

Visions for a New Old Town

Part 1: Urban Design Solutions for the Glisan Corridor

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ARCH 584
Urban Design
Studio

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

SCI Sustainable Cities Institute

SCYP Sustainable City Year Program

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We also wish to thank Gehl San Francisco and all our reviewers for sharing their time, feedback, and expertise throughout the course.

Course Description

ARCH 584: URBAN DESIGN STUDIO
Sustainable Urban Design Studio introduces students to the field of Urban Design, which focuses on an expanded number of scales, with different timeframes and different levels of control. The studio investigates contemporary trends and thinking about Sustainable Urbanism and evaluates those trends in light of their applicability to current design and development projects focusing on neighborhood design, street design, and the design of key public spaces.

Course Participants

Instructors

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Architecture Graduate Students

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Executive Summary

Architecture graduate students in this Urban Design Studio at the University of Oregon, Portland campus were asked to develop design solutions to activate streets along the Glisan Corridor, a portion of Portland's Old Town District. This area has long been challenging from a development and activation perspective, and city leadership is interested in new ideas for the district. The project sought to address area challenges such as low density, lack of a cohesive identity, and an overall lack of street level activity. The class learned about the site and its context through conversations with representatives of civic, community, and non-profit organizations working in Old Town, as well as conducting research and site analysis. The information gathered from these conversations and analysis informed proposals that would increase density, help to establish community identity, and promote street level activation and development.

Student investigations revealed that adding dense housing in Old Town is essential to creating the residential population needed to support active street life. Proposals focused on finding balance between the needs of residents and visitors, meeting basic needs, and building on the historic and cultural features of the district to create a lively, walkable neighborhood with an identity of its own.

This course highlighted the role of urban design in creating conditions that can promote growth and development. Targeted public amenities can serve as a catalyst to draw in new development and new residents, which are essential to creating lively streets. Old Town, with its rich history, unique cultural heritage, and central location, has the potential to become a diverse and lively neighborhood that supports the needs of its residents and the many visitors to the area. Student recommendations from this studio provide visions for leveraging Old Town's strengths to realize this potential.

Introduction

This Urban Design Studio focused on generating design solutions for active public spaces along the Glisan Corridor located in the northern section of Old Town Portland. Throughout the studio, students met with city officials, non-profit organizations, and other parties interested in the revitalization of the area. Interested stakeholders included Prosper Portland, TriMet, Blanchet House, Lan Su Chinese Garden, advocates for the planned Steel Bridge Skate Park, and proposed Made in Old Town project. Students also heard from PLACE, a design firm working on public space design for the nearby Broadway Corridor redevelopment.

For four decades, Old Town has been a focus for city investment, in hopes of activating this historically important part of Portland's urban core. Despite investments like the 5th and 6th Avenue Transit Mall, Lan Su Chinese Garden, and the establishment of protected historical and cultural districts, meaningful activity and development have remained elusive. The Glisan Corridor and Old Town have long been challenging for development due to the lack of permanent residents in the area, physical barriers, such as the area's three bridges (Broadway, Steel, and Burnside), the railroad tracks, and a high concentration of social services for people experiencing homelessness, addiction, and other challenges.

Despite these challenges, Old Town has solid foundational assets including robust transit connections, a direct connection to the waterfront, a unique sense of place due to the area's history as Japantown and Chinatown, and a connection to Portland's industrial past. These strengths and challenges provided opportunities for students to develop their understanding of neighborhood design, the development of key public spaces, and the importance of density to active urban spaces.



Visions for a New Old Town:
Urban Design Solutions for the Glisan Corridor

Site Analysis

Culture and Place

To gain understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the site, students gathered information about the cultural, historical, environmental, and physical context of Old Town. Conclusions from this research informed the design proposals developed by students during the course of the studio.

Neighborhood History

Portland's Old Town and the Glisan Corridor are part of the original urban core of Portland. It has long had a connection to industry because of its proximity to the formerly industrial riverfront. Major industries included timber, paper, cast iron, and agricultural transportation.

Many of Portland's remaining cast iron buildings are located in the Skidmore Historic District. Old Town was also a residential center for African Americans and immigrants from Japan, China, and Eastern Europe. Housing costs and biased policies prevented these communities from living in other parts of the city.

Once one of the largest Japantowns in the US, much of Portland's "Nihon Machi" was emptied during World War II when the US Government forced Japanese Americans into internment camps. Much of the Chinese American population was priced out of the neighborhood prior to the 1980's, when the official Chinatown Cultural District was designated by the city.

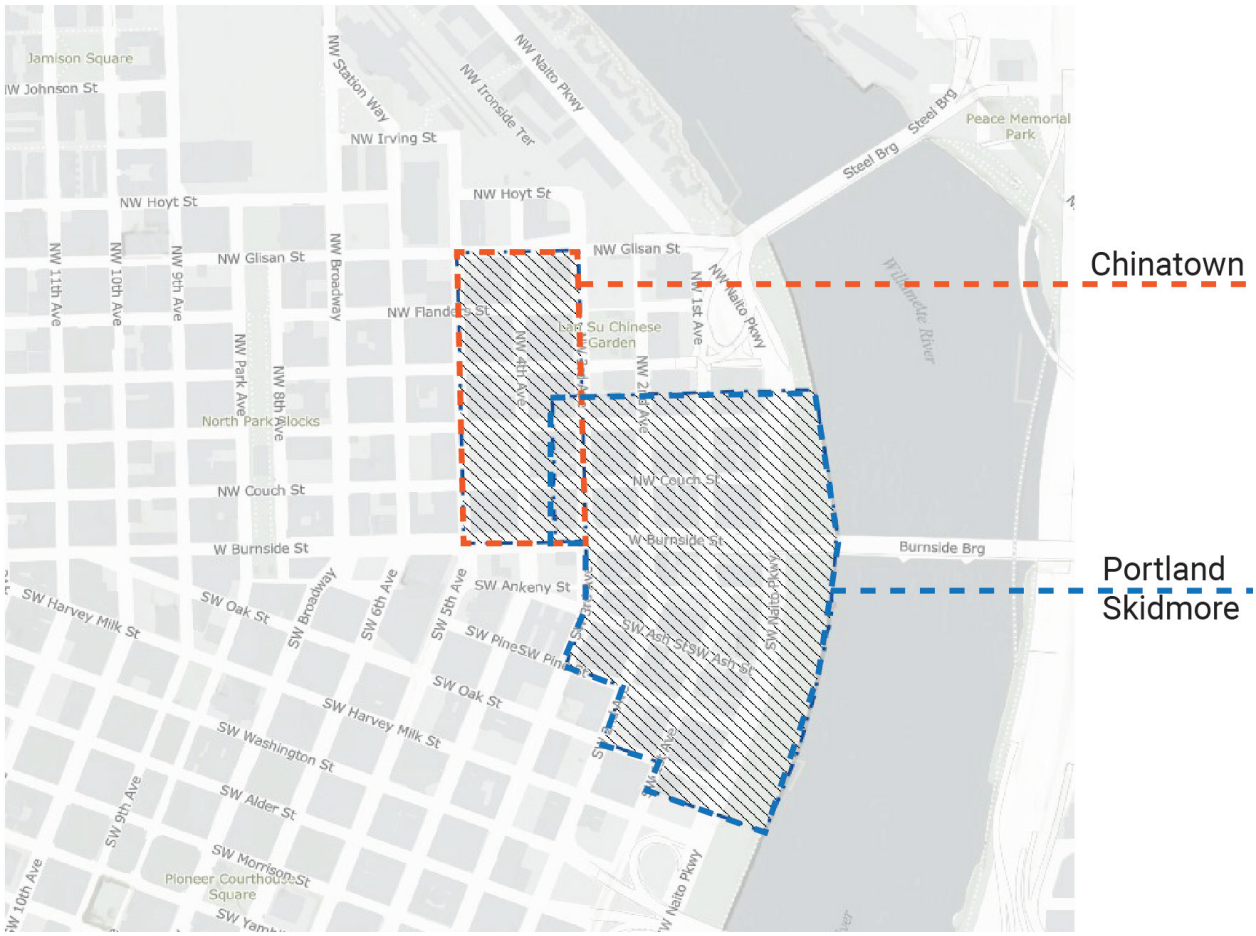


Figure 1: Map highlighting the locations of the Skidmore Historical District and Chinatown

Figure 2: Timeline of the history of Old Town Portland



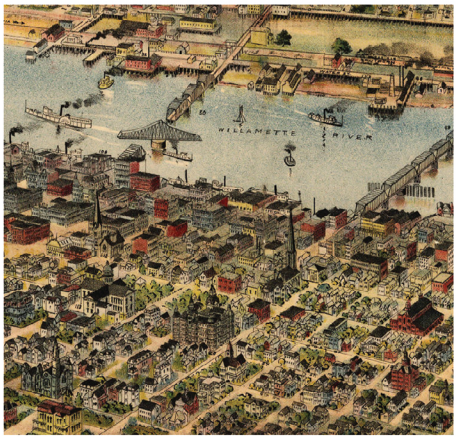


"The North End"

As Portland's original downtown, the area was initially known as "The North End." It served as the city's commercial and cultural hub during its early development.

MID 1800S





"White Chapel" and "Burnside

The neighborhood later adopted names like "White Chapel" and "Burnside," referencing prominent local landmarks and streets that defined the area.

LATE 1800S





"Skid Row"

The term "Skid Road" emerged due to the practice of skidding logs down the streets to the river, and it became associated with the area's working-class and transient populations. Over time, "Skid Road" became synonymous with urban poverty

EARLY 1900S



Figure 2 (continued): Timeline of the history of Old Town Portland



"Old Town"

As the city expanded, the neighborhood began to be referred to as "Old Town," acknowledging its status as Portland's oldest district. This name marked a shift towards preserving the area's historical significance.



MID 1900S



1975



"Historic Recognition"

The Skidmore/Old Town Historic District was established and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, recognizing the area's rich architectural and cultural heritage.



1980S





"Old Town Chinatown"

Efforts to revitalize the neighborhood led to the official designation of "Old Town Chinatown," honoring the Chinese-American community's historical presence and contributions to the area.



1989



"New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District"

A portion of the neighborhood was designated as the Portland New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District, acknowledging the significant roles both Chinese and Japanese communities played in the area's history.

Demographics

As of the 2020 Census, the population of Old Town is 3,974. By comparison, the population of the nearby Pearl District was 11,000 in 2020. Due in part to the concentration of services for people experiencing homelessness in Old Town, there are encampments scattered throughout the area, particularly in areas close to these service providers.

Figure 3: Demographic data for Old Town, derived from the 2020 Census

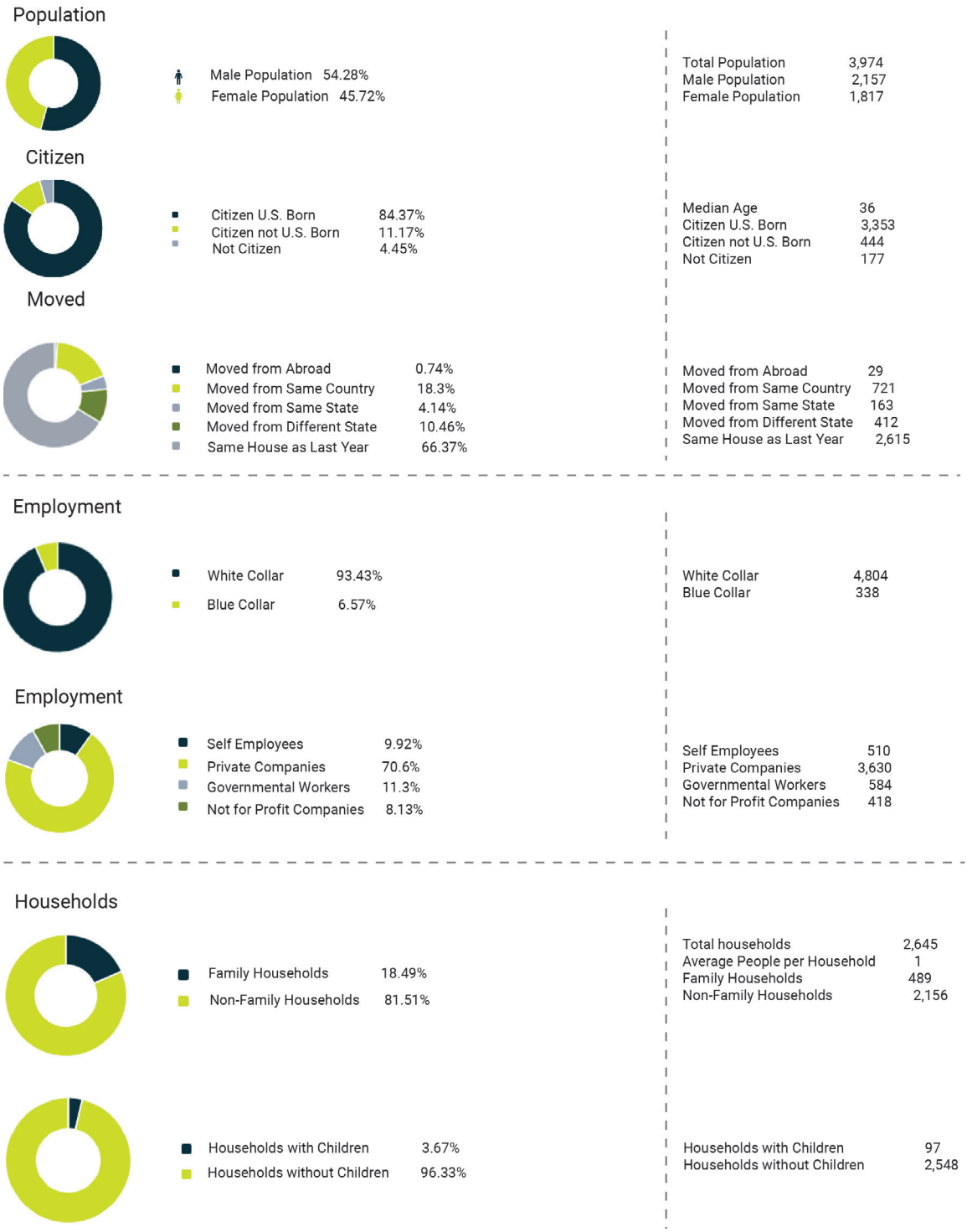
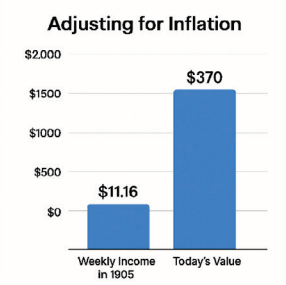


Figure 4: Economic and cost of living statistics for Old Town





To put historical wages into perspective, earning $11.16 per week in 1905 would be equivalent to approximately $370 per week in today's dollars, or around $1,600 per month.

CHARACTERISTICS PROFILE

EDUACTION

Percent of population age 25+ with:	
No completed High School or GED	15%
Bachelor's degree or higher	26%
Share of chilkdren 5-17 attending a public school	>99%

HEALTH

Food insecurity	19.8%
Disability	25.4%
Social vulnerability index	0.68
Life expentancy (years)	NA

INCOME

Share or persons living in households with income below poverty line	24.8%
Median household income	$25k
Share of households at or above $75k (approx. median city income)	17.3%

LIVING COST COMAPRISON WITH NEIGHBORING DISTRICT



OLD TOWN

Average Rent: $1,387 per month.
Studio Apartments: Average rent around $1,050/month.
1-Bedroom Apartments: Average rent around $1,320/month.
2-Bedroom Apartments: Average rent around $1,605/month.
3-Bedroom Apartments: Average rent around $2,387/month.
Homeownership: Approximately 20% of residents own their homes, while 80% rent.



PEARL DISTRICT

- Average Rent: Approximately $2,107 per month, reflecting its status as a more upscale neighborhood.
- 1-Bedroom Apartments: Average rent around $2,004/month.
- 2-Bedroom Apartments: Average rent around $3,035/month.
- Rental Market: Mix of high-end apartments and condos.

Places of Interest

Destinations in Old Town like the Lan Su Chinese Garden, Portland Chinatown Museum, Oregon Japanese American Museum, Oregon Jewish Museum, and nearby destinations like Voodoo Donuts and Powell's Books bring visitors from across the US and the world.

Figure 5: Prominent Old Town landmarks and businesses



Environment

Old Town Portland, like much of western Oregon, has a Mediterranean climate, with warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Prevailing wind patterns are from the north-northwest in summer and south-southeast in winter. Yearly precipitation averages 46 inches in Old Town. Much of this rain falls during the winter months. Because Portland experiences periods of prolonged rainfall, stormwater management and protected outdoor areas are an important part of public space design in Portland.

Figure 6: Map of prevailing wind patterns

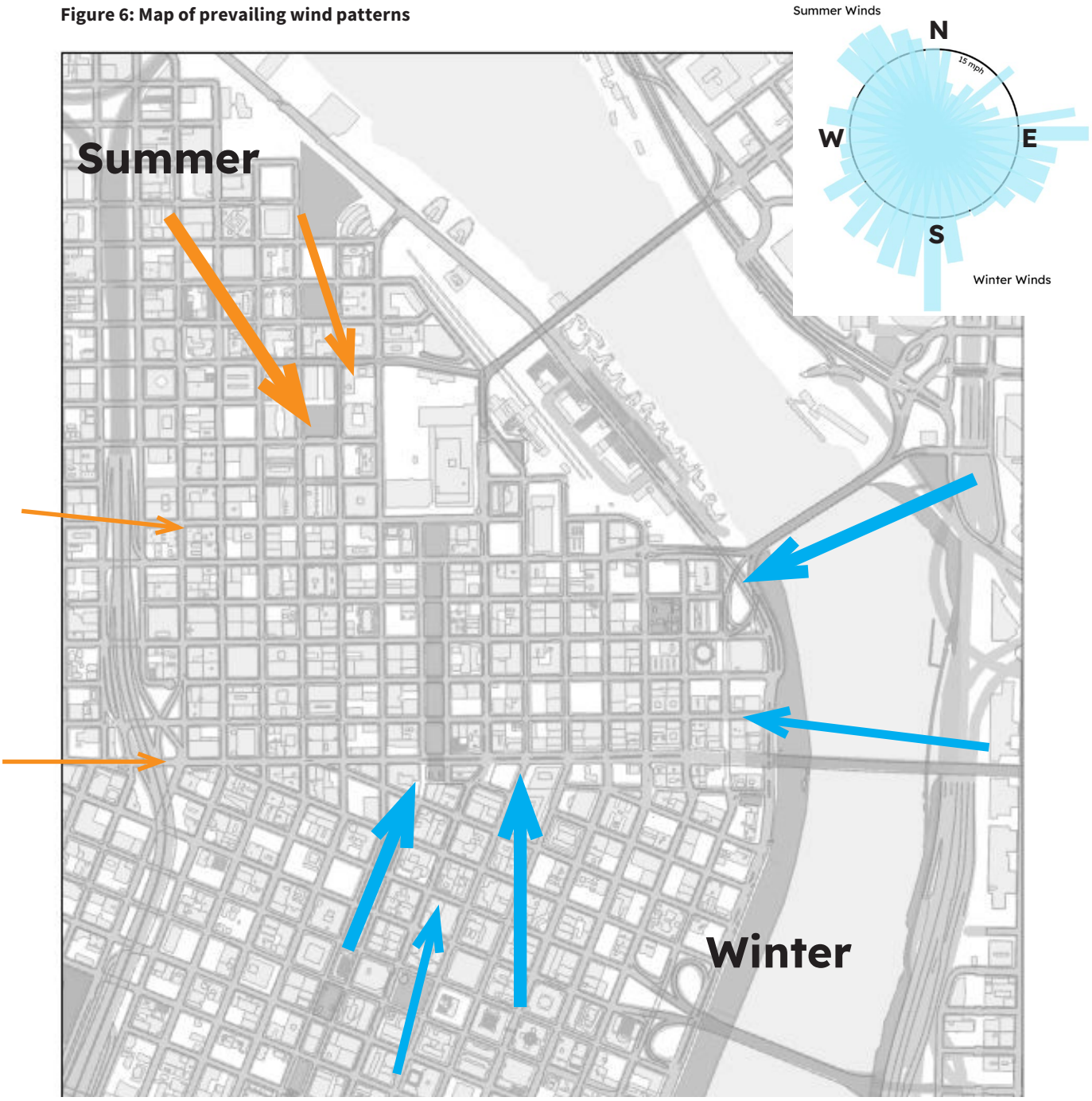
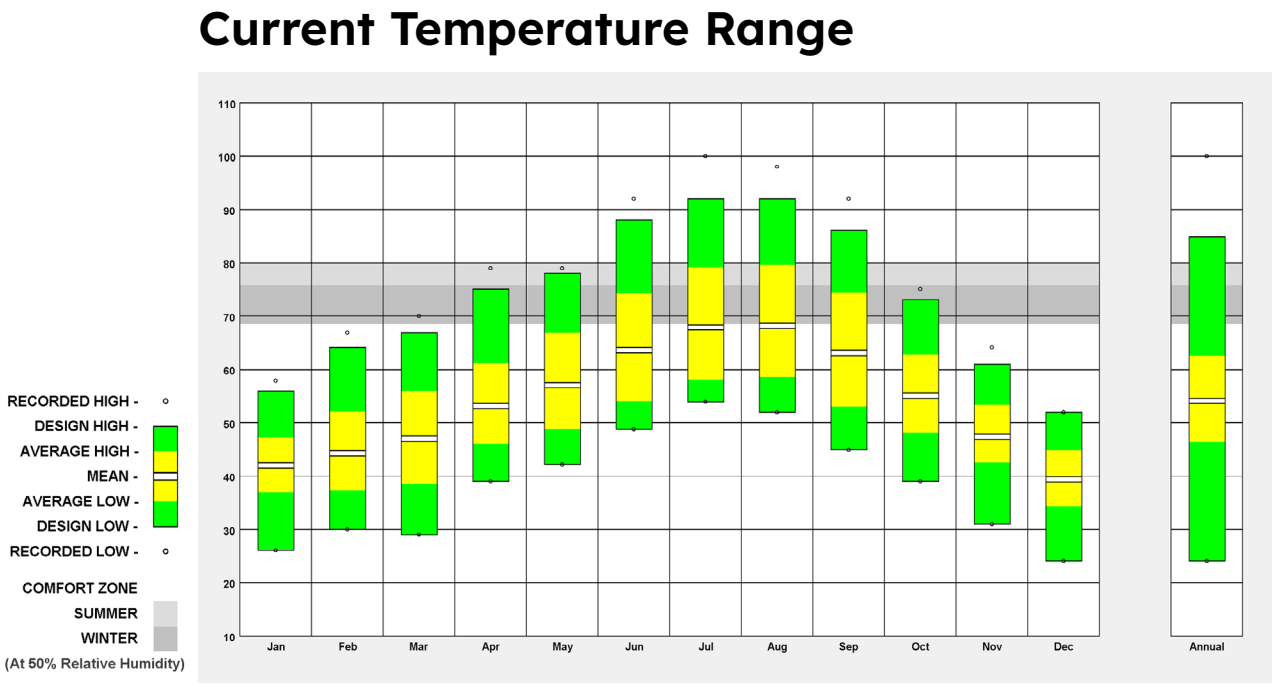
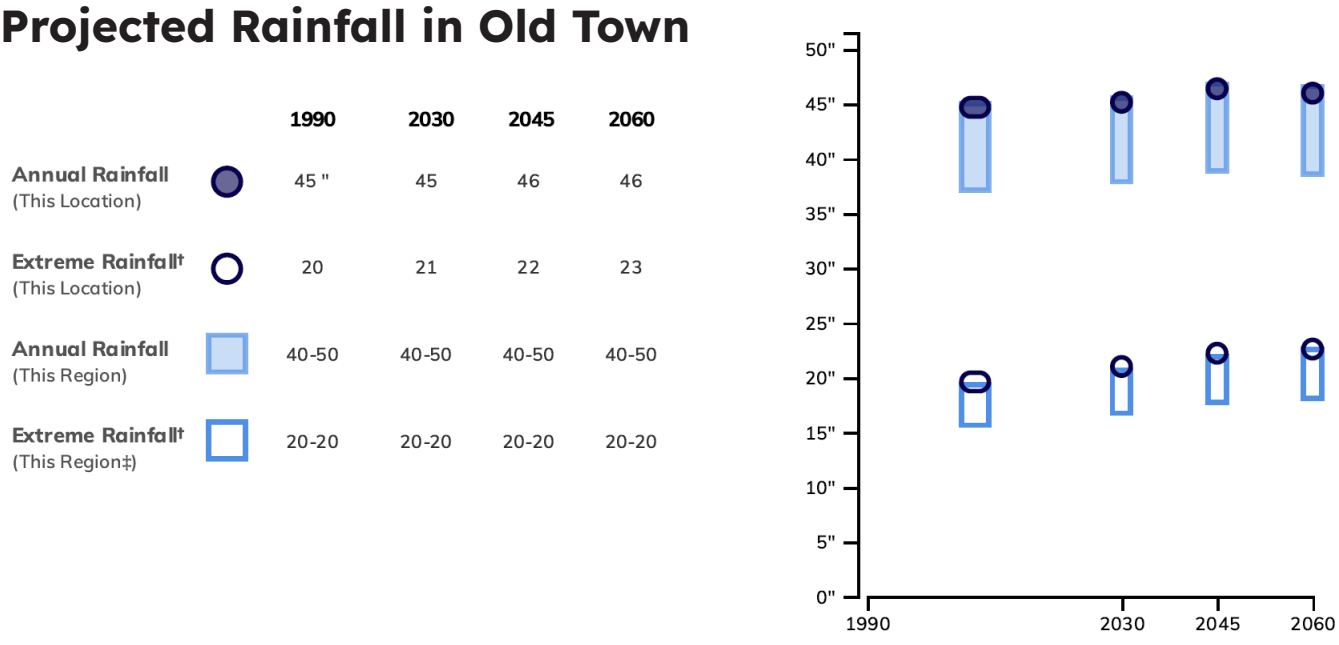


Figure 7: Monthly temperature averages for Portland



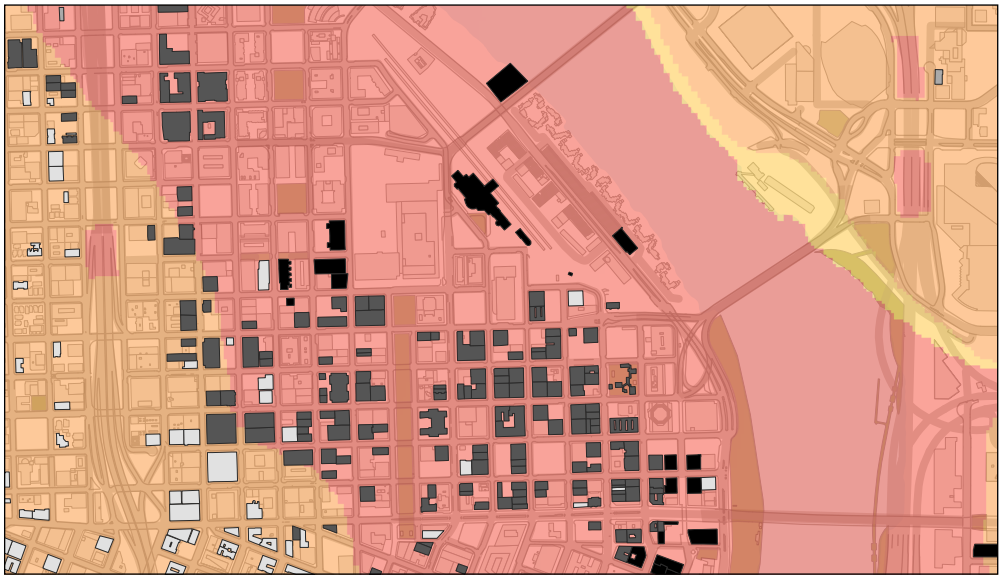
Data provided by Climate Consultant

Figure 8: Precipitation patterns for Old Town



Earthquake Hazard Risk

Old Town is largely flat in elevation, and it sits on soil deposited by the Willamette River and some manmade infill. Because of this, the area is at high risk in the event of a major earthquake. Many of the historic buildings in Old Town are made of unreinforced masonry, including Union Station, and are at high risk of serious damage in an earthquake. Reinforcing these buildings is a priority for public safety in the area.

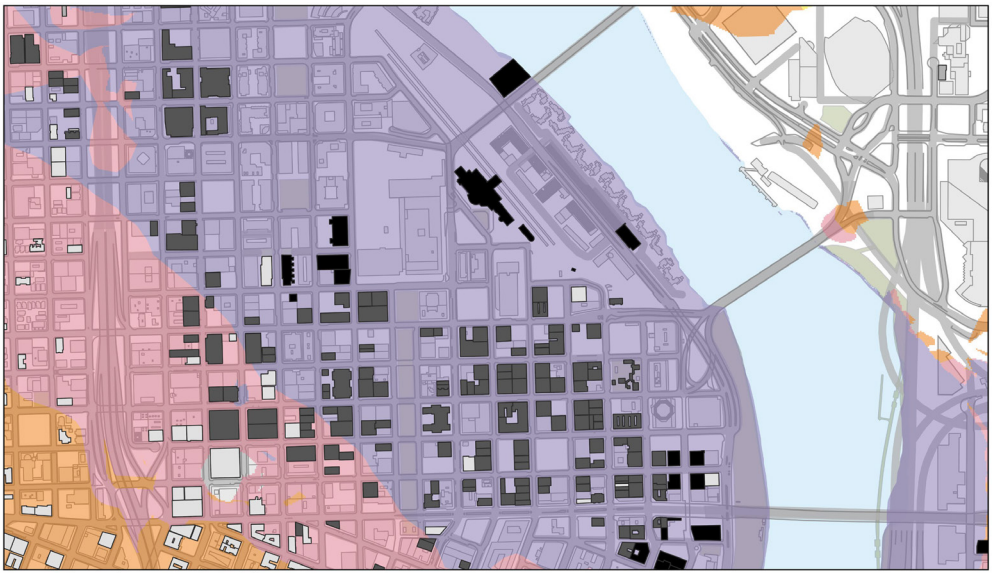


Earthquake Expected Shaking

- Light
- Moderate
- Strong
- Very Strong
- Severe
- Violent

Data reference historical seismic activity along the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

There are two recored active faults located southwest of our site in Downtown Portland and Goose Hollow. Several epicenters have also be recorded south of our site.



Liquefaction Hazard

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low

Unreinforced Masonry Buildings

- Low Risk
-
-
- High Risk

Liquefaction occurs when soil is cohesionless soils with poor drainage lose strength and stiffness during an earthquake. The resulting behavior is similar to a viscous liquid.

Since our site is located in a very high liquefaction zone improving soil drainage and soil compaction may reduce the effects of

Figure 9: Seismic and liquefaction hazard risks for Old Town

Green Space and Tree Canopy

Area green spaces include the North Park Blocks on the west side of Old Town and the Tom McCall Waterfront Park on the east side. These areas support wildlife such as squirrels, ducks, migratory birds, salmon, steelhead trout, and a variety of pollinating insects. Urban tree canopy in the area is not robust, leaving Old Town susceptible to the urban heat island effect. Improvements to the tree canopy could help reduce these impacts in the summer months.



Figure 10 : Old Town tree inventory and species

Tree Inventory

Native

- Unknown
- No
- Yes

Top 3 Species in Parks:

1. Japanese Flowering Cherry
2. Norway Maple
3. American Elm

Top 3 Species in Streets:

1. Norway Maple
2. Red Silver Maple Hybrid
3. Flowering Pear

Most trees planted in Old Town are not native to the area. Furthermore, more planted trees have a small trunk diameter; with most of the largest trees located in the North Park Blocks.



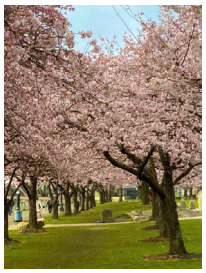
Norway Maple



Red Silver Maple Hybrid



Flowering Pear



Japanese Flowering Cherry



American Elm

The most common trees planted throughout the site are not native.
For a list of native flora visit: https://www.portland.gov/bps/documents/portland-plant-list/download

Figure 11: Tree canopy conditions



Tree Inventory

Condition

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Dead

Most trees on our site are in fair to good condition.

There are design opportunities to improve street tree condition in Old Town. Suggestions include: increased size of tree wells, root barriers, tree guards, public trash recepticles and restrooms, and conscious pathing for avoid desire paths through planters.



Root barriers guide the tree's root growth to protect them from breaking through the sidewalk.

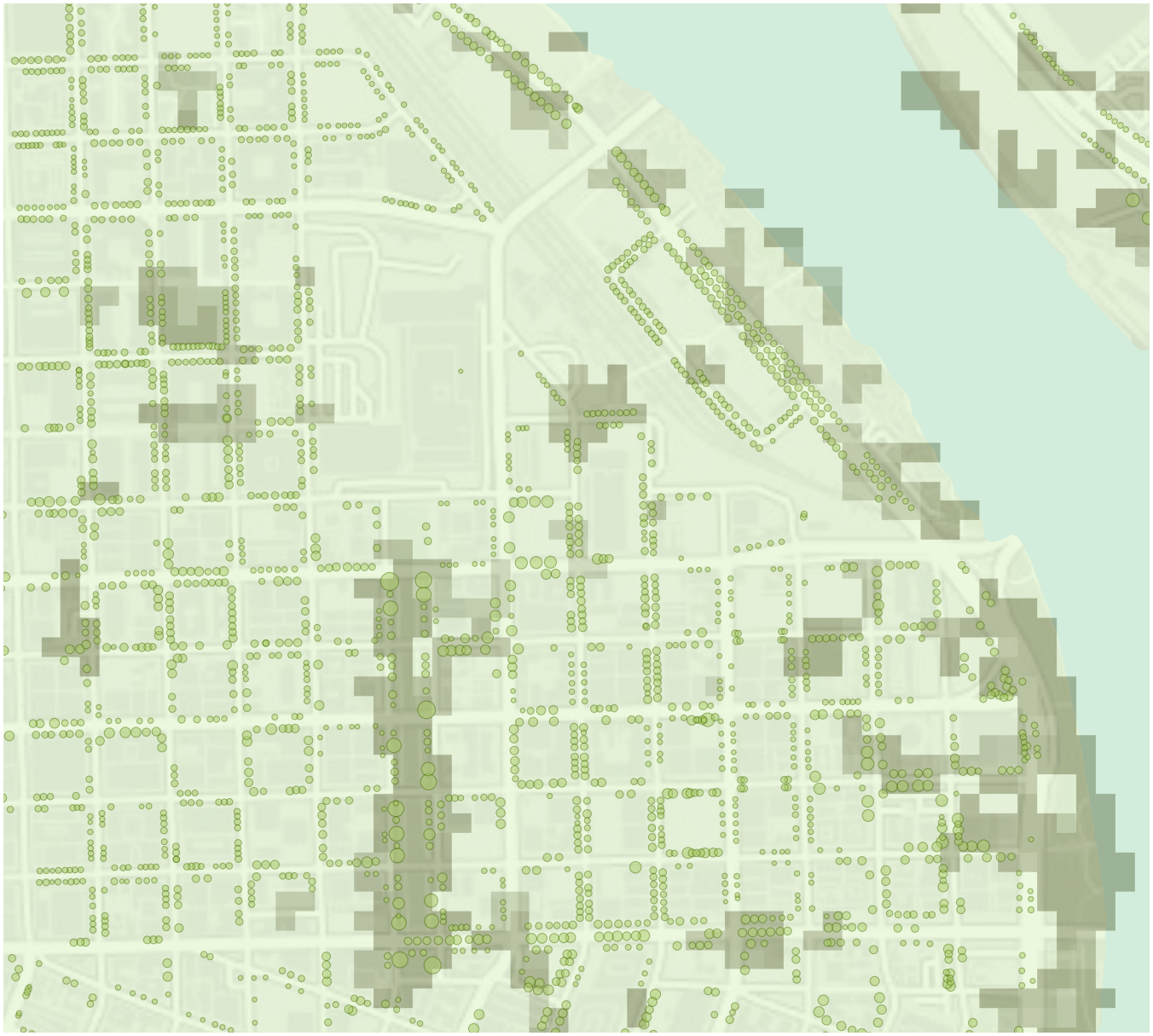


Guards protect the tree's trunk from potential collision and vandalism.



Public facilities like trash cans and restrooms can keep litter and excrement from trees.

Figure 12: Heat Island impacts on Old Town

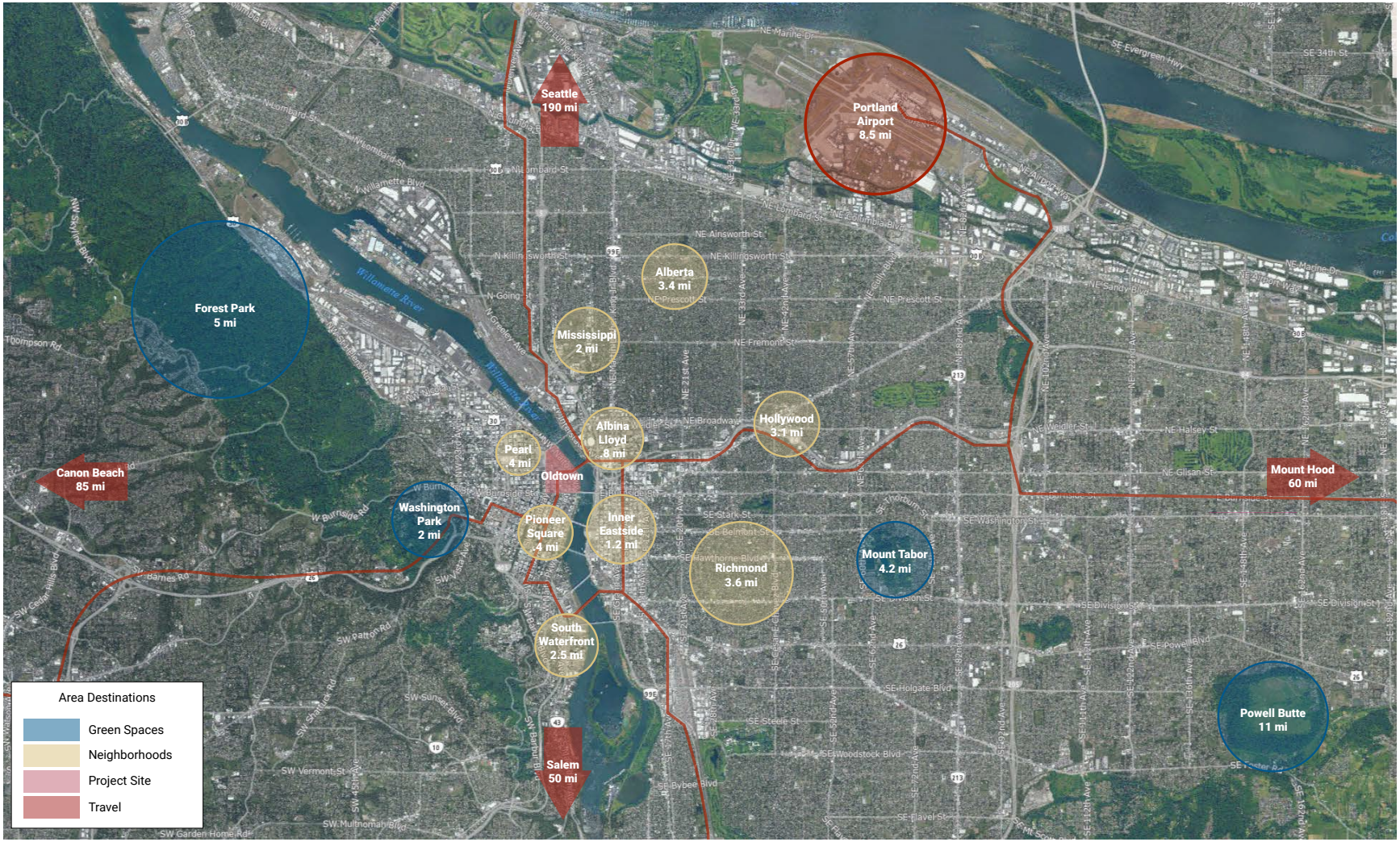


Physical Site

The Glisan Corridor is located in central Portland, just north of downtown. It is bounded on the north and east sides by a bend in the Willamette River, on the east by the North Park Blocks, and Burnside Boulevard to the south.

Union Station and its railyard dominate the northern portion of the site. All lines of the TriMet Max light rail run across the Steel Bridge and through the site. The Yellow and Green Max lines have stops near the former Greyhound Terminal near Union Station, and the Blue and Red Max lines run along 1st Avenue on the east side of Old Town and Chinatown.

Figure 13: Old Town context within Portland



Travel Times

On foot access to basic needs and services in Old Town Portland is difficult as the closest grocery stores, pharmacies, and public services like libraries are approximately 20 minutes walking distance. By bike, much of the central city is accessible, including destinations like Providence Park, the Moda Center, and the Portland Art Museum, all within a 15-minute biking range.

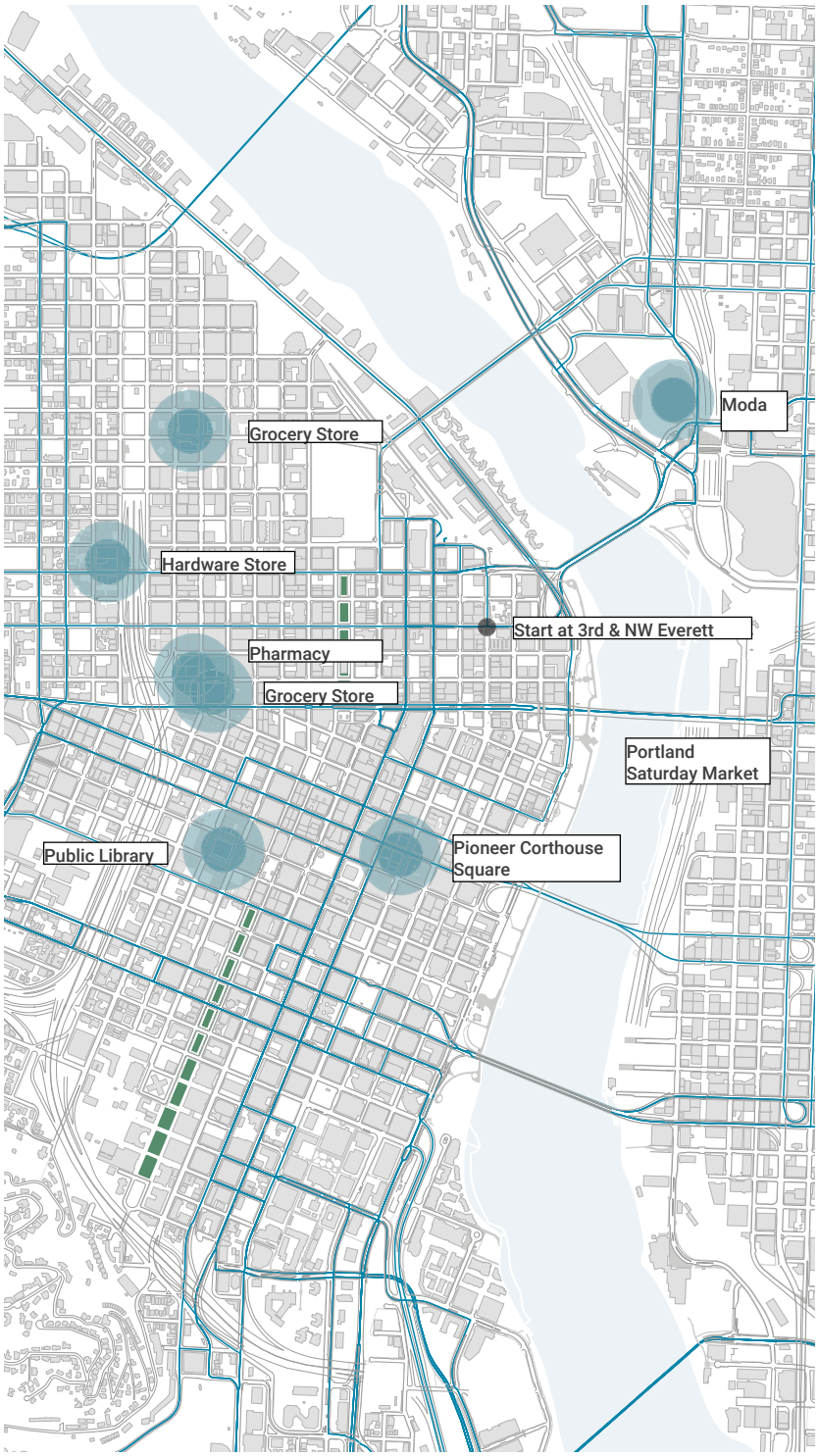


Figure 14: Destinations within 20-minute walking distance

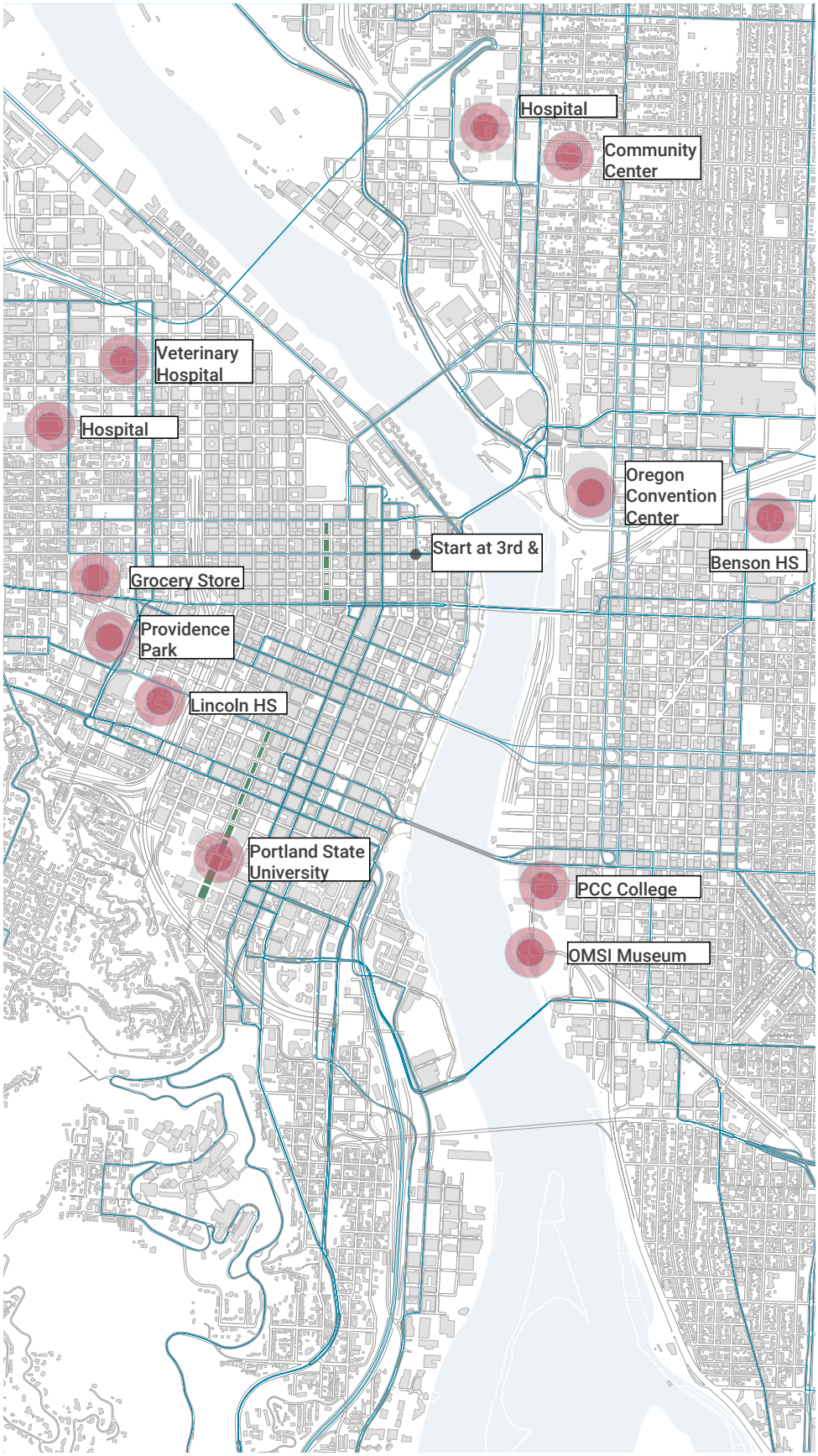


Figure 15: Destinations within 20-minute biking distance

Destinations and Existing Uses

Old Town is a mixed-use district with a diverse mix of spaces for shops, restaurants, and a variety of business types ranging from office to industrial. Residential density in the area is low due in part to lower height restrictions in the historic district. The northern part of the site is zoned for higher maximum heights.



Figure 16: Map of existing building uses and places of interest

Social Services

As mentioned in previous sections, there is a concentration of social services for people experiencing homelessness, addiction, poverty, and mental health challenges. These service providers meet a wide range of needs, from food and shelter to medical care and counseling.

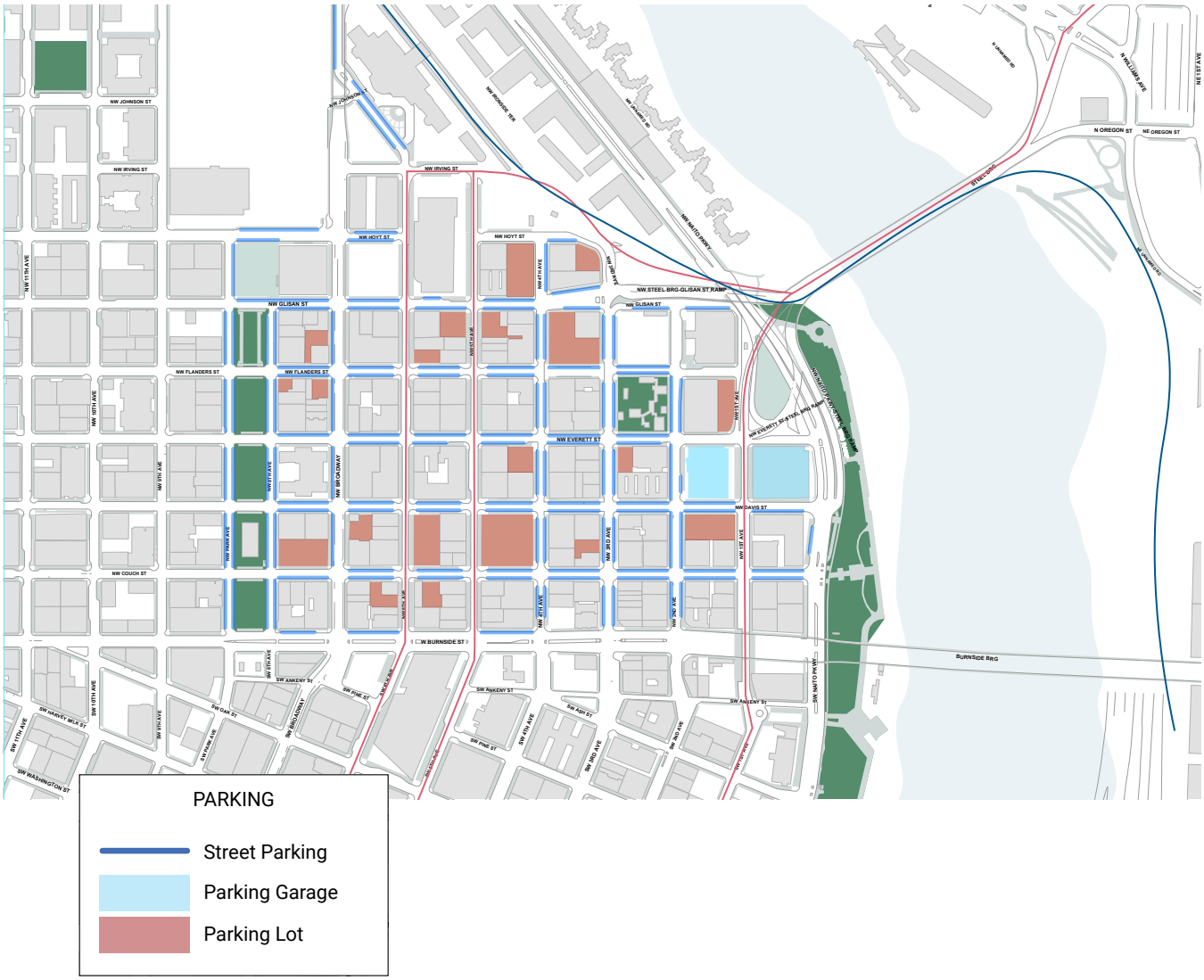
Figure 17: Old Town map highlighting locations of social service providers



Parking

Old Town has ample street parking and surface parking lots. There are two public parking garages located on the east side of the site.

Figure 18: Old Town map highlighting location of parking



Barriers

Both the Broadway Bridge and the Steel Bridge act as physical barriers to movement among different parts of the site. The two Steel Bridge ramps cut off access to the waterfront, and the Broadway ramp disconnects Union Station from the northern section of the Pearl District. Additionally, Burnside Boulevard acts as a barrier due to its size and traffic volume.

Figure 19: Physical and psychological barriers to separating Old Town from other parts of central Portland



Transportation

Public Transit

The Glisan Corridor and Old Town are rich in public transit options. All four of Portland's Max light rail lines run through the area, including a major transfer center near Union Station on Glisan. The Max lines provide connections to the Airport, East Portland, and Gresham along US 84, and to North Portland and the Southwestern suburbs of Beaverton and Hillsboro along Highway 26. TriMet Buses, including the FX-2 Express route, provide links between East and West Portland. The Portland Streetcar has routes within walking distance, in the Pearl District, and Union Station provides regional and national rail service via Amtrak.

TriMet's MAX Light Rail connects the city of Portland to the rest of the TriMet service area.

Daily Riders: 205,200 (2024)
Annual Ridership: 66,780,000 (2024)

(Across all of TriMet)

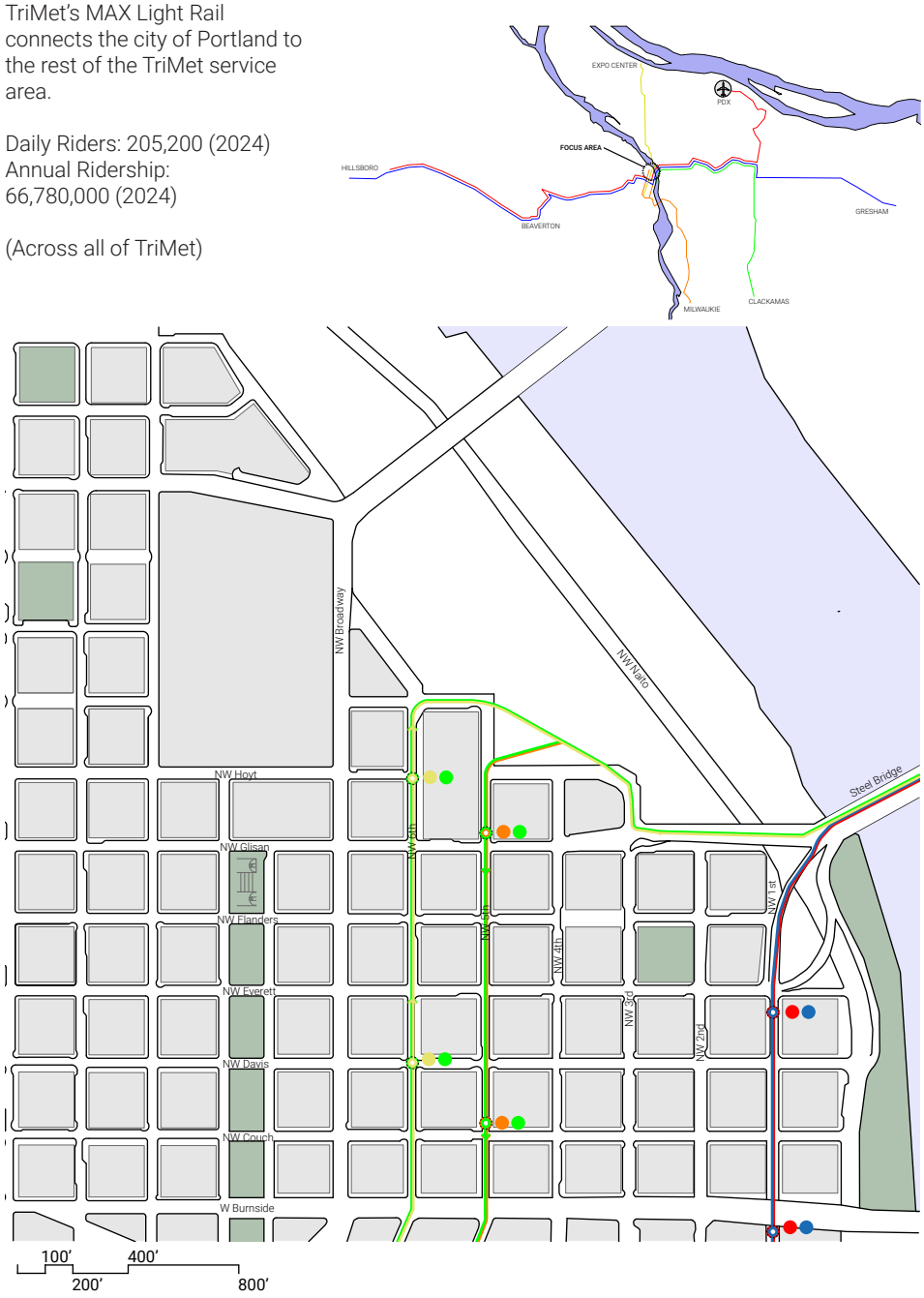
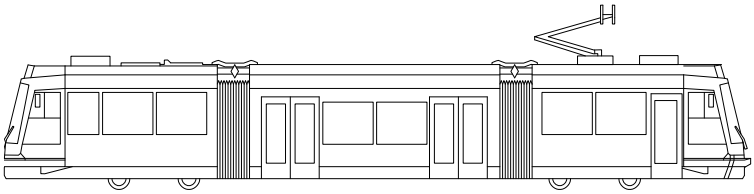


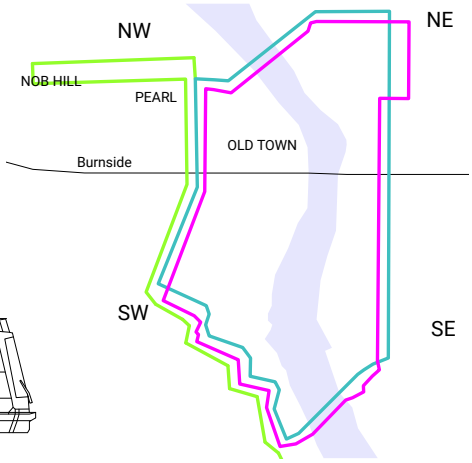
Figure 20: TriMet light rail routes through Old Town

Figure 21: Streetcar routes in the Pearl District

Portland's Streetcar serves as a link throughout the inner parts of the city.

Daily Ridership: 9,490 (Aug. 2023)
Annual Ridership: 2,600,000 (2023)





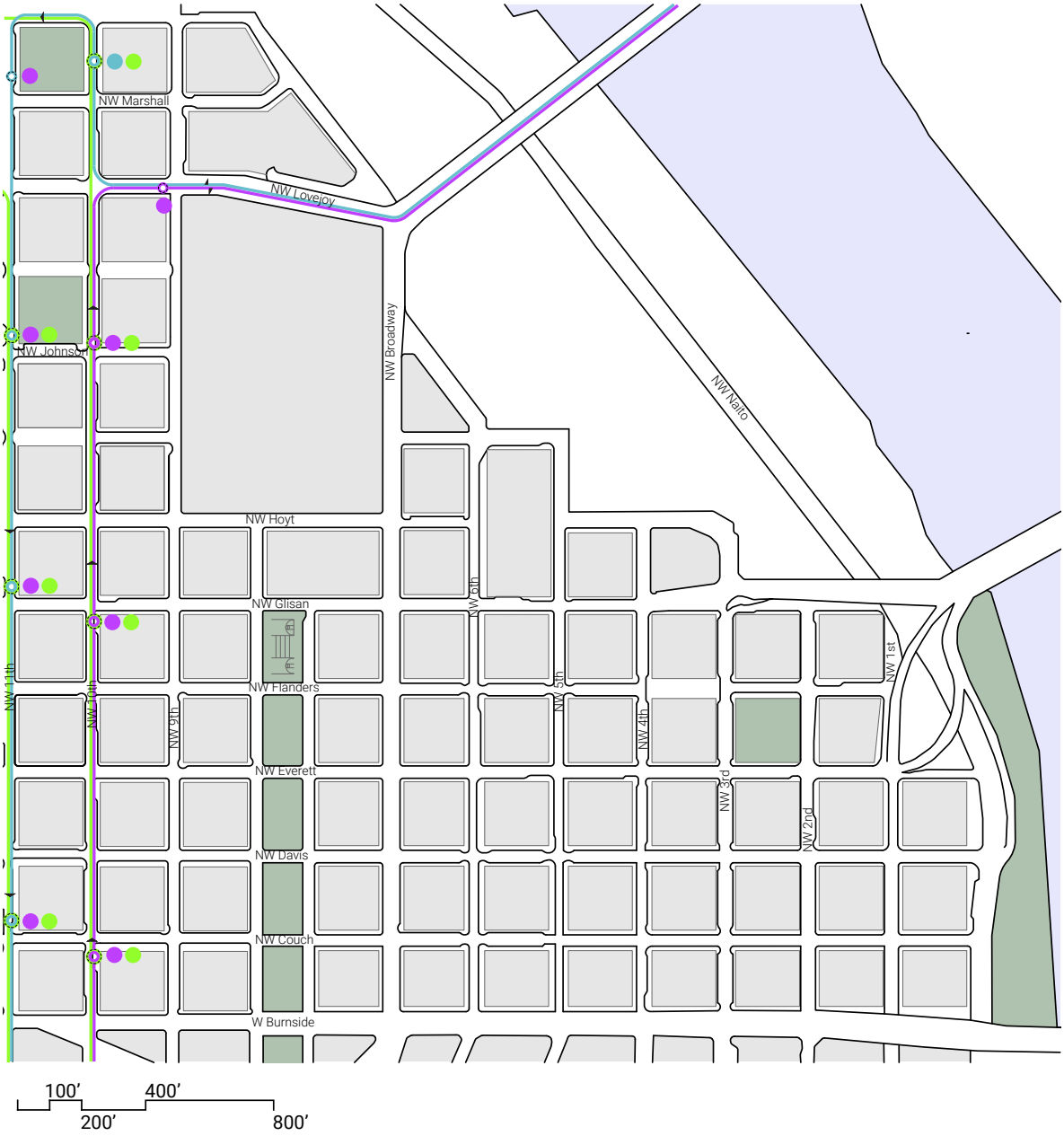


Figure 22: TriMet bus lines in Old Town

In places not served by MAX or Streetcar, the TriMet bus system serves those areas with a fleet of 688 buses on 85 lines. Many of those bus lines transit through Old Town.

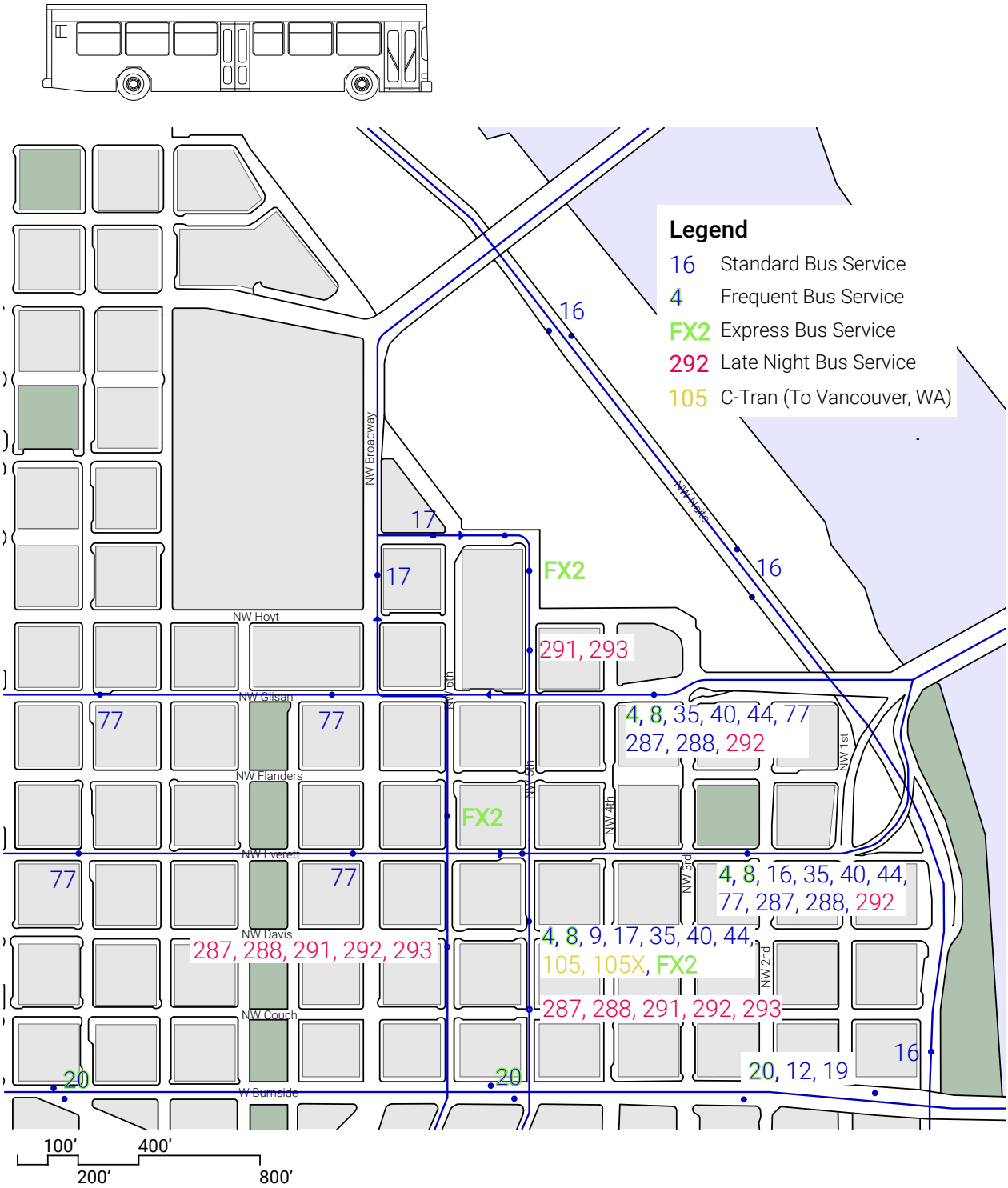
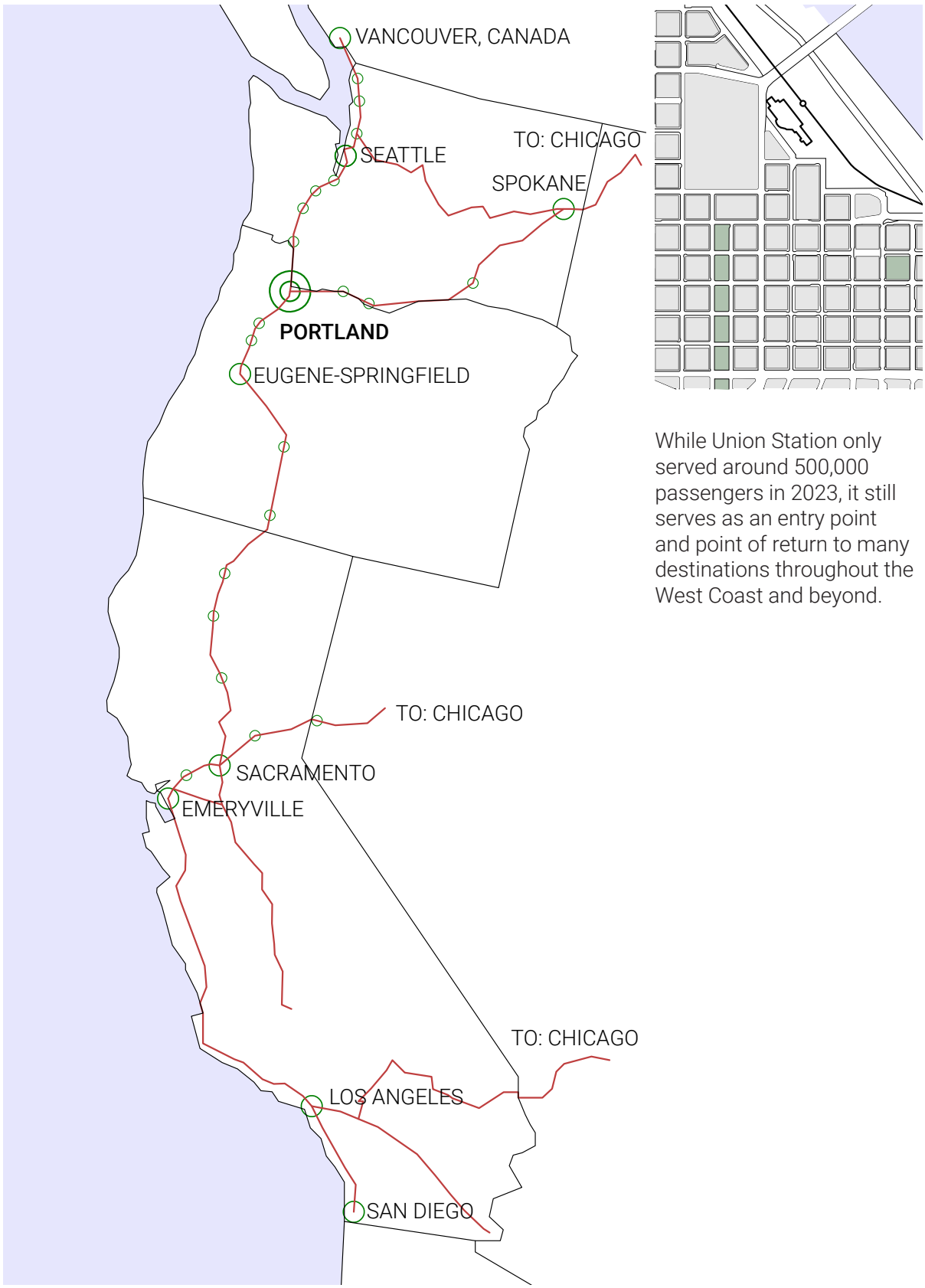


Figure 23: West Coast Amtrak service routes



While Union Station only served around 500,000 passengers in 2023, it still serves as an entry point and point of return to many destinations throughout the West Coast and beyond.

Roads and Traffic

Roads with the most average daily trips (ADT) include Broadway, Glisan, Naito, and Burnside. Speed limits are 20 mph on most streets, consistent with much of Portland.

Arterial roads such as Glisan and Naito allow slightly higher speeds. Flanders has been designated as a neighborhood greenway and has a slightly lower suggested speed limit of 15 mph.

Figure 4-5: Average daily trips (ADT) by passenger vehicle in Old Town

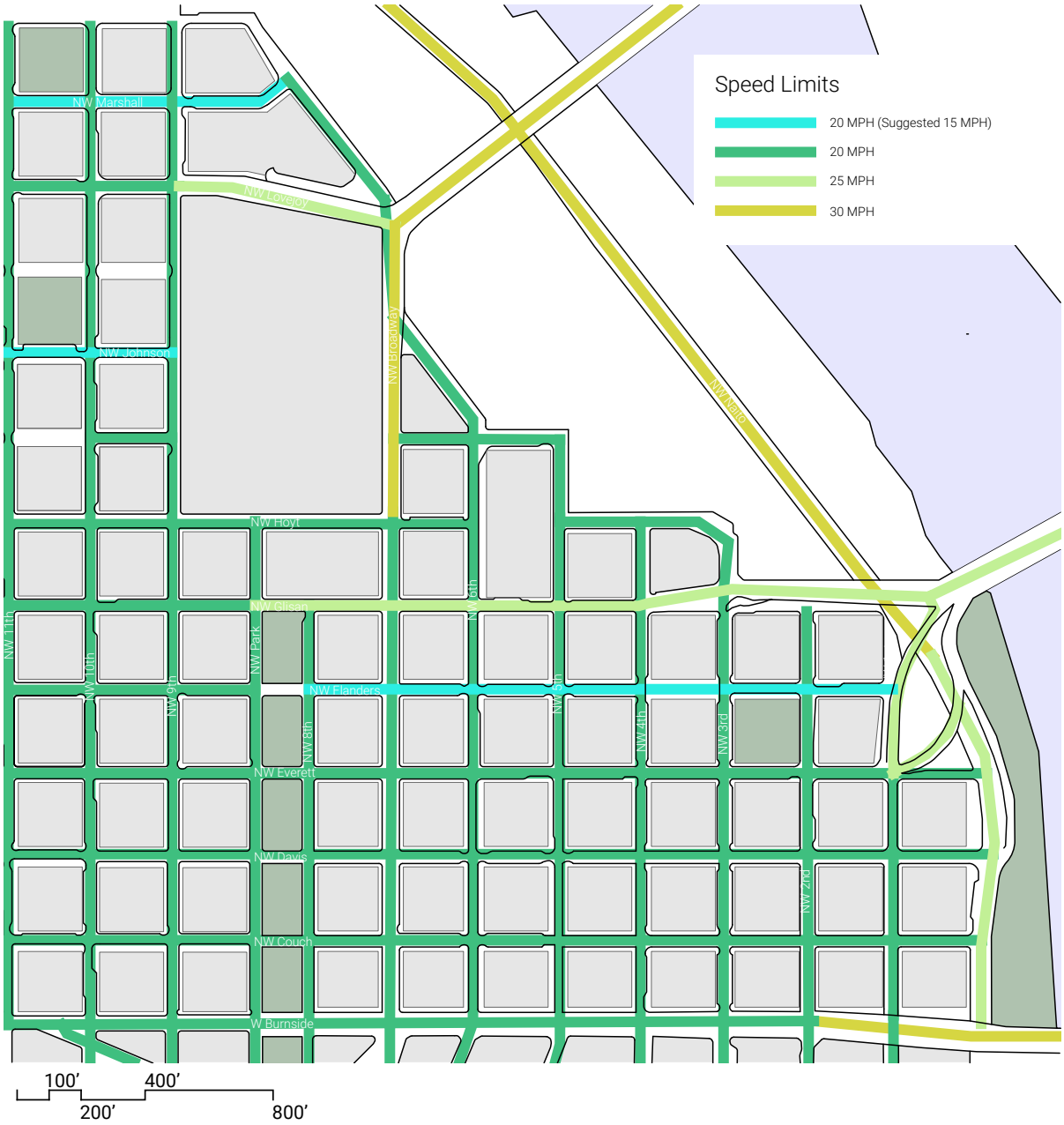


Figure 4-6: Traffic speed limits in Old Town

The standard speed limit throughout Portland is 20 MPH. This speed increases on larger, arterial roads.

While the speed limit on designated Neighborhood Greenways is still 20 MPH, there is a push to bring speeds on these streets down to 15 MPH.
For now, this is a suggestion to drivers.

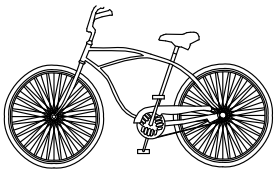




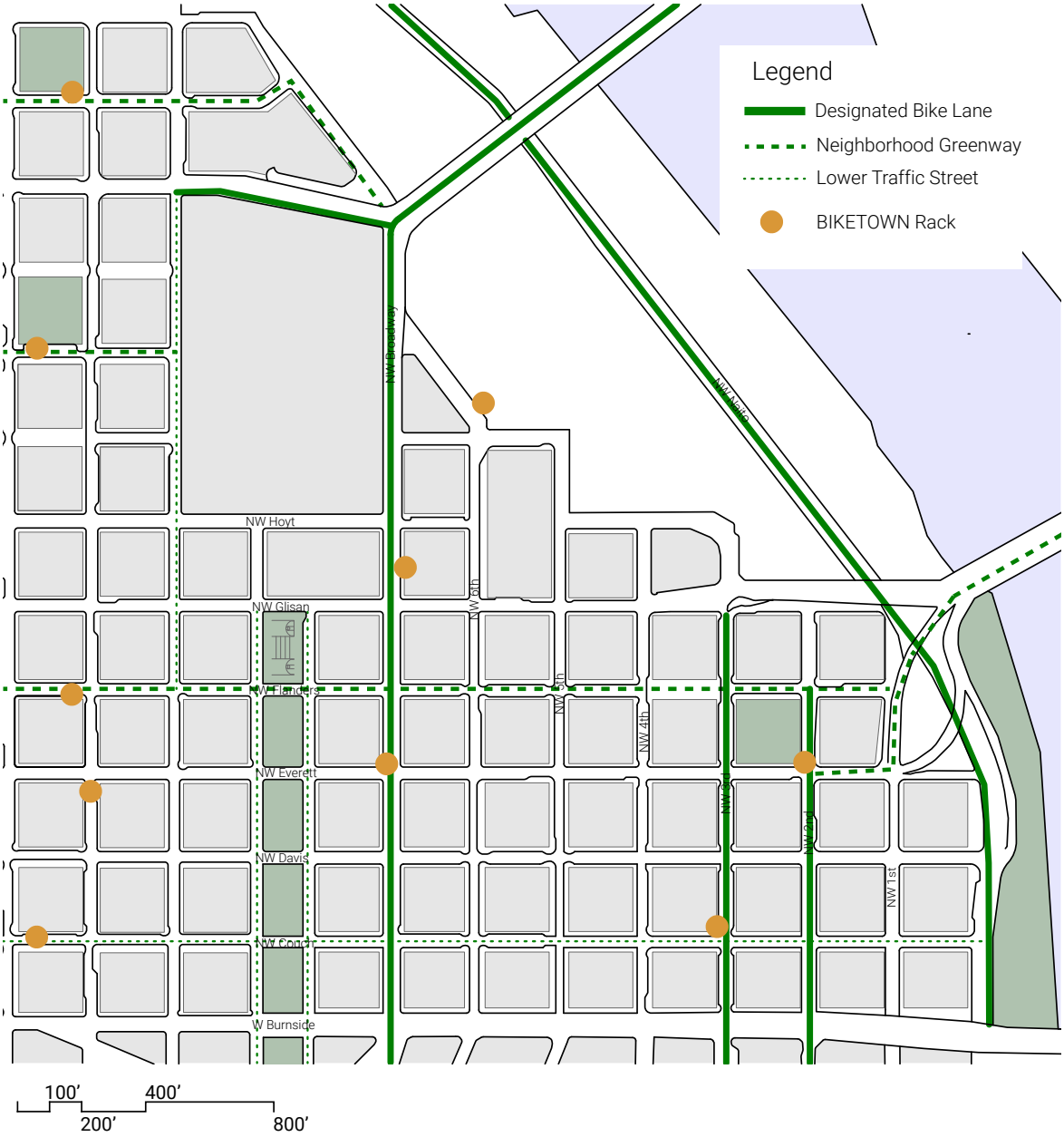
Biking

Streets with designated bike lanes run north-south through the site and include Broadway (bi-directional) and 2nd and 3rd Avenues (paired unidirectional). Neighborhood greenways provide east-west access along Flanders and Couch and north-south on either side of the North Park Blocks. Bridge connections for bikes are on Broadway, Flanders, and Burnside.

Figure 24: Bike routes through Old Town



Portland is consistently regarded as one of the most bikeable cities in the United States.



Street Sections

Street sections help students understand existing street design and dimensions. This knowledge helps to inform proposed interventions and design.

Figure 25: Typical multimodal main thoroughfare

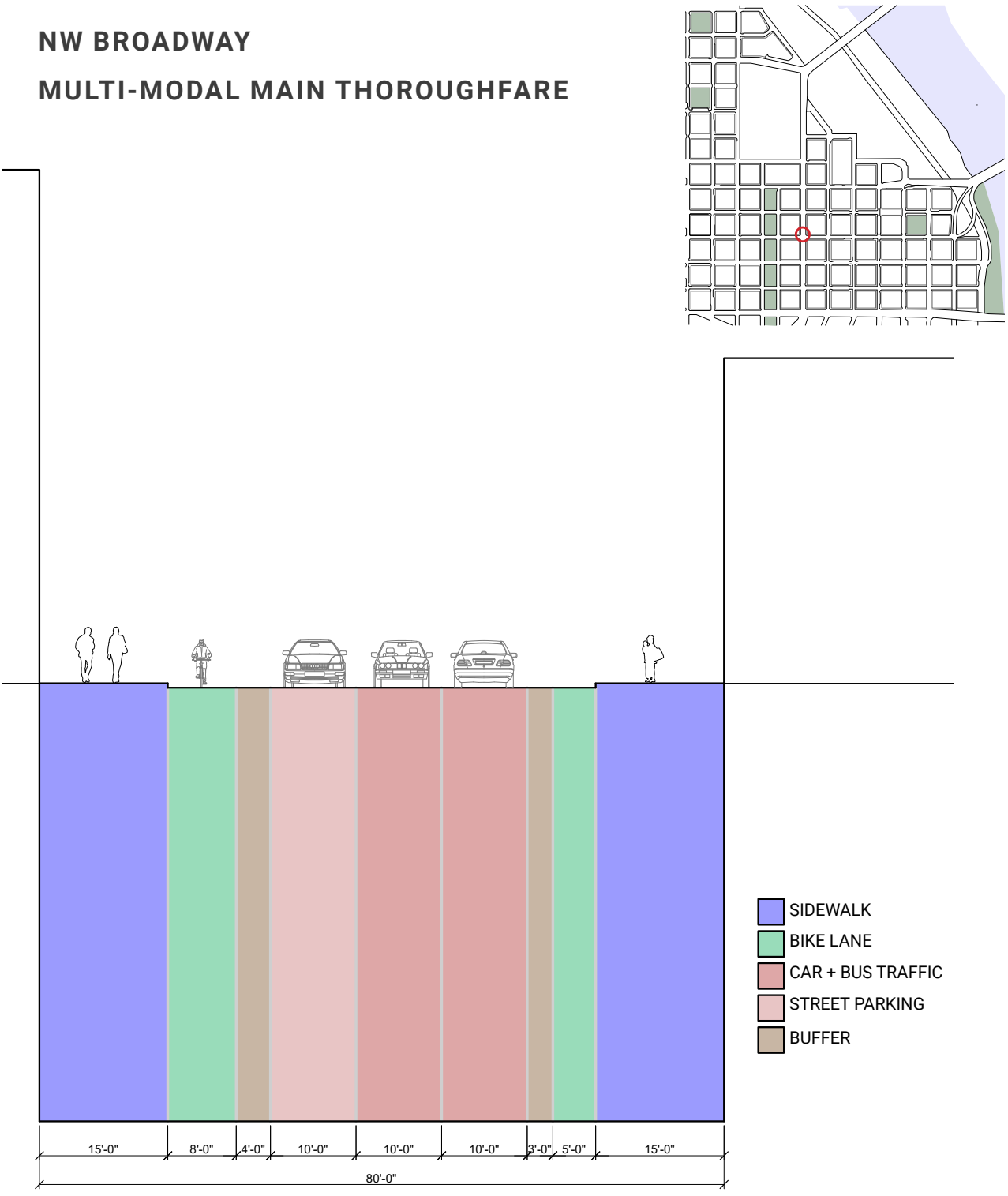


Figure 26: Typical vehicle-oriented street

NW GLISAN

VEHICLE-ORIENTED STREET



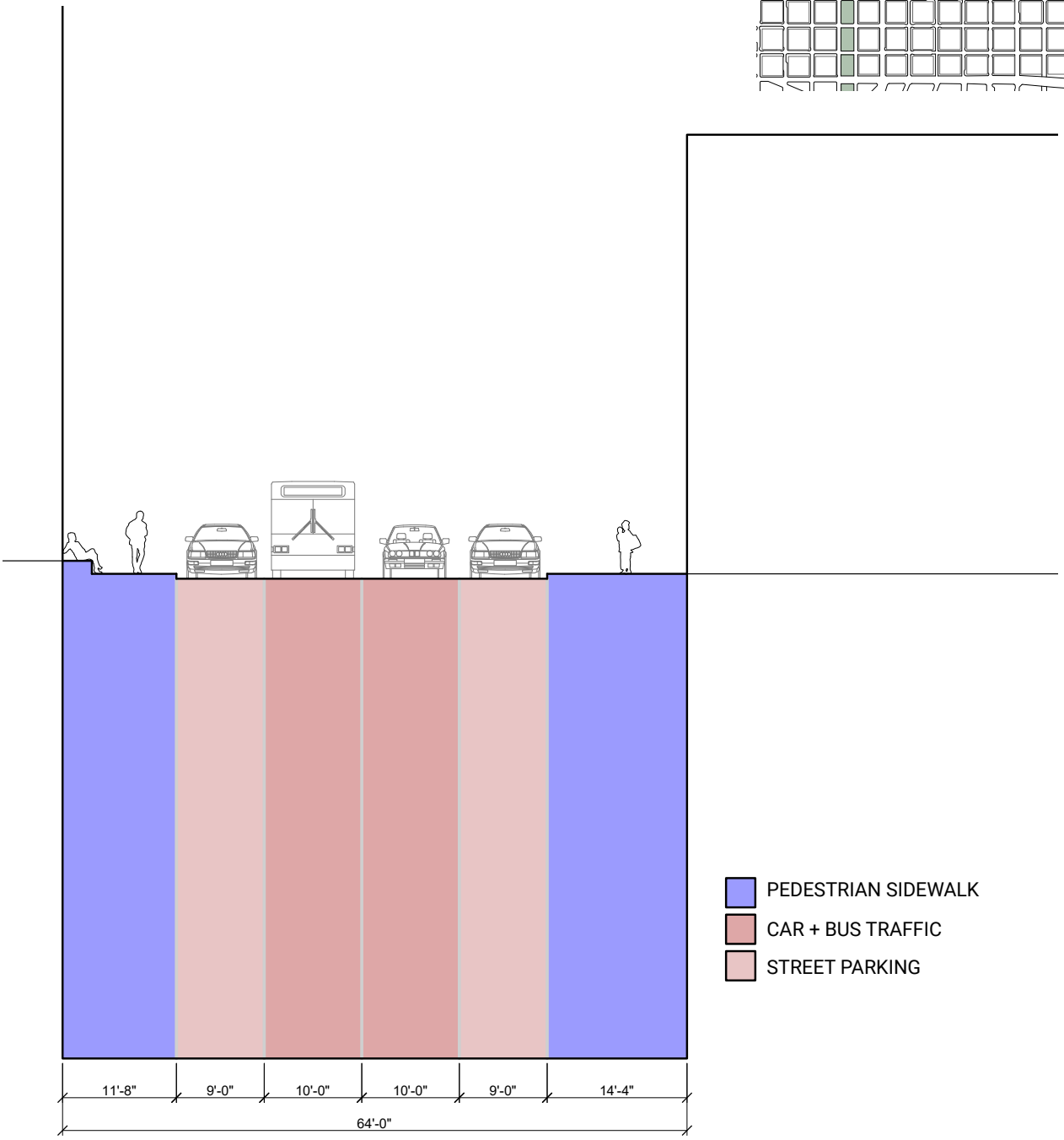
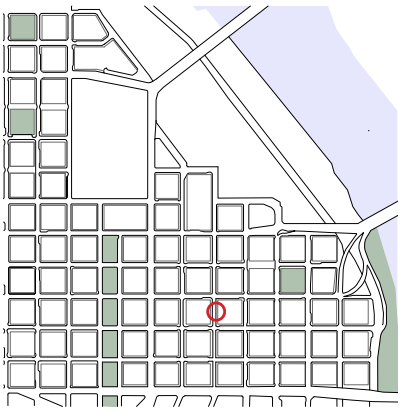
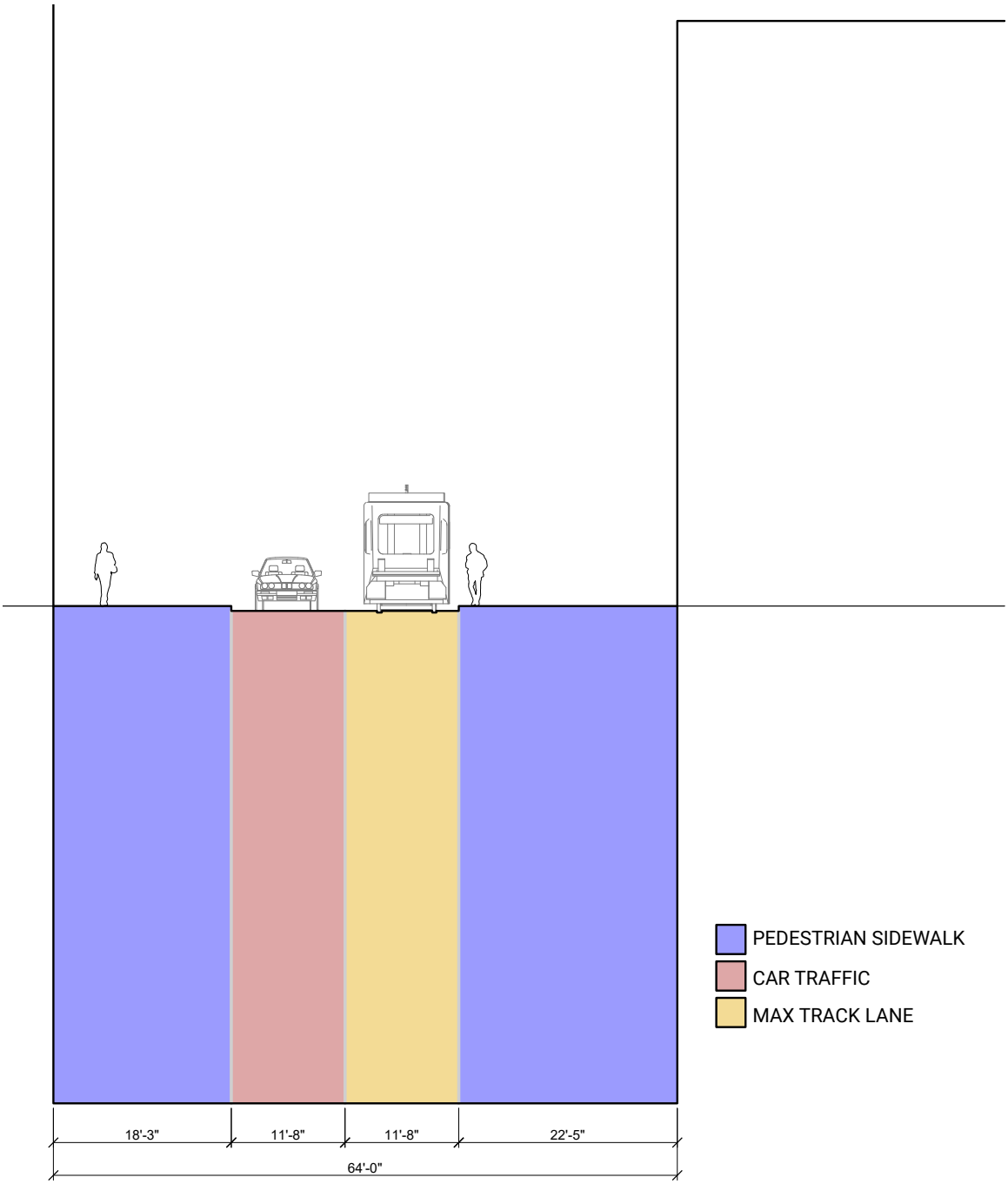


Figure 27: Typical 5th and 6th Ave transit mall

NW 5TH

TRANSIT MALL

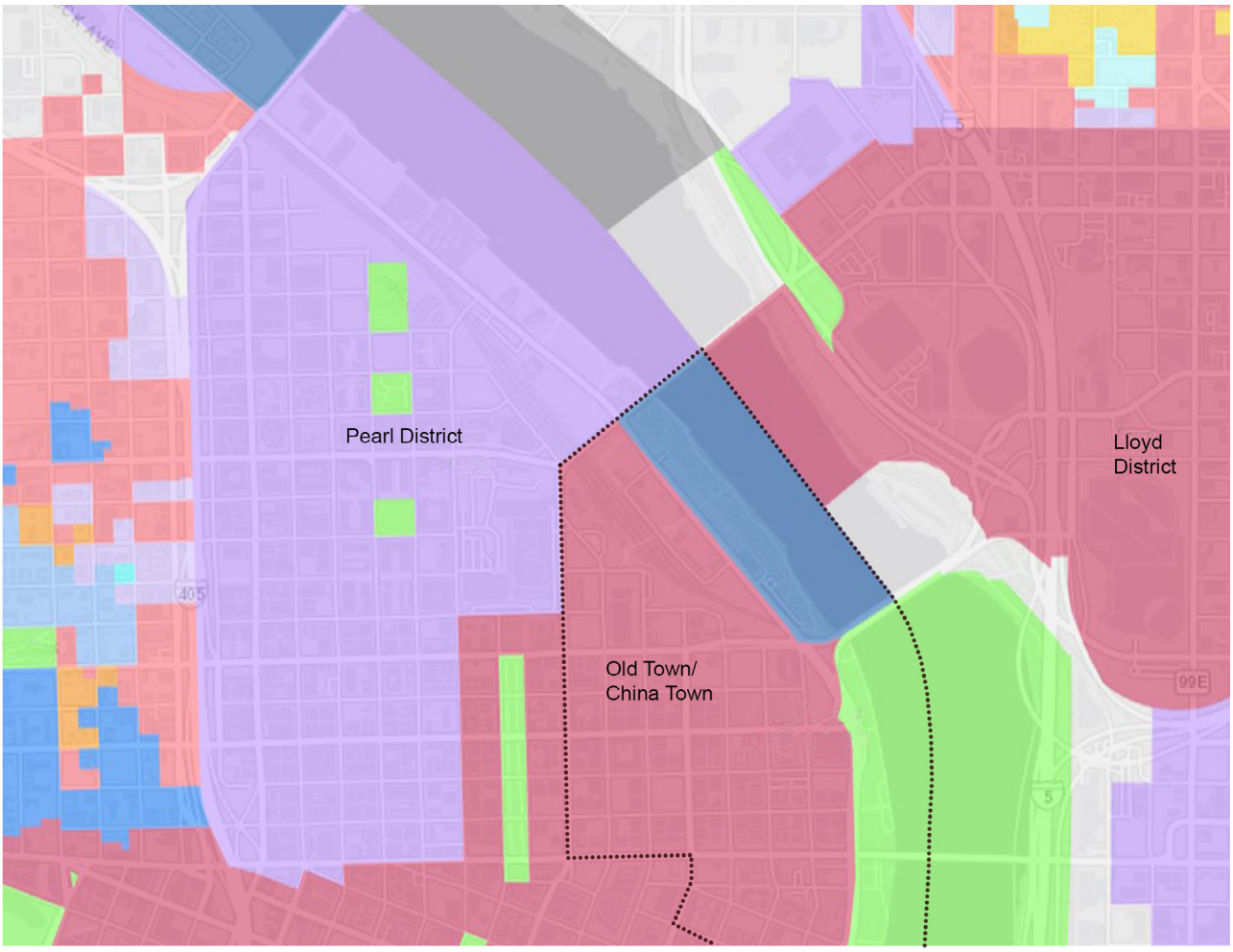




Zoning

Much of Old Town is designated as Mixed-Use Commercial except for the condo complex near the river, north of Union Station. This zoning allows for large scale commercial and residential development.

Figure 28: Map of zoning types in central Portland



CX Zone
High Density Commercial Zone

Allowable uses include:
Retail Office Residential

EX Zone
Central Employment Zone
High Density Commercial, Institutional, Light industrial and Residential
Allowable uses include:
Office Residential Industrial

Central Residential (RX)
High Density Multi-dwelling Zone
Medium and High rise Apartments, Condominiums
Allowable uses include:
Residential

Open Space (OS)
Preserve and enhance public and private open, natural and improved park and recreational areas.
Allowable uses include:
Open Space

Commercial Mixed Use (CM3)
Large-scale, commercial mixed use zone

Allowable uses include:
Retail Office Residential

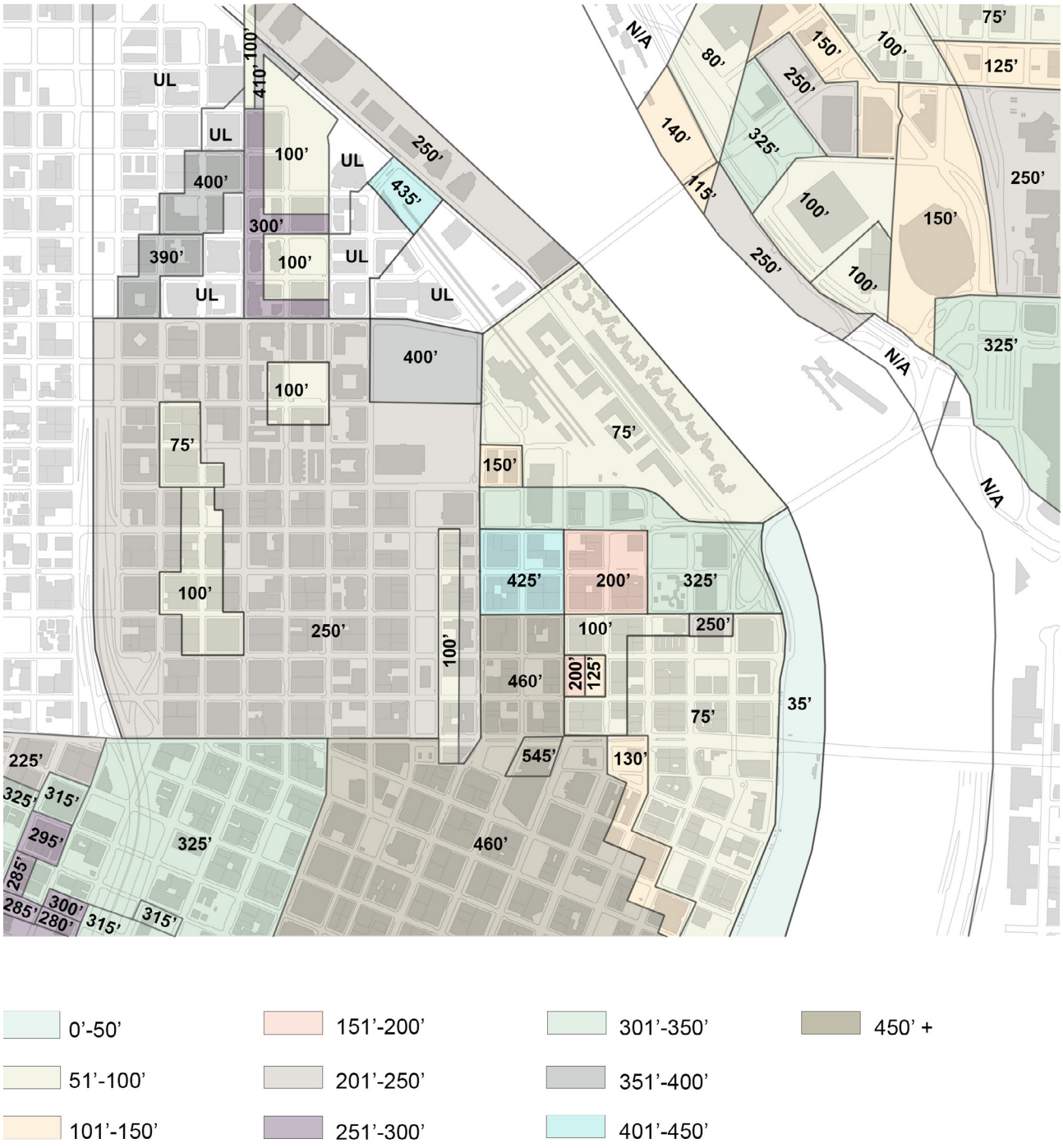
Commercial Mixed Use
medium-scale, commercial mixed us

Allowable uses include:
Retail Office Residential

Building Heights and FAR

Maximum building heights in the Skidmore Historic District remain at 75', but height limits and Floor-Area-Ratios (FAR) increase toward the north and west portions of the site. The maximum allowed heights are 460' along the 5th and 6th Avenue transit corridors. As of 2023, Portland eliminated parking minimums for all new developments.

Figure 29: Building height limits for central Portland



UL : The term "UL" or "unlimited" indicates that the height of a building is not restricted by the zoning code in that specific area.

Figure 30: Map of FAR zoning for central Portland

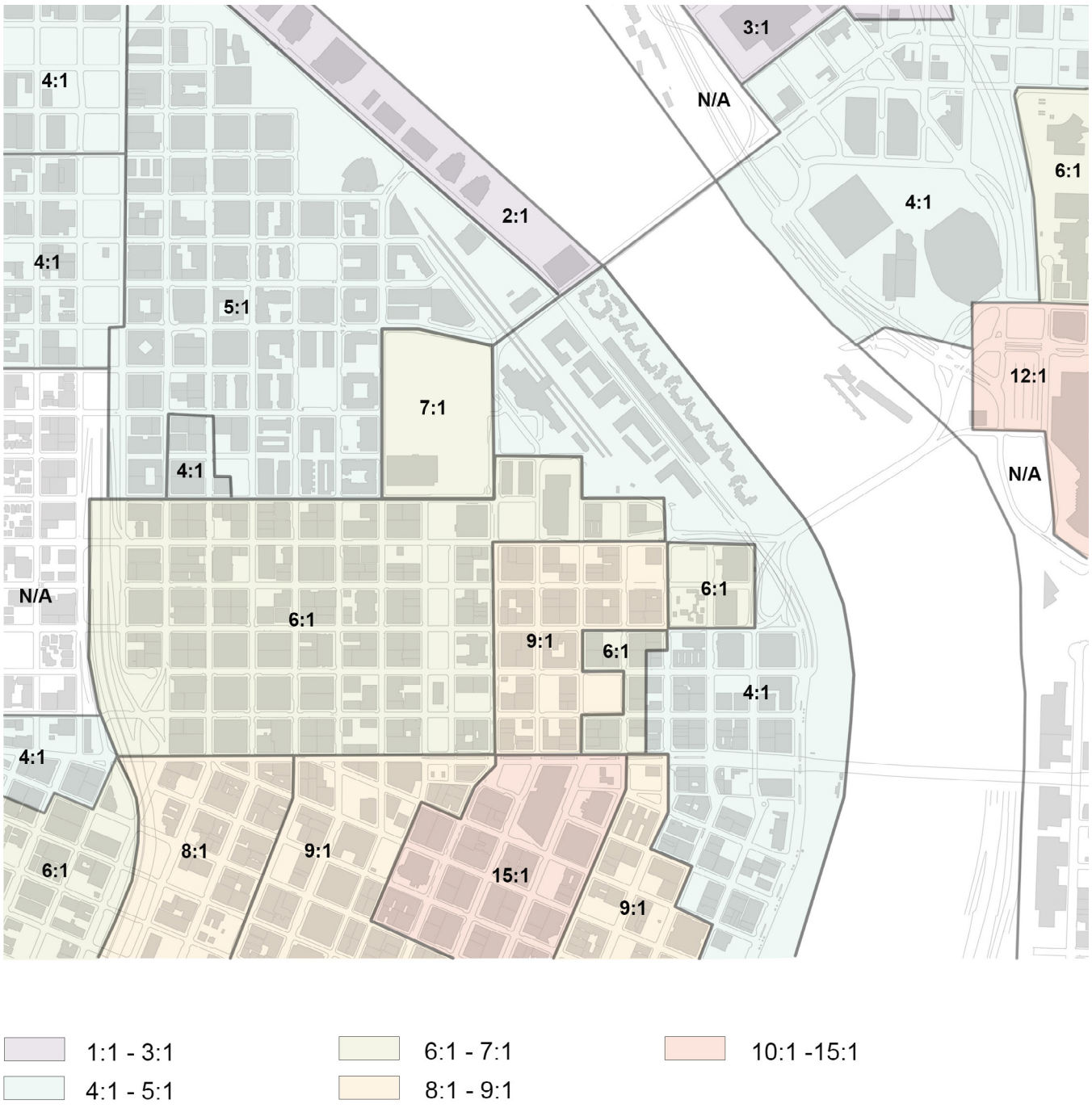
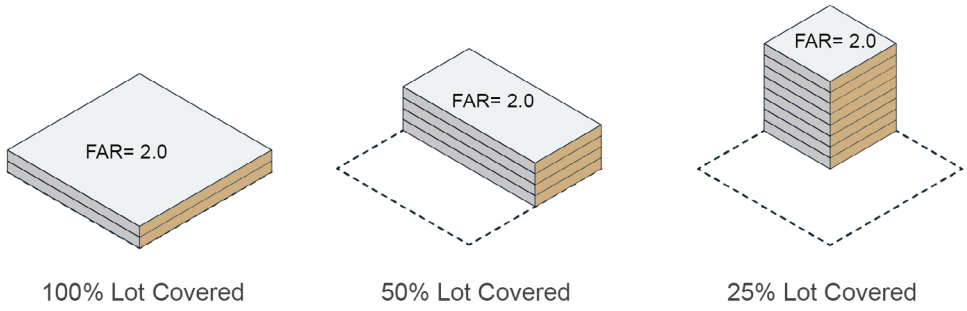
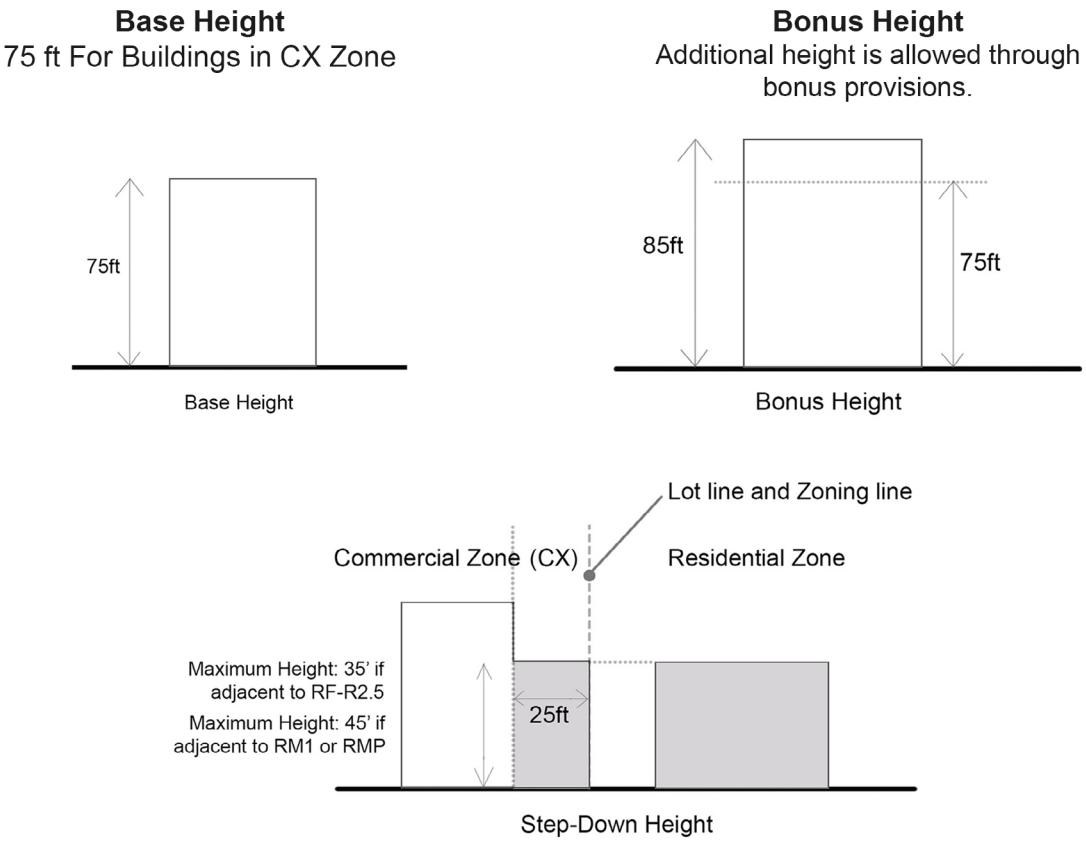


Figure 31: Zoning regulations for FAR in CX zones





Bonus Height: Additional building height allowed above the base limit in exchange for providing public benefits such as affordable housing, public open space, or green building features, as outlined in the zoning code.

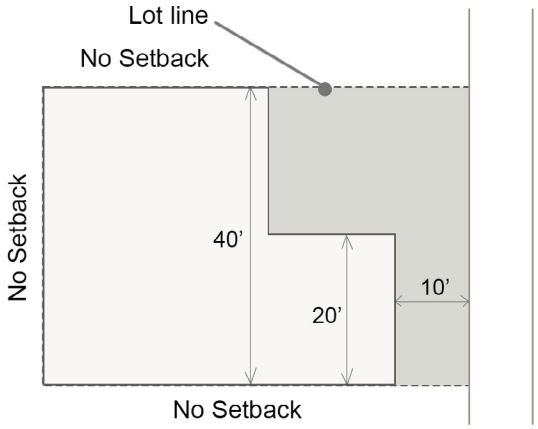
Stepped-down height: refers to the gradual reduction of building height near lower-density zones to ensure a compatible and context-sensitive transition.

Transfer of FAR allows unused floor area to be transferred to another site, enabling increased development. FAR can also be increased through transfers from adjacent historic sites.

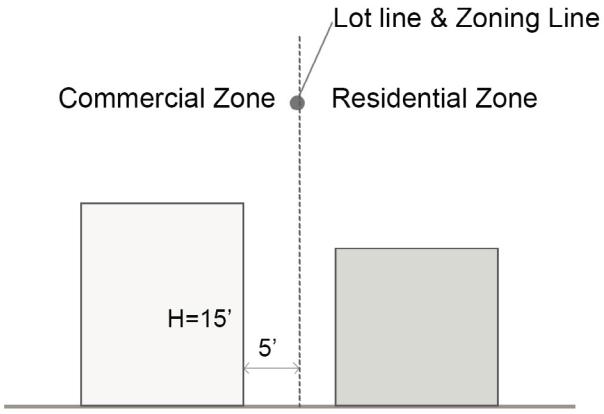
Frontage and Setbacks

At least 50% of a building's street facade must be located within 10 feet of the property line. This helps create a continuously defined street wall. Where commercial and residential properties meet, city code requires setbacks to allow for light penetration into residences.

Figure 32: Setbacks



50% of the street-facing building façade
is located within 10 feet of the front lot line.



Minimum Setback from Residential Zone
Building Height (H)
≤ 15 ft : 5 feet
> 15 ft : 1 foot of setback for every 2 feet of height,
up to a maximum of 25 feet

Stakeholders and Area Development

Prosper Portland

Prosper Portland is the economic development arm of Portland city government. Their funds are allocated toward purchasing underutilized properties around the city and working with private and public developers to adapt existing buildings or build new properties that contribute to the public good. They also invest in targeted public amenities to encourage more development in challenging areas. Currently, Prosper Portland manages many properties in Old Town, including Union Station, the former Greyhound Terminal, and the empty lot at Broadway and Glisan.

Prosper Portland shared information about current and upcoming redevelopment in and near Old Town including the Broadway Corridor Redevelopment, Creative Homies gallery and creative space, and a market rate housing project with art studios in conjunction with the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA). As they are very familiar with the cycle of investment in Old Town with less-than-ideal results, Prosper Portland is interested in new ideas for positive activation of public spaces in Old Town.

Figure 33: Rendering of Broadway Corridor development on the site of the former post office
Image Credit: Prosper Portland

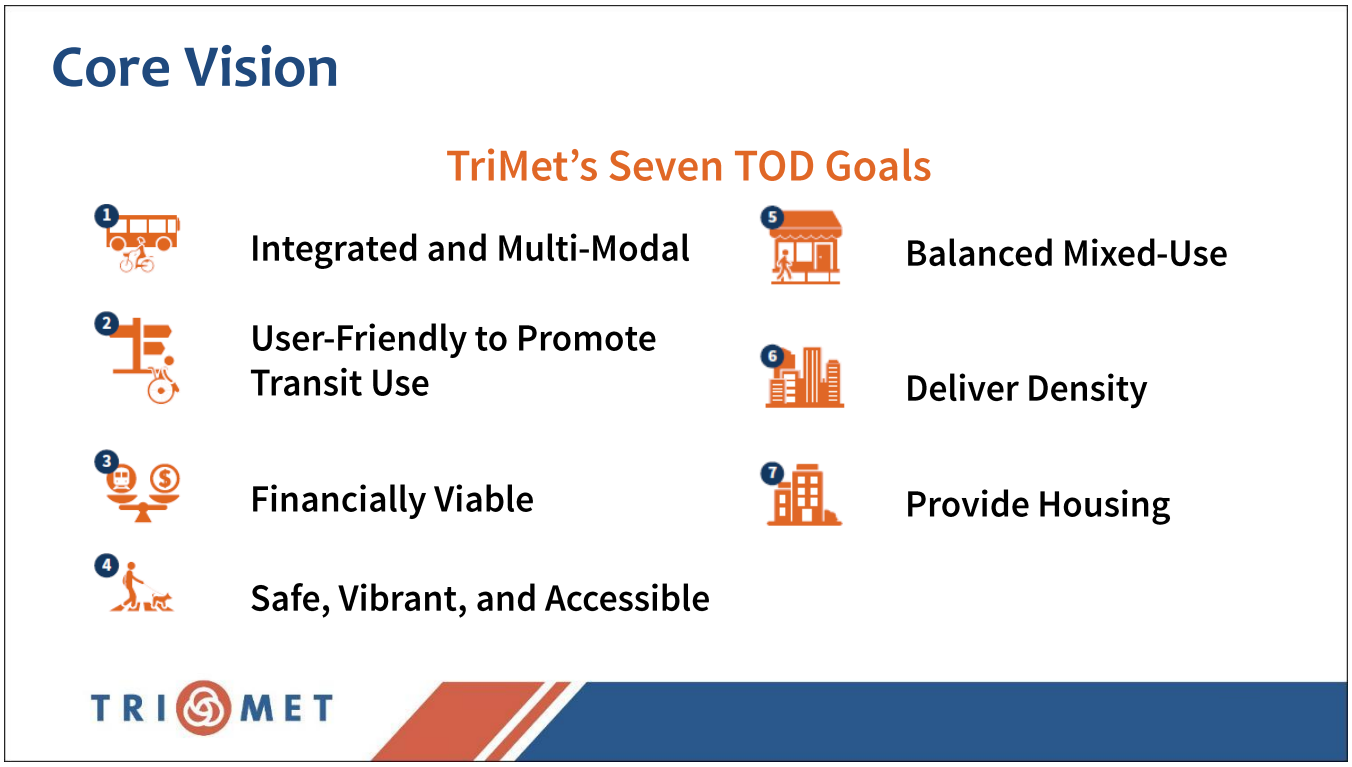


TriMet

TriMet is the regional public transportation provider for the Portland area. They provide bus, light rail, and commuter rail services throughout Portland and neighboring communities. TriMet's presentation focused on their transit-oriented development (TODs) projects around the region, and TriMet's interest in Old Town.

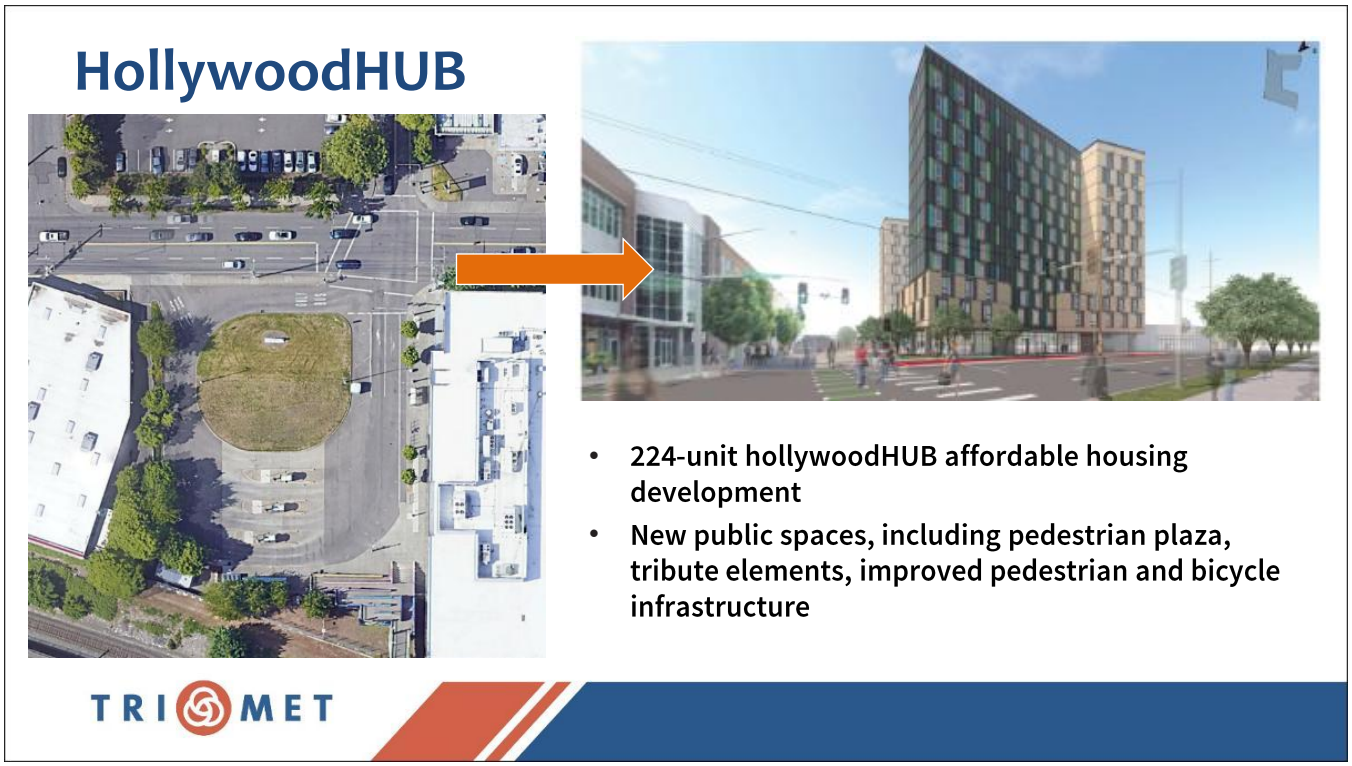
Currently, TriMet is working on several TOD projects at former park-and-ride facilities, creating dense-housing and walkable neighborhoods that are connected by transit to other parts of Portland. This program helps to meet the area's need for more housing by converting underused parking lots into mixed-use developments with improved public spaces and infrastructure for pedestrians, bikes, and public transit.

Figure 34: TriMet's Transit-Oriented Development goals
Image Credit: TriMet



As discussed in the Transportation chapter, all four of TriMet's Max light rail routes run over the Steel Bridge and into Old Town. The stop closest to Union Station serves as a major transfer stop for the Green and Yellow Max lines to Amtrak at Union Station or TriMet bus lines. The 5th and 6th Avenue transit malls connect Union Station to Downtown and southwest Portland. TriMet representatives expressed interest in the Greyhound Terminal property as a possible location for a bus turnaround.

Figure 35: Hollywood Hub Transit Oriented Development
Image Credit: TriMet



Lan Su Chinese Garden

Lan Su Chinese Garden is a traditional Chinese garden operated by Portland Parks & Recreation. Occupying a city block on 3rd Avenue between Flanders and Everett, the walled garden feels separated from the surrounding area. The garden hosts cultural events featuring Portland's Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities throughout the year. Currently, space within the garden for activities is limited due to the pond that covers much of the garden area.

Lan Su acquired the empty lot on the north side of Flanders adjacent to their current location in preparation for building an expanded cultural center. Plans include spaces for performances, classrooms, a greenhouse, and a semi-public plaza planned to open onto Flanders Street. The garden is a major draw for tourists in the area, and both the city and the garden are exploring ways to further develop the area as a destination where visitors want to stay and spend time. This makes development along Flanders and 3rd Avenue particularly important for activating areas around Lan Su. Additionally, the Oregon Japanese American Museum is located one block away on 4th Avenue and Flanders, presenting the opportunity for this area to become a cultural hub for the neighborhood.

Figure 36: Lan Su planned expansion
Image Credit: Lan Su Chinese Garden

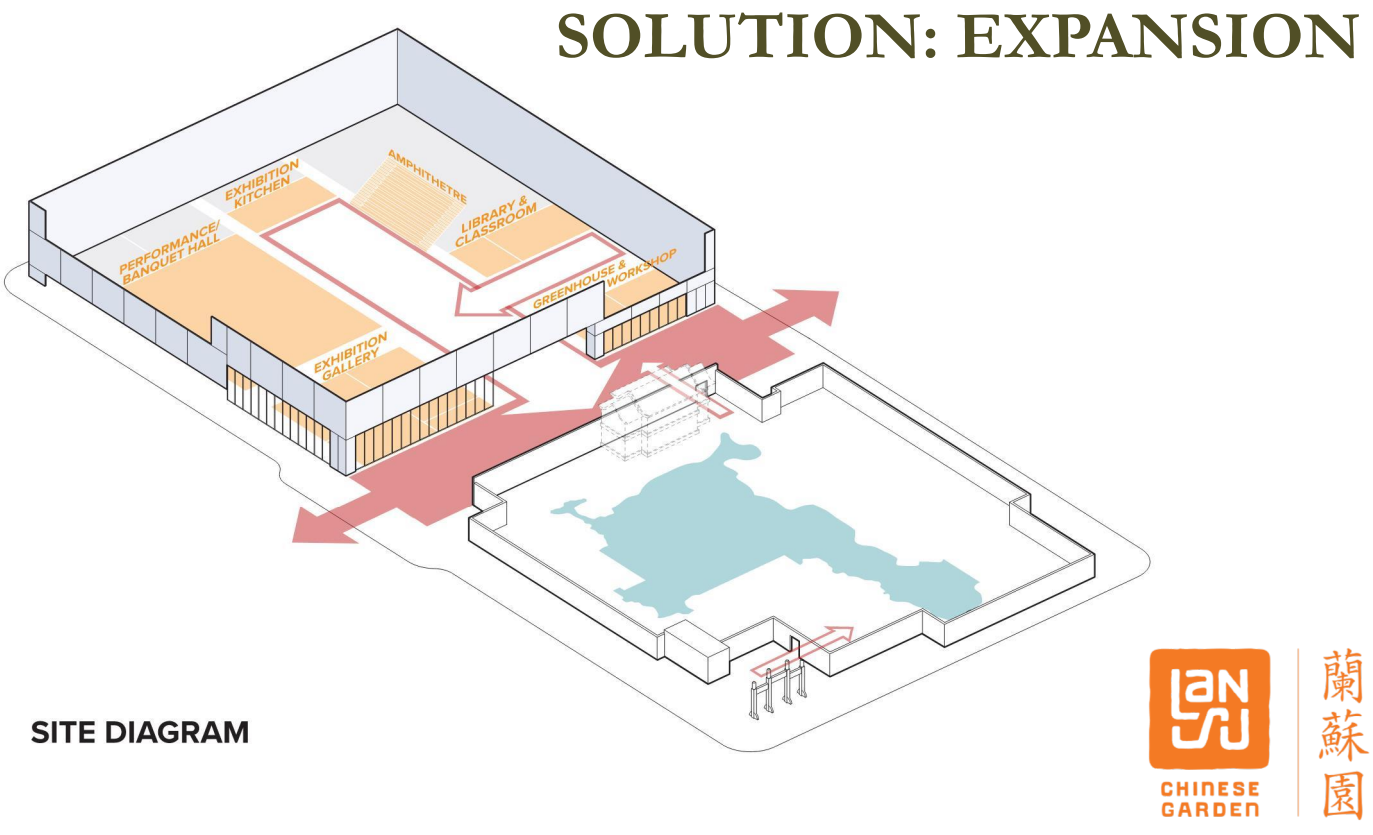
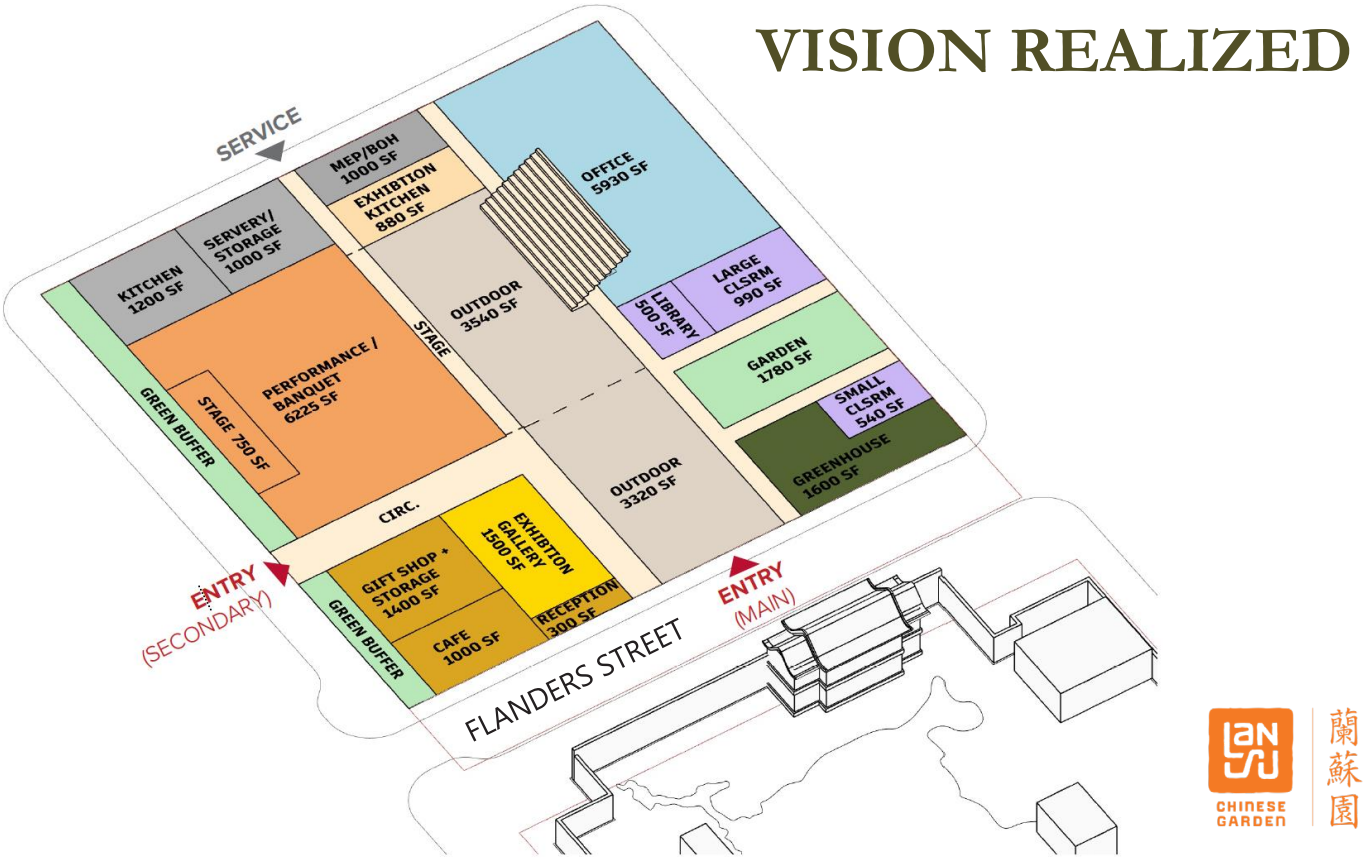


Figure 37: Lan Su expansion program detail
Image Credit: Lan Su Chinese Garden



Blanchet House

Blanchet House is a non-profit organization focused on providing hot meals from its location on the northeast corner of Glisan and 3rd Avenue. Blanchet has been serving meals from this location since 1952. Photos from the Oregon Historical Society show people lining up for meals at Blanchet in the 1950s. Queues of people waiting for food at mealtimes are a visible indicator of the degree of need in this part of Portland.

Figure 38: People lining up for a meal at Blanchet House, Glisan and 3rd Avenue, 1952
Photo Credit: blanchethouse.org



Scott Kerman, Executive Director of Blanchet House, discussed how traumatic the COVID-19 lockdown was for patrons of Blanchet House and for the Old Town community. Many social service providers closed suddenly for months or years, stranding those who depended on them for daily needs. This situation created more hardship for people already experiencing challenges related to homelessness, mental health, and addiction. The neighborhood is still recovering from this trauma. Blanchet House is interested in improvements to the area that will prioritize safety for their patrons. High speeds off the Steel Bridge make the intersection at 3rd and Glisan particularly dangerous for pedestrians and bikes.

Figure 39: Blanchet House, Glisan and 3rd Avenue, 2025
Image Credit: Ashley Carr



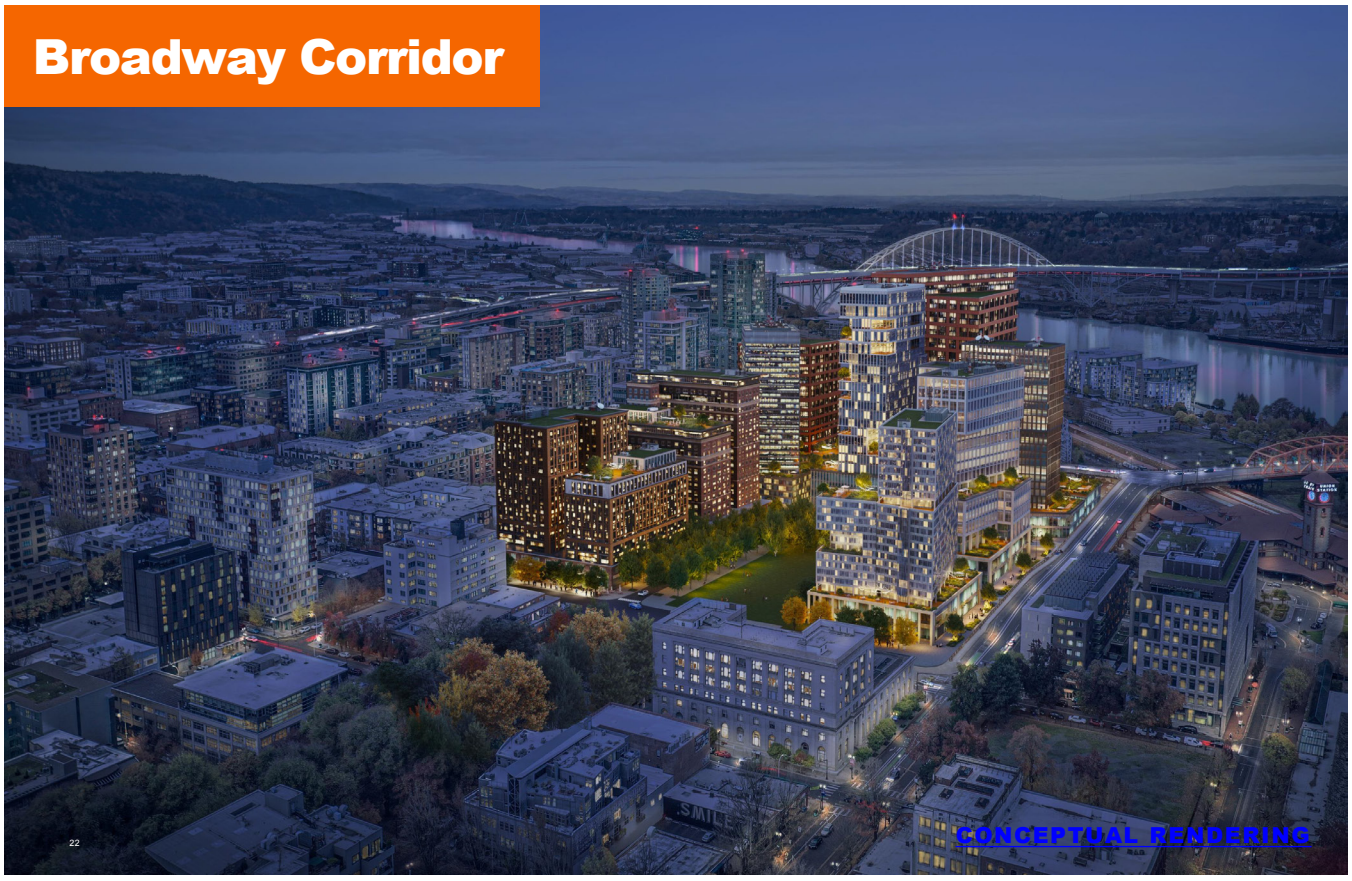
Steel Bridge Skate Park

The Steel Bridge Skate Park is a planned public skateboard park and plaza that will be located in the green space between Steel Bridge ramps near Tom McCall Waterfront Park. This project is in the development phase, but when it is completed, it will bring skating traffic into Old Town. A direct connection to Old Town via Flanders or Glisan would make access to the skate park easier from the west side.

Broadway Corridor Redevelopment

The Broadway Corridor Redevelopment is a project to build a mixed-use residential neighborhood on the site of the former central post office along Broadway. Initial plans include residential towers surrounding a new public park that will extend the existing North Park Blocks, and a flagship corporate headquarters in the northernmost part of the site. This site will serve as a connection between the Pearl District, Union Station, and Old Town. The development will also connect to the planned Green Loop, a bike and pedestrian friendly loop around the central city.

Figure 40: Rendering of planned Broadway Corridor development
Image Credit: Prosper Portland.



The City of Portland tapped PLACE landscape architecture to design a central park for the Broadway Corridor development. PLACE shared a presentation featuring the design schemes that were presented to the city. The selected scheme centers on the concept of a table that can serve as a community gathering space. In the scheme, a long table serves as the organizational spine connecting spaces for a variety of activities including active recreation, community gathering, play, and relaxation.

Figure 41: Rendering by PLACE of Broadway Corridor green spaces
Image Credit: PLACE



Made in Old Town

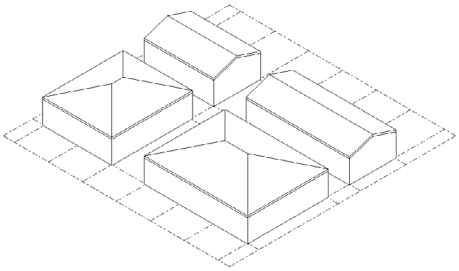
Made in Old Town is a developing project that would bring apparel production to Old Town. Preliminary plans involve the adaptive reuse of three buildings owned by Prosper Portland. These three buildings would include incubator space, offices, and a small-scale production factory, serving as a hub for innovation in apparel design and production. Future phases will expand production capacity, creating a Made in Old Town campus along 5th Avenue.

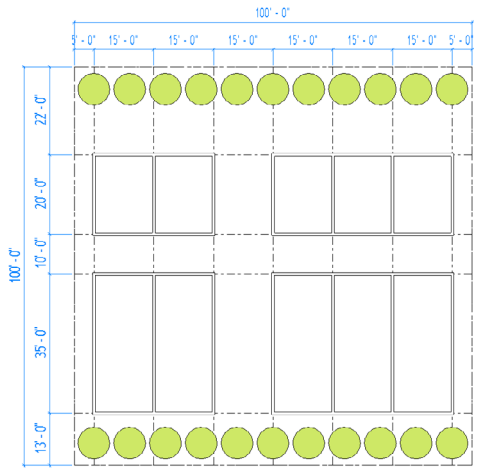
Typologies

Because of the need for residential density and high levels of office and retail vacancies in the central city, students focused on residential and mixed-use typologies to address housing needs.

Residential

High density residential and mixed-use typologies, such as apartment towers, were explored for areas with taller height limits. Medium density residential, such as townhouses and live-work units, were considered for transitional areas between high density residential and the lower density historic district. Additional typologies considered are listed in Part 2.



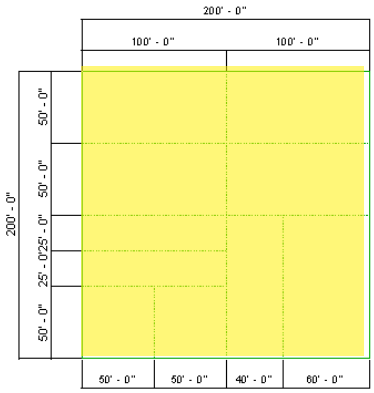


On a 10,000 square foot (100' x 100') site in an R2 zone, five rowhouse units are proposed, each ranging from 1,050 to 1,300 square feet. The massing is designed to blend with the surrounding single-family neighborhood context. Parking is provided in detached garages located at the rear of each unit, accessed via an alley easement. Between each unit and its corresponding garage is a small private garden. Additional square footage can be achieved by incorporating a full third story or by building living space above the garages.



Figure 42: Typology description of rowhouses also known as townhomes

Figure 43: Typology description of a mixed-use residential apartment building with a central courtyard

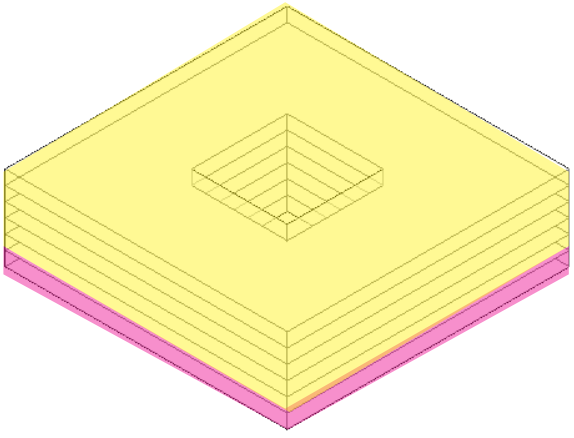




10TH AT HOYT
Address: 925 NW Hoyt Street
Total Land Area: 1 acres (40,000 sq ft)
Building Area: 240000 sq ft

Year Built	2004
FAR	6
Typology	Mid-rise mixed-use residential with ground-floor retail
Structure	6-story concrete and steel frame with masonry façade
Current Use	Office spaces with ground-floor retail
Zoning	Central Employment (EX)

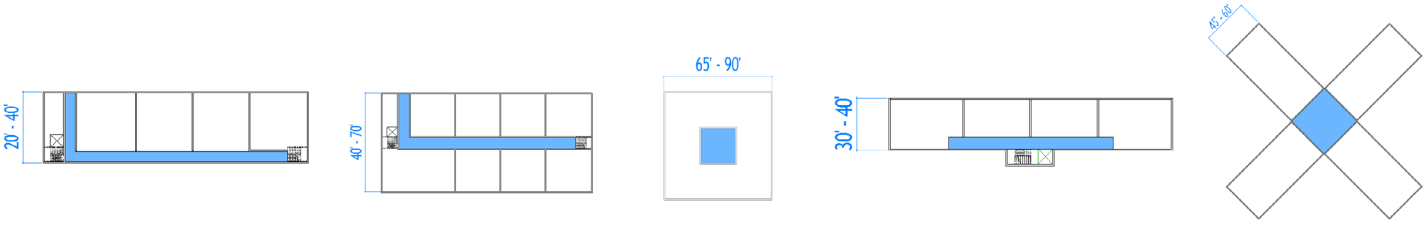




Retail/ Restaurant

Apartment

Figure 44: Corridor types in apartment buildings



Corridor Location	Corridor Type	Building Form	Unit Aspect
Side corridor or balcony	Single-loaded corridor on one side of a row of apartments	Narrow slab block	Intermediate double aspect
Central corridor	Double-loaded corridor in the middle of two rows of apartments	Wide slab block	Intermediate single aspect
Central lobby	Apartments off of central lobby at each floor	Tower block	Corner units
Alternate floor corridors	Single-loaded corridor on one side of a row of two-story apartments or maisonettes	Narrow slab block	Double aspect
Scissor corridor	Double-loaded corridor in the middle of two rows of two double-story units	Narrow slab block	Double aspect

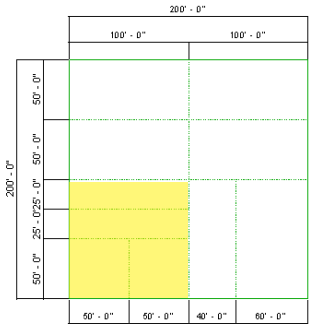
Figure 45: Average unit sizes and floor heights for mixed use residential buildings

Unit Type	Size Range (sq ft)
Efficiency Unit (Compact Studio)	300–350 sq ft
Studio	500–600 sq ft
1 Bedroom	680–780 sq ft
2 Bedroom	1,000–1,300 sq ft
3 Bedroom	1,300–1,400 sq ft
4 Bedroom	1,400–1,600 sq ft

Use	Notes
Mixed-use	Often includes retail or office on lower floors
Ground floor retail	Taller floor-to-ceiling height: 11–15 feet
Office space	Floor-to-ceiling height average: 10 feet
Double-height lobby	Floor-to-ceiling height: 18–22 feet

Commercial and Services

Adaptive reuse of former industrial and commercial buildings was also explored due to an interest in reviving the industrial history of the neighborhood through initiatives like the Made in Old Town project discussed in the Stakeholder chapter. There are several instances of mixed-use commercial hotels with ground level restaurants or cafes that provide a model for future hospitality development. Bud Clark Commons, a center that provides a mix of permanent housing, overnight shelter, a day center, and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, was studied as an example of service providers along the Glisan Corridor.



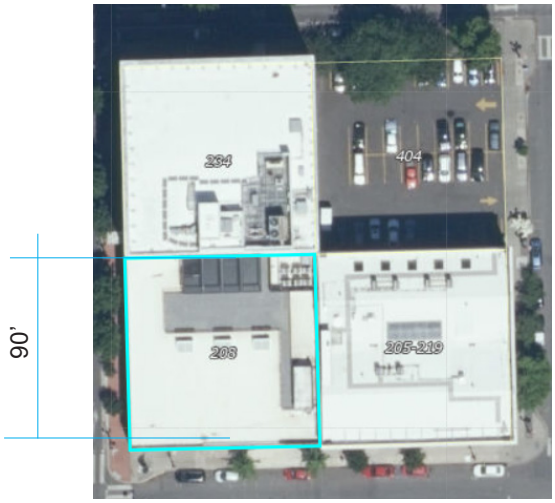


Figure 46: Adaptive reuse of existing light industrial or commercial buildings

MASON EHRMAN BUILDING AND ANNEX
Address: 222 NW 5th Ave
Total Land Area: 0.23 acres (10,000 sq ft)
Building Area: 20,000 sq ft

Year Built	Main building: 1908 Annex: 1940
FAR	2
Typology	Historic commercial office
Structure	7-story main building and 2-story annex
Current Use	Creative office spaces and ground-floor retail
Historic Status	Contributing property in the Old Town Historic District
Zoning	Central Commercial (CX)



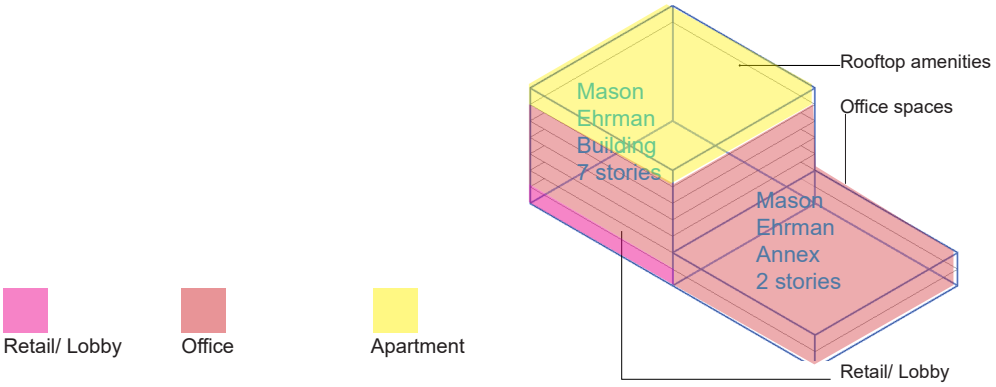
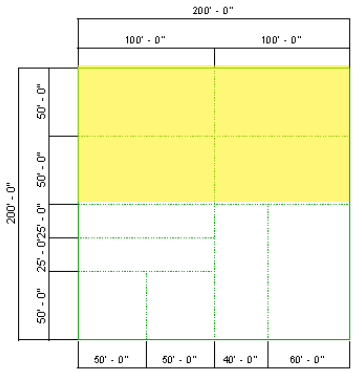


Figure 47: Mixed use hospitality with hotel on upper floors and ground floor restaurants, bars or other commercial

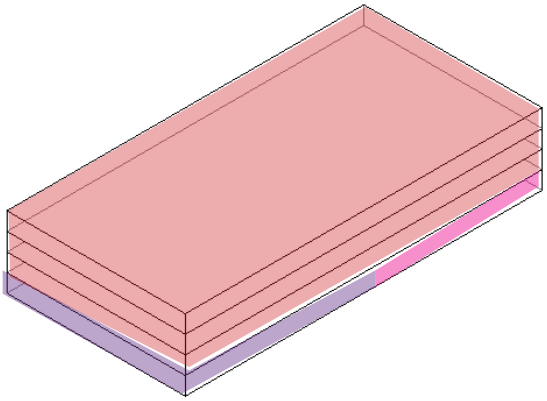




MERCHANT HOTEL
Address: 222–228 NW Davis St,

Year Built	1880
FAR	1.4
Typology	Former hotel, now mixed-use commercial
Structure	3-story Italianate cast iron building
Current Use	Level 2-4: Creative Office Spaces Ground Floor: Old Town Pizza / The Faux Museum / Retail Spaces
Historic Status:	Listed on the National Register of Historic Places; contributing property in the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District
Zoning	Central Commercial (CX)



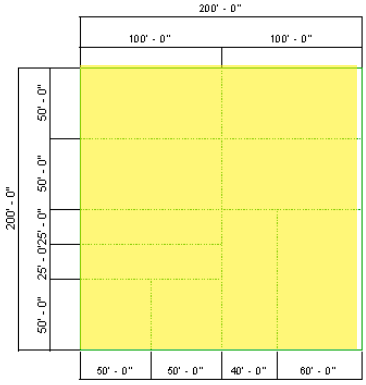


The Faux Museum

Retail/ Restaurant

Office

Figure 48: Example mixed use social service provider building with permanent and temporary shelter beds

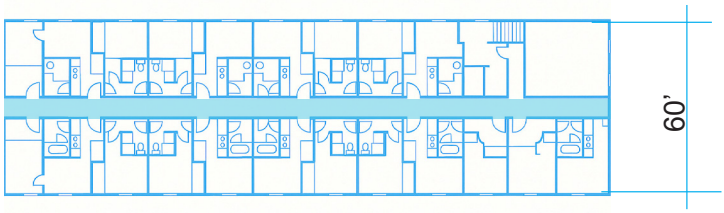




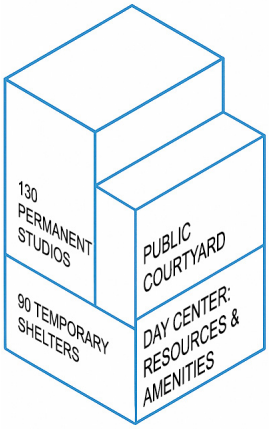
BUD CLARK COMMONS
Address: 655 NW Hoyt St.
Land Area: 0.67 acres (29,096 sq ft)
Building Area: 106,000sqft

Year Built	2011
FAR	3.64
Typology	Multi-service homeless resource center with permanent housing
Structure	8-story mid-rise, concrete and steel construction
Uses	130 units of permanent supportive housing (upper floors) 90-bed men's shelter "Doreen's Place" (lower floors) Ground-floor day center and support services
Population Served	Homeless adults (including veterans) needing housing, shelter, and support
Zoning	Central Commercial (CXd)





Double loaded corridor
~540sqf/ unit



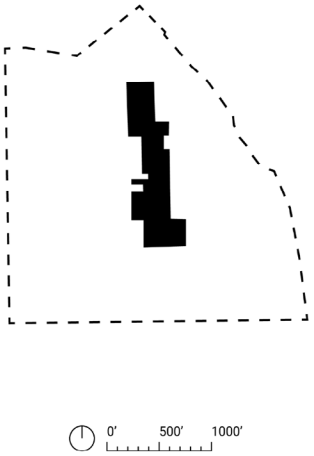
Precedents

Thirteenth Avenue Historic District, Portland

The Thirteenth Avenue Historic District is located across the North Park Blocks in the Pearl District. This district was once a center for rail freight and features adaptive reuse warehouses and industrial buildings with raised platforms that act as porches for the bars, restaurants, and businesses that now line the street. Portions of Thirteenth Avenue have been pedestrianized, and the street is closed to car traffic during "First Thursday" street-fair events in the Pearl District.

Figure 49: Thirteenth Street map and size comparison with Old Town district





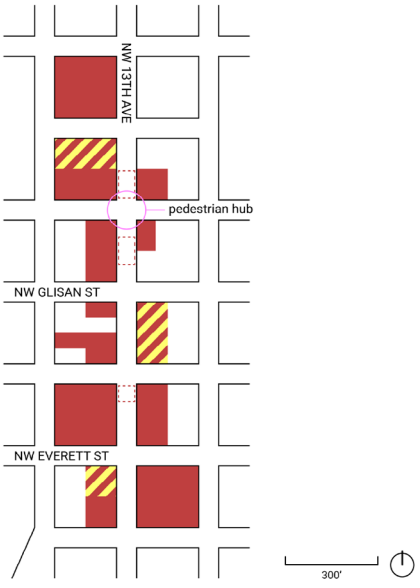




Figure 50: Historic images of 13th Avenue combined with new ground floor uses



Yaletown, Vancouver, BC

This example features a former freight district transformed into a mixed-use commercial node for the city of Vancouver. Yaletown combines historic building stock with high-density housing. The site hosts high-rise apartment towers, adaptive-reuse housing, and apartments. Historic warehouses have been adapted to raised pedestrian patios along a retail corridor.

Figure 51: Yaletown map and size comparison with Old Town district





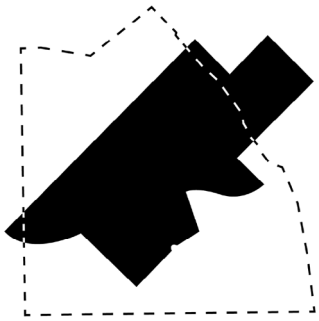
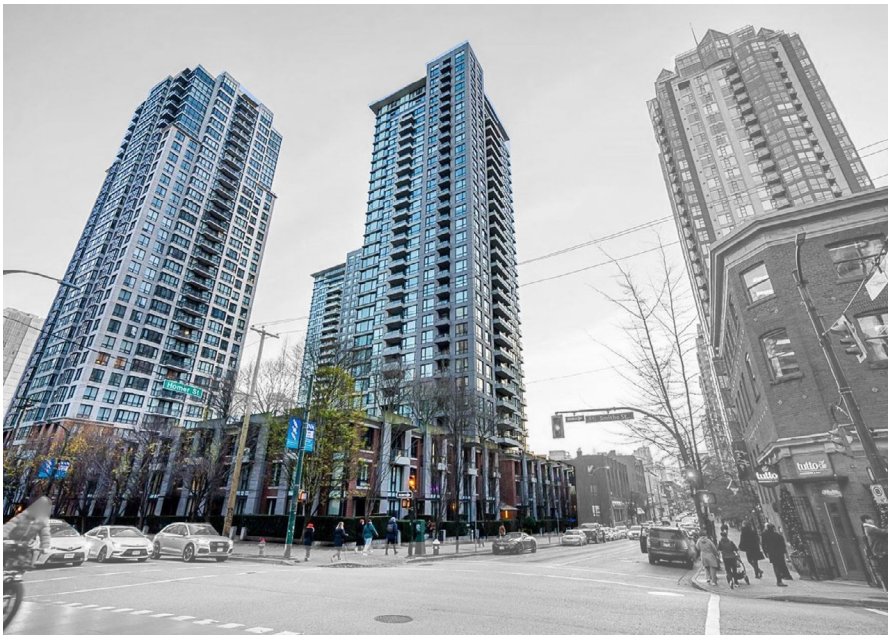
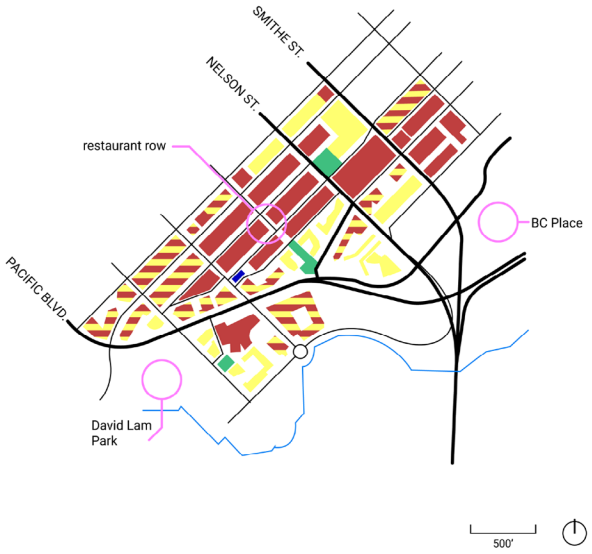
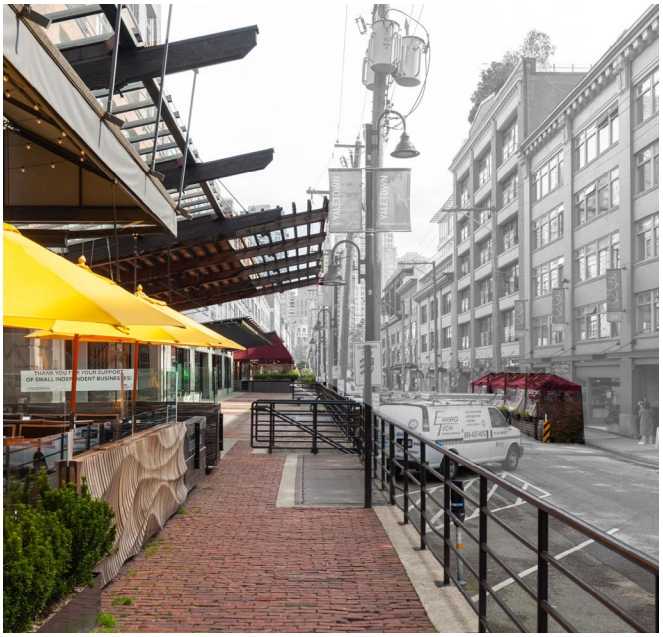


Figure 52: Images highlighting housing and public space improvements in Yaletown









Union Market, Washington, DC

Union Market is an adaptive reuse and infill development in Washington DC that centers on a food market in a former train station with indoor and outdoor spaces. It features new and adaptive reuse, mixed-use buildings, new green spaces, and pedestrian pathways around the market.

Figure 53: Yaletown map and size comparison with Old Town district

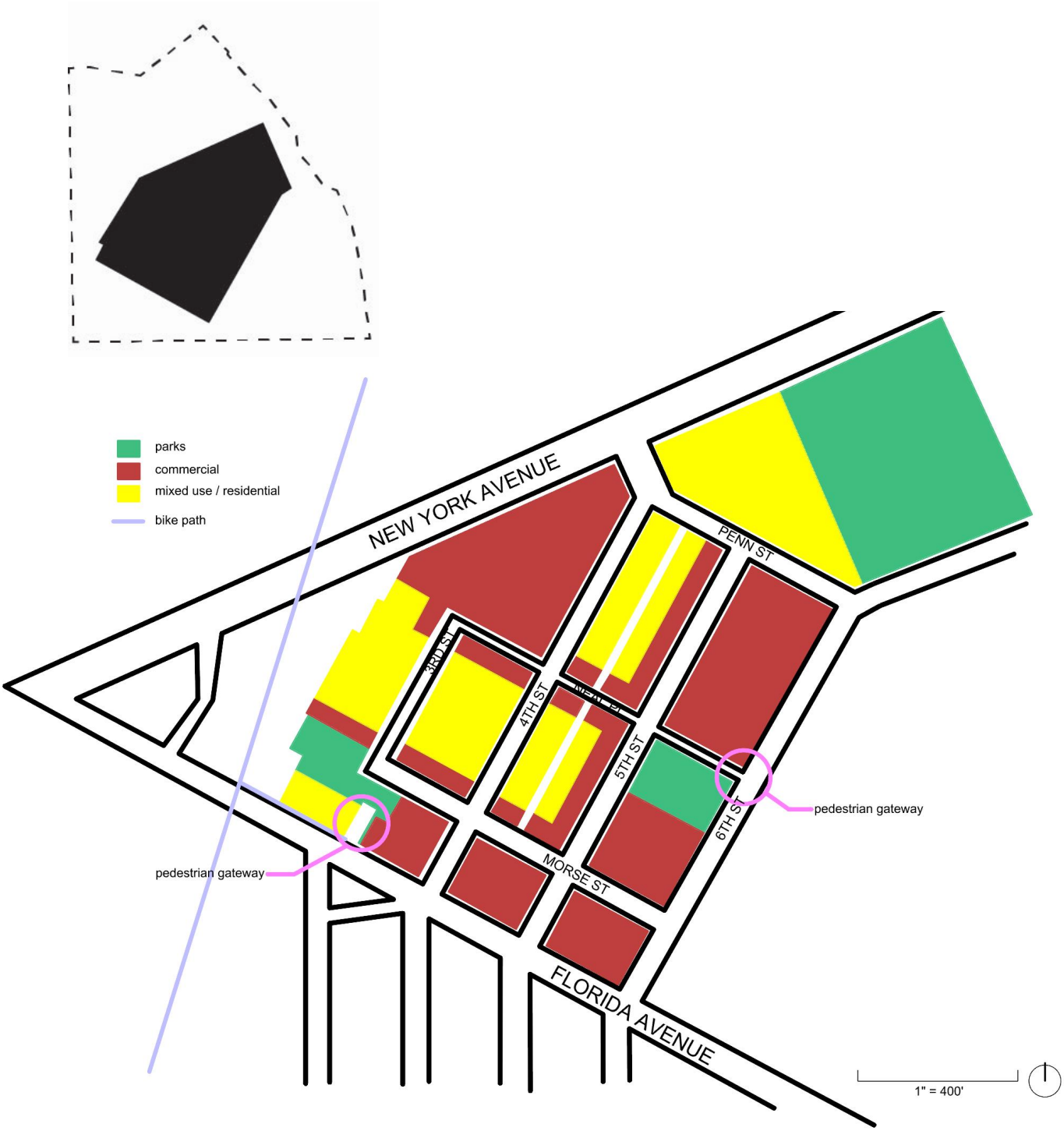


Figure 54: Indoor and outdoor food market stalls and dining areas







Visions for a New Old Town:
Urban Design Solutions for the Glisan Corridor

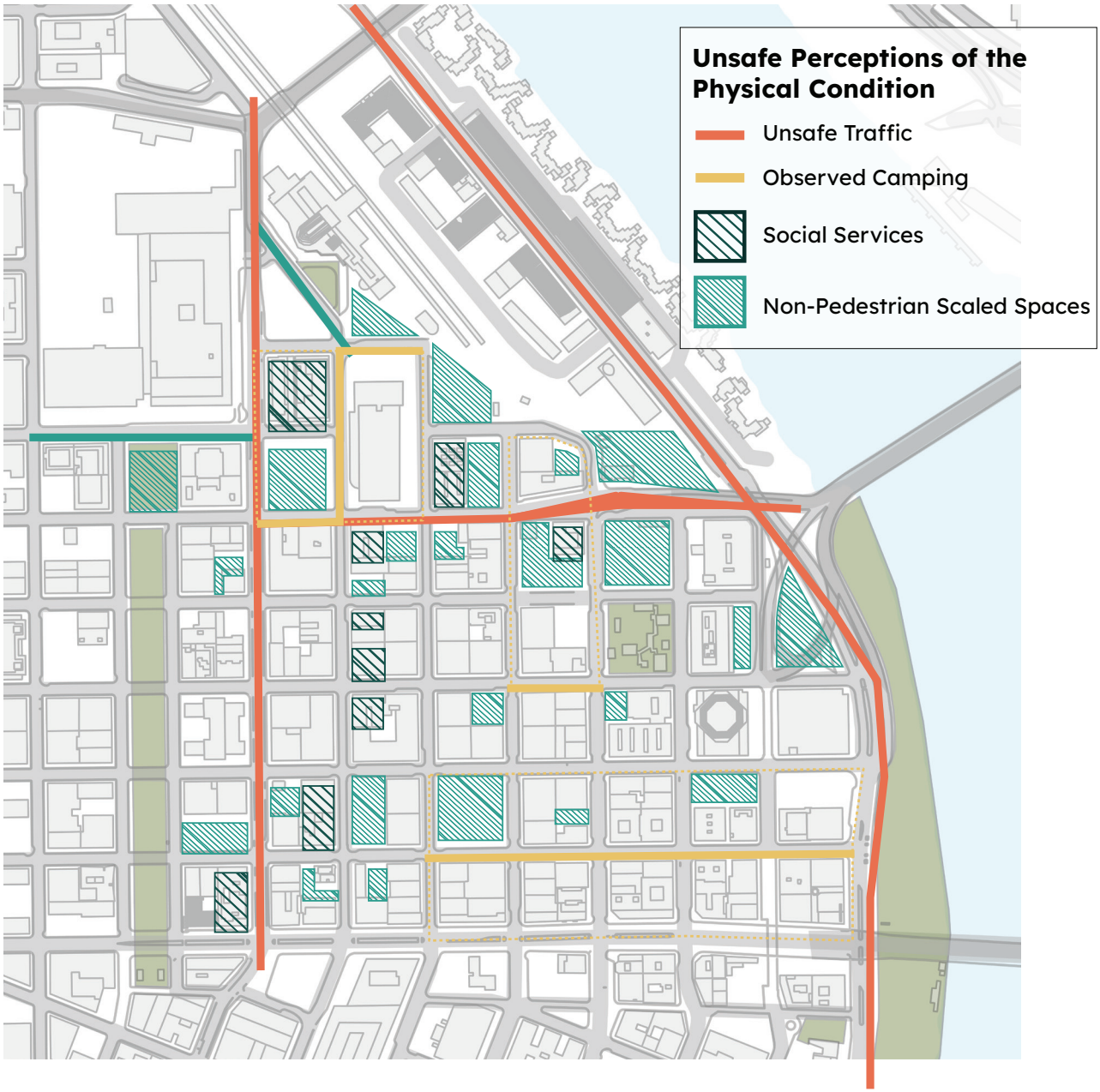
Student Projects

Group 1: Sofia Irvin



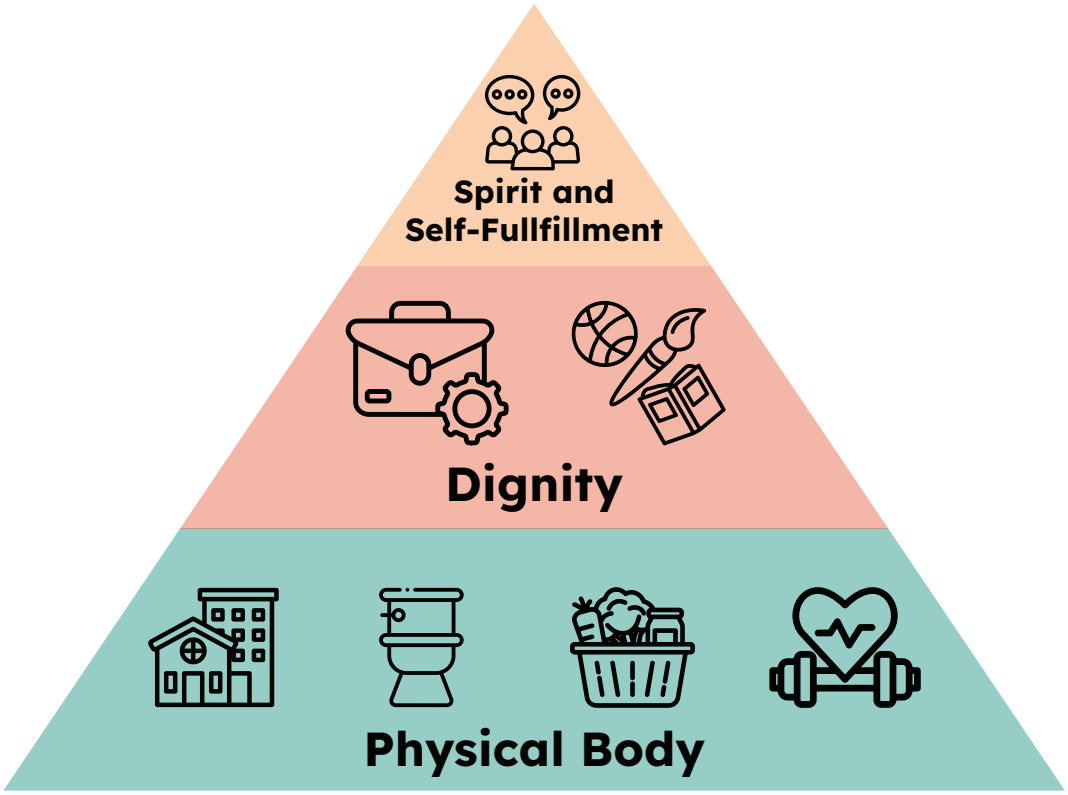
In investigating the site and its context, the first student project identified a lack of perceived safety and unhealthy conditions in the district as major problems to be addressed. Students observed heavy traffic and a lack of pedestrian protection along major roadways, contributing to safety concerns. Observed outdoor encampments near social services indicate that basic needs are not being met, contributing to health and safety concerns. Additionally, public spaces are not right sized for the human body, making some areas feel abandoned, unobserved, or underutilized.

Figure 55: Site plan



To address these health and safety concerns, the student proposed a concept focused on healing. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was used as a model for meeting basic human needs in the design. The hierarchy focuses on levels of human needs beginning with physical needs like food and shelter, moving to dignity through purpose, and reaching the top with spiritual and self-fulfillment. Designs for healing focused on neighborhood scales which include daily routines and activities, and a spectacular scale composed of public amenities intended for both residents and visitors. Sustainable urban design elements are threaded throughout the design proposal. These solutions include a focus on non-vehicular modes of transportation such as walking and biking, dense tree canopy to make walking and biking more comfortable, and enhancement of the urban forest and stormwater management systems.

Figure 56: Adapted hierarchy of needs pyramid



Defining health

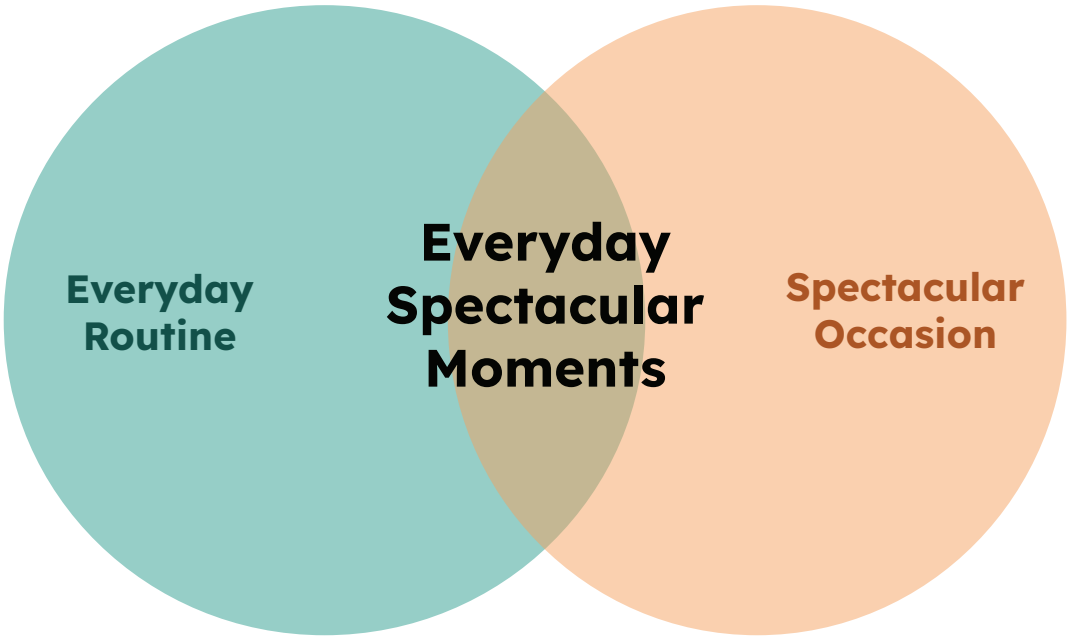


Figure 57: District scales diagram

Develop the neighborhood and district scale

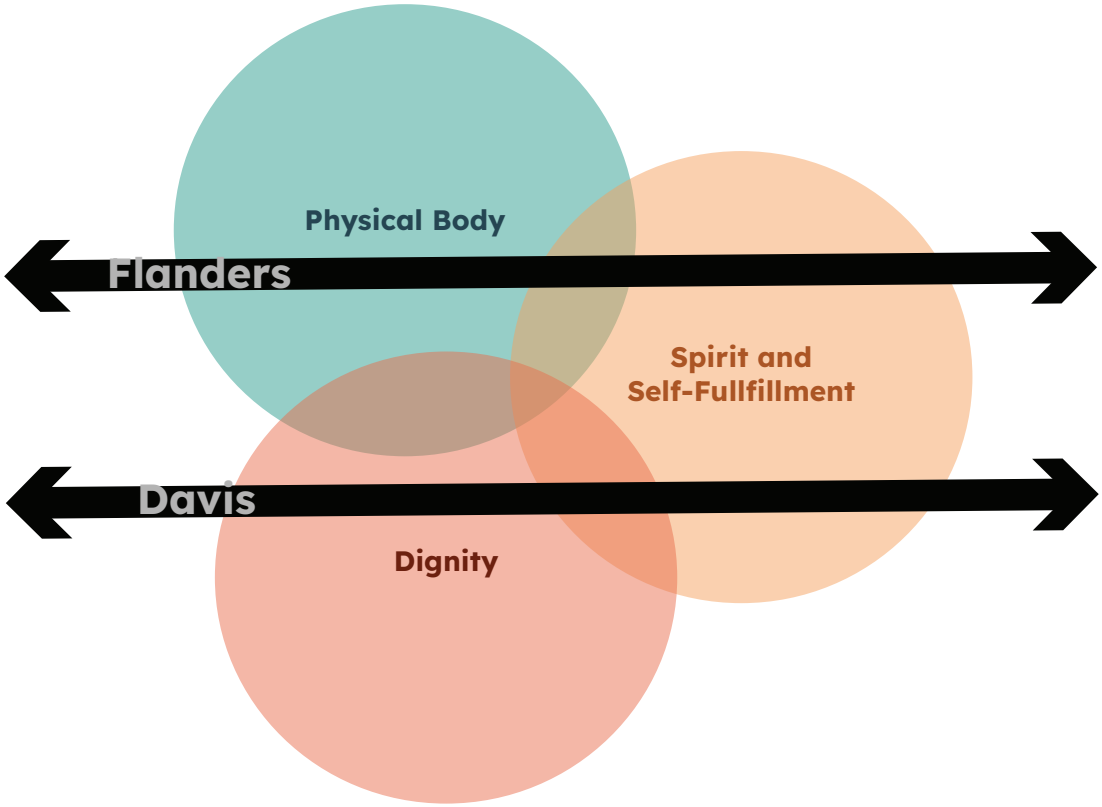
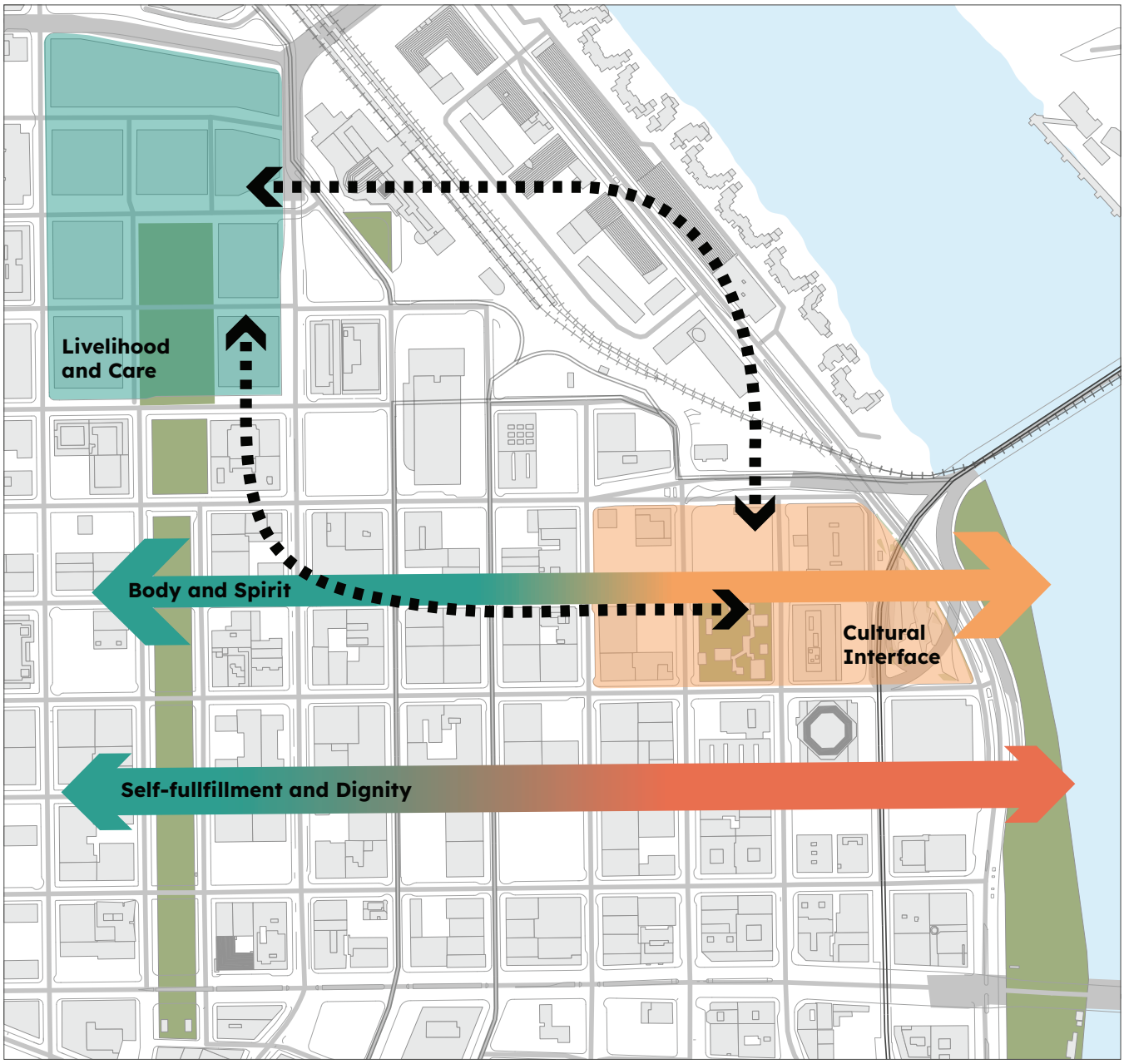


Figure 58: Concept diagram

Main streets that engage in health

Figure 59: Urban parti diagram



Proposed design solutions center on Flanders as a destination for physical healing, with spaces scaled for a spectacular, public scale on the east side near Lan Su and the future skate park. Moving west along Flanders, spaces shift to a neighborhood scale, with more amenities for residents.

Figure 60: District scales diagram

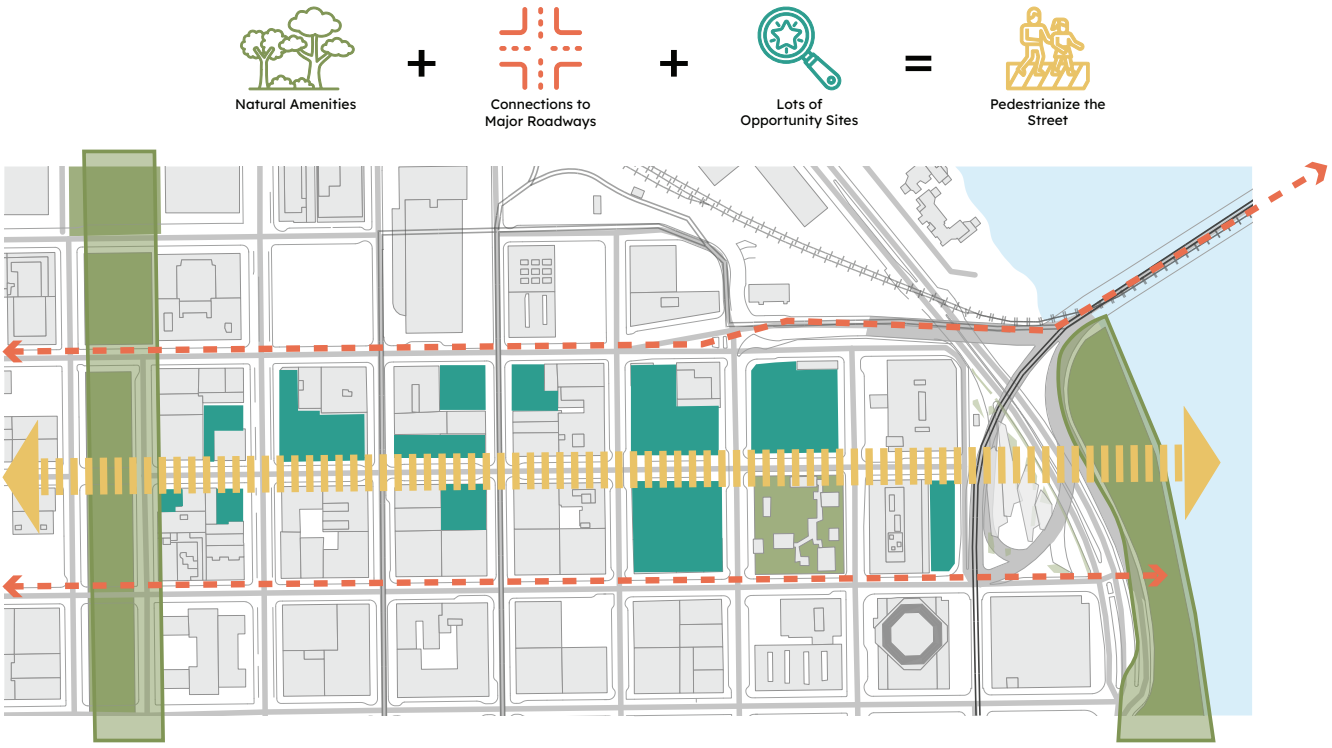
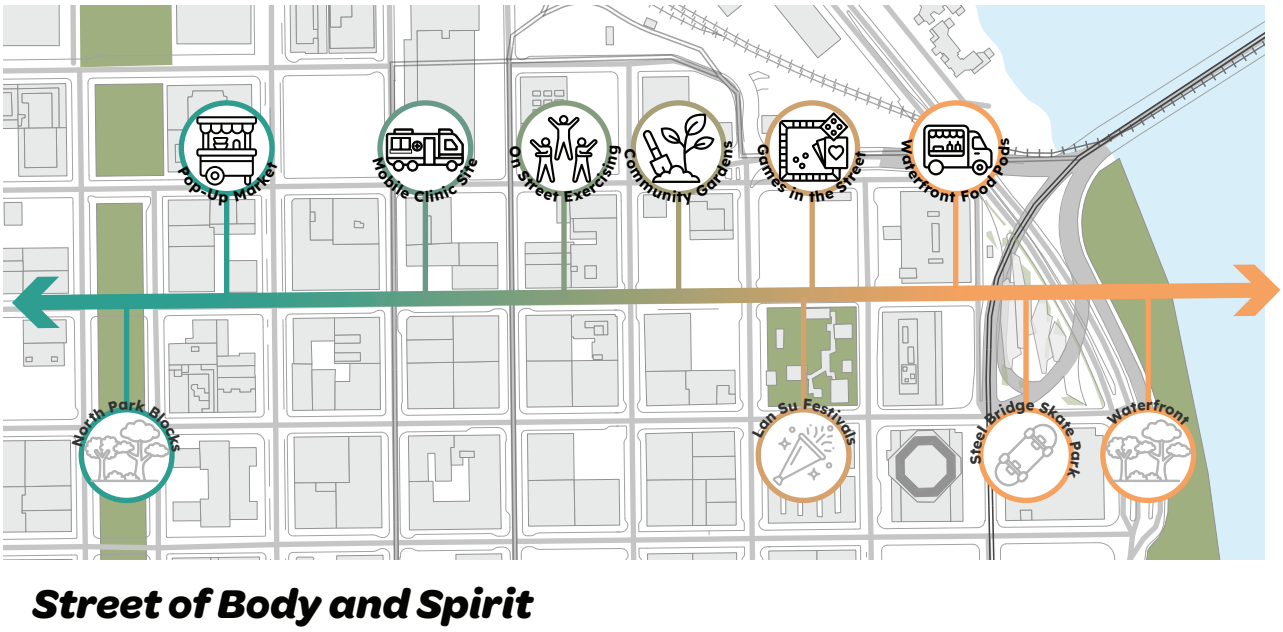


Figure 61: Program diagram



These spaces are connected by a shared street with a pedestrian path and neighborhood greenway that spans from the North Park Blocks to the Waterfront Park. Along this path, bike-share, drinking fountains, bathrooms, and seating help to meet people's physical needs as they move through the neighborhood. Next to the Park Blocks on 8th and Flanders, a pop-up market, test kitchen, and grocery store help to meet nutritional needs for the neighborhood. Space for a pop-up medical clinic near the existing P:ear (services for homeless youth) building addresses the need for health care in the area.

Moving to the more spectacular scale, a wellness plaza composed of a community garden and an exercise park provide support to the community, food security, and opportunities for physical movement. Where Flanders meets Lan Su Garden and its planned extension, game tables spill out onto the street exposing the garden programming from the outside-in. Near the planned skate park, a pod of food trucks provides food and drink to the park and helps to create a festival-like atmosphere.

Figure 62: Cart stations along Flanders

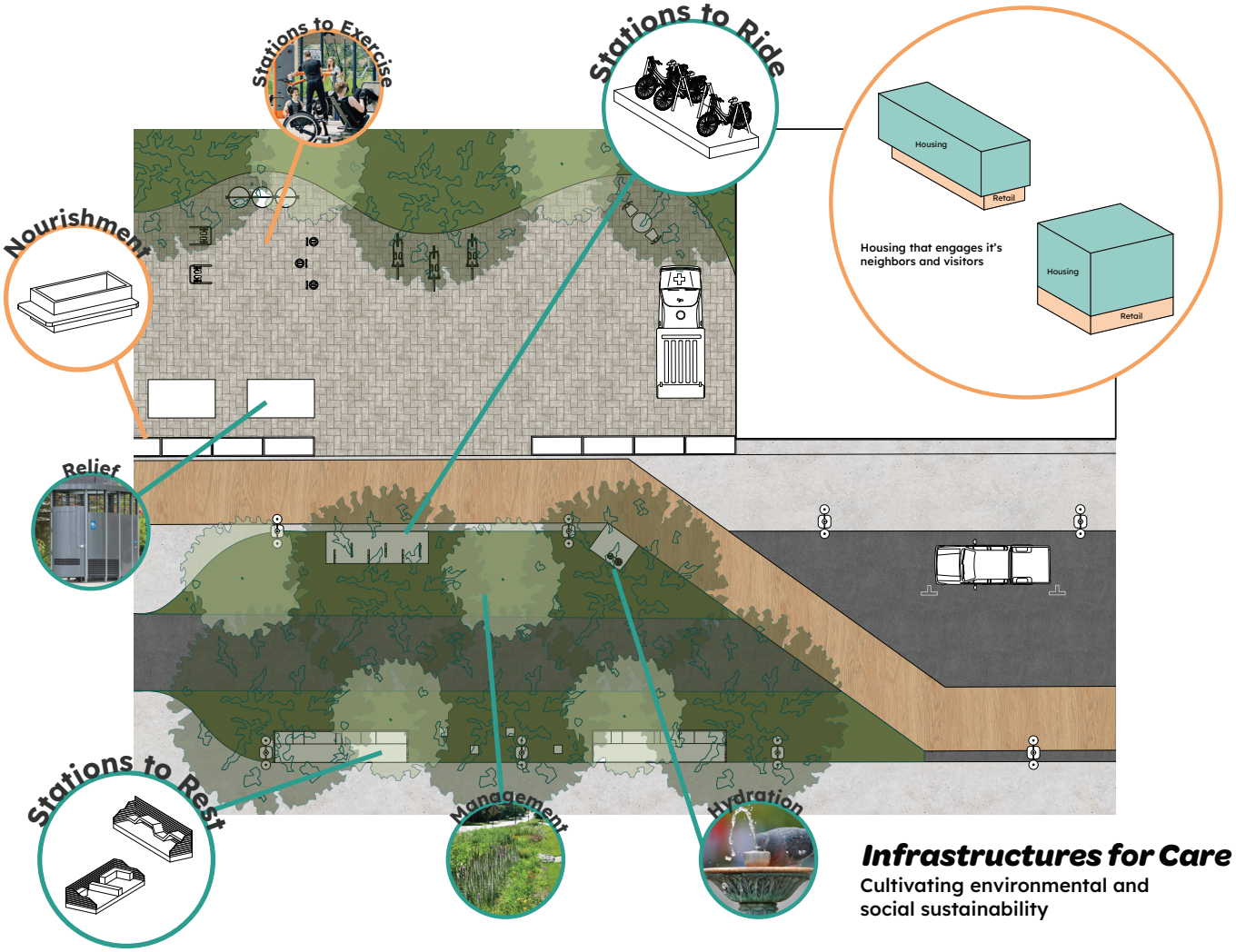


Figure 63: Pop-up market plan at NW 8th and Flanders

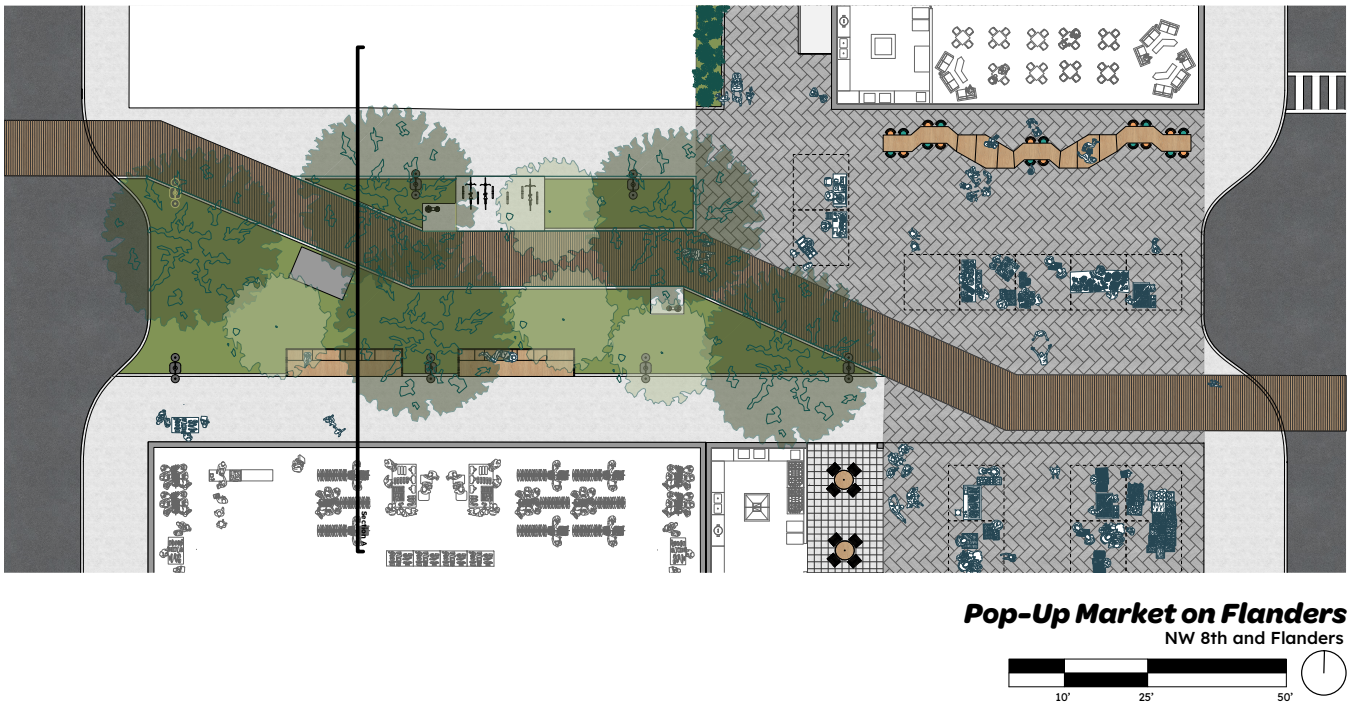


Figure 64: Street section for pop-up market

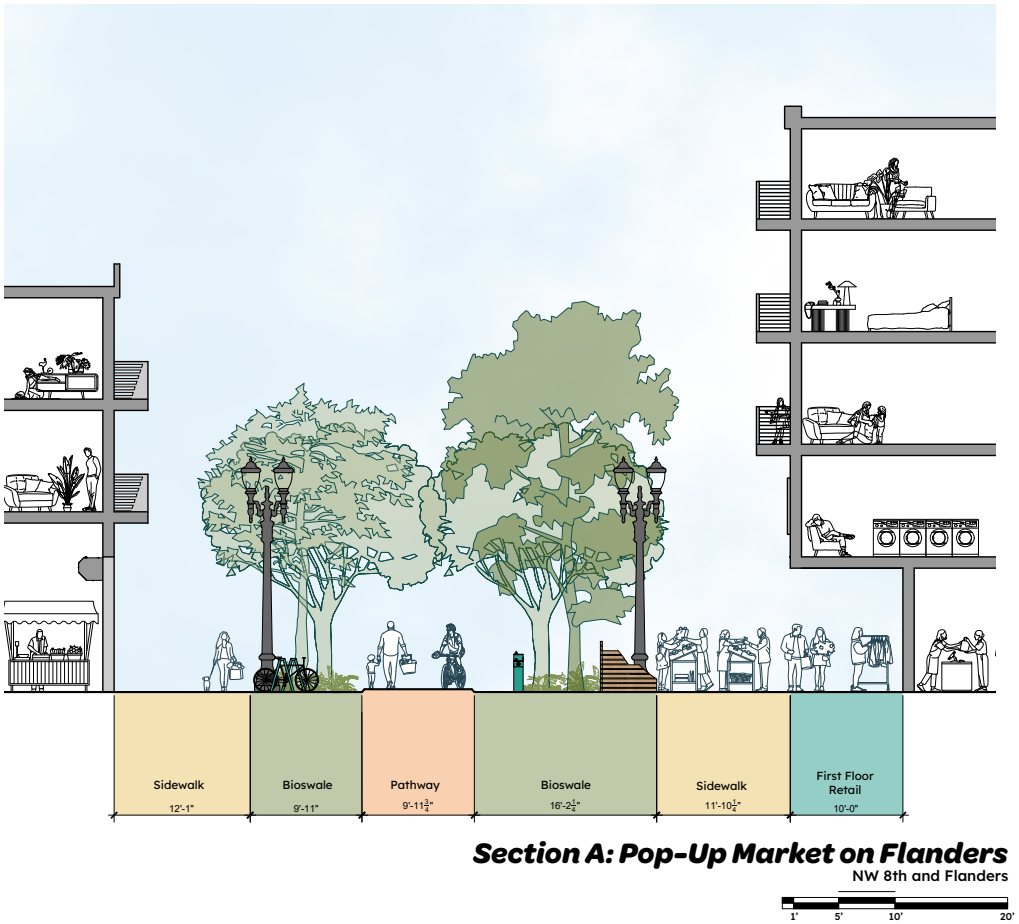


Figure 65: Wellness Plaza and festival streets on Flanders

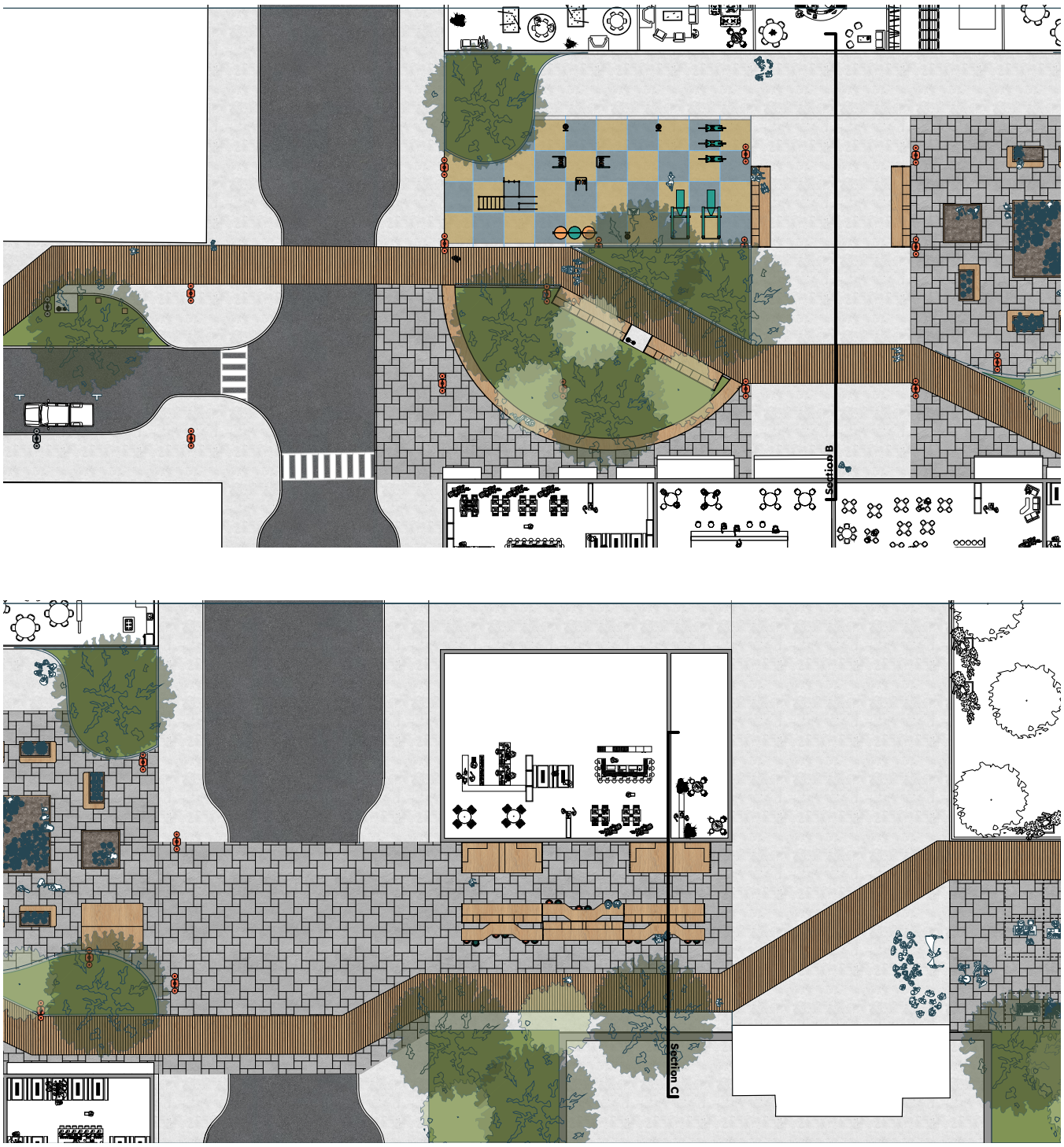


Figure 66: Street section at the Wellness Plaza

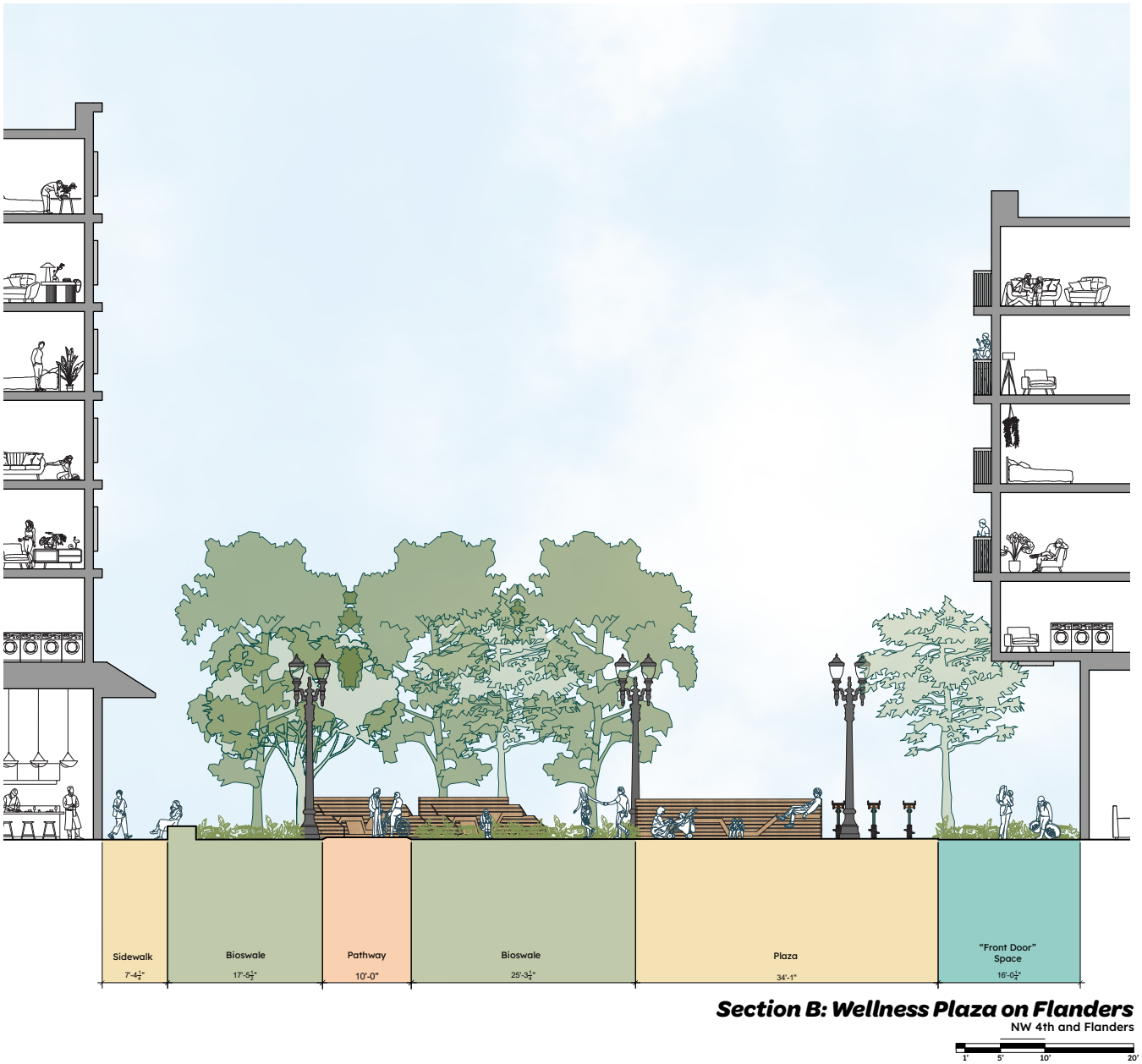


Figure 67: Wellness Plaza and festival streets on Flanders

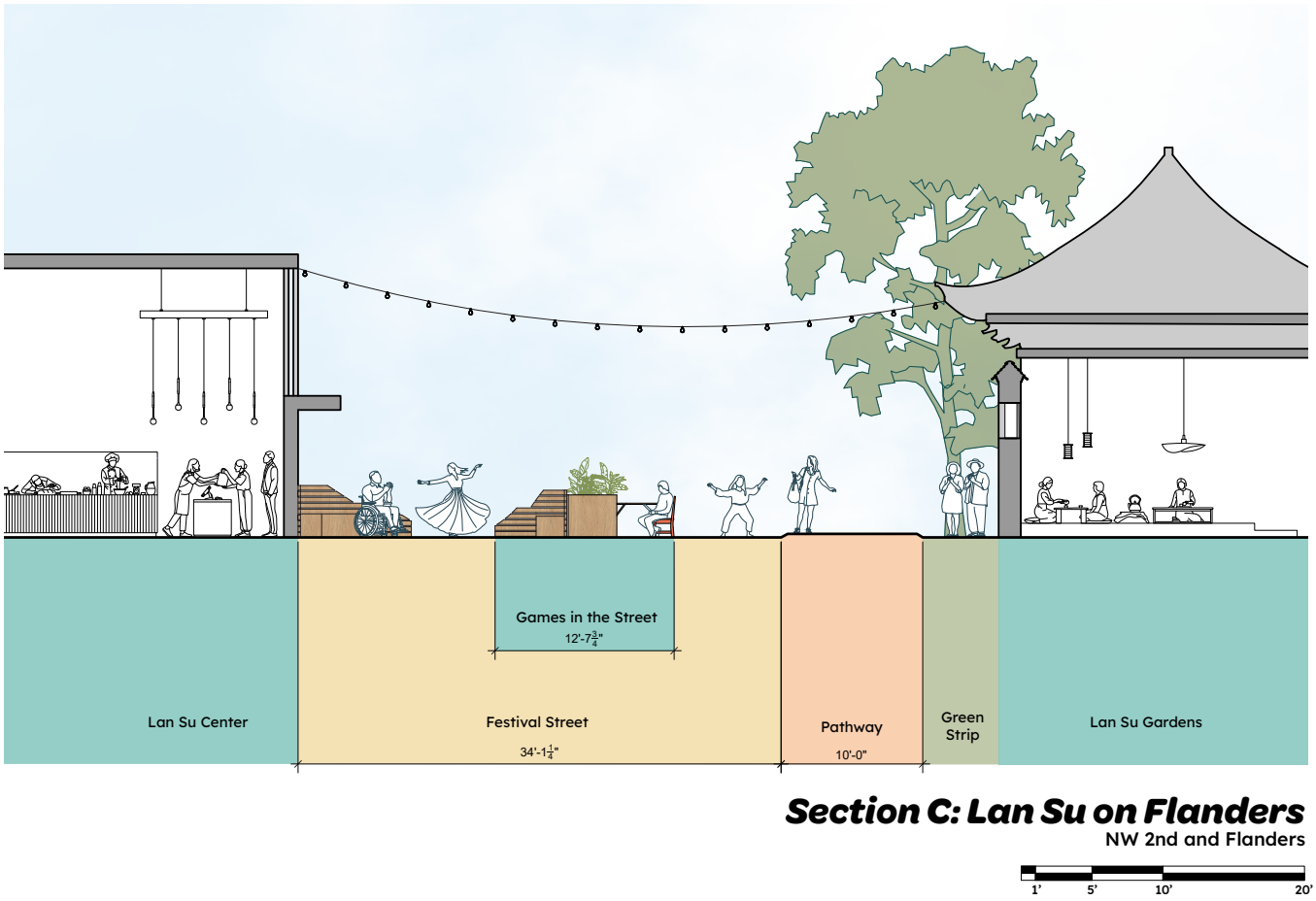


Figure 68: Food pods on Flanders at NW 1st

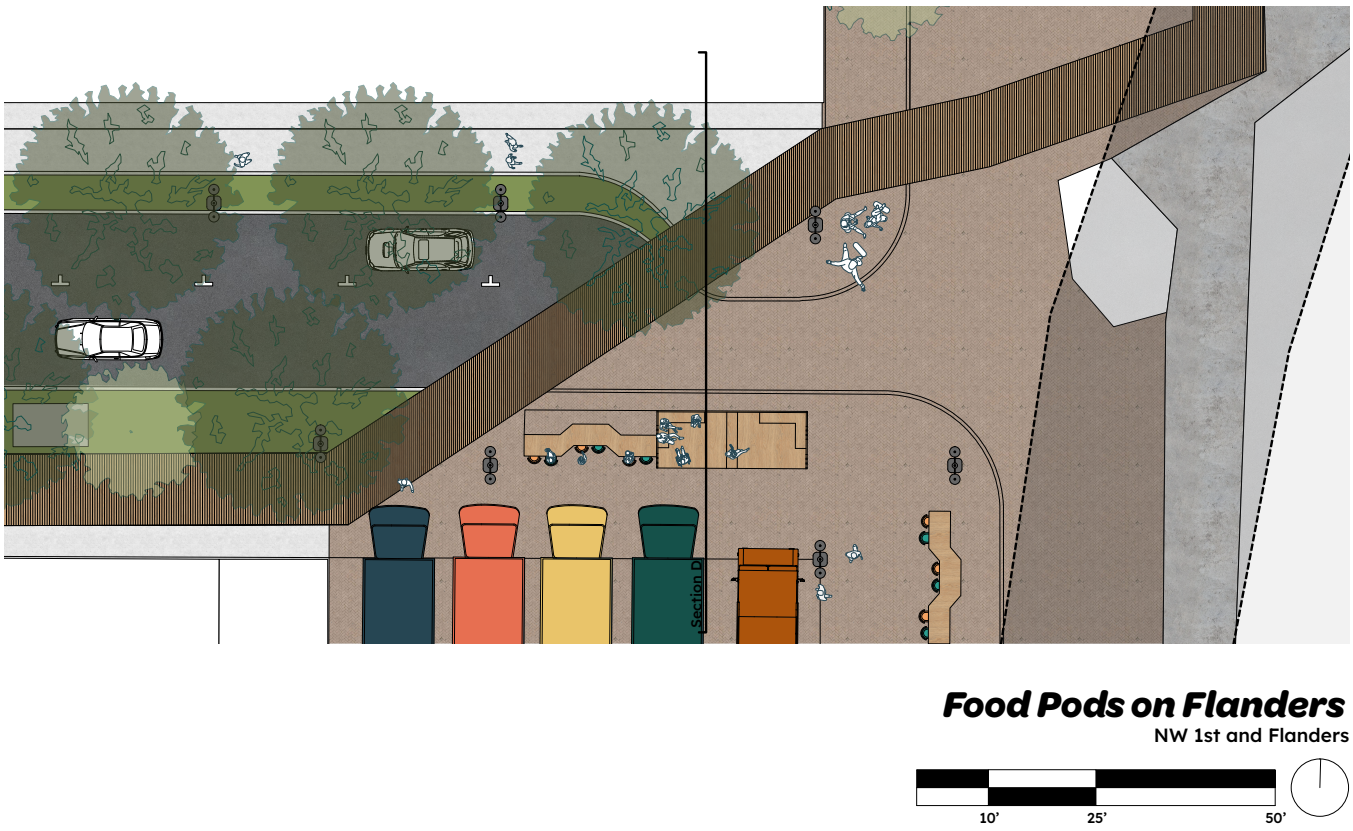
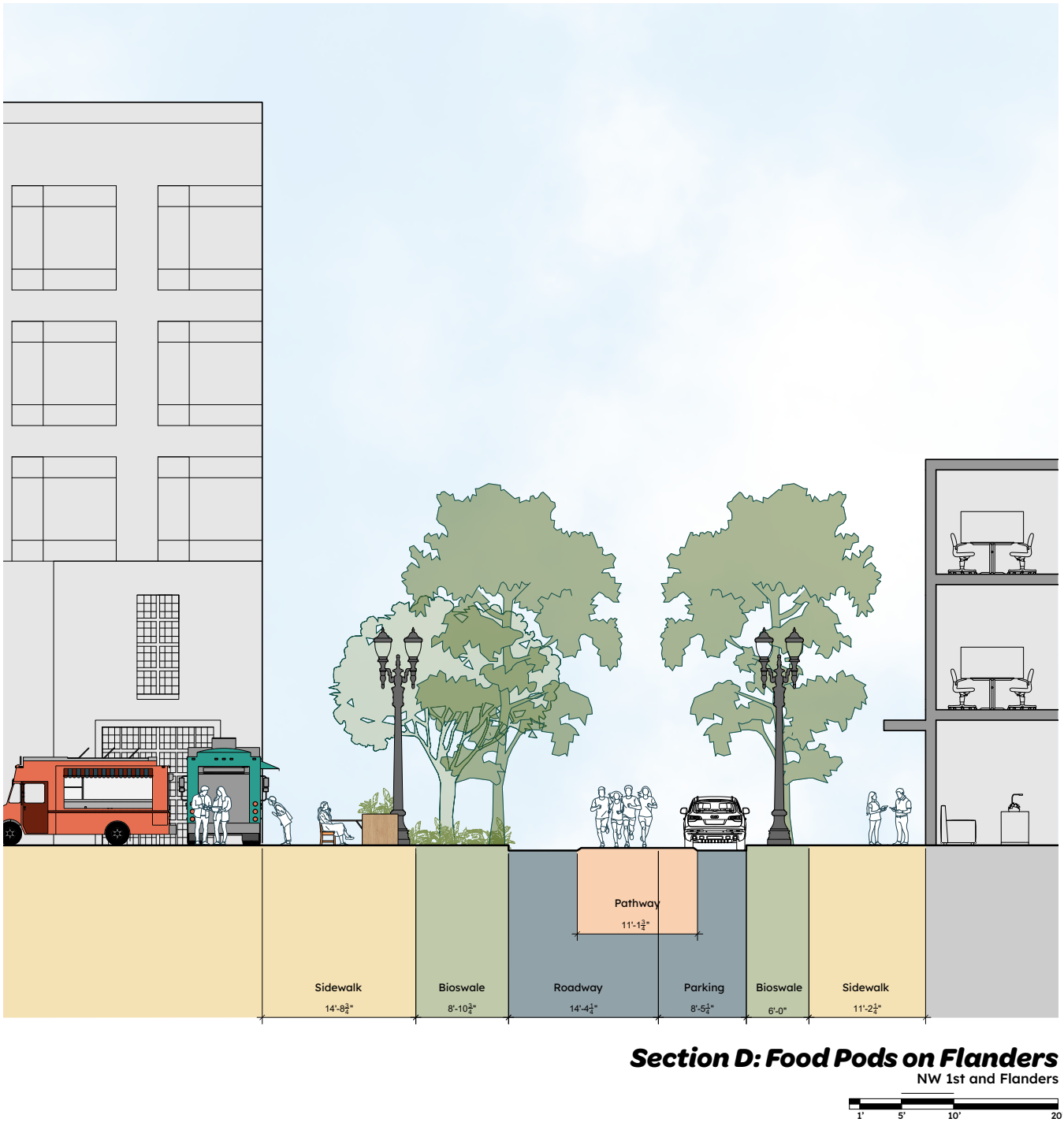
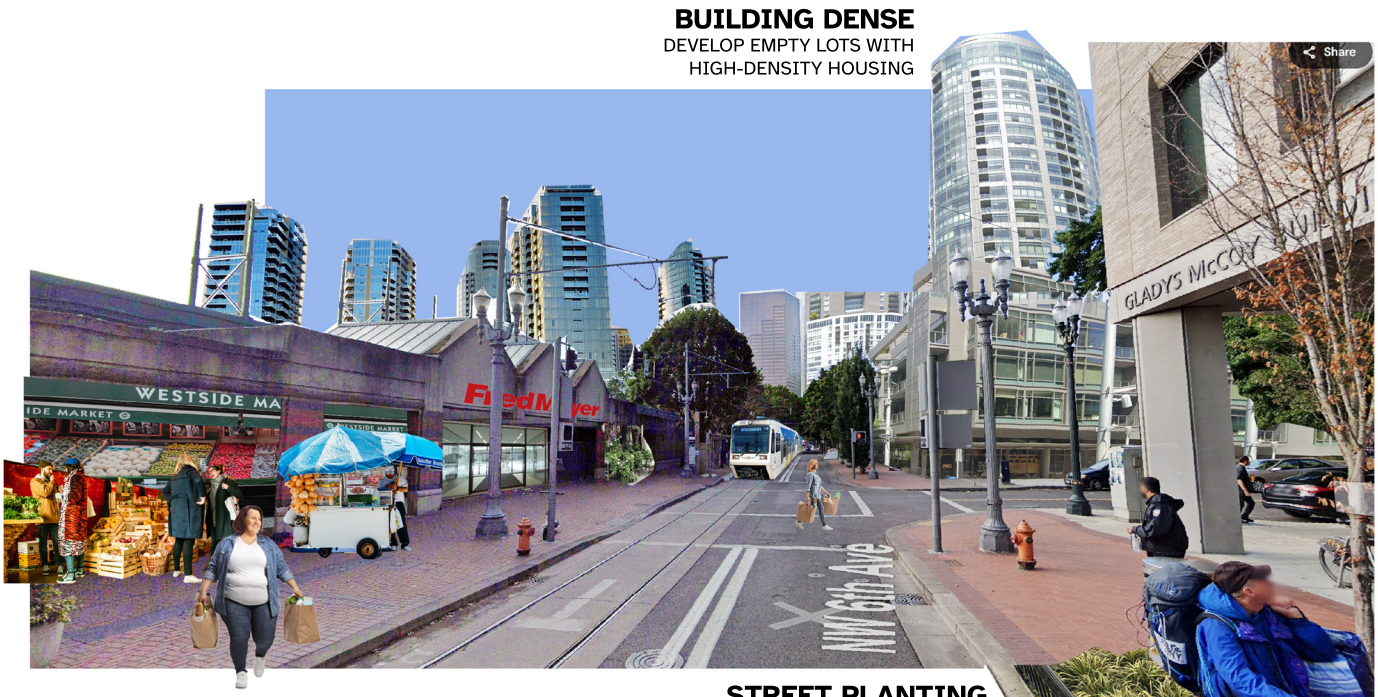


Figure 69: Street section for food pods



Group 2: Zoe Hammond, Davis Whalen



Student Project • Group 2: Zoe Hammond, Davis Whalen

The second student project identified low street-level activity, physical barriers that limited connection especially to green spaces, lack of access to fresh food and other basic needs, and high-vacancy rates combined with a lack of dense housing as major challenges to confront through their design proposal.

Figure 70: Site plan

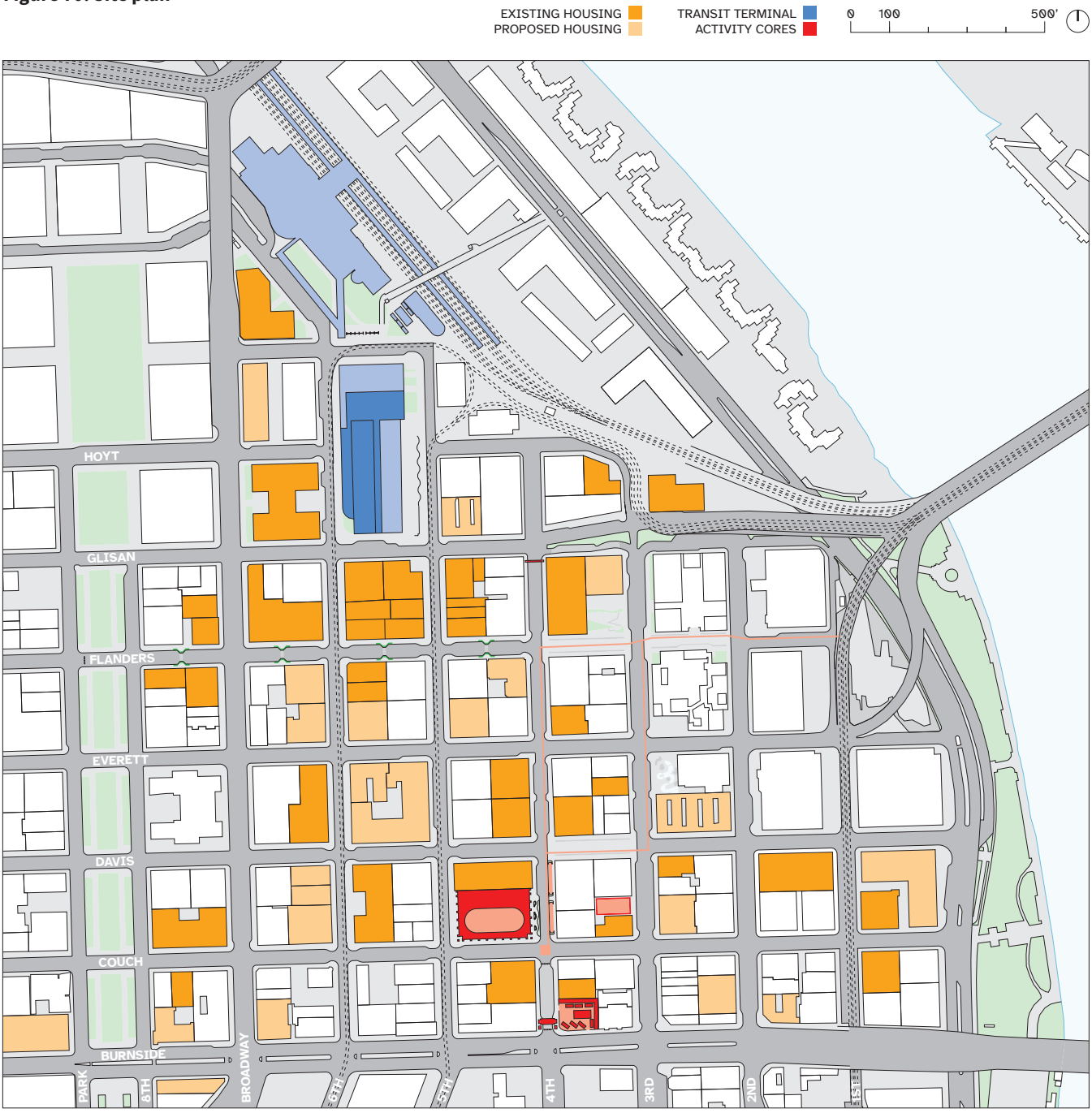


Figure 71: Site observations

CONFINING EDGES
BUSY, FAST-MOVING PERIMETER STREETS

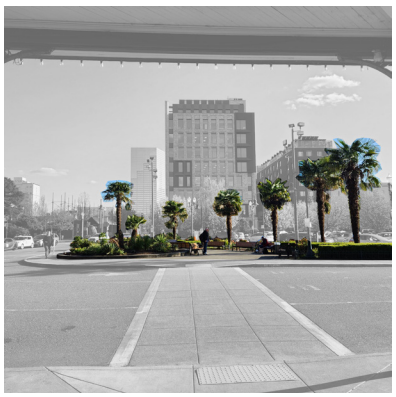




INACTIVE STREETS
LOW DIVERSITY OF USES, LACK OF HOUSING, JOBS, FOOD

VISIBLE VACANCY
BOARDED, BORING, AND VANDALIZED FACADES





POOR PARKS
ORNAMENTAL, PRIVATE GREEN SPACE

Figure 72: Barriers to connectivity

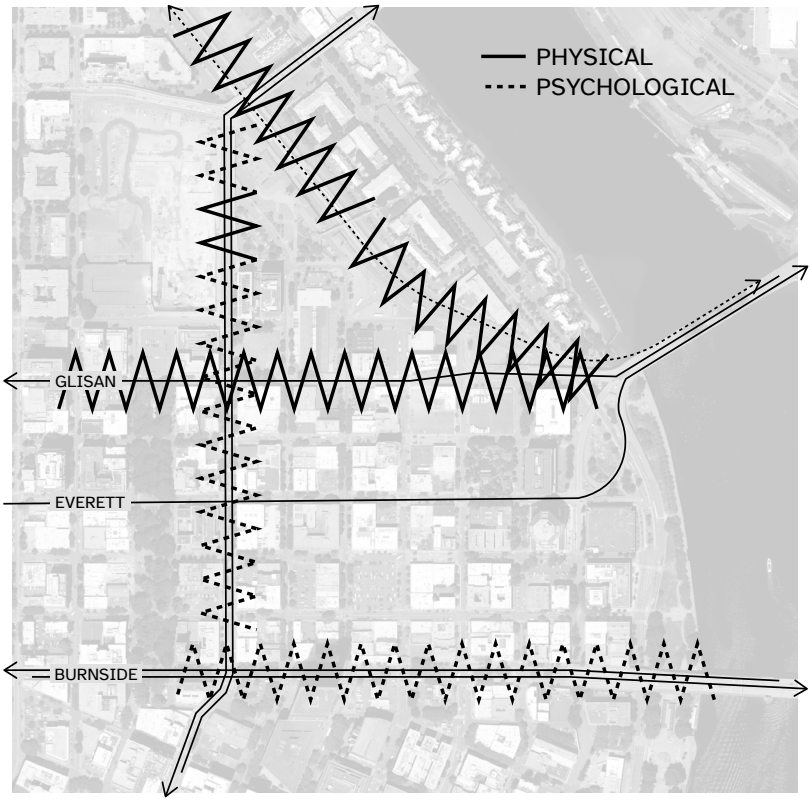


Figure 73: Map of greenspaces

FEW PUBLIC PARKS, LIMITED GREEN SPACE

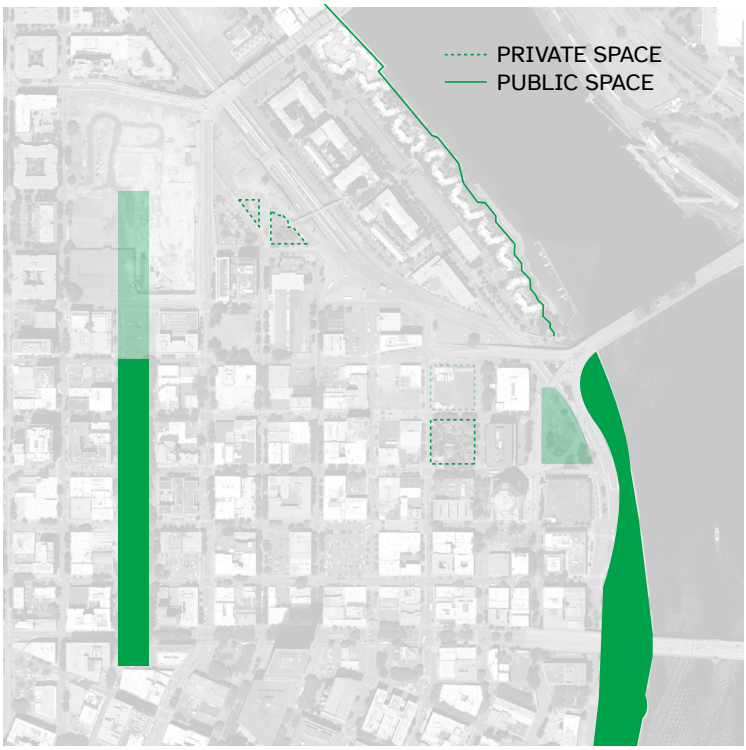


Figure 74: Map of vacancies and low density lots in Old Town

HIGH VACANCY, LOW DENSITY

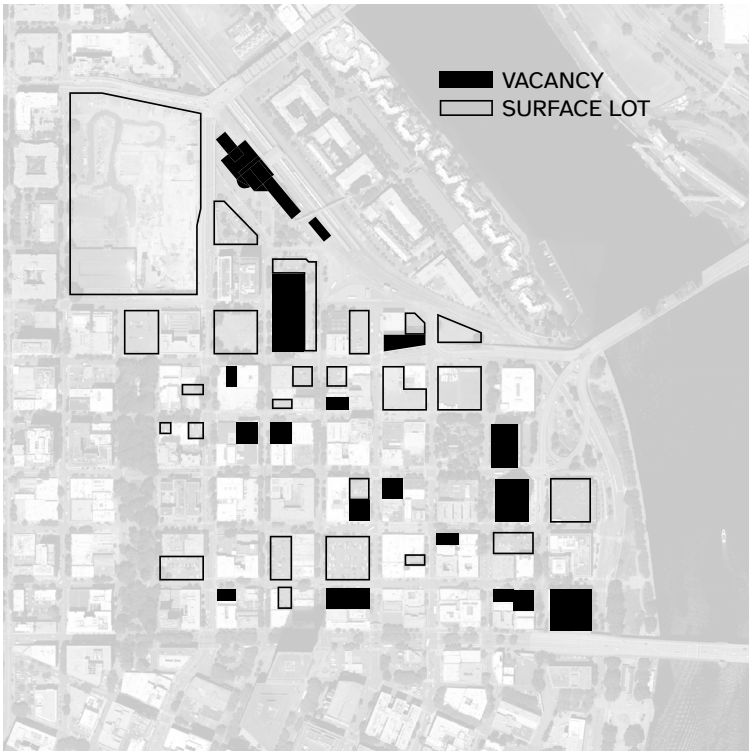
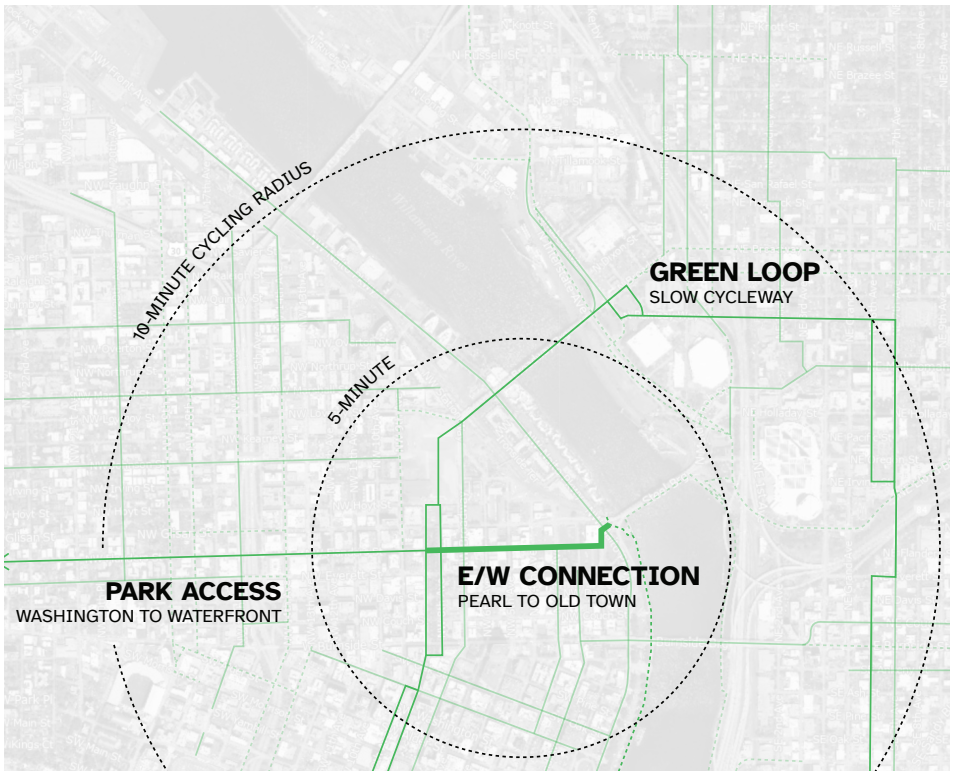


Figure 75: Network of greenways



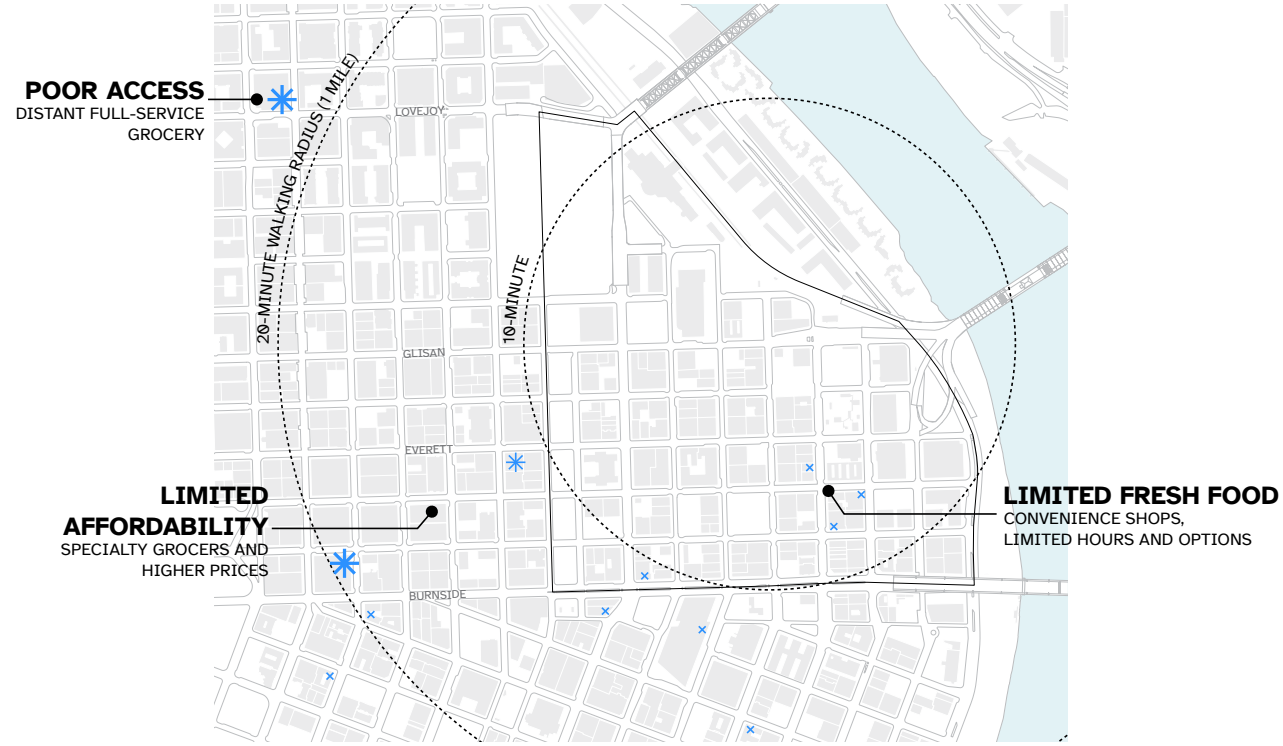
GREENWAY GOALS
Building safer streets where people **drive slower**

Providing transportation **options for everyone**, giving more people opportunities to walk, bike, and roll for neighborhood trips

NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS
Support entertainment and retail activity with improved **intradistrict connectivity**

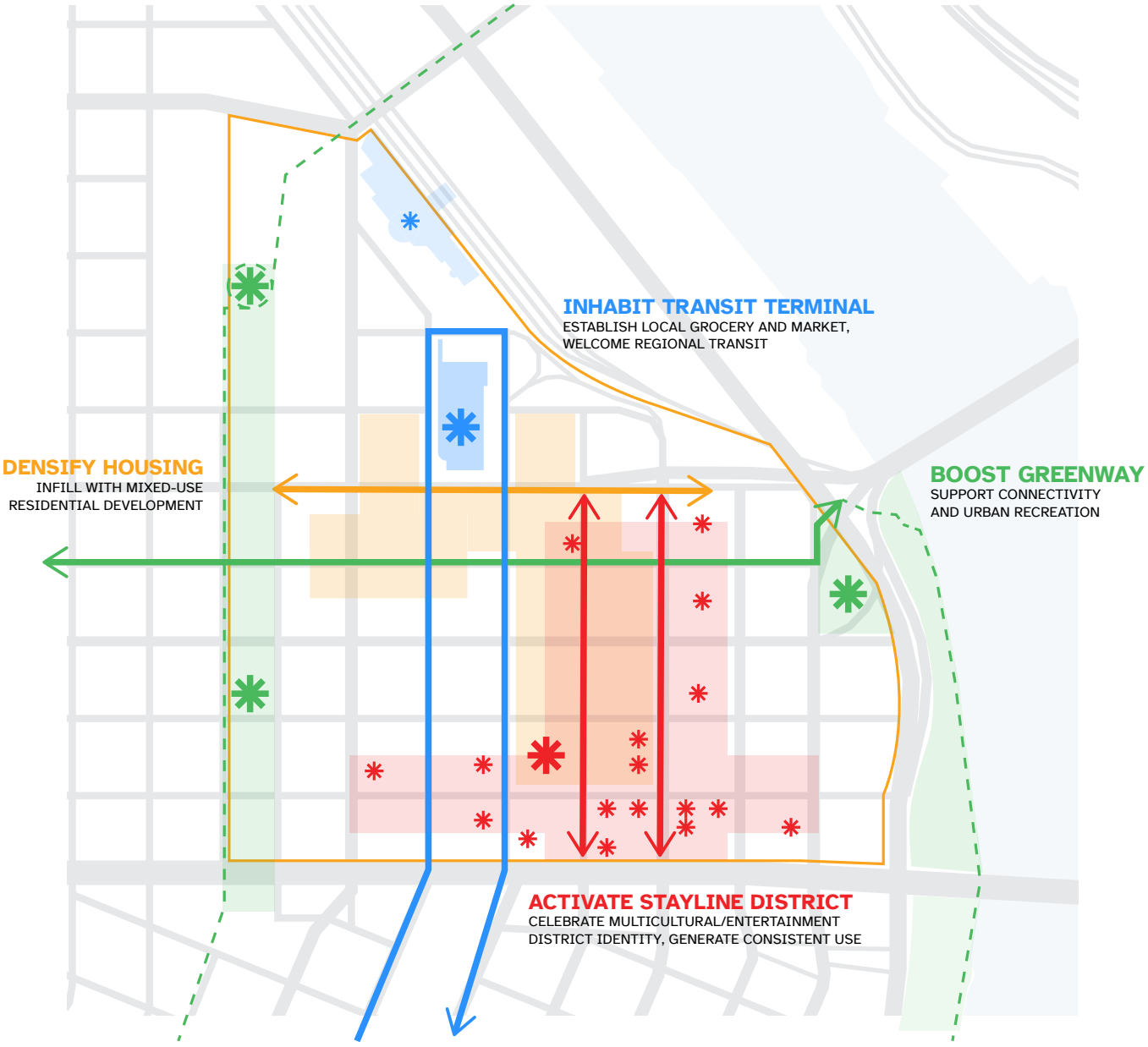
Figure 76: Distance to grocery stores

GROCERY AVAILABILITY



This proposal takes a multifaceted approach to creating active streets and making connections. It would add dense housing, boost non-vehicle travel in the area, support food and other basic needs with a grocery store and farmers market, and activate the Stayline District (3rd and 4th Avenues) with a diverse program to support a variety of activities. The programming of public spaces focuses on play, fun, and active recreation.

Figure 77: Urban parti



High rise, adaptive reuse, and midrise housing added throughout Old Town would increase density. High rise buildings would be located in areas on the north and west sides of the site, while midrise and adaptive reuse apartments would add density in Chinatown and the historic district. This housing would be a mix of protected, affordable, and market-rate buildings to accommodate people with a variety of income levels.

Figure 78: Housing typologies

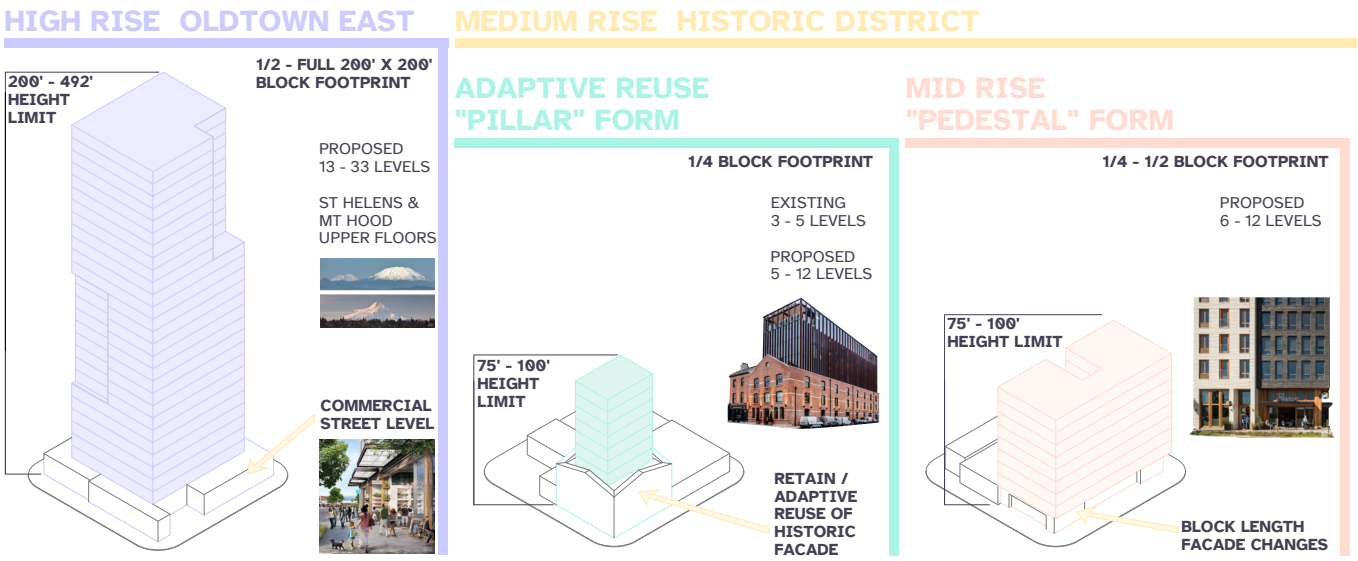


Figure 79: Housing proposal axon

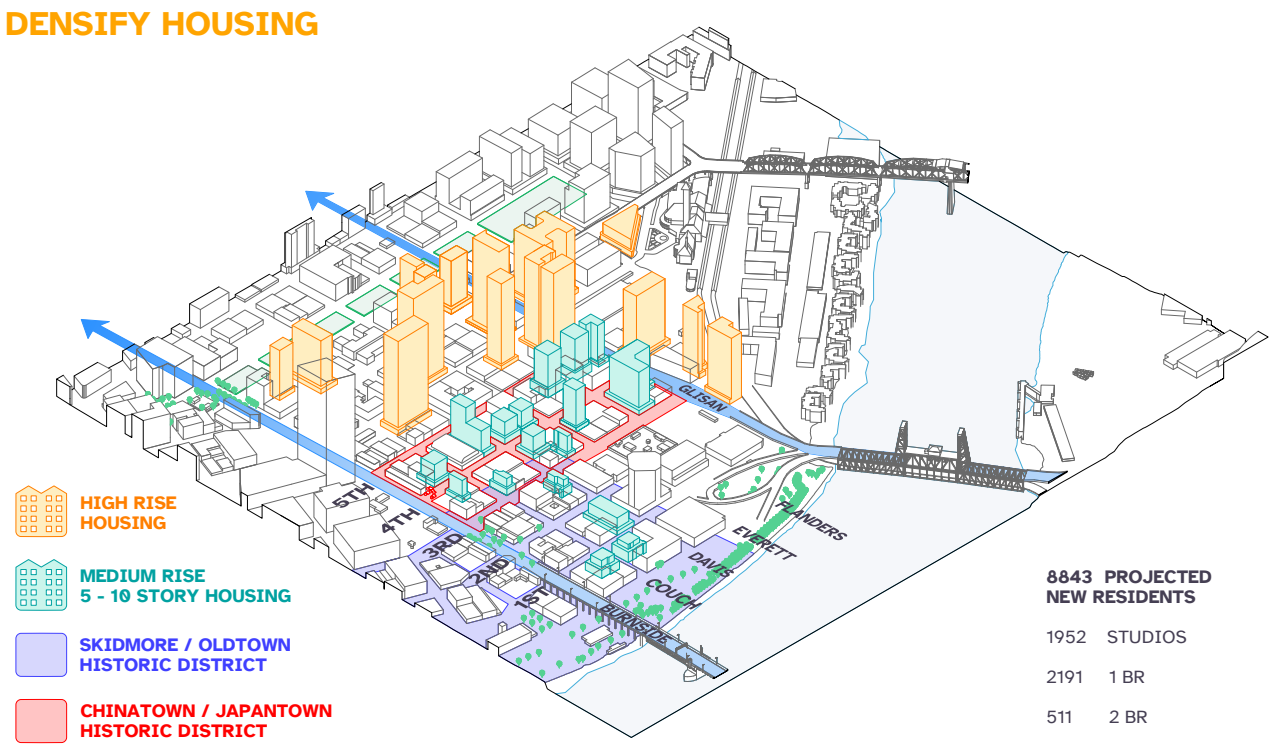


Figure 80: Housing strategies



DENSIFY WITH HEIGHT
BUILD TALL AND INCORPORATE DIVERSE UNIT OFFERINGS

ADAPT PLINTH
CELEBRATE HISTORIC BUILDING FACADES

ACTIVE SIDEWALK
ENCOURAGE PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY WITH ACTIVE STREET-FACING FACADES

ALL WHEELS ROUTE
PROMOTE ROLLING ACTIVITY, SUPPORT CAR ALTERNATIVES

Figure 81: Housing and street activation along 4th Avenue

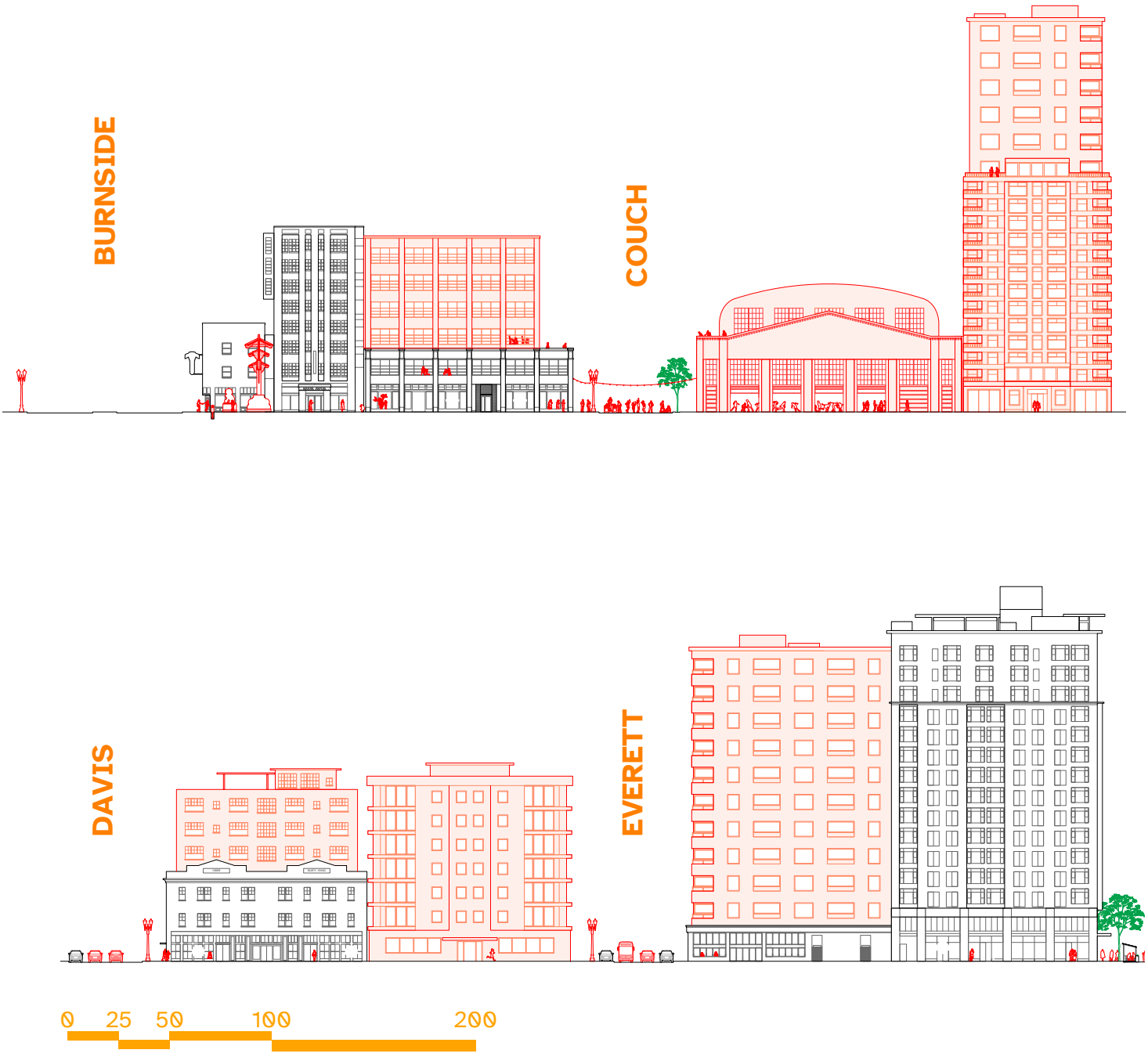
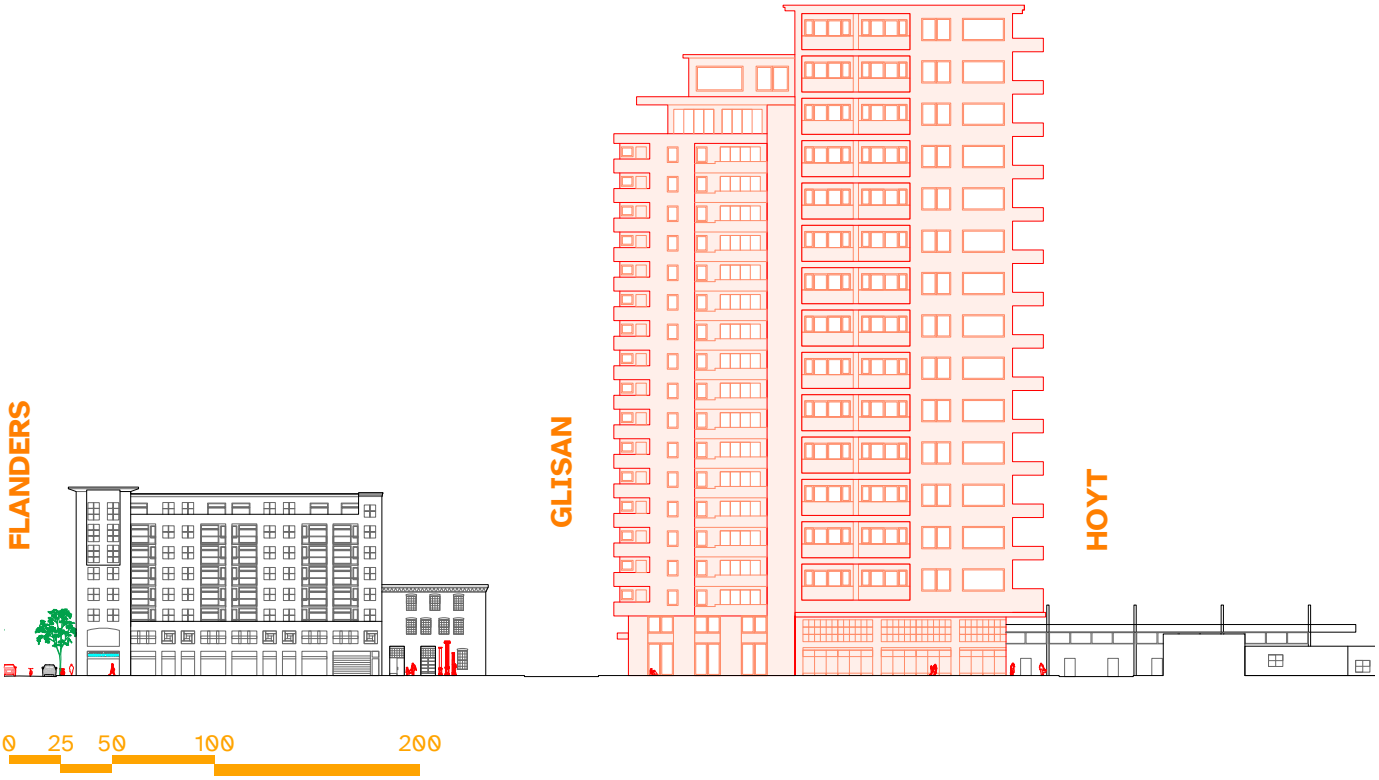


Figure 81 (continued): Housing and street activation along 4th Avenue



Along Flanders, an enhanced greenway would create a two-way shared street with bioswales, and other green stormwater infrastructure used as traffic calming measures. Where Flanders meets the Lan Su Garden, the existing festival street is activated with street furniture and facilities for outdoor activities and games such as Mahjong, Xianqi, and Go. A raised stage behind the existing teahouse would support the Garden's cultural programming in an active public space.

Figure 82: Flanders greenway street section

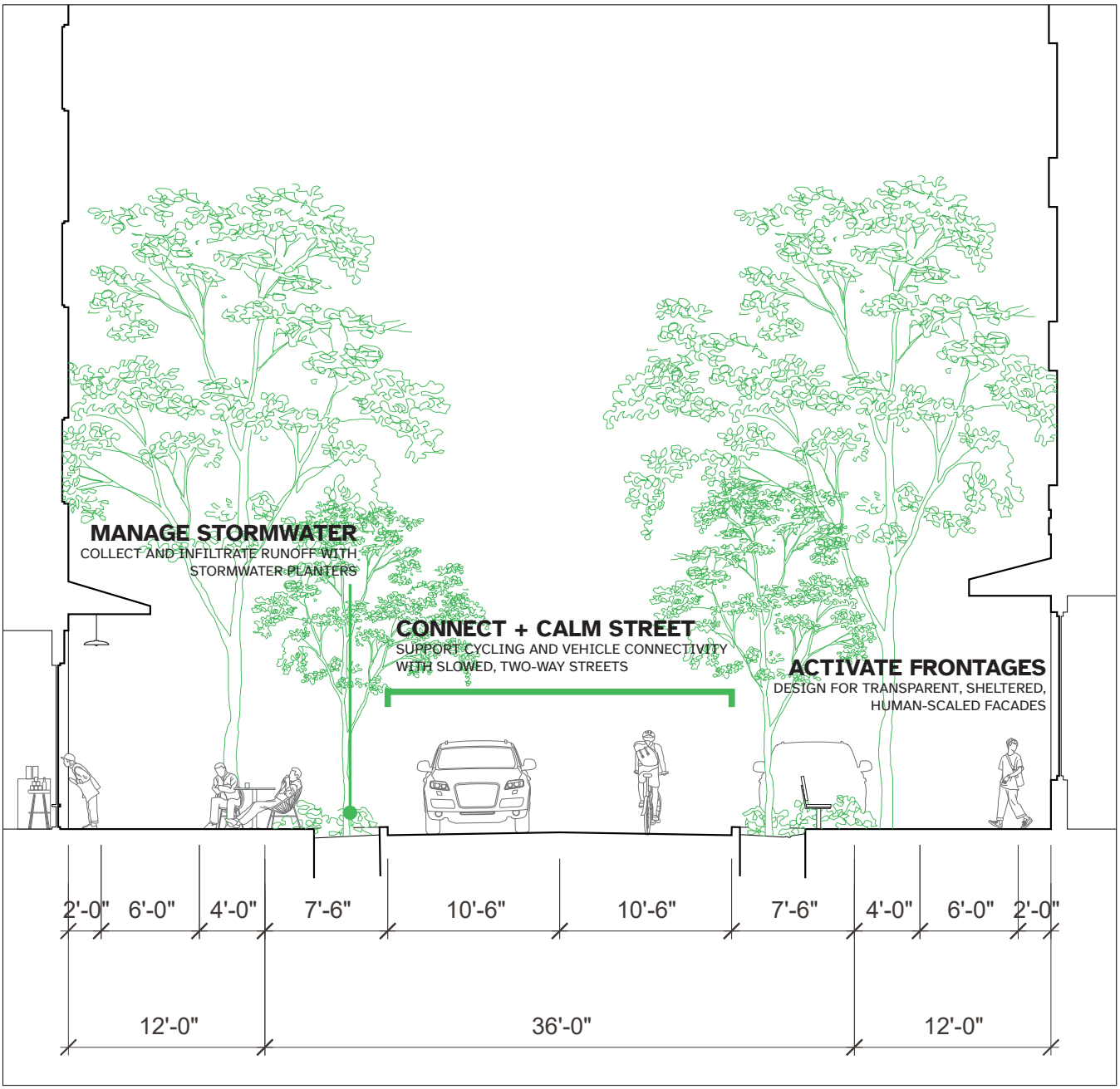


Figure 83: Flanders greenway street plan

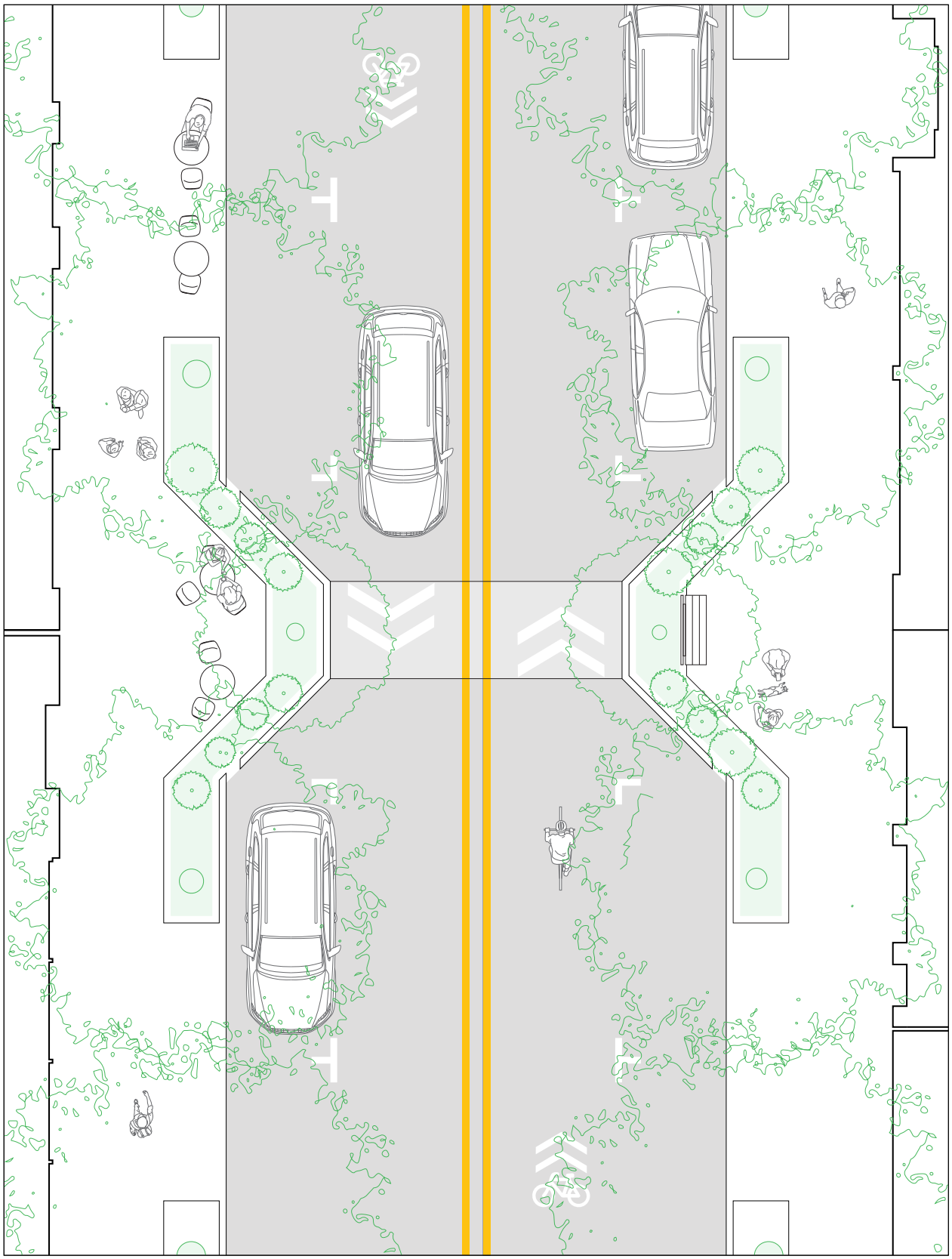


Figure 84: Activation strategies for Flanders



The former Greyhound Terminal is transformed into a center for community and commercial activity by adding space for a grocery store, post office, and an indoor-outdoor farmer's market. A covered plaza and sculpture garden to the north of the terminal connects to Union Station, creating a continuously activated public space that provides connections to transit and to the nearby Pearl District.

Figure 85: Strategies for the Transit Terminal

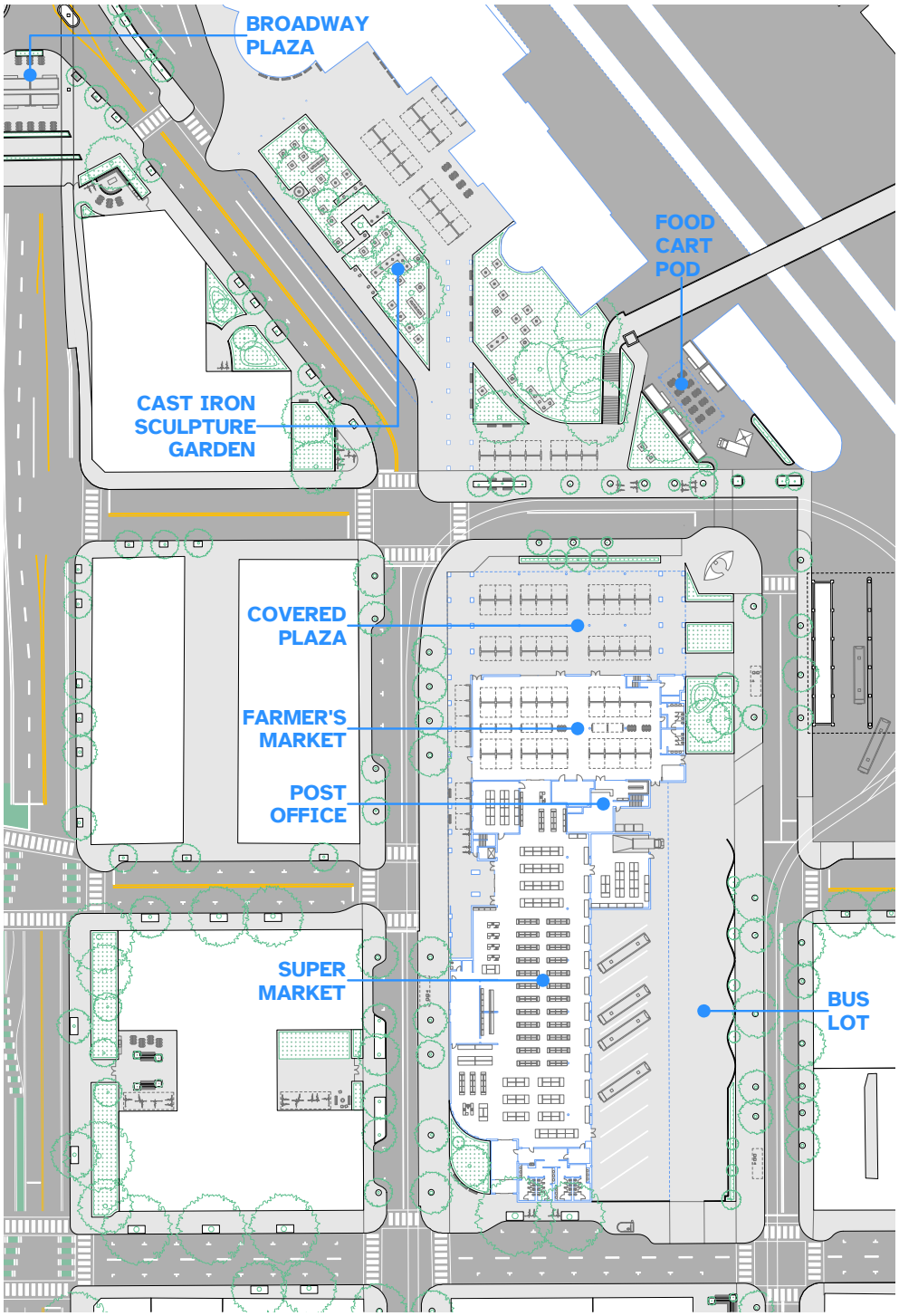


Figure 86: Transit Terminal activation strategies



The Stayline District along 3rd and 4th Avenues would become a center point for neighborhood activities. Features of the Stayline District include an “All Wheels” lane moving through the district and connecting to the Steel Bridge skate park. An “All Wheels” lane would support all types of wheeled traffic, including bikes, scooters, roller-skates, and others. Further design interventions for wheeled travel include a roller-skate rink and community center and an all-wheels curb park near the skate park. Activation of public spaces includes an outdoor beer garden located near the Chinatown Gate on the site of a former archaeological dig, expanded festival streets on Davis and Flanders, and a wade pond constructed with Belgian block on the south side of Lan Su.

Figure 87: Interventions along the Stayline District



Figure 87 (continued): Interventions along the Stayline District

MOBILE CLINIC



HISTORIC PATIO DINING



ROLLER RINK



ALL WHEELS CURB PARK

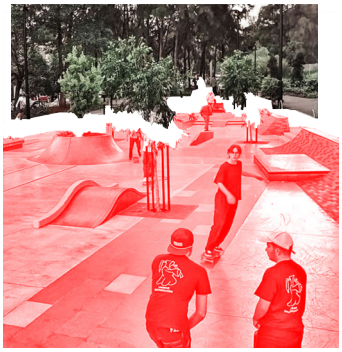


Figure 87 (continued): Interventions along the Stayline District

ALL WHEELS LANE PAINT



PEDESTRIAN GATEWAY ZONE



BELGIAN BLOCK WADING FOUNTAIN



FESTIVAL STREET EXPANSION



Figure 88: "All Wheels" zones street section



Figure 89: Festival Street section

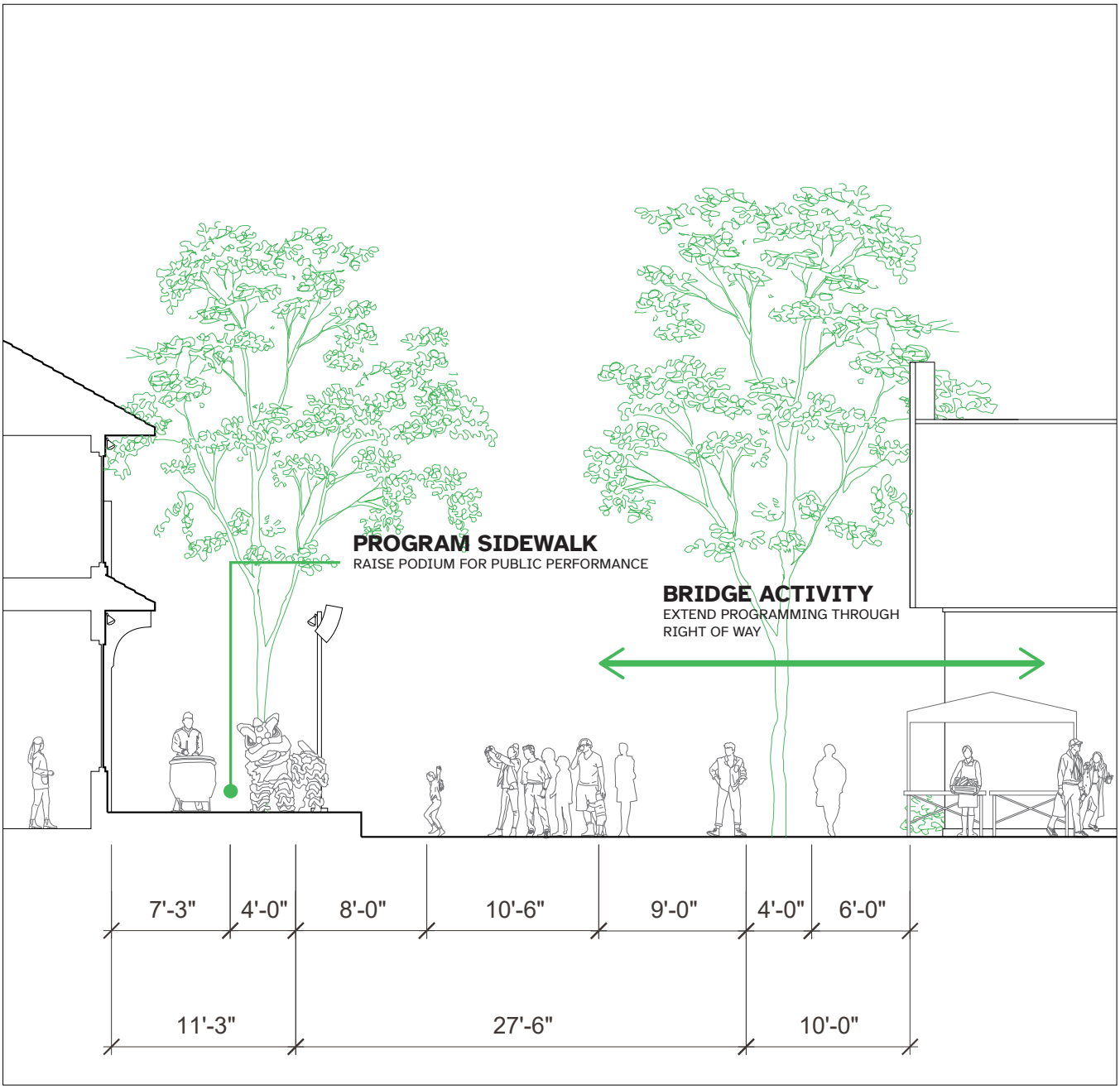


Figure 90: Festival Street plan

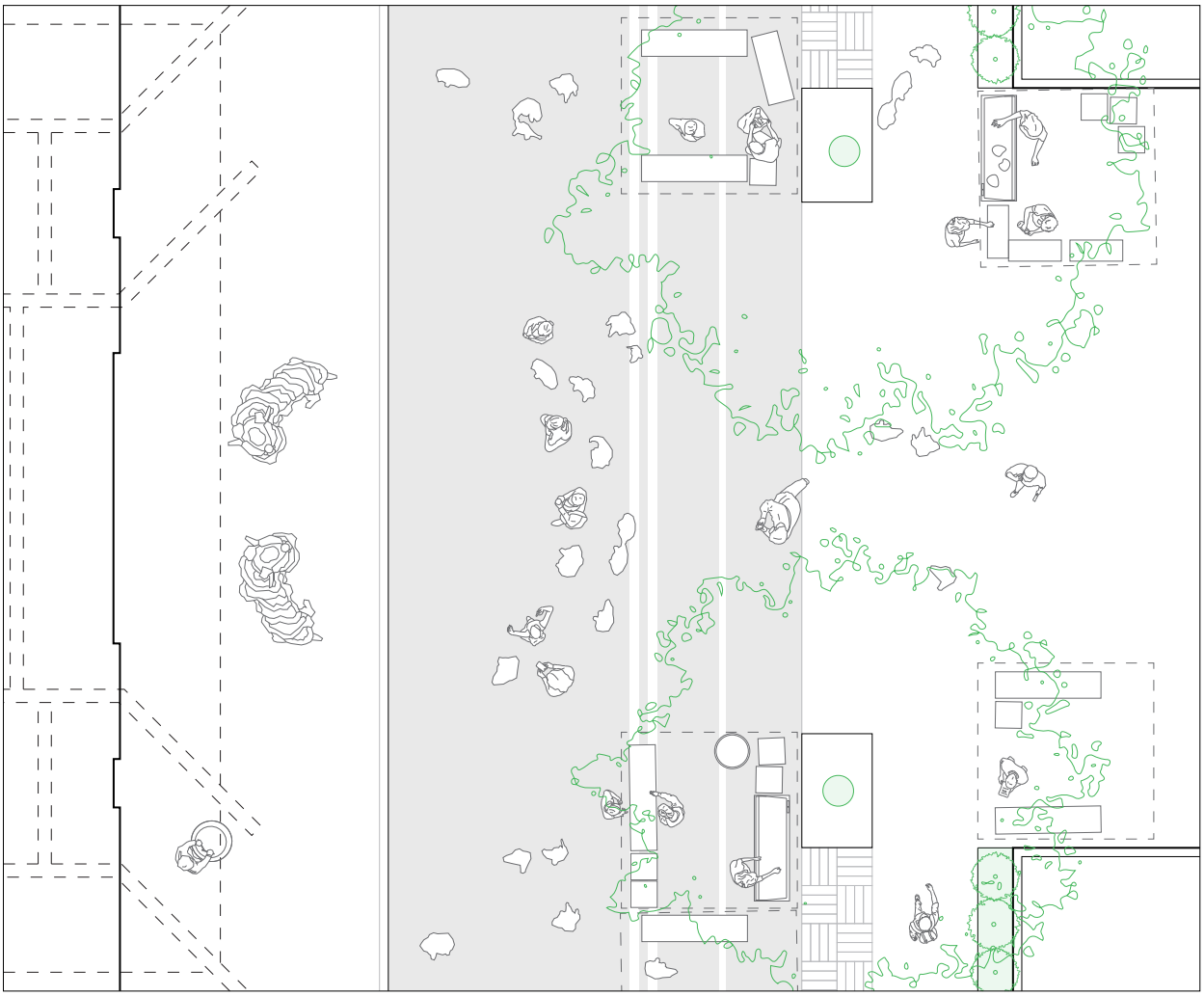




Figure 91: Roller Rink Community Center



Sustainable design solutions for this proposal focused on dense housing, boosting greenways and green spaces, creating a walkable neighborhood, and promoting multimodal travel via enhanced infrastructure for bikes a non-car wheeled transportation.

DENSIFY HOUSING

- Dense residential population reduces car dependency and supports TriMet's existing network on site.
- Housing unit options offer choices in scale and affordability for residents.
- Green roofs absorb and filter stormwater runoff.
- Reuse typologies preserve historic facades while extending the life of existing buildings.



Figure 92: Sustainable design strategies



BOOST GREENWAY

- Traffic-calmed greenways promote cycling and urban recreation for a wider range of users.
- Green stormwater infrastructure provides habitat and runoff filtration.
- Improved intra-district connectivity contributes to activity on site.

INHABIT TRANSIT TERMINAL

- Walkable access to fresh and affordable foods supports residents and local farmers.
- Adaptive reuse of the Greyhound Terminal preserves embodied carbon.
- Surrounding development improves regional heavy rail experience at Union Station.



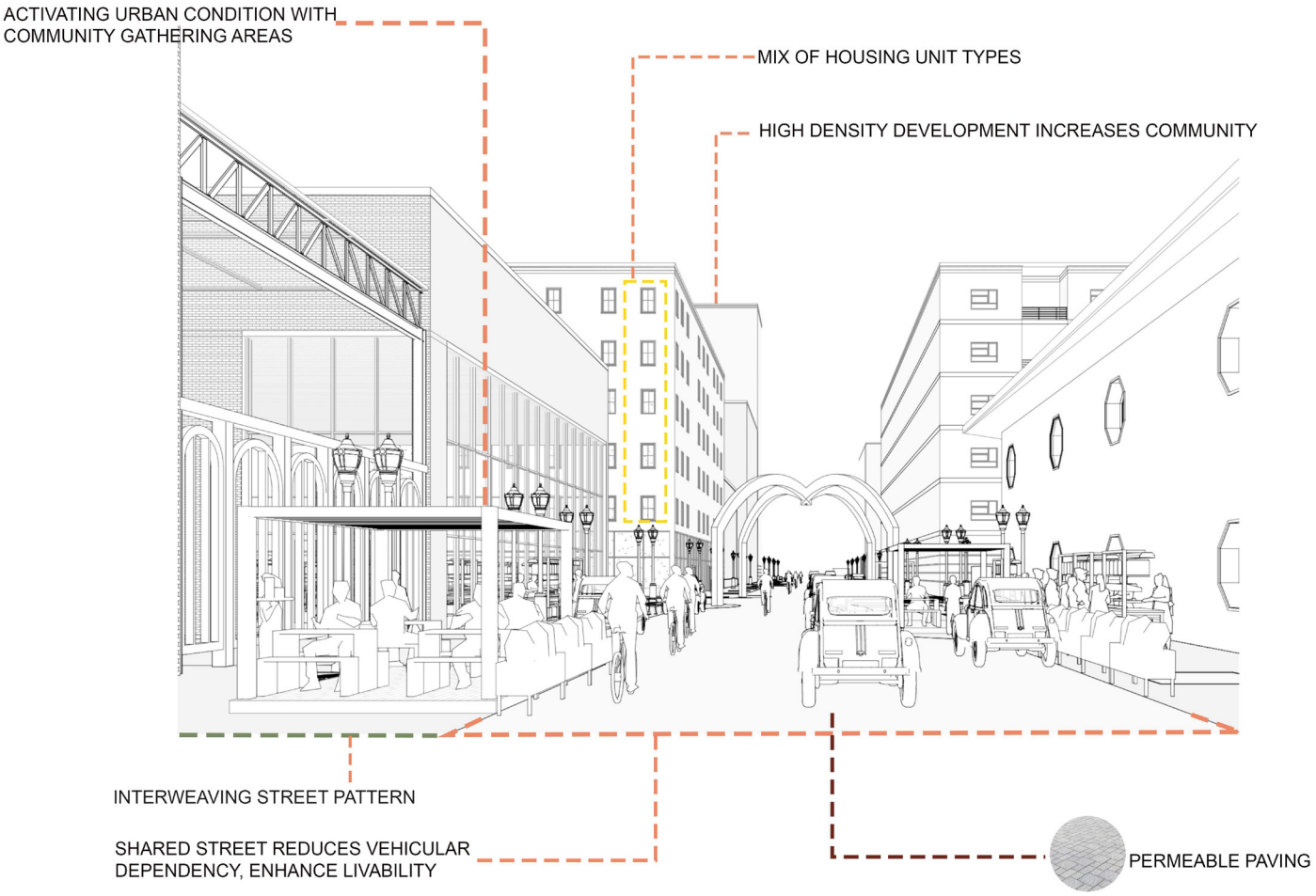


ACTIVATE STAYLINE DISTRICT

- Dense, diverse, and street-activating commercial uses improves pedestrian experience.
- Multimodal streets celebrate alternative mobility options.
- Consistent and activity across the day attracts a range of users.

Student Project

Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips



Student Project • Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips

Students in the third group see Old Town as disconnected from its neighbors and the larger metro area. Due to delayed infrastructure improvements and a lack of development, the district is separated both physically and psychologically from other parts of Portland.

Figure 93: Site plan

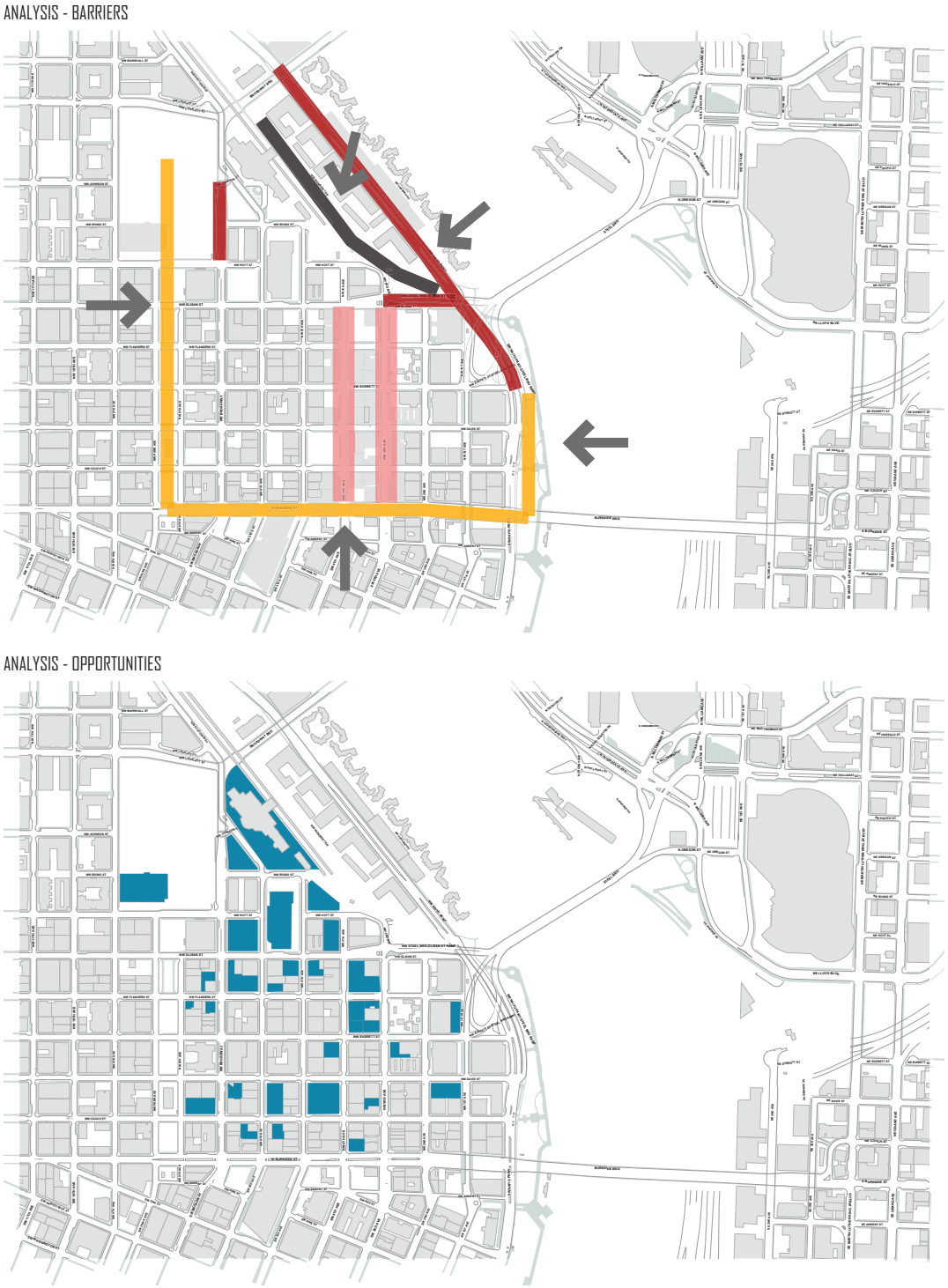


Figure 93: Site plan (continued)

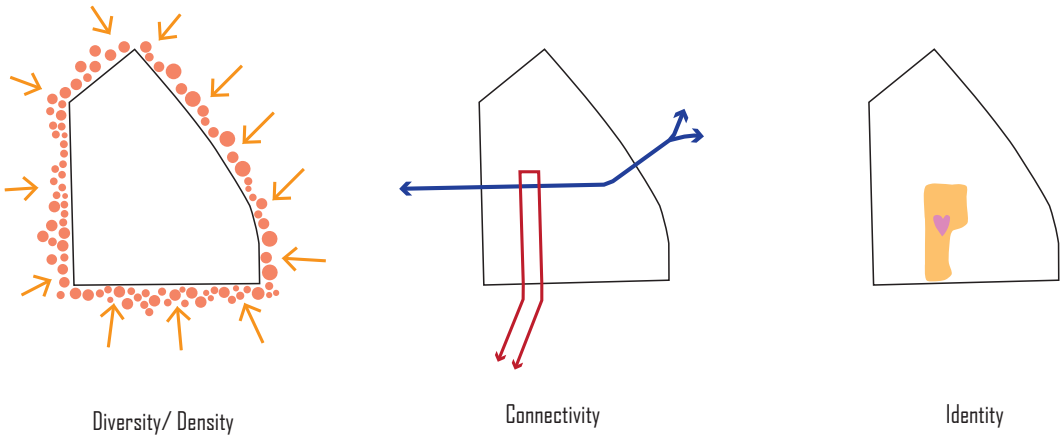
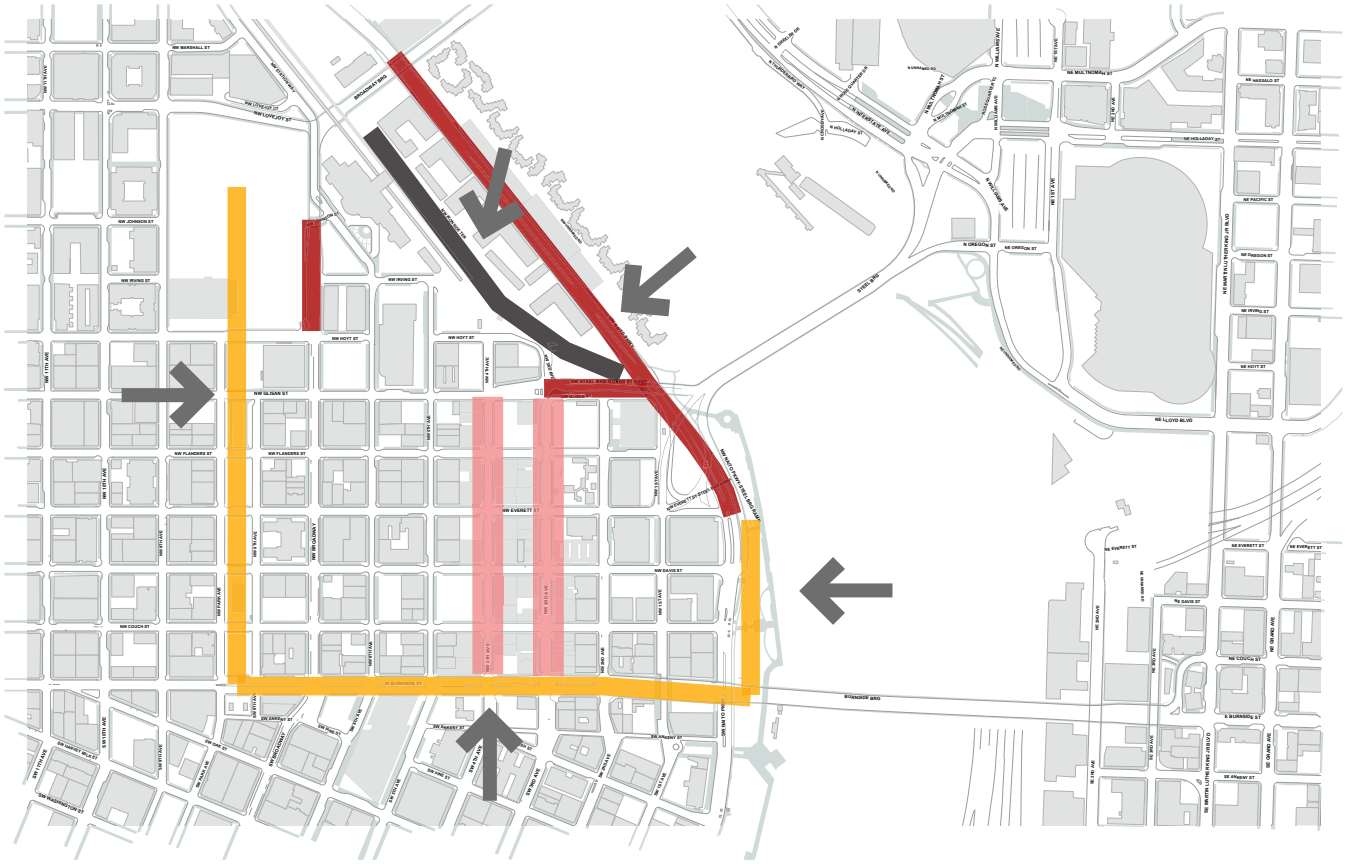


Figure 94: Physical and Psychological barriers to connectivity



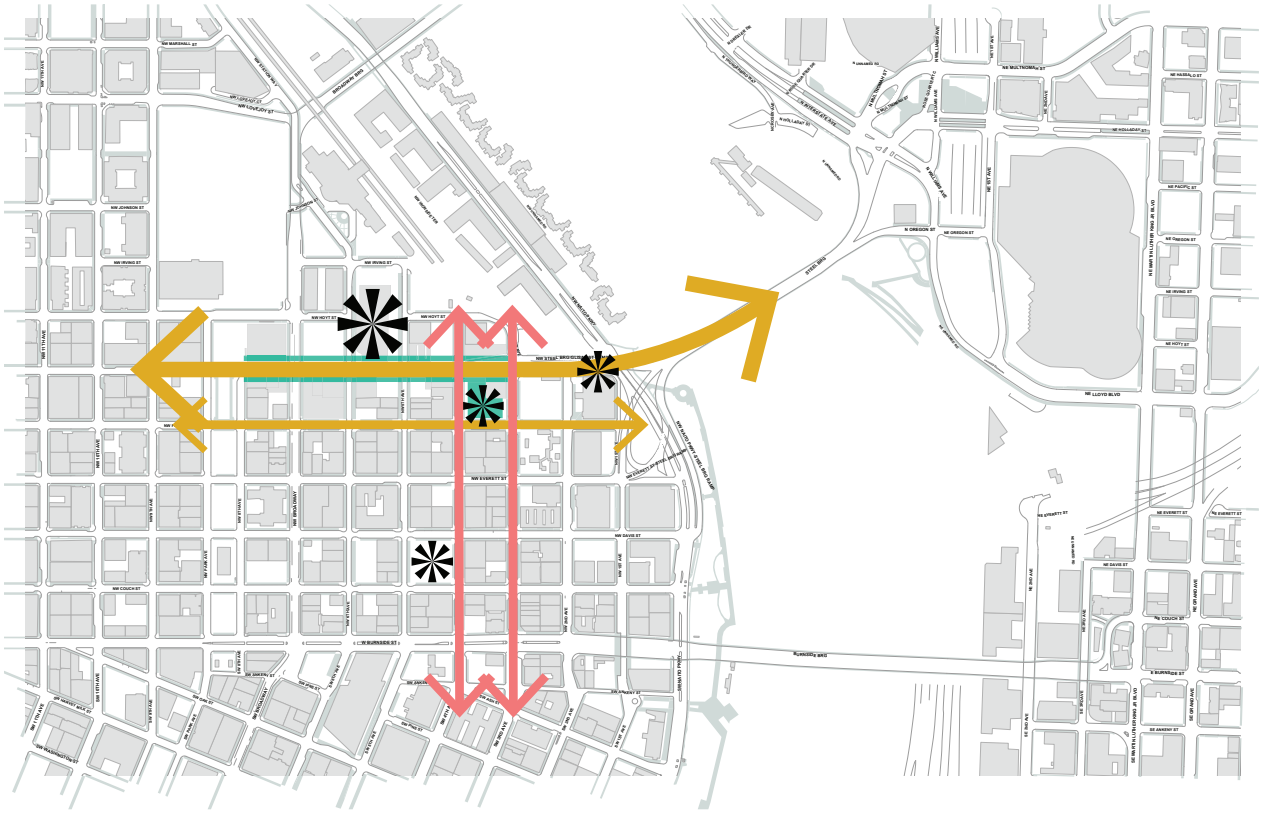
Student Project • Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips

This group's vision is to reconnect Old Town with its historic roots and weave it seamlessly into Portland's urban fabric. This will be accomplished by increasing housing density, improving connectivity, and helping to create an identity for Old Town. By improving east-west connections through the district and emphasizing existing north-south corridors, Old Town can attract residents, businesses, and visitors with an identity of its own.

Figure 95: Design strategies for Old Town



Figure 96: Proposed urban parti, nodes and zoning



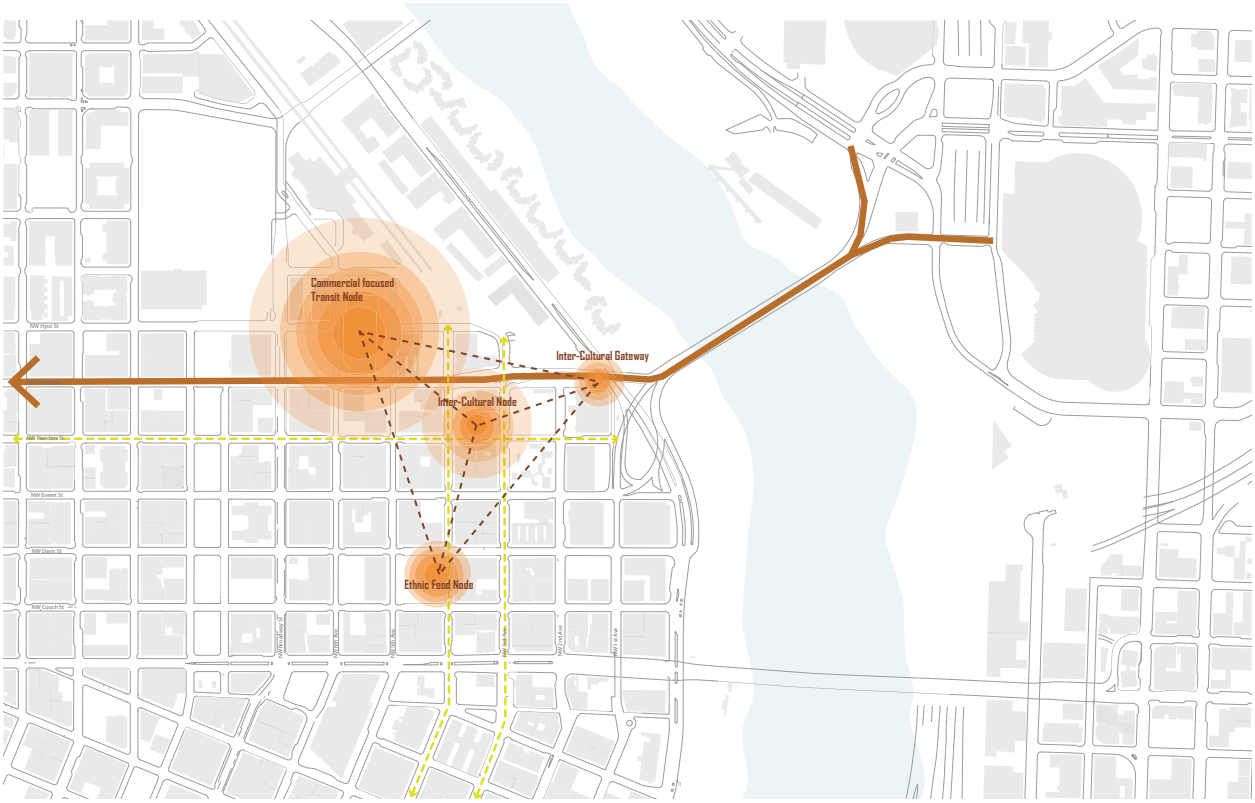


Figure 96 (continued): Proposed urban parti, nodes and zoning

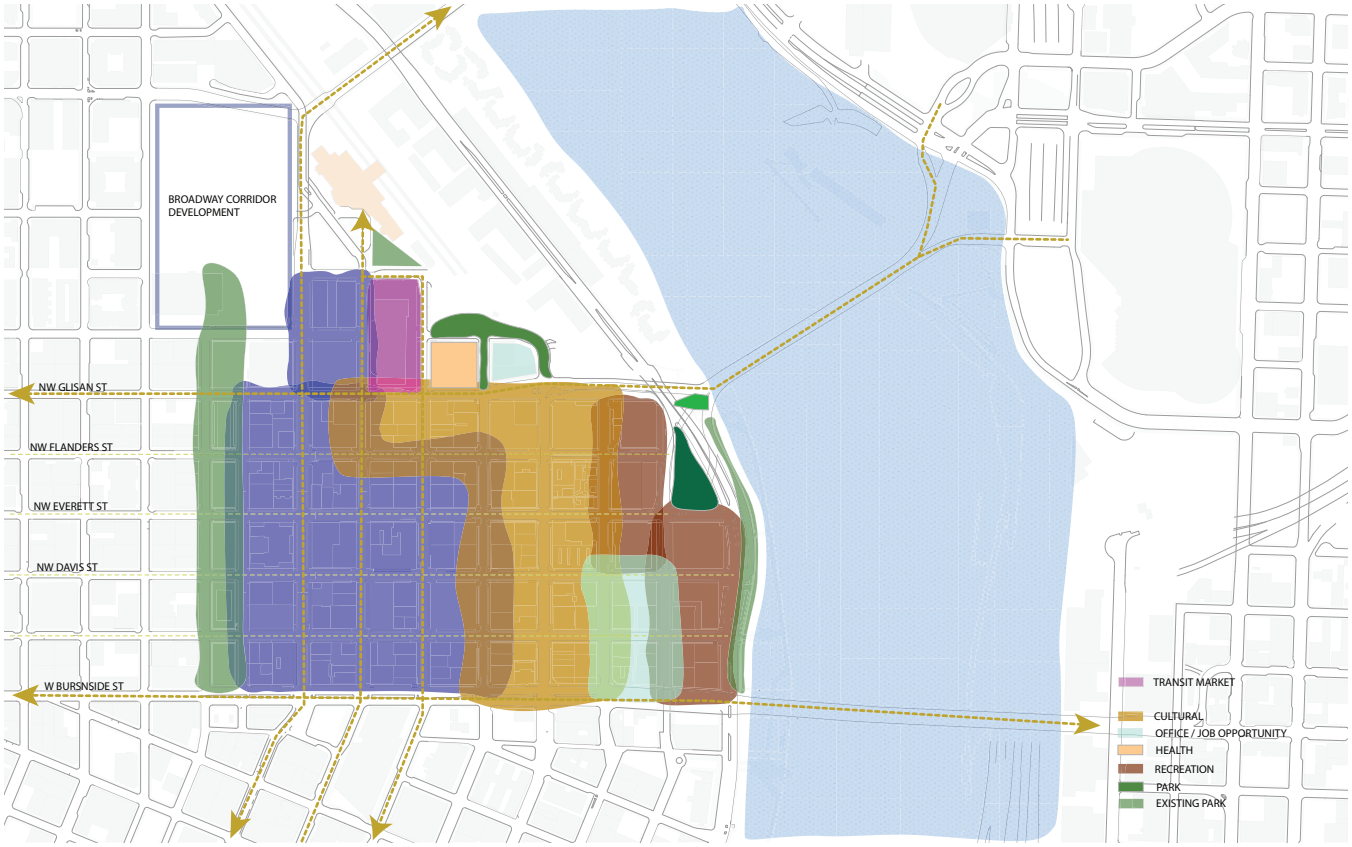
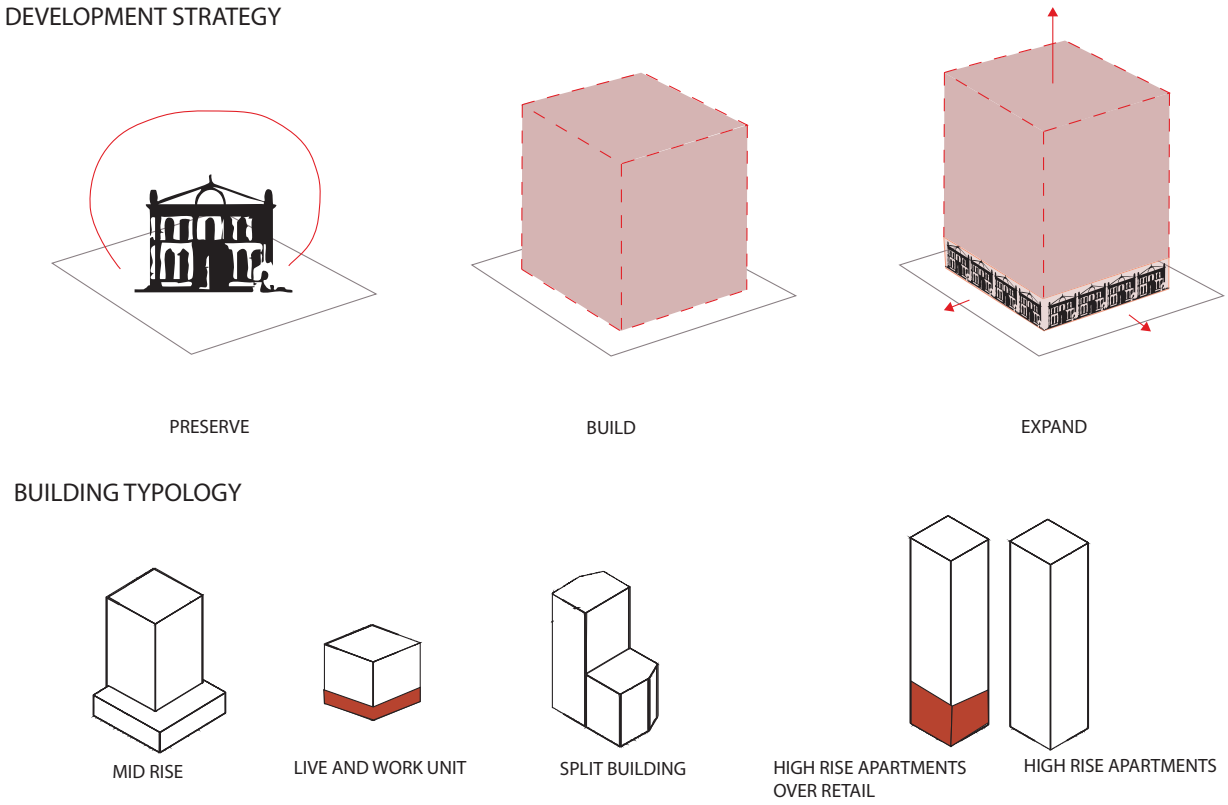


Figure 97: Proposed typologies and housing



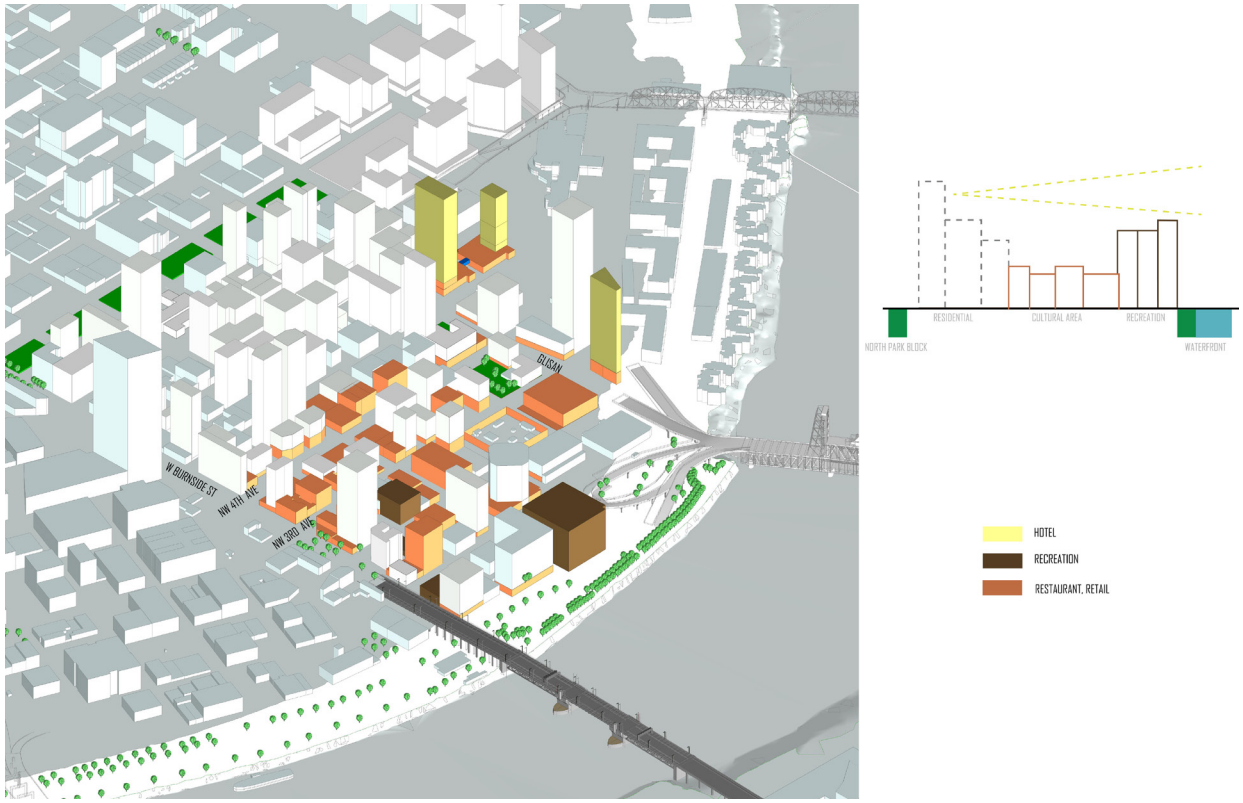
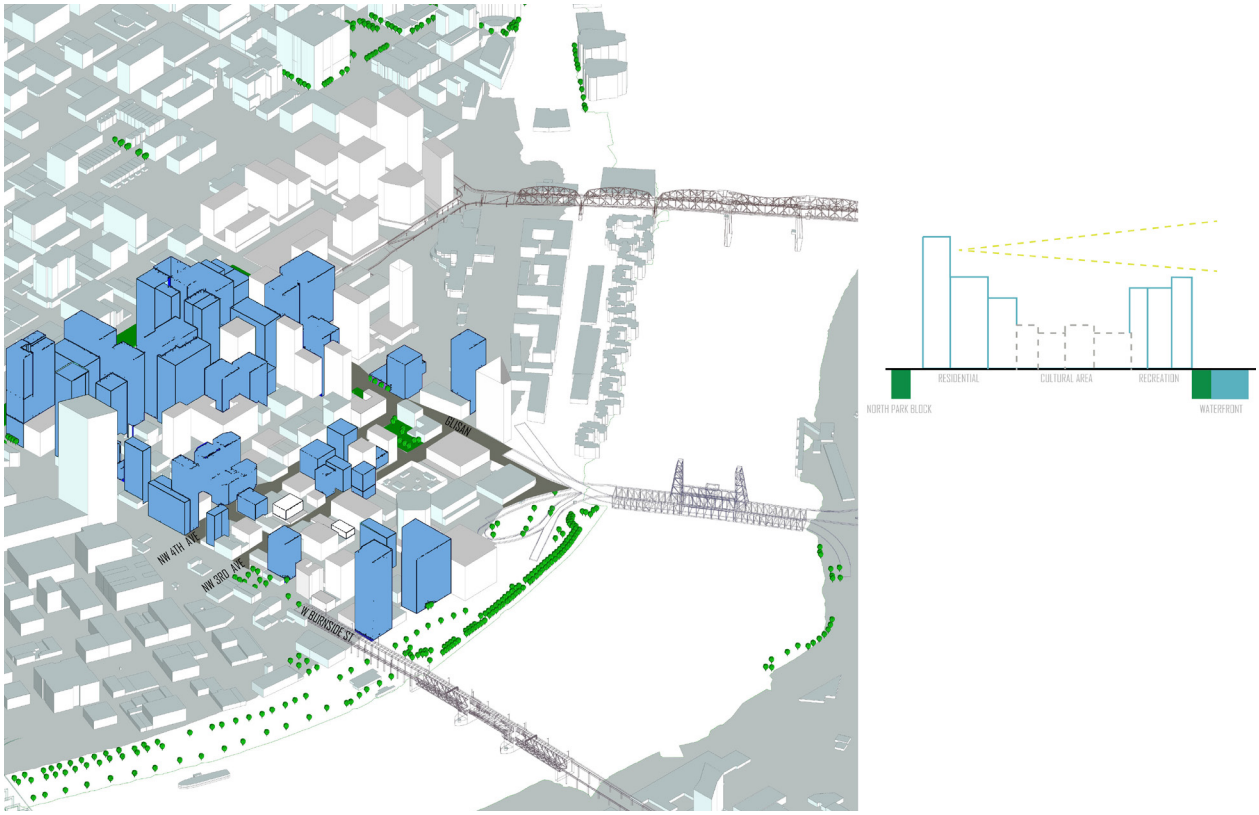


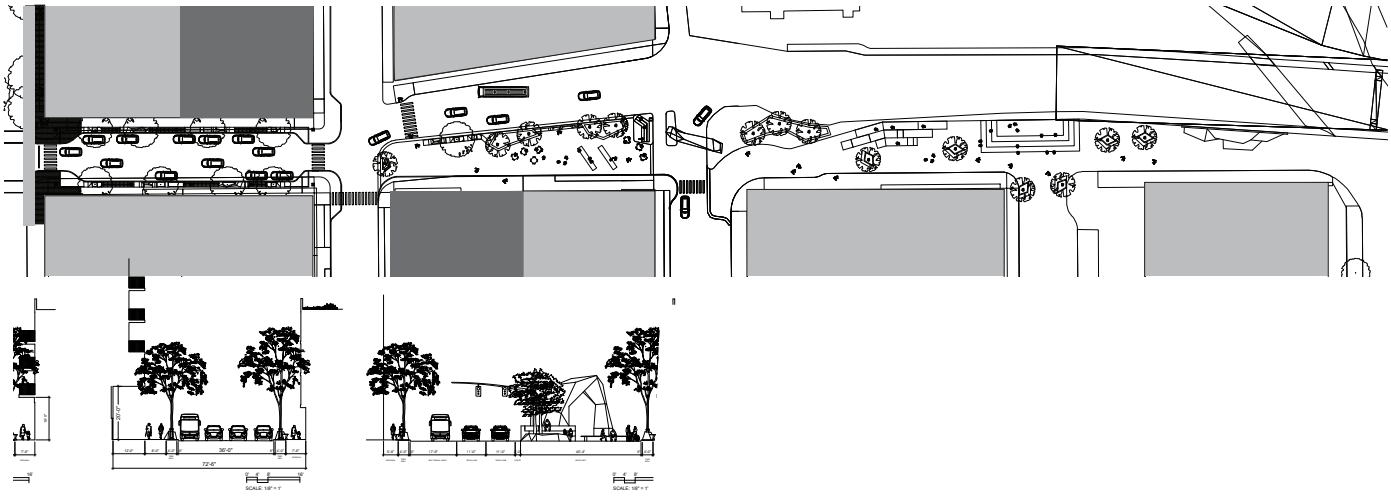
Figure 97 (continued): Proposed typologies and housing



Student Project • Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips

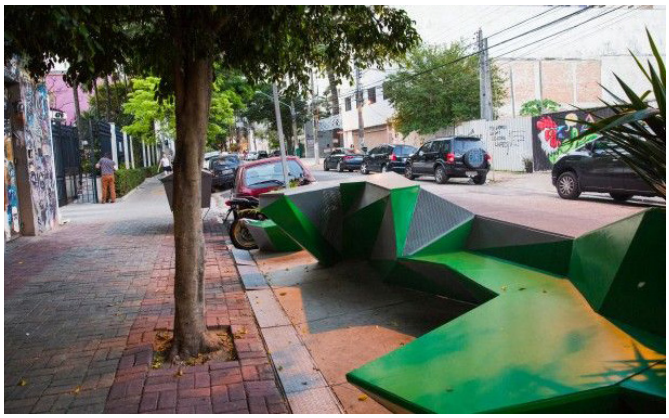
Figure 98: Street design for Glisan

Glisan Street will be improved with slower vehicular traffic, improved pedestrian experience, activating street level facades with retail shops, and adding a variety of mixed uses to upper floors. This will create an edge of new business and commerce to invite activity during the day.





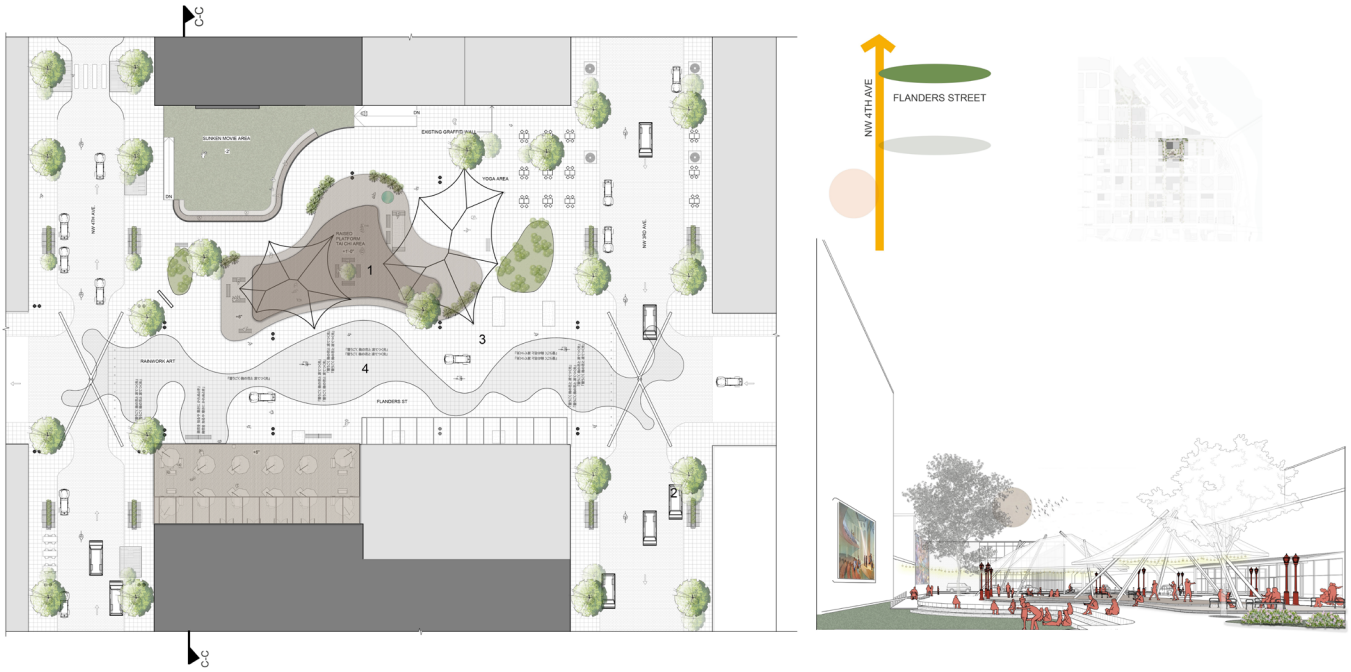






On Flanders, the street level will be primarily restaurants, bars, and nightclubs to engage the pedestrian experience during evening hours. Above, new residences will provide a welcoming place to live and play while adding density to support the bars and restaurants below.

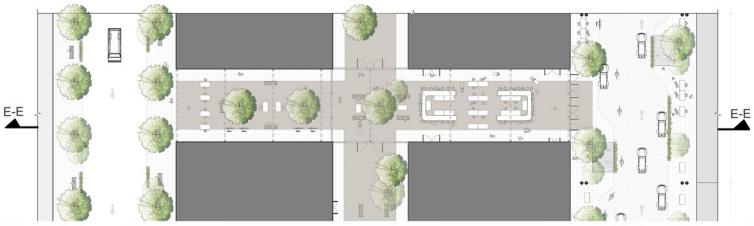
Figure 99: Plan for Flanders community node

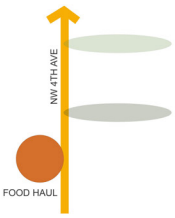


At the south edge, Burnside has an existing active nightlight scene that students want to spread along Couch Street. Here, as with other areas, nightclubs, bars, and shops with office/commerce above, will draw people up from Downtown and Skidmore, encouraging more street traffic in the evening hours.
To connect these east-west corridors, the 3rd and 4th Avenues will establish cultural connections through Old Town. Each street will be lined with museums, art galleries, and other cultural institutions as well as retail and small businesses that align with historic roots and new international viewpoints. These two corridors will be designed and landscaped to connect the pedestrian experience between Glisan and Burnside, attracting exploration through the rest of the neighborhood.

Figure 100: Plan and sections for food hall along 4th Avenue

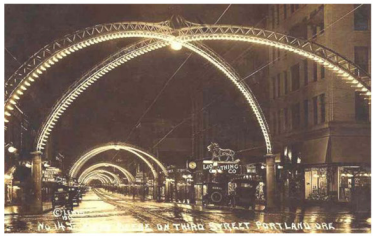








NW 4TH AVE SECTION - E-E
SCALE :- 1/8" = 1'-0"



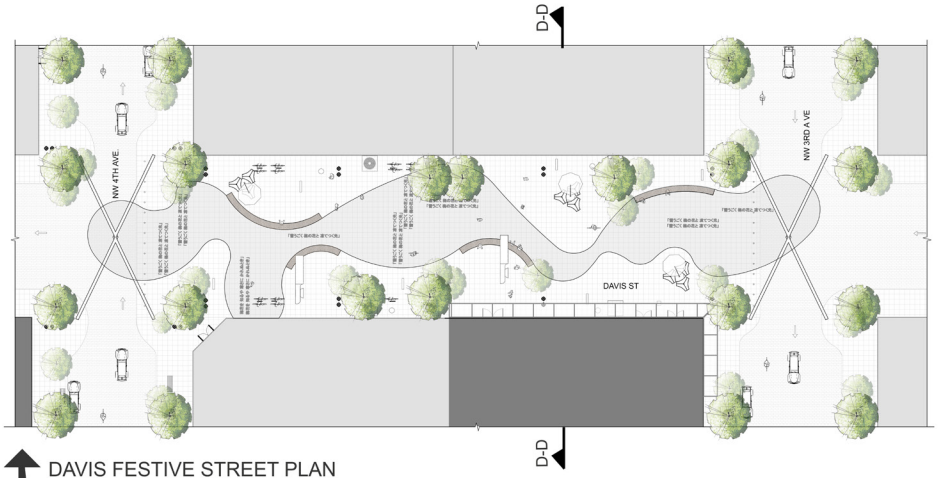
GREAT LIGHTWAY - 1920 3RD ST.



CHINATOWN PRECEDENT

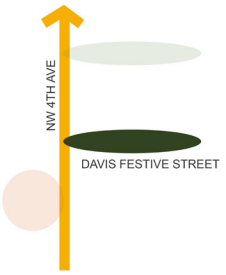


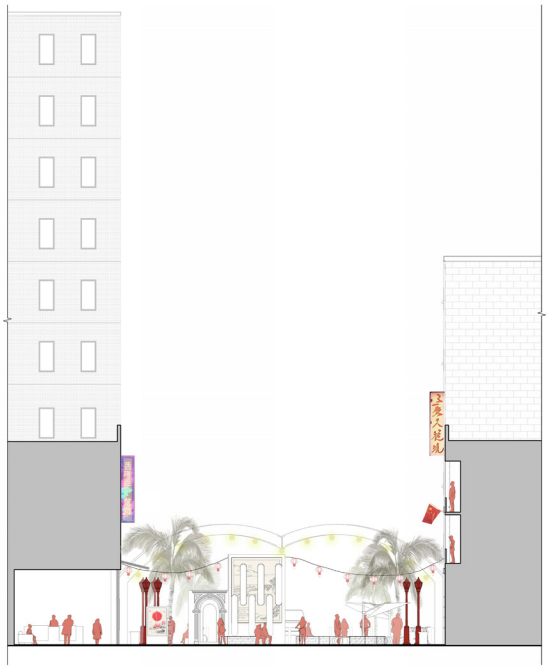
Figure 101: Plan and sections for the festival street on Davis



DAVIS FESTIVE STREET PLAN
SCALE :- 1/16 = 1'-0"







DAVIS FESTIVE STREET SECTION - D-D
SCALE :- 1/8" = 1'-0"



PRECEDENT - DOME NEXT DOOR INSTALLATION - RIGA





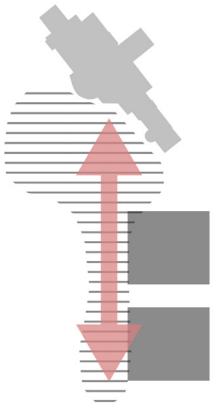
NIGHT SHIFT BY MANOELA & GRAY - ATHERTON MILL PLAZA

Student Project • Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips

Along the Transit Mall on 5th and 6th Avenues, a mix of residential and commercial will align with transit access to increase mobility in the area. Towards the North Park Blocks, dense residential buildings will address housing needs and establish a neighborly front to the Pearl District. At the northern end of 5th Avenue, a one stop market and bookstore/ coffee shop draw people up towards Union Station, where a plaza with seating and an urban arboretum invites them to stay and explore. These interventions work together to create density, improve connectivity, and establish a specific identity for Old Town Portland.

Figure 102: Design strategies for the transit corridor

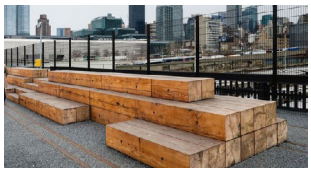
PARTII



MATERIAL



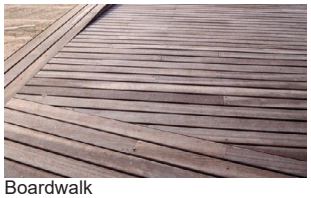
Concrete Pavers



Douglas Fir Log



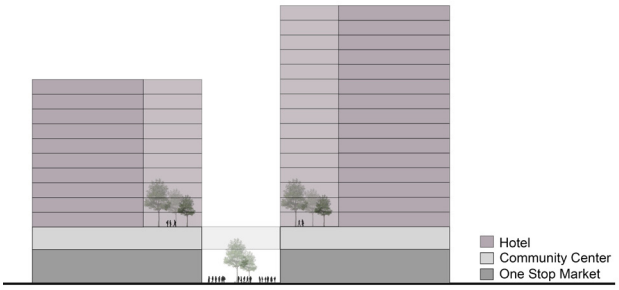
Red brick paving in a herringbone pattern



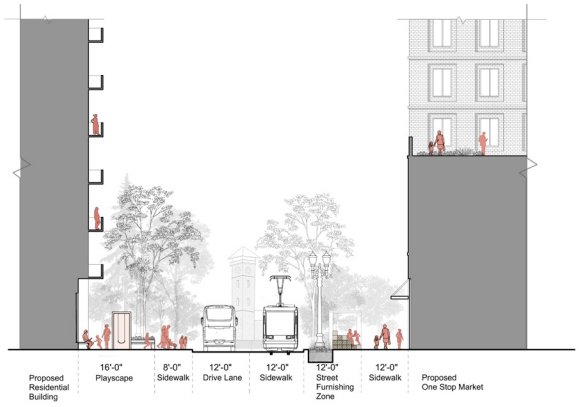
Boardwalk



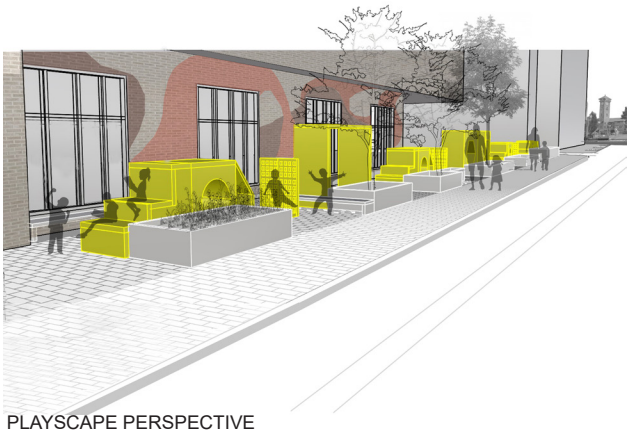
ONE-STOP MARKET PERSPECTIVE



TRANSIT HUB PROGRAMS



SECTION BB'
Scale: 1/8"=1'-0"



PLAYSCAPE PERSPECTIVE

Figure 103: Plan and program for the transit corridor



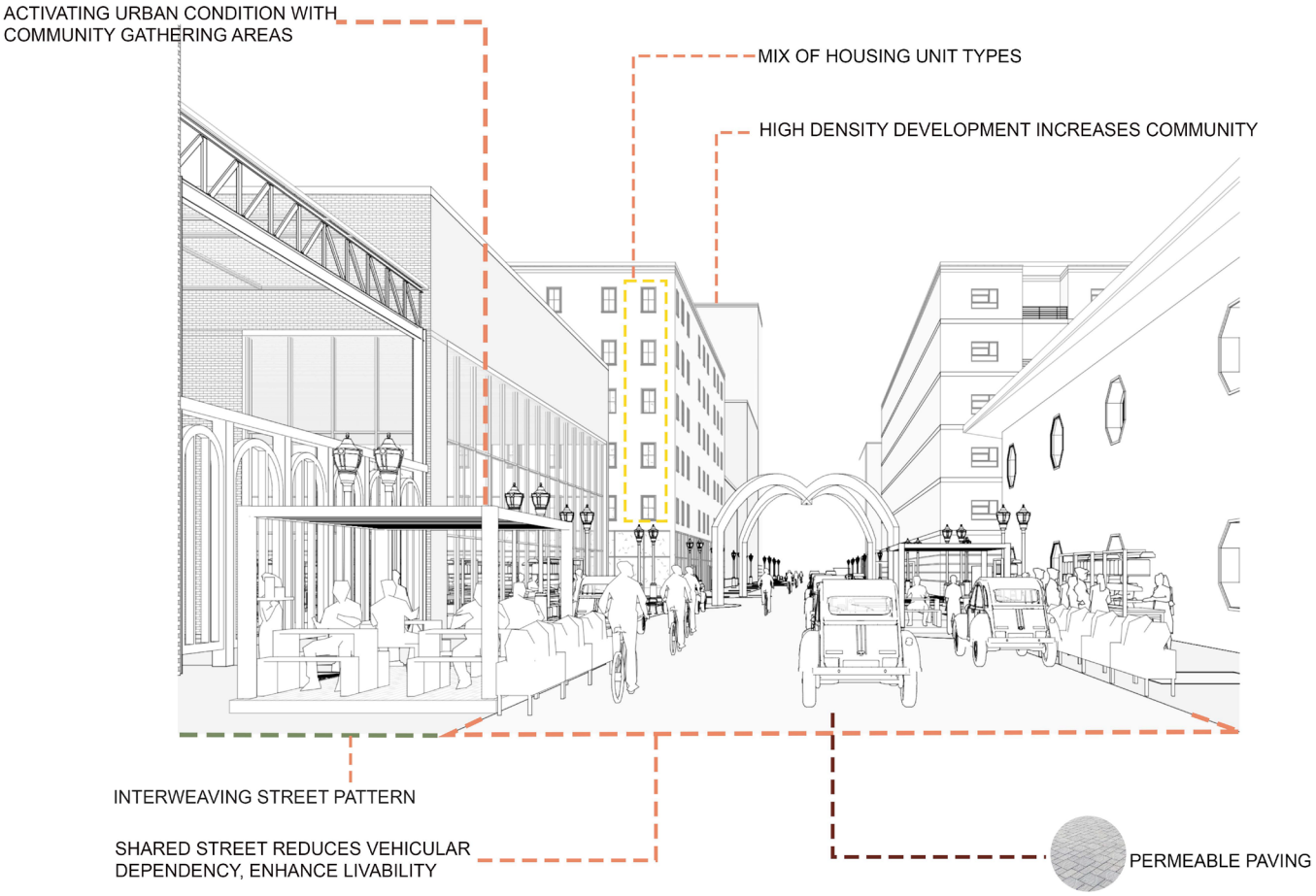
Figure 104: Plaza section for the transit corridor at Union Station



Student Project • Group 3: Priyanka Baten, Tanzina Islam, Jordan Phillips

Sustainable urban design solutions used throughout the proposal include permeable pavements, high density development with mixed uses, and shared streets to decrease dependence on vehicular travel.

Figure 105: Plaza section for the transit corridor at Union Station



Student Project

Group 4: Amy Dicker, Ashley Carr, Colin Hope



Figure 106: Site plan



Student Project • Group 4: Amy Dicker, Ashley Carr, Colin Hope

The fourth student group observed a lack of street level vitality as a major problem to be addressed along the Glisan Corridor. This lack of street vitality was hypothesized to be influenced by vacancies and underutilized buildings, the lack of services and businesses to support daily life for residents, and the absence of a cohesive sense of identity in the neighborhood. Additionally, the group identified the poor health of the existing street trees as an issue that could contribute to the heat island effect in the area. Students saw opportunities to capitalize on, such as an existing nightlife and arts scene, the abundance of transit options, and historical and cultural districts which provide a sense of place.

Figure 107: Observed issues: Holes in the urban fabric and an incomplete neighborhood

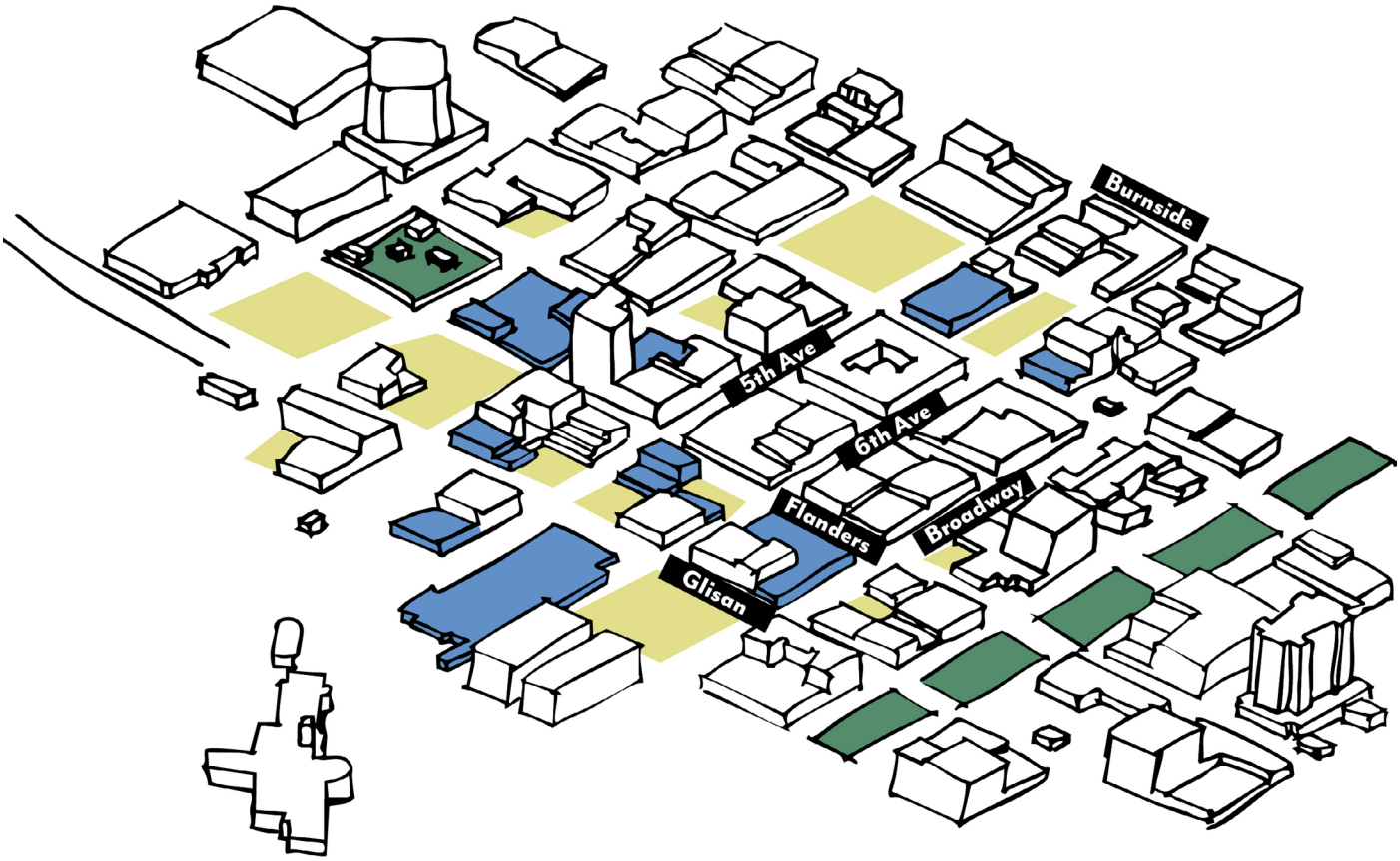


Figure 107 (continued): Observed issues: Holes in the urban fabric and an incomplete neighborhood

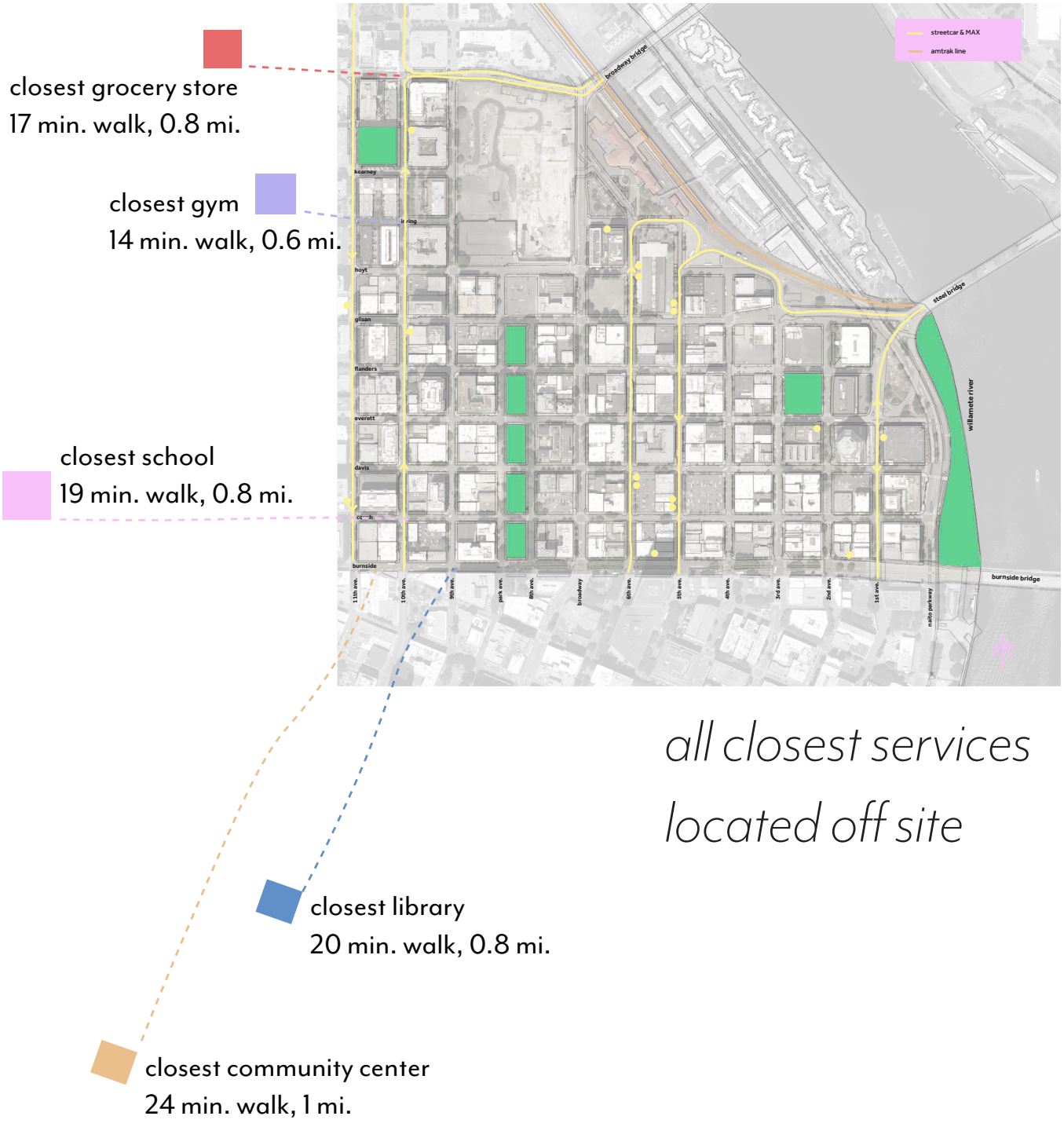
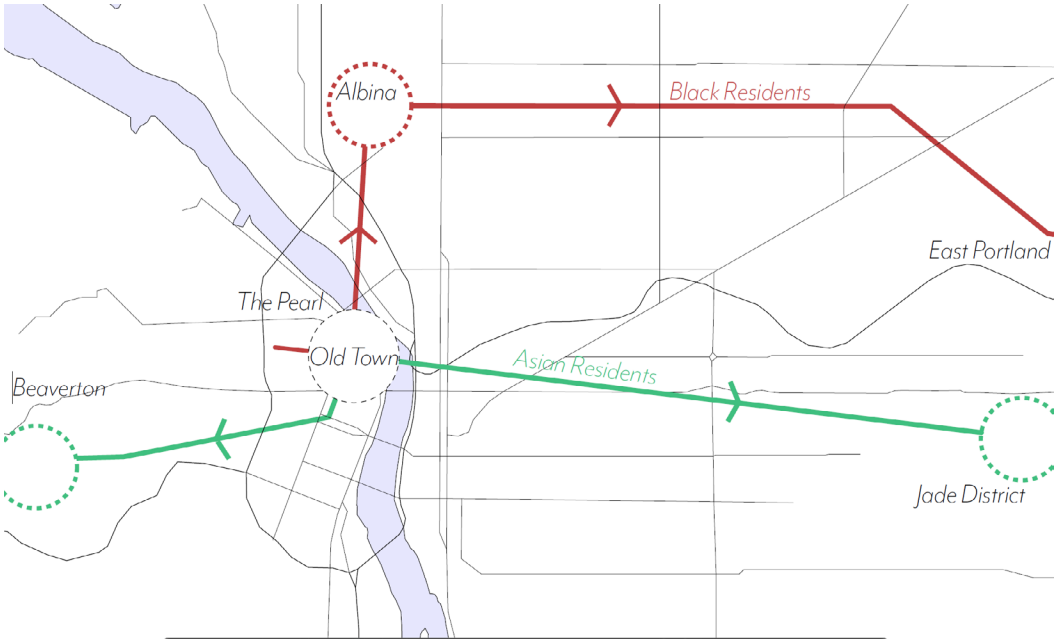


Figure 108: Observed issues: Cultural migration and unhealthy tree canopy





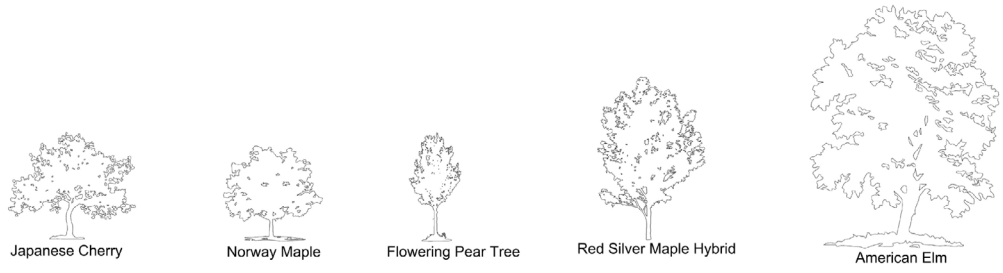


Figure 109: Observed opportunities in Old Town: Night life and arts and access to transit

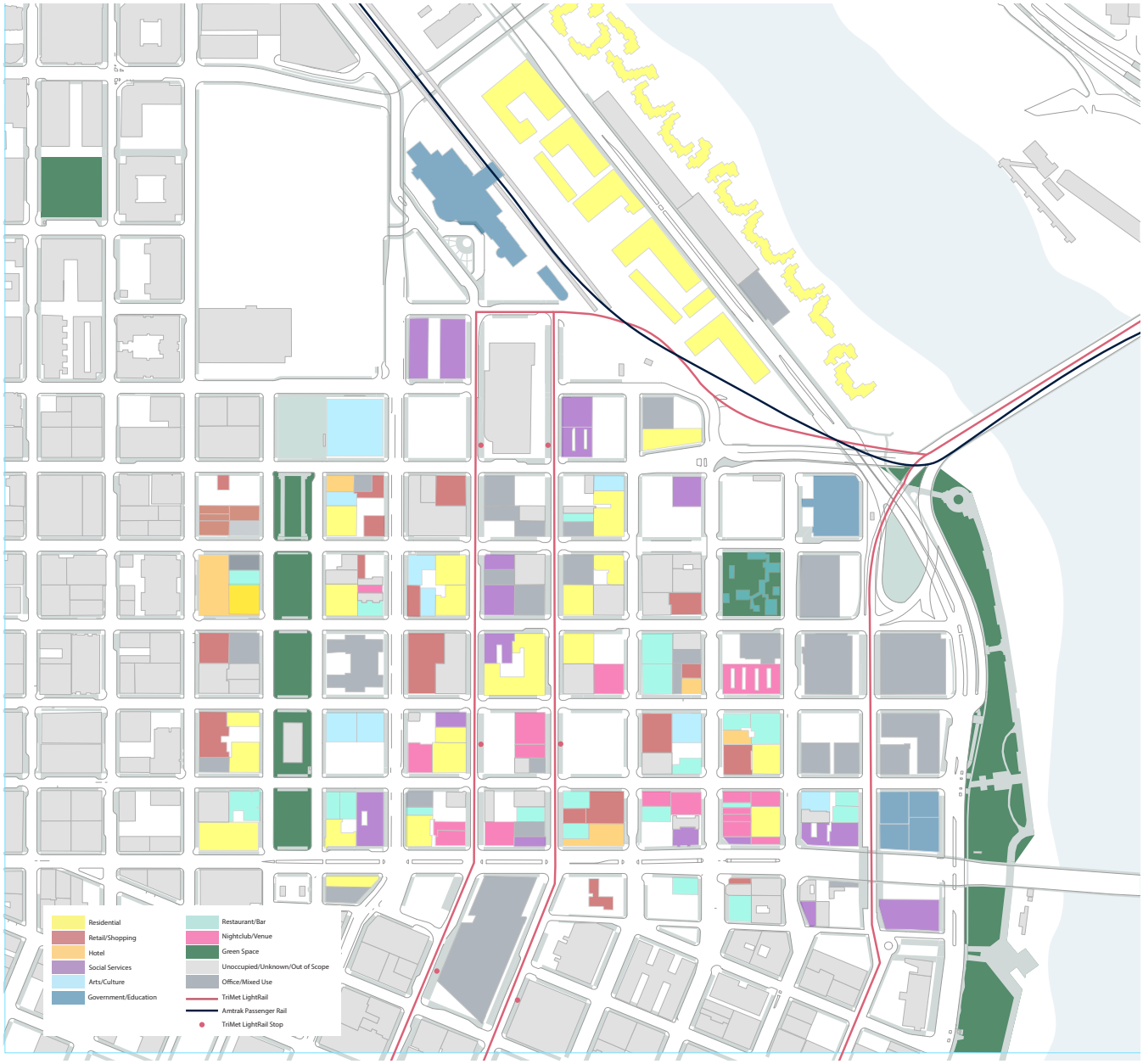


Figure 109 (continued): Observed opportunities in Old Town: Night life and arts and access to transit

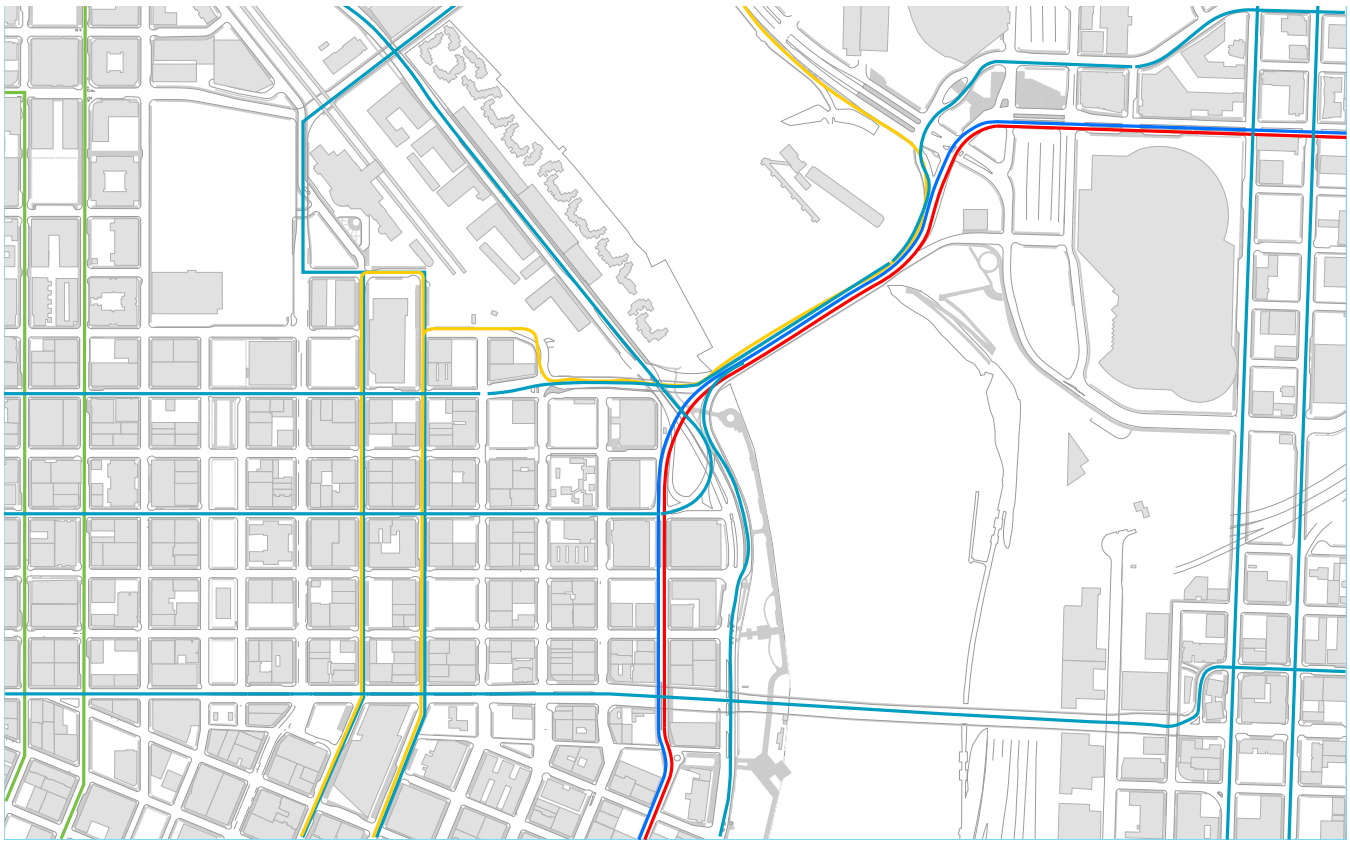


Figure 110: Observed opportunities in Old Town: Historical and cultural identity





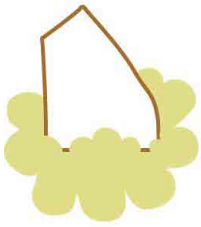
Figure 110 (continued): Observed opportunities in Old Town: Historical and cultural identity



Student Project • Group 4: Amy Dicker, Ashley Carr, Colin Hope

Group 4 envisioned a "new" Old Town that would set the table for a livable and visitable neighborhood at the center of the city. Components of the new Old Town would include services and amenities for new and existing residents and gathering spaces for communities from around the Portland area and visitors from farther abroad. Proposed interventions include creating dense housing for residents, expanding the existing tree canopy, addressing gaps in services to create a complete neighborhood, and enhancing existing historical and cultural strengths.

The three components of a new Old Town

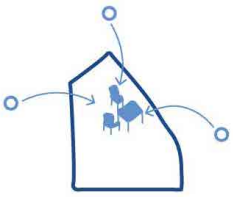


(resident)

safe haven

comfort
refuge
diverse

Figure 111:
1. A safe haven for residents

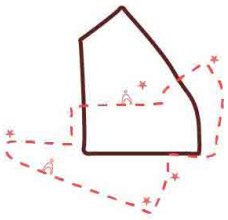


(portlander's)

gathering place

connection
central
third space

Figure 112:
2. A gathering place for Portlanders



(visitor's)

tour

walkable
free
discovery

Figure 113:
3. A walking tour for visitors

Proposed solutions focused on three areas, Glisan and Flanders, 6th Avenue including the former Greyhound Terminal and Union Station, and a pedestrian path through Old Town providing a connection between major cultural destinations.

The proposed residential spine of the neighborhood would be along Glisan and Flanders, connecting the North Park Blocks to the skate park and Waterfront. Flanders would become a shared street, prioritizing pedestrian and bike traffic while allowing for slowed vehicle passage. Townhomes along Flanders would help to provide a West Village-like neighborhood feel. Along the shared street, areas for seating, play, bike storage, and other street activities are defined and protected by salvaged cast iron pieces.

Figure 114: Dense residential along Flanders and Glisan

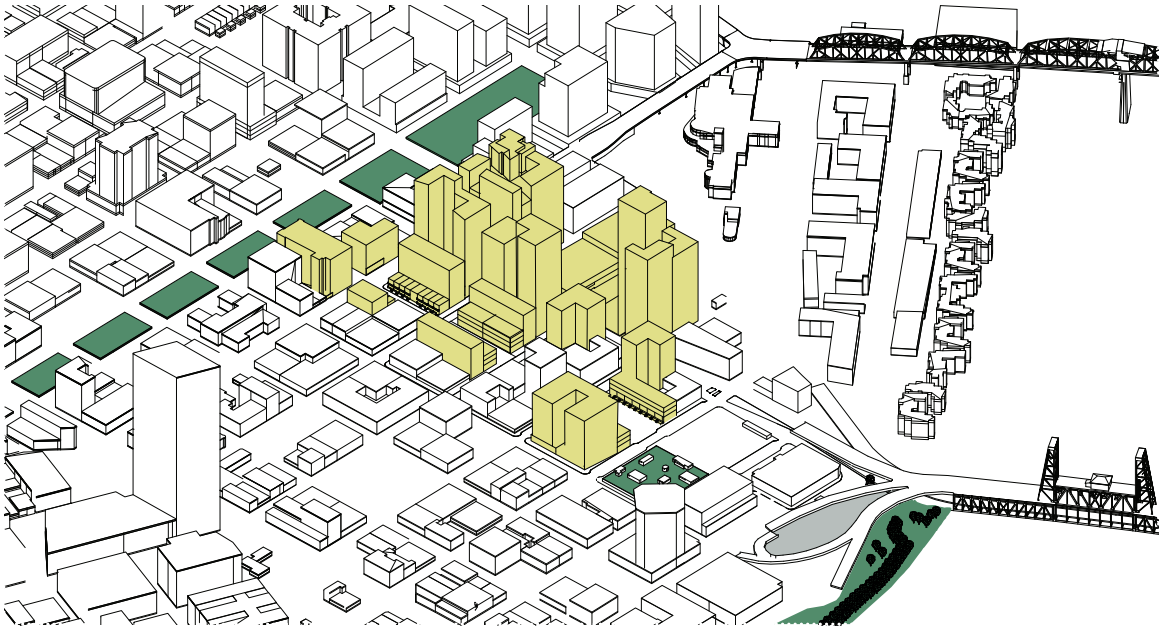


Figure 115: Housing typologies

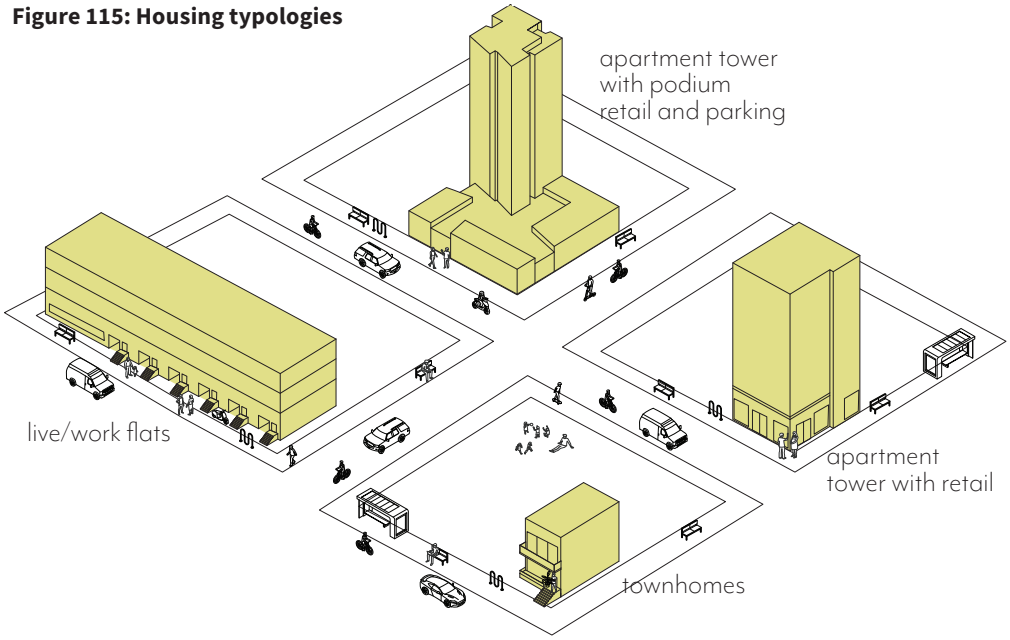


Figure 116: Street section of shared street with townhomes on Flanders

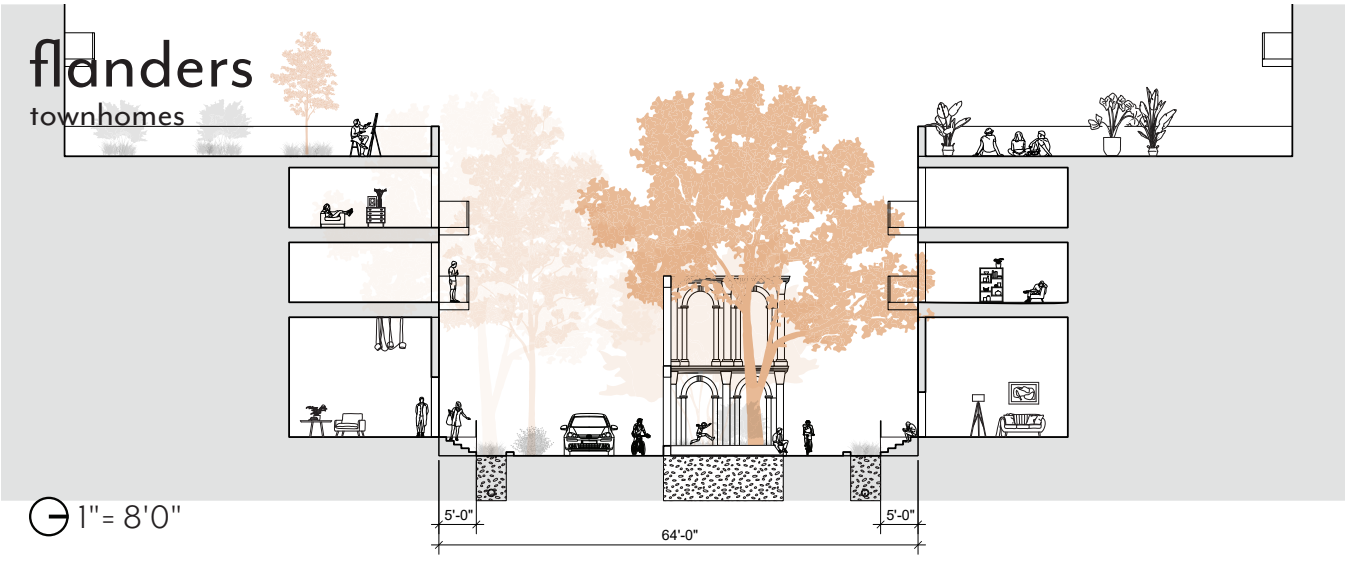
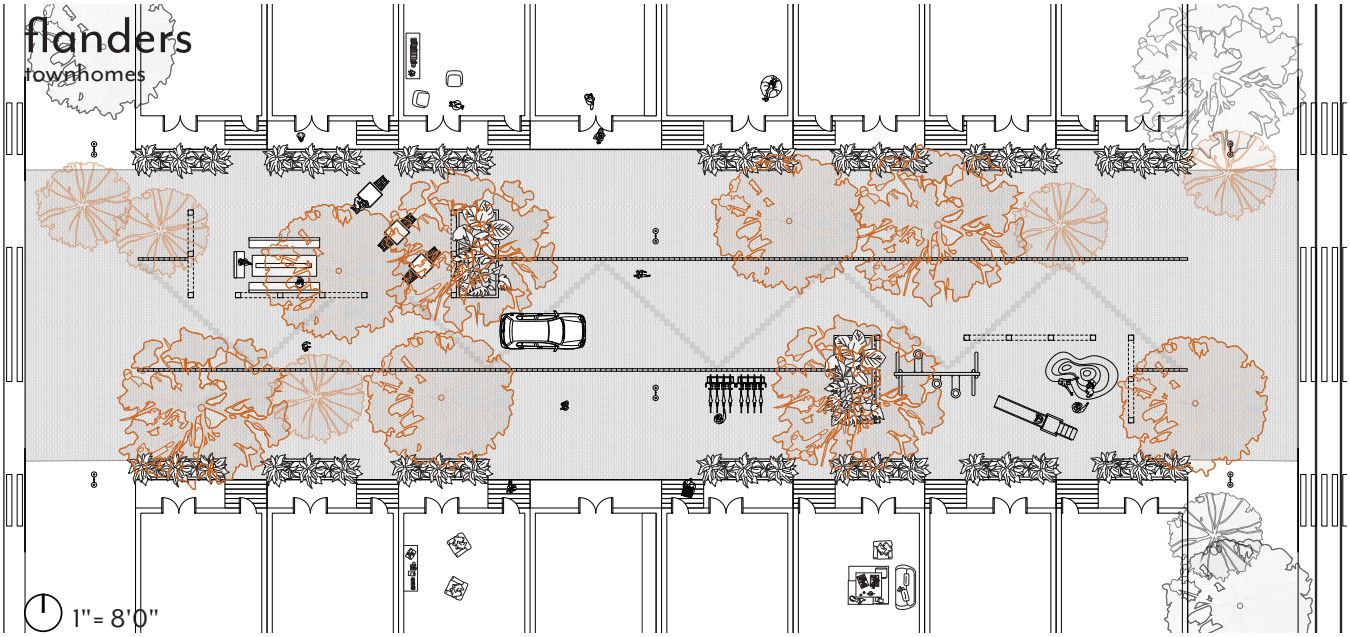


Figure 117: Street plan for Flanders near townhomes



To support the idea of light industry, live-work townhomes between 3rd and 4th Avenues on Flanders open onto a public plaza featuring worktables on train tracks that allow the plaza to become a flexible craft market space. The craft market plaza integrates sustainable urban design such as enhanced urban forest, multi-modal street design, and green stormwater infrastructure. These strategies and others are employed throughout the proposal to create sustainable streets and public spaces. High density residential towers are concentrated on Glisan, adding density and providing visual connections to the Broadway Corridor development.

Figure 118: Street section for plaza with live-work units

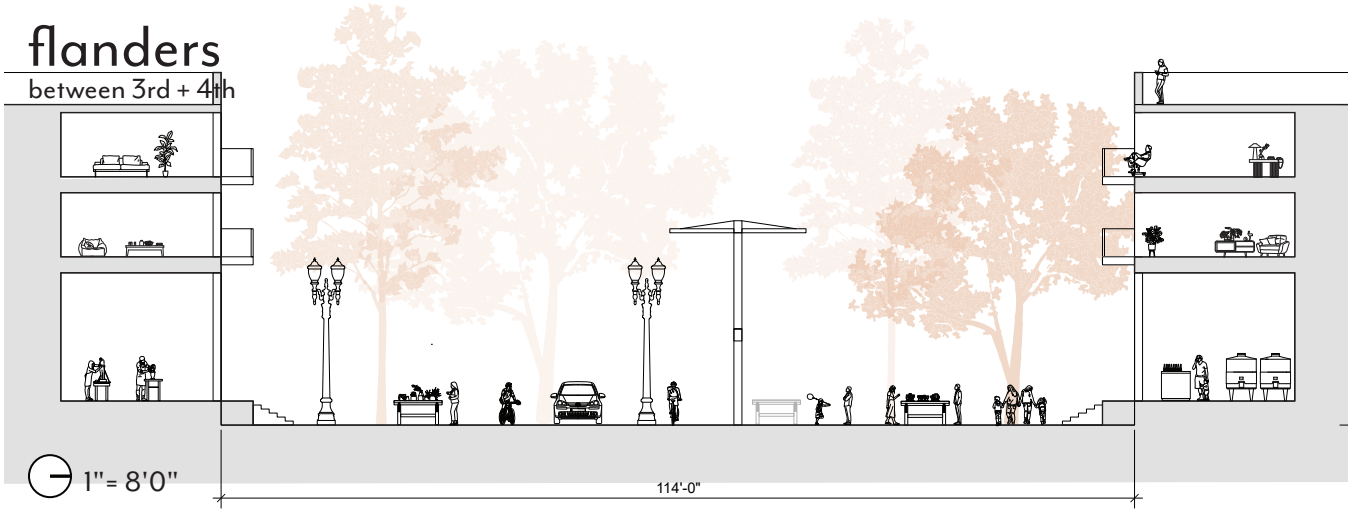


Figure 119: Street plan for plaza showing tables on tracks

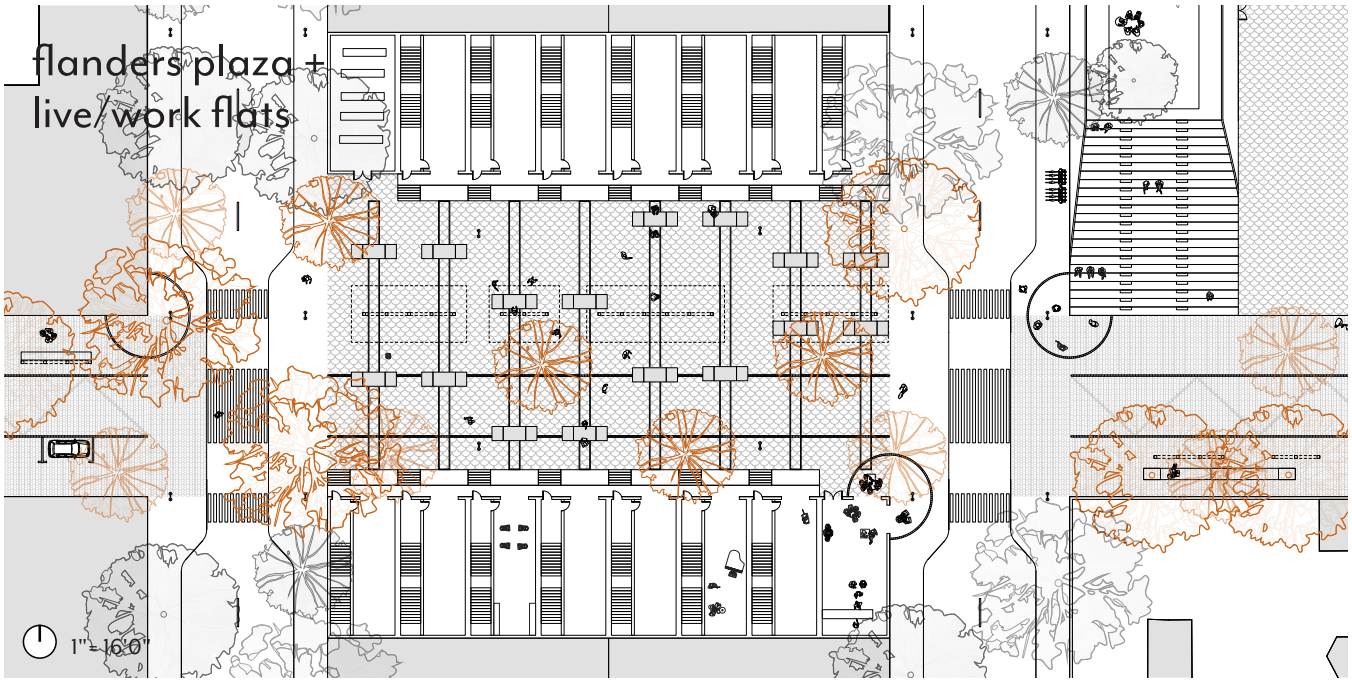
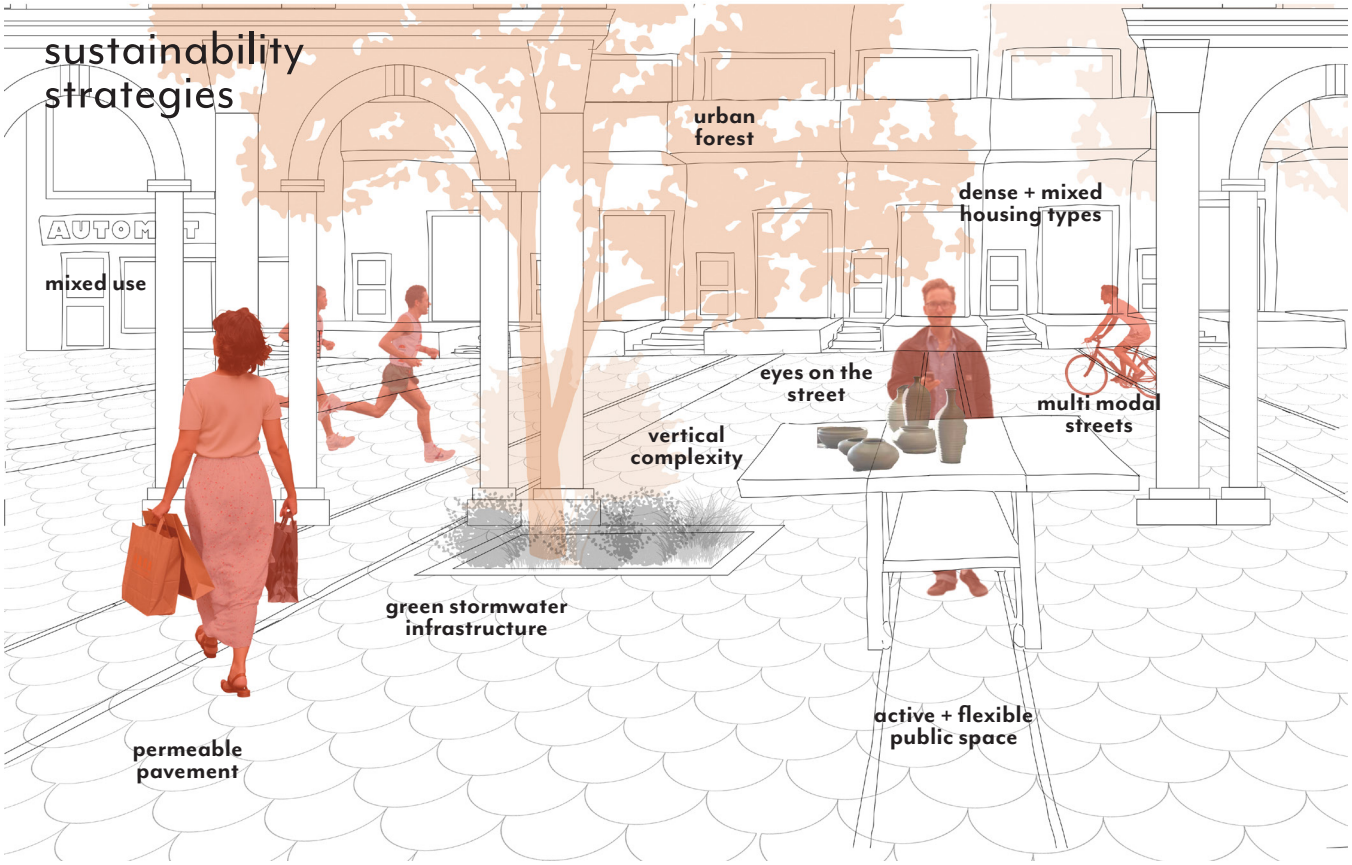


Figure 120: Sustainability strategies at the Flanders craft market plaza highlight strategies used throughout the proposal



Taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by the transit corridor, the Greyhound Terminal, and Union Station, 6th Avenue would become a major retail, social, and cultural axis. Forming a new center for the LGBTQIA+ community in Portland, Rainbow Road would serve as a restaurant row with spaces for people to gather and dine before heading to nearby nightclubs. Students envision a 24-hour activation along 6th Avenue.

Figure 121: Activation plan for 6th Avenue

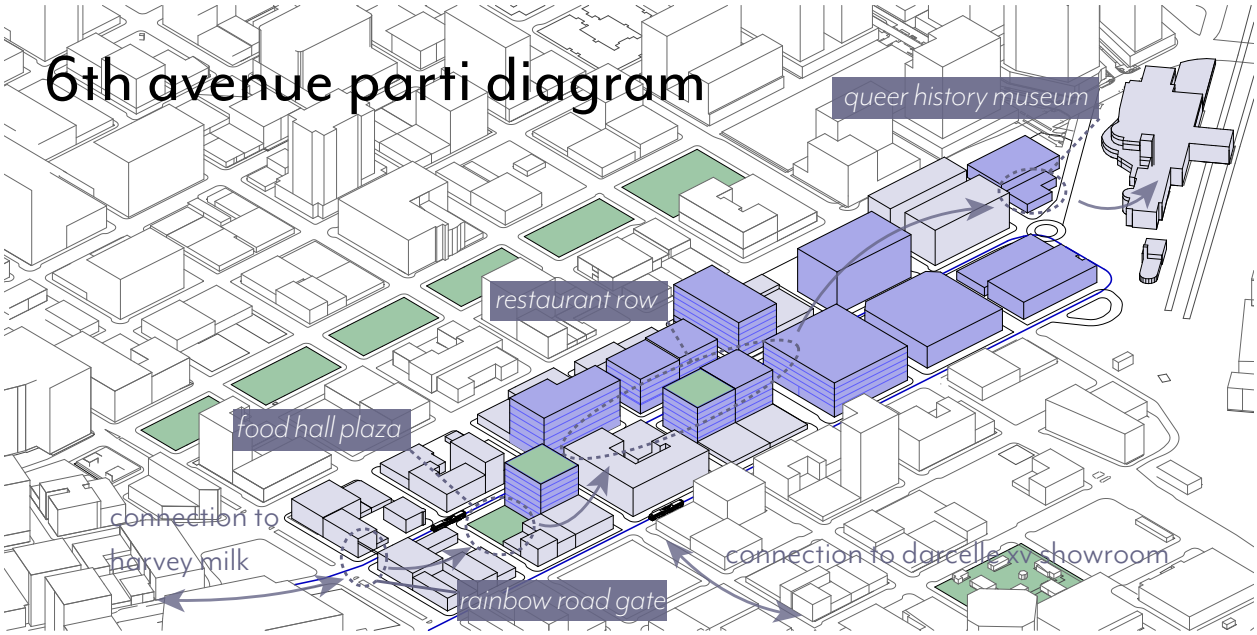


Figure 122: Projected 24-hour activation with interventions

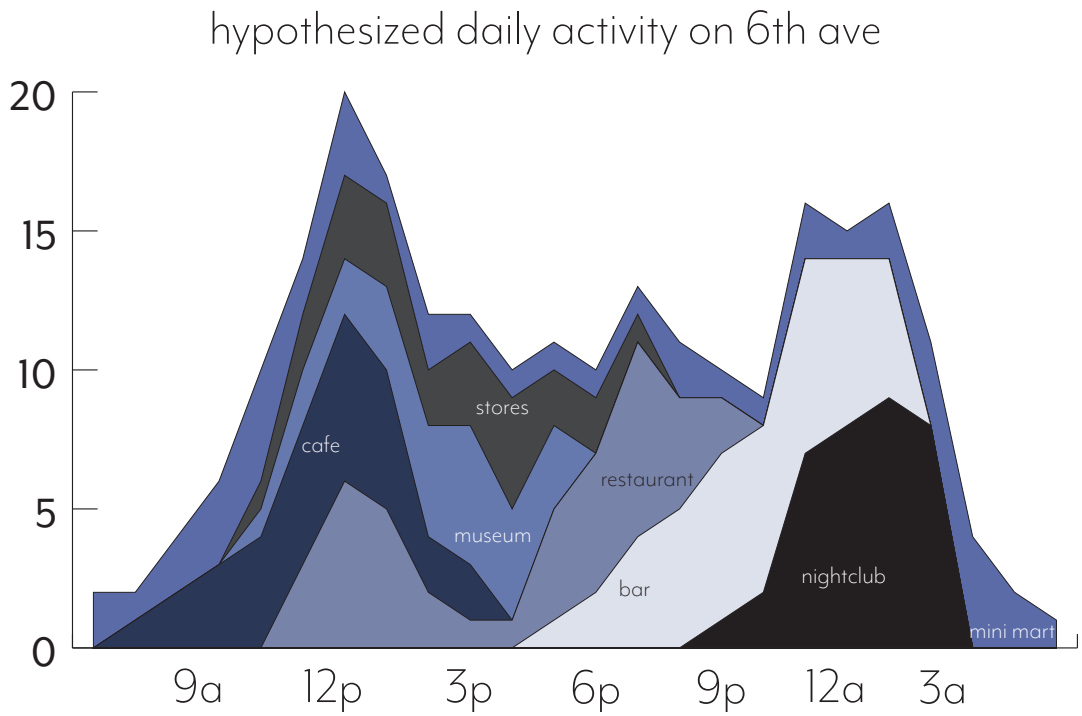


Figure 123: Entrance gate to Rainbow Road

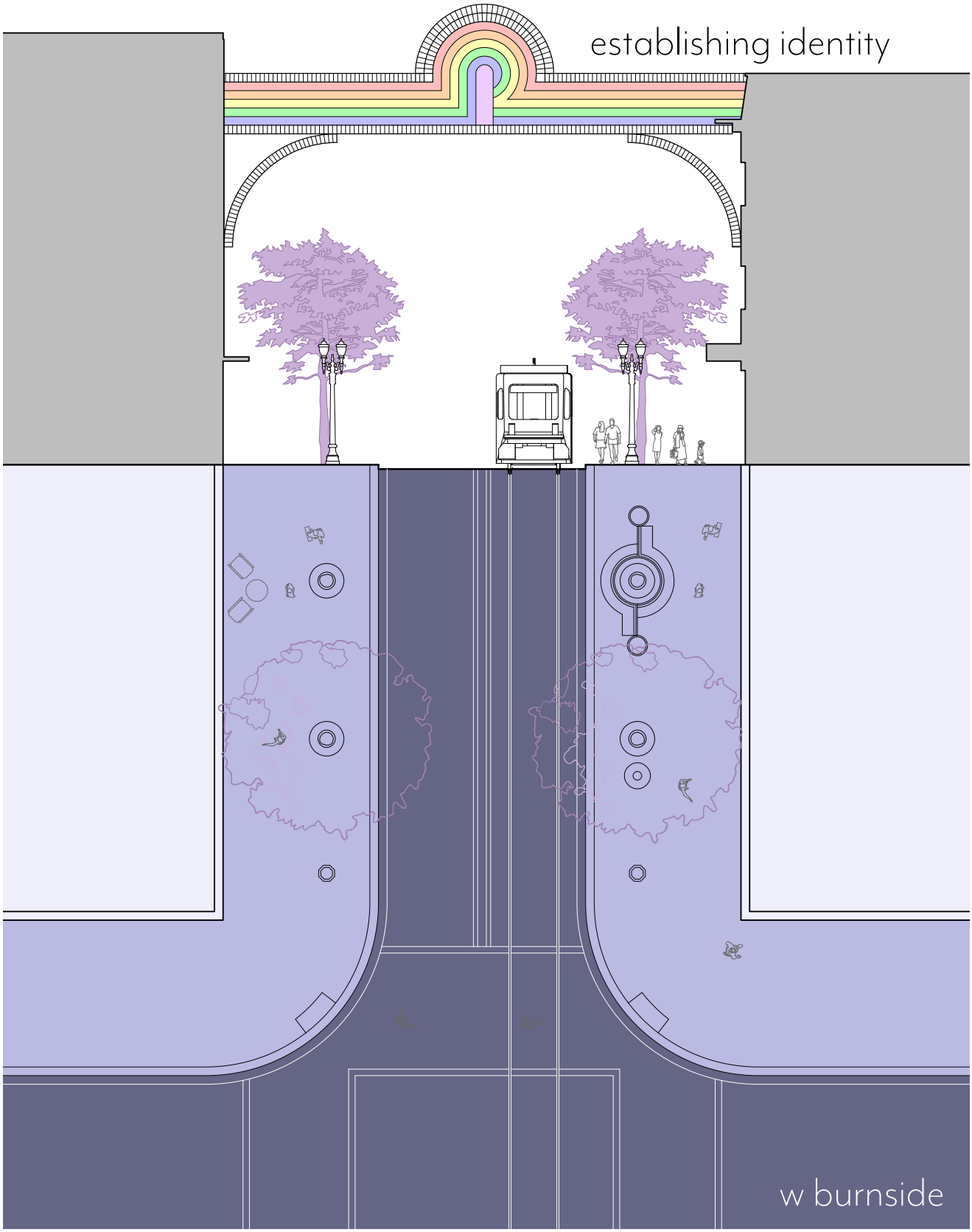


Figure 124: Plaza with food carts

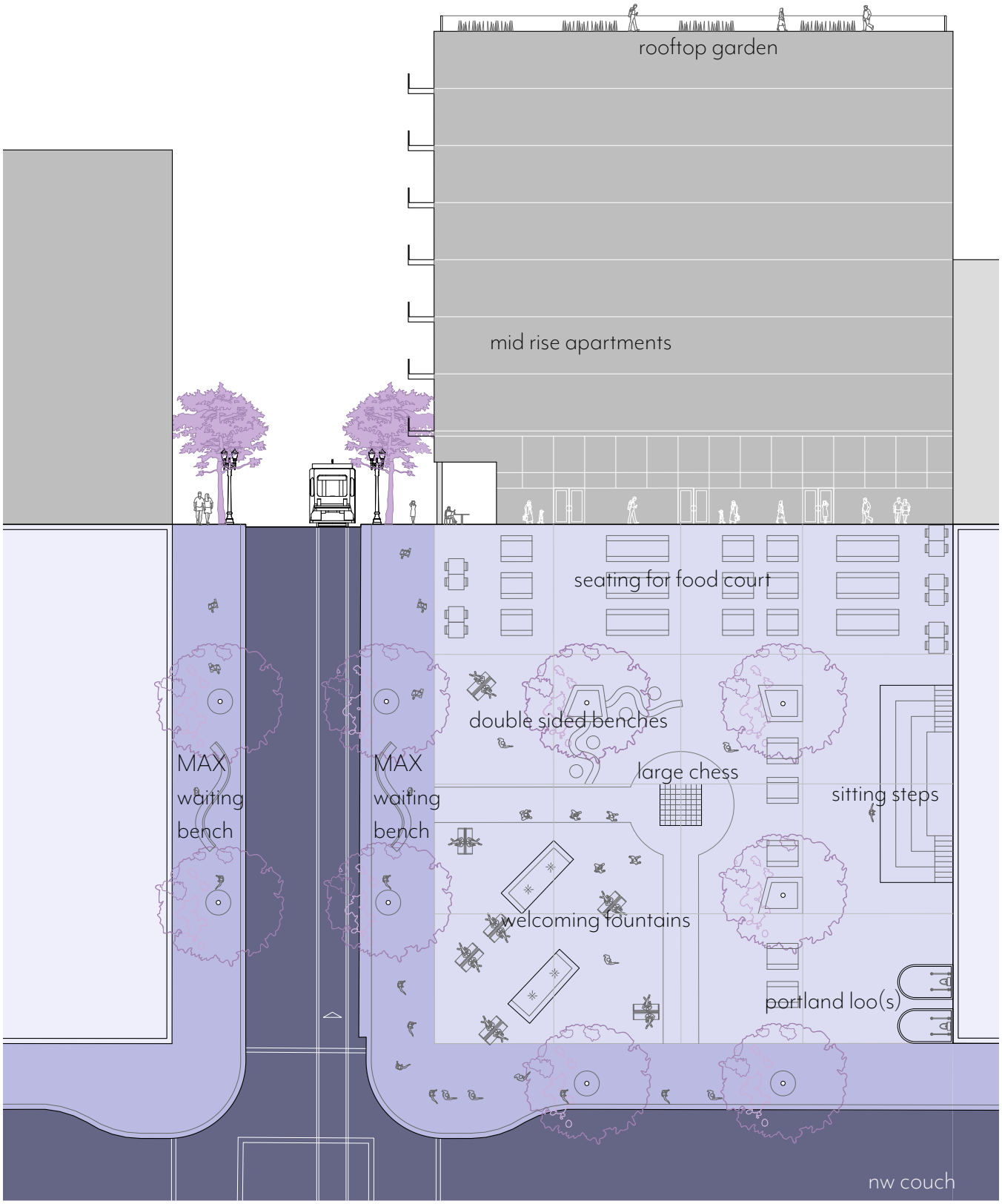
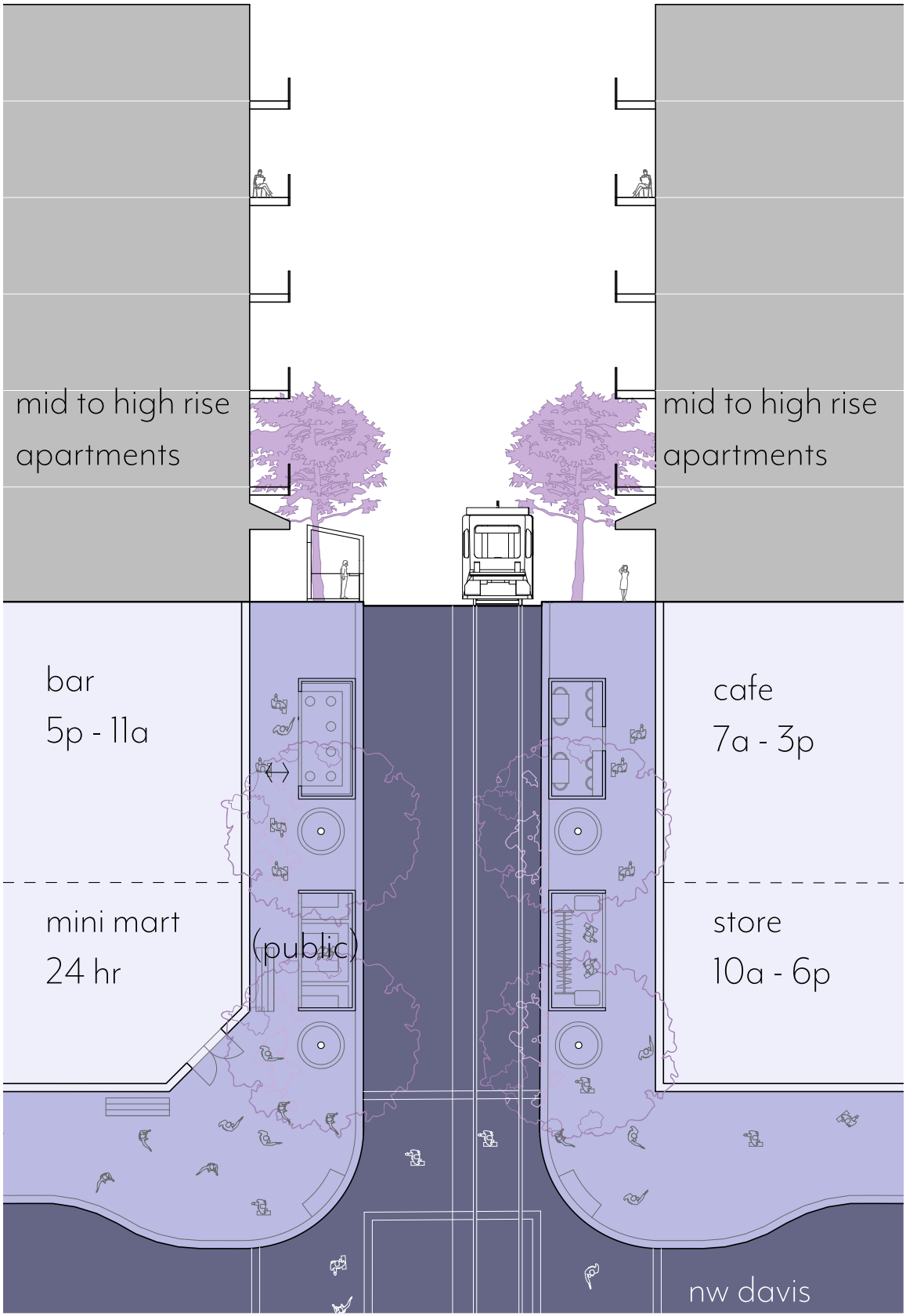


Figure 125: Outdoor dining pods along 6th Avenue



The Greyhound Terminal would be replaced by a mixed-use building that would provide space for a much-needed grocery store, as well as spaces for a community center and an indoor-outdoor farmers' market. This market opens onto an expanded plaza connecting to Union Station with space for active recreation and a food truck court. The use of Union Station would be expanded to include boutique retail and a library location on upper levels.

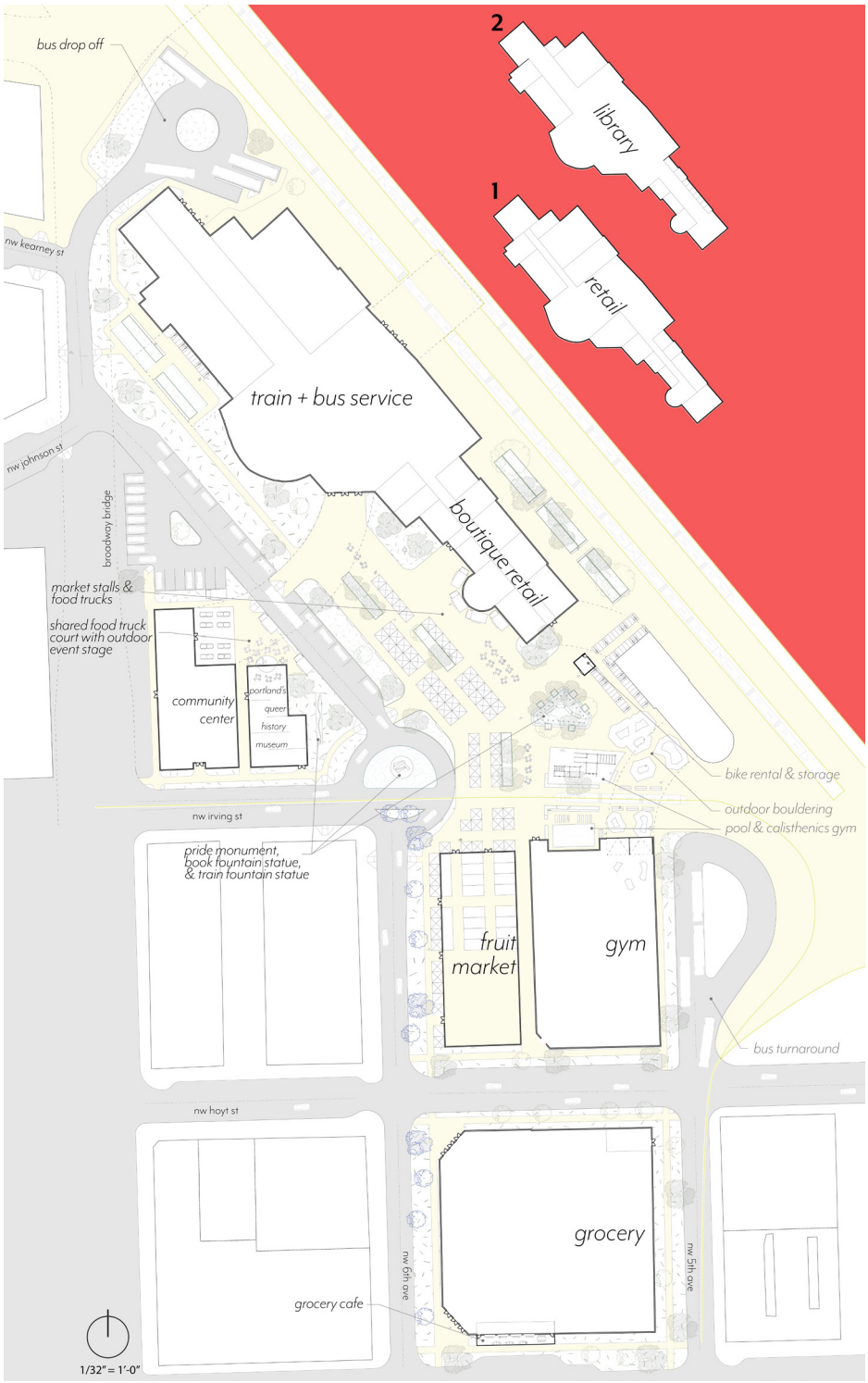
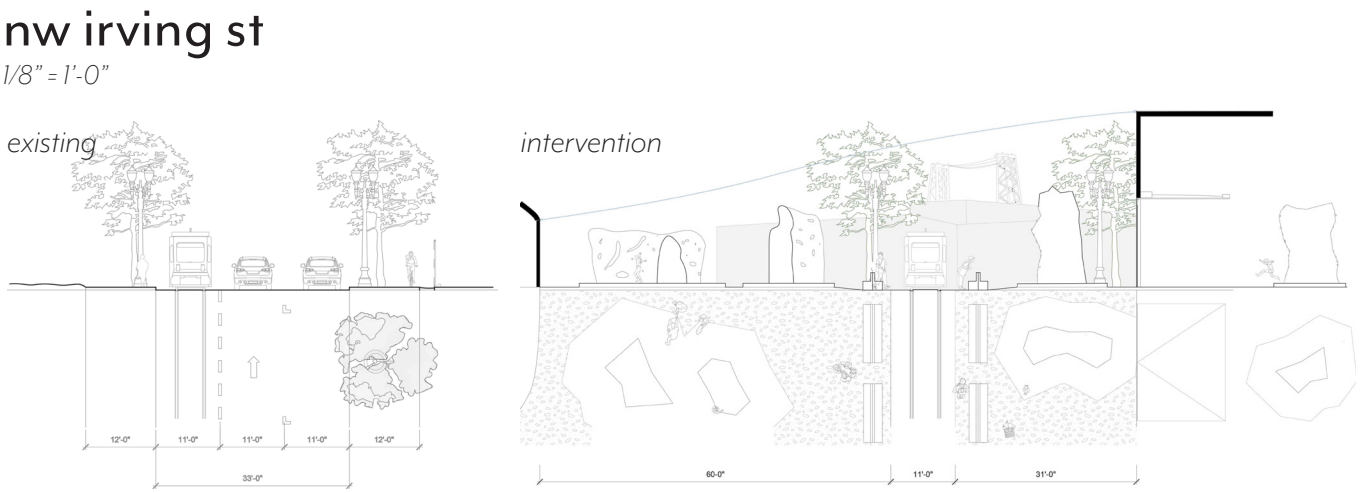


Figure 126: Plan for Union Station and former Greyhound Terminal

Figure 127: Street section at Irving, which becomes part of the plaza connecting to Union Station



Finally, a marked pedestrian path named the "Portland Promenade" connects visitors and residents to popular destinations around central Portland, serving as cultural tour of places that have shaped Portland. The Promenade is marked by a LED lighted path which is separated from traffic by a planted buffer made of historic Belgian block pavers.

Periodically along the path, miniature viewing stations allow visitors to view Portland's history in miniature. These interventions work together to create a vibrant, complete neighborhood with activities, services, and business options to support residents and visitors alike.

Figure 128: Map of Portland Promenade

1. 19th century portland waterfront
2. albina
3. indigenous willamette
4. japantown
5. automobiles & the harbor highway
6. skid row flop houses & 'hobos'
7. historical transportation
8. harvey milk & LGBTQ+ in portland
9. 20th century immigration influx

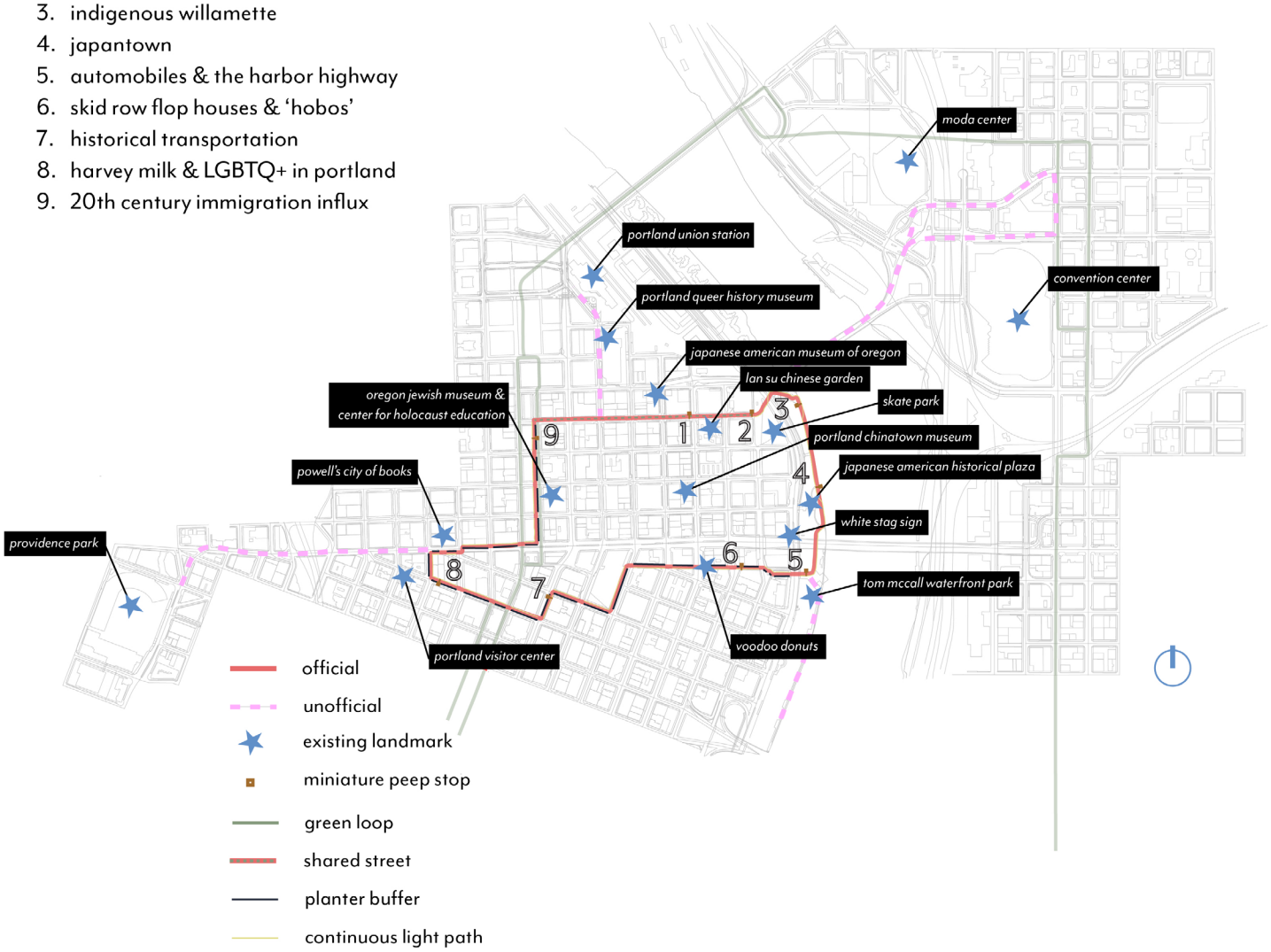


Figure 129: Portland Promenade features

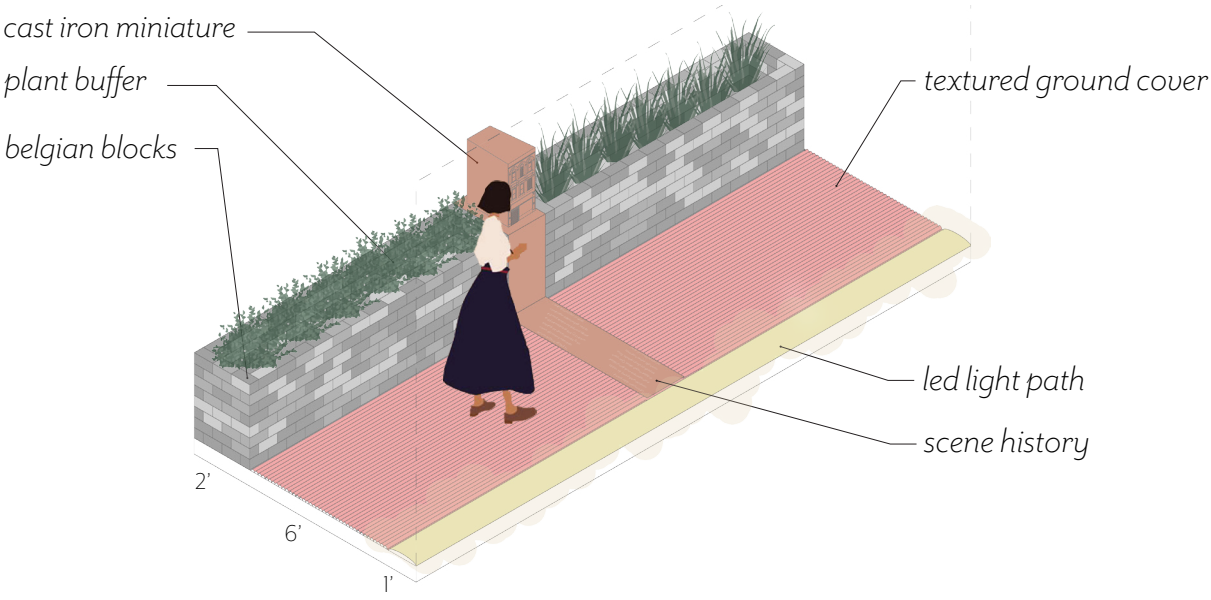


Figure 130: Close-up of miniature viewing stations along the Promenade

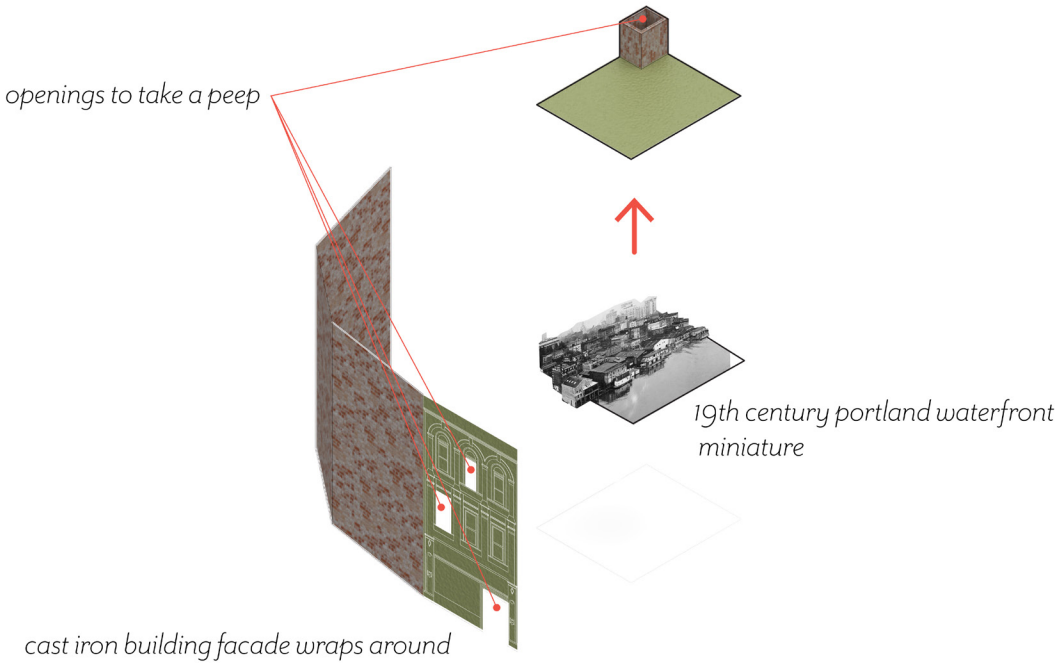


Figure 131: Street section showing promenade layout

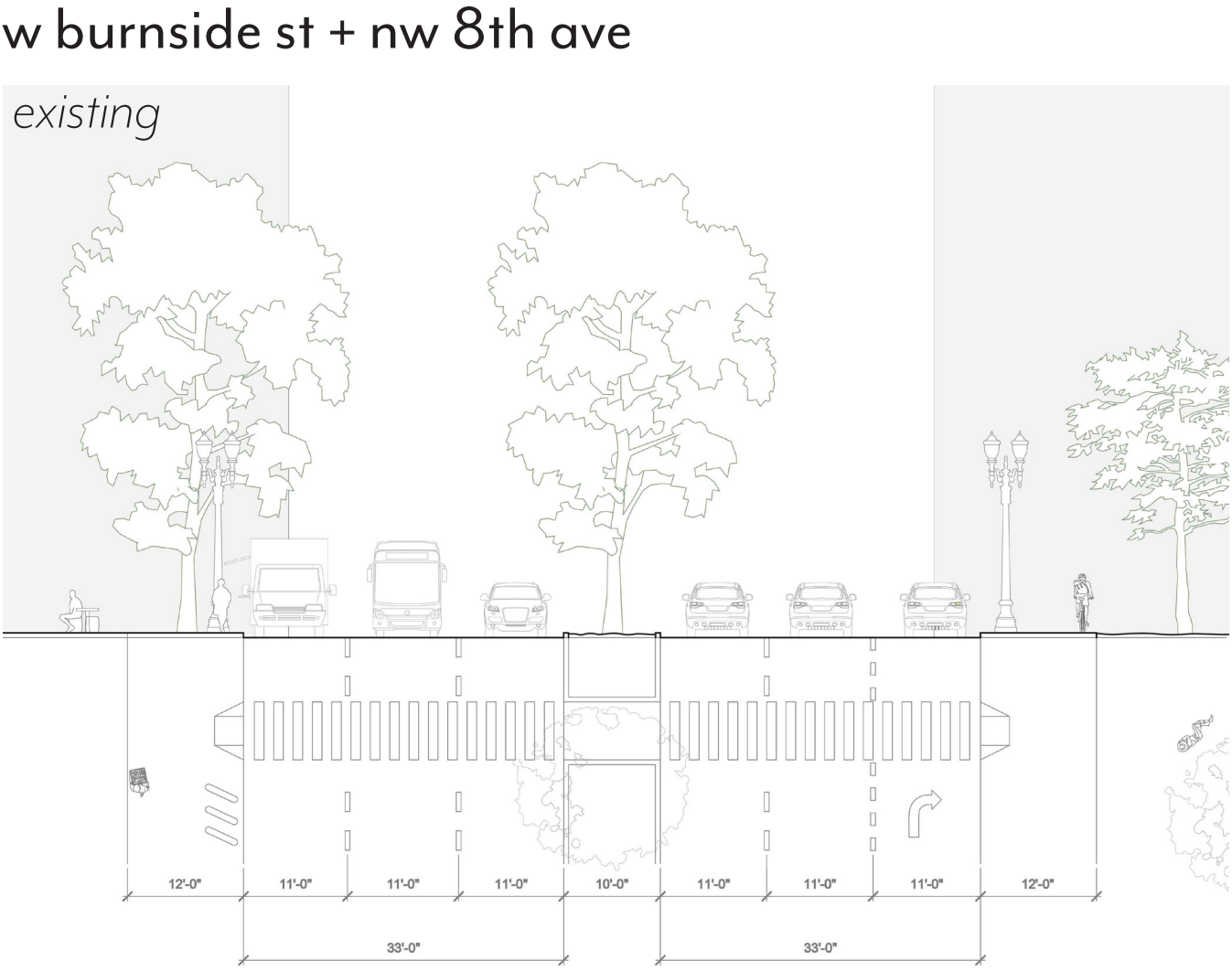
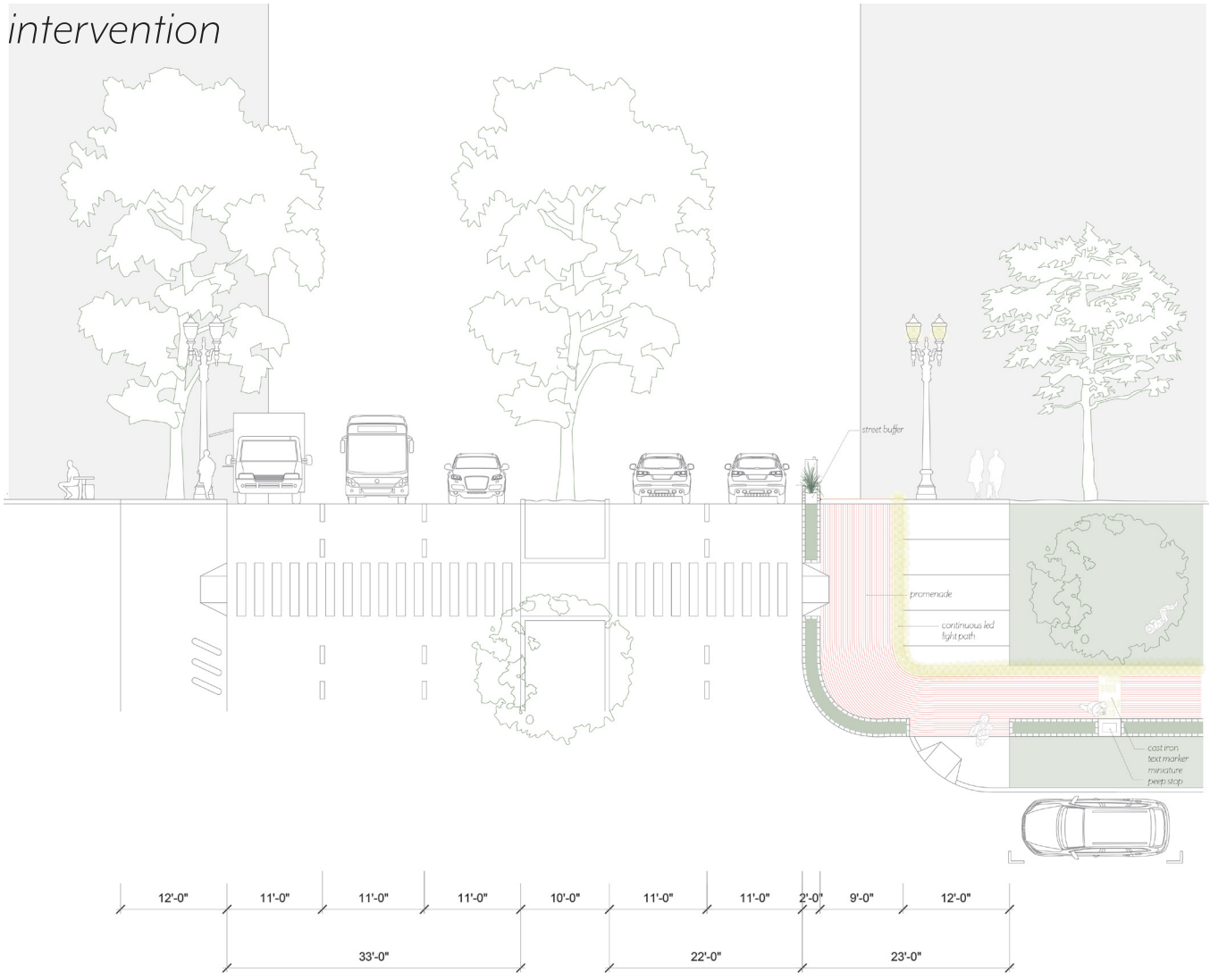


Figure 131 (continued): Street section showing promenade layout

w burnside st + nw 8th ave



Conclusion

As a district that has been historically difficult to activate, creating a tipping point for Old Town that will lead to sustained growth and development is an unspoken priority of the design proposals students offered in this Urban Design Studio. Guest speakers emphasized that helping the Old Town community recover and thrive after the challenges created by COVID-19 is key to creating active and vital streets and promoting further interest and development in the area. Common themes in the proposals included increased housing density, strengthening connectivity, and celebrating the cultural history of Old Town.

Adding dense housing in the district was a keystone in the proposals to provide the density necessary to support businesses, services, transit, and other amenities. Providing connections to other parts of Portland, including the Pearl District and the waterfront was another priority for students with several solutions focused on east-west connections along Glisan and Flanders and north-south connections along the transit corridors on 5th and 6th Avenues. Proposals also sought to preserve and celebrate the rich history and culture of the neighborhood by creating public gathering spaces centered on existing cultural and historic places such as the Lan Su Chinese Garden and Union Station. Many proposals suggested the use of salvaged cast iron and Belgian block pavers recovered from the neighborhood to create unique spaces that reference Old Town's past.

This course focused on capitalizing on Old Town's strengths and opportunities to create urban design solutions that have the most impact. Students learned that residential density is necessary to support the success of their proposals for Old Town. They learned that existing social challenges such as homelessness cannot be directly addressed by urban design, but that certain design solutions can help to create a more balanced neighborhood that serves all community members, creating opportunities for recovery and growth.

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