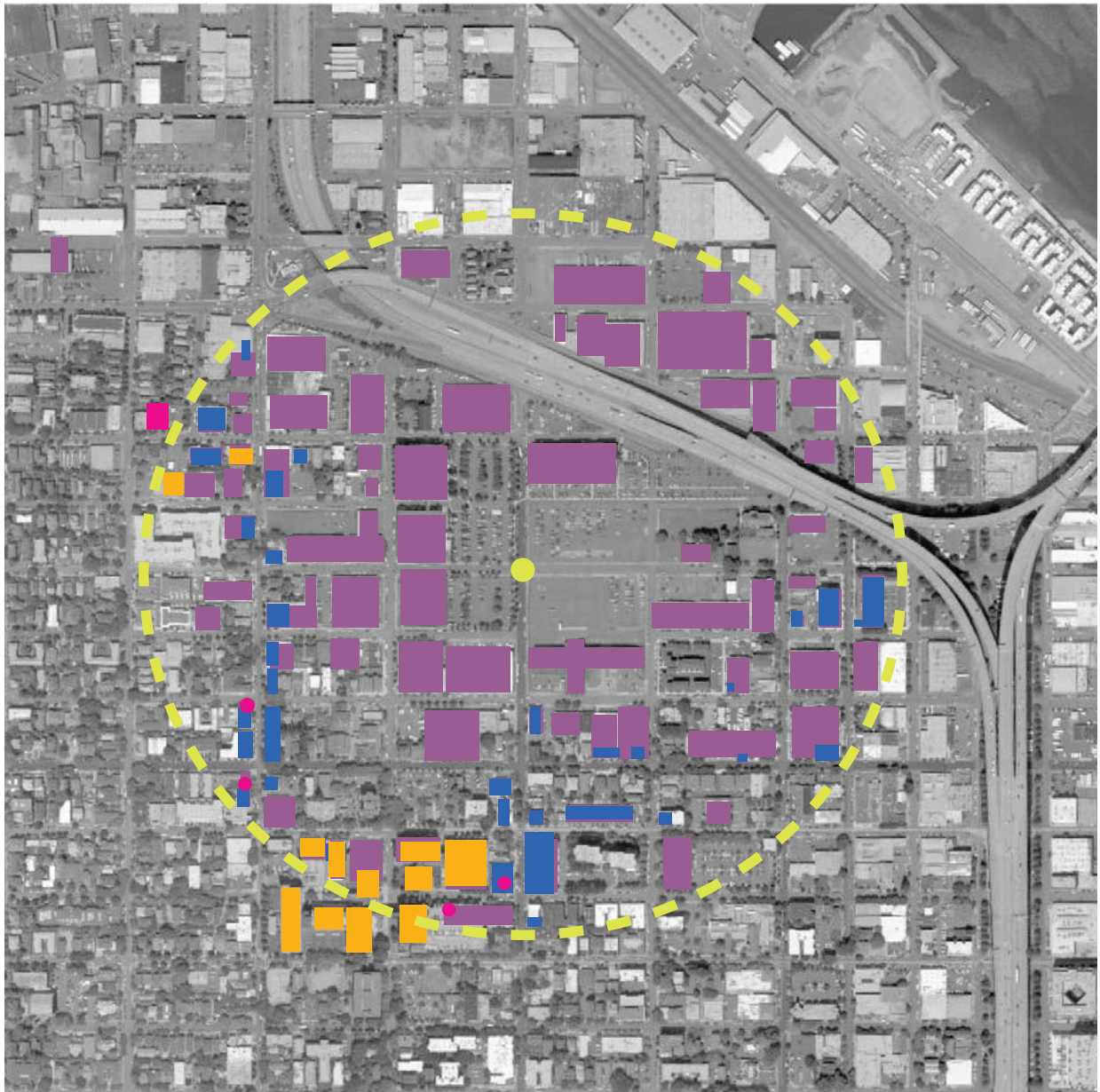


THE MISSING PIECE: AN ANALYSIS OF FUTURE LAND USES NECESSARY TO CREATE A "FIVE MINUTE" NEIGHBORHOOD ON THE CONWAY SITE IN NORTHWEST PORTLAND



- "5 MINUTE" NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER
- "5 MINUTE" NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY
- GROCERY
- PHARMACY/SMALL MARKET
- EMPLOYMENT
- RETAIL/SERVICE
- GOVERNMENT/INSTITUTIONAL
- PARK/PUBLIC OPEN SPACE (NONE)

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Project Three: Program Research
Terminal Thesis Project: A Master Plan and 1-block project design for the Con-Way Trucking site in Northwest Portland

Introduction

Northwest Portland is one of the city's densest and most vibrant neighborhoods. At the northern edge of the district the typical pattern of the built environment, i.e. a fine grain mix of single family and multifamily residential blocks of varying sizes and scales on tree lined streets, gives way to a discordant environment of surface parking lots, tilt up concrete warehouses and scattered commercial office buildings. This site of approximately 8 blocks owned by the Con-Way Trucking company is ready for re-vision and re-development. The site represents a kind of "hole" in the prevailing pattern of Northwest Portland development. The surface parking lots in particular, which comprise about 50% of the site, are not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood, and neither represent the best use for the land or the goals of the Northwest District Association nor the city at large.

These goals include the expansion of the successful model present in Northwest Portland: first and foremost a walk-able and active urban neighborhood with spaces for work, recreation, and dwelling. The Northwest District Association (NWDA) produced a master plan for the entire Northwest district, including the Con-Way Site, outlining development goals and principles for the district. That plan, called the Northwest District Plan, was adopted by the City of Portland Bureau of Planning in 2003. Given that the goal of the NWDA plan is to guide infill development of the Conway site towards a fine grain mixed use neighborhood that is livable without the necessity of an automobile, are there services and amenities that are missing that would be required to meet this goal? What would be necessary to create the "five-minute neighborhood?"

Rationale

The concept of the Five-Minute Neighborhood has been around in urban planning and urban design circles since at least the 1920s, with the work of Clarence Perry and Clarence Stein. The concept is simple (and much older, even ancient if we simply consider traditional urban form pre-dating the automobile): the neighborhood is the basic unit of town planning and has a defined size of approximately 160 acres, equal to a circle with a radius equal to a five minute walk, or approximately 1,350 feet or ¼ mile (this also corresponds with the extreme end of the distance the average American is willing to walk, which is said to be between 800 and 1,200 feet). Each neighborhood unit should contain cultural functions for the unit, such as schools and churches. Shops, places of business and work, and other basic amenities necessary for daily living should be arrayed along the borders of the neighborhood that are in turn shared with other neighborhoods, an arrangement that in agglomeration produces a town or, at larger scale, a city.

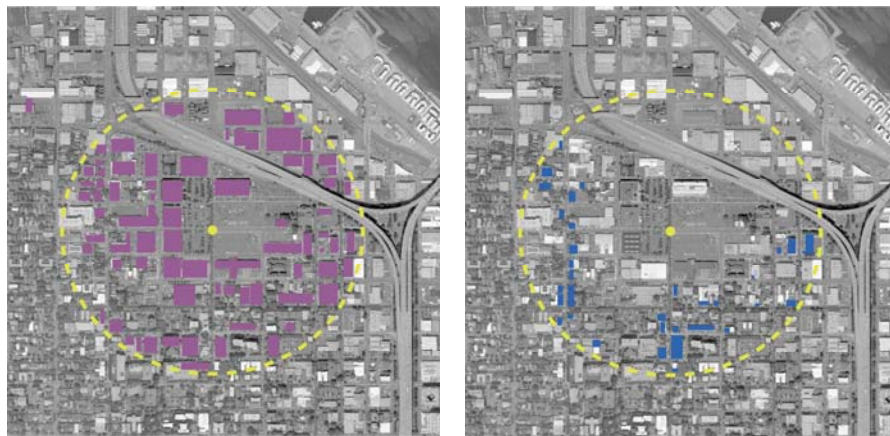
Neither the term "five-minute neighborhood" nor any related term are used in the NWDA Plan but the concept is a neat summation of the kind of community the plan proposes, essentially

a community in which residents could live comfortably without a car. If we consider the Con-Way site as the center of such a community, and the center of that site as the intersection of NW Raleigh Street and NW 21st Avenue, then the corresponding neighborhood would be a circle with a diameter roughly equal to 12 Portland city blocks, bounded on the North and South by NW Roosevelt and NW Lovejoy Streets, and on the East and West by NW 17th and NW 24th Avenues (see map below). Given that it takes density to support services, with each particular type of business requiring it's a different population base to be viable, a goal of my terminal thesis project will be to design a plan for the Con-Way site that achieves enough density to support these services while maintaining the desired character of the neighborhood envisioned by the NWDA and the city. I will not attempt here to determine the necessary densities or population bases for these services, but simply to make the first step in the process: to identify the businesses and services that are missing. Incidentally, a corollary issue (which I will likely also not be able to work out here) is whether the five-minute neighborhood is even a reasonable or achievable goal for the site, given economic conditions and design density constraints.

My research method involved mapping the area within the circle and identifying existing and absent services. These were broken down into four general categories (employment, retail and services, government and institutional uses, and green space) and one specific category: groceries and markets, including drug stores.

Findings

The first general category, employment, turns out to be by far the dominant use in the neighborhood. The shaded areas shown in purple (below left) represent all the buildings within the circle that can reasonably be said to be places of employment. There is some discussion of employment and work related development in the NWDA plan, although the goal of the plan seems to be primarily the design of an amenable mixed use residential neighborhood. For a five minute neighborhood to work there must at least some employment opportunities within a walk-able distance of each residence. It is clear from my mapping that there is currently no lack of employment within in the neighborhood, including the 894 jobs represented by the Con-Way Company itself.



The next category, Retail and Services (above right), is also well represented in the area. For my purposes the “Retail” category refers to businesses that fulfill non-essential needs or infrequent needs, for instance gift boutiques, book stores, clothing stores and the like. “Services”

refers to personal and professional services, including banks, hair salons, dry cleaners, law offices, counselors, auto repair etc. This category also includes all restaurants, cafes and coffee shops. I found that retail and food service businesses were primarily concentrated along NW 21 Avenue, while other service businesses were scattered throughout the district, concentrated somewhat to the south east around NW Northrup and NW Overton streets.

Some Government and Institutional services are currently present in the area and some are not (below left). On the northwest edge of the circle there is a US Post Office and a Multnomah County branch library (perhaps it should be noted here that any single use present on one edge of the circle means that it is potentially a ten minute—not five minute—walk from the opposite side of the neighborhood). There are ample medical facilities in the area, including the large Good Samaritan Hospital Complex in the southwest quadrant of the neighborhood. The stand-out institution missing from the area is that of a school. There are limited day care or child care facilities but no public or private schools for grades K-12 within the circle, although there are two public schools nearby, each within a quarter mile distance from the edge.

Public green space and park space is completely absent, save for one small, noisy, and uninviting park under the Highway 30/I-405 interchange over NW Raleigh Street (not shown because it lies just outside the bounding circle). The NWDA plan explicitly calls for the creation of a neighborhood park and community center to be built on the Con-Way site to remedy the situation.



Lastly, the most specific category that was mapped was the grocery/pharmacy/small market category. In this case individual locations were plotted (above right). My reasoning for singling out this category is that it represents businesses that fulfill the most frequent and essential needs. Based on personal and anecdotal evidence I would make the proposition that the most frequent purchase made in any given week by a typical household is for food, followed by small household items such as sanitary and cleaning products, and health products and beauty products, which are available from both grocery stores and smaller markets and pharmacies. There are no grocery stores located within the five-minute neighborhood currently. There is one small grocery located just outside the circle at NW 24th Avenue and NW Thurman Street. However this grocery store, called Food Front, is a natural foods cooperative market which, while it would certainly fulfill the needs of some consumers, must be considered a specialty store and not a general service grocery, and thus would not meet the needs of a majority of local residents. One small market (convenience store) on NW 23rd Avenue would likewise not meet

the food needs of most residents. Additionally there are three pharmacies within the neighborhood boundaries.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the survey my conclusion is that there are two uses (services) that must be included in any development of the Con-Way site in order to achieve the goal of creating a five-minute neighborhood in the area. The first is the necessity of a grocery store or supermarket large enough—or at least wide enough in scope—to supply the food needs of all the residents. A next logical step for my terminal project research would be to look into the base population necessary to support such a store, and to determine whether that population density is achievable and thus whether a new store in the area would be economically viable. There are currently four supermarkets catering to varying demographics (Fred Meyer, Zupan's, Trader Joes, and a new Safeway) within ½ mile of the neighborhood. Competition with these existing stores would have to be considered.

The second use absent from the site is parkland or open space. As mentioned earlier there is no public open space or green space in the neighborhood, nor public gathering space or community meeting space. I agree with the findings of the NWDA plan that the absence of open space is grounds for the building of both a new neighborhood park and a community center.

The Con-Way site is already in close proximity to—or includes—most of the services that make for a livable community, and the majority of these are located within a five minute walk from the center of the site. The addition of a grocery store, a park and community center on the site will allow the infill mixed use development proposed for the area in the NWDA plan to achieve the goal of creating a lively and variegated urban community that is not just pedestrian friendly but fully livable by all residents independent of auto ownership.

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