' appointments, give a hand with their mental health problems. But we have rules, too—live by them or we'll refuse to rent to you." In fact, what Portland has accomplished is a kind of hierarchy of SROs, from the emergency shelter up to beautifully painted and maintained facilities. Kick the booze and drugs and rowdiness, says Van Rheen, and "you earn your stripes to move up."

There is also a downtown shelter for battered women, and Dean Gisvold, the head of CCC, told us that the loss of SROs had virtually halted and that clear city commitment had emerged to keep all that are left. A good amount of old warehouse space was also being converted to lower cost housing.

A thorny question remained: How vigorously should a city seek to free its downtown of panhandlers, "street people," the mentally disturbed, and others who may scare off potential downtown customers? Portland retailers have complained, on occasion bitterly, of the city's tolerance for "alternative" life-styles.

At least on the homeless front, there has been a major effort to reach accommodation. In 1987, CCC and downtown merchants/property owners agreed to put a lid on shelter beds that might attract more vagrants even while endorsing strong efforts to preserve surviving SRO units and thus stem the growth of homelessness. A downtown housing preservation agreement, reached a year later, committed the city's major players to a serious effort to eliminate the need for mass shelters by the end of 1991, mainly through creating five hundred new units of housing for the homeless and very poor. The Portland Development Commission agreed to select and develop sites, the Portland Housing Authority to secure operating subsidies, CCC to own and manage the new buildings, and the Portland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce to raise funds for case management for individuals aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness.

The most interesting member of the partnership, in one respect, was the Portland Development Commission (PDC). Begun by

Mayor Shrunk, the commission's chair for several years was Ira C. Keller, the respected civic leader who would later have one of Portland's splendid downtown fountains named after him. He was also the Portland leader historian Carl Abbott likened to New York's Robert Moses "in his willingness to use appointive office and personal prestige to impose his own vision on a changing city." It was under Keller's leadership that the PDC, in the 1960s, carried out the aggressive clearance of the so-called "South Auditorium" area on the southern edge of downtown.

The PDC's executive director of the time, John Kenward, called South Auditorium a "blighted and economically isolated neighborhood" deserving demolition to make way for offices and business services and perhaps an inner loop freeway. Aside from bulldozing many acres, the project had two important results. It convinced many Portland business leaders that the PDC and the city had real business acumen—and thus could be trusted to carry out many of the ambitious projects endorsed in the 1972 plan—but it also frightened Portland's neighborhoods, setting the political stage for Neil Goldschmidt and what would become one of the nation's most neighborhood-sensitive city administrations.

The PDC's bulldozer-oriented leadership could not have welcomed Goldschmidt's election as mayor. His allies had actually been prime movers of a Portland City Club recommendation calling for the agency's abolition, but Goldschmidt decided to co-opt, not extinguish, the PDC, and with fresh appointments the agency was ready to do his bidding. In successive years, the PDC became a highly effective team player on every front, from design competition for Pioneer Courthouse Square to guiding the construction of innumerable public projects. It provides a model other cities might consider: an agency to test the feasibility of potential city projects (applying "reality checks"), to assemble financing (industrial revenue bonds, tax increment financing, and so on), to actually letting out construction contracts. A five-member agency appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council, the agency seems to have learned how to apply the test of public interest and need, to work with the rest of city government in setting the public agenda *before* it engages developers to carry out a project.

Withal, Portland old-timers had to chuckle when the bulldozer urban renewal agency of yesteryear was committing itself by the late 1980s to a partnership agreement aimed to building hundreds of housing units for the poorest of Portland's poor.

As for the 1972 plan's pledge of a full range of housing, the RiverPlace project added a reasonable quota of luxury condos. The Naitos' McCormick Place addressed the upper edge of middle in-

come, and from the 1970s provision was made for some two thousand units of lower middle income housing close to Portland State University, directly in the downtown area. The city continued to set goals of increased middle-income housing to add vitality to the downtown and prevent competition by middle-income households for lower cost units.

Tying It All Up

What led to the 1972 Downtown Plan's long-term success?

The fabric has multiple strands.

First, a remarkable consensus was achieved among sometimes warring camps—major corporations and neighborhoods, developers and environmentalists, small businesses and social activists. The consensus reflected, to be sure, the potential for mutual respect and accord inherent in Portland's history and civic culture. It was a process marked, some of the participants told us eighteen years later, by "patience and modest persistence, creeping incrementalism rather than revolutionary moves." In the words of architect-planner Gregory Baldwin:

> The downtown "Portland Story" demonstrates a means by which desired public and private urban development can be stimulated without restrictive or prescriptive regulations and without strong economic incentives. It tends to illustrate that if one neighbor can be shown it is in his interest to complement his neighbor's interest, he will do so, and in the process confirm that a good urban environment is a natural state, and should be pursued accordingly.

Indeed, while most American cities of the 1970s and 1980s saw developers become the driving force, putting forth their proposals, then barely tolerating public input, Portland evolved the idea that *the public's agenda* comes first. The process tried to accommodate the interests of the poor, but its leitmotiv was the downtown as everyone's place and the critical necessity to lure the middle class, indeed the very affluent too, back into the heart of the city. In an age of increasing privatization, with people drawing back into the shells of their private cars and private fenced-in houses, Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan represented a critical *return to public life,* underscored by investments in such places as Pioneer Courthouse Square, the bus mall, and Waterfront Park. In the long run, the Portland approach also turned out to be an extraordinarily healthy one for private business interests.

Second, there was the incredible effort put into entertaining all

viewpoints and ideas: consider that the leadership of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) had to take a community list of some one thousand ideas, reduce that list to some three hundred things to do, and then refine the list to some one hundred truly manageable in scope and character.

Third, the spirit of inclusiveness, of keeping everyone informed, became ingrained and helped maintain support for the plan. "We try to involve lots of people with complementary interests," a chief player told us, suggesting that Portland is a city where getting everyone on board leads to action, not the civic paralysis it might cause in many cities. The CAC, so key in preparation of the 1972 plan, was actually continued for the first phase of the Goldschmidt administration, providing reviews of major downtown projects and facing showdowns with developers on a couple of occasions. After two years, Goldschmidt apparently decided the political costs were too high and decided not to reappoint the CAC's members to new terms. After CAC's demise, Goldschmidt typically appointed ad hoc citizen-business consultative groups to oversee individual projects, such as the transit mall and Pioneer Courthouse Square. Observers noted it was a procedure that gave him more control plus an opportunity to take personal credit.

Born of the 1972 plan, a neighborhood alert system flourished and remained active. Even in the late 1980s, we heard, the city had a list of ninety-three neighborhoods to be regularly informed of developments that might affect them. Some 116 businesses and 100 different environmental groups were also on the alert system. As any student of urban affairs can attest, early "warning" systems, keeping all camps informed, can avert a huge portion of potential standoffs.

A fourth factor in the plan's success was Portland's remarkably clean politics. Kickbacks, payoffs, and sweetheart deals are so rare that suspicion of them does not paralyze (or discredit) the system. "This is an honest place. Intelligence is sometimes at issue, but not integrity," a leading figure in the 1972 plan's implementation told us.

Fifth, the plan enjoyed excellent political prospects because its salient principles—to assure a vibrant downtown, promote public transportation, and assure housing and further neighborliness—fit like a glove the agenda of incoming Mayor Goldschmidt in 1972. By the time he left office in 1979, they had become articles of faith in Portland's civic culture.

Sixth, the plan came forward when Oregon's great twentieth-century environmentalist governor—Tom McCall—was in office and ready to assist. Oregon's nationally pacesetting land-use plan, enacted under McCall and successfully defended by McCall against

hostile initiatives all the way to the last months of his life in 1982, set an ideal context for the 1972 plan and its implementation. The first principle of the state plan was participation and the idea that regions should evolve their own development plans, set their own urban growth boundaries, and stick to them. The state plan's central principle—to maintain the vitality of urban centers and to keep cities from sprawling out onto agricultural and timber lands—provided an expansive context, and one could say ongoing validity, to Portland's efforts.

Finally, Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan succeeded because it was relevant, because it addressed, in creative fashion, pressing problems of the time, from air quality and transit to downtown employment to saving the waterfront for the people, problems that Portland could not afford to ignore.

When Portland felt ready in the mid-1980s to move a step farther, to a Central City Plan to encompass a broader area than the downtown initiative of the prior decade, the 1972 plan was neither ignored nor rejected. Quite the contrary, it was consciously built on and proclaimed the basis for the next steps. Critics said the Central City Plan lacked the same drama and fervor of its 1972 predecessor. Some went so far as to suggest the city had become more bureaucratic, more ossified in its operating procedures over fifteen or so years; but in methodology and goals, the Central City Plan echoed 1972 almost point by point. As Commissioner Earl Blumenauer told us in 1988:

> The citizen-based and citizen-driven planning process took over three years, involved a 15-member steering committee and about 150 members of eight functioning advisory committees. . . . The effort epitomizes Portland's philosophy of planning for the future rather than waiting for breakdown and failure to get the community's attention.

Shades of 1972! Blumenauer continued to outline highlights of the Central City Plan:

> The plan focuses on the Willamette River, using it as a unifying element rather than a barrier dividing the "east" and "west" sides.
>
> The plan requires 5,000 new housing units within the central city. . . . We've opted to make housing mandatory as well as provide tax incentives, subsidized loans and zoning bonuses.
>
> The plan limits height and floor area ratios (bulk) in order to preserve Portland's human scale of development. . . . It protects views for the public and protects Pioneer Courthouse Square and the Forecourt Fountain from shadows that would be cast if tall buildings were built adjacent. . . . Less development means that we will have more projects on more blocks and more construction jobs. This plan is an alternative to the philosophy

of some cities, supported by some elements of our business community: bigger projects and taller buildings.

Mass transit continues to be emphasized with the plan calling for construction of an additional light rail corridor to the west.

Reading the Central City Plan in 1988, one indeed had the feeling that the 1972 Downtown Plan had become institutionalized, had become Portland's new conventional wisdom. Yet the fact remained: Portland's basic tenets, 1972 and 1988 versions alike, constituted a revolution in city planning, city building, and city social relations. It was a revolution still waiting its dawn in most cities of America.

Commentary: Portland

GEORGE E. HARTMAN, JR.: It is terribly difficult to define excellence in architecture and urbanism. If I have to create excellence in architecture, I can't get much done, but there is a very effective way for even the public to begin to achieve better architecture and better urbanism. That is through the process of choice: "I don't know what a good building is but if you give me two buildings, I can quickly figure out which one is better." People may not know what they want but they can make choices.

This chapter begins with a crisis of choice: the loss of traditional commercial markets to the fast-growing suburbs. That's a choice. You can decide if you'd rather have those markets downtown or in the suburbs. You can make that decision.

Portland faced a clear-cut choice when the city tore down a hotel and replaced it with a two-story parking garage. One could quickly look at that and say: "I would rather have the hotel. The hotel is a better building for this site." Faced with those alternatives, it's easy for people to figure out what they want to have happen. The choice process was at work throughout this Portland project. Abstract choices about urban excellence can't be tackled but the real choices are easy to work with.

ROBERT SHIBLEY: That's a lovely way to frame the idea of how crisis generates change for the better, how that energy gets transformed. The choices—suburban versus downtown, hotel versus parking, highway versus waterfront park, large-mass buildings all the way to the waterfront versus the step-down aesthetic—all of these were presented to the public in the form of simple dichotomies.

I think there's a trap in this conception. With hindsight, we can identify a few apparently key decisions, but we can also appreciate

the incrementalism of this plan. A set of principles was put in place that then got tested one building or project at a time. The dichotomies, your system of choices, don't give you the unity and cohesiveness that a plan needs. The strategic plan implementation that we saw in Portland came from a set of principles. Framing the whole process in terms of a series of dichotomies doesn't necessarily give you a good downtown.

There were some principles driving choice in Portland. We are going to step down to the waterfront. We are not going to let a highway separate us from our waterfront. We are going to maintain our block size—one of Portland's great gifts—and so on. These were principles with strong physical implications. The plan took a position that was then negotiated and argued about over specific buildings. A very sophisticated academic debate took place.

What I love about the Portland plan is that those principles were so immediate to that city, that region, that set of political and social circumstances. The principles govern how you translate from the choice environment and put a single building into context. You may derive some of these principles from examining available choices, but then the principles kick in and start to take over.

HARTMAN: The decision to limit heights and floor areas to preserve Portland's human scale of development again reflected a simple choice: "Would you rather have a few large projects or many small ones?" People chose many small ones. They argued that less mass development meant more projects on more blocks and more jobs. I would add that smaller projects are also more likely than large projects to be appropriately designed because they are easier to manage, and smaller projects are easier for people to evaluate. The choices become sharper.

SHIBLEY: Part of the success of this project derived from the primary placement of public perception and public good. As it happened, that priority turned out in favor of the business community. This is really dramatic, especially in light of the piecemeal growth that you've outlined. It meant that many small, local developers could play a role and play in a way that the money stayed in the area. It was a "grow-your-own-developer" plan as well as a physical proposal.

HARTMAN: The primacy of the public agenda was established very early on, but initially there was a battle between the people and the planners and architects. In general, the decision-making process has been abandoned to professionals during the twentieth century. In

Portland, you had the people and the politicians who represent them wresting the decision-making process back from incompetent and indifferent professionals who were not working in the public interest.

SHIBLEY: I think it's more complicated. The initial short-term business interests and the traditional solutions to business problems had been driving Portland to its demise prior to 1972. One example was the notion that the location of the hosiery counter tells you where to put the next parking garage—one block away. This was a straightforward business demand, but it should not be the wisdom that drives decisions on downtown access.

The choice process helped citizens and the business community to coalesce. Portland was "blessed" early on with some of the grand-scale urban renewal projects of the mid-sixties. The citizens said, "We don't want another large-footprint, homogeneous development that tears up the fabric of the city."

HARTMAN: The business interest is really quite simple. They don't really care where the hosiery counter is or where the parking is. What they want to do is increase sales and profits. They start looking at pieces of the problem in order to do that and their first move is always to put the parking closer to the shopping.

SHIBLEY: But what happened in Portland was interesting. The business interests who were unhappy with their inability to get their customers close enough to the hosiery counter took charge of the planning process. Only then did the citizens, architects, and planners put in enough checks and balances relative to this business initiative to organize a plan.

I am worried about thinking of this as a linear process, as "Let the citizens set their agenda, then bring in the planners." The process in Portland over the last twenty years was one where the architects and planners were brought in early, working hard with the public to frame those choices.

HARTMAN: There is a parallel between architects and planners and the military. Most urban decisions are too important to be left to anybody's notion of personal gain or political expediency. People have to be in there, deciding how they want this thing to come out. When you get the planners aligned with the public goals, as in Portland, they are effective at implementing them.

The people's interests and the business interests are not necessarily at odds, but they are both often at odds with the planners' inter-

ests. Planners are trying to implement a theoretical agenda. The planners' notions often are out of touch with the public. They mean to do things to save society but society is perfectly capable of saving itself. When the public decides on its goals, then the planners and architects can be brought in to implement them.

SHIBLEY: Oregon's culture is important here. It's a culture of participation and public involvement. The first tenet of the state land-use planning process demands a very clear community articulation process. There's a tradition of citizen advisory committees in Portland and a strong belief in a planning process that is structured that way.

HARTMAN: Three underlying elements made this project work. The first was the primacy of the public agenda and second was the necessity of inclusiveness. The third thing the citizens, planners, and politicians did was to maintain continuing accountability. The fact that nobody quit, that the people didn't lose interest, and that the government didn't abandon them means that everyone remained accountable.

The primacy of the public agenda means that the big issues—what we are going to do rather than how—are matters everyone is involved in deciding from the very beginning. The public, not the professionals, should decide *what* is to be done. Then the professionals can help decide *how* it is to be done. They are much better able to design the stuff than set the policy. That way you also get public support for designs that are responsive to the goals. You cannot have the medical profession deciding who is going to live. When we decide who will live, then the medical profession is ideally situated to implement that decision.

SHIBLEY: There are some issues here of equity and diversity. A fair amount was made in the press about Portland's comeback: that it was a victory, in their rhetoric, "for all the people." In reality, it was a reclamation for the middle class.

One needs a fairly exclusive income level to be able to take full advantage of Portland's downtown. The original intent of the plan was for housing replacement as development occurred: one-for-one replacement; but this was "one-for-one" beginning in 1972, when the city had already lost a large amount of its downtown housing and its lower income housing in particular. These issues have not been addressed in the way that was hoped for in the original planning document. This is evident now in some of the problems in North Portland and other areas.

HARTMAN: It does seem that it was set up with a middle-class bias, but that was probably the right way to do it. The upper class will take care of itself. One needs to take care of the homeless. By focusing this project the way they did, the sponsors were able to co-opt the support of the largest number of people, and that seems smart.

SHIBLEY: That might be all right strategically, but some subtler things give one pause. The project has been referred to as a kind of Disneyland set. Folks in green uniforms are being helpful to tourists and visitors but they also are helping the homeless out of the area. Given the grit, vitality, and diversity that one looks for in a healthy, vibrant city, the sense of homogeneity about downtown Portland, both in its physical design and in the population it serves, takes the edge off an otherwise incredible success story.

HARTMAN: Of course there is less diversity in Portland. One of the things that makes this project easier to do in Portland than in Washington, D.C., or New York City is that the city is a more homogeneous, more cohesive place.

SHIBLEY: It's more cohesive in two ways. The rivers, the topography, and the short blocks all tend to make it "work" as a city. It's imageable, understandable. It has that physical advantage. And, in general, Oregon doesn't have the history of diversity. It didn't have the immigrant experience of the East Coast or Seattle or San Francisco, but it's a myth that Portland is homogeneous. The reality is that it has had a fair influx of Asians and blacks.

The lip service was that this was a downtown plan for everybody. That rhetoric was necessary to make this project successful, but I question whether it is true. A certain part of the life downtown is less for that failure. It feels less real and more Disneyland stage set because that diversity is lacking.

Also, I'm hearing a fourth principle evolving in this conversation. Add diversity to primacy, inclusiveness, and accountability.

HARTMAN: Diversity is right. Areas of urban excellence often come from local diversity and larger, common goals. The pieces often represent very personal things that need to be based locally, but they can work together to make the town or state or country work. Diversity is not incompatible with a larger unity.

SHIBLEY: There need to be places where everyone across the ethnic mix can be together at the same time that there are ethnic en-

claves with a strong physical and social character. That may not be working yet in Portland.

HARTMAN: It also may be misleading to say that such a project can be done without government support on a large scale. The Graves building with the *Portlandia* figure is a massive piece of urban subsidy. It's completely occupied by government workers. When you take large buildings like this to complete a project, it's done with quite a bit more subsidy than you think. I don't think that's bad. That's what the government should be doing to further this project.

SHIBLEY: Much of the product of a huge project like this is the process itself, which continues to interrogate it and develop it over time. It's never done.