



Daniel S Meyers

SITE ANALYSIS for The Democratized Archive: *The Pacific Center for the Humanities, a research library and center for dialogue, for the citizens of the Pacific Northwest.*

I am proposing a new publicly funded institution to provide completely democratized first hand access to paper artifacts of culture (manuscripts, rare books, etc.), an expensive and improbable project. Further, I am proposing the new institution be sited in Portland, on the two Northernmost parcels of the Harbor-Naito redevelopment area. I have selected this area for a variety of reasons, but important among them is what I perceive as a lack of civic involvement in the South Waterfront (N Macadam URA) developments. Because I have selected a somewhat politically charged site, for my somewhat politically charged project, it is important that the characteristics and suitability of the site be explored fully; the purpose of this paper is to document that exploration. The site has positive as well as challenging attributes, and is basically suitable for the development of a public institution and library such as I propose.

SITE OVERVIEW

The site is located in southwest Portland, between to Western ramps of the Hawthorne bridge to the North, and the Marquam bridge to the South, in close proximity to the Willamette river. The site is a small landlocked parcel bordered by Harbor Drive to the East, Naito Parkway to the West, SW Harrison Street to the South, and SW Market Street to the North. The site is part of the Harbor/Naito sub region of the North Macadam URD, and is slated for development (PDC). The PDC has proposed offices and housing of roughly 260,000 GSF be built onsite, as well as other commercial projects in the parcels sandwiched between harbor Drive and Naito parkway further south to the intersection with interstate 5/405 (with the exception of a park planned for the southern corner of Harrison and Harbor drive, see PDC image next page). This plan is notably lacking in a deference to the civic needs of the expanding urban area at the southern edge of Portland, and is designed to benefit developers first, and the citizenry second. Though a close relationship is of course necessary between the city and developers willing to take personal risks to bring healthy growth to the city, we must also provide totally democratized civic spaces (not just parks) in areas where our cities expand, to ensure long term civic health, and civic parity. The site is currently divided into parcels owned by the City of Portland and by PDOT (PDC), with an easement axially from the north to the southern edge of the site for the parking lot which currently occupies it. This location is at the southern edge of what has traditionally been considered downtown Portland (see HISTORICAL SITE CONTEXT), but is well placed to act as a civic anchor between old Portland and the increasing urbanization of the south waterfront and beyond.



Southwest Portland, site in orange.



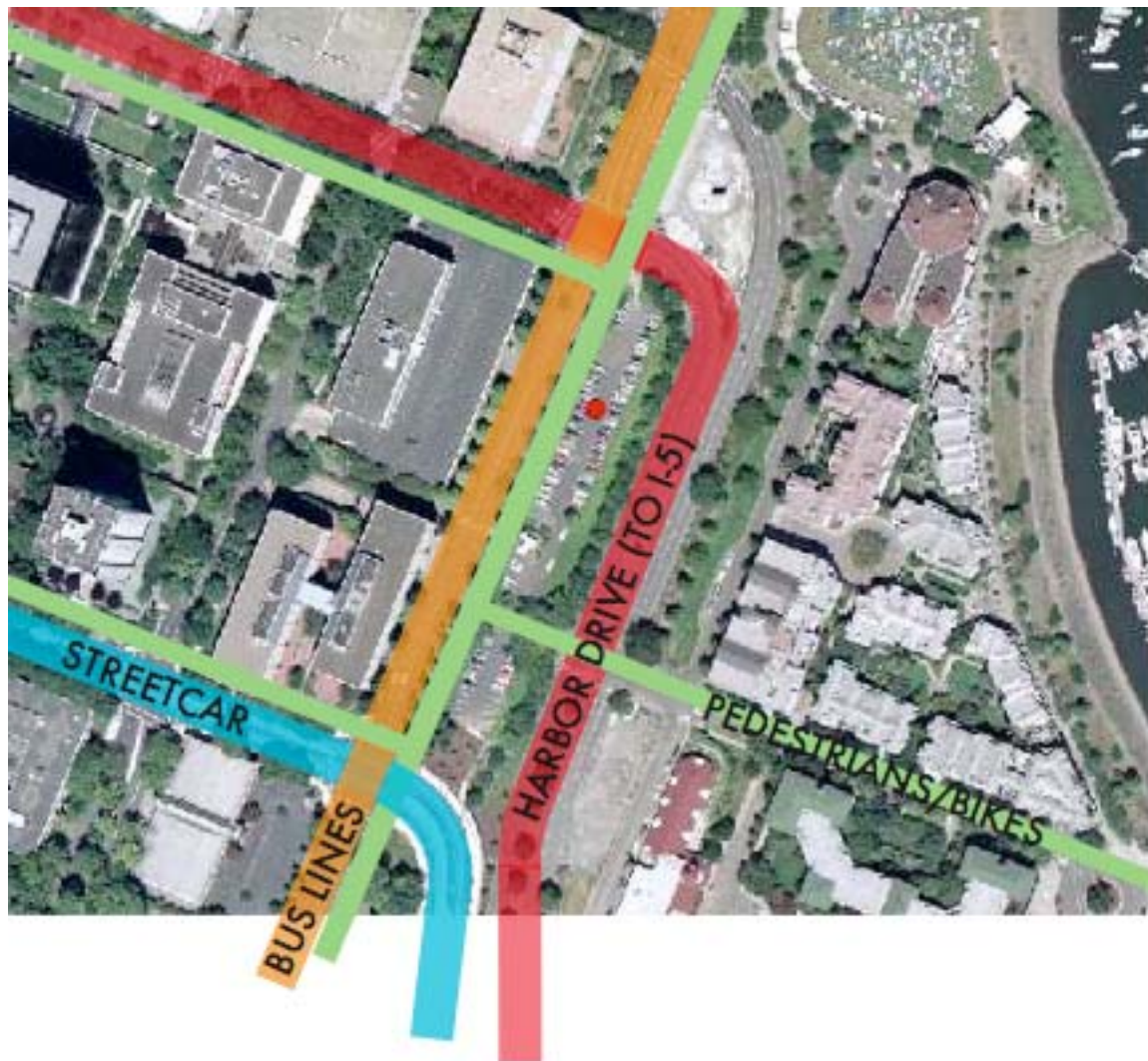
Site, relation to river and bridges, downtown.



Aerial Photo of site showing current conditions.

SITE ACCESS

The site has direct connections to multiple N/S bus-lines in and out of the city, and directly abuts the new Portland streetcar line – (Riverplace Extension, capitol improvement PDT000115). Pedestrian access is limited by the vigorous traffic on the two NS arterials bordering the site, though the PDC envisions strengthening pedestrian approaches to the area, including the rejuvenation of the Montgomery Street stair which transects the site at its mid point (PDC). Though this attitude is a positive initial move on the part of the PDC, a major element of site improvement must be the robust and explicit improvement of pedestrian and bike access to, and on, the site. The locations of current pedestrian access need not be altered, rather the character of that access improved. Streetcar passengers disembarking at the Harrison Park stop (at the southern edge of the site) should have safe, beautiful, and unfettered access to the entire NS corridor of the newly developed areas, as well safe access transecting the site arriving from or en-route to locations East and West. The Northern edge of the site is the dominant I-5 south access point for vehicular traffic from downtown SW, and therefore any solution to the pedestrian interface to the site must account for heavy vehicular traffic at this location at all hours. The availability of existing and newly developed public transportation onsite, as well as the potential for development of robust pedestrian site access, makes the site consistent with the stated project goal of minimizing single occupant vehicular transport to the new facility.



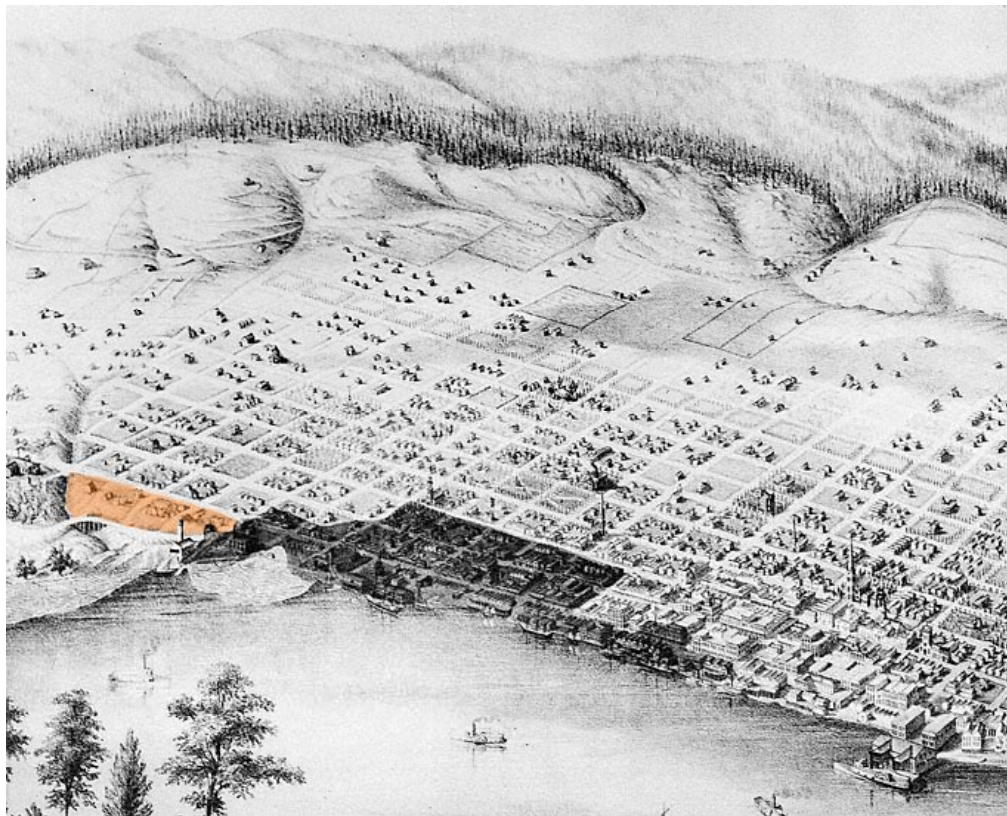
Current Access (Pedestrian access weak/ unsafe)



Detail, PDX bike map- no recommended bike routes to site.

HISTORICAL SITE CONTEXT

The site has become a distinct entity only as a result of geography, and later transportation needs at the southern edge of downtown Portland. As seen in the map of the 1873 fire, downtown development has traditionally stopped *literally* at the northern edge of the site (Tucker). This is due to dominant geographical features, including a bend in the river which forces the downtown street-grid to become non-parallel with the bank, and the steep E-W slope of the site, as steep as 30% at the southern edge. The kind of commercial riverfront development seen in the second photo from the left (taken from the towers of the Hawthorne bridge circa 1922) was stopped at the riverfront adjacent to the site, while the heavy industry of the mid-20th century in SW Portland was slightly further to the south, and avoided the site proper for the same geographical reasons that it was not heavily developed earlier. The current state of the site is largely the result of accidental or haphazard development; It is a slice of land essentially left over from decades of highway routing, and currently covered by a private right of way, which is manifest as a parking lot. The strand of undeveloped land between Naito and Harbor Drive until recently extended unbroken all the way from Market street to the Marquam bridge onramps. In 2004 the sliver of land was divided into two section N/S by the Riverfront Streetcar extension (see next page). Dignity village briefly considered the site of the future Harrison Park as a location in the late 1990's (Dignity Site Committee), which I see as an indication of the sites simultaneous proximity to, and removal from, traditional downtown Portland. It is this traditional characteristic of the site which makes it a viable site for the institution I am proposing, which will demand physical proximity to the urban core, but will also require the potential for portions of the project to be introspective.



Map of 1873 fire devastation area, site to S. (OHS)



1920's photo of riverfront directly North of Hawthorne Bridge. (OHS)



The site today (southern edge looking E).

Streetcar line transecting the southern edge of the site at Harrison:



2003

2004

2005

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL & POLITICAL SITE CONTEXT

The majority of public attention to the North Macadam URD, both positive and negative, has focused on the south waterfront development. None of the proposals made in the PDC final plan for the Harbor Naito area are as flashy, or as resource intensive, as projects like the OHSU tram or the extensive mid rise development further south. As a result, comparatively little public attention has been paid to the plans for the Harbor-Naito development area, and my view is that this is an unfortunate occurrence. The area is among a very few sites in tangential proximity to downtown and the river with little or no existing or historic development, and is uniquely situated as it is also physically connected to the south waterfront. All of these proximities indicate that the area has potential to become more than a leftover sliver of unused hillside, and rather a focus of civic interchange between major subregions of the metropolitan area. Without immediate action, however, the site will be developed commercially, greatly reducing the likelihood of a project of civic import ever occupying the site. Commercial development is of course a healthy and necessary mechanism of urban growth, but without nodes of civic activity (which does not mean simply open parklands, though those are also needed), the character of an urban subregion will by necessity become exclusionary, which is unhealthy in any democracy.

CODE/ZONING

The site (ID R556757) is currently zoned CX, with a d overlay. This zoning designation permits all conventional institutional uses. The design overlay is an issue that would obviously impact the project where it to move forward into reality, but since the project is an academic exercise, it is of little consequence. The site is not inside the city's Noise Impact Zone, though there is audible highway noise under certain atmospheric conditions, and significant traffic at almost all hours on Harbor Drive to the East. (Data source: Portland Maps)

The proposed building density is within the PDC's predictions for the site, the PDC's Final Concept Plan includes the following land use framework summary:

Land Use Framework Summary

Area	Land Use	Acres*	Building Area	Units	Parking Spaces- Ratio
A	① Office Only	1.4	153,000 sq. ft.	—	456- 3/1000
	Office	1.0	103,000 sq. ft.	—	306- 3/1000
	② Housing	0.4	—	70	150- 2/Unit
	Pedestrian ROW	0.2	—	—	—
Total Acreage:		1.6	—	—	—
B	③④⑤⑦ Housing Only	2.7	—	685	685- 1/Unit
	③④ Office	1.6	194,000 sq. ft.	—	582- 3/1000
	⑤⑦ Housing	1.0	—	270	145- 1/Unit
	School	0.2	—	—	—
	Pedestrian ROW	0.4	—	—	—
Open Space		0.55	—	—	—
Total Acreage:		3.85	—	—	—
C	⑥ Office Only	1.0	36,000 sq. ft.	—	108- 3/1000
	⑥ Housing Only	1.0	—	140	108- 0.8/Unit
Total Acreage:		1.0	—	—	—
D	School	1.7	—	—	—
	Total Acreage:	1.7	—	—	—

* Approximate

This matrix shows a total of 256,000 sq. ft. of planned building area. The Pacific Center for the Humanities is a proposed 240-275,000 sq. ft., indicating that the rough building sizes proposed for the site by the PDC are in concurrence with the building size I have proposed.

It is important to note, however, that I am proposing to greatly reduce the parking capacity onsite. A major element of my master plan for the site is the improvement of pedestrian access to the site, and the full development of infrastructure to take advantage of the recent addition of streetcar access to the site, as well as existing bus lines along each of the long edges. This vision of site access is direct conflict with regulation and vision for the site specifically, but is not without precedent in the Portland metro area, and is an attribute of this project which cannot be abandoned. Portland is at an especially acute crossroads as a visionary American city, and it is of paramount importance that we continue to emphasize modes of transportation which are energy efficient, and which promote urban forms that enrich the civic life of our city, our metropolitan area, and our region.

VIEWS & NEIGHBORS

The site has a variety of types of views available along its length. The Northeastern edge of the site has an unobstructed view of the western end of the Hawthorne bridge, over Tom McCall waterfront park. The site is flanked along its length by less inspiring views, of predominantly brutalist office buildings uphill to the west, and mostly newly constructed residential buildings downhill to the east:



View to the Northwest...



...the West (showing the Montgomery pedestrian stair)



....the East.



The Southern Edge of the site has a short view to what will become the new Harrison Street park, and a longer view to the new developments of the South Waterfront, and the OHSU tram. These views are pleasant and hopefully permanent, however the dominance of the less permanently constructed housing units to the East in the field of view at this end of the site are unfortunate.

SITE TRIVIA

- The site is sloped significantly along the E/W axis, rising an average of 15' along its 120' width.
- The site is near the ongoing work on the Westside CSO project (BES007353, BES007355 (Clay St. Shaft))
- The site (land) had an assessed value of \$1,308,880.00 in January 2006.
- As recently as 2005 a nuisance complaint had been filed against the property (2005-176190-000-00-NU) due to lapsed maintenance.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced above, the following may be said of the site and its suitability for the project at hand: a) There are no zoning restrictions which would preclude the use proposed. b) There is ample proximity to existing and future public transportation and pedestrian access. c) There will be limited private vehicular access to the site, which is an explicit aim of the project. d) The site's physical characteristics (narrow geometry, slope) present challenges, as well as opportunities for the building form. e) The project directly contradicts the PDC's vision for the site.

This research indicates that while there are few contradictions between the proposed building program and the city's land use regulations on the site, there is a significant divergence in my proposal from the PDC's vision of the Harbor/Naito area. Though the PDC's plan makes a significant gesture to the civic potential of the site with the proposed park at Harrison street, it is my assertion that the site is so unique that a greater percentage of it should be devoted to the regions citizens, for a classically civic use. Rather than producing rents for investing developers, the project proposes to produce a more substantial benefit, as an investment in the social fabric of the metropolitan area and the region.

WORKS CITED

Dignity Village, Dignity Site Committee

< <http://www.outofthedoors.org/docs/sites-considered.html> >

Google Maps

< <http://maps.google.com> >

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< <http://www.ohs.org> >

Images, Oregon Historical Society *Oregon History Project*

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Portland Development Commission, *Final Harbor/Naito Concept Plan*, June 2004.

PORTLAND MAPS, Data for 1720 SW Naito PKWY.

< <http://www.portlandmaps.com/> >