



Memorandum

To: Kenny Asher, Community Development and Public Works Director

From: Katie Mangle, Planning Director

Date: June 8, 2010

Re: Downtown Plan Refresh Background Memo #1:
Summary of Milwaukie's Downtown Plan

Background

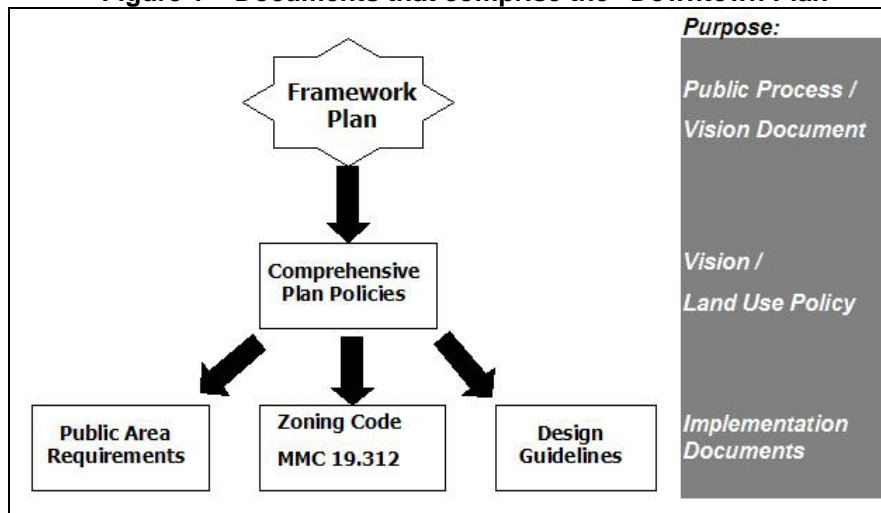
The *Milwaukie Downtown and Riverfront Land Use Framework Plan* guides the development of private and public land in downtown Milwaukie – a small area centered around ten blocks that exhibit the classic structure and scale of a small town downtown. The Plan was written over 19 months in 1999 and 2000 with the input of more than 2000 citizens.

Elements of the “Downtown Plan”

As a result of the downtown planning process, the City amended its Comprehensive Plan and zoning code to include five elements that together establish and implement Milwaukie's local vision for its small downtown. The community commonly uses the term “Downtown Plan” to refer to any of the documents listed below. As illustrated in Figure 1, these five documents each play a different role in defining the City's vision and establishing City policy.

- ***Milwaukie Downtown and Riverfront Land Use Framework Plan*** - describes the vision for downtown: a vibrant place redeveloped with mixed use buildings served by multimodal transportation system with easy access to great open spaces. Adopted as an ancillary document to the Comprehensive Plan.
- ***Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element*** – includes broad objectives and policies that direct the City to focus redevelopment efforts on the downtown and riverfront.
- ***Milwaukie Municipal Code Section 19.312 – Downtown Zones*** - specifies how the City requires development projects to implement various aspects of the vision (land use, public improvements, and building design).
- ***Public Area Requirements*** - provides transportation circulation plans for all modes of transportation, and detailed design of streetscape improvements.
- ***Downtown Design Guidelines*** - establishes a checklist of what it means for a new or renovated building to fit with Milwaukie's character.

Figure 1 – Documents that comprise the “Downtown Plan”



Each of these planning documents accomplishes different things, as described in more detail below:

Framework Plan

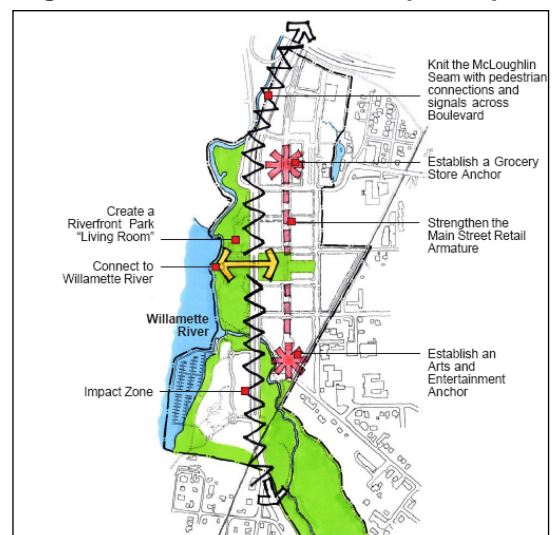
As described in the City's 2003 *Implementation Plan for Downtown Revitalization*, the Framework Plan is a “conceptual plan” that proposes a variety of projects and establishes a vision for downtown development. The local vision established in the *Framework Plan* was built on just a few key principles:

1. Build on existing assets, existing uses (including businesses), the few remaining historic buildings, and the town’s unique character.
2. Feature the natural environment, especially the Willamette River.
3. Strengthen Main Street as a source of community pride and to ensure economic success.

In selecting these concepts as a platform, the community expressed its affection for much of what is already downtown (the Willamette River, Main Street) and stated its preference that City leaders and other public officials not disrupt these features but rather build upon them so as not to lose contact with Milwaukie’s natural and cultural settings. The vision for downtown that is outlined in the Framework has been generally confirmed by the community during the planning processes for the Transportation System Plan, Kellogg Creek restoration, and the North Main Village projects.

The *Downtown and Riverfront Land Use Framework Plan* is a concise document that lays out the community’s vision in a series of statements and graphics that describe the framework for revitalizing and investing in

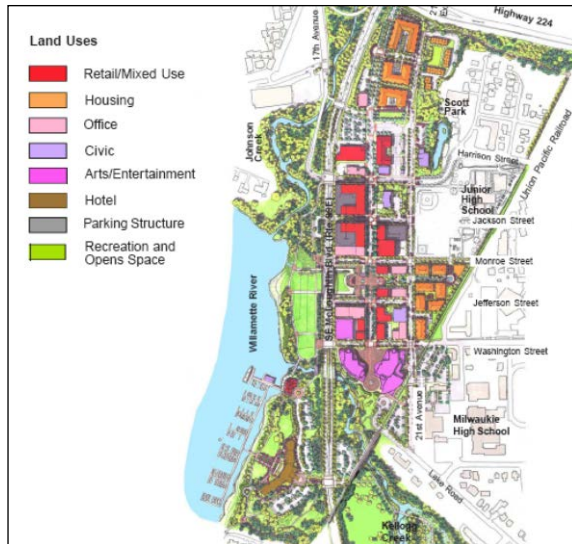
Figure 3 – Fundamental Concepts Map



downtown (see Figure 3). The “fundamental concepts” include:

- Reconnecting Milwaukie to the River
- Revitalization of historic buildings
- Designing new buildings that harmonize with the town’s character
- Creating anchors and attractors, such as a transit center, grocery store, or arts/entertainment / office campus.
- Strengthening the Main Street “retail armature”

Figure 4 – Illustrative Plan



The document includes illustrative plans, which illustrate how downtown could change to better meet the vision statements outlined above. These are helpful illustrations of what investments would fit in different sections of downtown, and what Main Street “anchors” could look like (see Figure 4). They are, however, one architect’s illustration of what implementation of the “fundamental concepts” could look like. Given the same concepts and principles, another architect could create a different illustration.

To understand what the Framework Plan is, it is helpful to understand what it is not. It is not a land use plan, but rather the framework for establishing other regulations, land use code, and design guidelines. Neither is it intended to be predictive of exact uses or building footprints. It is a

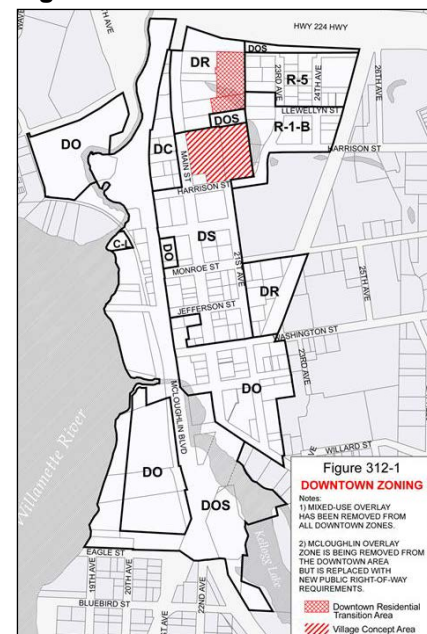
framework for downtown redevelopment aspirations to be implemented by more specific land use, streetscape, and design standard documents.

Zoning Code Section 19.310 – Downtown Zones

The zoning code for the Downtown Zones implements the Framework Plan by defining the following aspects of a project:

- Development Standards – The code specifies building height, setback from the sidewalk, where ground-floor windows are required, housing density, etc.
- Land uses – Downtown is divided into five zones, each with a different emphasis (see Figure 5). Retail and restaurants are emphasized in the Main Street corridor, taller office buildings are encouraged at the north and south ends, and residential buildings are planned as a buffer between the commercial area and existing residential neighborhoods to the east. Mixed uses (combining residential, commercial, and office uses in a single building) are allowed in all downtown zones.

Figure 5 – Downtown Zones



- Public improvements – Most types of development trigger a requirement to construct improvements to the public realm.
- Design Standards – Objective standards for new and major remodeling projects. These standards include requirements for wall materials, window proportions, and roof type.

The Downtown zoning code was written to support the vision of a multimodal (non auto-oriented) environment outlined in the Framework Plan. The zoning regulations allow or require mixed use development, employment and residential density, multimodal transportation access, and assume public and private sector redevelopment (not only preservation). Though the City's current zoning was adopted without presuming light rail service to downtown, the zoning calls for a scale and type of development that would work well with high capacity transit service of any kind.

Planning staff works with the Planning Commission and the Design and Landmarks Committee to apply the zoning code to all development projects in downtown.

Public Area Requirements

The Public Area Requirements document directs the City to implement a high quality, balanced streetscape that emphasizes walking but also provides “front-of-store” on-street parking that is critical to retail development, auto circulation that serves all properties, and convenient transit service to serve current and future downtown residents and employees.

The Public Area Requirements document includes both general plans for multimodal circulation (see Figure 6) and specific designs for each block of Main Street (see Figure 7), and details for designing features such as brick patterns. The requirements are implemented by public capital improvement projects or development, when triggered by the zoning code.

Figure 6 - Required On-Street Parking

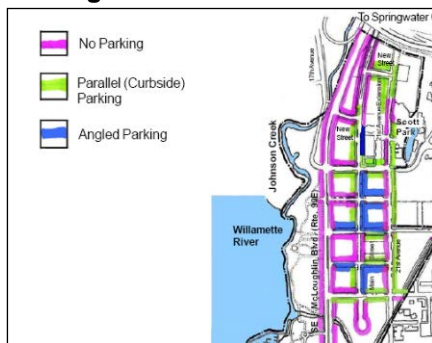
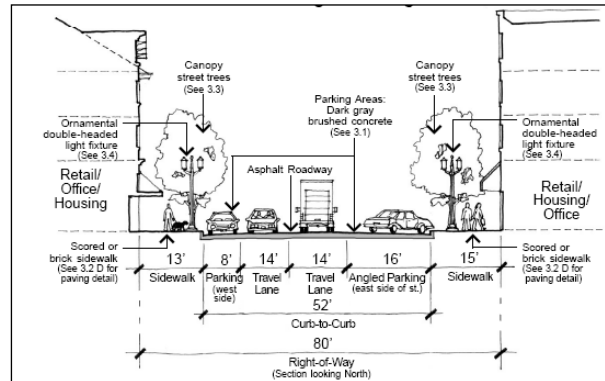


Figure 7 – Main Street Cross-section



Downtown Design Guidelines

The Downtown Design Guidelines endeavor to describe what it means for new buildings or facilities to “harmonize with the town’s character.” As explained on page 5 of the document, the Guidelines “do not prescribe specific design solutions, nor are they rigid requirements without flexibility.” The guidelines address Milwaukie character, pedestrian emphasis, architectural form and details, lighting, and signage. The Design Guidelines are used to review development projects for consistency. It is the responsibility of the Design and Landmarks Committee to review new construction and “major exterior alteration” projects; the Planning Director reviews

“exterior maintenance and repair” and “minor exterior modification” projects. The standard for Design Review approval is “substantial consistency with the design guidelines.”

Figure 7 – “Recommended” and “Not Recommended” Facades



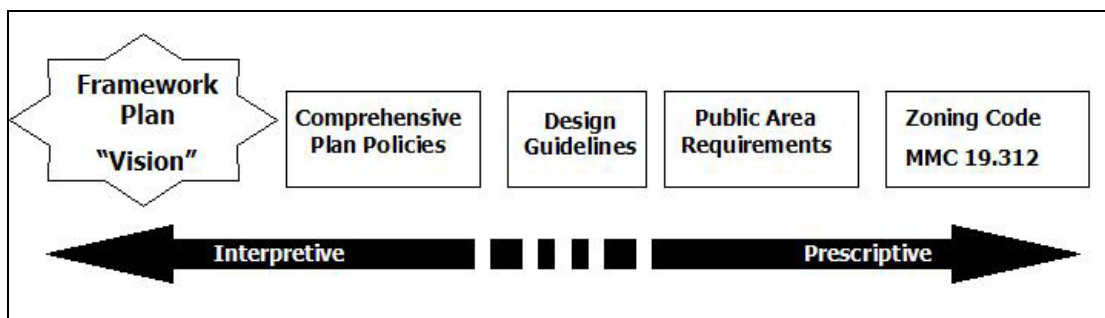
Implementing the Downtown Plan

The various elements of the Downtown Plan are implemented in several ways by many different departments and stakeholders.

- The *Framework Plan* is the “vision” document. It isn’t prescriptive – i.e., the various elements shown in the illustrations aren’t required. The big ideas are implemented through the zoning code, joint development projects, and the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Staff relies on the principles outlined in the framework plan to develop public investment projects.
- Staff works with the Planning Commission and the Design and Landmarks Committee to implement the code for the Downtown Zones.
- The Public Area Requirements are implemented by development (as directed by the code) or through public improvement projects. As directed by Council in December, staff is currently evaluating alternative code regulations to implement this document.

Each of the elements of the Downtown Plan carry a different degree of interpretation. The *Framework Plan*, as the visioning document, allows for the greatest degree of interpretation. The Zoning Code, as the City’s legal code for development, is the most prescriptive. This continuum is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Continuum of Interpretation



Such a continuum of interpretation manifests itself regularly in City business, as illustrated in the following examples:

- In June of 2007, staff prepared a recommendation to Council regarding a potential light rail alignment on Main Street in downtown Milwaukie. In preparing its recommendation, staff cited the Framework Plan vision, which calls for an active pedestrian-oriented retail street, and strong connections to the river, and argued that introducing light rail in such a constrained environment would run counter to the fundamental concepts outlined in the Framework. This was staff's interpretation of the tenets of the Plan. Staff also cited the Public Area Requirements and its desire for wide sidewalks, because providing these elements is directly related to the fundamental concept of creating a pedestrian-oriented retail spine on Main Street. The code and its design review requirements will ultimately apply to parts of the light rail project's design.
- During the December 2007 appeal of the public requirements imposed on the Main and Monroe redevelopment project, staff was applying the zoning code, which requires implementation of the Public Area Requirements (PAR). The code is very prescriptive in requiring staff to implement the street design shown in the PAR document. This left staff with little flexibility to determine how to apply the City's rules to the project. However, when the Planning Director made a code interpretation that allowed staff to reduce the amount of required improvements, that interpretation was based on the policy language describing the intent of the public area requirements.
- Had it moved forward, the proposed Town Center project would have requested a code amendment to allow for a fifth story in an area where the code currently allows four stories. After discussing a preliminary request from the developer and reviewing preliminary project plans, staff believed the City could support an amendment to the code by citing the Design Guidelines. In this case, staff was looking to the more interpretive documents for guidance on how the City could change the more prescriptive document. Such a request would have required approval of both the Planning Commission and City Council.

Other Implementation Efforts

In 2003, acknowledging that the zoning code alone would not be enough to achieve the goals and vision embodied in the Framework Plan and Public Area Requirements, the City worked with the Oregon Downtown Development Association and SERA Architects to develop *Milwaukie's Next Steps Project: An Implementation Plan for Downtown Revitalization*. The document recommends some specific steps the City should take to implement the plan. Most importantly, it points out that the City needs to decide "how participatory a role it will play in downtown redevelopment activities (i.e., continuing with piecemeal efforts based on grants, etc., or moving to a more comprehensive approach that utilizes Urban Renewal as a tool.)" The report continues to conclude that a laissez faire approach will make it extremely difficult to phase projects whose funding depends primarily on the availability of grants or the contributions of private developers.

The Implementation Plan recommends that the City take several actions. The City has made progress on the following key actions identified in the report:

- Focusing on solving the Transit Center issue. The City is currently actively pursuing this with TriMet.
- Focusing on detailed design of Riverfront Park. The City is actively designing and seeking funding for this high priority project.
- Developing detailed studies of certain aspects of the Framework Plan, specifically the proposed plaza location, an underpass connection to the Riverfront Park, restoration of downtown water features, and the location of a parking garage. The City's current South Downtown Concept planning project addresses all of these.

The City has not taken the following key actions identified in the report:

- Periodically updating the Framework Plan to "help make it a living document," while keeping true to the overall vision of the Plan. The report states that revisiting the Framework Plan "does not negate its value, but moves it to the next step of more detailed design, ensuring that the components fit Milwaukie from the perspective of cost, likelihood of implementation, and public support.
- Developing a strategy for public investment, particularly streetscape improvements and land acquisition for redevelopment and open space.
- Developing a strategy for incenting development.

Other recent implementation efforts not mentioned in the report include the following:

- During the TSP update project, the City updated the modal plans to comply with the circulation plans in the Public Area Requirements document. Based on public outreach, City investment in downtown parking and streetscape improvements were given a high priority.
- Over the past two years, the City worked with Metro to create a public-private partnership to develop the Town Center lot.
- City participation in the light rail SDEIS and station planning anticipates future development and transit service. From a local perspective, this work is in accordance with the principles of the Functional Plan vision for a mixed use center of housing, employment and amenities that is not auto-oriented.

Summary – Current Needs

The City undertook a significant downtown planning effort in 2000, one which charted a very different course for public and private investment in downtown. As the various parts of the plan have been implemented over the past several years, staff and community leaders have come to appreciate the wisdom of the bold plan, which led to the new McLoughlin Boulevard and the emerging Riverfront Park project. Staff believes that planning for a downtown is a dynamic, not static, process and that fresh ideas and approaches can and should be introduced without upsetting the fundamental concepts and goals of the original plan. At council's direction, staff has and will continue to pursue implementation of the plan, through developing projects like the Town Center site, Riverfront Park, and Kellogg Creek Restoration; conducting design review on new buildings to ensure compatibility with Milwaukie's desired character; and designing a multi-modal transportation system that supports a lively downtown.

Staff values the Framework Plan for its clear identification of vision, values, and principles, the Code for requiring mixed uses and high quality buildings; the Public Area Requirements for establishing the importance of a quality pedestrian-oriented public realm, and the Design

Guidelines for outlining what it means for new development to keep the feel of Milwaukie's small town.

However, after working to implement all of these documents, staff believes the following aspects of these documents could be updated or refined as follows:

- Refine vision in the Framework Plan – Update the details in the illustrative plan (including the possible locations of a plaza, downtown bus facilities, and closed streets). The illustrative plan could be periodically updated without calling into question the fundamental concepts and values of the Framework Plan.
- Refresh the code – Review the code, which is very prescriptive, to allow for a little more flexibility as downtown and its real estate market evolves.
- Add incentives for development to support private investment in downtown, including new tools such as urban renewal.
- Consider a technical clean-up of existing policies and documents, including:
 - Moving the street design details into the recently adopted Public Works Standards.
 - Developing more detailed studies for specific sub-areas, including South Downtown, Riverfront Park, and the Kellogg Treatment Plant site.

By proposing refinement of such elements, staff believes the value and importance of existing plans and policies will be enhanced. The City must continue to plan for downtown, including sub-area planning and refinement, and to adjust the code, to help realize the community vision that was established in 2000.