

## India Street Sustainable Neighborhood Plan

The Portland Society for Architecture appreciates the great effort by the many people who have developed this neighborhood plan. The plan addresses connectivity across Franklin St.; increases housing diversity; reinforces India St. businesses; creates a recreation hub at the foot of India St.; builds a model water and sewer infrastructure. PSA has been pleased to be a part of the planning process and hopes to continue to do so.

### HISTORIC DESIGNATION

However, PSA does not support the proposal to designate this neighborhood an Historic District. A designated neighborhood should “demonstrate a high degree of historical, cultural and/or architectural significance”. India Street was Portland’s first street, but the India Street that was — is no more. It is even unlikely that the India Street destroyed by the Great Fire bore much resemblance to the first India Street.. Aside from a small handful of already landmarked buildings, the map of Cultural Assets is most notable for what exists in memory and not on the ground: Fore Street as the first waterfront and India Street as the first street. This does not mean that this neighborhood is without culture or has not been the scene of important events – but that its current culture comes from its enormous variety, not its historic texture.

Does this neighborhood offer a collection of buildings that are remarkable, unique, historically significant or that provide a coherent picture of its history or the story of Portland? The Historic District Map reveals that contributing buildings are scattered among vacant parcels, older non-contributing buildings or among ones that are not yet 50 years old. This map does not look like the map of contributing buildings on the West End or Congress St. or any other historic district. In fact, it is likely that a map of any neighborhood in Portland would have many fewer ‘holes’ and a much greater proportion of contributing buildings than this one does.

The Plan lists a ‘lack of clear identity’ as the neighborhood’s first challenge. What will looking to its past rather than its future do for its identity problem? Historic District designation has profound economic repercussions. While the plan calls for maintaining and reinforcing neighborhood economic diversity, ‘gentrification by designation’ frequently results when cities do not take very aggressive measures to counter that tendency. Tax credits, limited to income producing buildings, do not offer enough money to overcome the fact that property owners in Historic Districts need to have deeper pockets than owners elsewhere. Likewise, the goal of having businesses that provide services to neighborhood residents and workers is hampered by having every storefront renovation dictated by the history of the building rather than by the future of the business.

The plan seems to endorse increased residential density without increased building height. To the degree that historic districting will control the height of infill buildings, there will not be enough new neighbors to support the extensive retail development that is planned. New buildings matching the bulk of historic buildings will house many fewer people than 100 years ago, because household size is so much smaller now. Unit reduction is already happening in buildings that are being renovated – and while family size drops, the apparent need for greater space grows.

Historic designation will not give the ‘authenticity’ this plan seeks. It is an attempt to build a new historic ‘feel’ that is long gone. It will remove an entire neighborhood from the natural evolution of the city — an evolution that accounts for the India Street neighborhood’s vitality and diversity right now.

#### FORM-BASED CODE

It is not possible to have an informed opinion on form-based code while so little is known about the nature of the code or its provisions. The plan should not include the Plan of Character Districts – until those districts are defined by the provisions of the code.

Thank you

Portland Society for Architecture