

North Downtown Waterfront Development: Urban Design Proposals

Fall 2010 • Architecture

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Sustainable Cities Initiative

Acknowledgements

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About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI) is a cross-disciplinary organization at the University of Oregon that seeks to promote education, service, public outreach, and research on the design and development of sustainable cities. We are redefining higher education for the public good and catalyzing community change toward sustainability. Our work addresses sustainability at multiple scales and emerges from the conviction that creating the sustainable city cannot happen within any single discipline. SCI is grounded in cross-disciplinary engagement as the key strategy for solving community sustainability issues. We serve as a catalyst for expanded research and teaching, and market this expertise to scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and project partners. Our work connects student energy, faculty experience, and community needs to produce innovative, tangible solutions for the creation of a sustainable society.

About SCY

The Sustainable City Year (SCY) program is a year-long partnership between SCI and one city in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with the partner city on sustainability and livability projects. SCY faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner city through a variety of studio projects and service-learning courses to provide students with real-world projects to investigate. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches to difficult, persistent problems. SCY's primary value derives from collaborations resulting in on-the-ground impact and forward movement for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future. SCY 2010-11 includes courses in Architecture; Arts and Administration; Business Management; Interior Architecture; Journalism; Landscape Architecture; Law; Planning, Public Policy, and Management; Product Design; and Civil Engineering (at Portland State University).

About Salem, Oregon

Salem, the capital city of Oregon and its third largest city (population 157,000, with 383,000 residents in the metropolitan area), lies in the center of the lush Willamette River valley, 47 miles from Portland. Salem is located an hour from the Cascade mountains to the east and ocean beaches to the west. Thriving businesses abound in Salem and benefit from economic diversity. The downtown has been recognized as one of the region's most vital retail centers for a community of its size. Salem has retained its vital core and continues to be supported by strong and vibrant historic neighborhoods, the campus-like Capitol Mall, Salem Regional Hospital, and Willamette University. Salem offers a wide array of restaurants, hotels, and tourist attractions, ranging from historic sites and museums to events that appeal to a wide variety of interests. 1,869 acres of park land invite residents and visitors alike to enjoy the outdoors.

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Executive Summary

During the fall 2010 academic term at the University of Oregon, five groups of three students in an architecture studio course worked with the City of Salem to develop five schemes for the redevelopment of the North Downtown Waterfront.

The students investigated existing site conditions and a variety of factors influencing development of this particular part of Salem. These investigations led the students to focus on some key issues that would be addressed by the broad range of the groups' design schemes, including:

- The Commercial Street barrier, currently blocking access to the Willamette River, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians
- A significantly underutilized Mill Creek
- The rail line on Front Street
- The potential for direct connections to other parts of Salem, via bike paths along waterways, Union Street for east/west connections, or Liberty Street for downtown accessibility

With these issues in mind, groups began to branch out into their own particular visions of what the area could become in the future. Each group took an individual approach and worked toward a unique scheme, but all students stressed the importance of a few common elements:

- Including special public places within the site
- Encouraging a more bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment
- Moving toward a more sustainable community, including green streets, bioswales, and ecological preservation of the creek and river habitat
- Creating an overall mixed-use district that would help to form a unique and inviting community for Salem residents and visitors

This report documents the students' investigations into current conditions and possible future scenarios.

Introduction

The Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI) is a cross-disciplinary organization that addresses sustainability from the region down to the building. SCI engages faculty and students at the University of Oregon in research and design while providing service and technical assistance to a different city each year. As part of a year-long partnership between the University of Oregon and the City of Salem, the North Downtown Waterfront Development studio focused on the area north of Union Street and south of Mill Creek, and east of the Willamette River and west of High Street.

The students of the North Downtown Waterfront Development studio were in a unique position to help generate big ideas and an overall vision for what the neighborhood could be.

This North Downtown Waterfront site contains industrial buildings, car lots, and other stand-alone businesses that do not make full use of the value and possibility of the area. Currently the riverfront is zoned for high-density residential, but progress in that direction has been minimal. The City of Salem is in a unique position to help move the neighborhood in a new direction, and the students of the North Downtown Waterfront

Development studio were in a unique position to help generate big ideas and an overall vision for what the neighborhood could be.

The studio took place in the fall of 2010. Students worked in cooperation with students in a planning, public policy, and management course, particularly during the beginning context investigations. The studio was led by Nico Larco, assistant professor of architecture and Associate Director of the Sustainable Cities Initiative. Allen Lowe, a former planner for the City of Eugene, Oregon, assisted with the studio. The following report is a summary of the students' work and recommendations.

Existing Conditions

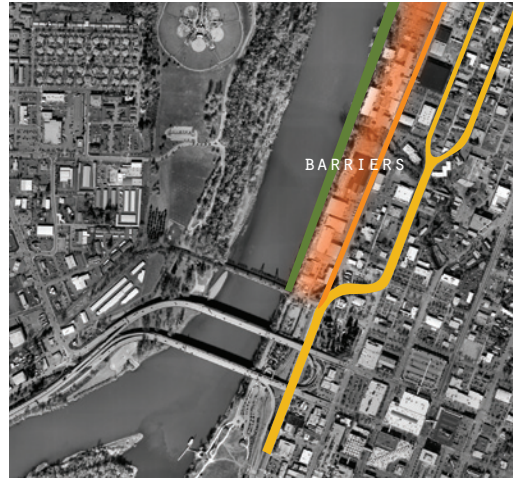
Salem is the state capital of Oregon, and with a population of 157,000, it competes with Eugene for the second or third most populous city in Oregon. Salem is located in the heart of the Willamette Valley and straddles the Willamette River and the border of Marion and Polk Counties. The downtown core offers retail and other commercial amenities and is closely connected with vital historic neighborhoods, the campus-like Capitol Mall, and Willamette University. Salem is surrounded by green pastures and enjoys the benefit of a vibrant agricultural community in the surrounding area.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the site. Source: City of Salem.

SWOT Analysis

As part of the initial site research and understanding, each group of students prepared a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, assessing the overall area. A more detailed version of this analysis appears in the Key Observations section below.



Figures 2 and 3: Diagrams illustrating identified strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- Proximity to the river
- Mill Creek
- Bike path bridge
- Marion Square Park
- Wallace Marine Park

Weaknesses

- Commercial Street
- Existing railway
- Limited river access
- Site contamination
- Oversized city blocks



Figures 4 and 5: Diagrams illustrating identified opportunities and threats.

Opportunities

- Views to river and natural environment
- Bike/pedestrian linkage between parks
- Repair Mill Creek
- Revitalize street frontage
- Industrial history and character

Threats

- Dangerous crossings
- Noise pollution
- Isolated from central commercial district

A few key site elements stood out right away, but did not necessarily fit into a single category. The rail line along Front Street can be seen as an existing weakness due to its location and the overall street design, but it also offers an opportunity to reference the history and character of the area and create a unique place. Commercial Street is currently a barrier to bike and pedestrian access, but with high traffic volume comes high visibility, which could provide an opportunity for commercial businesses in the area. The proximity to Mill Creek and the Willamette River are strengths of the site, but the past and present industrial uses have taken a toll on the ecological health of the area, and both waterways are currently underutilized.

Block Structure and Street Character

The North Downtown Waterfront site accommodates a high volume of traffic on a series of one-way streets, most having a large right-of-way. Commercial Street currently provides the largest barrier on the site, accommodating five lanes of one-way traffic without any median as it cuts through the site. Liberty Street provides the other half of the one-way couplet and also accommodates a lot of traffic. Front Street is used as a bypass for local traffic, but it does not see as much traffic as the Commercial Street / Liberty Street couplet. The perception of accessibility and safety on the street is low due to the train tracks running down the center of the street and the absence of a car/train barrier. While traffic is anticipated to increase generally throughout all of Salem, for the purposes of this studio, students were asked to assume that an additional bridge would be built across the Willamette River to keep the traffic flow through the site at a steady volume. Traffic considerations were therefore a strong influence on design decisions. However, even though the high volume of traffic could be perceived as a barrier, the site's resulting high visibility could also be an advantage.

The character of the streets is very vehicle-oriented. There are large rights-of-way with a lot of pavement, and very few buildings come anywhere near the edge of their lot lines. Street trees are not prominent, and other public

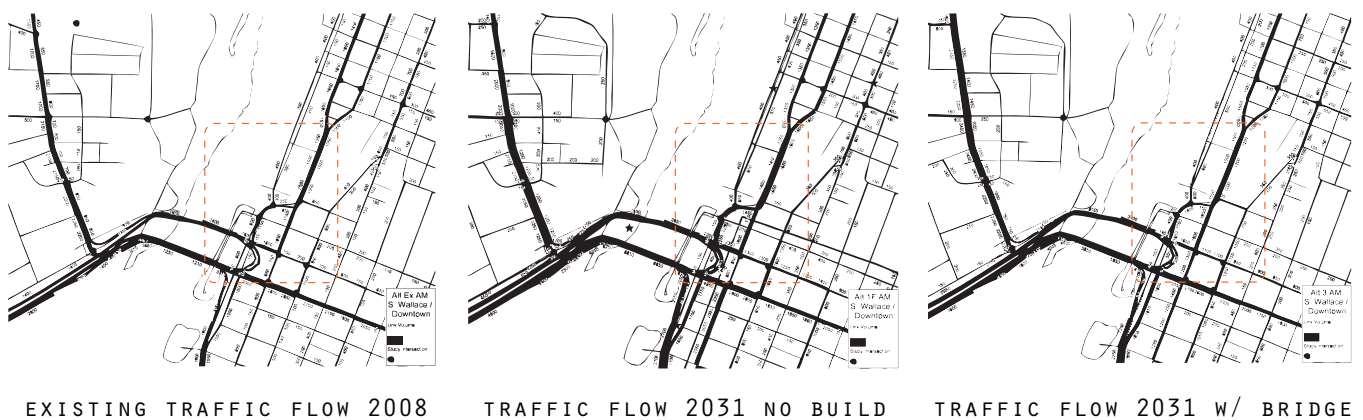
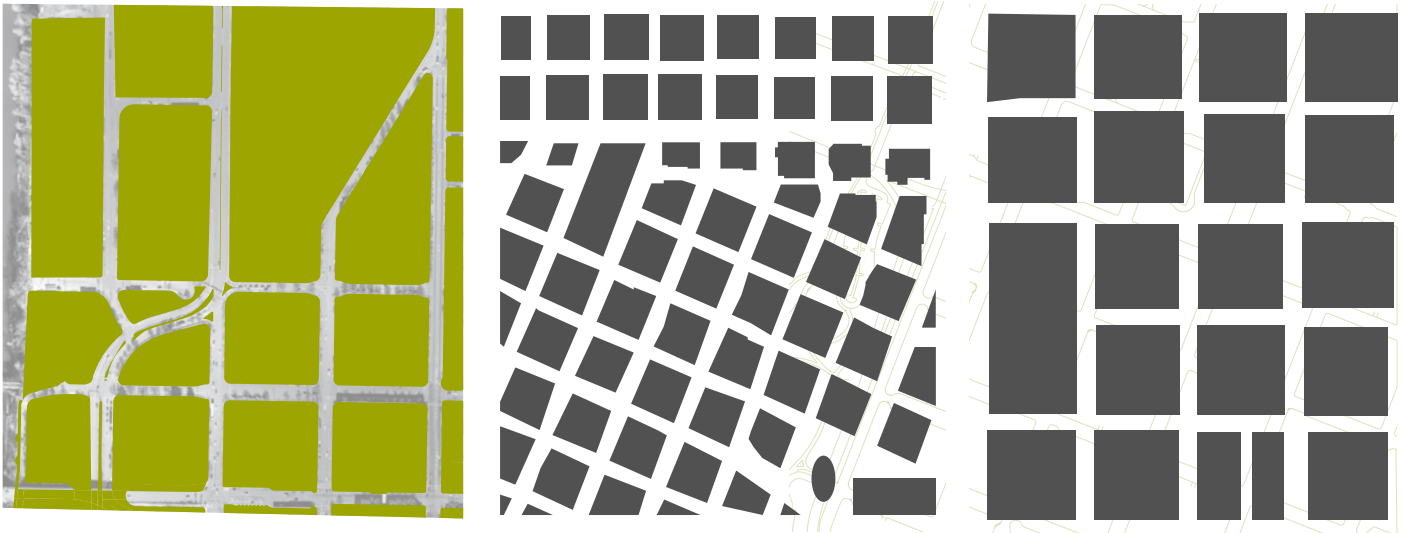


Figure 6: Traffic projections. Source: Julie Warncke, courtesy of the City of Salem Public Works Department

amenities, such as benches, trash cans, and bike racks are largely absent. This particular kind of street character, and the North Downtown Waterfront area in general, does not support a pedestrian friendly environment.

Block sizes in the site area are typically 400 feet by 400 feet, with some nearly double that. Within the individual blocks, there is a low density of generally low-rise buildings within a highly paved area, made up mostly of surface parking lots.



Figures 7 - 9: Figure-ground studies of blocks in Salem, Portland, and Eugene, Oregon, respectively, at the same scale.

Methodology

This report contains a summary of analysis and urban design recommendations from the first term of a two-term architecture studio course. The design studio included architecture students at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Students in the two-term studio focused on the North Downtown Waterfront area during both terms, but only the first half of the fall 2010 term focused on the urban design of the North Downtown Waterfront area. A forthcoming report will summarize student design work from the rest of fall term and the winter term.

The design studio was divided into five groups of three students to work on an urban design proposal for the North Downtown Waterfront area. The focus was to research and understand what the existing conditions are, what the community members would like to see in the area, and what the possibilities are for the future vision of the area. To accomplish these goals, students conducted a collaborative charrette with planning students, site visits, community engagement, and precedent research. The first site visit took place in early October, when nearly 60 students, from the architecture and planning departments, met in a new and successful development on the northeast edge of the site. Students listened as several city employees and community members shared their knowledge and vision for the site, then the group toured the area on foot to get an in-depth feel for the place.

Design efforts were focused on the area between the Willamette River and Broadway Street on the west and east, and Mill Creek and Union Street on the north and south, but all of the groups studied and considered the broader Salem plan and how nearby downtown, parks, schools, and civic centers both affect the North Downtown Waterfront site and are affected by it. Students looked particularly carefully at current traffic conditions and investigated realistic possibilities for relieving congestion and improving access to the many amenities of the area.

Through site analysis, community input, cooperative charrettes, and a lot of creative thought, the five groups documented plans for the future of the North Downtown Waterfront. While the ideas for these plans were to consider physical and economic viability, the students were also encouraged to think big and look at the site with a 30-year time horizon in mind. With this long-term vision, students could understand and examine short-term needs and starting points, while not necessarily being tied to current conditions and previous design assumptions in the area.

After the five urban design schemes were complete, three students continued to look at the public realm of their respective schemes. For the second five weeks of the fall term, these students focused on one large site located within the overall scheme and fleshed out a more detailed design strategy for that site. Those three focused explorations are shown in the Scenario Detail sections after Scenarios I, II, and IV below.

Key Observations

Student groups made and recorded some key observations during the research and analysis phase and throughout the entire design process. The observations below gave students an understanding of the opportunities and constraints of the project and helped to shape the goals of the final scenarios.



Figure 10: Willamette River.

Willamette River

- The Willamette River directly borders the northwest portion of the site.
- While the river is difficult to access from this area because of high banks (roughly 32 feet high), there are great possibilities to highlight views and awareness of the currently hidden riverfront.
- The recently opened Union Street Railroad Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge provides access across the river and increases visibility of any current or future development along the river banks.



Figure 11: Mill Creek.

Mill Creek

- Mill Creek offers an ecological amenity throughout the city, connecting the Willamette River with popular spots in the eastern part of the city.
- The creek is currently hidden, with few and rarely public access points, particularly in the North Downtown area.
- The confluence of Mill Creek and the Willamette River is at the northwest corner of the site. The banks at the confluence are not as steep as in most areas, and this spot offers a unique connection between waterways that is more accessible than other points throughout the site.

Transportation

- Vehicular traffic on most of the site is rather high, providing the main routes connecting downtown with north Salem.
- The high traffic on Commercial Street forms an east/west barrier for pedestrian activity through the site.
- Front Street provides a local bypass to avoid Commercial Street, but the rail line interferes with the bypass's effectiveness.

- The train tracks are located in the center of Front Street, at grade, causing perceived and actual time delays and safety concerns. Because the tracks have sunk into the ground, they need to be rebuilt. This provides the perfect opportunity to investigate whether or not the center of the street is the ideal place for the tracks.
- The Union Street bridge is a valuable amenity, but currently does not easily or directly connect bicyclists and pedestrians to downtown, or to north or east Salem.

Block Infrastructure

- Blocks are large, typically 400 feet by 400 feet, and occasionally as long as 800 feet, mostly divided into small parcels.
- While there are some existing alleys throughout the site, they are not often utilized for traffic purposes.
- There is currently only one street connecting to the waterfront on the river side, leaving most of the riverfront blocks connected as one large block.

Public Amenities

- There are three main parks near the site, Marion Square Park, Riverfront Park, and Wallace Marine Park.
- The Historic Downtown District is only a few blocks away, along with shopping and other commercial amenities.
- There has been some significant progress with new developments at Broadway Street and Market Street, offering commercial businesses and housing just to the northeast of the North Downtown Waterfront site. The Broadway development also offers a clear picture of what is possible in downtown Salem.



Figure 12: Union Street Railroad Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge.

Scenario Alternatives

The Scenario Alternatives found on the following pages represent the work of five different teams of three students each. All five of these scenarios addressed sustainability on a multitude of scales. Broad ideas such as density, bike and pedestrian friendly environments, livability, and transportation significantly influenced the programming and layout ideas for the North Downtown Waterfront redevelopment site. Smaller-scale ideas such as public places to sit and gather, waterfront connections, and permeable paving can also be seen in many of the scenarios. With the energy and input from community members, planners, developers, professors, and architects, the students of the North Downtown Waterfront redevelopment studio produced five different approaches to how this site can be transformed into a vibrant, beautiful, and sustainability-minded community spot.

Scenario I: The Warehouse District

Heather Metz, Amelie Reynaud, and Elizabeth Schmidt

The Warehouse District encourages local commercial development along a public river path, with strong connections made at the intersection of Front and Union Streets.

Scenario II: Liberty Square

Matt Linn, Krystan Menne, and Molly Rogers

The proposed Liberty Square provides a new town square for the City of Salem, connecting the site with the current downtown area through landscape, hardscape, and an ecologically-focused public place.

Scenario III: Living Lightly on the Waterfront

Miranda Hawkes, Tim Kremer, and Colin McNamara

This scenario would create a lively, active waterfront by engaging a variety of activities through the integration of commercial businesses, housing, and civic structures.

Scenario IV: New Town Center

Matt Brooke, Jay Cicack, and Alisha Snyder

The New Town Center scenario extends the character of downtown Salem farther north, emphasizing a pedestrian-friendly environment with a strong public connection between Mill Creek and the Willamette River, with a “greenbelt” path linking many Salem highlights.

Scenario V: Arbor Lane

Hugh Bitzer, Wanting Chen, and Natasha Owens

The Arbor Lane scenario focuses on connectivity, diversity, and sustainability through a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment. The proposed Arbor Lane would be a multi-modal urban promenade connecting the bend in Mill Creek with the Willamette River.

Scenario I: The Warehouse District

This scenario seeks to create a fully mixed-use district that contains housing for varied economic classes; daily services; commercial real estate for local shops, local artisans, and local producers; entertainment opportunities along the river and Front Street; and natural spaces that support ecological awareness and appreciation. The overall feel of the place tries to respect the current and historic structures and uses of the neighborhood by reusing existing structures and maintaining a location in Salem for production of tangible goods.



Pedestrian-friendly environment



Entertainment (nightlife)



Water and natural awareness

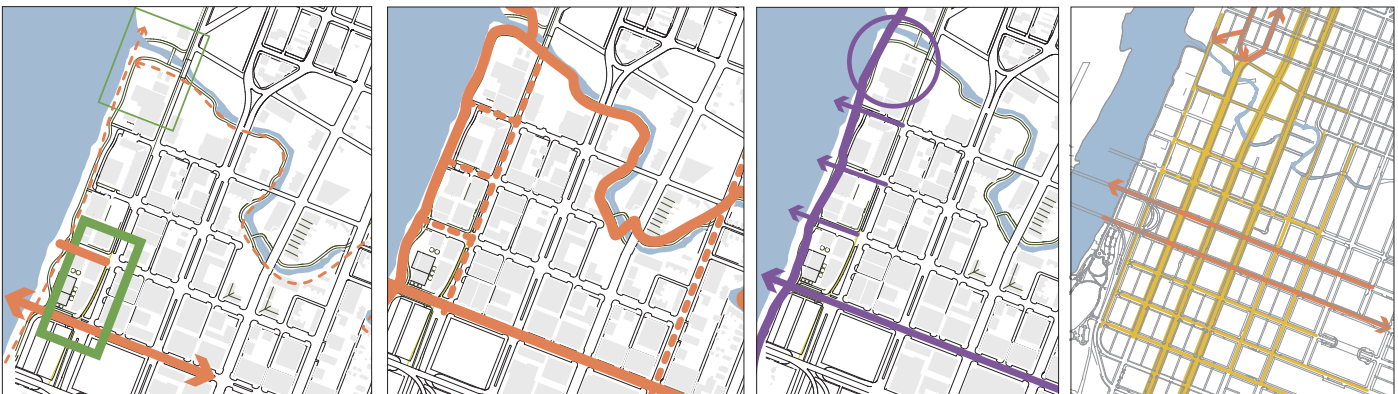


Local workshops

Figure 13: Concept diagram for the Warehouse District, a combination of these elements.

Goals

One of the main goals in creating the Warehouse District is to create a **hub of activity along the riverfront**, paying particular attention to the intersection of Front and Union Streets, and the Union Street Railroad Bridge access point. The “hinge” located at this point will signify the entrance to the heart of the district, the main spot for entertainment and nightlife. The area along the river, and the buildings facing Front Street will support local businesses, encouraging the



Figures 14 - 17: Scenario I: Diagram showing major bike pathways, Diagram showing pedestrian pathways, Diagram showing major connections to the river, and Traffic flow diagram showing one-way streets (orange) and two way streets (yellow).



Figure 18: Scenario I site plan.

act of production. Storefronts might include print shops, furniture studios, and artists' studios, with the inclusion of breweries, restaurants, bars, and stages for live performances, which will help to support a 24-hour district.

Scenario I also focuses greatly on walkability and creating a **pedestrian and bike friendly environment**. A bike and pedestrian path along the river and creek will help to connect various parts of the district as well as several amenities around Salem. The path will be continuous from Riverfront Park up to Mill Creek, and then continue along Mill Creek. This path will intersect and combine with the Union Street Railroad Bridge, and Union Street itself will also serve as a major pedestrian pathway to continue this bike/pedestrian network to Willamette University and the Capitol Mall.

Along with the major sites of commercial activity along the river and Union Street, the overall plan is one that tries to encourage a **mixed-use neighborhood**. Several types of housing will also be located throughout the site. Mixed-use buildings will provide smaller apartments at a higher density along Union Street. Affordable housing is included to support multiple socioeconomic groups. Smaller scale, lower density housing fits well on the northeast portion of the site, with direct access to the creek and some open green space.

Design Recommendations

As part of this “hinge” area, the block of Division Street that lies between Front Street and the river will act as a pedestrian street and provide service access for the businesses in that area. The street will be capable of supporting outdoor seating and gathering spots for the commercial businesses along it, and will terminate in a public viewing and gathering area in conjunction with the river path. The north portion of the riverfront zone offers enormous potential to include an indoor/outdoor market or an outdoor activity center, bringing awareness to local food production and riparian ecology. The outdoor activity



Figure 19: District zoning uses. Green represents the primarily commercial zone; orange represents the mixed use zone, with mostly ground-floor retail; and yellow represents the primarily residential area.



Figure 20: Detail plan of Union and Front Street intersection (Division Street at top).



Figures 21 and 22: Possible River Boardwalk perspective and Union Street perspective.



Figure 23: Parking diagram.

center could provide equipment rentals, educational classes, and activities, and it could serve as a community center for the people who enjoy its services.

Union Street will provide a connection for travelers (local and tourists) to the main Warehouse District and the river. Union Street will support pedestrian and commercial activities, and the green character of the street will help to signify its pedestrian nature, which will be especially noticeable when arriving at the street from a perpendicular direction. Higher structures (three to five stories) and mixed-use buildings will help keep Union Street active, with ground level retail supporting the needs of area residents. Other streets will be redesigned to include two-way traffic, more greenery, bioswales, bike lanes, on-street parking, and other traffic calming elements. The idea is to spread the

large volume of traffic on Commercial Street over three streets: Commercial, Liberty, and Broadway. Parking will be dealt with on a district scale, including a significant amount of on-street parking and a parking structure near the “hinge” at the Union and Front Street intersection. The changes in traffic flow and parking strategies will help to keep the area generally more urban in character, connecting with downtown Salem and supporting a lively and unique entertainment district.



Figure 24: View of the “hinge” from Union Street.

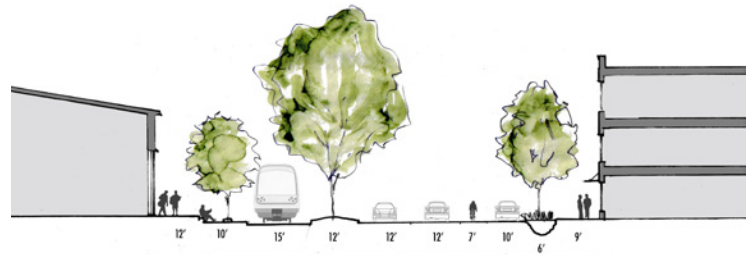
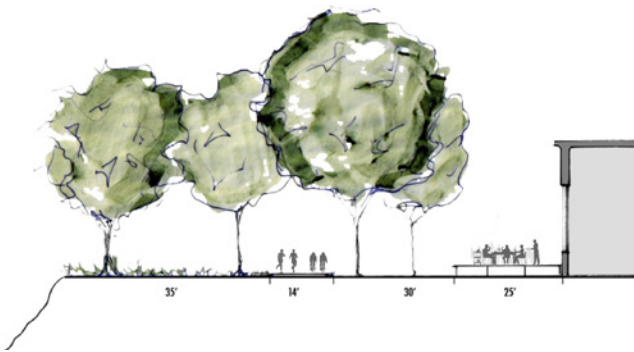
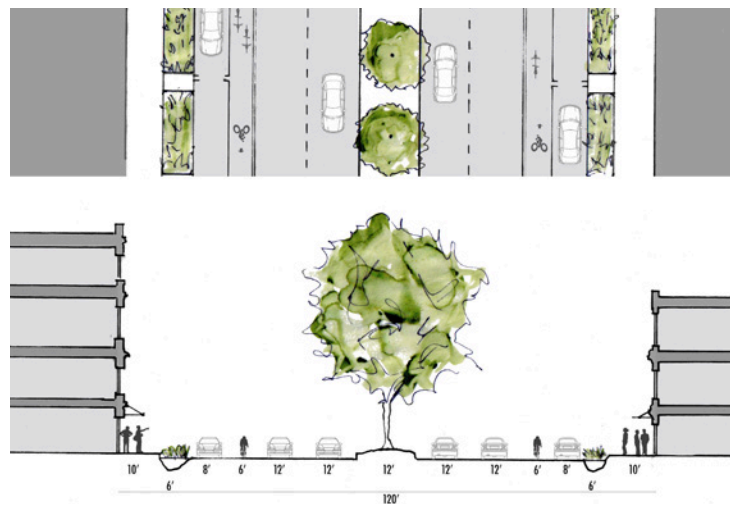
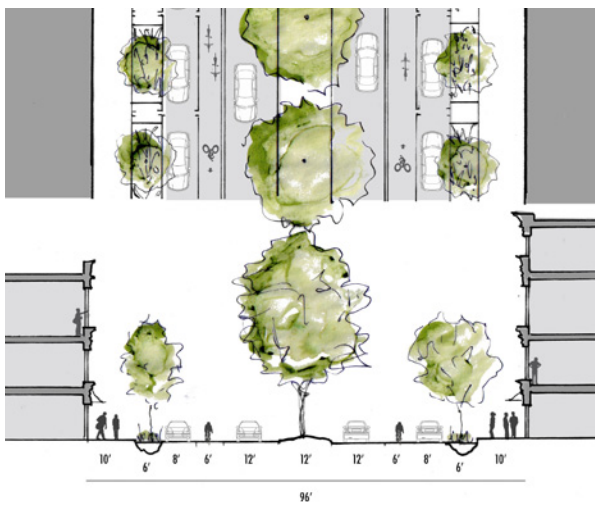
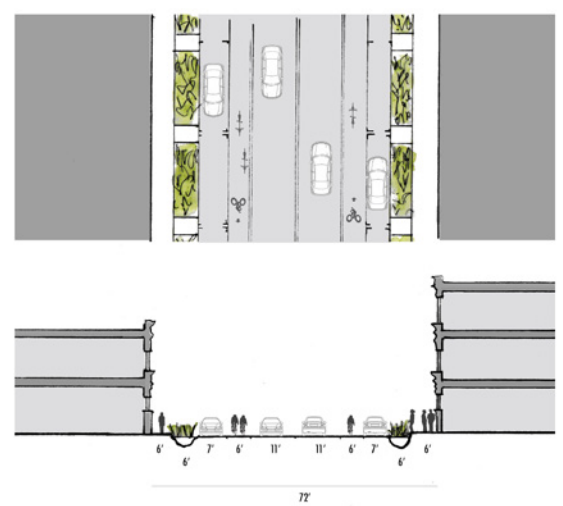
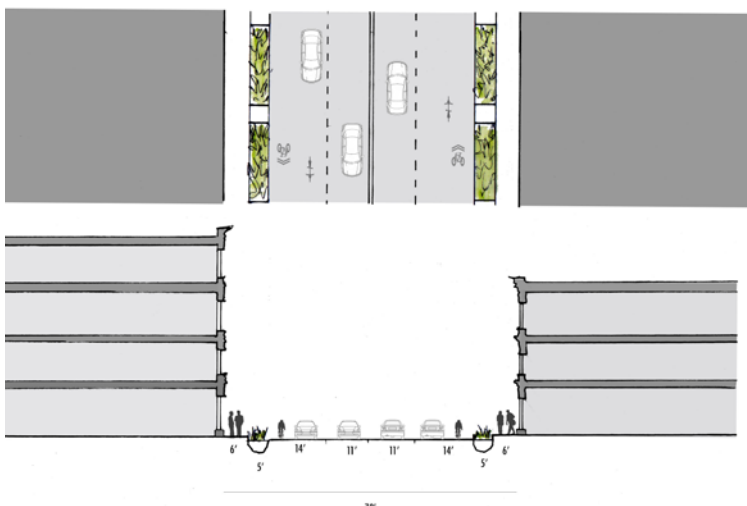


Figure 25: Sections through river path (left) and Front Street (right).



Figures 26 and 27: Street sections and plans for Union Street (left) and Commercial Street (right).



Figures 28 and 29: Street sections and plans for Liberty Street (left) and Division Street (right).

Scenario I Detail: Warehouse District Waterfront

The Salem Warehouse District Waterfront combines the appreciation of the area's industrial history with ideas of sustainability, while encouraging the Salem community to interact with a previously underutilized riverfront. The concept for the new urban design is the peeling or chipping away of existing man-made surfaces and allowing natural elements to emerge and blend beautifully with surrounding businesses and attractions.

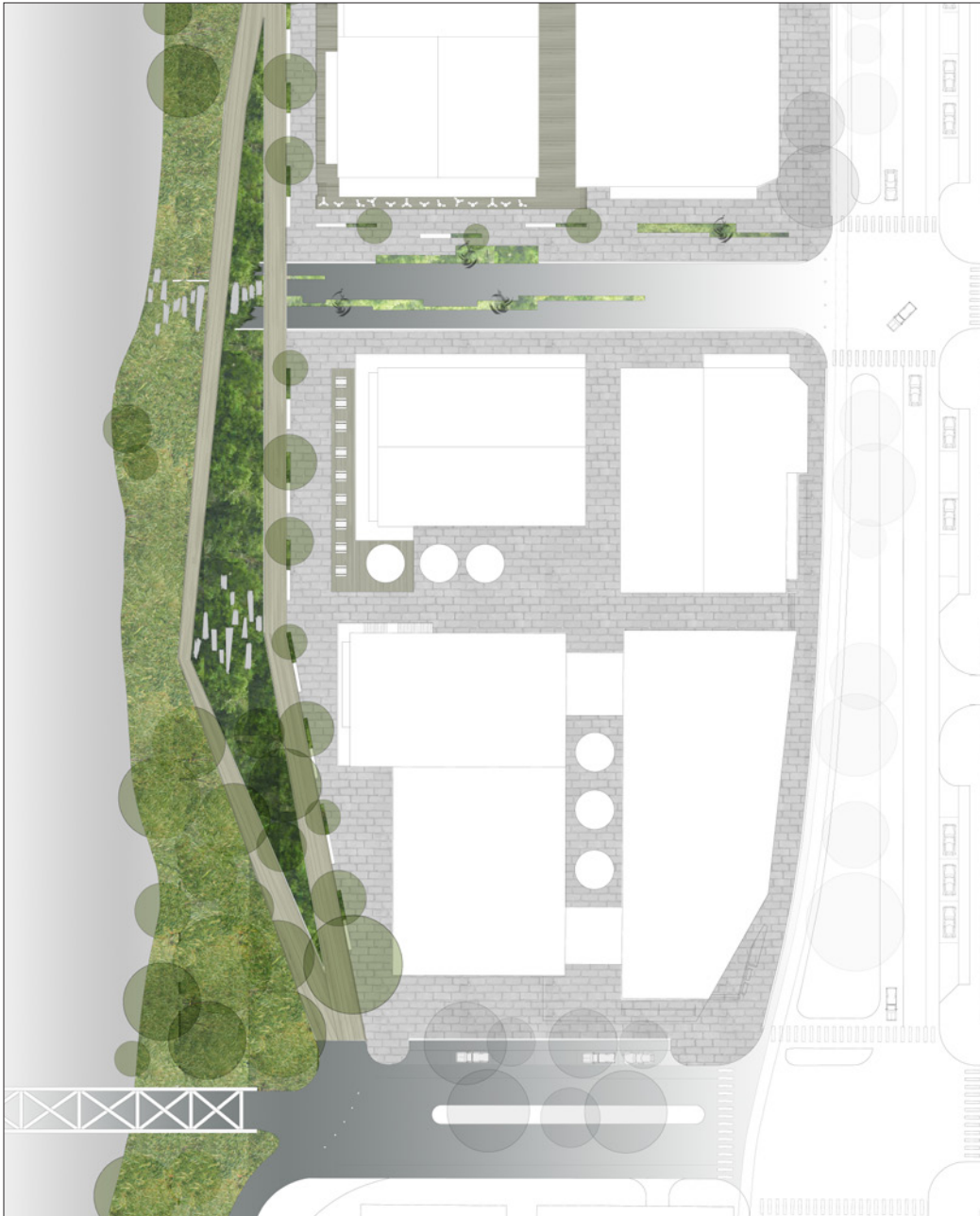


Figure 30: Warehouse District Waterfront plan.



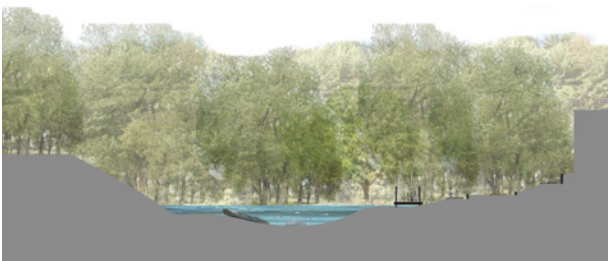
The new waterfront can be a popular place for walking, biking, enjoying riverside dining, or simply relaxing with beautiful views of the Willamette River. The design features rain gardens and permeable pavers to demonstrate sustainable storm water management, a sculpture garden, a boardwalk made of reclaimed railroad ties, custom steel benches and lighting, and areas for habitat restoration with interactive observation points.



Figure 31 - 33 (top to bottom): Site section of waterfront; View toward river on Division Street; View of river connection at Division Street.

Scenario II: Liberty Plaza

Scenario II focuses on sustainability, walkability, and public engagement through the connection of major public places via a waterfront boardwalk and Liberty Plaza, a new center for activity in the North Downtown Waterfront site.



Figures 34 - 36 (top to bottom): Perspective of the Mill Creek - Willamette River confluence; Perspective of the Mill Creek Dock; Cross-section through the dock.

Goals

Scenario II increases the visibility of, interaction with, and access to a sustainability focused and ecologically friendly environment. Street character and design is driven by the desire to **encourage multi-modal transportation** while providing features that can **improve the health of ecological amenities**. The proposed Liberty Plaza would **provide a new center for activity and directly connect to the current commercial hub** in downtown Salem. The proposal seeks to provide multiple connections to a variety of city features via many modes of transportation: pedestrian, bicycle, automotive, bus, and light rail.

Design Recommendations

The Boardwalk

The boardwalk embodies the idea of a living laboratory. It is an interpretive trail taking visitors around the borders of the site, along the Willamette River, down Mill Creek to Liberty Street. It progresses through ecological areas into industrial areas and illustrates the idea of using ecology to improve the urban condition.

Key elements of the boardwalk include:

- A loop from Union Street, along the Willamette River, down Mill Creek, down Liberty Street, and back to Union Street
- An interpretive trail with signs and examples of habitats
- Floating docks at the confluence of Mill Creek and the Willamette River, showing the current water level on the poles



Figure 37: Scenario II site plan.

Development along the riverfront begins with a public facility. The suggestion is for a research institute or a university-based laboratory. The rest of the riverfront is high density housing with retail and commercial activity permitted on the ground floor. The riverfront development would include buildings of three to four stories, with housing densities of 20 units per acre or more, and would maintain a 50 foot setback from the river.

Liberty Plaza

Liberty Plaza is an extension of the commercial development located in downtown Salem. It is created by widening a portion of Liberty Street between Union Street and Mill Creek.

The space and landscape of Liberty Plaza seeks to represent the collision of industry and ecology. At Union Street, the landscape mimics the street trees of Salem on a grid, beginning with a European Beech that mirrors an existing one in the 1600 block of Liberty Street. This zone then blends into an “orchard” style planting group of sedges, referencing the legacy of fruit orchards in Salem. The next zone is an oak savanna that blends across Division Street into the riparian zone. The riparian zone is represented with bioswales drawn along existing topographic lines. The section view of Liberty Plaza, Figure 38, also serves as a diagram explaining this progression of landscapes.

Key design elements include

- The central portion of the plaza, including hardscape, landscape, and bioswales
- Bioswales extending across the street and sidewalk to establish interaction between buildings, cars, and pedestrians



Figure 38: Liberty Plaza narrative section.



Liberty Plaza

Figures 39 and 40: Section through and perspective of Liberty Plaza.

Figure 41 (right): Detail plan of Liberty Plaza.



oak savannah

the symbiotic relationship between land and water. a city is as healthy as it's waterways.

riparian zone



The big changes to the current traffic flow focus on diverting traffic from the Front Street / Commercial Street interchange. To do this, High Street becomes a two-way street all the way through downtown. Front Street also becomes two-way through downtown, with the addition of two lanes (one each direction), and the rail line is moved to the west side of the street. Commercial Street becomes a two-way street between Marion and Center Streets. These changes, along with the addition of light rail, bike lanes, street trees, and pavement changes, will help to create a pedestrian friendly, multi-modal environment.



Figure 42: Broadway Street cross-section.



Figure 43: Front Street cross-section.



Figure 44: Union Street cross-section.



Figure 45: Division Street cross-section.



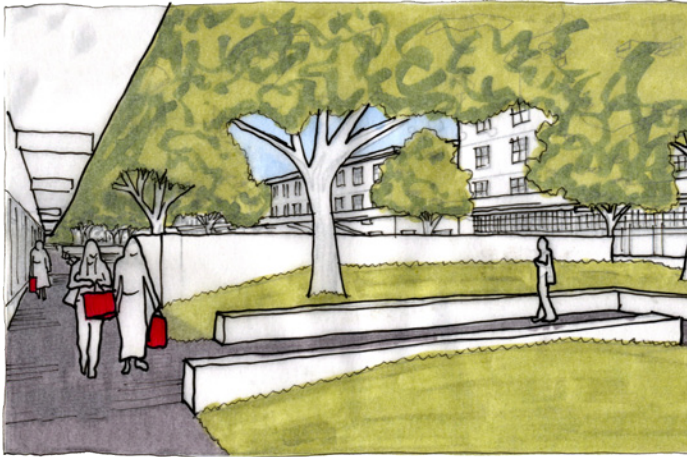
Figure 46: Mill Creek - Willamette River confluence cross-section.

Scenario II Detail: Liberty Plaza

Liberty Plaza is the new center for activity in the North Waterfront site, focusing on a unique interface between man and nature. Liberty Plaza will serve as a direct connection between the heart of downtown Salem and the proposed North Downtown Waterfront development, providing a variety of amenities for visitors, residents, and area employees.



Figure 47: Plan for Liberty Plaza.



Figures 48 and 49: Perspectives of Liberty Plaza park amenities.

The plaza is located on the west side of the street, directly adjacent to store fronts and other commercial spaces. The east side of the space offers a multi-modal street, including two-way vehicular traffic, public transit and bikeways. Amenities offered include a coffee stand or other food cart area, space for a farmer's market, grassy hills for sunbathing or picnicking, creekside patios to the north, and a playground offering equipment for children and adults alike.

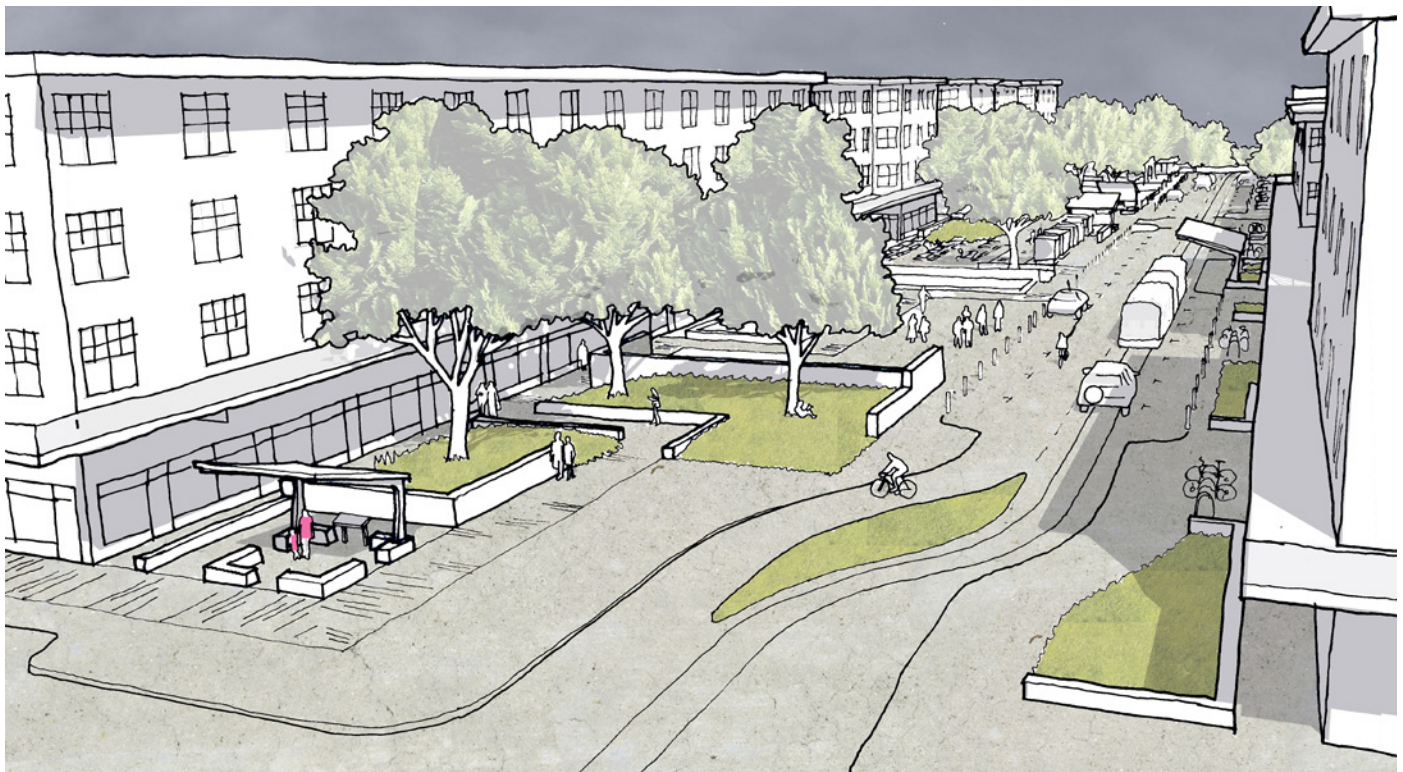


Figure 50: View of Liberty Plaza from the south entry.

Scenario III: Living Lightly on the Waterfront

Through the use of mixed-use buildings, Scenario III attempts to transform the waterfront into a lively, active area that encourages a multitude of activities,



Figure 51: Perspective of Front Street and the waterfront.

day and night. The design scheme provides a strong view axis toward the river, with a proposed new North Street that terminates at a fountain. This axis will help to create civic areas that are open to the public along the waterfront and form a public “Town Square” at the intersection of Front and North Streets with ample space for seating, a public market, a performance space, and other public activities.

Goals

Scenario III seeks to create a safe area that **encourages walking and biking without reducing or obstructing vehicle access**. Housing on upper floors along the river will help to maintain a presence at night and to highlight the river within the neighborhood. Office spaces along the river will help to maintain a daytime presence and support local businesses. A new bike/pedestrian trail looping around the site will increase access independent of roadways and increase exposure to the creek. These paths will also provide connections to the river and creek from the suburbs south and east of the site.

The neighborhood will provide **a variety of housing options**, allowing for a mix of apartment and condominium sizes, and live-work units, to accommodate a wider demographic, encouraging people to move closer to downtown. These housing units will respect surrounding neighborhoods by creating a gradient of density, with the highest density along the river, decreasing toward established neighborhoods.

Scenario III also seeks to **create a strong extension of the downtown area**, using Liberty Street as a continuation of retail from the downtown area, connecting to the creek and turning toward Front Street.

Design Recommendations

In Scenario III, the riverfront zone is conceived as a mixed-use area. While housing and local businesses will make up a large part of the space, the inclusion of an interpretive center or museum, along with a clear connection from North Downtown to the river, will help to make the riverfront a destination for Salem visitors as well as Salem residents. The potential for a recreation center at the south end of the waterfront also creates a local draw and provides activity that ties into the existing park system.



Figure 52: Scenario III site plan.



Figure 53: Front Street perspective.

A greenbelt system along the river and creek will help create a framework for pocket parks and bike/pedestrian trails, while linking into existing paths to create a larger network. This system provides an opportunity to improve the ecology of the waterfront and creek. Introducing bioswales throughout the site will help to clean stormwater before it enters the creek and river. Maintaining a minimum setback distance of 50 feet from the river and Mill Creek will reduce the ecological impact of development. The possibilities to

improve the ecological habitat include the reintroduction of native plant species and community education about ecological restoration and the importance of healthy ecosystems.

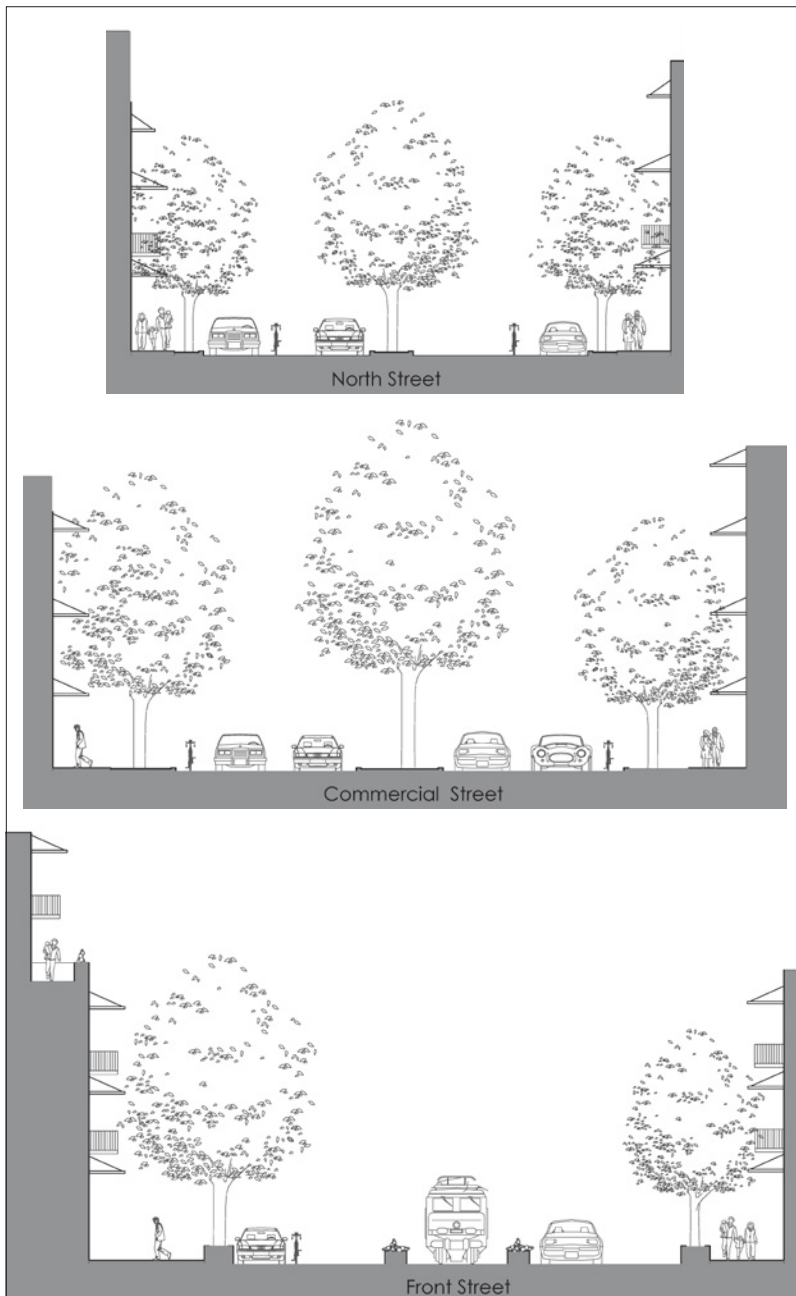
Pedestrian access and comfort is enhanced via street trees to slow traffic, and through implementing crossing islands and improved crosswalks at large intersections. Generous planting strips and on-street parking with a network of on-street bike lanes and sharrows will help to create multiple buffers, improve pedestrian safety and walkability, and give bike commuters easy access to all parts of the city. Pedestrian comfort and safety is also improved on Front Street by leaving the rail line in the middle of the street to maintain access to businesses while providing a planted buffer between the train and vehicle lanes to improve safety and add aesthetic appeal.

Parking is addressed on a neighborhood scale with the hope of reducing surface lots throughout. By encouraging internalized parking, accessible by a series of alleys, a strong street presence can be maintained. One public parking structure



Figures 54 - 56 (left to right): Diagrams showing phasing, zoning, and bike/pedestrian ways.

along with significant on-street parking will help meet parking demands of commercial uses. Residential developments are responsible for their own parking needs, but are prohibited from building surface lots on major streets.



Figures 57 and 58 (left to right): Proposed street cross-sections and detail plan of the waterfront area.

Scenario IV: New Town Center

In this scenario, Salem’s Vision 2020 planning process was a major influence in the decision to create a new town center. That document reports that the people of Salem are looking for the following amenities to be brought to their city:

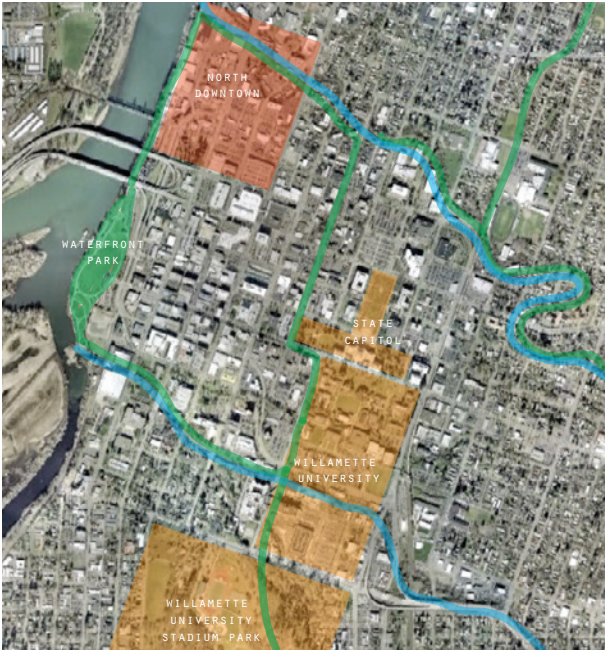


Figure 59: Site map illustrating design factors.

- A new town square
- New downtown housing
- Additional restaurants
- Pedestrian-friendly streets
- Improved bike facilities
- More riverfront and creekside corridors

Scenario IV poses the North Downtown site as an ideal location to incorporate all of these ideas. North Downtown is a highly underutilized space in a prime location. Creating public spaces such as parks and a town square is a high priority, as they provide an opportunity for the public to enjoy the Willamette River and Mill Creek and would be within easy walking and biking distance of downtown.

Goals

Mixed demographic housing within the site is essential to provide for the diverse needs of the people of Salem as well as to create a vibrant neighborhood. Certain waterfront sites would provide opportunities for high-end housing that could generate large tax revenues for the city, while other sites would be ideal for affordable housing.

Commercial uses, including, but not limited to, restaurants and shops would be carefully phased into the neighborhood to meet demand. A one-block **“Main Street” commercial core** embraced at either end

by a town square and park would be the ideal spot for phase one development.

An improved bike system would be a key element of Scenario IV to **increase sustainable transportation and reduce traffic congestion**. The North Downtown site is centrally located in the city and has tremendous potential to support and encourage bike and pedestrian pathways. The City of Salem



Figures 60 and 61: Diagrams showing Willamette River and Mill Creek connections and focal points.



Figure 62: Scenario IV site plan.



Figure 63: Fir Street perspective.

is embracing the idea of a more multimodal transportation plan, and a bike/pedestrian bridge is located at the southern edge of the North Downtown site. An expanded bike path system would link into current paths and help to connect larger parts of the city through non-vehicular modes of transportation. The riverfront and creekfront are ideal locations for these bike trails, as they create a natural loop through the city.

Design Recommendations

The Town Center is conceived as a connection between the Willamette River and Mill Creek. In order to create a Town Center that has life and vitality, a core of activity would be created along an east/west axis, connecting the two waterways and serving as a central hub for the commercial and civic functions of the neighborhood. All other programmatic functions in the neighborhood connect back to this central area.

In order to help support the vitality of this neighborhood, a mix of housing types would be present. These housing options would range from low- to high-income. The higher-income housing would be along the river and creek banks, and the middle- to low-income housing would be concentrated in the mixed-use facilities in the central axis and along the northern edge of the expanding downtown.

Part of the vibrancy of the neighborhood would be a restaurant culture not currently found in Salem. An all-hours restaurant district with morning, lunch, evening, and after-hours eating establishments would populate the area, with a focus on a “Town Center Axis” along the proposed new Fir Street, supported by



Figure 64: Detail plan of Fir Street.

the heavy pedestrian traffic and the visual and spatial proximity to the civic spaces at either end of the axis. The proposed Willamette Plaza, which forms the east end of the axis and borders Mill Creek, is surrounded by brewpubs and outdoor patio restaurants. The park would provide views of the creek and a venue for live music.

A small performing arts venue in the neighborhood would help support the restaurants and civic functions, such as a farmer’s market, that are envisioned for the neighborhood. The scale of this venue is smaller to prevent it from competing with the Riverfront Park Amphitheater, and it is located in Liberty Square to help it support the businesses there.

Improving pedestrian walkability was a major part of this project. The plan to increase walkability incorporated the “greenbelt” transportation way, which would connect the site to the rest of Salem and downtown while providing pedestrian infrastructure throughout the site. Pedestrian-friendly crossings were added to Commercial and Front Streets, and bike lanes, on-street parking, and landscaping help to separate the sidewalks from the streets, allowing for a more comfortable, walkable neighborhood.



Figure 65: Phasing.

Scenario IV Detail: Fir Street

The proposed Fir Street will become the anchor of the newly developed North Downtown Neighborhood. The pedestrian friendly street becomes a key link between the proposed public amenities of Willamette Plaza and Creekside Park.

Willamette Plaza is a space perfectly suited to the Salem community. The Plaza provides a variety of spaces in scales appropriate for everything from a game of chess to medium sized outdoor concerts. It will be kept active through the support of surrounding restaurants and businesses as well as its key location on the greenbelt bike trail.

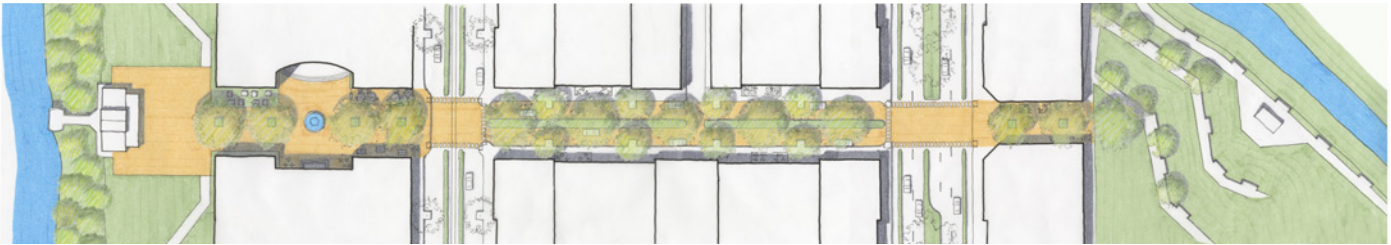


Figure 66: Fir Street plan.



Figure 67: Willamette Plaza perspective.

Reopened Fir Street will be a mixed-use street that is both pedestrian and car friendly. Local businesses will be helped by heavy foot traffic on sidewalks protected from excessive rain and sun by a row of street trees.

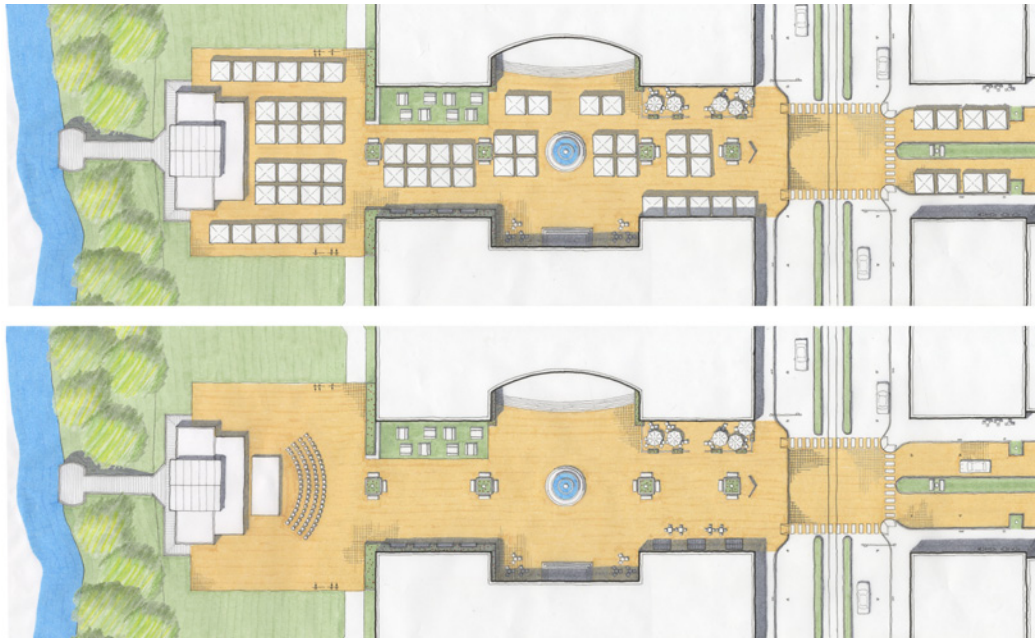


Figure 68 and 69 (top to bottom): Willamette Plaza during the farmers' market and on a typical day.

Willamette Plaza and Fir Street are designed to seamlessly integrate with an active Salem farmers' market. Plenty of seating, space for activities at all scales, and visual access to the Willamette River are key components to activating this public amenity. The urban plaza is brought to life with food carts, community message boards, and restaurants. Nearby buildings and trees provide protection from wind and rain and give access to sunlight, providing a pleasant outdoor space all year long.

The much smaller Creek Plaza, at the east end of Fir Street, is similar in character to Willamette Plaza and acts as the gateway to Creekside Park.



Figure 70: Fir Street perspective.

Scenario V: Arbor Lane

Scenario V focuses on the ideas of connectivity, diversity, and sustainability. It supports a connection between the North Downtown Waterfront site, the heart of downtown, and the city as a whole. Scenario V encourages a diverse range

of building uses, including a range of economic housing types. It also incorporates a variety of sustainable features, helping to improve and highlight natural features, as well as supporting bike and pedestrian transportation.

Scenario V was driven by a desire to provide places that encourage interaction between people at all income levels. This brings culture and diversity to the area, opening it up for more possibilities.

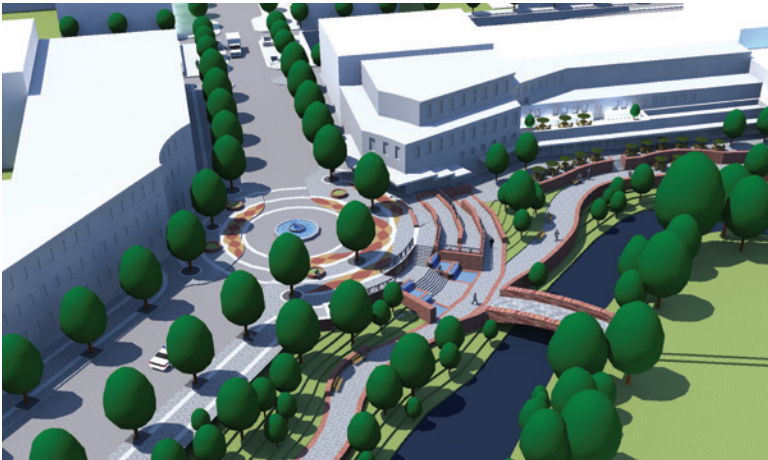


Figure 71: Arbor Lane perspective.

Goals

One of the main goals in Scenario V is to **enhance the connectivity across and through the entire site** while providing clear and easily accessible paths to and from other parts of the city. The Willamette River and Mill Creek are major amenities for the site and are treated as such in this scenario. By **enhancing visibility and accessibility to the waterways**, Scenario V increases the connection to important ecological habitats and provides places for visitors to physically interact with the natural environment. Increasing the connection between individual visitors is also a goal of this particular proposal. Arbor Lane **creates a community scale gathering space** in the heart of the neighborhood, providing commercial fronts for local businesses, space for artistic displays and a place for outdoor events.

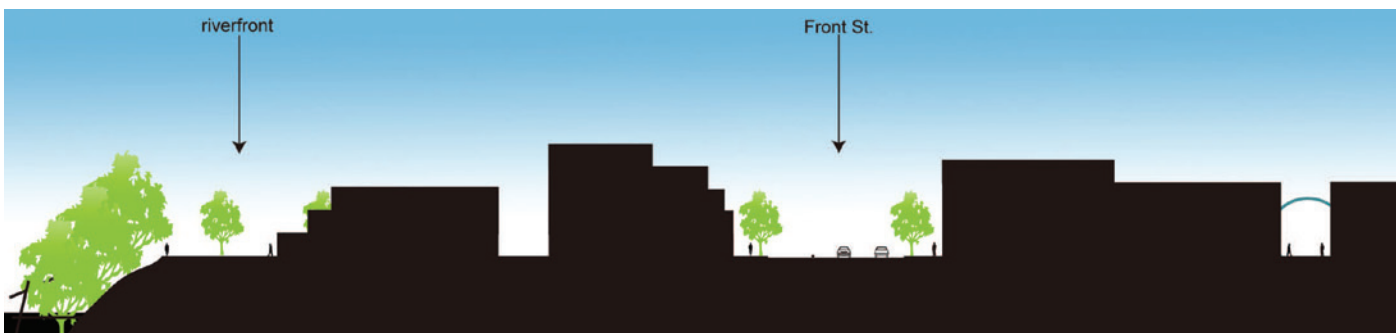


Figure 72: Site section from the Willamette River (left) through and past the bend in Mill Creek (right, following page).

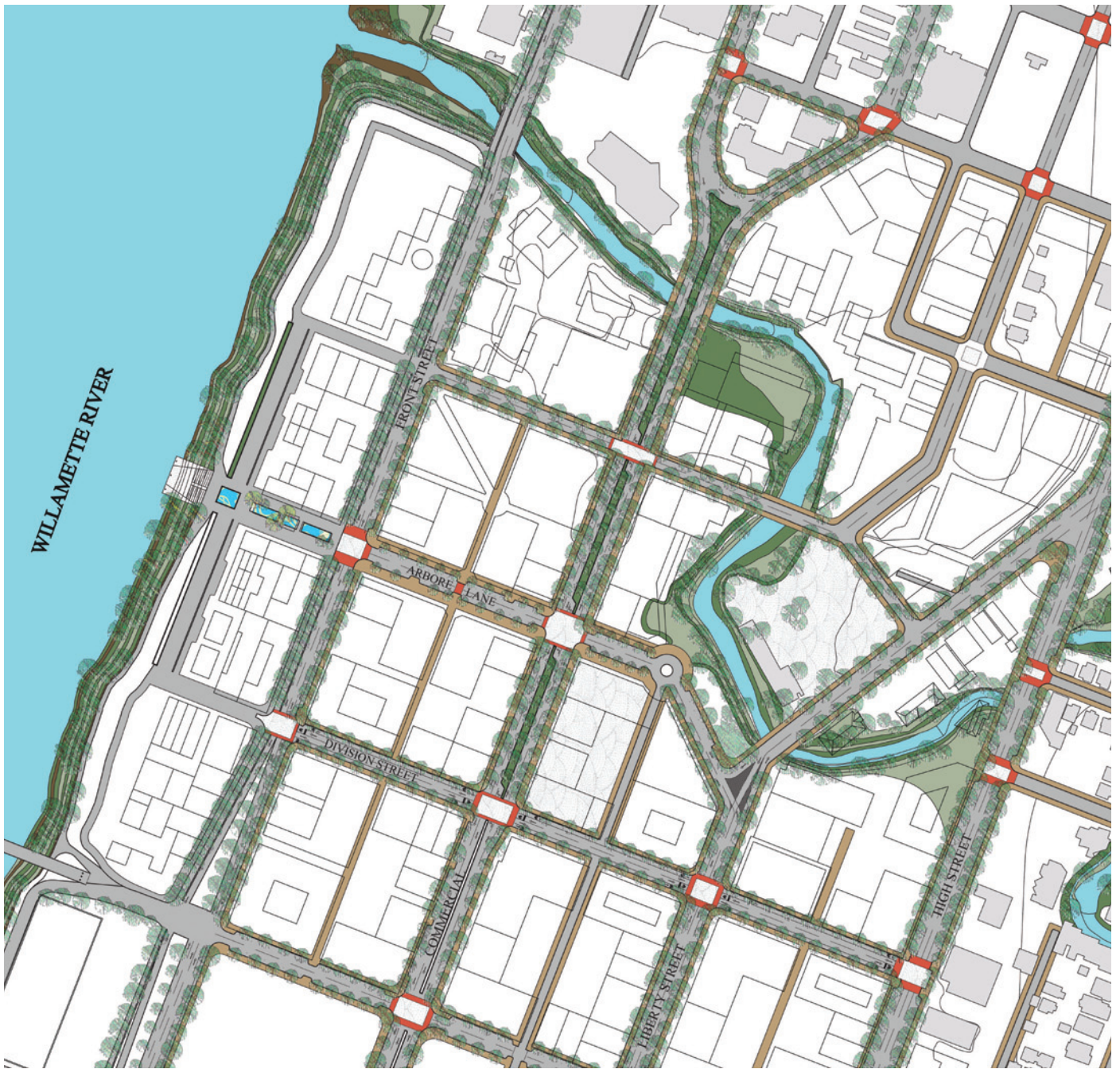
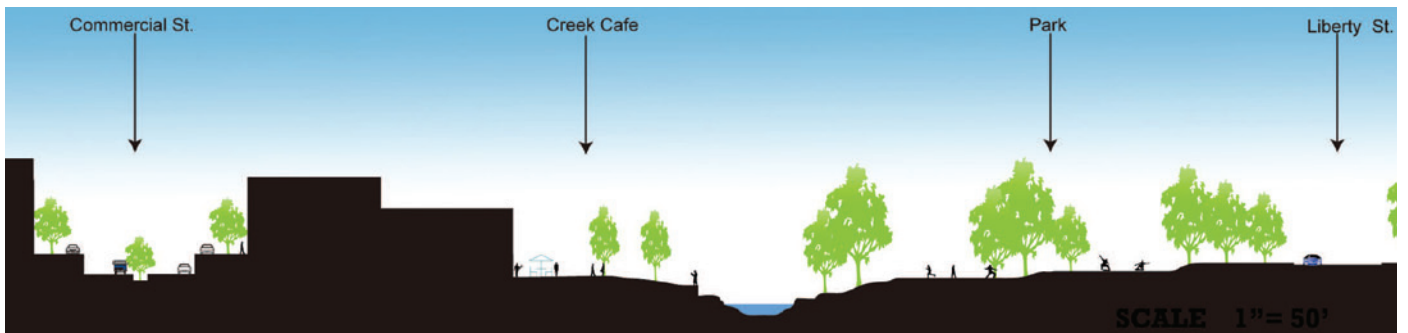


Figure 73: Scenario V site plan.



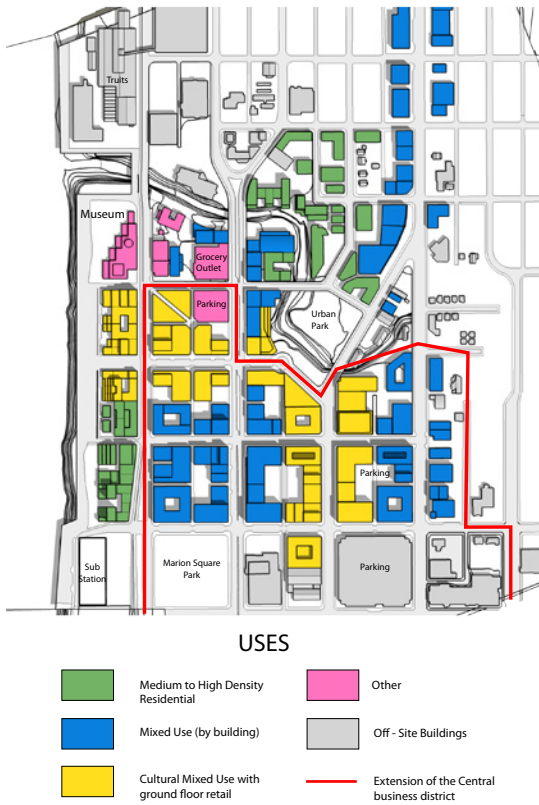


Figure 74: Uses diagram.

Design Recommendations

A river walk along the Willamette River takes advantage of the riverbank, opening it up to the community and providing an extension of the pedestrian and bicycle loop. A 50-foot setback along this bank would maintain habitat along the river. Commercial businesses, such as small local shops, restaurants, cafes, local food markets, and a bicycle repair shop, would be located along the river. A promenade with a river overlook supports large outdoor events, such as a Saturday market.

The proposed Arbor Lane is perpendicular to the promenade and is characterized by wide sidewalks, water features, and sculptures. Just off Arbor Lane is an intimate, covered alley allowing for shopping and strolling in all seasons.

A pedestrian and bike path along Mill Creek connects to the single family residences east of the site. This path was designed to bring the existing community together and provide an outdoor amenity for all. A sculptural walk is intended to bring local artists and Salem manufacturing companies together. In the early

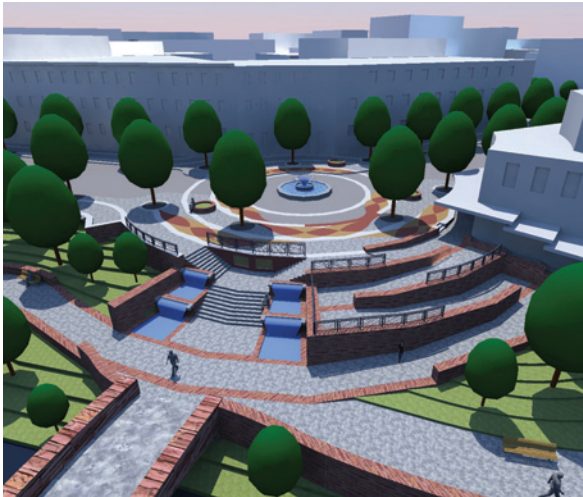
phases, the walk would connect High Street to the Willamette River, but it could easily be extended farther east in the future.

A regulated grid system distributes the flow of traffic crossing the downtown bridges and directs the flow of traffic to and from downtown areas. This proposed street grid encourages a connection, via Liberty Street, from the downtown shopping district to the Mill Creek sculptural walk and the park created within the curve of the creek. Tree-lined streets, green medians, and bioswales will help to filter water runoff, reduce the heat island effect by creating shade over streets and buildings, and improve air quality. Sidewalks are extra wide to encourage pedestrian use, while automobile lane widths are small to help slow vehicles through high-traffic pedestrian areas.

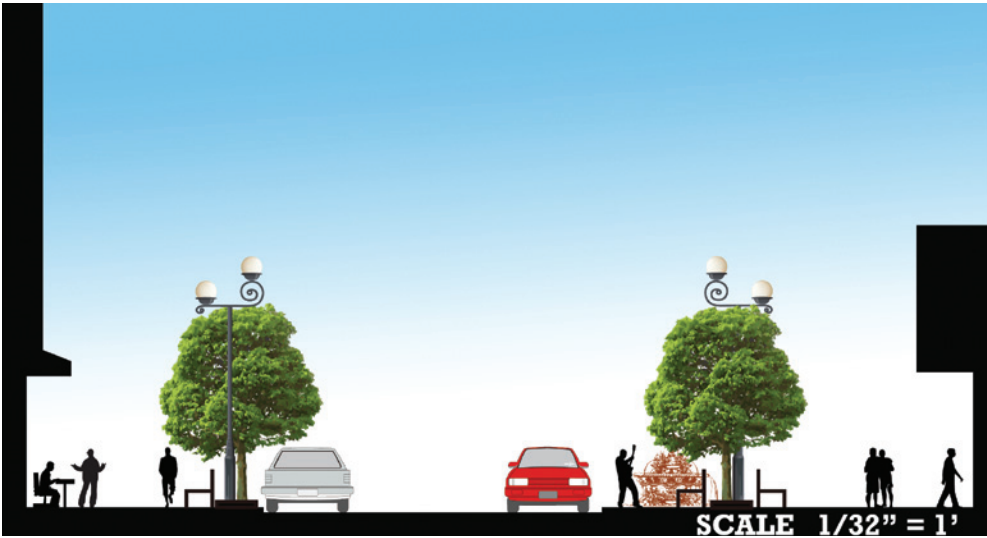
Front Street's design is a celebration and integration of the train. The sidewalks are 15 feet wide, and trees provide a barrier between the train and pedestrian traffic. The wide sidewalks are meant to allow for bike traffic as well. A two foot wide median provides a buffer between the train on the west side and automotive traffic. Locating the train on the west side of Front Street limits the train's disruption of automotive traffic. Parking is located on the interior of most blocks, helping to minimize negative interactions between pedestrians and vehicles, and opening the street facades to foot traffic. Parallel parking is provided on the east side of the street.



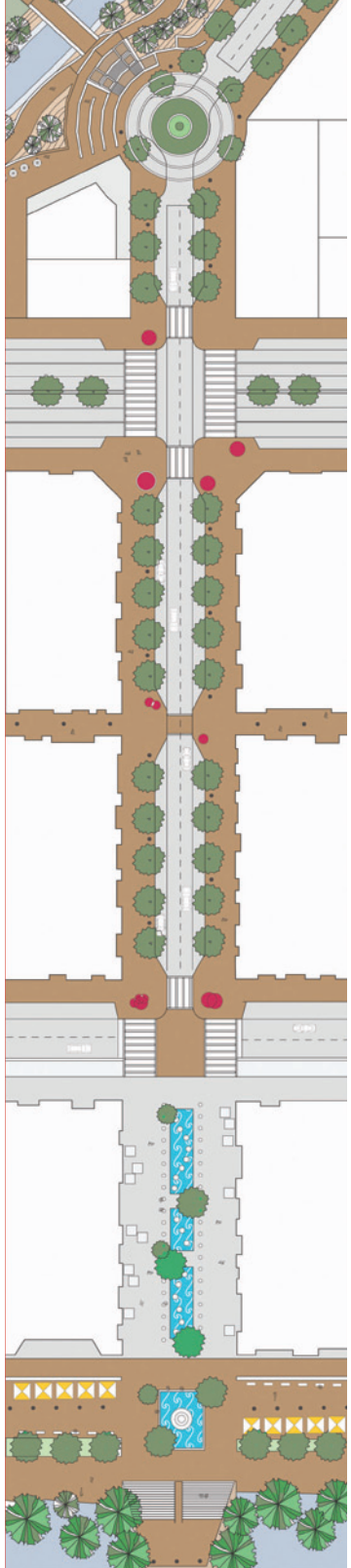
Figure 75: Section through riverfront



Figures 76 and 77: Section through covered alley and view of roundabout.



Figures 78 (above) and 79 (right): Typical street section and Arbor Lane detail (Willamette River at bottom, Mill Creek at top).



Summary of Design Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from many of the urban design scenarios for the North Downtown Waterfront area.

Connectivity and Walkability

- Enhance people's awareness of both the Willamette River and Mill Creek by providing a continuous network of bike and pedestrian pathways along the respective banks.
- Improve the street network by changing the street character to both slow vehicular traffic and encourage pedestrian use.
- Use existing alley infrastructure to create smaller block sizes, increase transportation choices, and reduce the overly large block sizes in the area.
- Provide the means for multiple forms of street transportation, including, but not limited to, bike lanes, sharrows, and public transportation vehicles.
- Look to Union Street as a prime opportunity for providing an east-west bike and pedestrian connection.
- Enforce minimum street setbacks throughout most of the district to improve street definition and activity.

Transportation Network

- Investigate the possibilities of a more complete Front Street bypass by moving the Front Street / Commercial Street split to the north of Mill Creek.
- Encourage stronger east-west connections within the street network, particularly looking at the possibility of a street directly connecting the bend in Mill Creek with the Willamette River.

Parking

- Establish a neighborhood parking plan and system rather than individual site parking requirements to increase density and encourage a more urban fabric. This district approach will help to keep the area from becoming a suburban development.
- Increase the amount of on-street parking while reducing off-street parking.

Front Street Railroad Tracks

- Consider moving the railroad tracks to the west side of the street. This option eliminates the need for a vehicle to cross the train tracks if it is simply traveling along Front Street. A green strip would be useful in providing a buffer between vehicular traffic and the train and also between pedestrian traffic and the train.
- The rail line could also remain in the center of Front Street, in an effort to retain commercial visibility and accessibility on either side of the street. If the train does remain in the center, the use of green planting strips is still

- desired to provide a similar buffer between the train and vehicular traffic.
- It is not recommended that the rail line move to the east side of the street.

Mixed-Use Development

- Encourage a mix of uses and density throughout the entire site.
- Provide areas specifically designated for housing in order to provide sufficient local population to support neighborhood businesses.
- Encourage the presence of local businesses and entrepreneurs at a variety of scales to promote a unique community atmosphere.

Special Places

- Provide public open spaces that offer a variety of amenities for local residents and tourists alike.
- Consider both seasonal variation and day and night activities to promote year-round use.
- Build on the unique characteristics of the area by allowing community members to shape the urban environment through public art, storefront displays, street furniture, and interactive displays.

Sustainable Development

- Use plantings and pervious materials to reduce stormwater runoff. Consider the connectivity of habitat to the Willamette River and Mill Creek.
- Increase solar access throughout the site by using alleys and building height restrictions.
- Reduce carbon emissions by providing and encouraging public transportation and an infrastructure that offers many services and goods within easy walking and bicycling distance.

Ecological Opportunities

- Enhance, restore, and highlight the river and creek habitats.
- Maintain minimum development setbacks from both the Willamette River and Mill Creek.
- Include native species in plantings along the waterfronts as well as throughout the district as a whole.

Conclusions

The City of Salem currently has interest, energy, and involvement in the North Downtown Waterfront site. There are multiple opportunity sites within the area and an active community engaged in a process to create a clear and exciting vision for the neighborhood. The site is directly bordered by both the Willamette River and Mill Creek, both major ecological amenities. While high traffic volumes currently provide barriers to parts of the site, opportunities for commercial and natural visibility are high. The North Downtown Waterfront site is a prime location for the expansion of urban development, the highlighting of ecological habitat and sustainable strategies, and the creation of a unique Salem district.