

## Introduction

This district analysis focuses on Milwaukie, OR, a small town-turned suburb located south of Portland. Milwaukie was settled in 1848 as a rival city to Oregon City, and for a time the two cities rivaled Portland for title of regional center. Birthplace of the Bing cherry and Dark Horse Comics, Milwaukie maintains a welcoming small-town feel, at the center of which is a soda fountain visited in 1960 by then presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy.



*Milwaukie is home of the Bing cherry*

The Historic Milwaukie neighborhood district lies on the western edge of the City of Milwaukie, with its focus being Main Street and the surrounding environs, two blocks east of the Willamette River. Circumstances have presented the district with significant barriers to becoming a vibrant and lively district and left it largely cut off from important neighboring places and populations. The construction of McLoughlin Boulevard, a four-lane regional boulevard, separates most of the district from the river while funneling passing traffic away from local businesses along Main Street. Further, the bulk of Milwaukie's 20,490 residents (as of the 2000 U.S Census), live in the subsequently developed, and principally residential, neighborhoods on the eastern half of the city that are separated from the historic city center by Route 224 and the Milwaukie Business/Industrial neighborhood district. Main Street no longer contains the diversity of uses that it probably did before McLoughlin Boulevard was built and exurban shopping centers like Clackamas Town Center began drawing residents away from the city's core. As a consequence of this change in development, passive or vacant storefront uses along Main Street are noticeable.

On April 1, 2003, the Milwaukie City Council adopted the "Milwaukie Downtown Design Guidelines" (henceforth referred to as "the design guidelines" or "DG"), which is the design component of the Milwaukie Downtown and Riverfront Plan. Both documents are guided by the principals of seeking to create a "livable community" and "ensuring economic success." The design guidelines "provide a descriptive template for maintaining and improving the urban character of downtown, without dictating or prescribing a specific style or theme." The guidelines provide direction for how projects will be reviewed with regard to Milwaukie character, pedestrian emphasis, architecture,

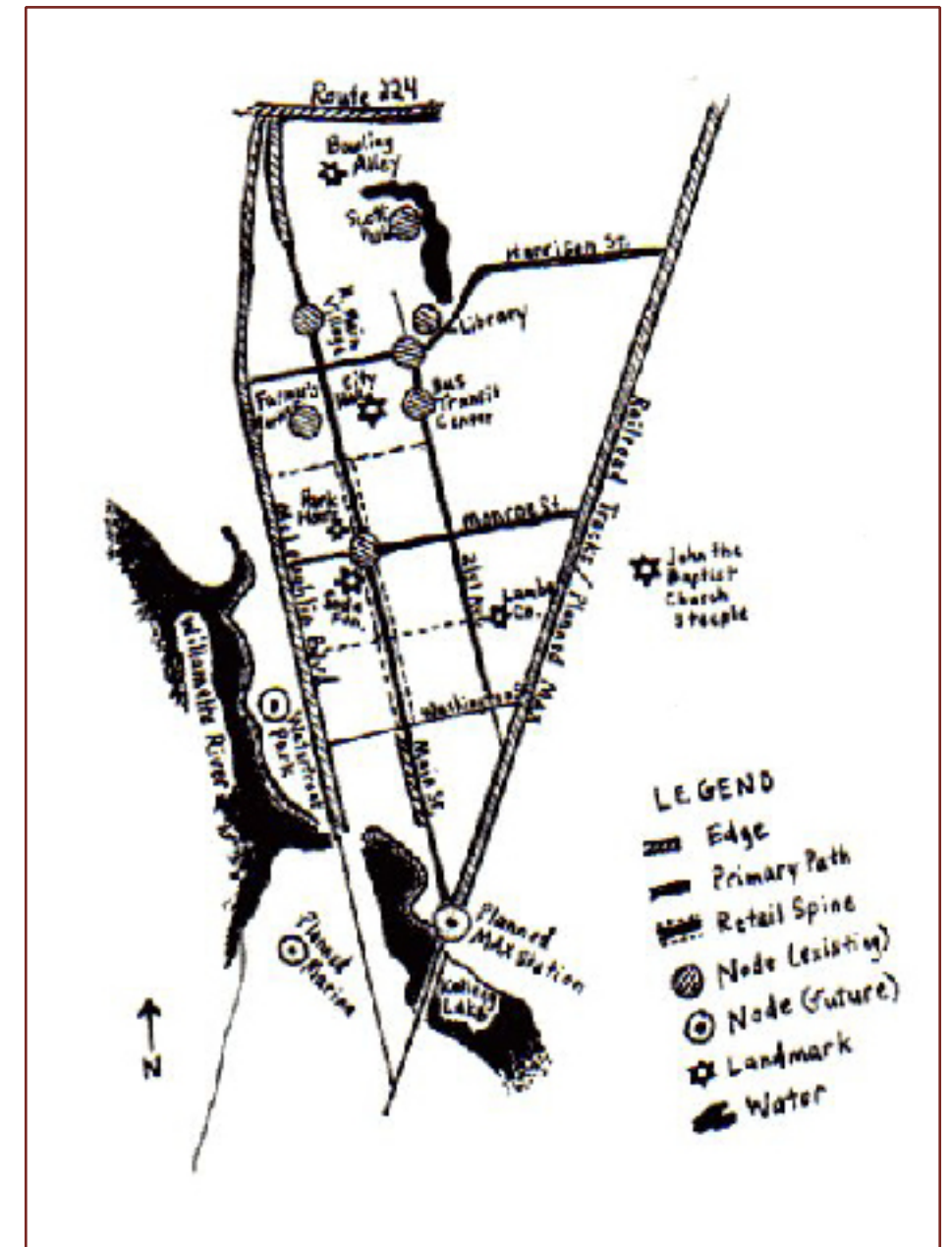
lighting and signs. These elements should contribute to improving the quality of the district by such efforts as creating anchors and attractors at either end of an enlivened Main Street, while reconnecting the district to the river. In addition to the design guidelines, the City has also been working since 2007 with consulting group Center for Environmental Structure (CES) on a new South Downtown Plan. A large component of the plan is a new public plaza at the south end of downtown near the future light rail stop. The City hopes this new plaza, in conjunction with new downtown retail uses will draw pedestrians and contribute to a more cohesive community feel.

Our analysis will assess a variety of design elements of the district based on accepted standards of quality design and district planning and Milwaukie's stated goals. We will address the design elements (such as blocks, architecture, streetscapes, activities, etc) and the downtown plan planning documents in the context of the following sections: legibility and character, streets, open spaces, and uses and activities. It is important to note, however, that Milwaukie's Downtown Design Guidelines were only adopted six years ago, and most of the elements of the district have not yet had time to achieve the stated goals stated in the planning documents. We will note instances where there are discrepancies between what has taken place and the goals, and in areas where the goals are either inadequate or not reflective of the actual situation on the ground.

## Legibility and Character

Using Lynch's (1960) approach to considering the mental image and "legibility" of the physical environment, we examined the extent to which the individual elements of the district work together to form recognizable patterns and a cohesive whole, as well as the extent to which the design guidelines address these issues.

Currently, the district has strong edges and some distinctive landmarks, but it lacks a balance of nodes throughout the district and suffers from poor connectivity in some areas, particularly in terms of access to the riverfront. Main Street's primary asset is its historic character which has been preserved relatively well, despite lack of upkeep evident in many store facades. Given recent efforts and plans to integrate higher density mixed-use development into the neighborhood, the issues of historical preservation, architectural character and cohesiveness are particularly relevant in our analysis and are addressed in detail in the DG.



*Imaging the city: A Lynch diagram of Milwaukie*

### Paths

As Lynch points out; at the district scale paths have intimate interrelationships with other physical elements. Movement within the district is oriented along the street grid of continuous north-south streets and a mixture of short (2-3 blocks) and long (continuous) east-west streets. Along with the interconnectivity of the street grid, small blocks contribute to the overall walkability within the neighborhood. Main Street provides the key activity and retail spine of the district, supported by the secondary north-south street of 21st Avenue. Along Main Street, the concentration of commercial uses (shops, restaurants and offices), characteristic spatial patterns (building fronting the sidewalk) and distinctive facade characteristics (such as awnings) play an important role in contributing to path identity (Lynch 1960). However, the path lacks destinations at its end-points, as discussed in the Nodes section.



Transit routes play an important role in identifying paths through the neighborhood. The current bus route circles around City Hall, reinforcing its centrality in the neighborhood. When the MAX station opens (planned for 2012), the sense of pathway orientation within the neighborhood may shift as more and more people depart and arrive from the south end of Main Street. The City’s South Downtown Plan is in large part centered on this anticipated increase in activity.



*Informal path to riverfront*



*Contrasting pavers help pedestrian on McLoughlin*

Recent improvements in traffic calming, crosswalks and stairs to the waterfront have improved pedestrian crossing, and plans for a bridge over McLoughlin should further benefit pedestrian connectivity.

Another challenge to pedestrian connectivity is that many areas, such as the sloping hill from the southern end of Main Street down to the River, contain no paths of any kind. As one means of addressing this problem, Milwaukie’s Land Use Framework Plan includes a recommendation to create a “rail trail,” pedestrian walkway, along the path of the railroad tracks that connect up to Riverfront Park pathways and around to downtown.



*Railroad overpass demarcates the south end of the district*

**Edges**

The DG call for prioritized pedestrian routes that are “attractive and convenient” (p. 22); however, we identified several challenges to this goal. The biggest challenge to pedestrian connectivity is McLoughlin Boulevard, which serves as a barrier to comfortable movement between downtown and the riverfront. The DG call for measures to make McLoughlin more permeable by stitching it into the district’s fabric to become an integrated seam between the downtown and the riverfront, including plans for a pedestrian bridge. Recent improvements in



*One square mile of Milwaukie’s Downtown and Waterfront Area*

The historic district of Milwaukie has well-defined edges on all sides, comprised of the river, railroad tracks, highways and topography; however, in some cases those edges are muted by other features. The Willamette River, train tracks, and highways present the hardest edges, with other streets breaking up the district in places. The edges also fail to provide adequate gateways, which are recommended in the DG to indicate transitions between pedestrian and auto areas and between



*Car-centric streetscape at the northern end of Main Street*

the public and private realm (p. 14).

Even though the river forms the district’s true eastern edge, its role in defining the district is weakened by the presence of McLoughlin Boulevard. Because McLoughlin is not intricately related to the other elements of the district, it currently functions as an edge rather than a path, as previously discussed. The district’s western edge is formed

by the railroad tracks which cut diagonally through the neighborhood forming a boundary that separates the downtown from the hillier residential areas to the east. East of the tracks, land uses are more spread out and pedestrian activity fades.

In contrast to McLoughlin, Main Street is an edge within the neighborhood that serves to connect adjacent areas. “In commercial districts, complex edges can combine with other factors to create the kind of diverse character that helps to foster an active street life” (Owens 1993, p. 131). The fine grained nature of buildings along Main Street, and the fact that buildings front right onto the sidewalk, contribute to making Main Street not only a path but also a seam that connects the district.

Both the northern and southern areas of the district are defined by overpasses, which create physically soft edges reinforced by changes in the visual environment that signal the end of the pedestrian realm. On the south end is the railroad overpass highlighted by a flashing caution light. Here, Main Street turns to the southeast, its name changes to SE Lake Road, and the visual environs transition from a Main Street to a winding country road. At the northern end, a soft edge is formed by the overpass of the Milwaukie Expressway/Route 224. However, the visual transition from the district to the industrial area farther north is more of a gradient. North of the North Main Village development, the surroundings gradually become more car-centric, with a bowling alley and large pizzeria set back far from the street in a vast parking lot. Beyond the overpass is an industrial no-man’s land of warehouses.

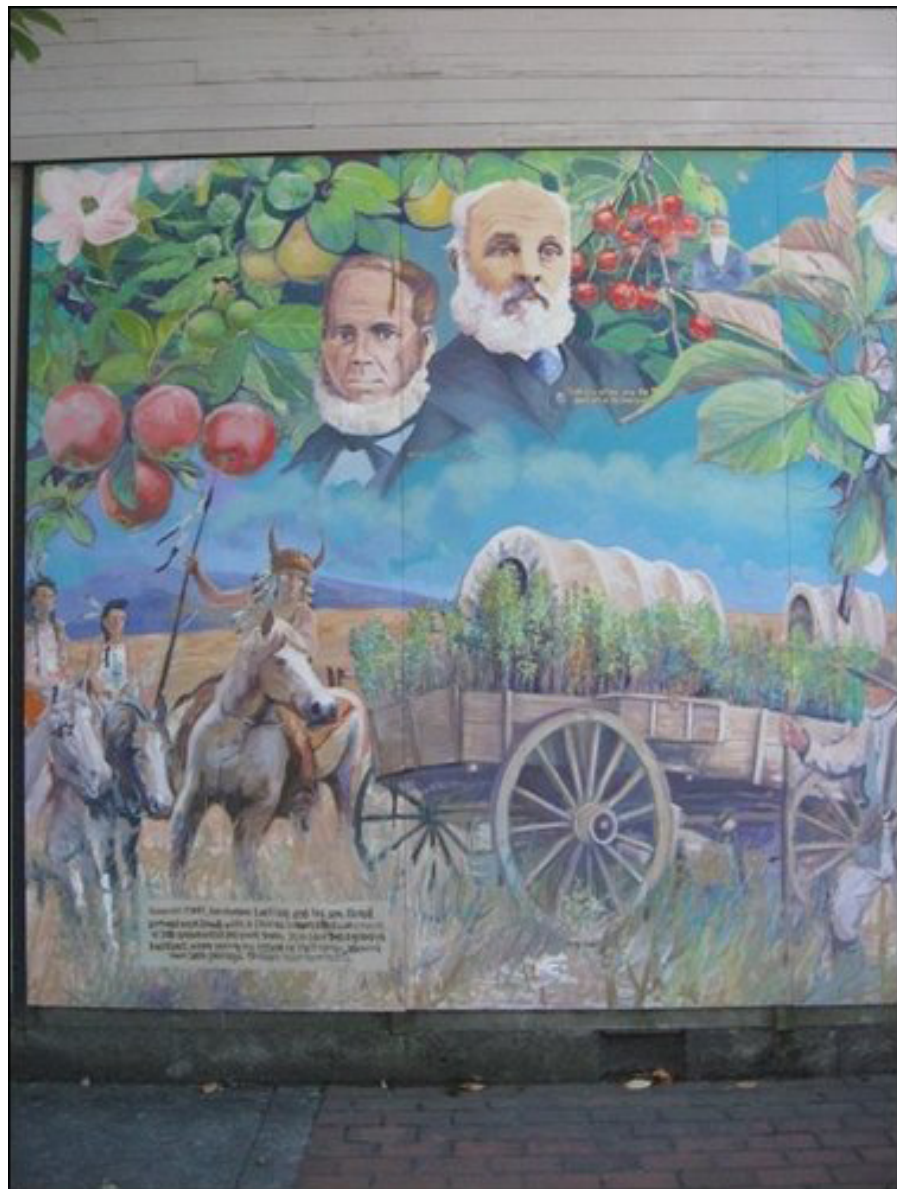


*City Hall is an important node in the heart of Milwaukie*

**Nodes**

The district has a loose constellation of nodes in its center, but lacks nodes farther out from the center. At the center of this cluster of nodes is City Hall, which meets Alexander’s (1977) description of a successful town hall “embedded in the community” and surrounded by “small community activities and projects.” (p.243). Close to City Hall, nodes include the intersection of Harrison and 21st, located at a crossroads connecting the North Main Village development, Public Library, the bus transit center, and a parking lot where the farmer’s market is held between May and October. The City plans to create an additional node with the planned plaza at the south end of downtown. This plaza and its adjacent light rail stop will be discussed in greater detail in the later section on public spaces.





*Mural depicts city's horticultural roots*

Other nodes, which don't currently meet their fullest potential, are dotted along Main Street. The North Main Village development serves as a node, with some commercial/restaurant activity across the street. However, for the number of people living in it, visual signs of activity around the development are not as strong as would be expected. Just south of City Hall along Main Street, the intersections at Jackson Street and Washington Street comprise key junctions between the districts primary north-south and east-west streets. However, the strength of these intersections as nodes is weakened by the overall pattern of vacancy in many of Main Street's storefronts. The district suffers from a lack of anchors at the south and north ends of Main Street. Milwaukie's Design Guidelines address this problem, recommending the addition of a grocery store on the north end of Main Street and an arts/entertainment/office complex to the south near the future MAX station. Other recommendations in Milwaukie's current Land Use Framework Plan call for the redevelopment of

the waterfront, including an old waste-water treatment plan, into a node with a public marina, restaurant and hotel, in addition to open landscaped space geared toward festivals. The City's South Downtown Plan further addresses the need for north and south anchors, which will be discussed later in the Public Spaces section.

### Landmarks

Milwaukie has a number of landmarks that contribute to the overall structure of the district and the sense of relative location within the district. The tallest landmark, visible from a variety of places within the neighborhood is the distinctive modernist white steeple of the John the Baptist Catholic Church. City Hall comprises another landmark, contrasting from the surrounding area due to its setback from the street and the open spaces around it. Flashing signs, such as the large, brightly lit signs for the Wunderland Cinema and the Kellogg Bowling Alley, also create visually memorable places within the district. Smaller, cultural landmarks include the historic soda fountain and Dark Horse



*The steeple of John the Baptist Catholic Church is a landmark visible from many parts of the district*

Comics store.

### Character and Image

Milwaukie projects an image of the all-American, riverfront town; a family oriented place with a rich history and natural setting. From the bowling alley to the Wunderland cinema, and from City Hall to the historic Masonic Lodge, much of Milwaukie's small town fabric is intact. However, some aspects of the district's rich cultural history seem to be lying dormant, rather than actively contributing to the district's character. Milwaukie's early history as a horticultural center is mainly

present in the historical record and the dogwood trees surrounding the parking lot where the weekly farmer's market is held in summer. The importance of Dark Horse Comics within the town's character is not oriented toward visitors, but seems to be more of an internal phenomenon. The DG address character by calling for promoting linkages to horticultural heritage and integrating art, exemplified by the mural honoring one of Milwaukie's early horticulturalists. We would further recommend efforts to support the role Dark Horse plays in the town's character through public art or the opening of a Dark Horse museum along Main Street.

The DG call for preserving historic buildings, promoting compatibility and using architectural contrast wisely. It recommends against "development that has a 'themed historic' appearance," and development that is "over-scaled, monotonous nondescript" (p. 11). While the eclecticism of building styles makes for an interesting visual environment, it also presents challenges for creating a cohesive image while encouraging new development. Further, the district's imageability is impacted by the presence of some run down buildings and diverse architectural styles, both factors that reflect the district's long lapses in building activity. The presence of vacant buildings throughout the neighborhood's fabric further reinforces this image of neglect



*Bringing the inside out at the Soda Fountain, Monroe and Main Street*

## Streets

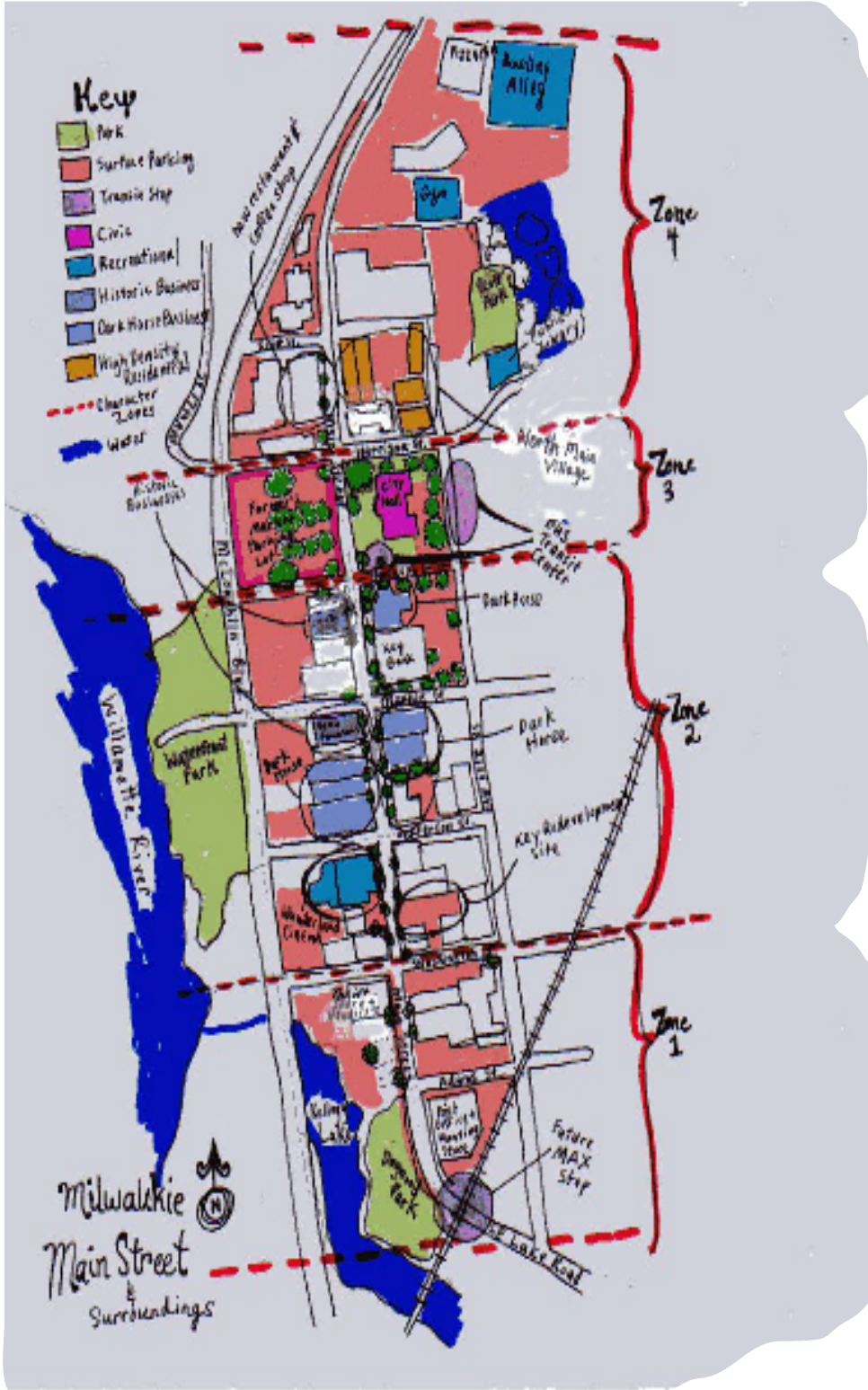
"The best streets are comfortable to walk along with leisure and safety. They are streets for both pedestrians and drivers. They have definition, a sense of enclosure with their buildings; distinct ends and beginnings, usually with trees. Trees, while not required, can do more than anything else and provide the biggest bang for the buck if you do them right. The key point again, is great streets are where pedestrians and drivers get along together." (Jacobs, 2001)

Generally, the streets of this district struggle to meet Jacobs' definition of great streets, mainly due to the fact that Milwaukie is a small town without the population to create bustling sidewalks. For reasons



outlined in the Legibility and Character section, McLoughlin and the east-west streets would not be considered “great streets.” Main Street and 21st Avenue are more oriented toward stopping and shopping, but Main Street is the most suitable candidate for this evaluation according to Jacobs’ criteria. Milwaukie grew up around Main Street, and the bulk of retail and civic activity is centered there. Other streets are home to satellite business locations, but none have attained the density or continuity needed to attract pedestrians.

Accommodating Pedestrians and Cars



Main Street is rather successful in facilitating interaction between pedestrians and cars; however this may in part be due to the slow pace of the street. We observed people leisurely crossing the street at several places with and without pedestrian crossings. Cars drove slowly, perhaps partly due to the traffic calming effect of the angled parking, and seemed aware of those pedestrians that were present. Sidewalks and lanes are wide; in fact, the facade-to-facade width is such that it dwarfs some buildings. Parking abounds, to the point where one might argue that there is an oversupply of surface parking lots that break the continuity of buildings (see Complementarity and Definition). Although parking is important for supporting Main Street businesses, Jacobs’ is clear on this point: “Parking in great amounts . . . is not a characteristic of great streets” (Jacobs p. 306).

Comfort and Safety

Main Street spans six blocks, a short enough distance to walk comfortably. The wide sidewalks have amenities such as benches, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, and bike racks. There are mature trees and awnings that provide protection from the elements, as well as contributing to visual rhythm. Although there is room for more sidewalk activation, several shops do bring the inside out into the interaction zone, clearly catering to pedestrians and adding a sense of comfort and safety by ensuring eyes on the street (J. Jacobs, 1961).

Pedestrian oriented street lighting is important for safety. Unfortunately, most lighting in the district is auto-oriented, hanging out over the street and far above sidewalks. The DG emphasize improved lighting, and recently constructed developments, included the North Main Village complex and a project just off Main Street at Jefferson, have incorporated attractive pedestrian level lighting. Consistent and continuous lighting will be important when the MAX comes, to visually connect the station area to Main Street. If resources are sparse, residents could vote on prioritization of street element investments, as done for Granville Street, Vancouver (Vancouver, 2004).

Transparency, Storefronts and Facades

“A great street should help make

community”, writes Jacobs (p. 8). While the climate limits the feasibility of literally bringing the inside out, a high degree of transparency through inviting and active storefronts, together with aesthetically appealing facades can go a long way to promote interaction and “strengthen the relationship between the public and private realm” (Jacobs). Despite many overdue face lifts, Main Street facades are overall successful at catching the eye, by being visually appealing or decorated with quirky details. As explained, most buildings stem from pre-auto eras and were designed to be appreciated up close. The integrity of the neighborhood fabric should be maintained by careful facade renovations. A good example is the recently renovated bank building, where the modern touches pay tribute to the historical character.



Craftsmanship and attention to detail show careful renovation of historic facade

Good facades aside, the covered windows of businesses such as Dark Horse Comics, funeral agencies and dental offices detract from the street. Wunderland Cinema’s only presence on Main Street is its rear exit; the entrance has been reoriented to gain exposure from McLoughlin, where about 55,000 cars pass every day. Most of these phenomena can be explained by the lack of investment in downtown. Still, even these storefronts can be improved, and one of the best examples of unexpected transparency is the tae-kwondo club at Main Street and Adams. The Wunderland Cinema entrance should be relocated back to Main Street, and as downtown begins to attract new investment, active and inviting uses such as a year-round produce market and a flower shop should be encouraged.

Complementarity and Definition



Many facades do not embrace the street



Wide sidewalks with awnings protect from th elements



Main Street buildings are generally of similar heights, because the street’s historical character is in tact. The street is therefore successful in terms of Jacobs’ notion of visual complementarity and definition. The buildings generally “get along with each other,” (p.287) and make for a continuous but by no means monotonous streetscape that provides a sense of enclosure to the pedestrian. Nonetheless, there are some uneasy meetings, especially where surface parking lots create unpleasant gaps and dilate the vertical and horizontal definition of the street.



Surface parking lots on Main Street disrupt district continuity

Lack of complementarity is a related issue. Jacobs might point out that the 1960s building does not express respect for the 1910 building. North Main Village is a recent example. While the New Urbanist architecture may be intended to respect the historic architecture of the neighborhood, the ground floor is an ungraceful mix of bulky concrete pillars and a dark, tinted glass facade, in stark contrast to the “lived in” character that the other (old and newer) shops around the neighborhood have. The building code limits the building height to four stories along Main Street, but it is not likely that



Lack of complementarity between pre-war and post-war buildings



Mature trees give Main Street definition north of Jefferson

stories will be added to existing buildings. As outlined in DG, new buildings should aspire to these heights, which would increase street definition and reinforce Milwaukie efforts at fostering transit-oriented development, while integrating the design with complementarity in mind. However, withstanding new construction, the mature trees on Main Street make a remarkable difference in establishing definition and providing visual rhythm (Jacobs 1995).

### Beginnings and Endings

Main Street lacks strong beginning and end points, with both the north and south ends of the street being marked by overpasses. The north end peters out into a car-centric landscape and the street lacks an anchor or gateway. The south end is more scenic, with Kellogg Lake and Dogwood Park; however, the flashing yellow caution light on the railroad overpass is not a proper gateway out of the neighborhood. The location of the MAX station here in 2012 should help provide more definition on this end. The City’s South Downtown Plan also calls for creating a new public plaza at the south end of downtown that will be complementary to an enhanced public space at the north end of downtown (CES 2008). Further, the addition of a grocery store as a northern anchor with help to define that end of Main Street.

In sum, Main Street has the potential of being a good or even great street, at least when accounting for its setting in a small town. It accommodates pedestrians and cars alike, features eye-catching facades and some good storefronts that help build community. Beautiful trees provide a sense of enclosure and help define the street when building heights do not, whereas the overall complementarity of buildings make up for their low heights. As it stands, the opportunity of being a great street has not been realized, primarily for lack of investment interest. With increased economic appeal, Main Street can attract more visitors by encouraging more retail and restaurant activity in the interaction zone, improving pedestrian lighting, bringing back the Cinema entrance and pushing for active ground floor uses, or encouraging innovative ways of



Wunderland Cinema entrance (above) should be relocated to Main Street (left)

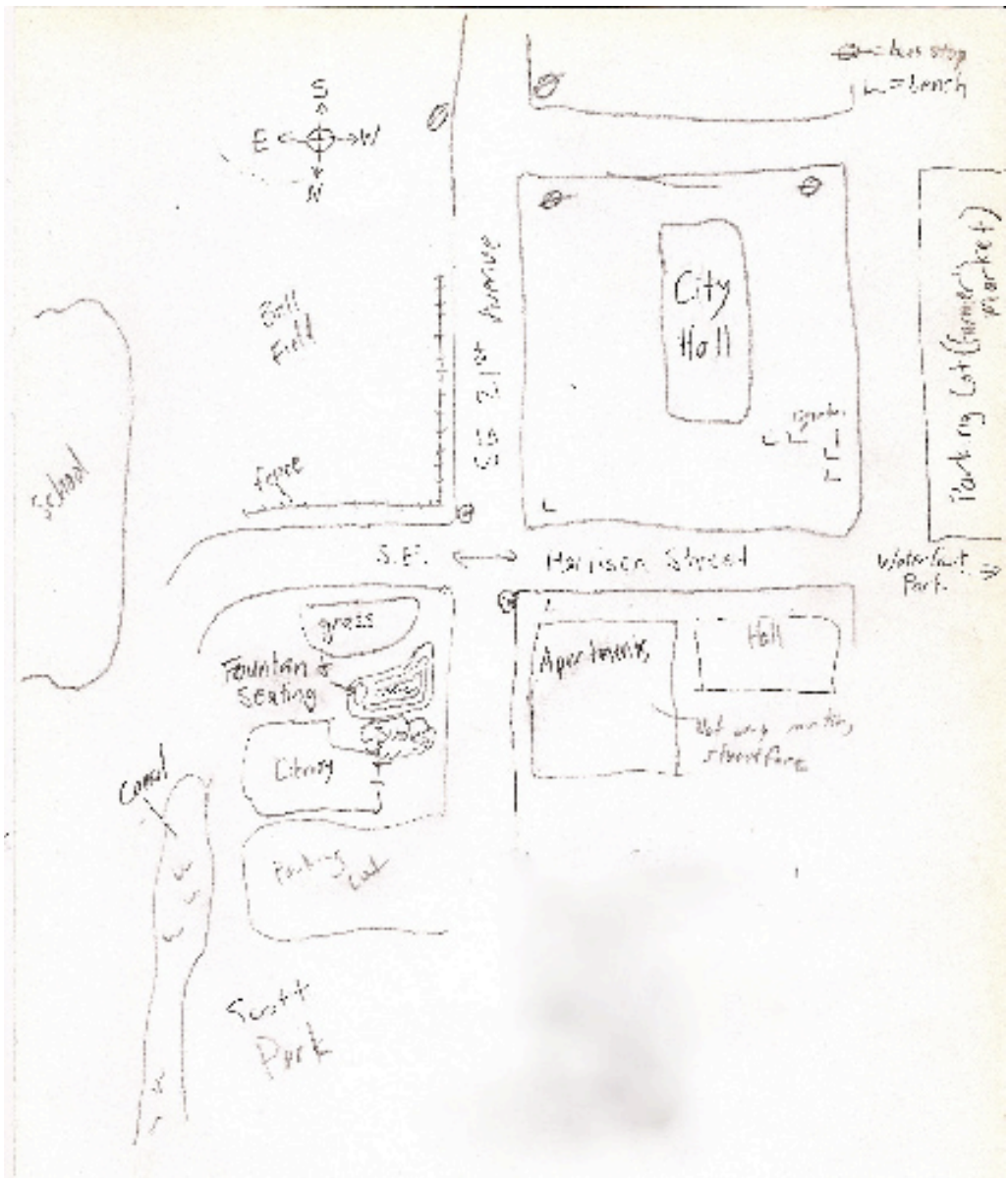


animating existing but dull storefronts. To wrap up, the entire street would benefit from well-defined gateways at the north and south ends.

## Open Spaces

### Functions of Milwaukie’s Public Spaces

Improving Milwaukie’s open spaces is a stated goal of the City of Milwaukie. This goal is highlighted in the Milwaukie Downtown Design Guidelines (DG) as well as the South Downtown Plan that the City is currently working on with help from the consulting firm Center for Environmental Structure (CES). The need for lively public spaces is recognized by Whyte and many other planners, architects and social scientists concerned with creating spaces that foster engaged communities and civic pride. Public spaces are places that invite us to gather, to pass through, or to spend a few moments alone observing our neighbors. They are the kind of places that help us become good neighbors. According to Kemmis (1992), “it is in being good neighbors







*Stronger crosswalks could help to connect open spaces.*

that people very often engage in their simple, homely practices which are the last, best hope for a revival of genuine public life” (p. 118). Like great streets, lively open spaces should connect residents to one another and to the natural features that help define a city’s unique sense of place and character. In Milwaukie’s

case, these features include the Willamette River (which is currently severed from the city by McLoughlin Boulevard), several small streams that feed the river and the flowering dogwood and cherry trees that symbolize the City’s agricultural heritage.

For the purpose of this analysis, Milwaukie’s existing public spaces have been assessed according to how well they meet the stated criteria of the DG and how well they meet Whyte’s criteria for good public spaces. This analysis concludes that Milwaukie’s open spaces currently suffer from a lack of designated space, community programming, connection with the City’s commercial core and a critical mass of foot traffic necessary to draw passersby. We identified two public spaces that currently support some civic use and have potential for intensified use. We also discuss the City’s plans for new open spaces that include an improved waterfront park and a new public plaza near the future transit stop at the South end of downtown.

### **City Hall Plaza**

A small plaza at the North end of the district across the street from City Hall hosts the weekly farmers’ market in the summer. It is served by the City’s transit mall nearby and is visible from McLoughlin Boulevard. The parking lot contains a variety of mature dogwood trees that offer shade and provide a sense of enclosure, something Whyte considers valuable for a public space (p.46). Currently utilized during the week as a parking lot for city employees, this space is identified by Milwaukie residents as an important public space. CES considers this parking lot to be a potential north anchor to the downtown, while the new public plaza and light rail stop at the south end of town would act as the south anchor. These two public spaces will create a “barbell” effect, with Main Street contained as the central business district (CES, 2008). The hope is to attract foot traffic from the new transit stop as well as pedestrian shoppers downtown. As Whyte points out, the presence of other people attracts people to a space (p.19). Without the planned addition of the new south plaza and the additional downtown

improvements, this space currently lacks a defined purpose beyond being a parking lot for City Hall. When the market is not active, there is nothing to draw people into this space; no seating food or activity. An entrance archway could help to communicate more clearly the intention of the space. Creating defined entry points to public spaces is a stated goal of the DG.

### **Library intersection**

The intersection of SE Harrison Street and SE 21st Avenue, behind City Hall adjacent to the public library and the Portland Waldorf School, exhibits some of the traits that Whyte finds essential for a successful public space. The space is also near the transit mall, and the intersection serves as a connector from downtown to the school and the natural elements of Scott Park, a small pocket park behind the library that is a haven for ducks and geese. However, people arrive and leave the library by car, making it more of a destination place somewhat unconnected with the larger downtown area nearby. The nearby North Main Village condos on Main Street currently feel disconnected from the space and from Main Street. The development



*The library intersection connects a progression of public spaces*

might benefit from more commercial activity and a larger number of pedestrians in the area, both as a draw and to supply a feeling of safety and security. The Waldorf School, while an inviting-looking area, is private property not technically open to the public. The private nature of the school field might cause confusion to people using the intersection behind City Hall. Whereas this public space does not meet many of Whyte’s qualifications for a great public space, nor the requirements of the DG, it does act as an important connecting link between a progression of public spaces and the commercial corridor of

Main Street.

Whyte points out that a good public space begins at the street, which can have a “brisk social life of its own,” (p.54). People seated around the water feature can watch other people coming and going between downtown, the library and the park. The same goes for people seated on the grass at the southwest corner of the intersection. The benches lining the sidewalks, however, face away from the street. These benches could be turned outward to face the street, which would add a sense of connectivity to the intersecting streets as well as entice library users, City employees and downtown pedestrians to sit and people-watch during lunch breaks or breaks from shopping. Stop signs or other speed reducing measures on Harrison Street, along with improved crosswalks, would further reinforce a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

### **Future of Milwaukie’s Public Spaces**

Whyte stresses the importance of showcasing and enhancing the City’s unique characteristics in its public spaces. This sentiment is echoed by the DG, and South Downtown Plan and many local interviewees who state that maintaining the current scale of downtown and its blue-collar character are important when considering revitalization projects like the proposed South Downtown project (City of Milwaukie website, and DG). To achieve these goals the focus should be on preserving and enhancing the Milwaukie’s sense of place and identity.

Whyte also points out that smaller cities must pay special attention to scale. Smaller populations mean that lively public spaces should be



*Benches should be turned to foster interaction with the street*

compressed and concentrated in order to create a “critical mass” of pedestrians (p.92). There is no such year-round place in downtown Milwaukie today, but the City’s South Downtown Plan aims to create such a place in the new south plaza that will attract foot traffic from Main Street and the transit stop. The City further plans to remake the





*Unrealized potential at Milwaukie's waterfront*

waterfront park, which currently suffers from a disconnect from the district's core, into "The City's Living Room" (DG p. 3).

The public spaces would be greatly served if the nearby downtown streets contained more retail and restaurants, and were able to attract more visitors. Improvements to Milwaukie's public spaces, its downtown core and the creation of new public spaces along the waterfront and in conjunction with the new light rail stop will help the district regain a cohesive sense of community. The City has identified many of these elements in their DG and their South Downtown Plan. Taking into account Whyte's principals as well as the existing character of the City will help it create public spaces that are relevant to and beneficial for the community.

## Use and Activity

### Business Use

To bring vibrancy to the area, Milwaukie's design guidelines call for continuous retail up and down Main Street, as well as an arts, entertainment and office campus of buildings at southern end of main street. As mentioned earlier, the ability to attract and hold retail businesses has been a struggle, and some office uses have moved into retail spaces. Dark Horse Comics, for example, takes up a substantial section of Main Street storefront that could instead house businesses that cater to shoppers, diners and pedestrians.

### People

Repeated mid-winter visits at various times of day and different days of the week did not reveal much vibrancy or bustle. Nonetheless, the district has a number of family-friendly establishments, and was named as one of the 50 best places in the U.S. to raise a family (Shaputis, 2006). These family-friendly establishments include the school with its adjacent sports fields, the public library and a plethora of family doctor's and dentist's offices. Commercial recreational activities seem to be particularly geared toward children and teens, including the Kellogg Bowling Alley, Wonderland Cinema, and comics, candy and ice cream shops on Main Street. While most residents live to the east of the historic downtown district, the new North Main Village development has increased the base of people living within the downtown.

The district is frequented primarily by those who live or work in it,



*Unfit use of a prime location: A former grocery store on visible corner, now occupied by the Dark Horse Comics warehouse (up close on right side)*

and to a limited extent by transit riders making connections. Large employers include Dark Horse Comics (with 150 employees), the Milwaukie Lumber Company, and the City of Milwaukie. While its historic character could serve to attract some to visit specific destinations, the district does not currently contain the kinds of large-scale attractors sufficient to make Milwaukie a regional leisure or shopping destination. A significant drawback of the district is its failure, thus far, to transform the waterfront park into an attractive and active space. Without good pedestrian connections and activity areas, the park is unlikely to be heavily frequented and incorporated into the daily routines of residents and visitors to the area. The City appears to recognize this shortcoming and plans to improve connection to the river and create more amenities and programming along the river.



*Eye-catching storefront relating to local identity and history*

## Conclusion

Milwaukie has the bone structures



*The Popcorn & Candy shop embodies the small town Americana feeling that is one of Milwaukie's strengths*

of a good place but suffers from long lapses in investment and from the fact that McLoughlin Boulevard has severed the downtown from its primary natural asset, the riverfront. Further, the relocation of the residential core of Milwaukie to the east of Route 224 and the industrial district has left a downtown district that is not immediately accessible to many residents.

### Strengths & Opportunities

Milwaukie has a number of strengths on which it can draw. Natural assets include several bodies of water in addition to the Willamette River, including Scott Lake in the north and Kellogg Lake in the south. In addition to the cherry and dogwood trees across from City Hall, the district has many other trees of varying types and scales. Milwaukie also has a rich history, drawing on a small town Americana feeling elucidated through its well-defined Main Street spotted with historic businesses and through its notoriety as the birthplace of classic horticultural icons (the Bing cherry) as well as modern pop culture icons (Dark Horse Comics). Recent construction, including the North Main Village complex on the north end of Main Street and a corner storefront midway down the street, have drawn on many of the positive suggestions in the design guidelines, such as having storefronts that embrace the street with attractive facades, well-defined proportions, large open windows, and pedestrian-oriented lighting. Further, the planned MAX station at the south end of town offers a significant opportunity to create an anchor, reframe the southern edge of the district, and bring the much needed pedestrian traffic to support stores along Main Street.



## Weaknesses & Challenges

Many of the current failures of the district stem from challenges and barriers to taking advantage of the opportunities presented. The riverfront district is currently undeveloped, and mainly used as a boat launch, despite signs of informal use (a dirt footpath, a fire circle and litter). While allowing some historic businesses to remain largely unchanged, a lack of investment has also left many storefronts unoccupied (sometimes until less than ideal uses move in, such as office spaces facing Main Street) or in ever-increasing need or repair. Streets and open spaces have been neglected, posing significant challenges to the district's legibility.

The district's primary new development, North Main Village, has found it difficult to meld to the largely otherwise unimproved Main Street landscape, and has struggled to obtain retail occupants on street-level shops. There are still many gaps that will need to be filled -- such as a grocery store -- in order to allow it to meet the basic needs of residents, who currently head toward the eastern portion of the neighborhood to go shopping.

The failures may be ascribable to a long-term failure of planning activities over a number of years which have allowed the district to become fragmented, natural resources to be squandered, businesses and residents to move away, and inappropriate uses to settle in on Main Street. Such failures are not remedied overnight, and the guidelines recognize that change will happen incrementally. In addition, larger planning actions to implement an overhaul of the riverfront park and a stronger crossing pathway across McLoughlin Boulevard are necessary.

In order to transition to becoming a destination location, downtown Milwaukie needs to draw on its location near the river and its American, small town roots. The 2003 Design Guidelines, which have



*North Main Village does not blend well with the surrounding fabric*

only begun to be implemented, made the important step of recognizing some of the key barriers that Milwaukie is facing, namely the lack of retail on Main Street and the separation of Main Street from the river. The City's South Downtown Plan elaborates on these guidelines, focusing on making the addition of the new transit stop and plaza into assets that will benefit the downtown district. This is a solid template on which to build a strong district with a great Main Street. While the district may never receive the (pedestrian) traffic to become a great urban place, it has a strong future as a defining town center for Milwaukie and an attractive destination for Portland metro area residents.



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