



November 27, 2019

TO: Mayor Ted Wheeler – mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, City Commissioner for Transportation – chloe@portlandoregon.gov
Commissioner Nick Fish, City Commissioner for Parks – nick@portlandoregon.gov

Subject: South Park Blocks Master Plan/Green Loop/Pedestrian Safety

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) writes to warn of potential pedestrian-bicycle conflicts that need addressing at an early stage of the South Park Master Planning process, which at this point includes three concept options¹ of running the Green Loop along the two north-south parallel streets (Park Avenue East and West) bordering the South Park Blocks.

The DNA supports dedicated bike lanes as an important part of the City's transportation planning. However, the DNA currently questions the concept of having dedicated lanes of the Green Loop run along the South Park Blocks for a number of reasons.

Given that:

- Hundreds of children come each week to the Cultural District (northern 3 blocks) by school buses to attend free arts programming offered by the Portland Art Museum, the Oregon Historical Society and the Portland5.
 - To accommodate all needs of these critical Portland institutions, the DNA recommends reaching out to the leadership all of these organizations to understand potential impacts on school bus parking, deliveries of children, and child safety with children assembling in the park blocks.
 - Portland5 indicates to the DNA that they serve 1,400 Title I children each week in their enrichment programming.
- Kindergartens/preschools in the area bring children to the park blocks during the day to play, usually crossing the Park Avenues with a couple of teachers guiding them.
- This is the only green space available to West End residents. Per city statistics², there are no (0.00) open spaces currently in the West End, which holds one of the highest densities of affordable and “missing middle” housing and in the area. Given no alternative West End green space, the Park Blocks are heavily used and are a crucial green space for all downtown residents. As you are doubtless aware, the health benefits of green spaces and trees are well documented. The highest priority in the popular park blocks and adjacent Park Avenue(s) should be pedestrian safety.
 - Please keep in mind, there is no alternative green space for this population³, but there are plenty of other streets where bicycles can ride. Would the Green Loop be more appropriate on Broadway? We understand the “commuter” bike lanes are planned to be on Broadway, so combining the Green Loop with that is a possibility.
 - Cyclists could still take a side trip from a Broadway Green Loop to any destination within the park blocks. They just would not have a dedicated lane.



- Madison Street pedestrian-only walkways join the streetcar stops on 10th and 11th with the Park Blocks at Madison/Park. Hundreds of commuters/residents heading to downtown offices or shops or to the Cultural District organizations use the passageways day and night, resulting in heavy east-west pedestrian traffic crossing both (east and west) Park Avenues. Because current on-street parking reduces the single car lane to one *narrow* lane, cars go very slowly; parked cars on both sides of the street currently act to protect pedestrians on sidewalks. Pedestrians can easily and safely cross a narrow, single lane of slow-moving cars.
- Auto drivers are licensed and cars registered, so tracking and enforcement of violations is possible. Because cyclists are neither trained nor licensed and because bicycles are not registered so not traceable, it is not possible to report violations. This lack of enforcement likely contributes to the many violations and “encounters” nearby residents witness/experience already today, without an increase of more cyclists the Green Loop would bring.
- The Wednesday Farmer’s Market draws hundreds of people⁴ including school children, most on foot from nearby residential and office buildings. Heavy east-west street/park block crossings by pedestrians are common.
 - Vendors also need temporary parking to be able to deliver their produce and set up their temporary stands in Shemanski Park which would be complicated by a bike lane in place of parking spaces.
 - To reduce conflicts between distracted shoppers and cyclists, at least on market-day, closing down these bike lanes would also seem advisable.
- Hundreds of people attend the churches that line the South Park Blocks certainly on Sundays, which is also a popular day for cycling. Worshippers come by foot, by public transportation or car from the suburbs (needing parking), but they all end up on the sidewalks and the park blocks as pedestrians. In addition, these churches host a lot of other programming during the week.
 - We suggest it will be important to contact all these churches directly to hear their assessment of the impact of an increase in bicycles and a loss of parking.
 - The churches to be contacted are First Congregational United Church of Christ, St James Lutheran Church, Sixth Church of Christ Scientist, and First Christian Church.
- When asked in the Parks survey how people usually travel to the South Park Blocks, the overwhelming majority come by foot (nearly 90%). Cyclists weren’t even close (less than 10%).⁵

As a result, the following recommendations are presented for consideration:

1. Consider moving the Green Loop to Broadway to keep the park a pedestrian-priority area to minimize cycle and e-scooter conflicts with pedestrians. Prioritize pedestrian safety.
2. If Broadway is not possible, make any bike lanes on the 3 northern Cultural District blocks walk-only for bicycles. Along the three other (so-called) “orphan-residential” blocks north of Market, install bike lane street lights/stop signs at each north-south bike lane intersection with Market, Clay, Columbia, and Jefferson. All four of these major streets are high traffic volume



commuter/evacuation/emergency streets. Add pedestrian midblock, raised crosswalks with stop signs for bicycle lanes only. Cars already stop at any sign of pedestrians midblock or at crosswalks but cyclists do not, so pedestrian-priority signage would be important.

3. Create new design features that effectively force cyclists to slow down along the park blocks. Options might be rumble strips or raised tables at cross walks, etc. (Emergency vehicles also need to be accommodated as design features are created.)
4. Make violation enforcement possible by a cyclist licensing and bicycle registration program. Fees might help support bicycle lane maintenance. Bicycle violation enforcement is today a safety concern often cited.⁶

The DNA appreciates the City and both Commissions giving a close and critical look at the placement of the Green Loop in this dense residential, urban, largely hardscaped neighborhood whose residents walk much of the time and are heavy users of this particular city park.

At this early stage of the South Park Blocks Master Plan, the DNA is opposed to the Green Loop being placed along the South Park Block, preferring it be on Broadway. However, the DNA is open to discussions and to working with the City. Pedestrian safety remains our top priority.

Finally, it would be useful to know who has final authority on where the Green Loop will be located. We were advised that the Green Loop is part of the South Park Blocks Master Plan, but that neither the Design Commission nor the Historic Landmarks Commission have the final authority over this particular master plan. This seems at odds with CC2035 master plan guidelines (33.510.255 E.) Clarification of this process and the final approving authority would be useful.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,

Walter Weyler
Chair, Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA)

Wendy Rahm
Chair, DNA Land Use Transportation Committee

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Historic Landmarks Commission (c/o Hillary Adam [Hillary.Adam@portlandoregon.gov])
Design Commission (c/o Art Graves [arthur.graves@portlandoregon.gov])
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NOTES:

¹. "South Park Blocks Master Plan, Master Plan Concepts"/elements/Movement and Experience, October 2019 (presentation documents)

². CC2035 Vol5A p.59, adopted by City Council June 2018, effective July 9 2018.

³. "South Park Blocks Master Plan, Visioning Survey Results," September 2019, [<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/746830>] p. 5. Graph 4 shows reasons people visit the South Park Blocks: From top of the list in descending order are: "Shop at Portland Farmers Market"(75%); "enjoy nature and be outdoors" (68%); "on way to cultural events, performances, concerts, church" (65%); and "it's the closest greenspace to my home (55%)." All other reasons were well below 50%.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. P4. Question 3. "How do you usually travel to the South Park Blocks on a weekday and weekend day.?"

⁶ Ibid. Some relevant excerpted comments: "Main safety issue is unlawful and reckless thoroughfare of e-scooters and bicycles;" "...just several occasions where I have seen people almost get hit by people riding their bikes;" "Concerned about danger from bicycles, scooters, skateboarders running into pedestrians – esp. senior citizens;" " Bikers walking their bikes would be great. Scooters should 'scoot' elsewhere;" "No scooters/bicycles;" "Bicycles and scooters should not be on the sidewalks."