

Downtown Portland Retail: A New Renaissance?

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As citizens of Portland, it is important to understand that the success of retail in our downtown is a measure of downtown's overall success. Similarly, downtown's success is a barometer of health for the city and the region. A May 2008 Oregonian editorial best sums it up: "Downtown is the place we play, go out to dinner and show off when company comes. We want out-of-town guests to see the best of the region — and the best includes the center²." The notion that downtown's health is reflective of the city's health has been a guiding principle for Portland for almost 40 years. The Downtown Plan of 1972, along with then Mayor Neil Goldschmidt's leadership, set a new precedent for downtown reinvestment and revitalization. At that time, Mayor Goldschmidt understood the importance of making a high quality retail environment the center of downtown.

Mayor Goldschmidt's efforts resulted in the Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal Area of 1974, a recently retired district. Significant downtown accomplishments followed as a result of public-private partnerships leveraged with tax increment financing (TIF) dollars: Pioneer Place, Tom McCall Waterfront Park, RiverPlace, the Yards at Union Station, along with many others. Major catalytic projects set the tone, with Pioneer Place being the most significant retail development.

Now, more than 30 years after the pioneering revitalization efforts initiated during the Goldschmidt era, downtown Portland leaders and the Portland business community are pursuing a new approach for addressing the issues and opportunities related to downtown Portland retail. At the heart of this emerging strategy are two core objectives not previously addressed in the history of downtown Portland retailing. First, the emerging strategy will include implementation tools that are designed to make property owners and downtown real estate professionals more integrally involved in realizing such a strategy. Second, downtown stakeholders and leaders realize that a greater strategy for how the retail sub-districts relate to each other and to other districts is lacking. Therefore, a physical solution is being proposed for how the downtown retail is branded, how the distinctive character of the retail streets and sub-

¹ Accompanying reports and publications on downtown Portland retail can be found at <http://www.pdc.us/retailvision>.

² Source: "Selling us on the Center". Editorial. The Oregonian. 28 May 2008.

districts relate, and how that translates to a clearly defined signature district at the heart of the city. This article describes how Portland leaders are working to define a new strategy for its downtown retail core with fresh eyes. With much discussion among downtown’s major players, a new strategy for a signature retail district in downtown Portland is emerging.

The Downtown Retail Core Defined

Before Pioneer Place, Nordstrom, or even Pioneer Square were developed, the 1972 Downtown Plan set the stage for investment in downtown’s retail core. The 1972 Downtown Plan defined the retail core as “All blocks fronting on Morrison, Alder, and Washington Streets from SW 3rd to SW 10th Avenues.” Since that time, the retail core boundaries have been extended west to SW 12th Avenue, south to SW Salmon Street and east to SW 2nd Avenue. Figures 1 and 2 below show the retail core boundaries today, as defined by the Portland Business Alliance (PBA) and the Portland Development Commission (PDC). It is interesting to note that recent investments such as Park Block 5, the Galleria, the Fox Tower, and the Meier & Frank building have indicated a shift in the retail core energy towards the West End, defined as the area between SW 10th Avenue and I-405, south of W Burnside Street.

Downtown Retail Core Boundaries

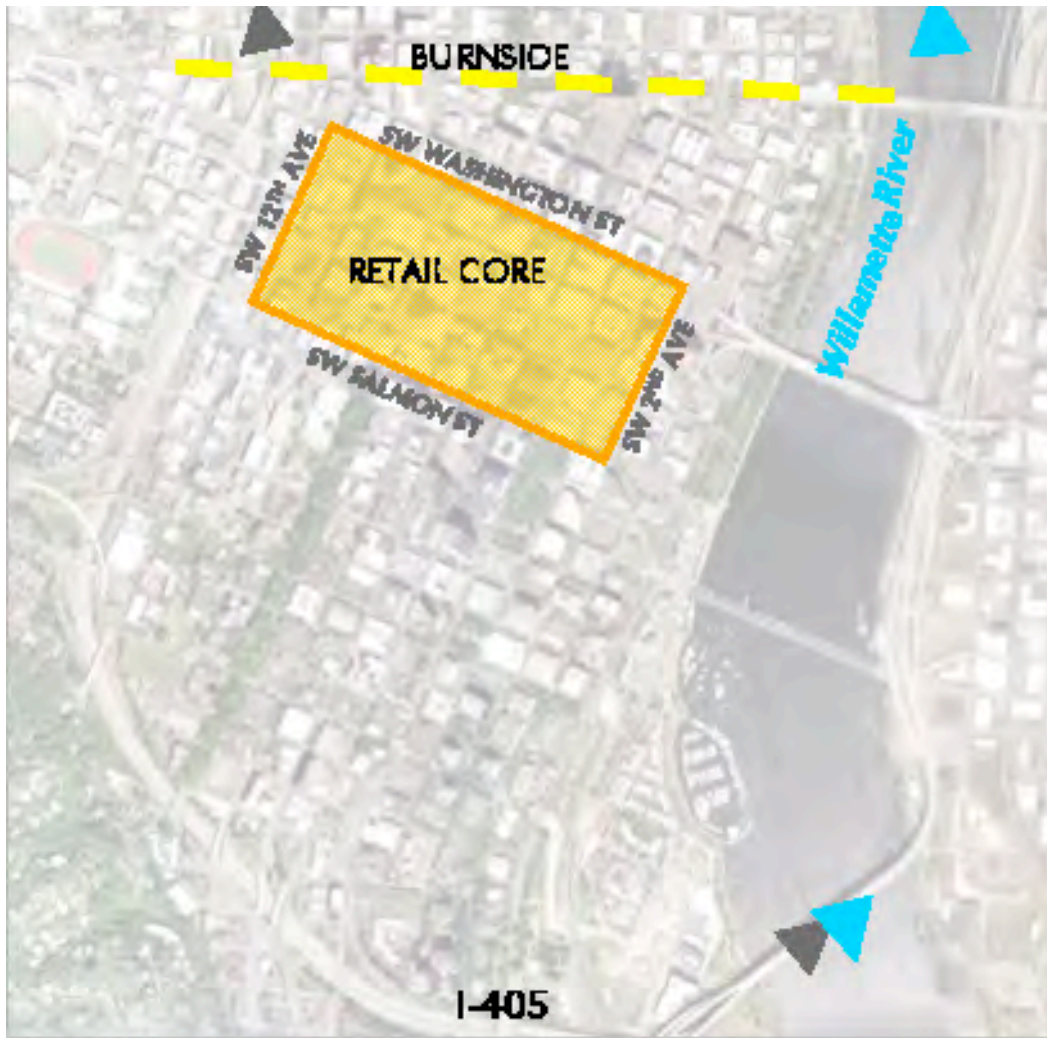


Figure 1 – Source: Leland Consulting Group

Downtown Retail Core Key Retailers and Landmarks



Figure 2 – Source: Leland Consulting Group and Portland Business Alliance

At the heart of the central city, the downtown retail core contains approximately 1.3 million square feet of retail space³, compared to 1.4 million square feet at Lloyd Center. The downtown area, bounded by W. Burnside, the Willamette River, and I-405, has approximately 1.7 million square feet of retail space. Retail vacancies throughout the downtown are on the rise. According to the Norris, Beggs, and Simpson Central City Vacancy Survey, vacancies for the Central Business District (downtown) increased from 5.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007 to 9.8 percent in the second quarter of 2009.

That said, the retail core is still in many ways the most attractive urban retail real estate in the Portland metropolitan area, despite the vacancies. No other retail district in the region contains a confluence of high-end, luxury retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Mario's, Brooks Brothers, St. John, Mercantile, and others. While average triple net rents range from \$20 to \$35 per square foot in the retail core, spaces on Broadway (before the onset of the recession) commanded rents as high as \$60 per square foot. These are the highest street-level (non-shopping center) retail rents in the region.

The diversity in the retail core's customer base—residents, employees, and visitors—may give it the capacity to attract and support more retail than it has space to accommodate. Even in the context of these difficult economic times, the retail core may be able to sustain new retail growth over the next five years. The past five years have shown almost no growth—only 14,000 square feet of new space has been added since 2003³. Some downtown brokers and retail recruiters report that desirable retailers want to locate in the retail core, but they cannot find the right space they need to accommodate their business needs. Factors such as small block sizes, fragmented ownership, and costly upgrades make it challenging for new retailers with

³ Estimate derived from a number of sources: Norris, Beggs, and Simpson, Cushman & Wakefield, and Costar.

larger floorplate requirements to locate in downtown Portland. Said differently, attractive national retailers that want to locate in downtown Portland are often unable to find the right space that can fit their preferred format. What is more, landlords are finding themselves in a tenant market that demands lower negotiated rents and more landlord concessions, such as tenant improvement allowances and other tenant benefits. Combined public and private sector participation is a key component to overcoming this challenge.

Building a New Approach from Past Strategies

Over the years, various plans and strategies have identified key factors that impact downtown Portland's retail success. The key concepts, findings and recommendations of past strategies lay the foundation for the emerging retail strategy.

In 2002, the PDC and the Association for Portland Progress (now part of the PBA) analyzed the opportunities and challenges for downtown retail and recommended a strategy for moving forward. For the first time, Portland had a strategy that addressed multiple issues related to downtown retailing, market, policy and the physical realm. According to the 2002 Downtown Portland Retail Strategy, downtown Portland (bounded by the Willamette River, W. Burnside Street and I-405) would have the potential to support \$200 million in additional sales growth or 600,000 square feet of new retail space between 2005 and 2015. As noted above, only 14,000 square feet of that growth has occurred since 2002.

In 2007, the PBA and the PDC drafted an update to the action plan first presented in the 2002 strategy. Leland Consulting Group was retained by the PDC to revisit the 2002 strategy, update data and findings and evaluate the 2007 Downtown Portland Retail Strategy Update.

Two key messages surfaced from Leland Consulting Group's 2007 engagement. First, the state of downtown retail was healthy, yet vulnerable. At the time of this study⁴, the downtown retail core was doing well compared to other central city districts. A number of national chain stores such as Express, Gap, and Talbots were achieving their highest sales in their downtown stores, ground floor lease rates exceeded those of any other shopping districts in the central city and the downtown retail core yielded the highest annual sales of any other central city shopping district (Nob Hill, Pearl district, Old Town/Chinatown, and the Lloyd district). For as many indicators as point to its success, there are equally as many that show it could experience a downward slide, particularly in the current recession. Some concerns included significant presence of transients and aggressive panhandlers, lack of continuity in key retail areas and stiff competition from suburban lifestyle centers and shopping malls. In 2007, suburban shopping centers were outperforming central city shopping centers. Pioneer Place and Lloyd Center were averaging \$540 and \$415 in sales per square foot, respectively, and Washington Square and Bridgeport Village were averaging \$763 and \$850 in sales per square foot, respectively.

A second key message was that the public and private sectors together lacked a cohesive vision and collective strategy for downtown retail. Unlike a shopping center, fractured ownership and management structures in downtown make it extremely difficult to maintain a uniform and highly effective shopping environment. Therefore, equal participation from public and private champions is an essential component of the emerging strategy.

The Foundation for a New Signature Retail District Strategy

In late 2008, recognizing both the potential of the retail core to serve as a branding tool for Portland and the need to bring together public and private sector downtown leadership, Mayor Adams initiated a process to take a new look at the downtown retail core. He was particularly

⁴ Leland Consulting Group acknowledges that much of the real estate market data reported in the 2007 report is now outdated and, most likely, drastically different from 2007 numbers.

interested in how retail districts and streets such as the Magnificent Mile in Chicago happened, what Portland's version of a signature retail district would look like and what we would need to do to get there. Mayor Adams' initiative was timely as the future of urban renewal funding for downtown had either vanished or been called into question. The South Park Blocks and Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal Areas had expired and the expansion of the River District Urban Renewal Area has been appealed.

Mayor Adams initiated two important actions. First, he formed a task force of downtown stakeholders, comprised mainly of property owners, brokers and other real estate professionals involved in downtown to help guide a new vision for the downtown retail core. Second, he retained Leland Consulting Group, urban strategists, to build on their previous work, to conduct case studies of five exceptional retail districts and to develop a set of recommendations for how principles derived from these successful retail districts can be applied to Portland.

Case Studies: What Makes an Exceptional Retail District?

What makes places like Newbury Street in Boston and the Magnificent Mile in Chicago special and successful? This question led to an in-depth study of how exceptional retail districts are physically defined, how those retail districts developed over time and what common principles guided the success of each district. With input from PDC and PBA staff, the following five retail districts were selected for the case studies:

- Old Pasadena; Pasadena, California
- Seattle retail core; Seattle, Washington
- Robson Street; Vancouver, British Columbia
- Magnificent Mile; Chicago, Illinois
- Newbury Street; Boston, Massachusetts

After conducting web, interview, and field research, Leland Consulting Group distilled a set of common success factors for each district and classified them into physical, organizational, market and political success factors. While each district was physically distinct in its own way, there are attributes common to most of the case study districts. The team evaluated each district based on how strongly it exhibited each success factor. These ratings were averaged and compared against Portland, with involvement from City of Portland, PBA, and PDC staff.

As a result of this research a number of key observations were made:

- **Through traffic and on-street parking.** All of the primary retail streets examined in the case studies have two or more lanes of traffic, either in a two-way configuration or a one-way configuration. Moreover, brokers and other stakeholders in other cities, including cities with a high transit mode share, such as Vancouver, B.C., emphasized the importance of on-street parking to create the reality, or at least the visual impression, that parking is available close to stores.
- **Compactness.** Most case study districts were focused on a relatively small area or had pockets of compactness. The best example of this is Robson Street in Vancouver, B.C., which extends three city blocks and achieves ground floor retail rents as high as \$200 per square foot (Canadian dollars). Compactness helps promote better continuity and concentration of retail energy.
- **Residential base.** As shown in the figure below⁵, all case study cities, with the exception of Pasadena (which has a significant visitor population), have extremely high residential

⁵ Vancouver B.C. is not included due to lack of comparable data. However, Vancouver is known for having achieved high downtown residential densities and most likely exceeds population counts exhibited here in Portland.

densities close to the retail districts. The Portland population within a half-mile and a mile of the retail core is lower than that in the case study cities. If Portland is to grow into a metropolitan region on the order of Chicago, Boston, Seattle, or Vancouver, B.C. and adhere to Metro 2040 growth principles, it will need to significantly increase its downtown residential population.

Close-in Residential Population to Case Study Retail Districts

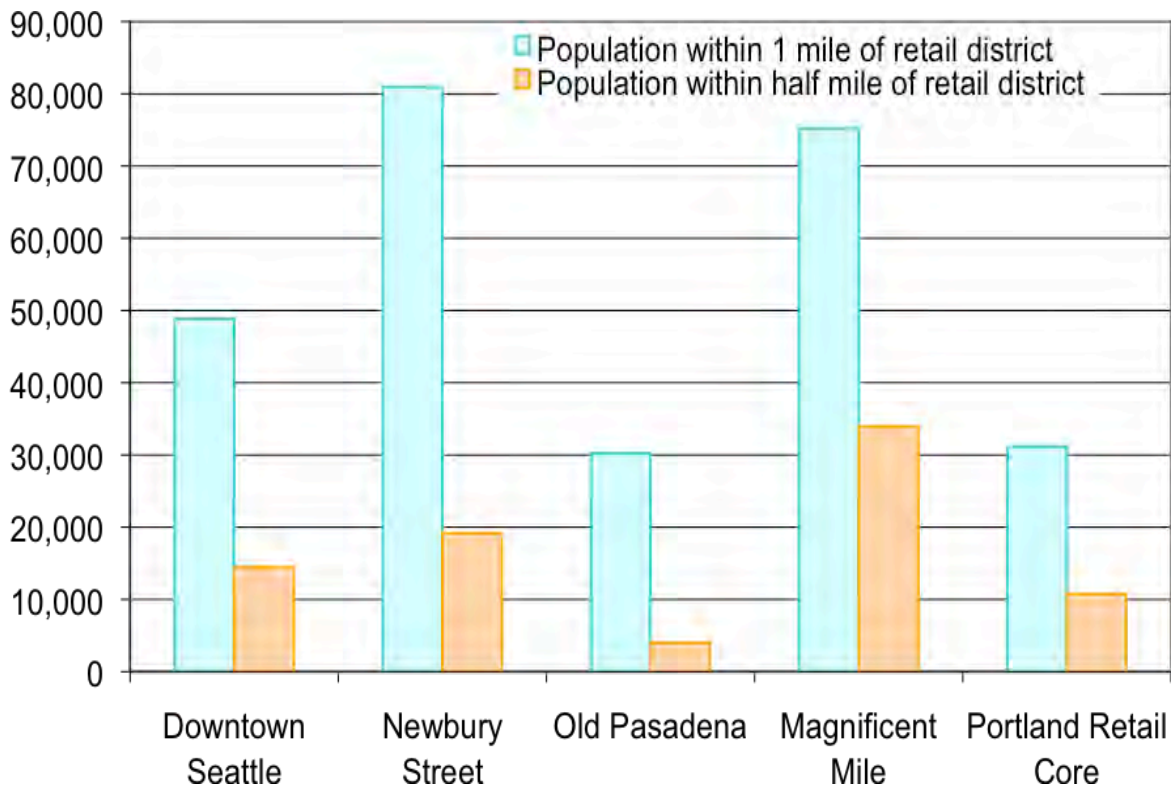


Figure 3 – Source: Leland Consulting Group and ESRI Business Analyst

Shown below on the next page are the descriptions and results of the physical success factors evaluation.⁶

⁶ Information on the other success factors and detailed methodology are not included here. For more information on the other success factors, the Findings and Recommendations Report is available at <http://www.pdc.us/retailvision>.

Physical Success Factor Evaluation for Case Study Cities and Portland

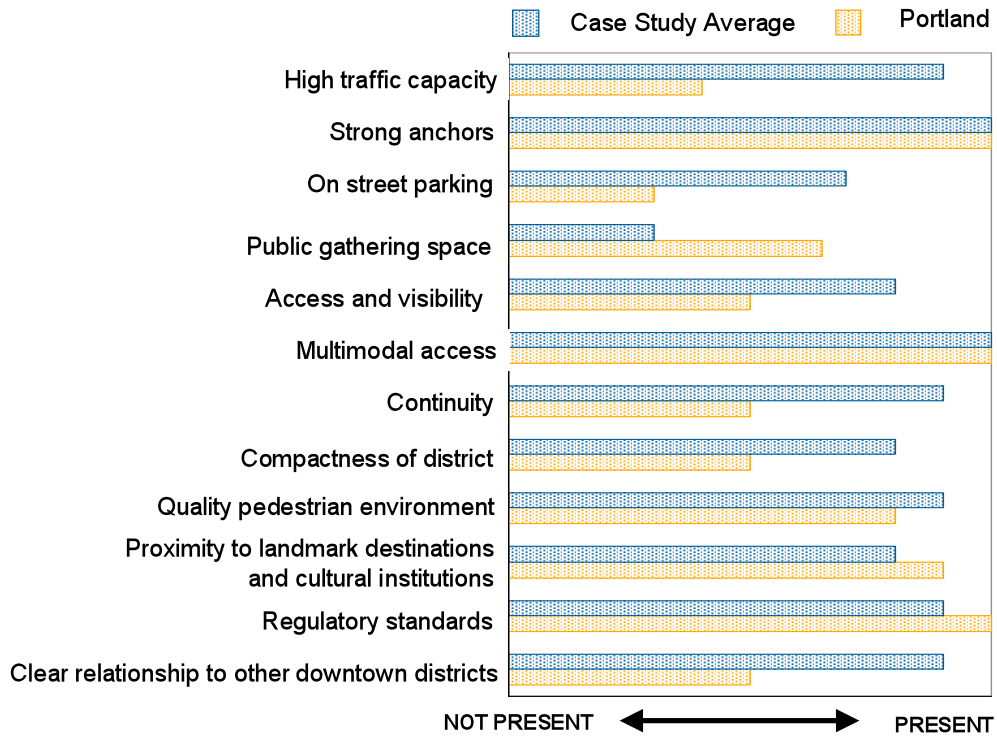


Figure 4 – Source: Leland Consulting Group

Physical Success Factors	
<p>High Traffic Capacity: Streets accommodate a significant traffic volume, either in a one-way or two-way configuration with at least two traffic lanes. Two-way traffic is preferred.</p> <p>Strong Anchors: Important retail anchors exist and are strategically located throughout the district to maximize their impact.</p> <p>On-street Parking: On-street parking is available on the main thoroughfare throughout the district.</p> <p>Public Gathering Space: A public plaza for large events and gatherings is located within or directly adjacent to the district.</p> <p>Access & Visibility: The retail district is conveniently located within the region, is highly visible and is easily accessed from nearby freeways and neighborhoods.</p> <p>Multimodal Access: The district is easily accessible by auto yet is also well-served by transit.</p>	<p>Quality Pedestrian Environment: Streetscapes are inviting to pedestrians with wide sidewalks, ample way-finding signage, street furniture and other amenities.</p> <p>Proximity to Cultural Institutions: The signature retail district is close to supporting destinations such as museums, galleries, theaters, etc.</p> <p>Regulatory Standards: Special zoning and/or design standards apply to the signature retail and specifically reinforce the retail character of the area.</p> <p>Clear Relationship to Other Downtown Districts: There are clear linkages to adjacent supporting districts such as office districts, cultural districts, civic centers residential neighborhoods and university districts,</p> <p>Continuity: There are few or no retail gaps in the district.</p> <p>Compactness of District: The district is compact and walkable.</p>

Components of Portland's Retail Strategy

The emerging strategy and action plan will build on previous strategies, modified with new information and a new approach. As a result of the aforementioned case study research, Leland Consulting Group was asked to develop a set of so-called big ideas that would help define a signature retail concept in the retail core. The following subject areas are currently being discussed by task force members to determine what will be included in the new strategy and how these strategy elements may be refined or altered. *[It is important to note that the concepts presented here will be somewhat different from the final recommendations that will be forwarded to the PDC by the task force.]*

District Definition: Signature Retail Concept

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the retail core is currently defined as all blocks between SW Washington and SW Salmon Streets and SW 2nd and SW 12th Avenues. One topic of debate is whether the retail core is too large. The larger the district, the more likely there will be gaps in continuity and an encroachment into other downtown districts.

Mayor Adams has asked the consultant team and the Downtown Vision Task Force to consider a signature retail concept for the downtown retail core. This concept could take the form of a retail district, or set of streets, that function as the identifying mark for Portland's downtown and for the city as a whole. This signature street or district could act collectively as the retail anchor for downtown and as a starting point for Portland downtown visitors.

The case study research verified that such a street or district portrays many factors that work together to make it successful. A signature retail street does not stand-alone—it has supporting streets and a collaborative public and private effort guiding management and implementation

The Backbone

For a signature district to be successful, there needs to be a backbone of the retail core. Leland Consulting Group recommended that this backbone be defined as SW Morrison Street and SW Broadway Avenue. Those primary streets are where the majority of investment in retail stores has been concentrated and where, collectively, the greatest number of success factors is already present. As part of this concept, Leland Consulting Group recommended that the city consider returning SW Broadway Avenue to a two-way traffic flow to further strengthen its identity as a retail boulevard.

The Backbone and Supporting Streets of the Signature Retail Concept

Figure 5 – Source: Leland Consulting Group

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Supporting Streets

The supporting streets are where retail investment exists but, due to a lack of important factors, such as anchors, continuity or traffic, these streets play a different role in the retail signature concept. For example, SW Park Avenue functions as a restaurant row, SW Alder Street could serve as an excellent location for more price-sensitive fashion retailers, and the eastern section of SW Yamhill Street (between SW 3rd and 5th Avenues) is clearly a location for high-end, luxury retailers, such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Tiffany & Co., and Gucci. The following streets and street sections are defined as the district's supporting streets:

- SW Yamhill Street – SW 3rd to SW 10th Avenues
- SW Alder Street – SW 4th to SW 10th Avenues (possibly SW Park Avenue)
- SW 10th Avenue – SW Yamhill to W Burnside Streets
- SW Morrison Street – SW 3rd Avenue to SW Naito Parkway
- SW Broadway – SW Washington to W Burnside Streets
- SW Broadway – SW Taylor to SW Jefferson Streets

Quality of the Physical Realm

The quality of the retail experience is in large part a function of the quality of the pedestrian environment. This includes storefronts, street improvements, ease of mobility, the perception of safety and streetscape elements such as trash receptacles, benches, newspaper boxes and planters. The success of lifestyle centers suggests that shoppers want to be in an urban environment, but they want all of the conveniences and features of a mall or lifestyle center to go along with it: safety, management, cleanliness, evening and weekend operating hours, a continuous, diverse retail mix and more. While downtown Portland will never replicate a lifestyle center, it can learn from the basic operating principles of lifestyle centers and shopping malls.

Safety

Downtown retailers, brokers, and other stakeholders report that some of their top concerns are public nuisance issues. Loitering, aggressive panhandling and other acts of public disorder create the perception that downtown is unsafe. The sit/lie ordinance, which precludes loitering, remains a complex and controversial issue for both homeless and retail advocates. While the Street Access for Everyone (SAFE) initiative generated a comprehensive plan with broad-based support in 2007, following through with implementation and maintaining the momentum of the agreement between disparate groups has been challenging. In general, downtown and city stakeholders understand that approaching the public safety issue in a comprehensive manner (providing services for the homeless while also keeping the retail streets unobstructed) is the preferred strategy for addressing the issue.

Continuity

A second key public realm consideration is the need for continuity. The average shopper will walk approximately 1,200 feet (about a quarter mile) in a retail environment providing that there is a continuity of storefronts. Vacant storefronts, open spaces, parking garages, and buildings with no active ground floor retail all create gaps in continuity and thus dilute the success of the district. The proposed signature retail streets (SW Broadway Avenue and SW Morrison Street) have significant gaps in continuity:

- Weak retail on SW Morrison Street between SW Broadway Avenue and SW 6th Avenue across from Pioneer Square;
- No retail on the south side of SW Yamhill Street between SW Broadway Avenue and SW 6th Avenue;

- Spotty retail on both sides of SW Broadway Avenue between SW Morrison and SW Washington Streets;
- Weak retail on SW Alder Street between SW Broadway Avenue and SW 5th Avenue (with the exception of Macy's);
- Banks and service businesses occupying critical corners; and
- Other weak or spotty retail on the supporting signature streets.

Repairing continuity is likely to be tailored to each weak link. Leland Consulting Group proposed potential solutions for repairing weak links:

- Pioneer Courthouse, located immediately east of Pioneer Square, is a celebrated historic building. However, the Courthouse is a barrier to retailing. Its limited use (courts) contributes little or nothing to the signature retail district. A big idea is to purchase or lease this building from the federal government and activate it with cultural uses, retail, restaurants, and other attractions. Another idea is to create a local design competition to explore possible solutions.
- Banks on key retail corners is a universal issue in most downtowns, particularly as they close at or before 6:00 p.m. weekdays and have limited weekend operating hours. The reason is that banks have historically moved into downtowns and retail districts before major retailers. It is not necessary to remove the banks as long as retail continuity can be provided. If retail liner space can be cut into a portion of the bank's space and made accessible from the street, the bank could remain and the signature street can increase its retail continuity. In some cases, it may be appropriate for the city or an agency to lease key ground level space and re-tenant that space with the most desired tenants.

A final consideration in the public realm experience is quality of the streetscape itself. While the block-by-block program and Portland Mall Management, Inc. (PMMI) have successfully given the transit mall a new facelift, other key areas of the retail core could use the same treatment to make the physical realm more appealing.

Supporting Land Uses

The success of retail is as good as the size and demographics of the market that support it. As opposed to suburban retail, downtowns tend to have a much more diversified customer base. Downtown retailers not only serve nearby residents but also a significant number of employees and visitors. When evaluating a downtown's potential to establish and sustain a thriving retail district, an important rule of thumb is that a downtown resident will support more retail than an office worker. While the number of downtown Portland employees has remained fairly steady over the years, the number of residential units and central city residents has dramatically increased. From 2002 to 2007, approximately 7,000 market-rate and affordable units were either built, under construction, or on the drawing boards for both the downtown and the Pearl District combined⁷.

However, as noted above, Portland compares unfavorably with the case study retail areas with respect to the number of residents in close proximity to its retail core. It may be important to revise the city's height and FAR limits for downtown, particularly in the West End district as part of its emerging retail strategy. With a significant increase in the FAR limits, considering an affordable or workforce housing FAR bonus, site assembly and demolition for downtown housing may become more achievable.

⁷ Source: *Central City Development and Redevelopment Projects*. Portland Business Alliance. April 2007.

Many existing FAR allowances are approximately 9:1 in the West End district, with some bonus provisions for housing to bring the FAR to 11:1. Leland Consulting Group recommends allowing an additional 5:1 FAR bonus for affordable housing and an increase in the minimum FAR to make the economics of housing development more feasible in the West End. Consider a standard 40,000 square foot downtown block that could develop 360,000 square feet of floor area (40,000 x 9) plus a bonus of 80,000 square feet (40,000 x 2), for a total of 440,000 square feet. With a 20,000 square-foot footprint on the upper floors (the footprint of the first two floors would likely go street-to-street), a 20-story tower could be developed.

If the FAR limit was raised an additional 5:1, making a 16:1 total FAR, the tower might achieve 30 or more stories (see Figure 6 below). Consider the possibility that a portion of the additional 5:1 FAR might not be an outright allowance, but rather, an opportunity or option to purchase that capacity at say, \$20,000 per unit. Using this example, an additional 5:1 FAR could generate as much as \$3 million (150 additional units, or 10 floors at 15 units per floor, x \$20,000) that could go into a revolving fund to assist in financing affordable and/or workforce housing.

Potential Impacts of Increased Density Bonus

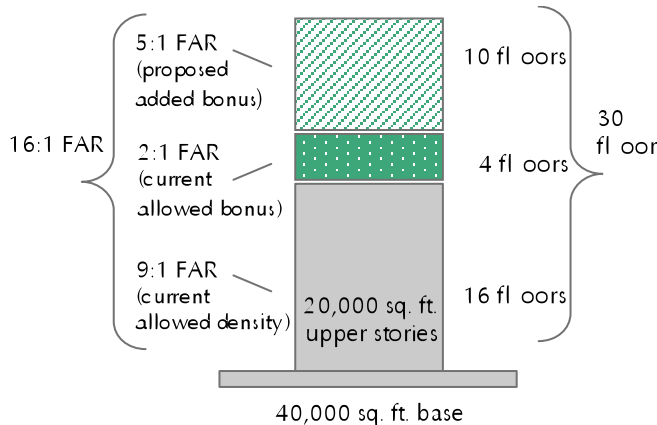


Figure 6 – Source: Leland Consulting Group

Retail Mix – Retailer Recruitment and Retention

Shopping mall and lifestyle center success is highly dependent on management’s ability to recruit and lease to a carefully selected mix of retailers. Selecting the right mix of retailers is essential. National anchors help support independent retailers by generating a large volume of foot traffic for retailers in the area. By combining national destination retailers with regional uniqueness and a local downtown flavor, the downtown becomes a one-of-a-kind destination.

Unlike a shopping mall, downtown has highly fractured ownership and challenging spaces to lease in terms of size and configuration. However, aggressive recruitment, coupled with financial or amenity incentives, may be able to land the right retail tenants. To stay competitive, the PDC and the PBA began to explore avenues to more aggressively recruit preferred retailers. For three years, the organizations had a retailer recruitment booth at the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) annual conference. Attracting Brooks Brothers to downtown was a result of that effort. In addition, a downtown retail advocate position has been created, jointly funded by the city, PDC, and PBA, to ensure a year-round, pro-active recruitment effort. Retail recruitment requires a long-term commitment to landing the right tenant and a collaborative effort by downtown brokers, the PBA, the PDC and other private sector partners.

Given the retail core's potential to broaden market share and respond to the current economy, Leland Consulting Group emphasized that the retail core is undersupplied with affordable product offerings. People living in and near downtown are forced to shop elsewhere when it comes to price-sensitive purchases. Appropriately scaled and designed urban versions of big box stores, traditionally located in power centers and near freeways, can be an important part of Portland's retail core, can help attract new spending and reduce leakage to suburban locations. There are proven techniques for bringing big box stores downtown and incorporating them into the urban environment. Affordable fashion retailers such as H&M, Zara, and T.J. Maxx, or a general merchandise retailer such as Target, can and would complement the high-end fashion offerings represented by Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, Brooks Brothers, Mario's, Mercantile, and St. John. Particularly in an economy in which discount retailers are seeing the greatest sales growth, recruitment of such tenants is encouraged.

Linkages and Gateways

Other districts and landmarks surrounding the retail core support it and help channel foot and automobile traffic towards the retail core. These districts and landmarks include the waterfront, employment districts south of the core, the civic district, the cultural district, the Pearl district, and others. Without critical links between these districts, continuity in the downtown experience is lost and the retail core loses in terms of visibility and synergistic effects with the other districts. Figure 7 on the next page shows the relationship between the retail core and other downtown districts.

Retail Core in Relationship to Other Downtown Districts

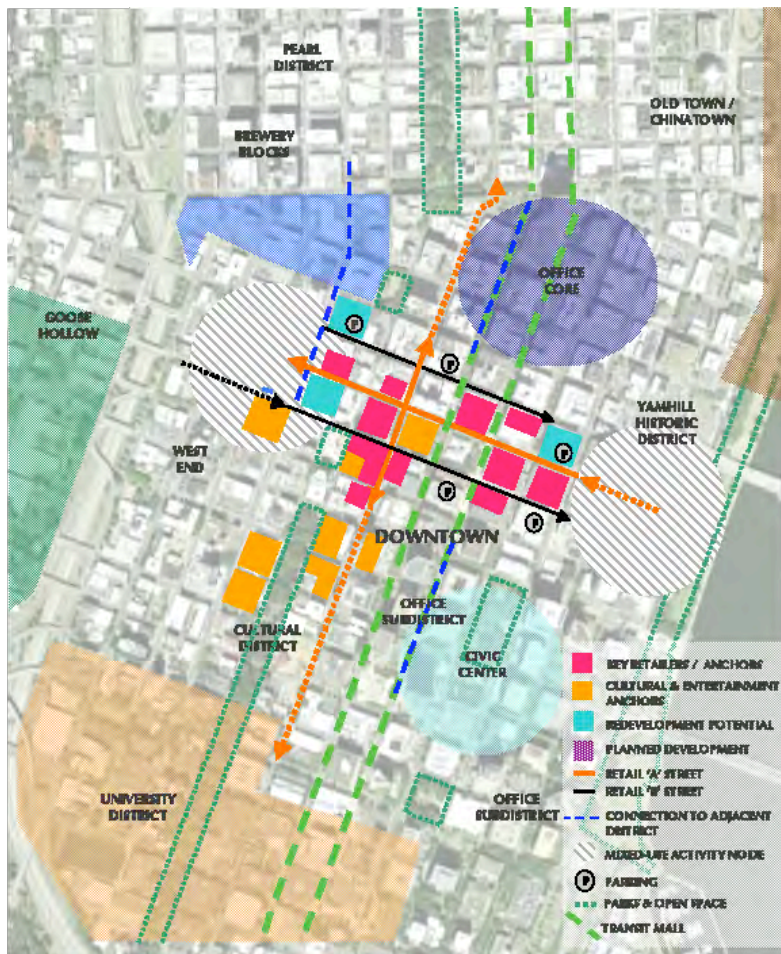


Figure 7 – Source: Leland Consulting Group

There are critical linkages between downtown districts that need strengthening. These linkages can be strengthened via street improvements, public realm improvements, or activation of ground floor building uses. Some important linkages include:

- **SW 10th Avenue from SW Alder Street to W Burnside Street.** The retail along SW 10th Avenue could be considered “retail light,” with shallow retail spaces filled with restaurants, galleries, services, and related storefronts that support livability upstairs. The retail would most likely be liner retail (20 to 30 feet deep) and would promote the activity and continuity to connect the shopper to the Pearl District.
- **SW Broadway Avenue from SW Washington Street to West Burnside Street.** This section of Broadway, although not part of the retail core, is an important connection to the Pearl district and Old Town/Chinatown.
- **SW Broadway Avenue from SW Salmon Street south to the Cultural District.** This section of Broadway is an important link to the cultural district and Portland State University.
- **SW Morrison Street from the retail core to the waterfront.** This connection could be strengthened to attract traffic from Naito Parkway, pedestrians at the waterfront, and Yamhill Historic district visitors into the retail core.

Furthermore, to signal the entry to downtown Portland’s signature retail district, physical gateways at the entries to the four signature retail streets could be established: SW Broadway Avenue at SW Washington Street, SW Broadway Avenue at SW Taylor Street, SW Morrison Street at SW 10th Avenue and SW Morrison Street at Naito Parkway. Design competitions could provide inspiring physical statements of arrival to Portland’s signature retail district. Such competitions could be international, local, or even stem from engagement with local schools. Each gateway could be different, yet still reinforce the signature district brand.

Marketing and Branding

Downtowns need to be run in a business-like fashion and, as with any business, marketing is absolutely critical. As retailers across the country struggle, even more promotional opportunities and other events will be necessary to help keep the retail core healthy. Chicago has the Magnificent Mile, San Francisco has Union Square, and New York has Fifth Avenue. Numerous marketing entities such as the Downtown Marketing Initiative (DMI) and Travel Portland (formally the Portland Oregon Visitors Association) help to market downtown, but no one marketing campaign focuses exclusively on forming a brand and identity for the retail core. The city has a commitment to continue funding for the DMI through 2010 and a focused effort led by the DMI, PBA, PDC, and other organizations will work on branding the signature retail district as part of the emerging strategy.

Implementation

The ultimate success of this strategy lies in equal public and private stakeholder support, particularly in how the strategy will be implemented. An examination of more sustainable funding resources and key catalytic redevelopment sites will also be part of the emerging strategy and will require significant private sector participation. To test the ideas presented above, the task force members were assigned to one of two subcommittees: physical realm or implementation and resources. Each subcommittee presented a full set of recommendations to the task force in June that will form the basis for an implementation strategy with broad-based support. The desired result will ultimately be a more robust strategy with ownership from the public and private sectors to carry Portland’s retail core forward in the midst of a challenging economic climate.