

*A Community Center for Portland's Brooklyn Neighborhood:
Survey of Demographics and Existing Services*

My thesis project will explore the possibilities of transit-oriented development (or redevelopment) on four parcels, totaling about 250,000 square feet, in Southeast Portland's Brooklyn neighborhood. The sites form the four corners of a heavily-traveled intersection, and will abut the Portland-Milwaukie MAX line's Holgate Station. The development will include a mix of neighborhood-serving retail, housing, office space, light industrial, and a community center. My central interest in this project is in finding ways to make a unified, functional, recognizable place out of what is currently a fractured no-place.

I believe that a community center at this location can help strengthen the neighborhood's identity and activate the streetscape, while providing an amenity that the area currently lacks. In order for a community center to be successful, however, it must be appropriate to area residents and their needs. The following questions need to be answered: Who will use the community center—what are the demographics of neighborhood residents and workers? What recreational opportunities are currently available in the neighborhood? And what programs and facilities does a "typical" Portland community center offer?

Who will use the community center?

Potential beneficiaries of a community center at this location include neighborhood residents, employees of neighborhood businesses, and transit riders transferring between MAX and busses at the Holgate station.

Demographic information is readily available in the form of census data. There are, however, two major disadvantages to the use of census data. The first is that the most current census data is now almost nine years out of date—enough time for a neighborhood’s character to experience significant changes. The American Community Survey provides more recent figures for Portland, but it provides a less detailed picture, requiring the user to extrapolate from changes in the city as a whole to the specific neighborhood. These larger shifts may or may not be reflected in the area under study; further, the neighborhood may have undergone demographic changes of its own that are not reflected in the larger picture.

The second disadvantage to the use of census data is that census tracts (the “datashed,” so to speak) do not necessarily align with neighborhood boundaries. Conveniently, the entire Brooklyn neighborhood falls within a single census tract (tract 10), but the census tract is considerably larger than the neighborhood. Thus, the apparent demographics of the neighborhood may be affected by populations that fall outside of its borders.

As of the 2000 census, the residents of census tract 10 are—compared to the general population of Portland—relatively young, college-educated renters with few children. Their income and employment characteristics reflect those of the city as a whole. Their most striking contrast with the greater population is the number of children per household, which is less than half of that in Portland as a whole. More recent data for Portland shows that the city’s residents have become wealthier, better educated, and older, with a higher rate of home ownership and fewer children; employment in the management/professional sector has increased while production and sales/office work has declined. The area in question may or may not have experienced similar changes. For instance, the addition of 70 units of senior housing at Sacred Heart Villa will have added to the concentration of both older residents and lower-income residents.

One of Brooklyn's major employers, located across the street from the potential community center site, is TriMet. Their facility on Seventeenth Ave. includes a bus maintenance garage and administrative offices as well as driver-training classrooms. According to Maintenance Manager Tom Nielsen, there are currently about 145 employees, of whom about 2/3 work day shifts (beginning as early as 6 a.m.) and 1/3 work night shifts (beginning after 5 p.m.). The facility operates continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

<i>Household composition</i>			
	Tract 10*	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
One-person household	36.1%		
Two-person household	35.8%		
Families with children	11.2%	24.5%	22.3%
Average household size	2.12 persons	2.3 persons	2.25 persons

<i>Housing tenure</i>			
	Tract 10*	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
Home owners	37%	55.8%	57.4%
Renters	63%	44.2%	42.6%

<i>Race/ethnicity:</i>			
	Tract 10*	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
White	82%	81.3%	81.7%
Hispanic	5.6%	6.8%	8.5%
Asian	4%	7.5%	7.7%
Black	3.2%	7.9%	7.7%
Native American/Alaskan	1.1%	2.3%	3.0%
Native Islander	0.2%	0.7%	0.7%
Other	2.4%	4.9%	3.2%

*PortlandMaps.com

**Census 2000

†American Community Survey 2007

<i>Age</i>			
	Tract 10*	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
under 5	6%	6.1%	6.4%
5-17	10.9%	(5-14) 12%	(5-14) 11.3%
18-21	5.8%	(15-19) 5.7%	(15-19) 5.6%
22-39	44.5%	(20-34) 25.9%	(20-34) 21.9%
40-64	27.2%	(35-64) 38.8%	(35-64) 44.8%
65 and over	5.6%	11.5%	10.1%

<i>Educational Attainment (over 25 years of age)</i>			
	Tract 10**	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
Less than 9 th grade	3.9%	5.2%	4.0%
Some high school	7.8%	9.2%	6.2%
High school graduate	17.7%	22.2%	22.0%
Some college	26.5%	25.0%	22.7%
Associate's degree	8.3%	5.8%	6.7%
Bachelor's degree	26.5%	21.3%	23.6%
Graduate or professional degree	9.3%	11.4%	14.8%

<i>Employment (over 16 years of age) by occupation</i>			
	Tract 10**	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
Management/Professional	36.8%	37.2%	41.8%
Service	16.6%	15.0%	15.7%
Sales & office	26.6%	26.5%	23.95
Farming, fishing, forestry	0.9%	0.2%	0.7%
Construction, extraction, maintenance	6.1%	7.0%	6.1%
Production, transportation, material moving	13.1%	14.0%	11.7%

<i>Income by household</i>			
	Tract 10**	Portland 2000**	Portland 2007†
Less than \$10,000	10%	9.9%	8.7%
\$10-\$24,999	22.2%	19.6%	17.3%
\$25-\$49,999	29.7%	31.2%	26.0%
\$50-\$74,999	22.9%	19.9%	19.4%
\$75-\$99,999	8.7%	9.2%	10.5%
Over \$100,000	3.4%	10.3%	18.0%

*PortlandMaps.com

**Census 2000

†American Community Survey 2007

What recreational opportunities are available in the neighborhood?

At present, recreational opportunities in the Brooklyn neighborhood are limited. The Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge and the Springwater Corridor Trail, along the Willamette River, are nearby, but somewhat difficult to access due to heavy traffic and poor pedestrian crossings on McLoughlin Boulevard. The neighborhood has two small parks, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn School Park, which include play equipment and ball fields. TriMet's Holgate maintenance facility has a workout room, open 24 hours and staffed from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., but this is open only to TriMet employees. The neighborhood's resources will be considerably increased by the opening of a new 24-Hour Fitness location on Holgate Boulevard at McLoughlin Boulevard, due sometime in 2009.

What programs and facilities does a "typical" Portland community center offer?

Portland Parks and Recreation lists thirteen community centers on its website. They are scattered through the city, and exist in a variety of settings, though most are connected to parks. Facilities and programming vary widely: from the Laurelhurst Dance Studio, a small single-purpose building that offers dance and fitness classes, to the Mt. Scott Community Center and Pool, which offers an indoor basketball court, two indoor pools, and a roller rink; reservable rooms for parties and meetings, a reservable kitchen, a stage, and a weight room.

Classes at the community centers are offered in almost every imaginable category, but can be roughly grouped—arts and crafts, education, fitness (including aquatics and sports), and performing arts. They are tailored for families, preschoolers, school age children, teens, and seniors. Hours vary from one facility to another, but the centers generally open early (5:00 to 6:00 a.m.), stay open late (9:00 to 10:00 p.m.), and are open 7 days a week; the only exception are the smallest facilities, which have fewer amenities and more limited hours.

Alongside the Parks and Recreation community centers, there are also a several centers run by nonprofit or religious groups. The Northeast Community Center and Mittelman Jewish Community Center both include pools and recreation facilities; the Northwest Neighborhood Cultural Center, Isobel's Clubhouse, and the Sunnyside Swap Shop Co-op are smaller. These centers differ from the Parks & Recreation centers in that they usually require membership in order to access their facilities and classes, and they may be tailored to the needs of a particular community.

Summary

Brooklyn's residents are on the whole relatively young, affluent, and childless. Their neighborhood currently includes some outdoor recreational opportunities, and it will soon include an indoor fitness facility as well. Portland's existing community centers generally offer a mixture of classes and fitness/recreation facilities; their classes are aimed towards almost everyone *except* childless young adults. On the one hand, this may mean that a community center would not be appropriate for the neighborhood: residents' and workers' recreational/fitness needs are already being met, and typical community center class offerings indicate that the demographic group most typical of the neighborhood is not interested in community-center activities. On the other hand, this may indicate that, while the neighborhood does not need additional fitness/recreation facilities, childless young adults are under-served by Portland's existing community centers, and a carefully-programmed community center would be an asset to the neighborhood. Further research into the leisure activities of this demographic group would probably be helpful. A survey of neighborhood residents to gauge their interest in a community center and the likelihood of their using it would also be useful.

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