

why do we vision?

Portland's Visionary History

Portland has a rich history of visioning and planning for the future. Despite the fact that few plans have been completely implemented, previous planning projects have made way for some of the most cherished aspects of our city.

Between 1885 and 1915, Portland's population increased by 300% and its physical boundaries grew by 154%. Partly in response to this growth and rising interest in the City Beautiful Movement, the Olmsted brothers were commissioned by the Portland Parks Board to design an open space system that would accommodate their prevailing and future open space needs¹.

The 1903 Olmsted Plan provided a vision for parks connected by parkways and boulevards. Several pieces of the vision have been implemented over time: Mount Tabor Park, Willamette Park, Terwilliger Boulevard and Leif Erikson Drive were all called for in the Olmsted Plan. Today's "40-Mile Loop," 160 miles of bicycle/pedestrian trails connecting many of Portland's parks, was named after the approximately 40-mile-long system of boulevards and parkways that Olmsted proposed.

In 1932, the Portland Planning Commission brought Harlan Bartholomew to town to see if a new plan could revitalize Portland out of the Great Depression and address growing automobile use. The result, a greatly detailed study known as the Bartholomew Report, was the first plan to clearly articulate ideas for Portland's Central City². A west-bank river park in downtown Portland was also envisioned in this document.



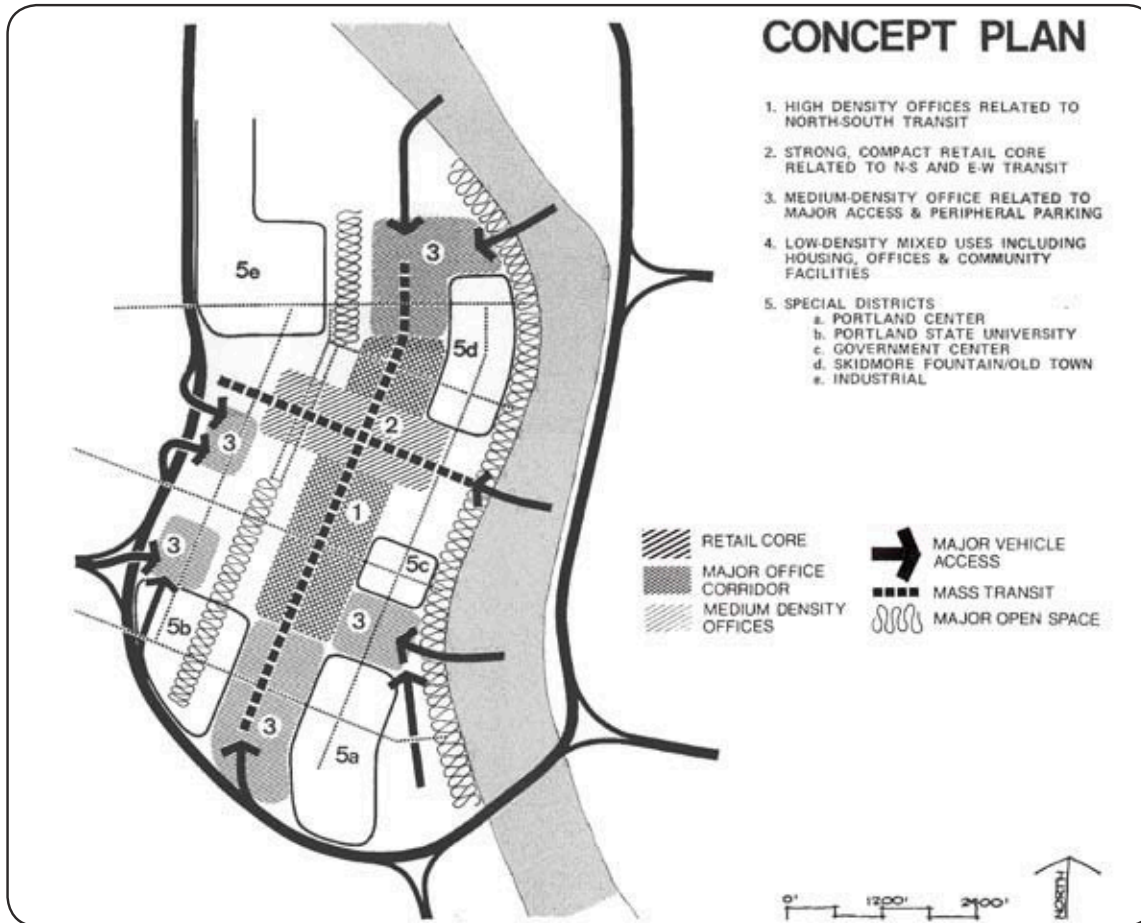
John Charles Olmsted's plan for Portland-area open spaces envisioned a cohesive network of parks and parkways, many of which exist today.



The Bartholomew Report of 1932 was the first plan to envision parks along the banks of the Willamette River. Harbor Drive was built (see below) and later removed before this vision was turned into reality.



¹ City of Portland Bureau of Planning, Central Portland Plan Urban Design Assessment.
² *ibid.*



More recently, the 1972 Downtown Plan marked an important shift towards community members actively participating in planning. This plan grew out of community concerns that included disinvestment in the downtown, increasing crime and the prevailing perception of poor public decisions. The plan marked a major shift towards the quality of public spaces,³ and has helped define the downtown’s purpose and function.

Planning efforts have ranged in form and purpose, but each was driven by the sense that planning today would protect and improve the city for future generations.

The implementation of these plans, including the more recent legacy of public involvement, has made Portland the place we know today: with a strong and vibrant central city, quality neighborhoods, significant public spaces throughout the city, the extensive and popular light rail system, bicycle infrastructure and the ability to attract the young creative class.

Portland’s 1972 Downtown Plan and the 1988 Central City Plan have shaped our city’s downtown core over the past several decades. The Downtown Plan laid out special districts throughout downtown and planned for land uses and transportation corridors which are still visible today.

³ *ibid.*

portland future focus

What Was the City's Last Visioning Project?

In response to changing trends and the political and economic landscape in the late 1980s, the City Council and Mayor Bud Clark called for Portland's first City-led and community-owned effort to plan for a greater future for the city. The two-year process was funded by the City, with an initial contribution from the Portland Business Association.

The goal of Portland Future Focus (PFF) was to engage citizens in creating a vision of Portland in the year 2000. This vision, born from the values and expressed needs of Portlanders, would shape a strategic plan outlining clear and definable goals and strategies to guide Portland's growth and to ensure that the city's future was a self-determined one, rather than a mere adaptation of its circumstance and surroundings.

In 1989, 55 leaders from a cross-section of community interests were chosen by the mayor and project staff to examine current trends and to create a preferred vision of the future.

Citizen Involvement

Portland Future Focus was an ambitious initiative, and boasted broad-scale involvement for a city of its size. Many public engagement methods were utilized throughout the process to gather the data needed to create Portland's vision, including a survey of community values, a speaker's bureau, eight major policy meetings, open work group meetings and a newsletter.

The Vision

By the year 2000, Portland residents wished to see a culturally diverse urban center that had preserved both its history and environmental integrity, and that remained the core of the region's economy. Children and families were recognized as the

community's top priority, as was promoting understanding of and appreciation for Portland's increasingly diverse population. This vision, or preferred future, spoke to the city's desire for a nationally-ranked education system, distinct neighborhoods and housing opportunities, a vibrant arts community and lower crime rates. A regional focus and strong cooperation between jurisdictions, as well as forging new, lasting partnerships between local agencies and organizations, were seen as critical to reaching all of these goals.

The Plan

As a result of the comprehensive nature of community needs and the resulting vision statement, Portland's strategic plan addressed a broad number of issue areas. Designed by Future Focus working groups made up of community experts, stakeholders, policy committee members, and local consultants, its six action plans concentrated on the same focus areas as the vision statement:

- Crime
- Diversity
- Economy
- Education
- Growth management
- Leadership

Each work group was charged with the task of designing appropriate action plan items to reach the community's six most critical goals. Draft action plans became refined and finalized through a series of public hearings hosted by the policy committee.

Implementation and Results

Various stakeholders throughout the city joined to work collaboratively towards the successful implementation of

specific programs. The most lasting results, however, were the partnerships formed as a result of cooperative efforts throughout the process. According to Debbie McCabe, Project Manager for Future Focus, "the individuals involved were very invested in the process," and their ability to lead and to influence others "resulted in terrific recommendations" and lasting collaboration. Associations like the Citizens' Crime Commission became much stronger in the community, as did dialogue among Portland business owners. The efforts of working groups contributed to the way we as a community address social issues. Among other lasting trends, there emerged a reprioritization in education towards early outreach and intervention.

Drawing from the innovative work of the Oregon Progress Board, the City of Portland and Multnomah County created the Portland Multnomah Progress board in 1994 to design and implement benchmarks (concrete, numerical indicators) used to monitor progress and measure success in achieving public goals. Many of today's benchmarks grew from Portland Future Focus' action plans and are reflective of the project's ambitions.

Building on Portland Future Focus

Portland Future Focus was successful in developing strong partnerships and a benchmark system to measure performance. After over 15 years, both the partnerships and the benchmarks need to be reinvigorated. visionPDX has laid a foundation for this work, as well as raising the bar for public engagement.

Furthermore, visionPDX has been strongly integrated into planning efforts, like the Portland Plan and the Vision into Action Coalition. These efforts will follow the adoption of visionPDX, ensuring that the priorities identified in the visioning process will be integrated into the City budget process as well as the day-to-day and year-to-year decisions about programs and priorities.

community vision project

Definition: The process by which a community sees or conceives its future. A collaborative effort involving all community members, leaders and officials in shaping:

1. A plan for the future we'd like for our city;
2. How we prioritize what issues and projects to tackle; and
3. How community members are involved in public decisions.

Why Do We Vision?

Portland is facing important trends and changes in the coming years, and visioning can help us build a cohesive plan to help us succeed. Communities are often focused on day-to-day problems and challenges. Without a vision to guide them, a community's individual actions may not add up to a unified whole.

The forecasted trends predict that the Portland region will grow by an additional million people in the next 25 years. Those people will likely be more diverse and older on average than those here today. The industries that once drove our economy – forest products and transportation – are playing a smaller role, while high-tech and service jobs have been employing more of our workers. Global issues like climate change will impact our region. How can we ensure that we maintain the aspects of this city that we hold dear while planning for the future?

Community visioning is a powerful tool for managing change. Its primary purpose is to unite the community around common goals. Through the act of visioning, whole communities identify what they love most about their cities, so that those elements can be preserved and enjoyed by future generations. Visioning can also help communities reach agreement on their biggest challenges, how the choices we make might affect our future, and how we can balance these pressures in the face of change. Visioning projects give local government leaders direction on where the community wants to be in the future.

Oregon cities have been at the forefront of a growing trend towards using visioning to set priorities for a community. Cities like Gresham, Corvallis, Hillsboro and Bend have completed visioning projects over the past decade, and the impacts on their communities have been far-reaching.

Over 15 years have passed since Portland's government and our community last engaged in a "big picture" look at the future of our city, 1991's Portland Future Focus (see sidebar page 5). Since then, Portland has experienced significant demographic shifts, a rise in housing

costs and continued growth. Many new Portlanders were not living here when our community last envisioned its future. Portland is ripe for a reevaluation of its values and direction.

Goals of Visioning

In our process, visionPDX primarily sought to discover and establish Portlanders' values. Through the analysis of the community input, we focused on what was driving people's ideas. We took time to identify what Portlanders hold in common, even when they sometimes disagreed over particular solutions.

As such, the rich data collected through visionPDX can be used as a baseline for policy makers, bureau directors, businesses, community organizations and individuals to help prioritize actions that are aligned with Portlanders' values and that are widely and deeply felt by the community as a whole.

The visionPDX process first asked Portlanders what they value most about their community, then what changes they would like to see today. After identifying immediate challenges facing the city, we asked people's greater vision for Portland in 20 years. Finally, we asked, "How can we get there?" By taking community members through this simple exercise, we gained an understanding of where Portlanders agree and where there are tensions in public opinion.

In our analysis of the data, we found that some assumptions about Portlanders' beliefs were confirmed. We also discovered that the public is thinking about a range of pressing issues, many of which will require collaborative problem-solving.

Equally important to our visioning process was the act of engagement. By taking the time to meet with and talk to people, we built ownership of the vision. Once people were meaningfully engaged, they became keenly interested in the outcome of visionPDX, both for themselves and for Portland. These partners will be influential in carrying the vision beyond City government and into the community, where meaningful action will occur.

Origins of visionPDX

Shortly after Mayor Tom Potter took office, he began several major initiatives to re-evaluate the way government operates and to make it more responsive to needs of the public. More than that, Mayor Potter believed that the public should shape its own future. The visioning process was a way to explore community governance – real community ownership over the decisions that affect the community.

visionPDX was established to give the community a “place at the table” to consider the direction for our future. At the time the project was conceived, the City of Portland was facing budget cuts, while demands for City services were growing. The vision was a way to use the community’s creativity in addressing some of our biggest challenges, while also celebrating what we love about our home.

By starting this conversation, Mayor Potter planned to re-orient local decision-making to be more in tune with what Portlanders really need and want, as well as to empower them to take a role in overcoming the challenges that we face. Mayor Potter wanted to strengthen existing and create new community networks that can be self-sustaining, reducing the burden on local government to solve issues by itself. We suspected, and it was confirmed, that the community knows best what Portlanders need and want and what must be done to get there.

How to Read This Document

What follows is a written representation of what over 17,000 people said through visionPDX that they want for Portland’s future. The following sections describe:

Shared values: Community principles largely agreed upon by the people with whom we talked.

Portland’s vision for 2030: A summary of where we want to go as a community, written as if we were in the year 2030.

Five elements of Portland: These sections describe in more detail how the values and vision look in different aspects of our city. These are the community’s ideas placed into the main areas of our city, written as if we were in the year 2030.

Expect change: Primary trends that will impact our community in the future.

Community challenges: Areas that need more conversation and problem-solving to determine how to proceed. These arose out of disagreements in what we heard, as well as likely challenges as the trends described in the “expect change” section come up against our values and preferred future.

The rest of the document describes how we carried out our process to reach this point, and how visionPDX is already forming the foundation for other planning processes underway in the City of Portland.

The vision, values and elements can be viewed independently to depict what we want Portland to look like in 2030. In addition, the challenges, the trends our community faces – and the people we talked to in order to develop this vision – are all valuable parts of what lies behind this vision and how it can be used. We hope that this document is a resource for all who want to learn about what the community thinks and how to enact the vision.

Visit www.visionPDX.com in the coming months for tools to help you incorporate the vision into your daily actions, your community’s activities and your business plans.

community engagement report

In a separate report, visionPDX shares the insights and lessons learned from our community engagement phase of the project. Information in the report includes:

1. Principles for successful engagement of hard-to-reach communities;
2. Stories from community members and organizations about their involvement in visionPDX; and
3. The lasting impact of community visioning and partnerships formed through the visionPDX process.

Visit www.visionPDX.com



Photo by Mike Houck