

FALL 2024

GRESHAM

PPPM 399: URBAN TRANSPORTATION

SCHOOL OF PLANNING, PUBLIC
POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Revitalizing Gresham's Historic Downtown Hub

Suzie Weber

Report Author • School of Planning, Public Policy and Management

Robert Binder

Visiting Assistant Professor • School of Planning, Public Policy and Management



Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank and acknowledge City of Gresham for making this project possible. The writer would also like to thank the following City of Gresham staff for offering the support and resources integral to the completion of this report.

Ashley Miller, Community Development Director

Jay Higgins, Senior Transportation Planner

This report represents original student work and recommendations prepared by students in the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program for the City of Gresham. Text and images contained in this report may not be used without permission from the University of Oregon.

Contents

4	About SCI
4	About SCYP
5	About City of Gresham
6	Course Participants
6	Course Description
7	Executive Summary
9	Introduction
13	Opportunities for Downtown Revitalization
39	Conclusion
40	References
41	Appendix A: Evaluation Scores
45	Appendix B: Community Survey Example

About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Institute (SCI) is an applied think tank focusing on sustainability and cities through applied research, teaching, and community partnerships. We work across disciplines that match the complexity of cities to address sustainability challenges, from regional planning to building design and from enhancing engagement of diverse communities to understanding the impacts on municipal budgets from disruptive technologies and many issues in between.

SCI focuses on sustainability-based research and teaching opportunities through two primary efforts:

1. Our Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP), a massively scaled university-community partnership program that matches the resources of the University with one Oregon community each year to help advance that community's sustainability goals; and

2. Our Urbanism Next Center, which focuses on how autonomous vehicles, e-commerce, and the sharing economy will impact the form and function of cities.

In all cases, we share our expertise and experiences with scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and project partners. We further extend our impact via an annual Expert-in-Residence Program, SCI China visiting scholars program, study abroad course on redesigning cities for people on bicycle, and through our co-leadership of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), which is transferring SCYP to universities and communities across the globe. Our work connects student passion, faculty experience, and community needs to produce innovative, tangible solutions for the creation of a sustainable society.

About SCYP

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is a yearlong partnership between SCI and a partner in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with a public entity on sustainability and livability projects. SCYP faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner agency through a variety of studio projects and service-learning courses to provide students with real-world projects to investigate. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches

to difficult, persistent problems. SCYP's primary value derives from collaborations that result in on-the-ground impact and expanded conversations for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future.

Community partnerships are possible in part due to support from U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, as well as former Congressman Peter DeFazio, who secured federal funding for SCYP through Congressionally Directed Spending.

About City of Gresham

The City of Gresham is located on the traditional territory of the Chinookan people. In 1851, the Powell brothers settled the area and it would be known as Powell's Valley until the creation of the Gresham post office in 1884. The economy ran mostly on agriculture with trains running between Gresham and Portland every hour. In 1904, the city elected Lewis Shattuck as its first mayor and in 1905 officially incorporated.



Gresham is the fourth largest city in Oregon with a population of just over 110,000 people. Gresham is bordered to the west by Portland, the largest city in the state, and is located near both the Columbia George National Scenic Area and Mount Hood, the highest point in Oregon. It has a wide variety of neighborhoods including: the Civic Center, known for its active transportation network, rapid transit connections, and residential, commercial, and retail mix; Historic Downtown,

which offers a walkable blend of shops, restaurants, and service businesses; and Rockwood, one of the youngest and most diverse neighborhoods in Oregon. It offers community farmers markets, history museums, and several historical landmarks. Gresham's residents care deeply about their heritage as a homestead and agricultural community and are committed to building a vibrant future. Today, Gresham is a dynamic, innovative, and rapidly growing city with a mutual desire and drive to thrive.

Course Participants

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Cooper Bobbitt
Owen Burge
Seb Daniels
Grace DeBlase
Aaron Kaplan
Andy Lam
Asia Lieberman
Alec Palm
Kate Petersen
Owen Pyle
Noa Schwartz
Rachel Van Horn
Suzie Weber
Daelia Wong
Maya Yoshihara
Alyssa Zaback

Course Description

PPPM 399: URBAN TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is central how people move through space and access opportunities. This course provides a foundation in transportation planning and covers a variety of topics related to the planning for and management of transportation systems. The course presents a survey of issues transportation planning raises—such as equity, congestion, health, and environmental—across a variety of modes, as well as considers the opportunities and challenges new technologies present. Course assignments use Oregon cities as a transportation laboratory and challenge students to synthesize knowledge and original data collection into planning and policy recommendations.

Executive Summary

During the fall of 2024, the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management (PPPM) offered a course at the University of Oregon titled “Urban Transportation.” Students in an Urban Transportation course worked with the City of Gresham to revitalize the city’s downtown. Students gathered information about the study area through a meeting with city staff, a site visit, and a simulated community engagement session. With this information, students began to research possibilities for downtown revitalization efforts. Student groups developed suggestions and each group focused on one of five categories: multimodal transportation, network connectivity, parking, development, and community engagement.

Each group completed a needs assessment based on the existing conditions of Gresham’s current downtown. Students concluded that the downtown area sees the most activation during the lunch hour and the dinner hour, with parking occupancy peaking at 1 PM and 6 PM respectively. Otherwise, the area is relatively quiet. Students perceived few activities during the 16-hour programming window people desire, meaning there may not many opportunities for nightlife. Downtown is primarily dominated by cars and very few people choose to walk, bike, or bus downtown—despite the possibility of all three. One obstacle to revitalizing Gresham’s downtown is the busy five-lane arterial road, Powell Boulevard. It is a barrier to encouraging more pedestrians and cyclists, and it fragments the network from Main City Park, the beautiful community park adjacent to downtown.

Despite these challenges, student researchers suggested ways to bring new life to the historic downtown area while keeping its small town-like charm. The most frequently suggested recommendation was to close a corridor of N Main Avenue to automobile traffic. The proposed corridor is from NE 1st to NE 5th Street, and would include a two-way bike lane, large sidewalks for pedestrians, and increased social spaces. This, along with infrastructure improvements to nearby intersections, would make walking and biking a more attractive alternative to driving downtown. Alternatively, if the city decided against a walking- and biking-only corridor, Gresham could turn N Main Street into a one-way. The unused lane could be converted into a two-way protected bike lane and would accomplish the same goal of encouraging multimodal transportation.

Another common theme researchers suggested was improved and centralized signage downtown. The city could create more cohesive wayfinding signage directing visitors to special attractions like the parks and local businesses nearby. The signage could also better direct drivers to underutilized parking lots to address community members’ perceived lack of parking in the area. The use of bulletin notice boards could offer information about biking and walking as viable and safe travel options in Gresham. Other important recommendations addressing Gresham’s historic downtown district’s needs include infill underutilized parking lots with social space hubs, engage with local artists and students to create public art downtown and increase aesthetic pleasure in the area, and implement a street fair to celebrate new development downtown.

Introduction

The City of Gresham partnered with SCYP and the Urban Transportation class to work towards their “One Gresham Initiative”. The initiative is an urban redevelopment and social strategy to achieve greater interconnectivity between all three hubs in Gresham—the Rockwood Neighborhood, the Civic Center, and historic downtown. Researchers for this report focused on one facet of the One Gresham Initiative—revitalizing Gresham’s historic downtown hub. Gresham’s downtown consists of about a 16-block area bordered by Eastman Parkway, Hogan Street, Division

Street, and Powell Boulevard. Gresham’s central research area included the North Main Avenue corridor, from NE 5th Street to Powell Boulevard, where most downtown activity exists. The area is between two east-west arterial streets, Powell Boulevard and Division Street, meaning heavy traffic flow passes through the immediate vicinity of downtown — approximately 50,000 people per day (“Gresham Map, Traffic Counts” 2019). The corridor has two travel lanes, two street parallel parking lanes, and no separated bike lane.



FIG. 1

Aerial view map of study area.

Image credit: Google Maps

Edited by: Robert Binder



FIG. 2

Image of N Main Avenue corridor.

Image credit: Robert Binder

To begin research, the Urban Transportation class conducted a site visit to Gresham on October 16, 2024. Before touring and photographing downtown, students met with city staff to discuss the context of Gresham’s historic downtown district and the City’s visions for its future. City staff shared responses from a community survey that detailed residents’ desires for intentional and caring growth of the city with a downtown area that has diverse programming, flexible streetscape improvements, and an emphasis on safety and putting people first. To expand on this survey, the Urban Transportation class hosted a simulated community engagement session that featured 13 different

personas of potential stakeholders in the event of a redevelopment project in downtown Gresham. Community involvement is vital to successful development efforts in a city, and without public participation, a city runs the risk of marginalizing underrepresented communities. Although it was outside of the scope of this project to host a community engagement session with actual community members, students achieved a similar result by embodying key stakeholders with a variety of needs and opinions. The 13 stakeholder characters acted out by students were: older, conservative-leaning, long-time resident, liberal-leaning new resident with a young family, invested developer

opposed to change, ambitious developer for change, parishioner of nearby church, environmentalist, Tri-Met representative, small business owner, low-income resident, middle-income resident, young professional, local student and/or adolescent, and resident of nearby city. Participation of each persona was encouraged during a community engagement activity called World Cafe. The class came to a similar consensus as results of the community survey conducted by the city, with student participants emphasizing a desire for a more walkable downtown with a greater variety of downtown programming.

After the site visit and community engagement simulation, student research

groups identified opportunities for improvement in downtown Gresham to bring greater vitality to the area. Key recommendations include redevelop N Main Avenue into a pedestrian- and cyclist-only corridor or turn it into a one-way street with a protected bike lane, ornament downtown with cohesive signage, engage with students and local artists to implement murals and crosswalk paintings, infill underutilized parking lots with social spaces, and increase transportation education outreach. The following figure depicts the major recommendations and their locations, excluding the recommendations that cannot be shown on a map (i.e. "increase transportation education and outreach efforts").

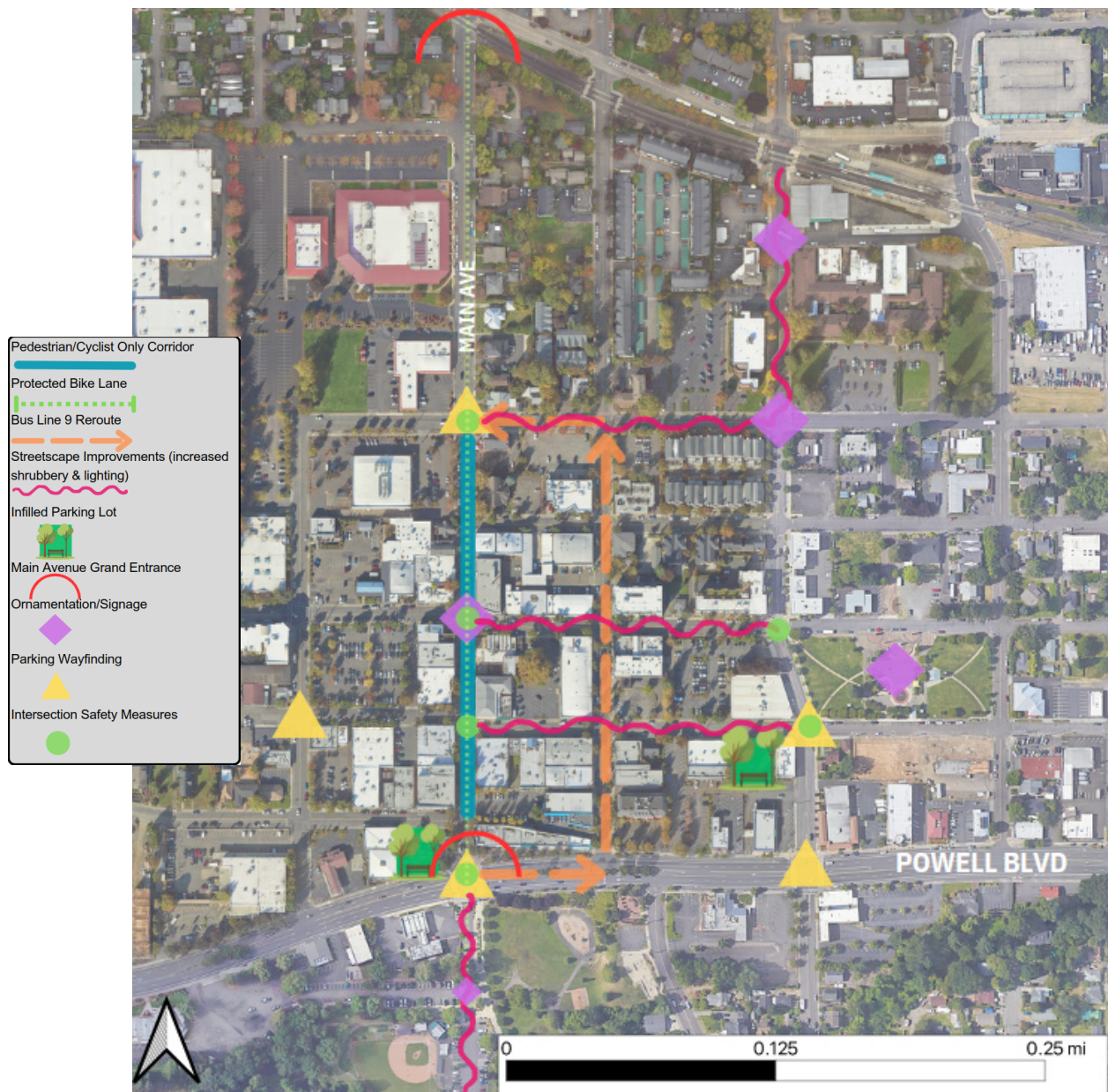


FIG. 3
Map of study area with student recommendations and legend.
Image Credit: Google Maps
Edited By: Robert Binder and Suzie Weber

Opportunities for Downtown Revitalization

Below are the five facets of Gresham's downtown that course participants focused on for this project. These facets are multimodal transportation, network connectivity, parking, development, and community engagement. A description of the existing conditions and needs assessment is included in each section. Based on the needs assessment, course participants developed two to three recommendations to address the issues raised, all in an effort to help stimulate social and economic activity in downtown Gresham. Some recommendations

address multiple opportunities for improvement across categories and thus are presented in more than one section. Recommendations were evaluated on a 100-point scale, and a recommendation needed to score 75 or higher to be included in this report. The evaluation criteria included six categories, with each category having a maximum possible score of either 20 or 10. The maximum possible scores are indicated in parentheses next to each category heading in the table below.

	Alignment with Community Needs (20)	Feasibility of Implementation (20)	Impact on Efficiency of Resource Utilization (20)	Contribution to Downtown Activation (20)	Cost-Effectiveness (10)	Sustainability and Long-Term Benefits (10)
16-20 Points or 8-10 Points	Strong alignment with community needs, addresses identified concerns.	Highly feasible with minimal financial, logistical, or regulatory obstacles.	Significantly improves the utilization of existing infrastructure and resources.	Strongly enhances the social, economic, or cultural vitality of downtown Gresham.	Low-cost relative to potential benefits.	Provides long-term benefits and aligns with sustainability goals.
15-11 Points or 7-6 Points	Partial alignment, addresses some community needs.	Moderately feasible with some financial, logistical, or regulatory challenges.	Moderately improves efficiency in targeted areas.	Moderate contribution to downtown activation.	Moderate cost with reasonable benefit-cost ratio.	Moderately supports sustainability or long-term benefits.
10-5 Points or 5-3 Points	Limited alignment, with only minor relevance to community concerns.	Significant obstacles that may delay or complicate implementation.	Minor impact on efficiency.	Minor contribution with limited activation benefits.	High-cost relative to benefits but still justifiable.	Minimal sustainability or long-term benefits.
4-0 Points or 2-0 Points	Does not align with community needs.	Not feasible due to insurmountable obstacles.	No improvement or negative impact on efficiency.	No contribution or negative impact on downtown vitality.	Prohibitively expensive with minimal benefit.	No sustainability or long-term benefits.

TABLE 1

Evaluation Criteria Rubric.

Evaluation tables with each recommendation's score can be found in the Appendix.

MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION

Multimodal transportation includes all types of transportation of people and goods. Many cities in the United States were designed with a development pattern known as urban sprawl. This means the majority of homes are single-family units in suburban neighborhoods far from the city center, making most people dependent on personal automobiles to get from place to place. Car dependability creates environmental issues from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by gasoline-powered vehicles. A high frequency of vehicle-related deaths is also associated with car-dependability. Because of these issues, Gresham is looking for creative solutions to increase multimodal transportation like walking, biking, and riding transit. Increasing multimodal travel options and accessibility helps people who do not own cars, making the city more equitable.

Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

The modes of transportation available to reach Gresham's downtown are driving a personal vehicle, walking, biking, or taking the Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail or bus route. North Main Avenue is a two-way street with parallel parking on both sides. The speed limit is 20 miles per hour, and the traffic flow is moderate on this road. North Main Avenue does not have designated bike lanes; rather it employs "sharrows" denoting a shared lane of traffic for both automobiles and bicycles. There is decorative bike parking infrastructure downtown. Bike lock stands in the shape of bikes and tractors are charming and practical additions downtown, but they all remained unused during the class site visit.



FIG. 4

Decorative bike lock infrastructure in downtown Gresham.

Image Credit: Robert Binder

The MAX's transit Blue Line system runs through Gresham about every 15 minutes daily. The nearest MAX light rail station to downtown is Gresham Central Transit Center, about three blocks from the N Main Avenue corridor. There is also a TriMet bus system that runs from Rockwood to 188th Avenue. The

two specific bus lines that run through Gresham's historic downtown are the 82 and 9, which also run every 15 minutes. The 82 bus passes Gresham's Farmer's Market, Old Town, and the Town Fair Shopping Center. The 9 bus runs through N Main Avenue and stops at the Cental Gresham MAX station.

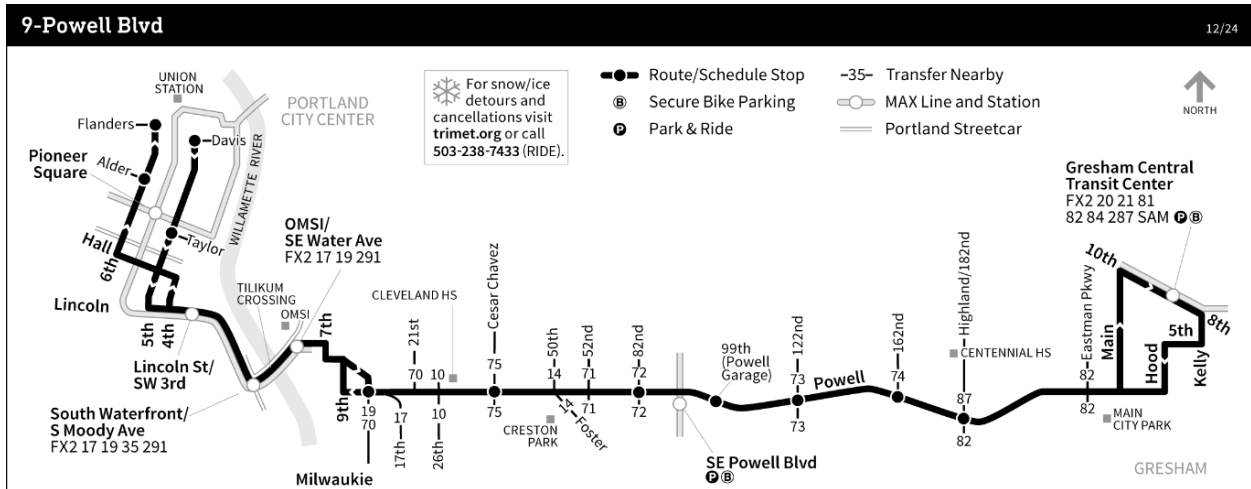


FIG. 5
Line 9 bus route map.
Image Credit: TriMet

The Gresham-Fairview Trail, Springwater Corridor, and Wy'East Trail are three mixed-use trails for walking and biking that exist within the city and are opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists

to reach downtown. Currently, they are used mainly by high schoolers and for exercise or recreation by community members, but few people use the multiuse paths to reach downtown.

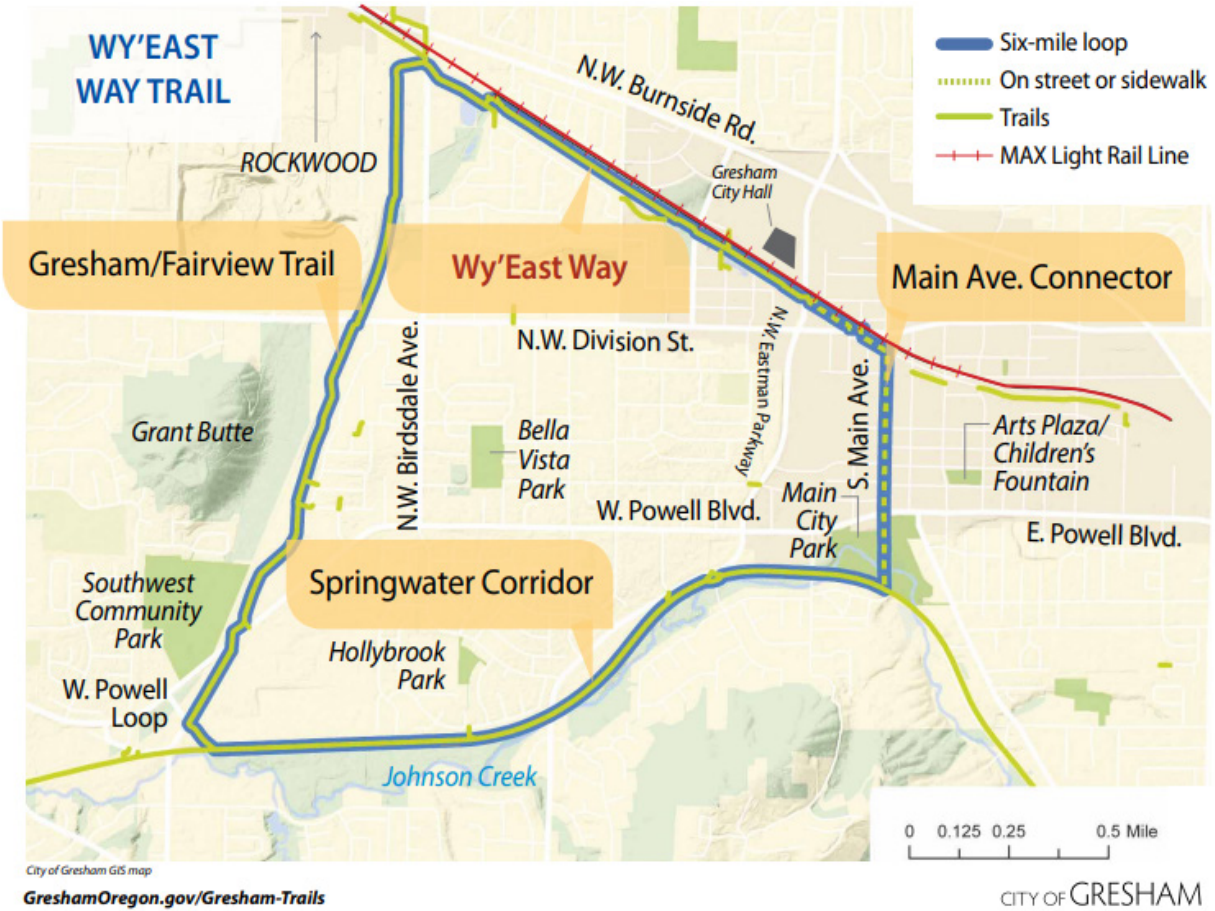


FIG. 7
 Map of Gresham-Fairview Trail, Springwater Corridor, and Wy'East Trail.
 Image Credit: City of Gresham

Recommendations

The students developed multimodal transportation recommendations that focused on solutions to enhance equity and access.

Close N Main Avenue to Automobile Traffic on the Weekends or Seasonally

The first recommendation for increasing multimodal travel is to close N Main Avenue to automobile traffic from NE 1st Avenue to automobile traffic from NE 1st

Street to NE 5th Street every weekend from Friday to Sunday as a pilot program. Crucial slow-moving traffic like the TriMet 9-line buses and delivery trucks will be permitted to drive through the corridor. Alternatively, the bus could be rerouted one block east to Roberts Avenue and delivery trucks could use existing alleys. See the student mockup design below of what a reroute could look like.

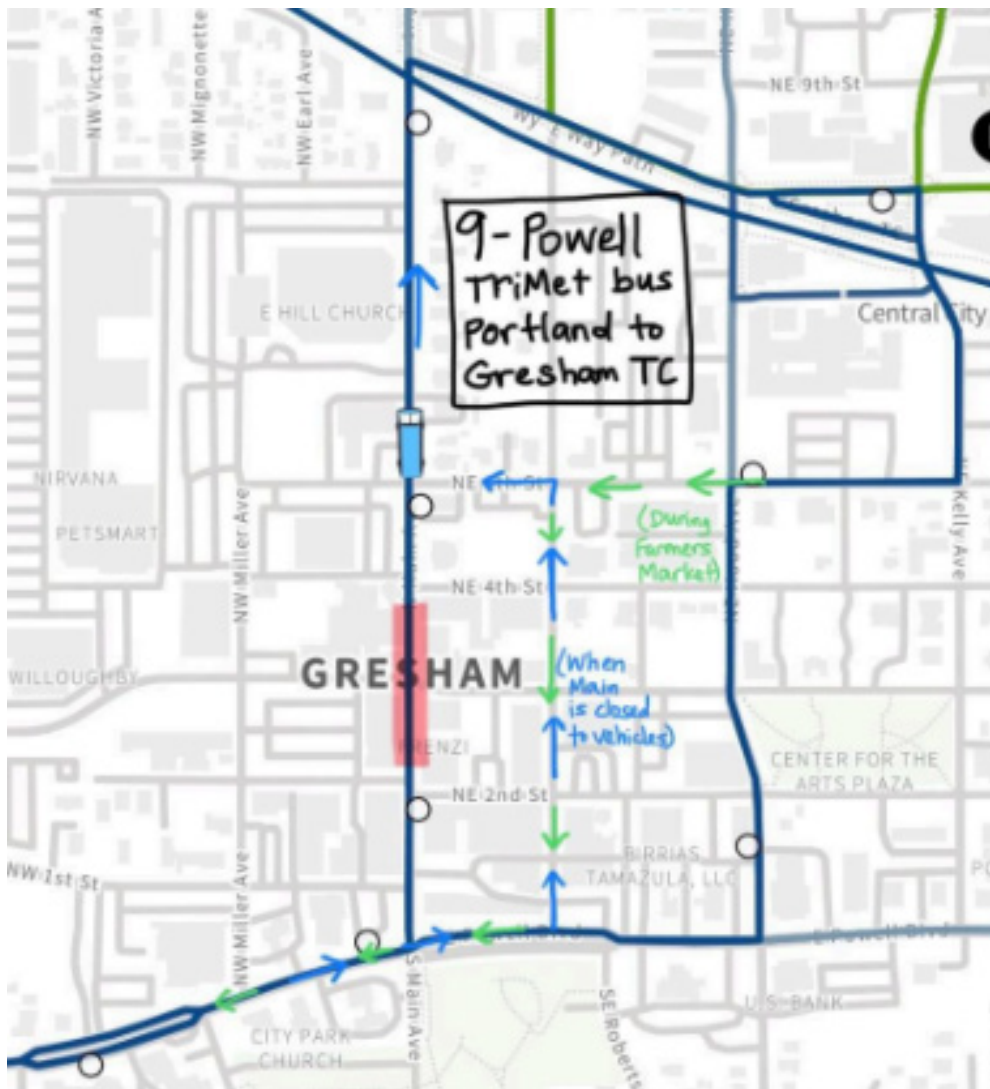


FIG. 8
Bus reroute possibility.

This proposal is intended to normalize multimodal development and activity in downtown Gresham. It would allow bicyclists full access to the road without fear of accidents with cars. Similarly, pedestrians could cross N Main Avenue safely. The goal of this street intervention is to prioritize slow moving traffic by making more space for people to walk, bike, scooter, roller blade, and play. This proposal would make the on-street parking on N Main Avenue obsolete, enabling local businesses to use the space as outdoor dining areas or social spaces. Developing drop-off zones just outside the street closure to serve as designated drop-off and pick-up points for rideshare services, taxis, and deliveries could make a smoother transition to the street closure.

During the trial period, implementation of this project would require limited tactical-urbanism-style infrastructure like barricades, cones, and signage to limit through-traffic and open more space for pedestrians. If Gresham chooses to make the street intervention permanent, further infrastructure changes would be required. Such changes include painting bike lane lines, adding bollards to street entrances, and possibly adding dining or social spaces to the street where there was previously on-street parking.

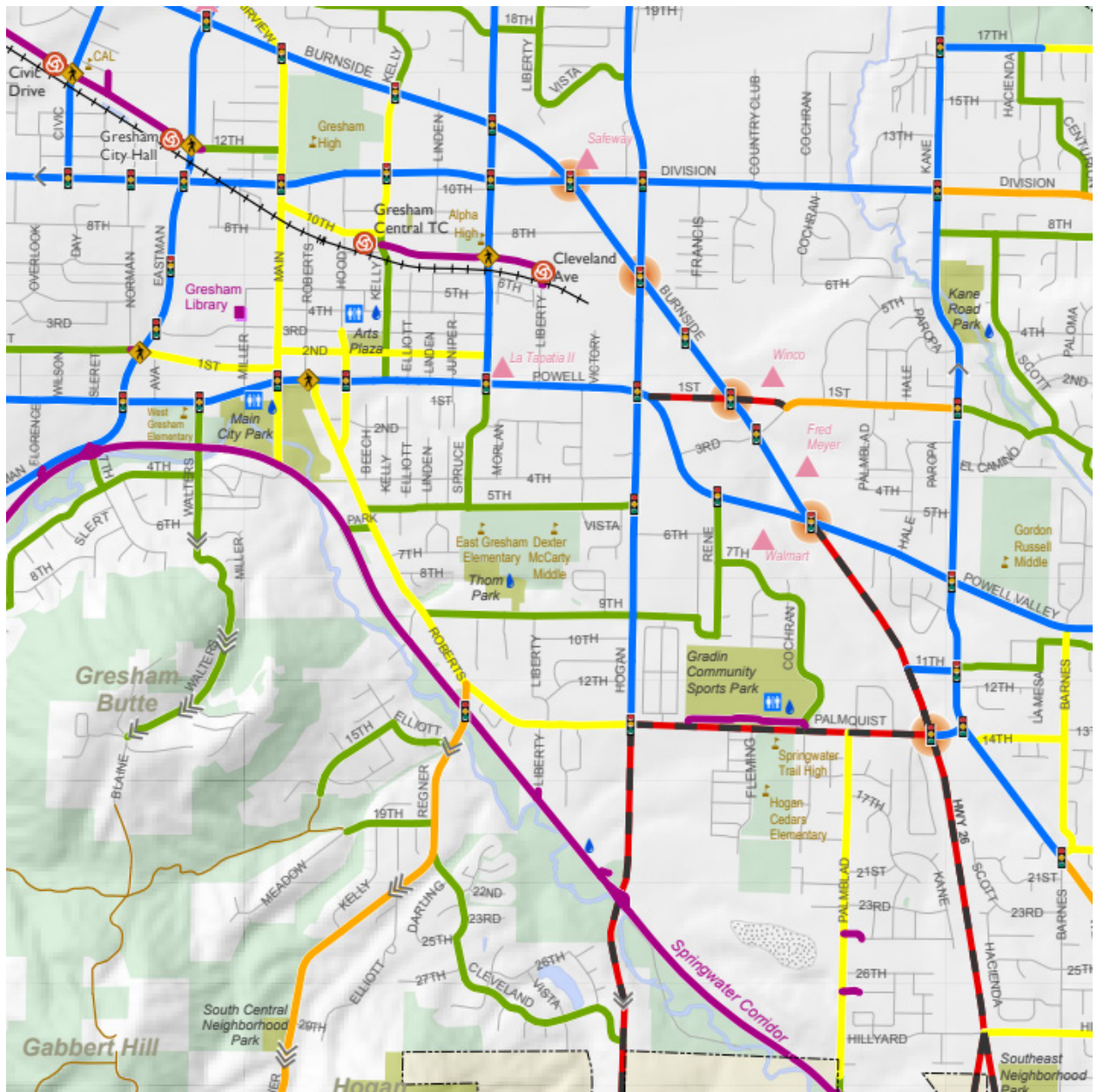
This proposal received an evaluation score of 86, with relatively high scores across all categories of evaluation (see Appendix A, Table 1).

Enhance Bicycle Infrastructure

Enhancing bicycle infrastructure by improving crosswalks, intersections, bike lanes, and bike parking will prioritize safety and potentially increase bicyclists in the downtown area. A simple bicycle infrastructure enhancement is adding buffers between car lanes and bike

lanes by painting the streets. The goal of bicyclist safety can be further enhanced through physical barriers like planter vegetation boxes, bollards, and curbs. This is known as protected bike lanes. Students recommend developing protected bike lanes down N Main Avenue to fully invest in cyclist and pedestrian safety. If this recommendation is selected in tandem with the street closure to automobiles recommendation, the bike lane could be implemented all throughout the NE Division Street to Powell Boulevard corridor even though there may be no cars on N Main Avenue seasonally or on weekends. The protected bike lanes would be vital to bicyclists' safety while cars are there, and to ease the transition of NE 1st to 5th becoming permanently closed to cars, the city could use the buffer method or cones as separation along this corridor for a cheaper option. Furthermore, a designated bike lane will benefit pedestrians because there will be a specific area to watch out for cyclists as opposed to cyclists scattering all over the street.

The bike route map available on Gresham's website is useful to identify difficult connections and intersections. For example, it is evident from the map that residents living in the southeast neighborhood of Gresham may be averse to biking downtown because Highway 26 (which turns into Burnside) is not bike friendly. The Springwater Corridor mixed use trail is adjacent to the neighborhood, but residents likely must bike along the difficult connections or through the busy intersections to reach the Springwater Corridor. Given this, it may be worth the improvements to bike lanes and intersections in communities nearby the central point of research for this project to improve network connectivity to the downtown area.



Legend

Off-Street Multi-Use Path	Difficult Connection	Elevation Change Slight to steep slope	Pedestrian Crossing	Drinking Fountain	Parks
Bike Lane or Wide Shoulder	Trail	Traffic Signal	Restrooms	Stores	Green Space
Shared Road – Low Volume	MAX	Difficult Intersection	Hospitals	Schools	Surface Water
Shared Road – Medium Volume	Gresham City Limits		MAX Stop	Libraries	Airports
Shared Road – High Volume					

FIG. 9
Bike map of Gresham's Southeast Neighborhood and map legend.

Image Credit: City of Gresham

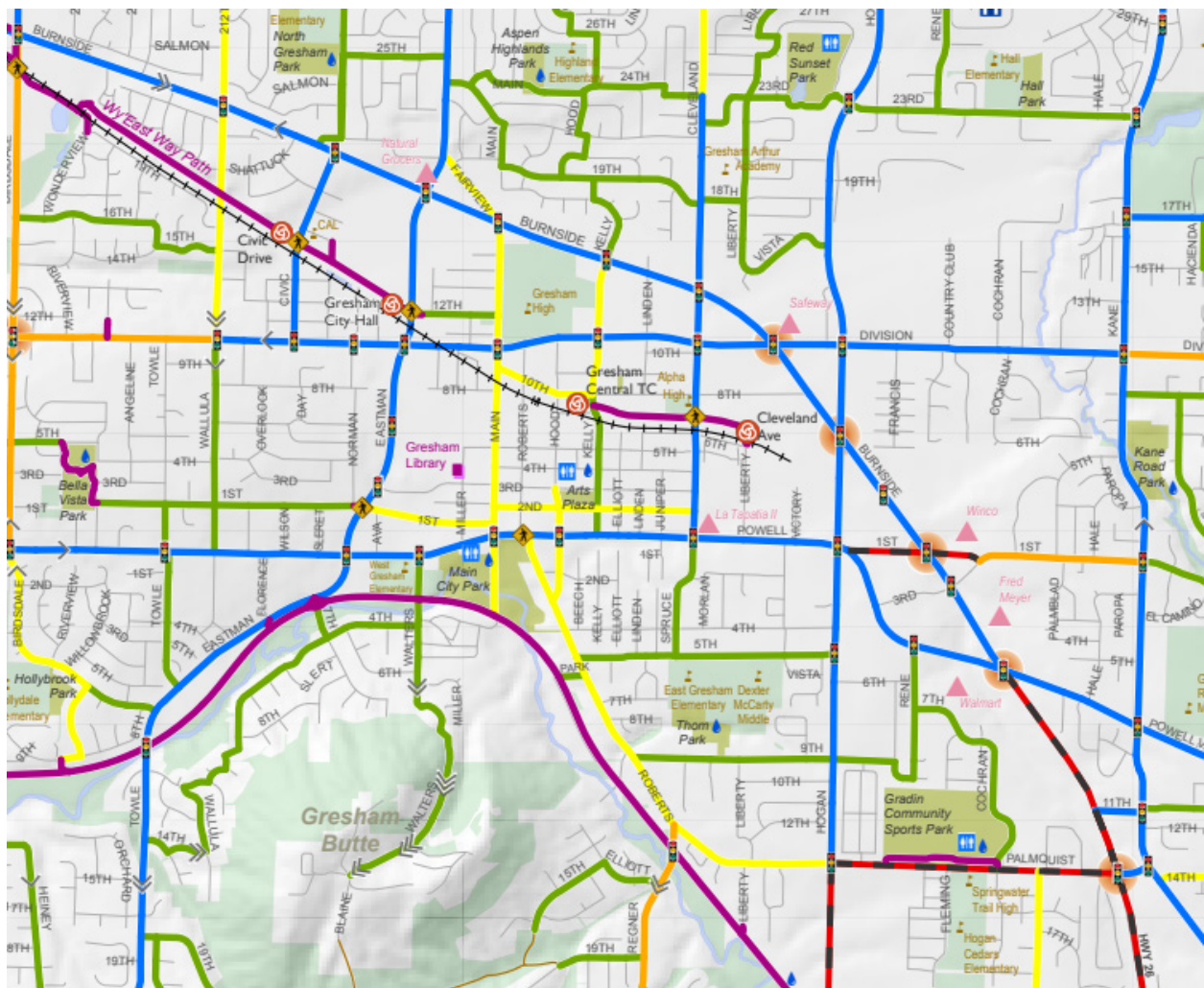
Other steps Gresham can take to enhance bicycle infrastructure are incentivizing downtown businesses to provide bike locks for patrons and adding turn boxes at highly trafficked intersections to provide an additional measure of safety for cyclists. The city could also explore micro mobility options like bike and scooter sharing programs, which are especially useful for tourists, visitors, and people who do not own a bike or scooter.

By improving intersection design and increasing development to protect pedestrians and cyclists, the City of Gresham can show its dedication to multimodal transportation options and its support of people without access to cars.

This recommendation scored an evaluation score of 81 (see Appendix A, Table 2).

Transportation Education and Outreach

Through focusing multimodal transportation efforts on education and outreach, the city may reach new demographics of people who want to become less car-dependent. One opportunity exists in updating Gresham's "Getting Around" website with specific routes relevant to accessing the historic downtown hub. The addition of a "Downtown Access" tab on this website may draw people to explore downtown by means of biking, walking or bus. There is also a comprehensive bike route map of the city available on the website that could be better advertised downtown by use of a large notice board. The map could be bolted to the middle of the board, surrounded by advertisements about community events related to biking. The other side of the bulletin could have a pedestrian version of the map highlighting walkable areas around the city. This would signal to the community that the City of Gresham cares about bicyclists and pedestrians and wants to support them.



Legend

Off-Street Multi-Use Path	Difficult Connection	Elevation Change <i>Slight to steep slope</i>	Pedestrian Crossing	Drinking Fountain	Parks
Bike Lane or Wide Shoulder	Trail	Difficult Intersection	Restrooms	Stores	Green Space
Shared Road – Low Volume	MAX	Traffic Signal	Hospitals	Schools	Surface Water
Shared Road – Medium Volume	Gresham City Limits		MAX Stop	Libraries	Airports
Shared Road – High Volume					

FIG. 10
Bike map of study area and map legend.

Image Credit: City of Gresham

Postcards could be sent to Gresham residents to inform them of their addresses' transit routes and offer tips about riding public transportation safely. The city could give out free or reduced transit passes to students and their families, teach about transit in schools, and incentivize residents to use transit by partnering with TriMet to offer free and discounted day passes whenever possible.

Another suggestion is to create an annual Public Transit Day or month. Activities like a scavenger hunt may induce more transit riders. Participants would disembark at different bus stops and get stamps from local businesses, culminating in small prizes or gift cards for riders. This idea is inspired by Gresham's May bike month,

during which the city offers group rides and helmet giveaways.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 85 (See Appendix A, Table 3).

Case Study: In Atlanta, Georgia, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) hosts an annual “dump the pump” day to encourage ridership. MARTA creates a scavenger hunt participants complete by using the transit system to find items and places around MARTA's rail system. The hunt closes at 4 pm, and teams submit their booklets to be scored. The winner receives a gift card prize, and the event helps spur community excitement about public transit in Atlanta.



FIG. 11

MARTA scavenger hunt participants reading a hunt booklet.

Image Credit: MARTA

NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

Network connectivity is the ease of access to get from one place to another in a city. It includes transportation options, road design, the prevalence of mixed-used development, and aesthetic cohesion in the area. The City of Gresham envisions a downtown area that visitors can easily navigate no matter their mode of transportation.

Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

Currently, there is room to improve network connectivity within Gresham's downtown area as well as the connection between downtown and the other two hubs in the city. The main issues facing downtown are fragmentation, underutilization, and safety—all of which limit Gresham's potential to function as a cohesive urban space. Empty, or mostly empty parking lots contribute to the problem of a fragmented urban

environment downtown, the downtown corridor sees little activation after the 6:00 PM dinner hour, and intersections perceived as dangerous to pedestrians discourage people from walking.

Certain amenities and locations in Gresham could be better advertised throughout the city. For example, Main City Park is a beautiful community park with sports fields, mixed-use trails, a playground, and a Japanese Garden, but when driving on the arterial road, Powell Boulevard, the sign for Main City Park is blocked by a large crosswalk pole. Even though the park is just across the street from downtown, the network route to reach the park from downtown involves crossing busy Powell Boulevard, a task that may seem daunting to some pedestrians. The park is also inconveniently located in a sloped downhill bowl, further concealing it from passing traffic.



FIG. 12

The large, busy intersection of Powell Boulevard and N Main Avenue.

Image Credit: Robert Binder

FIG. 13

Main City Park
playground.

*Image Credit: Urban
Transportation Student*



FIG. 14

The Japanese Garden at
Main City Park.

*Image Credit: City of
Gresham*



The Arts Plaza is located near downtown, about two blocks from N Main Avenue on NE 3rd Street and NE Hood Avenue. Currently, the Saturday Farmer's Market

is held here. With the right signage and guiding infrastructure, Farmer's Market shoppers could be encouraged to walk the short distance downtown.



FIG. 15

Panoramic photo of the Arts Plaza.

Image Credit: Urban Transportation Student

Another location with opportunity for improvement is the MAX light rail Gresham Central Transit Center located about half a mile from downtown. The lack of wayfinding and visual cues make it feel as though the MAX station is nowhere near downtown. Street art, sculptures, signs, and landscaping would all contribute to indicating the downtown area is nearby.

As mentioned briefly above, cohesive and informative wayfinding signage is lacking in the area. The little signage that does exist is full of character, utilizing a fun font to convey the history in the downtown area, but the signage is small and difficult to see from a moving vehicle.



FIG. 16

Photo of a parking sign in downtown Gresham.

Image Credit: Robert Binder

There are several important roads in Gresham’s downtown area. All roads in

the study area are under the control of the City of Gresham.

Road	Functional Classification
Powell Boulevard and Division Street	Principal Arterial
Miller Avenue and Main Avenue	Major Collectors
All other streets in study area	Local Roads

TABLE 2
Roads near Gresham’s downtown and their functional classification.

Recommendations

The following recommendations offer solutions to some of the fragmentation and safety issues addressed in the existing conditions and needs assessment.

Close N Main Avenue to Automobile Traffic and Move Location of Farmers’ Market

Turning the Main Avenue corridor into a walking only street will increase foot traffic and improve connectivity, accessibility, safety, and aesthetics. This change to Main Avenue would also open the possibility of bringing the Saturday Farmers’ Market to Main Avenue, increasing activation for other local businesses downtown. Currently, Gresham’s Saturday Farmers’ Market is located about two blocks from Main Avenue in a lower-foot trafficked area, the Arts Plaza.

With the closure of Main Avenue to cars, parking lots along Main Street, like Lot 5B and Lot 3B (see Figure 16), may be unnecessary. To address this, the city could infill one or both parking lots with pleasant greenery and architecture to encourage rest and offer social spaces. This would be especially cohesive with

the new Farmers’ Market location because shoppers could use the infilled parking lots to rest or eat after browsing the vendor booths. This would help the downtown network feel unified and less fragmented. However, residents may wish for these areas to remain designated parking lots so they could park their cars right beside the street closure.

Moving the Farmers’ Market to N Main Avenue received an evaluation score of 87 (see Appendix A, Table 4).

Use Art and Cohesive Signage to Connect Downtown to the Other Hubs

Gresham could connect N Main Avenue to the other hubs by implementing signage with a cohesive aesthetic. Signs, street art, sculptures, and landscaping would all contribute to indicating the downtown area is nearby. Specific locations for art and signage opportunities include the intersection of Main City Park and the Springwater Corridor Trail, at surrounding TriMet bus and MAX stops, along NE 3rd Street near the Arts Plaza, and on Powell Boulevard and Division Street. These locations were chosen because they are near important public amenities, and they are in highly trafficked areas.

Gresham High School is located adjacent to the downtown area, and many high school students use the Wy'East Way trail. To make this area more attractive for multimodal use, the city could spur students' creativity by sanctioning street art on the multi-use paths and streets. They could also hire local artists for this initiative. Public art is a great way for cities to increase placemaking and improve aesthetics.

Larger infrastructure changes to the entrance corridors and intersections of downtown are more expensive but would be effective in drawing passer-by vehicles downtown. One example is adding a large arch over the Powell Boulevard and Main Avenue intersection entrance. Many people drive through Gresham on their way to Mt. Hood, and a grand, eye-catching entrance downtown may draw passers-by to stop in the area before or after their trip to the mountain.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 81 (see Appendix A, Table 5).

PARKING

Most people living in the United States use personal automobiles to commute daily, and Gresham residents are no different. Because of the reliance on cars, there must be adequate parking. The challenge lies in finding a parking balance so as not to under supply parking and disenfranchise drivers, and alternatively, not to oversupply parking and waste space contributing to fragmentation problems. Because it is so widely and

often used, adequate parking tends to generate passion in community members.

Existing Conditions and Needs

Assessment

During the class site visit, there were many empty parking spaces along Main Street and nearby lots, and the two-way Main Street traffic flow was mild. Another key finding from the site visit is the disconnect between available parking and downtown activity; despite ample parking, the lack of signage and limited programming contributes to a feeling of emptiness and underutilization of the area. For example, Easthill Church, located at the corner of NW 5th Street and N Main Avenue, has a huge parking lot that likely remains completely empty, save for Sundays or during occasional Church events throughout the week. Another large, underutilized lot is the Main City Park parking lot.

An extremely useful tool when assessing Gresham's needs related to downtown parking was the City of Gresham Parking Use Assessment Report completed in the summer of 2023. The report found that currently, there are 1,229 parking spots in downtown Gresham with demand concentrated around Main Street between NE 1st and 5th Streets for both on and off-street parking. Many parking areas are left empty most of the time (City of Gresham, 2023). Parking lots that did not exceed 55% occupancy even at peak hours include Lot 1, Lot 7A, and Lot 7B (see Figure 16). Occupancy for on and off-street parking peaks at different times of day, around 6:00 PM and 1:00 PM respectively.

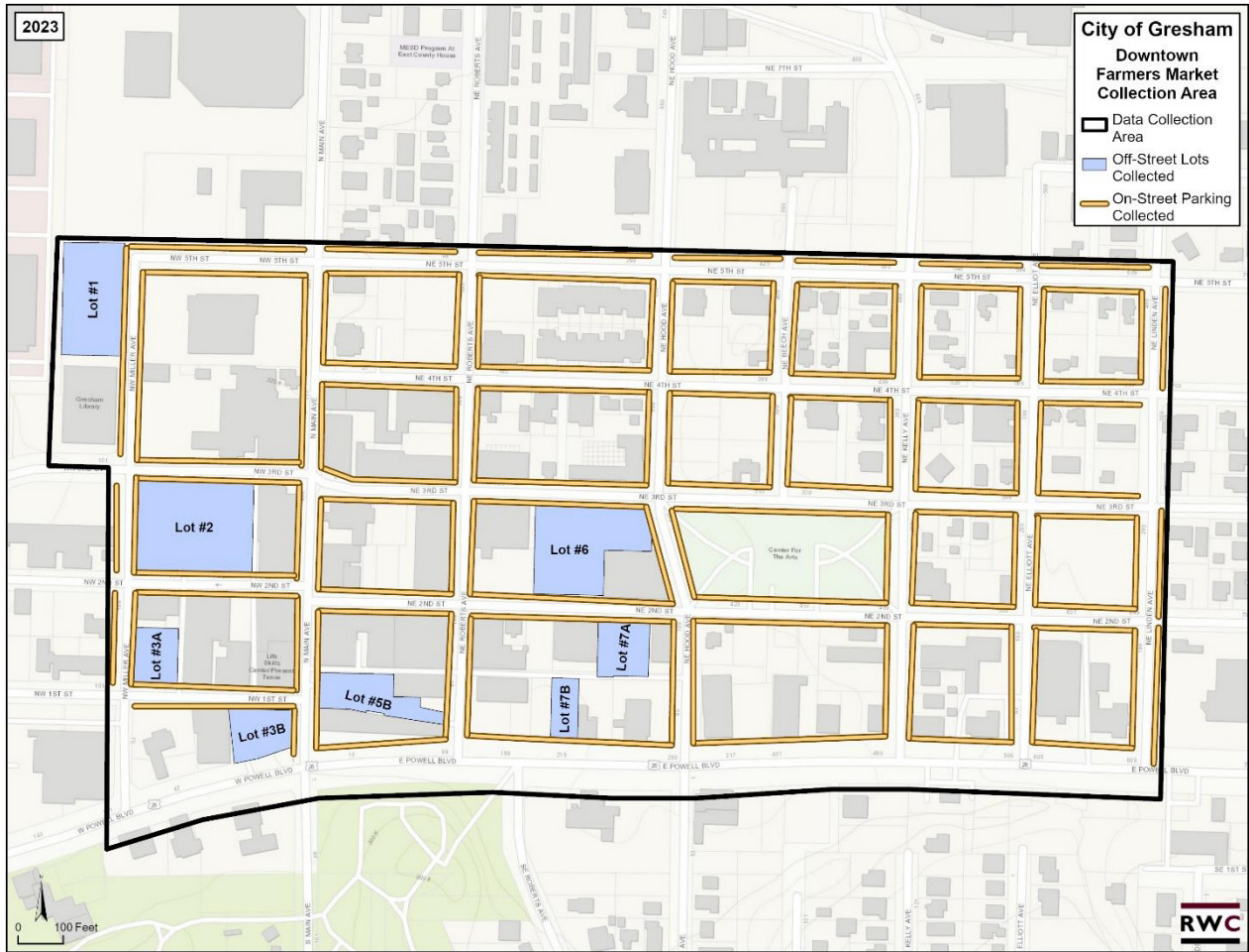


FIG. 17
Downtown study area of Parking Use Assessment Report.
Image Credit: Rick Williams Consulting

Recommendations

Students developed parking recommendations to address the dissonance between residents' perceived lack of parking and actual oversupply of parking.

Cohesive and Clear Signage to Downtown Parking Lots

Like the previous signage recommendation, this project would involve an increase in clear signage directing downtown visitors to the nearest parking lots. The signs should aid drivers in wayfinding and should be cohesive in design. The recommended intersections for signage are NE 5th Street and N Main Avenue, Powell Boulevard and NE Hood Avenue, Powell Boulevard and N Main Avenue, NE 2nd Street and NE Hood Avenue, and NE 2nd Street and NW Miller Avenue. These intersections were chosen because of their proximity to existing parking lots and the heavier traffic flow of the streets.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 84 (see Appendix A, Table 6).

Adaption of Underutilized Parking Lots to Social Gathering Spaces

Since there is an oversupply of parking in Gresham's historic downtown, it is recommended the city infill one or more lots to be converted to a social space. One possibility is converting Lot 7A to a food truck pod. Lot 7A, one of the previously mentioned underutilized lots, has a peak usage of 25%, or three cars. Plenty of on-street parking and supplementary lots exist nearby, so residents would not be at a loss for parking opportunities. Existing food truck pods in other cities have additional amenities like covered

seating, firepits, lawn games, and live music. Adding a space where people are encouraged to sit and enjoy spending time engaging with family, friends, and other community members would help activate downtown. The blank yellow walls of a nearby building offer an opportunity for a mural painted by students or a local artist. Additionally, Lot 7A is near the Arts Plaza and Main City Park, making it a perfect location for people to grab a bite to eat before adventuring to the parks.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 81 (see Appendix A, Table 7).

Implement a Pilot Parking Program

In the event N Main Avenue is closed to car traffic seasonally or on weekends, it will be important to measure the strain on parking lots and nearby on-street parking, since the two-blocks of on-street parking in the walking-only corridor will be gone. A Pilot Parking Program to collect data on parking capacity will address this need. It will inform the city if more parking lots can be infilled with social spaces or if the closure of on-street parking has strained downtown's parking system and more lots or parking infrastructure should be developed.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 80 (see Appendix A, Table 8).

DEVELOPMENT

Development in the context of city planning is the process of shaping and managing the growth of a city. It includes the construction of new buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces, but also involves transportation and building zoning restrictions. City zoning laws

dictate what types of development are allowed downtown. The city has full jurisdiction over Gresham's zoning laws, so if they choose to redevelop downtown, necessary zoning changes will be possible. The impact of redeveloping N Main Avenue is the focus of this report. A large-scale redevelopment project will have significant impacts on Gresham's historic downtown hub, and the intended outcomes are higher density housing, mixed-used zoning for commercial and residential areas, more walkable streets, and increased 16-hour programming.

Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

The City of Gresham has been reimagining downtown since 2009, when the Downtown Vision was published and released to the public. The study area of this report is categorized as Downtown Commercial Core, with the intention of

preserving the small-scale feel of the Main Street area, while also serving as a mixed-use land to house retail, services, office and residential buildings. Main Avenue is considered a "Unique Street," which requires multiple zoning standards, such as site design for walkways and pedestrian circulation, open space design, and integrated site planning.

During the site visit, researchers observed an over-supply of salons in comparison with restaurants and other local shops. Other areas for improvement include intersections lacking crosswalk paint and lighting, limited community activity space, and insufficient signage to help visitors locate local businesses and attractions. Walking down Main Avenue, pedestrians will see few identifying features to offer a place-making experience in Gresham's historic downtown.

FIG. 18
Photograph of N Main Avenue and NE 3rd Street intersection.
Image Credit: Robert Binder



Recommendations

Development recommendations are based on the current need for increased activation downtown.

Close N Main Avenue to Automobile Traffic

As mentioned in previous sections, the downtown area would reap many benefits by closing N Main Avenue from NE 1st to 5th Street. It is ultimately a redevelopment project that could start with limited infrastructure changes like the usage of barricades and mobile signs. If the project becomes permanent, bollards, vegetation boxes, and permanent signage could eventually be installed to signify the pedestrian- and bicycle-only access. It would free up space for the city to utilize and develop in other areas like current on- and off-street parking spots.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 86 (see Appendix A, Table 1).

Case Study: During the summer of 2020, the City of Edmonds, Washington closed their Main Street to vehicular traffic on the weekends to give pedestrians more space for physical distance to combat COVID-19. The street closure allowed local businesses to utilize extra street space, with 17 restaurants expanding seating outside and 28 retail businesses displaying their products outdoors (Schlossberg 2021, 122). This contributed to a lively Main Street environment with a community that could safely support local businesses during the pandemic. The street closure was an advocacy effort for people first design; before the closure there was 19 feet of human space (sidewalks), and after the closure there was a staggering 57.5 feet of human space. A survey revealed that 70% of businesses downtown supported walkable Main Street.



FIG. 19
Edmonds, WA Walkable
Main Street and
outdoor seating.

*Image Credit: City of
Edmonds*



FIG. 20
Edmonds, WA Walkable Main Street and street art.
Image Credit: City of Edmonds

Turn N Main Avenue into a One-Way

An alternative to closing N Main Avenue to cars completely is to make the corridor into a one-way street. Turning N Main Avenue from NE 1st to NE 5th Street would allow excess space to be used for a protected two-way bike lane. This renovation would give bicyclists and pedestrians a safer option to access

downtown and ideally decrease car-dependability. The development of this project could result in larger walkable streets; safer intersections; a two-way secluded bike lane; increased walkability to schools, government nearby factions, and businesses; the implementation of a bike or scooter share program; and lastly improved light systems at intersections.



FIG. 21
 Student Mockup of a one-way street design on N Main Avenue.
 Image Credit: Google Maps
 Edited by: Noa Schwartz

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 78 (see Appendix A, Table 9).

Ornamentation of Downtown

The City of Gresham could redevelop downtown's ornamentation by creating centralized signage and implementing public art to help people navigate the greater downtown area. The signage could direct visitors to Main City Park, the Arts Plaza, and nearby MAX stations.

Well-designed wayfinding signage funnels foot traffic to local businesses and piques visitors' interests. Utility box painting is an example of a placemaking feature to show people that they are downtown. The signage could also include historical information plaques to lean into the rich history of Gresham.

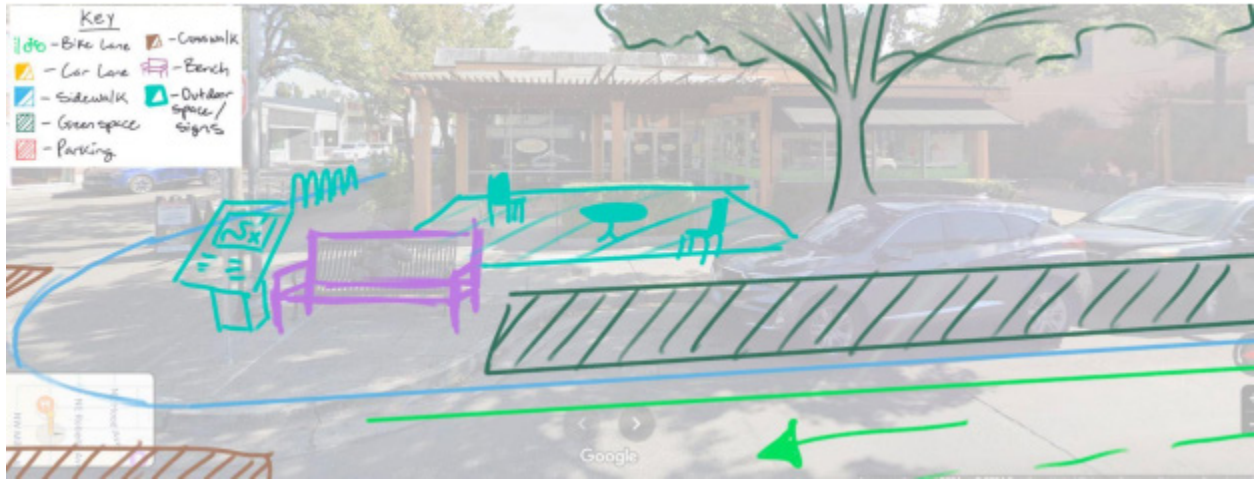


FIG. 22

Student Mockup of ornamental elements on N Main Avenue.

Image Credit: Google Maps

Edited by: Noa Schwartz

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 85 (see Appendix A, Table 10).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Understanding a community’s hopes for the future is essential, and there are many diverse ways to engage with a local community. Gresham’s goal is to spur activation downtown and get community members involved in downtown activities to foster an energized and thriving social and financial economy.

Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment

Initial findings from the class site visit included very few pedestrians downtown, but of note was the absence of the youth population. The median age of Gresham

is 37, younger than most cities, implying modern development to attract a youthful population may be necessary to spur community engagement. Currently, a lack of diverse businesses and attractions makes downtown Gresham unactive.

Every third Thursday of the month, participating local businesses downtown stay open until 8 PM for the City’s Third Thursday program. Third Thursdays is an effort to increase activation downtown by turning N Main Avenue into a large social environment with vendor booths encouraging community activation.



FIG. 23
 Photograph of Gresham’s Third Thursday Program.
 Image Credit: City of Gresham

The City of Gresham conducted a community survey about the redevelopment of downtown. Key takeaways from the response summary include: people desire better infrastructure like roads, wider sidewalks, and more parking; people want more variety in businesses like a grocery store and more diverse dining options; people should be prioritized over cars; there is a desire for more lighting on side streets; and there is a desire for a better pedestrian connection between Main City Park and the Arts Plaza and downtown. There was some pushback from business owners opposed to pedestrian corridors because of the possible cumbersome effect on delivery drivers and fears of a decline in their business, but overall, initial survey responses to the idea of a pedestrian-only corridor were positive.

Recommendations

Students developed the following recommendations with efficiency and feasibility in mind to address increasing community engagement.

Engage with Gresham High School

Gresham High School is a ten-minute walk from the study area. Researchers recommend contacting Gresham High School through surveys, event tabling, and class or club visits to request their collaboration and discuss engagement options. Surveys and event tabling could be done during local events such as the Farmers' Market or through online surveys advertised through QR codes posted at various public buildings. Acknowledging the adolescent experience and perception of downtown is extremely important. Young people are often ignored in city planning despite their involvement and

energy in community events. Gresham has the opportunity to change this by collaborating with high school students. Learning which retailers, restaurants, and activities are desirable to the younger generations is a great opportunity for Gresham to invest in and plan for their future.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 84 (see Appendix A, Table 11).

Downtown Street Fair

In the event of a pedestrian and cyclist only corridor on Main Avenue, a street fair would take advantage of the increased foot traffic while acting as a celebration for the new development. Art and craft vendors, musicians, performers, and other local business vendors would be invited to participate and create a fun space for Gresham's downtown visitors. A street fair would bring new faces downtown who may not regularly visit the area, thus increasing community engagement. It is also recommended that the city host a community survey booth or conduct table paneling to gauge community responses to new developments in the downtown area. With the increased foot traffic and concentration of community members, a street fair is the perfect opportunity to get community feedback and engage with stakeholders. Appendix B includes a student example of what a community survey about downtown redevelopment could look like. This example survey has three sections: aesthetic appeal, functionality, and usage and traffic.

This recommendation received an evaluation score of 83 (see Appendix A, Table 12).

Conclusion

While working towards their One Gresham Initiative, the City of Gresham partnered with students to develop recommendations to revitalize Gresham's historic downtown district. The downtown area has the potential to encourage multimodal transportation, create greater network connectivity, improve parking, invest in development, and offer opportunities for community engagement. Historic downtown Gresham

has character, charm, and authenticity, but there are plenty of opportunities to further activate the area. Student researchers recommend development changes to diversify multimodal transportation options and increase connectivity and activation. These changes will help amplify the vibrant energy of Gresham and give community members a centralized space to enjoy all Gresham has to offer.

References

City of Gresham. "City of Gresham Bicycling Map and Guide," 2017.

City of Gresham. "City of Gresham Parking Studies Data Assessment." Report, June 2023.

"Gresham Map," n.d. <https://portal.greshamoregon.gov/GreshamMap/>.

"Gresham Map, Traffic Counts." City of Gresham, City of Gresham, 2019, portal.greshamoregon.gov/GreshamMap/. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

Schlossberg, Marc, Rebecca Lewis, Alixa Whalen, Clare Haley, Danielle Lewis, Natalie Kataoka, and John Larson-Friend. Rethinking Streets During COVID-19: An Evidence-Based Guide to 25 Quick Redesigns for Physical Distancing, Public Use and Spatail Equity. Portland, OR: Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC), 2021.

Appendix A:

Evaluation Scores

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
18	18	16	17	8	9	86

TABLE 1

Evaluation of closing N Main Avenue to automobile traffic recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
17	16	16	16	7	9	81

TABLE 2

Evaluation of enhancing bicycle infrastructure recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
16	18	17	16	9	9	85

TABLE 3

Evaluation of transportation education and outreach recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
17	17	18	17	9	9	87

TABLE 4

Evaluation of moving location of farmers' market (in the event Main Avenue is closed to cars) recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
17	15	15	18	7	9	81

TABLE 5

Evaluation enhancing art and cohesive signage recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
15	20	19	15	8	7	84

TABLE 6

Evaluation of adding signage specific to parking recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
15	15	15	20	7	9	81

TABLE 7

Evaluation of transforming underutilized parking lots into social gathering spaces recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
18	18	15	10	9	10	80

TABLE 8

Evaluation of implementing a pilot parking program recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
15	15	16	17	7	8	78

TABLE 9

Evaluation of turning N Main Avenue into a one-way recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
19	17	15	18	7	9	85

TABLE 10

Evaluation of ornamenting downtown recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
16	17	15	18	9	9	84

TABLE 11

Evaluation of engaging with Gresham High School recommendation.

Alignment with Community Needs	Feasibility of Implementation	Impact on Efficiency	Contribution to Downtown Activation	Cost Effectiveness	Sustainability & Long-Term Benefits	Total
17	15	15	19	9	8	83

TABLE 12

Evaluation of implementing a downtown street fair recommendation.

Appendix B:

Community Survey Example

SECTION 1: AESTHETIC APPEAL

The aesthetic appeal would be measured by personal surveys performed by city surveyors around the downtown area. Willing participants would answer questionnaires to rate on a scale of 1-10 how effective the changes were in improving the overall “look” of downtown Gresham. They will also be asked if this change affects the time/frequency they spend downtown, which places they visit, and how they feel about Gresham as a community. The survey would be as follows:

- 1.** How would you rate the appearance of the downtown Gresham area BEFORE additions were made?
 - > (1 = Very Poor, 10 = Excellent)

- 2.** How would you rate the appearance of the downtown Gresham area AFTER additions were made?
 - > (1 = Very Poor, 10 = Excellent)

- 3.** I spend more time in downtown because of these changes
 - > (1 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree)

- 4.** I visit more stores than I did before changes were made
 - > (1 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree)

- 5.** I believe the look of Main Avenue influences how many shops I visit and how much time I spend downtown
 - > (1 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree)

SECTION 2: FUNCTIONALITY

The survey would also ask participants to rate the functionality of the space using their preferred mode of transport. Whether it be by car, on foot, by bus, by bike, or other, visitors will rate whether the changes have made their travel better, worse, or neither. This includes travel within downtown and travel to and from downtown. QR codes linked to the survey would be placed on benches. Participants will rate their experience from positive to negative. The survey would be as follows:

- 1.** How easy was it to get downtown from your home BEFORE changes were made?
 - > (1 = Very Easy, 10 = Very Difficult)

- 2.** How easy is it to get downtown from your home AFTER changes were made?
 - > (1 = Very Easy, 10 = Very Difficult)

- 3.** What mode of transport did you use to get here today?
 - > (a) Car (personal) (b) Car (carpool) (c) Bike (d) Bus (e) On foot (f) Uber/Lyft (g) Other

- 4.** What mode of transport do you most often use to get downtown?
 - > (a) Car (personal) (b) Car (carpool) (c) Bike (d) Bus (e) On foot (f) Uber/Lyft (g) Other

5. Has your preferred mode of transport changed since the downtown redesign? If so, what was your previous preferred mode of transport?
 - > (a) No
 - > (b) Yes (i) Car (personal) (ii) Car (carpool) (iii) Bike (iv) Bus (v) On foot (vi) Uber/Lyft (vii) Other

6. Rate your overall experience traveling to, around, and from downtown
 - > (1 = Very Poor, 10 = Excellent)

7. I find downtown navigation to be simple, and easy to understand
 - > (1 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree)

8. I would like better flow for a particular mode of transport
 - > (a) No
 - > (b) Yes (i) Car (personal) (ii) Car (carpool) (iii) Bike (iv) Bus (v) On foot (vi) Uber/Lyft (vii) Other

SECTION 3: USAGE/TRAFFIC

Usage and traffic could be measured by combining city data collected from bus services, bike rentals, and existing car counters with local businesses' observations. Businesses may be asked to keep track of how many customers they get and if their sales increase or decrease. Although this puts some strain on small businesses to keep these records, measuring how our projects affect daily operations and getting feedback is important. If there is reason to believe that development projects have hurt business or foot traffic, we would also ask businesses what changes they think should be made. Finally, these results would be collected over six months after the redesigns are finished.

SCI Directors and Staff

Marc Schlossberg	SCI Co-Director, and Professor of Planning, Public Policy and Management, University of Oregon
Nico Larco	SCI Co-Director, and Professor of Architecture, University of Oregon
Megan Banks	SCYP Director, University of Oregon
Lindsey Hayward	SCYP Assistant Program Manager, University of Oregon
Grace Craven	Report Coordinator
Danielle Lewis	Graphic Designer