

Reimagining Space at Portland's Lloyd Center Mall

by

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A THESIS

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Adaptive reuse is the practice of taking unused or abandoned spaces and turning them into something new. It is a creative process that modern planners struggle with. From office buildings to industrial parks to shopping malls, we have an abundance of vacant space and no methods for adapting them without demolition and rebuilding. This thesis explores a failing shopping mall – the Lloyd Center in Portland, Oregon – and examines how to reuse the space to bring value to the community. Through examining placemaking frameworks and local case studies, themes emerge that guide recommendations for the mall. Current shop owner interviews inform these recommendations and give first-hand accounts of what draws in shoppers and where the Lloyd needs improvement. First, the mall needs accessible entrances. Users have to feel welcome and invited in. Next, it needs a variety of uses. There must be services, programs, entertainment, and commerce to attract a variety of needs. There has to be comfortable seating that offers a variety of types in a socialized layout. Local food needs to fill the food court and provide a unique dining experience to draw customers in. Social programming like events, music, and activities will attract people and make the space relevant in the Portland going out scene. Lastly, through every step of redesign and implementation, the Lloyd Center must involve the community and respond to their needs and desires. Without community engagement, the space will stay irrelevant.

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Section 1: Introduction

Shopping malls across the country have been trending towards irrelevance since the 1990s. Visitor numbers started declining and never stopped. A number of factors, from changing consumer demand to competing box stores to online shopping, have all driven patrons away from once thriving malls. The Lloyd Center shopping mall in Portland, Oregon is no exception. In fact, it is a prime example. The mall had influence across the country with its novel ice rink, and at the time of opening, was the largest shopping mall in America. For years the mall represented American life. It was a place for people of all ages to gather, for businesses to thrive, where friends would meet, and families would shop. Today, the concept of the mall as a cornerstone to American society has all but faded. Malls across the nation are boarded up and vacancy rates are high. The Lloyd Center has lost all of the anchor stores that drove traffic for decades. However, the space still remains. Where a cultural powerhouse once stood, now sits vacant storefronts and empty hallways. My thesis seeks to reimagine the Lloyd Center to renew the relevance and importance it once had in Portland.

Guiding question: How can space in the Lloyd Center mall be reimaged to support the needs of modern Portlanders?

Existing plans for the Lloyd Center

I am far from the first to propose new uses for the Lloyd Center; however, many of the proposals that exist would tear down the mall to build something completely new. Importantly, my project reimagines the space as it exists today, without leveling the building and starting over. I wanted this limitation for three reasons. Firstly, I find the confines of the existing building to spark creativity. Having limits and bounds forces planners to think of new solutions. Without limits imagination can be lazy. Limits and rigidity force unique and creative ideas to explore

what could be possible. Secondly, without limits this paper would never end. There must be guidelines for my research and discussion to sit within. By narrowing my scope to the existing building space, I can engage on a deeper level with my research on space. Lastly, reuse of existing space is an underutilized thought experiment in a world of limited resources. From malls to office buildings to industrial parks, our spaces are outdated and unadaptable to change. While this project will not provide generalizable prescriptive solutions, it will spark imagination on what thinking outside the box looks like. It will demonstrate that, with a little creativity, we can use what exists to meet dynamic consumer demands.

Furthermore, I am not going to explore the possibility of turning the mall into housing in this project. Portland is facing a massive housing shortage, and the Lloyd Center space could theoretically supply a lot of units. The housing debate, however, is extremely complicated, and to adequately examine it would require much more research than I can provide in this project. Additionally, housing cannot exist in a void. Shops and activities, the idea of third places, need to exist in society *alongside* housing to make the areas desirable. The Lloyd Center has existed as a shopping and activity center for over 60 years, and I want to honor that legacy as I propose new uses.

History of the Lloyd Center

In 1920s Ventura, California, Ralph Lloyd, a self-taught geologist, decided to build an oil rig and dig 5,000 feet underneath his ranch. Lo and behold, he struck oil and became one of California's first oil tycoons. His brief stay in Portland, Oregon had infatuated him with the city, so he started buying plots of land on the east side of the Willamette River. As early as 1924, he was planning his massive Lloyd Center development, which would include homes, a 24-story hotel, and a shopping center. The next few decades were not kind to Ralph Lloyd, as the Great

Depression and the second world war forced him to abandon his Lloyd Center plans twice. The third set of plans were submitted to the city shortly before Lloyd passed in 1953. His three daughters, however, fulfilled his wish and opened the monumental Lloyd Center on August 1st, 1960. Not only was the mall the largest in the country, it was also the first American shopping center to feature an ice rink, which caught on across the country. Since its opening day over 70 years ago, the mall has seen a plethora of renovations including a glass roof, covered parking lots, expansions, and interior redesigns (Rose, 2015).

Broader context

The American shopping mall has been in decline as a commercial space for decades. Since the 1990s, planners have noticed that initial consumer excitement for these spaces had slowly faded, and older malls were losing out to strip malls and mega box-stores like Walmart (Robbins, 2002). In the following decades, the rise of the internet further suffocated the shopping mall while propping up online shopping and speedy shipping. The final nail in the coffin may have come with the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Retail across the world took a massive hit and consumers that were previously wary of internet shopping had no other choice.

The Lloyd Center was classified as a dead mall well before the pandemic. Nordstrom left the mall in 2015, followed by Macy's in January 2020 (Rogoway, 2020). Despite renovations in the 2010s, the mall continued to face vacating tenants and declining commercial activity. In 2021, the mall faced foreclosure. Many Portlanders assumed that was the end of the Lloyd Center's slow downfall (Leivian, 2022). This sparked conversation on what to do with the space. Portlanders agree the space has high potential, and there have been calls to transform it into anything from housing to a baseball stadium (Mesh 2021). In late December 2021, the Urban Renaissance Group and KKR Real Estate Finance Trust Inc. bought the property from the

previous owners. They announced their plans to revitalize the space by leveling the mall and building a new neighborhood on the site with housing and shopping. They proudly state they are “reimagining community” on the Lloyd Center website but show no evidence as to why their plan will be successful and will revitalize the space.

During the pandemic, with a certain combination of luck and a unique economic situation, the Lloyd Center started to make a comeback. While most retail space in Portland faced rising rent prices, the Lloyd Center needed tenants and started offering cheap short-term rentals of vacated storefronts (Leivian, 2022). Small Portland businesses struggled after the pandemic, and saw the Lloyd Center as their only option to stay in business. Slowly, and unbeknownst to many Portlanders, the shops of the “zombie mall” began to fill. Artists saw the space as a blank canvas for their dream projects (Gallivan, 2024). Recently, the Lloyd Center has been in local Portland news more often because of its comeback. Just last fall eight pickleball courts opened, and over the winter several art markets made use of vacant storefronts to host multi-day vendor showcases (Saslow, 2024).

Across the country, malls are in trouble. Their decline is not a new trend, and it is not limited to one type of mall (urban vs suburban vs strip). Retail shopping as an industry is not as stable as it once was. Despite this downward trajectory, the Lloyd Center has been making a comeback over the last few years, and its growing potential prompts the question, how should we reimagine what the mall can be?

Importance of social infrastructure

In 2023, the Surgeon General of the United States published a report declaring a national epidemic of loneliness. Americans today feel they lack connection to their community. People are isolated and removed from family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. The report finds that

loneliness has major health and economic repercussions. Lonelier individuals are more likely to have premature deaths and lengthy hospital stays. They are also less able to perform at school and work. One of the primary methods to reduce isolation that the report highlights is through improvement to social infrastructure — the physical spaces where we spend time with one another (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). These are the spaces that build daily interactions within a local community to strengthen relationships and connection to place. The Lloyd Center was once this space for the Portland community, and my thesis provides a path for it to become prime social real estate once again. The goal of this project is to create space that improves the daily lives and wellbeing of Portlanders, and the Lloyd Center has the most potential to do so because of its history, location, and uncertain plans.

Methods

Through existing literature, case studies, interviews, and visuals, I explore the Lloyd Center and its history, how community space is built, and what strategies existing examples employ to define their space. Through these methods I build a strong base to provide thoughtful and relevant recommendations for the Lloyd Center.

Literary based research:

This thesis has drawn on various types of literature to answer a range of questions. To learn about the Lloyd Center and its history, I drew from local newspaper publications such as *The Oregonian*, *The Willamette Week*, and *OPB*. These publications also served as secondary historical perspectives that have been publishing stories about events dating back to the Lloyd Center's grand opening in 1960. For broader context about malls, I relied on national news outlets, scholarly articles, and books to provide information on much larger trends. The bulk of the thesis, though, does not discuss history or national trends, but explores questions about

successful places and important qualities of a space. To examine these themes, I reviewed planning frameworks that prescribe key attributes and features a space needs to be impactful. The most in-depth and relevant framework came from the Project for Public Spaces, which I will overview in section 2. Literature is not the leading source of this paper, but heavily informed the context and structure of this project.

Case studies

Case studies are used to expand on the principles and concepts from literature. They provide real-world examples of different cases utilizing similar theories in unique ways. For this project I focused on local cases in Eugene and Portland. Each location in Eugene I was able to visit multiple times to make observations. The case studies in this project are: The University of Oregon Erb Memorial Union, the Eugene YMCA, the Lane County Farmers Market, and the Multnomah Arts Center. Each case interacts with its community through a unique method and serves a different purpose. The cases are all ambitious spaces — they require high levels of relevance and community buy-in to function. They successfully capture their users' attention and build a desire to return. None of the cases are related to shopping malls, and this is intentional. I wanted to explore a broad array of community spaces in order to imagine new uses for a mall that draw lessons from each case. By highlighting non-retail case studies, I am examining what community space is at its core. I find connections between the cases, whether it is similar programs and infrastructure or the same commitment to certain values and methods. I use the findings from the case studies to influence and defend my recommendations for the Lloyd. These spaces are examples of what is success looks like.

Interviews

For this project I also conducted 12 interviews, split into two categories. The first category is comprised of stakeholders who are currently engaged in the Lloyd Center. These are the people on the ground that experience the current environment. From them I learned what's working, what's not, and how they feel the space could be used differently. The other set of interviews is with individuals on the management teams at the four case studies I examined. They are able to give me an administrative perspective on why their spaces are successful and what policies and guidelines their team follows. These interviews acknowledge my limitations and biases as a student of city planning. I am heavily influenced by my field, which narrows me to see the issue from certain angles and points of view. The interviews give me new perspective and priorities that are useful to make well informed recommendations about the Lloyd Center.

Another useful perspective to include is that of the Lloyd Center's property manager, the Urban Renaissance Group, which acquired the mall in 2021. Despite reaching out via email and phone multiple times, and going in person to their office, I was unable to get a response or schedule an interview. I am mostly curious what the goals of the group are and what metrics they use to measure success of the Lloyd Center. I have gathered a decent picture of the management's intentions by talking with leaseholders at the mall, but unfortunately do not have the official perspective of the management team.

Visual Storytelling

I use visuals in this project to further describe and explain the concepts and examples I write about. Especially from the case studies, there are obscure references I make — such as socialized seating — that are much better conveyed with visual aids alongside description. The visuals used are primarily captured by me, unless otherwise noted.

The visuals used in this thesis are considered a method because they are aspects of the research and contribute to the strength of the argument. They reflect the visual observations I made as I visited each case study space and the Lloyd Center.

Section 2: What makes a place successful?

This chapter explores the concept of community space, using the placemaking framework from the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a New York-based organization that partners with communities to improve public spaces. The term *placemaking* describes the practice of strengthening the cohesion of a neighborhood or community by creating spaces that reflect the values and identities within a community. It is born from the idea of planning cities for people, not for cars or businesses, in a way that ensures people feel connected to their regions. Placemaking is a collaborative process between community members, planners, artists, and other key stakeholders to ensure spaces are reflective of the people they serve. As a modern term, placemaking centers on the reimagination of existing public spaces rather than the construction of new ones, a central theme within my research. Specifically, placemaking is concerned with spaces which lack connection between residents and place. Even if parks, plazas, or centers exist, placemaking is the act of improving those spaces for the purpose of community cohesion. PPS has done extensive research and worked with communities to build spaces that reflect placemaking ideals, and in their work have developed a list of core qualities that define any successful public space. Successful places are where “celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges occur, friends run into each other, and cultures mix” (PPS, What Makes a Successful Place). The framework dictates that a successful place is accessible, users are comfortable, are engaged in activities, and social with one another. This section will first define each quality by synthesizing the PPS framework, then explore examples and context through the four case studies.

Summary Table of the PPS Placemaking Framework		
Quality	Overview	Key attributes
Comfort	Comfort as a quality means the extent to which a space actively seeks to make users feel indiscriminately welcome	• Inclusive • Seating • Clean • Safe
Uses	Well-defined uses thoughtfully dictate how a user will interact with the space	• Complementary • Active & passive • Experimental • Scope vs scale • Community input
Access	Access refers to how connected a place is to its surroundings, both how easy it is to get to from afar, and the experience of approaching the place from the street	• Transit • Bike • Pedestrian • Entrances
Social	Social denotes the amount of enriching interactions that a space facilitates which build the community around it	• Active vs passive • Social programming • Entertainment • Social seating

Comfort

Comfort as a quality for public space means both the feeling users have while in the space as well as the image the space has in public perception. A welcoming image attracts new users, and a safe atmosphere encourages them to come back. The PPS framework defines comfort with three main attributes: inclusivity, cleanliness, and safety.

First, a comfortable space feels inclusive to all ages, cultures, and abilities among other aspects of identity, so anybody can confidently navigate and utilize a space with dignity, i.e. feel a sense of belonging. Examples of easy first steps to create more inclusive spaces are having signage in multiple languages, convenient access to ramps and elevators, and easy-to-find

amenities like restrooms and water fountains. A next step would be seating. There must be an ample amount of seating for those who need or want it, and seating should be comfortable for all body types. Places should feel easy to use. Inclusivity of a space is relatively easy to measure observationally without any surveys or tools, just by noticing who is there and who isn't. Is it only families with small children, or a mix of ages and group types? Are there people in wheelchairs? If not, the space is probably inaccessible.

For a space to be comfortable, it also needs to be clean and taken care of. This sends a message that it is invested in and looked after, and thus ought to be respected. The PPS article provides an example of a field beside a train station in New York. To turn the grass patch into an inviting park, a local nonprofit in partnership with community groups designed seating and amenities to put in the field. By providing seating, the park became a place that was taken care of and thought about. Neighbors resonated with the efforts and saw the seating as an invitation to use the space. Now, it is lively and hosts celebrations for the community.

Lastly, comfort requires safety and security. In a well-designed space, parents are comfortable letting their kids roam independently, women can be alone without anxiety, and nobody has to hide aspects of their identity out of fear. The standard method of increasing safety is with trained security personnel who can monitor the space and respond if situations arise. A full-time security staff is not always realistic, though, especially for public areas, so another tool for increasing safety is having more bodies in the space, especially families and individuals of mixed ages. If enough people are present in a space, users feel comforted by the assumption that if something went wrong, there are enough people with good intentions to jump in. This sense of safety also comes from a sense of connection to a space and the community there.

Inclusivity, cleanliness, and safety are subtle qualities that take care and intention to cultivate in a space, but when achieved create an environment where users enjoy spending their time (Peinhardt, Katherine, Nov 2023).

Uses

Defining how a space will be used is the first step in making it vibrant. To get people to come to a space, they have to know what they can do there. A city's industrial district is a great example of a space with a well-defined use. Industry happens there, not dog walking or haircuts or childcare. Downtown districts generally have less clearly-defined uses, and many are facing identity crises as offices lay empty and rents are too high. The ideal space fits somewhere between these examples: more defined than a downtown, but less rigid than an industrial area. An ideal space has many uses that serve a broad array of needs to attract a variety of people.

Uses for a space should complement one another. Referred to as triangulation by PPS, this idea is not necessarily to have similar uses, but to be thoughtful about what blends and what conflicts. A library and an education are examples of uses that blend very well, which is why most schools have a library and most libraries have educational events. Triangulating a variety of uses together in a blended space attracts like-minded users who will interact between uses. Not all use types mesh well together, so having intentionality when defining uses is important. A sports bar cannot live next to an AA facility, just like a childcare center should not share a parking lot with drivers ed. In defining uses, deciding what to exclude is equally as important.

In addition to blended uses, the uses have to feature a balanced mix of active and passive activities. Active uses involve intervention or direction, while passive uses allow the user greater agency to do as they please within a space. Libraries are very passive. Visitors can wander and read and interact with the space in a number of ways — they might check out a book, or not, and

there is no pressure to do either. Active space tells the user what to do. Any class or workshop is active in shaping the user experience. Art museums are passive, but science museums are active. A good space has both. Some users might want to be told what to do, but others might want to just be in a space without direction.

Uses can also be experimental. Covid forced a lot of experimenting with space and inspired new uses that became a part of life. Cities learned how to use streets for restaurant seating and have more meaningful outdoor events in parks. A good space is accepting of trying new uses to see what fits.

One challenge inherent to any multi-use space is finding the balance between scope and scale. There is a finite amount of space, resources, and time. On one end of the spectrum, some spaces prioritize scope, meaning the variety of uses offered. Activity centers and downtowns are high scope areas, with multitudes of services, programs, and entertainment options. Two users might go to these areas with vastly different intentions and be able to have their needs met. The other end of the spectrum is maximizing scale — picking one specific use or purpose and going all in. Specialized services where supply is limited are generally high scale facilities, like rehabilitation centers, which tend to offer a certain type of care in response to a specific need. Most spaces fall in the middle of the spectrum. Even a community gym, focused exclusively on fitness (scale), will offer a variety of workout types, classes, and hours to serve various community needs (scope).

With so many factors to consider in determining uses of a space, it can get complicated. The solution is simple but effective: listen to the community. Call it bottom-up, grassroots, or community-centric, community input is all about removing prescription from planning. A good

space will have a mix of complementary uses, some of which are active, some are passive, that are informed by community members and users (Peinhardt, Katherine, Jun 2023).

Access

Access is any way a user reaches a space: what means there are to get there, and how easy it is to find. A good space will be just as easy to access by bus as it is to bike or drive, giving consumers the ability to choose what best fits their needs. Access means not just the presence of various transit modes, but modes that are desirable. They must be timely and pleasant. A space is not accessible by bus if it requires multiple transfers and takes hours. Centrality of a space aids access but does not ensure it. LAX is central within the massive metro area but getting there without a car is a nightmare.

The primary mode of access discussed in the PPS framework is by foot. At some point, all modes of transit include walking, whether it is walking from the parking lot, bike rack, bus stop, or train station. The pedestrian experience is therefore the first building block of accessing a space, especially around key entrances. Because of this, spaces, particularly their entrances, should be designed on a human scale. This means having windows and being able to see inside; avoiding long bare facades, walls, or fences; and having multiple entrances if the building is large. Transit and bike access are also important to connect users who are traveling further than is reasonable to walk. Good spaces are designed strategically along transit lines and bikeways to capture existing networks rather than trying to build new ones (Surico, John, 2023).

Social

The final criteria for a thriving place is sociability. In the midst of a loneliness epidemic, spaces have to try harder than ever to foster human interaction (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). Social is the hardest quality to engineer, but the easiest to measure, based on the number

of people and the amount who are in groups. Social is a quality to focus on after the others. If a place has comfort, access, and uses, social comes naturally. The first three criteria bring people to a space and encourage them to stay, while the goal of sociality is to build community that brings people back over and over. A social space feels personal and is where friendships are built and developed. Social spaces can be meant for socializing with strangers, but primarily are open spaces to go with a friend. A good social space is the answer to the question, “where do you want to hang out?”

Much like uses, there are active and passive ways to promote sociability. An active intervention to create a social space occurs with events or programs that direct participants to meet each other and socialize. A party or dance or facilitated activity promotes active socialization. Infrastructure and design within a space are important tools for the passive promotion of sociability. As discussed in the comfort section, seating gets users to stay and makes a place more open to the public, but good seating design and layout can go far beyond that and create a feeling of community. Entertainment also produces socialization passively. A concert or show gives the audience a shared experience to connect over and, while not forcing socializing, eases the awkwardness of engaging with a stranger. On a smaller scale, TVs in sports bars serve the same social purpose of shared experience that makes it easier to strike up a conversation (Peinhardt, Katherine, Aug 2023).

What Makes a Great Place?

Project
for Public
Spaces

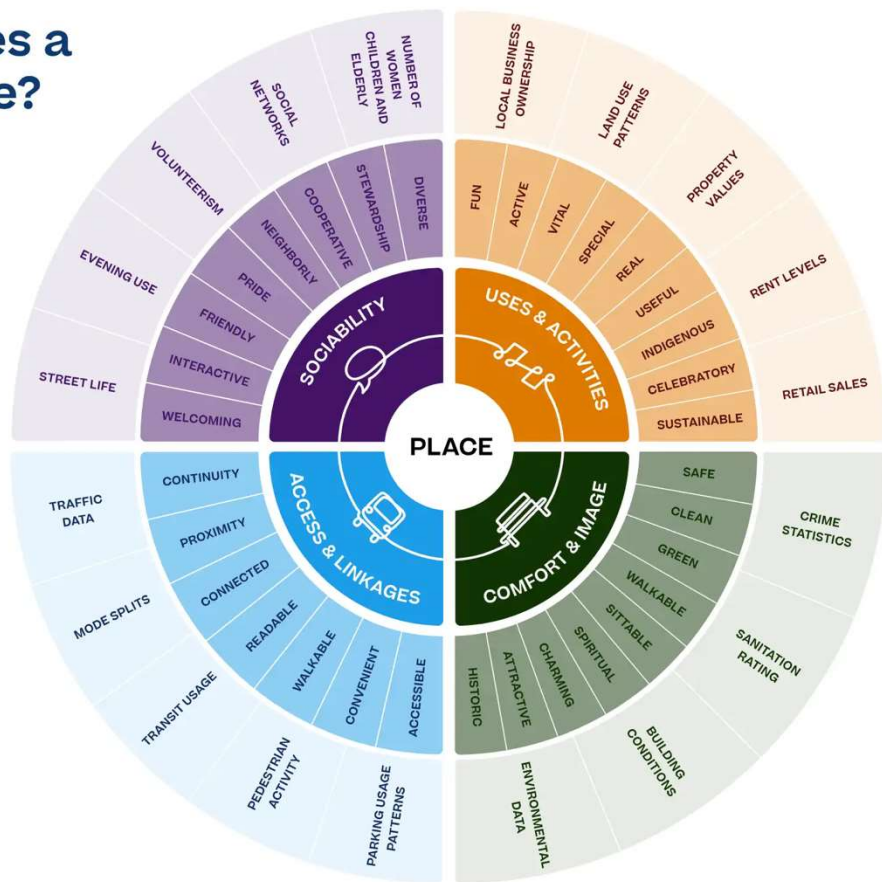


Figure 1: The Place Diagram

This chart is developed by PPS as a tool to judge any place (Peinhardt, Katherine, Aug 2023).

Overview:

The Project for Public Spaces defines a good place by its comfort, access, uses, and social qualities. The organization works with communities to revitalize failing spaces along the guidelines of this framework, and insists all great spaces have these qualities. The next four segments of this paper will expand on PPS's framework by examining local case studies and describing how they reflect the qualities of a good space.

YMCA

The YMCA is a large national nonprofit, composed of over 2,500 locations across the country. Despite its vast reach, it offers services localized to specific community needs in any given area. The national organization has a general mission of strengthening communities and improving health, but each branch reflects these values differently depending on their means and goals. The Eugene YMCA (the Y) was recently relocated to a brand new building, granting leadership a fresh opportunity to design the space from scratch to fulfill local needs. The new space is extremely popular for Eugene residents, and offers a different perspective from the other case studies as a facility that is focused on communal health. It is a membership-based space but offers public programming as well. It is a good example of a financially successful and motivated communal space. I interviewed Danielle Uhlhorn, who is the Donor Relations Manager at the Y. She spoke in one of my classes winter term and was passionate about the Y's role in community building, which inspired me to look more into the space.

PPS Framework Analysis Table - YMCA	
Quality	How the space exhibits these qualities
Comfort	• Inclusive programming • Community feedback • Restricted access
Uses	• Complementary workout types and facilities • Structured classes along with open use times
Access	• Along existing transit networks • Adjacent to public schools • Bikeshare access
Social	• Public lobby • Free amenities • TV lounge

Comfort

The YMCA enhances the feeling of inclusivity by offering programs that respond to users' needs and reservations over using the space. It provides free childcare for members during their workouts, and offers classes for people of all ages and abilities as well as workout series that target different injuries or health issues. For teenagers who want a communal space but might not want to play pickleball or swim laps, there is a hang out room with gaming computers, a mini kitchen, couches, and art supplies. The Y targets specific needs to make the experience feel more personal, creating an image that it is a space for everyone. These practices reflect what PPS writes about comfort in their article: "people are drawn to places that intentionally show us elements that will make us feel welcome." Additionally, the space was built to keep users feeling safe. There are large interior and exterior windows that enhance visibility within the space. The member facilities are restricted by a doorway with keycard access, and a reception desk to keep track of who is entering the space. Lastly, there are a variety of changing room options for families or individuals who want privacy.

Uses

The YMCA has found complimentary uses for its facilities by regularly assessing community needs. Childcare pairs with workout facilities so parents have a place to drop their kids. The teen area pairs with the gym by giving teenagers a space to try less or more active activities in the same facility. Their lobby is intentionally a nice area to spend some time for people who want to go to the Y with their family or friends but might not be able to participate due to injury. They offer various courts, workout machines, stretch areas, and aquatic facilities to support exercise of all types. Each use at the YMCA is in pursuit of serving the needs of the community. A standalone pool is a great activity, but becomes even better with childcare and a stretching station next door.

Active and passive uses are well defined at the Y. The workout classes and lessons are textbook active uses, directly engaging with users and providing organized programming. The open use hours that define how most users regularly engage with the Y is a passive use. Users come on their own time and use the space in an unstructured or defined way. The Y simply offers the means and space.

Access

The YMCA thoughtfully positioned itself in its current location to emphasize access. It is in close proximity to its previous site, which has now been converted to covered tennis courts, and regulars are used to the general location. Along with being along bike routes, transit routes, and major roadways, the Y is adjacent to the local high school and middle school. Their membership reflects this. Every weekday around 4 PM when school gets out, teenagers flock to the Y in droves, which is why they have created multiple spaces focused on youth activity and development. The Y also worked with PeaceHealth Bikeshare to add a massive bikeshare hub in front of the building, along with regular bike parking.

Social

The YMCA has designed their public lobby to be a conduit for social interaction and community building. Unlike the bulk of the Y's facilities, the lobby area is open to the public and does not require membership to spend time in. They even encourage people to hang out there by offering daily free coffee and a small library. When I met with Uhlhorn at 11 AM on a Monday, the tables and chairs were mostly filled with community members socializing, reading, or working on their computers. Along with a variety of seating options and arrangements, a few couches are positioned well to watch a large TV. There are often sports or events showing on the screen, and groups gather to cheer on their team with others. The mere existence of a screen to

watch relieves a ton of social pressure and gives a shared experience for users to connect over. This is why sports bars are so popular — people like to watch alongside their peers.



Figure 2: YMCA Lobby

The lobby at the YMCA has diverse seating options, a TV, and large windows to give users a preview of the space before they walk inside.



Figure 3: YMCA Coffee

This picture shows some users of the YMCA enjoying the free coffee while sitting and socializing around a table in the breezeway lobby area.



Figure 4: YMCA TV Lounge

This picture shows two users watching TV on a couch, sitting on opposite side but still enjoying the same piece of entertainment.

Erb Memorial Union

The Erb Memorial Union (EMU) is the University of Oregon's student union. Opened in 1950, and majorly remodeled in 2013, the building is a centerpiece of campus life. It has offerings for every type of student, from food to study spots to cultural centers to event spaces. I have worked in the Craft Center in the EMU for three years, where I have gained a firsthand understanding of how our offerings fill a communal need and bring people together. I also joined the EMU advisory board this year and have been learning more about how administration puts deliberate intention behind every decision made to benefit the community. In order to learn more about the EMU as well as the student union model in general, I interviewed Eric Alexander, the Director of the EMU and former director of student unions at Western Washington and Oregon State Universities.

PPS Framework Analysis Table - EMU	
Quality	How the space exhibits these qualities
Comfort	• Cultural programming • Identity programming • Responds to modern identities
Uses	• Relevant services • Responsive to student needs • Constantly updating
Access	• Primarily pedestrian • Large open entryways • Major throughway
Social	• Social activities • People-watching and entertainment • Social seating

Comfort

For Eric Alexander, inclusivity is a top priority when creating a student union whose role is to respond to every member of the student body and their needs. He wants students to feel like a union is a space where they can connect with others while exploring themselves and their own identity. College is a vulnerable place, and in order to be open to change students need to feel comfortable. This is particularly true for a school like the University of Oregon, which draws students from across the globe with diverse backgrounds. The first step for Alexander is making sure students feel culturally supported, having representation for different identities present in the union. The building hosts multicultural organizations that are student-facilitated, as well as centers for women, men, LGBTQIA+ students, veterans, and non-traditional students. He also recognizes some students might be more comfortable in shared interests rather than shared identity, and for this reason the EMU also supports various student interests like art,

environmentalism, journalism, music, and Greek life. Recently, the EMU added an Esports lounge to give students a space to connect, responding to its growing popularity.

Uses

The EMU has an amazing variety in its uses ranging from services to activities to entertainment to food vendors. Within each category, there are many options for students to choose from and facilities that meet their specific needs. The student services in the EMU, for example, address a wide range of needs, from legal help to bike rentals. The space is responsive to a huge student demographic, so the administration puts a lot of intention into diversifying the uses available. Some of the spaces within the building are small and limited, but their mere presence in the building nonetheless reflects the needs of the users. This discussion between scope and scale arose during my conversations with Eric. Student unions are frequently changing to meet student demands, and as college populations grow there is increasingly limited space to do so. Space allocation is therefore taken very seriously. Multicultural organizations are important for a diverse student body to feel seen and comfortable, but they have to receive enough resources to make an impact. They compete for space and money using metrics like attendance and number of events to indicate their organization's relevance. Just this month, the EMU admin launched a space allocation committee that will conduct an annual review process to examine each space within the building and evaluate its relevance with the current study body. The committee is composed of students and utilizes student feedback to make its findings.

Access

Access at the EMU looks different than the other examples because of its target audience. It is primarily catering towards students who live close to campus or are on campus for other reasons. It is extremely accessible by foot and bike, but less so by car or transit. How is this

apparent? The pedestrian focus is apparent through the large glass doorways that connect to outdoor plazas. There are seven primary entrances with large glass double doors; notably, none of them are along the small parking lot on the south side of the building. Before the remodel in 2013, the ground floor of the building was a breezeway, heavy with pedestrian traffic of students coming to and from academic campus. The remodel supported that by designing the ground floor entrances to be utilized as a throughway, with an information desk in the middle to interact with the most people.

Social

The EMU is a very social space. The physical space provides passive socialization, and student organizations fill the calendar with active events like bingo, trivia, movie nights, and concerts. These events are especially utilized by first-year students, who use the activities to make new friends or have a structured hang out with existing friends. The activities are weekly and reliable, with different events happening each night.

Users of the EMU are quick to highlight a unique form of entertainment the space provides: people-watching. Simply observing groups move and interact with the space satisfies something within us. The building has engineered space to be open and observable, so that most areas look over the main floor or outside to a campus walkway. The view allows a break from studying with a quick glance. Various meeting rooms have big windows so people both inside and out can see what is happening, and the ceramics studio also has a window wall facing a group of tables and couches, so students can watch the creative process as they work. People-watching requires both good open infrastructure and a social space where a lot of people can interact in unique ways.

Lastly, the EMU has incredible social seating that is widely varied to give users lots of choices. There are small tables with one or two chairs, bigger tables with four or six chairs, a few large tables with twelve seats, armchairs and couches around tables for more comfort, as well as booths and nooks to give more privacy for group projects. The larger tables and larger groups of armchairs attract solo studiers, who will sometimes strike up conversations with those around them, since they are all connected in some way that they would not be if everyone had their own table and workspace. They are separate enough to not feel awkward but close enough to feel connected.

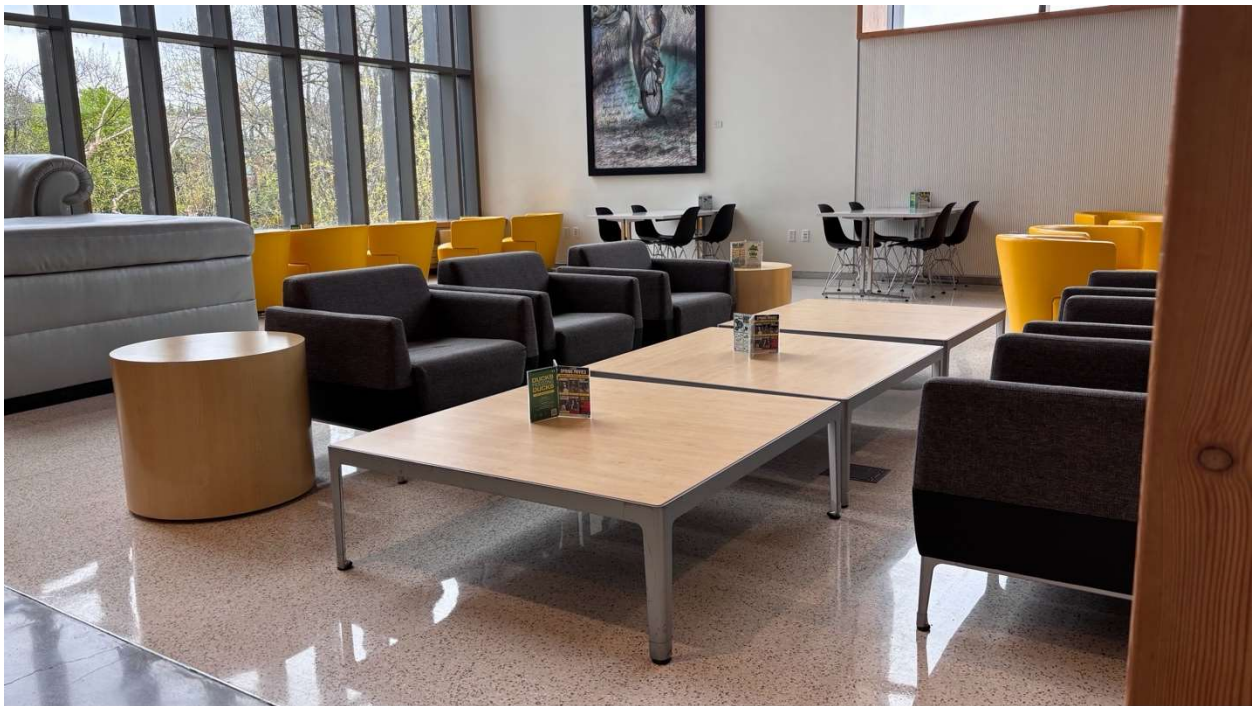


Figure 5: EMU Seating Area 1

This seating area offers a variety of seating options. There are large armchairs in grey, smaller swivel armchairs in yellow, tables with four desk chairs, and a novelty size armchair in light grey.

Photo taken April 7th, 2025.



Figure 6: EMU Seating Area 2

Here there are two rows of large armchairs with coffee tables in between. The armchairs are separate enough that users feel comfortable sitting next to a complete stranger, but close enough that it is easy to work as a group at these seats. Photo taken April 7th, 2025.



Figure 7: EMU Seating Area 3

An isolated group of chairs with coffee tables that serves as a group space or spaces for individuals to work side by side without intruding on each others' space. Photo taken April 7th, 2025.



Figure 8: EMU Piano Lounge

The EMU piano lounge has comfortable chairs and couches where many students go to work alongside others, with enough space between the chairs to feel independent. Photo taken April 7th, 2025.

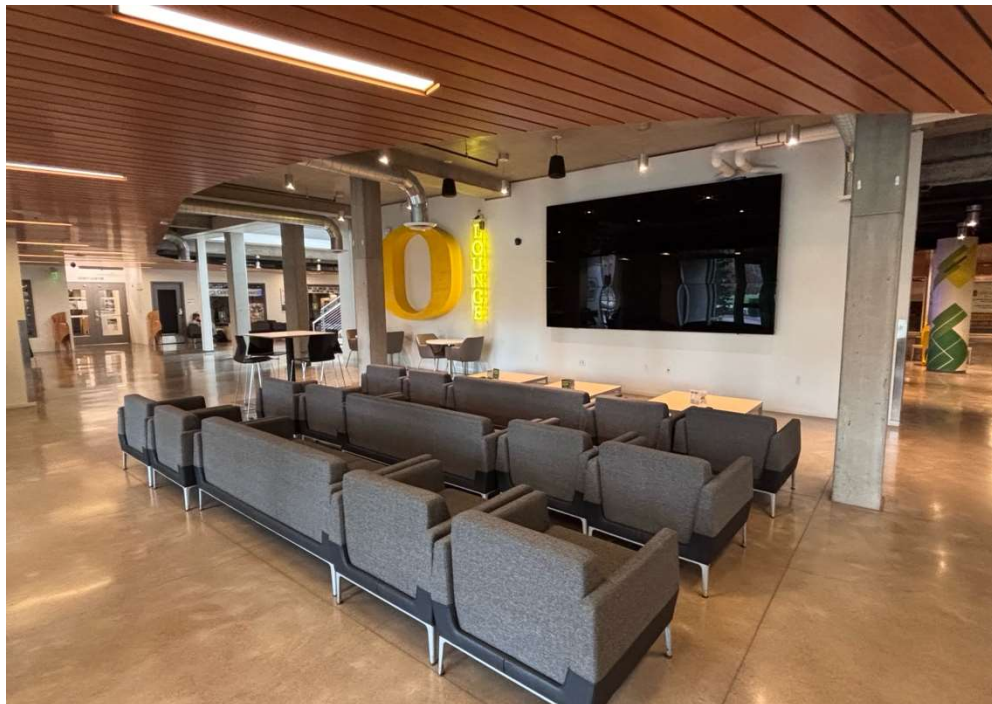


Figure 9: EMU TV Lounge

This area serves as a popular communal theater for major Duck football and basketball games as well as important events like election coverage. When the TV is off, it is used as a space to eat, nap, or work independently or with others. Photo taken April 7th, 2025.

Lane County Farmers Market

The Lane County Farmers Market started as a means to connect local farmers directly to consumers, boosting the local agricultural economy. For over 40 years it has operated under that vision, while expanding to showcase more vendors as well as feature local restaurants, bakeries, breweries, and more. Today the market is filled with music and art and excitement. People of all ages come to the market, and it is one of the few places in Eugene where college students and families coexist regularly. I chose the market because it is both the most unlike a mall, and the most like a mall. It is not a permanent space, existing only on certain days and certain weeks out of the year. It is outdoors and can be heavily affected by the weather. On the other hand, the primary focus of the market is shopping and commerce. It is therefore very much like a traditional mall in that various vendors selling similar products cater towards shoppers that wander the space waiting for something to catch their eye. To learn more, I interviewed Orion Lawrenz, the program manager at LCFM, and have gone to as many markets as I can to make observations about the space.

PPS Framework Analysis Table - LCFM	
Quality	How the space exhibits these qualities
Comfort	• Cultural cooking demonstrations • Variety of cuisine and produce options • Staff trained to manage safety
Uses	• Dining • Shopping • Information • Cooking demonstrations
Access	• Pedestrian and bike friendly • Outdoors without definable entrances
Social	• Lively atmosphere • Entertainment through buskers and musicians

Comfort

The LCFM meets the comfort criteria in two major ways: identity and safety. They offer products and vendors that highlight a range of interests and needs. There are restaurants with various cultural food offerings, and farmers selling seasonal products that can be used in all types of recipes from across cultures. Orion was quick to comment on the market's ability to provide a stage where food cultures can blend and come together. With the recent remodel of the market space, there has been an addition of a demonstration kitchen, where different recipes and cuisines are highlighted to give marketgoers new ideas on what to do with their food.

Additionally, physical safety is important for comfort at the market. Many of these case studies have somewhat restricted access that makes safety easy to manage. The Lane County Farmers Market, however, is unlike the other case studies in this project because it is a public outdoor event. Without defined entrances or exits, it is easy for anyone to wander in, which

poses an inherent risk. The market does not have any security, yet receives thousands of visitors, and many let their children roam without fear. In my interview I pressed Orion about how the market stays safe. Firstly, LCFM has dedicated, well-trained staff that walk the market, checking in with vendors and customers, answering questions and solving any issues. These staff are always close by in case there is a situation, although Orion said there hasn't been a serious issue that they are aware of. Second, the market is lively and full of people. There is a sense of community there, and as you walk around you know at any moment there are fifty people who will jump up to help if you need it.

Uses

The uses at the farmers market are primarily related to food commerce. It is a place built for farmers and local restaurants to sell their goods directly to the public. That being said, there is still variety in the goods offered and the types of uses at the market. Recently, they expanded their demonstrations and educational activities, which bring complimentary uses to the shopping experience.

Access

The LCFM is in central downtown Eugene, and easy to access by foot, bike, or transit from across the city. Car access is less prioritized, but there are plenty of nearby street parking options. The market exists outdoors along public sidewalks, so where it starts or ends is less distinct. It uses this to make the visitor experience positive before they even enter the market grounds. While approaching, pedestrians hear music and smell the food of the market before they see any tents. As a visitor you can assess the vibe before committing to entering, by visually observing how many people are there, how many tents are set up, and what people are walking away with.

Social

The LCFM uses entertainment to foster community as well. The entertainment at the market is usually unprompted buskers and street performers, but the environment welcomes them in a way most do not. These performers amass crowds, giving strangers something to talk about and connect over. People will often dance along and cheer at the market, which warms the environment and makes it lively.

Multnomah Arts Center

The Multnomah Arts Center (MAC), located in Southwest Portland, is a city-run instructional community center that provides performance and visual arts classes to the general public. It offers workshops in twelve different mediums with over 100 instructors on the team. I chose to explore this case study because of my work at the Craft Center at the University of Oregon. I have worked there for three years and have seen firsthand the community the space fosters through art education and open studios. The Craft Center is limited because it mostly caters towards college students and is funded through the University. I examined the MAC as an example of a community art space that does what the Craft Center does on a larger and more public scale. Additionally, the Lloyd Center has drawn a lot of artists to rent space in recent months, so an art focused case study felt particularly relevant to the mall. To learn about the MAC I spoke with Patrick Browne, the Performing Arts Coordinator there.

PPS Framework Analysis Table - MAC	
Quality	How the space exhibits these qualities
Comfort	• Programming based on age, ability level, and financial situation • Rigorous safety procedures and trained staff to minimize injuries
Uses	• Variety of art studios and art forms • Events through partnerships with community groups
Access	• Far away from most of Portland • Satellite programs offer support for distant communities
Social	• Multi-session and multi-course programs that build friendships and connection • Lots of returning users especially for youth performance art classes

Comfort

The qualities that contribute to a comfortable place are embedded in the policies and practices of the MAC. Firstly, the MAC aggressively seeks to increase inclusivity constantly. It not only offers programs for all ages and ability levels, but also different financial situations. Recently the center has put more resources towards the financial aid offerings to make the space accessible to artists without the budget for a class. They heard from community members that cost was a barrier, and made changes to their policies accordingly, showing they care about their users. In addition to inclusivity, the MAC is an art space where injuries can be common, so they have procedures in place to keep their users safe, as well as well-trained and knowledgeable instructors that overview proper techniques in every studio. Attention to safety is a way for a space to show its care for its users, while avoiding a bad image of negligence if a user gets hurt.

Uses

The MAC provides a great example of complementary uses. It is overall an arts center but features a wide range of art types and mediums. There are twelve categories of programs the center offers, some more athletic like dance, some tactile like ceramics, and some more niche like jewelry making. Each offering draws a different audience, but it is easy for a user to switch from one program to another.

Since the MAC is an instructional space and its programming is all class-based, most uses are on the active side of the active / passive scale. Classes are generally hands-on instruction, but some are more unstructured, allowing participants guided studio time to work on personal projects. This is not a completely passive use, but does provide a variety that is key to bringing users with different needs to the space.

The MAC also gets experimental with its uses from time to time. Since their facilities are not in use at all hours, they provide space for groups to meet and hold events. Generally, these are art-centered groups like the woodworking or ceramics guild. These activities strengthen the relationships the center has with the community while attracting new users with artistic interests to the space.

Access

Access is a challenge for the MAC. It is located far from Portland's city center, and while transit options exist, cars are the most convenient mode of access by far. Feedback from community groups exposed that a major barrier for Portlanders accessing the facilities was the commute. In response, the MAC began offering satellite programs at community centers throughout the city, expanding how users can access their services without having to alter existing transportation networks. They quite literally met people where they were at, bringing

dance lessons and pottery wheels with them. This case demonstrates the power spaces have to become more accessible by utilizing community partners and thinking creatively.

Social

The MAC is different from the other case studies since it does not offer public space to hang out. However, this does not mean it lacks a social atmosphere. Its classes connect users with aligned passions over a shared activity. Most classes are multi-session and give people a chance to become acquainted and make friends. Where socialization truly thrives is in the youth classes, especially in the performance arts. The youth theater classes often see the same engaged kids returning time after time and building friendships and community with the other students. The MAC has built an engaging set of programs with comforting staff and exciting activities that create opportunities for community building.

Synthesis

The four criteria for a successful space are comfort, uses, access, and social. The community spaces interviewed for this project have all implemented these elements in unique ways within their organization. The implementation looks different depending on the needs of the community and the reality of the space.

This analysis shows how spaces can be successful without fully meeting all of the PPS criteria, if they are conscious of their shortfalls and trying to improve. The MAC is inaccessible for many Portlanders, so they are experimenting with satellite programs across the city. The LCFM is limited in its uses, so it is expanding its demonstration space to offer more things to do at the market than just shop. Every space is thriving because they are responsive to their community, not just listening to feedback, but acting on it.

I focused my case studies on spaces that look very different than the Lloyd Center knowing that their successes and strategies would not be directly transferable. The mall does not need a swimming pool like the YMCA or a non-traditional student center like the EMU. What is transferable is the themes and values that each space shares as they make changes and improvements. By combining these themes with the realities of the space at the Lloyd Center, the next section will provide recommendations for the Lloyd Center to lead it towards a more successful and social space. First, I take these principles of placemaking and explore how they are reflected in the Lloyd Center, then suggest improvements the mall can make and strategies to stay relevant.

Section 3: Community Reimagined

The next section evaluates the current state of the Lloyd Center in reference to the four qualities of the PPS placemaking framework. This analysis draws on my conversations with shop owners and users of the mall, as well as my observations from my various trips there over the course of this project. I outline where the Lloyd Center is succeeding, where its shortfalls are, and what the space allows for.

PPS Framework Analysis Table – Lloyd Center	
Quality	How the space exhibits these qualities
Comfort	• Variety of identities and interests represented • Security presence to reduce feeling of unsafety • Lots of vacant and boarded up shops
Uses	• Lots of varied and mixed uses • High vacancy rate in storefronts • Artist galleries and work studios • Temporary art markets and pop ups
Access	• Close proximity to transit • Ample parking and car access • Bike networks • On street pedestrian entrances
Social	• Ice rink • Community events

Comfort

Inclusivity at the Lloyd Center has improved in recent years as more small businesses are opening shops and management is working with artists and vendors to offer space. The small businesses that have moved in reflect a broader array of interests and needs than the traditional mall shops like Hot Topic or Foot Locker. The pop-up markets are good examples of this. I

interviewed JD Cox, who runs the Spectrum Art Market which highlights artwork from LGBTQIA+ creators. Their market uses space in the Lloyd during the winter months, attracting a new demographic to the mall.

The Lloyd Center is clean, but not well taken care of. The shuttered windows of vacant shops give a feeling of abandonment, and the sporadic and spread-out seating options do not send a message that the space has been given much thought. The vacant storefronts especially contribute to the disinvested-in dead-mall image. As a user of the space, the lack of attention is noticeable.



Figure 10: Lloyd Center Food Court

An abandoned Subway in the food court shows a divestment in the space. Source: Nopp, Ruby. Personal Collection. 8 December. 2024.



Figure 11: Lloyd Center Ross

The abandoned Ross store poorly painted over and shuttered. Source: Nopp, Ruby. Personal Collection. 8 December. 2024.

Safety at the Lloyd is a chief concern for many Portlanders. The city in general has a reputation for urban crime, public drug use, and homelessness. Having grown up in the city, I have learned how to navigate the streets so as not to feel unsafe. Even so, some of my visits to the mall for this project have put me in situations where I feel my heart race and walk a little

faster. For the Lloyd to be successful, it should not require users to have to put their guard up. To address safety, the management has hired increased security that roams the mall and has a very visible presence. A security presence is helpful, but as seen with the LCFM what really makes a place feel safe is foot traffic volume and a sense of community, which the Lloyd is missing.

Uses

A traditional American shopping mall features three uses. Most prominent is shopping, followed by food, then often entertainment from a movie theater or arcade. The Lloyd Center was no different, although it also included its famous ice-skating rink. However, as most shops closed and space started to fill with new small businesses, the uses of the mall have grown. There still is some shopping and food, though more limited than before, and the ice rink is still a major draw for users. New businesses have added childcare, exercise, events, galleries, and workspace to the mall's uses. Childcare is offered through camps hosted by Trackers Earth, which utilizes the old Marshalls space to run their camps. Jumbo's Pickleball opened in the fall and has seen massive engagement, filling their courts most days with users playing pickleball for fun and exercise. Dance parties and small concerts are put on sporadically by various groups in spaces around the mall, demonstrating new uses for space. Lastly, artists take advantage of cheap rent in the Lloyd Center to display their work and set up temporary studios. These new uses have all pushed the visionary boundary of what a mall can be.

Traditional shopping malls failed because their uses were too limited and blended. Most shops offered a variation of clothes shopping for the middle-class consumer. As finances grew tighter and online shopping reduced the demand for brick-and-mortar retailers, the one main draw of malls collapsed. The Lloyd Center's retail clothing chains have all closed now, the last being Forever 21, which closed in April 2025. Notably, the one business that has stayed open

through all the uncertainty is the ice-skating rink, which offers a distinct and separate use from the dominant shopping model of the mall. When a space exists for as long as the Lloyd Center has, it can get stuck in its ways, making it hard to imagine what uses are missing. The new owners of the mall have been flexible in working with nonprofits, artists, and small businesses to create spaces that are not traditional for the mall, but there is more to be experimented with, especially in the common areas between shops.

With so few shops, the current Lloyd Center does not maximize scope or scale. High *scope* would manifest in every shop serving a different purpose, and users being able to find just about anything at the mall, but these offerings would be minimal. Think a small ceramics studio with a couple of pottery wheels and a firing every six weeks (not enough to satisfy a dedicated potter). High scale at the Lloyd Center would mean a focus on just one area. The Lloyd Center is massive and therefore has the capacity to have both large scale and scope. The space allows for each section of the mall to have a focused theme, with enough range to satisfy diverse customer interests. The framework of blended uses could be broken a bit at the Lloyd since it is so spacious. Uses that are not complementary could be separated by different floors and wings of the mall, but each node within the mall should have well blended uses. Right now, there is a comic book shop next to a used Lego store next to a collectible toy store. Each draws a similar yet distinct audience, and the stretch feels cohesive.

Access

Access is a difficult quality to evaluate for the Lloyd Center. The mall is well-positioned within central Portland, just slightly over a mile away from downtown. There are ways to reach the mall via any common mode of travel, as the following paragraphs outline.

First, the mall is extremely accessible by car, an important feature for our car-based society. The Lloyd Center is along two major highways, I-5 and I-84, and locally accessed by two sets of one-way streets, one set going north-south and the other east-west. Once drivers reach the mall, there are endless free parking options in the multi-level and surface lots that encircle the mall. Because vacancies are currently high and parking is abundant, the lots have become well used by visitors to neighboring businesses as a free and easy option.

When the mall was built in the 1950s, pedestrian access was more of a priority than it is today. The interior was open-air and only two stories tall. Visitors walking to the mall would hardly notice the transition from sidewalk to mall. Today, the mall is obstructed with doorways and parking lots that separate the myriad of shops from the outside world. Going to the mall means leaving our world and entering their world. It is not like going downtown or the farmers market, where the space exists fluidly within a larger zone. The Lloyd is designed to feel isolated and let shoppers lose track of time. As a pedestrian accessing the modern Lloyd Center from the west side, first encountering an expansive empty parking lot, then walking past a towering blank grey facade, you might walk as much as a quarter mile on Lloyd Center property before finding a mall entrance. Many other entrances and exits are buried within multi-level parking lots, without well-defined routes for pedestrians to escape. The parking garages send a clear message that pedestrians are not prioritized.

Unlike most American malls, the Lloyd Center is along a range of sophisticated transit networks. Primarily, it is one of the few stops for three MAX Light Rail lines that quickly get riders in the metro area from one end to another. The longest line, the Blue Line, stretches twenty miles west and fourteen miles east, connecting distant suburbs to the Lloyd Center. The stop was made for the mall, and releases riders across Holladay Park, just 500 feet from the entrance. In

addition to MAX Light Rail, there are seven bus lines that access the Lloyd Center within three blocks: 6, 8, 17, 70, 77, and the 287 and 292 which replace the light rail lights for late night service. The two streetcar lines that run through downtown also have stops within three blocks of the mall. Lastly, the Lloyd Center is surrounded by bike streets that connect both east-west and north-south, providing easy access from the neighborhoods around the Lloyd District.

The Lloyd Center's access is leagues ahead of most American malls, which are inaccessible by foot without crossing massive intersections and walking through a huge parking, like a moat that protects the mall. Because the Lloyd was originally designed with pedestrian entrances from the street, all non-car modes of transit have a better experience, since every mode ends with walking. There are three street entrances that cater to pedestrians: the north entrance directly along the sidewalk, the south entrance connected by a small corridor, and the southwest entrance. Recently, the south entrance was remodeled with a more inviting glass facade, but is still inset from the street, creating a gap between the sidewalk and entrance.

The southwest entrance has a small plaza with a fountain, concrete benches, landscaping, and a bike rack. It is the mall's most exciting entrance and has the most potential for use. Four bus lines stop across the street from this plaza, and three MAX Light Rail lines and the streetcar stop merely a block away. It is also close to the new Blumenauer bike bridge across Highway I-84, which connects a bike route along 7th Ave., only two blocks from the Lloyd Center. This plaza has potential to become a welcoming threshold for the Lloyd Center that sets expectations for the mall. The threshold is what invites guests in and bridges them between the inside and outside world. It is like a cold open or teaser trailer, putting the user in the mindset of the experience. A threshold for the Lloyd should provide a glimpse of what's inside, with some food,

art, a place to sit, and events and happenings.



Figure 12: Southwest Lloyd Center Entrance Plaza — Wide View

This entrance features a large plaza along the sidewalk with benches and landscaping. The photo was taken on March 27th in typical Portland rainy weather.



Figure 13: Southwest Lloyd Center Entrance Plaza — Close Up View

The old Nordstrom(left), the mall entrance (center), and a turned-off fountain (right) are seen in the bleak and open plaza. Photo taken March 27th, 2025.

Although the limited entrances into the mall negatively affect accessibility, they do provide a tool for addressing safety. Limited entrances are intentional when it comes to control. I mentioned the single facility entrance at the YMCA, which controls where the flow of people goes. Every single visitor walks past the front desk, controlling who enters and exits. The Lloyd Center can use its limited number of entrances to ensure security at the venue and monitor who is using the space. It can also ensure no rouge child accidentally wanders through an exit.

Good access was the primary reason I chose to focus on Lloyd Center. There are plenty of dying malls, and even multiple to choose from in Portland. The Lloyd Center puzzled me because of how accessible it is. The mall's location is about as central as it gets for all transit modes, yet it is barely visited. Access sets up the Lloyd Center to become a remarkable central hub for Portland if it is able to meet the other criteria for a great space.

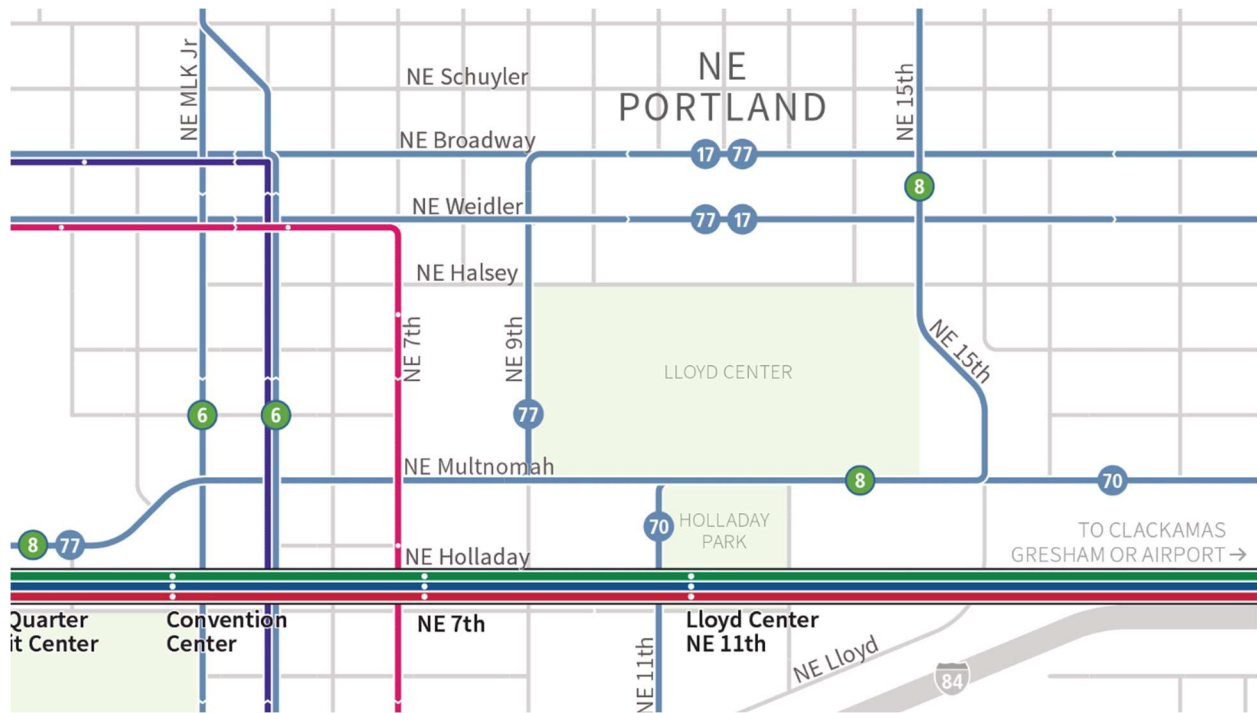


Figure 14: Lloyd Center Transit Map

This TriMet transit map details the variety of bus and light rail lines that stop near the Lloyd Center. Source: “Portland City Center and Transit Map.” *TriMet*.

<https://trimet.org/maps/img/citycenter.png?v=aug24>

Social

The Lloyd Center does not feel like a social space as it is. While there are some groups of people walking the mall together, there are not enough to create a lively atmosphere or encourage interactions with strangers. Part of this is due to the seating options in the mall. There are some groups of chairs, and decent variety in the type of seating, but most places to sit are individualized or secluded, not conducive to large groups or socializing. There are no couches that face each other or defined areas to simply hang out. There are plenty of tables in the food court, but the space is very open and echoey — not a good spot for conversation.

The biggest feature of the Lloyd that contributes to its sociability is the famous ice rink. It gives users an activity to take part in together, and provides some of the best people-watching, since it allows onlookers to see people socialize and interact as well as watch beautiful displays

of ability and movement. Each level has a balcony with seating around the rim of the rink, and there are often onlookers peering over to watch the skaters. It therefore offers endless passive entertainment for mallgoers.



Figure 15: Lloyd Center Ice Rink

The view from the second floor looking onto the ice rink as users engage in a figure skating activity. Source: Nopp, Ruby. Personal Collection. 8 December. 2024.

Recommendations:

The findings of this project have come from understanding the history of the Lloyd Center and malls in America, from researching placemaking frameworks that are used to create impactful communal spaces, from examining four case studies of local community centers, from interviewing eight business owners within the Lloyd Center, and from observing how users interact with space in the Lloyd and the case studies. The recommendations are both concrete changes the mall can make, as well as policy shifts leadership can enact.

Defining spaces

First, it is important to define four categorizable areas that the Lloyd Center can be separated into: entrances, storefronts, common areas, and food. Each space is connected but interacts in a unique way with the placemaking frameworks and deserves individualized attention. Defining these spaces allows for tailored approaches and strategies for each category, since what is needed for one might not be for another. Each category has potential to satisfy different placemaking qualities, so it is important to address all four at once. This section defines the four spaces, details how they connect to the PPS framework, and provides a description of what they should look like according to my research.

Entrances

Entrances are the thresholds that connect the Lloyd Center to greater Portland. They are what sets the tone of the mall before a visitor walks through the door. Because of this, entrances need to be thoughtful and inviting. There are many doorways to the Lloyd Center, some through a store, some along a parking lot, but what defines a true entrance is its connection to a sidewalk. As discussed in the PPS analysis, all trips end as a pedestrian, so the pedestrian entrances are the most important to consider. There are three entrances that directly connect to a sidewalk.

Mentioned earlier, these are the north entrance directly along the sidewalk, the south entrance connected by a small corridor, and the southwest entrance which includes a small plaza.

Entrances primarily contribute to the access quality of a space, but also have potential to enhance the other three qualities as well. Since the Lloyd is positioned well along transit networks and has ample parking, improving the entrances is the next step in becoming an accessible space.

The YMCA and EMU both use their entrances to showcase what's inside through large windows that highlight eye-catching facilities. Without serious renovation, this is not in the cards for the Lloyd Center, but it can use other strategies to highlight its offerings. Bulletin boards or displays are easy and effective ways to do this. The Lloyd has a few displays near the ice rink that promote various shops, but they require users to have entered the mall already. These kinds of displays along the adjacent streets will catch the eye of passersby and can draw in more visitors.

Building off this, the plaza entrance has huge potential to go beyond displays to highlight the mall, and could feature pop ups or booths that promote a featured business, analogous to how vendors at the LCFM provide a limited selection of their offerings that encourage users to visit their primary location. A restaurant could provide samples, an art studio could sell pieces. This type of investment in the threshold experience sets a tone that the mall is lively and engaging throughout.

Lastly, the entrances as they currently exist are dull and unattractive. There is a great opportunity for the mall to partner with local artists to create murals or artwork that can bring life and energy to the spaces, and make them stand out visually.

Storefronts

Storefronts are the spaces the Lloyd Center leases out to other entities. There are about 150 storefronts, ranging in size and utility. There are four massive, multi-level sites that once housed the anchor stores, but the majority of the storefronts are closer to 1000 square feet. These sites have the potential to provide a huge range of activities and uses, many of which I touched on in the uses section for the Lloyd Center. Right now, most storefronts are vacant and boarded up. For any of the recommendations of this thesis to work, these vacancies need to be filled so that the mall feels lively and offers users things to do.

A key challenge with improving the storefront spaces is that the Lloyd Center is reliant on other entities to make good use of the space. It can incentivize businesses with low rents and special offers, but without consistent foot traffic there are not many incentives for a thriving business to move to the mall. Right now there are primarily startups and struggling businesses signing leases. That being said, every month more businesses move to the Lloyd Center. Management has proven successful, albeit slow, at attracting new tenants. They have control over who gets offers a good deal, which means they should keep in mind the aspects of well-defined uses.

Firstly, the storefronts need to have a range of short-term flexible rentals as well as long-term anchored rentals. Short-term spaces are good for events and art shows that might need a space for a day or a week. There could easily be a few spaces of different sizes for this purpose that could be altered quickly for various events. This model is how a lot of the art shows at the mall operate, such as the Spectrum Art Market which rents out a space for one Saturday every month. JD Cox has noticed a local shortage of good short-term rental spaces for art markets and pop ups, and appreciates the Lloyd Center for providing space, but feels like more could be done to support the artists and encourage more groups to host markets and shows. A long-term space

would mean a tenant is committed to the mall, and the mall is committed to them. These are businesses that need time to set up and establish themselves. Currently Smash Pickleball fits this category, having to alter a huge space and build courts. Long-term rentals could also attract professional entities that need more permanent meeting spaces. Sarah Taylor from the Braided River Campaign (a nonprofit that is currently renting out gallery space in the Lloyd Center) brought this up in our interview, explaining that the city council is looking for a centralized space to meet and have offices, which the Lloyd could easily offer if it was willing to provide stability.

There also needs to be a good mix of blended uses within the types of businesses that operate in the mall. Right now, there are a mix of nonprofits and traditional businesses, both providing different types of services to the mall user. Some shops provide experiences, some sell products, and some sell activities or lessons. As the Lloyd signs new tenants, it has to be mindful about what activities it brings in, and whether they conflict or complement the current mix. However, after learning more about how the case studies stay successful, it is clear that *what* shops occupy the storefronts is not necessarily as important as *why* or *how* they are chosen. Whether the shop is an art studio, gym, or electronics store, if it has reasoning and intention behind it, it can be impactful. The farmers market and the YMCA offer completely different services, yet both are hubs of socialization and draw huge crowds. This is because they both are intentional in why they offer what they do. They both respond to key community needs. The market – the need for fresh local produce; the Y – the need for indoor exercise. Both are needs that can be satisfied elsewhere. There are plenty of online tutorials for home workouts and tons of options for vegetable purchasing across Eugene. This is why *how* they offer these services

also matters. They provide spaces that foster socialization and build community, so people enjoy using their services over other options.

For the Lloyd Center, these examples represent the importance of why they choose shops to occupy storefronts, and how they support them. The current tenants are shops that have been priced out of other rental spaces. Nobody I spoke to was there because they thought it was the best for foot traffic or business, but because it was such a good rent deal. This means they are getting unique local shops, but these shops are not guaranteed to be responsive to community needs. As the mall progresses it can still attract businesses by offering cheap rent, but it should be intentional in who it is giving those deals to and what communal needs it is addressing.

Lastly, the Lloyd needs to facilitate social programming in its spaces. Various groups have recently put on some dances, art shows, and concerts, and management should work to make these programs a regular and reliable occurrence. These types of events are methods of active socialization infrastructure, an important first step to convince the community that the Lloyd Center is relevant. There are plans to remodel the old Nordstrom space into a concert venue, but the Lloyd Center does not need a new space to start hosting shows. Portlanders love a weird location, and do not need the amenities of a traditional venue. Concerts in parks are hugely successful and draw big crowds during the summer. When the weather is bad, open up the old Macy's and have a show.

Common areas

The common area is all the space between shops. Mostly this means hallways and walkways that shoppers use to get around the mall, but there are a few key open areas that serve as destinations in their own right. The common areas of the Lloyd Center can best impact the comfortability of the space, by offering space where users can hang out. This area is where the

Lloyd Center management has the most control in shaping how users interact with the space. It is the public space of the mall. Each case study utilized its public space to build a welcoming environment, and the Lloyd can benefit a lot from their methods.

Firstly, the YMCA demonstrates the importance of free amenities to draw users in. They have daily coffee, a TV, a bulletin board, and a small library that enhances the public hang out space. The care put into these amenities makes the users feel encouraged to stay and come back. These amenities do not make a profit for the Y; rather, they are an investment in the Eugene community. In return, the Y increases its positive image within the city. If the Lloyd Center really wants people to use the space and hang out, it needs to offer amenities. A few TVs showing local events and sports with couches, a child play area that offers more than the basic plastic play structure, an art gallery that displays local artists. People will care about the space if it shows it cares about them.



Figure 16: Lloyd Center Hallway

The current Lloyd Center hallway seating layout. A couch or bench every 20 feet or so makes the space feel isolating and discourages interactions between seated users. It also does not offer seating for large groups. Photo taken March 27th, 2025.



Figure 17: Lloyd Center Common Area

This area is on the west side of the first floor. The space is bare, with just a few tall tables that are rarely used. It is open and spacious but feels disconnected because the adjacent storefronts are all vacant. Photo taken March 27th, 2025.

Next, the LCFM is a great example of the power of entertainment in open space. There are constantly buskers playing music in every corner of the market, and they are encouraged to stay by market leadership. The music enhances the experience for shoppers, and in return the buskers earn tips. Many shoppers will even stop and watch a performer for a few minutes. Live music is not by any means traditional for a shopping mall, but could nonetheless drastically improve the mood at the Lloyd Center and effectively utilize the open space.

Lastly, the most important element in improving comfort and retaining shoppers is providing good seating. The EMU is the best example I have seen of this. The seating there is truly phenomenal. It is varied, comfortable, and, most importantly, social. The layout of couches and chairs and tables allows users of the space (who are mostly awkward college students) to feel comfortable striking up a conversation with a stranger or complimenting a sticker on their water bottle. As mentioned, the current seating in the Lloyd is dispersed and uninviting. Rarely do users utilize it, and never does anyone talk to the person sitting near them.

In addition to the hallways, the Lloyd has three large open spaces that could be thoughtfully filled following these recommendations.

Food

Generally, the food courts in malls are an afterthought. They are not the main attraction, and provide a basic set of options, usually from chain restaurants. For the Lloyd Center to be successful, this must change. Portland is a food city. Every neighborhood has an array of local restaurants offering customers a unique dining experience. Portlanders are excited by new, experimental restaurants, not national chains. Recently Kann, a restaurant that blends Haitian cuisine with Pacific Northwest themes, has taken Portland by storm. It has a limited and unique menu, and Portlanders love it. If the Lloyd Center could tap into foodie excitement, it could draw a whole new audience to the mall.

I spoke with Michael Russell, a Portland-based food critic, about the Lloyd Center's food scene. He believes that, with the right incentives and partnerships, the mall could attract a handful of hot local restaurants to the food court, each with a unique specialty, that could make the mall a real attraction. Each spot would only need to offer a few menu items. To paraphrase

Russell, if the Lloyd Center were to open a dumpling spot that served only three, maybe four, types of dumplings, but executes them well, it would be popular within a month.

The Lloyd Center's food court certainly does not offer the amenities of a 5-star restaurant, but Portlanders have shown that is not important, and they will spend money on good food no matter where it is. Food cart pods are some of the most popular dining options in the city. Many pods have outdoor seating at picnic tables, serve food on paper plates with plastic utensils, and have no wait staff to clean or bus tables. And yet, people are willing to spend \$20 on a food cart burger. The Lloyd has a huge advantage already over food cart pods because its food court is indoors with climate control. If the mall attracts enough unique and exciting local restaurants, it can easily become a hub of the Portland food scene.

Community programming

The last two recommendations that emerged from my research do not fit into a certain space, but are broadly about how the Lloyd Center management can conduct the space as a whole to build a feeling of community around the mall.

In the past few years, the Lloyd Center has been hosting various activities and events. There are occasional dance parties, roller discos, and small concerts that use the space in new ways. These events are great at getting Portlanders back in the door in new and exciting ways; however, they need to be more consistent and reliable. Much like how the EMU has multiple weekly social events (bingo, trivia, movie nights, etc.) the Lloyd Center should establish a regular event schedule so users can build habits around these nights. The space could easily host concerts, dances, comedy shows, and parties that draw in a crowd. These events do more for the space than just get people through the door. Attendants will socialize and make connections, tying these relationships to the Lloyd Center and strengthening the feeling that it is a space where

community is built. Events also convey that the space is relevant as they draw bigger and bigger crowds. By promoting social activities and providing incentives and assistance, the Lloyd Center can become a reputable venue in the Portland event scene.

Finally, as each of these recommendations are examined and implemented, it is critical that management does so with proper community involvement. My findings provide the most impactful methods to create community at the Lloyd Center based on my research; however, every community is different, and needs and values shift constantly. What is relevant today may change tomorrow. The case studies examined all have policies and procedures in place to regularly check in with their community — whether it is by soliciting user feedback, holding listening sessions, or meeting with community leaders, they are intentional about engagement in every decision made. A key reason the Lloyd Center became a zombie mall was the growing disconnect between management and the community. This was exemplified with the remodel in 2017 that put \$100 million towards a spiral staircase inside the south entrance, rather than enhancing the space in ways users would appreciate (Marum, 2017). Shop owners today point to this remodel as a symbol of the out-of-touch management team, even as management has shifted, because they still feel that management does not understand their needs and values.

For the Lloyd Center to be successful, it has to actively and intentionally engage with the community by collecting detailed user feedback, creating listening sessions, being available and reachable, and connecting with community leaders. It needs to be responsive to the values and needs of not just its users, but all Portlanders, so that it is a relevant and impactful space.

Summary

The Lloyd Center needs to focus on four distinct spaces within the mall. Each area has unique significance to the success of the mall as a whole. First, the mall needs inviting and

accessible entrances, specifically making improvements to the three entrances that connect to the street. Second, the mall needs a variety of uses within its storefronts that offer a mix of services, programs, and entertainment to draw different types of interactions with the space. Third, the mall needs inviting common areas, so that once users are there, they feel welcome to stay. The most important way to do this is with comfortable and social seating. Lastly, the food court has to feature exciting local food, so the mall feels like a cohesive part of the larger city. As the Lloyd Center makes these improvements, it must also continually consider social programming in each space. These are the concerts, events, and activities that bring in new users to interact with the mall in new ways. Most importantly, every decision has to be made with community involvement, so that the space is responsive to Portlanders' needs and values and reflective of the city as a whole.

Closing remarks

Limitations

This thesis reflects four years of studying in the school of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, and a year of engaging with space at the Lloyd Center specifically. My experience at the University of Oregon gave me valuable insights and tools to conduct this research, but even so I had limitations and unexplored questions which I will outline below.

First, this thesis did not explore how my reimagined Lloyd Center would perform economically, and if it would be a sustainable business. A business thesis on this topic could recommend plans for rent deals and incentives to entice tenants to the space and marketing strategies to bring in more shoppers. Additionally, I would have liked to research other forms of ownership models — especially co-ops — to explore if other options are more conducive to a community space than the ownership by large real estate firms.

Economics are an issue because the current low rent deals are unsustainable to make profit. As more businesses move in and demand for space increases, management will naturally raise rent in response. The businesses that will be able to afford rent are the ones that cater towards a higher income demographic, already have an established presence, or have capital to invest. The current array of small businesses and nonprofit groups will be priced out. This concern was voiced in a couple of the interviews I conducted with shops that were just starting out. They feel that their presence is what makes the mall unique and interesting. If rent increases, they will be forced to close their doors — gentrification for retail tenants. If the mall's management views the small shops as important to the cohesion of the space, though, there are strategies to retain them. Management could use more profitable tenants to subsidize those that are less profitable, such as nonprofits and small businesses. This would lessen overall profitability but contribute to an impactful culture with a wider variety of uses. The mall could also seek governmental or grant-funded investments that support the inclusion of unprofitable, but important spaces, such as community services or programs. Exploring the economic realities of the Lloyd Center is an important consideration for its future, but beyond the scope of this thesis.

I was also limited by my technical capabilities. I used visuals to enhance my descriptions of existing spaces, but do not have the photoshop skills to show visuals of reimagined spaces that do not yet exist. Renderings and mockups would be useful to convey what a reimagined Lloyd Center would look like. With more time and design experience, I would have liked to make a mockup of each of the four spaces I talk about with the addition of my recommendations.

Lastly, I was unable to connect with anyone at the Lloyd Center management office. Despite calling, emailing, and visiting in person multiple times, I could not get a response. Their

perspective would have been useful in this project, to balance with my findings to give recommendations that align with their vision for the space. I especially would like to know how they view success at the mall, and what a successful place would look like to them. I imagine their answer would consist of seeing increased foot traffic, which my proposals would achieve. However, given how unresponsive and unreachable the management office is, it seems that my most pressing recommendation — the need for community voice and input — is clearly missing from the current Lloyd Center.

Public and private space

Next, I want to address the use of the PPS framework for a private commercial space. This application is unconventional because the successful place framework is geared towards nonprofits and governmental organizations that create very public spaces that are mission- or purpose-driven. The case studies, for example, are all driven by a mission that is not exclusively profit, whereas the purpose of the Lloyd Center is to generate profits for its parent firm. These two types of spaces seem incomparable at face value, but on closer examination have needs that are incredibly alike. For both goals, mission or profit, the means to achieve them (for the case studies as well as the Lloyd Center) is increasing users and foot traffic. For the mission-driven case studies, more people results in a larger community impact, aiding their goals of service. For the Lloyd Center, more customers results in more sales and larger profits. The PPS framework is a toolbox to bring users to a space and retain them. It is not a business plan or management strategy, but arguably more impactful for the success of the Lloyd Center — a space that depends on a strong user base. The current management team appears to value community in their goals. The slogan on the website is “reimagining community.” Even if this is corporate

exaggeration and they solely care about their bottom line, creating a more welcoming and responsive space will contribute to profit goals.

Next steps

I plan to share this thesis with Portland City officials as well as Lloyd Center shop owners and management. I have been offered to present my findings in the Braided River Campaign's space in the Lloyd Center and will follow up in the coming weeks. I also will look into providing public comment at a Portland City Council hearing. The city has invested in transit lines and bike paths around the Lloyd Center, giving officials motivation to see the space succeed. I am hoping city officials will realize the importance of community space and the potential the Lloyd Center possesses, and therefore use incentives and regulations to direct the mall towards a successful future. (Conveniently, public comment slots are three minutes long, much like the Clark Honors College Three Minute Thesis Competition, in which I took first place!) Whether the Lloyd Center chooses to listen to my recommendations or not, the existence of this thesis represents the need for more creativity and thoughtfulness to be put into failing public spaces.

Love for the Lloyd Center

Lastly, I want to end by highlighting an overarching theme from my interviews. Nearly every shopkeeper or user of the Lloyd Center I spoke with was quick to mention their love for the Lloyd Center. Many business owners grew up coming to the mall and have fond memories of it thriving. In addition to their rent deals, their connection to the space is what led them to open shops. Multiple interviewees mentioned that the bulk of their customers, especially the older ones, will regale them with stories of their childhood spent in the mall, and are happy to see some spark of life within its walls after years of darkness. The Lloyd Center represents more to

Portlanders than just a mall. It is a special place that people like to root for. When the first few high-profile shops started to move their business to the mall, there was excitement in the community. The Lloyd Center is not just another dying mall. It is a Portland institution that, with a few changes, can become a modern icon of the city.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Questions:

I structured my interviews with business owners around these nine questions, but much of the conversation developed in response to my interviewee:

1. First, tell me about your business and what brought you to the Lloyd Center?
2. What are the limitations of the space you're in and the mall in general?
3. What are the benefits of your space and the Lloyd Center?
4. Do you see the Lloyd Center as your permanent home?
5. What does a typical day look like?
6. What are relationships like between shops in the mall? Do you enjoy being around so many different types of shops?
7. Do your customers typically visit the mall just for your store, or do they come to the mall for other reasons and wander in?
8. What is missing from the Lloyd Center?
9. What do you want the mall to look like in the future?

My interviews with leaders of the case studies followed a different set of questions, but were more divergent from the planned structure in order to respond to the interviewee and space:

1. Tell me about your space and what services it provides.
2. What does community mean in your context?
3. Who is your target demographic?
4. What do you do to get new people to your space?
5. How do you measure success?
6. What does your space provide that other third places don't?

7. What guides your organization?
8. Is interest growing or shrinking? Is it seasonal or consistent?
9. What lessons could any community space learn from you?

Appendix 2: Presentation materials

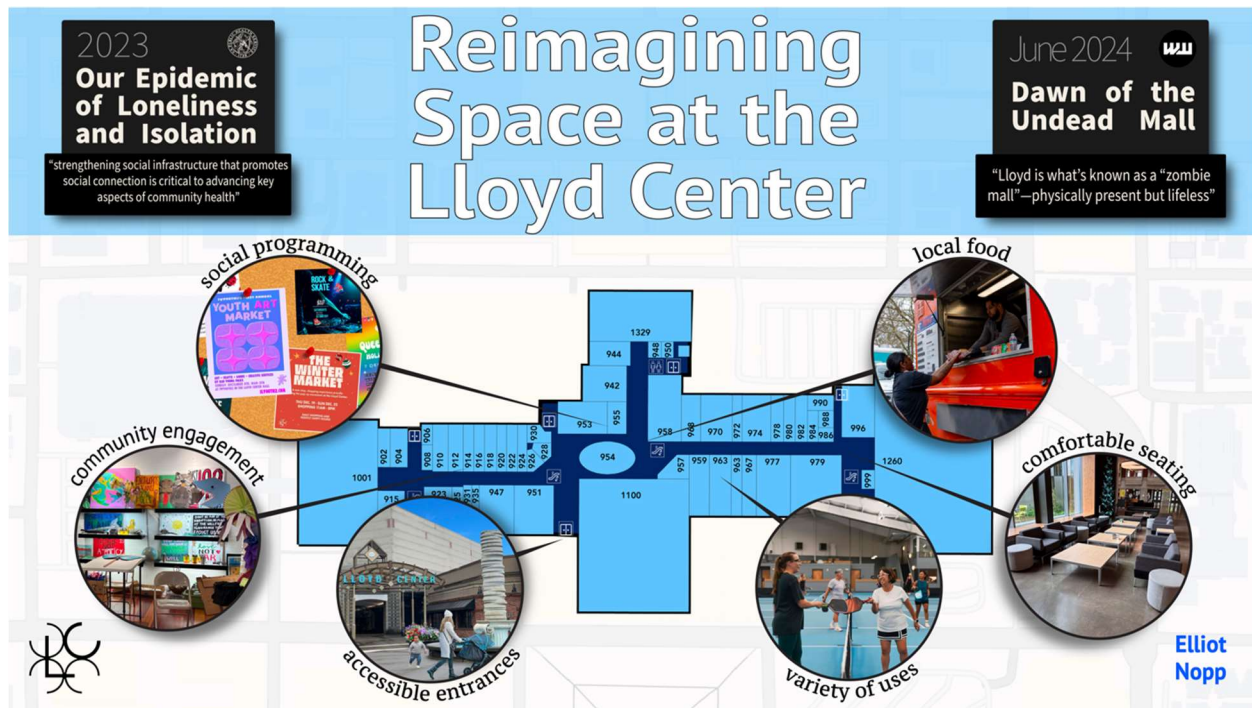


Figure 18: Three Minute Thesis slide

This graphic was displayed during the Three Minute Thesis competition as I presented my speech. It highlights background information on the top part of the slide and the various recommendations on the bottom, all centered around a stylized map of the mall.



Figure 19: PPPM Award Showcase Poster

This 24x36 inch poster was displayed at the PPPM award showcase along with other student work, and visitors had a chance to talk with me to learn more about my project and findings.

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