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Outer South East Livable Infill Project

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About the LIV-IN Project Team

The LIV-IN Project team is composed of six students enrolled in the Planning Workshop. Planning Workshop, the capstone course for Portland State University's Master of Urban and Regional Planning program, provides graduate students with professional planning experience. Student teams develop consulting contracts with clients for planning services that address local and regional issues and the students' personal and professional interests. The Workshop provides experience in planning for constructive social and environmental change, while considering the planner's ethical responsibility to serve the public interest.

Staff at the City of Portland, Bureau of Planning, first proposed the subject matter of the LIV-IN Project; the team formed around this request for assistance. The team members include: Debbie Collard, Kristine dos Remedios, Krista Hornaday, Harper Kalin, Ying Lin and Kris Sorensen.



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Project Summary

The Project

Infill development presents challenges to metropolitan regions throughout the United States. The “filling in” of vacant or underutilized parcels of land in developed areas is the direct consequence of urbanization, a process caused by population growth and market demand, and shaped by public policy. In instances where infill occurs in residential areas, it can be perceived as detracting from the existing neighborhood character, displeasing those who live nearby. Multi-family infill development – infill structures intended to house more than one household – tend to evoke an even stronger reaction than single-family infill development when placed in established neighborhoods.

Design is one tool that can lessen the impact that infill development has on the surrounding area. It includes elements of the private realm, such as interior design and layout; elements of the public realm, such as streets and sidewalks; and the relationship of the building to its surroundings, which includes massing, scale and architectural elements. Thus, these three elements of urban design – (1) private realm function, (2) public realm interface, and (3) contextual relationships – are useful criteria by which to evaluate infill developments.

The City of Portland, Oregon has experienced unprecedented population growth in the last decade, much of which has been accommodated through infill development. Not all infill development has contributed to meeting design goals, prompting the City’s Bureau of Planning to launch the Infill Design Project in 2003. The Infill Design Project aims to improve the design of multi-dwelling and rowhouse development outside the Central City. This study supports the Infill Design Project by studying the design of new, multi-family infill development in a section of Outer Southeast Portland, Oregon. Through public outreach, this study identifies community design preferences and analyzes whether these preferences are being met in the private realm, the public realm and contextually. The study further identifies reasons for the current state of multi-family infill development and provides recommendations to improve design quality of multi-family infill.

Findings

- There are a number of factors that complicate the study of design of new multi-family developments in the selected study area. These include: the prevalence of infill issues not related to design, the transitioning neighborhood demographics, the importance of housing affordability to residents, and an irregular land development pattern.
- In the private realm, new multi-family infill development works well. The majority of the infill occupants surveyed in this study had positive perceptions of the developments.
- It is in the public realm and contextually that the developments require

improvements. The overall look of the developments' exterior, including the size and bulk of the buildings, was frequently criticized. The majority of people surveyed responded that the buildings did not relate well to the surrounding neighborhood.

- Discussions with developers and architects revealed that the consumer market for multi-family infill developments stresses the internal design over the external appearance. There has been little incentive for developers to focus on the building's outward façade and relationship to the neighborhood.
- Portland Zoning Code does not currently support all the favored community design preferences.

Recommendations

This study recommends four approaches to improve the design quality of multi-family infill in the selected study area. These recommendations, summarized below, require action by the City of Portland, developers, and residents of the Powellhurst-Gilbert neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION #1: TAKE A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO PLANNING AND DESIGN

- Plan the infrastructure necessary for good urban design
- Revive a community vision
- Use public investment to implement infrastructure

RECOMMENDATION #2: DEFINE THE TRANSITION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE

- Public and semi-public space should be publicly provided
- Encourage developers to delineate semi-private and private space

RECOMMENDATION #3: PROVIDE EXPEDITED AND LOWER-COST PERMITTING TO ENCOURAGE AMENITIES

- Expedited and lower cost permitting are more appropriate bonuses for design amenities currently offered as density bonuses in the Portland Zoning Code

RECOMMENDATION #4: MAINTAIN MATURE TREES

- Multi-dwelling structures should be required to meet tree preservation standards similar to other development types in the R1, R2 and R3 zones

Why Study Multi-Family Infill Development?

What is Multi-family Infill Development?

Urban living is on the rise in the United States¹. One driving force behind this trend is changes in household composition. The 2000 census reported that the vast majority of households are no longer nuclear families. Singles, young couples and retirees are driving market demand for a variety of housing options, with an increasing preference for higher-density housing near jobs, transit and entertainment.² Typically, this higher density housing is in multi-family structures, which provide more living units than traditional single-family homes. Multi-family housing options include apartments, plexes, condominiums, townhouses and rowhouses. They generally provide smaller units with little or no exterior maintenance requirements of the occupant. Condominiums, townhouses and rowhouses provide the opportunity for home ownership. Because these housing units are generally smaller and less land is required for their development, they may also provide a more affordable housing option. When located near existing shopping and transit services, multifamily housing can provide a convenient, carefree lifestyle.

Developers have been quick to accommodate the demand for multifamily housing. Frequently, they take advantage of existing infrastructure by building housing on undeveloped or underutilized land in established urban areas. This “filling in” of vacant parcels, also known as infill development, changes the landscape of existing neighborhoods. The impact infill has on neighborhoods can be both positive and negative. On one hand, infill provides housing near job centers, shopping and public transit. It increases the property tax base and provides for efficient use of land and public infrastructure. Infill can also enhance neighborhoods by revitalizing shopping areas and cultural districts. On the other hand, infill may not be well received by neighbors. It may result in loss of open space and natural features valued by the community.

What does multi-family development look like?



¹ World Resources Institute, *Facts about Urbanization in the United States*, <http://www.wri.org/wri/enved/suscomfacts.html> (May 30, 2004)

² Northeast Midwest Institute Congress for New Urbanism, *Strategies for Successful Infill Development*, 2001, <http://www.nemw.org/infillbook.htm> (May 30, 2004)

What is Design?

Attention to design can lessen the negative impact of multi-family infill development. Important elements for the design of multifamily infill can be grouped into three categories: (1) those that are internal, called private realm elements, (2) those that are external, called public realm elements, and (3) contextual elements, those that define the relationship of buildings to adjacent properties and the surrounding neighborhood.

Elements of the private realm include such things as unit layout, exposure to natural light, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the availability of storage, and garages.

Public realm elements include architectural design (including the placement of entryways and windows), building color, placement of components of the development (such as parking, open space, recreational amenities and pathways), and landscaping.

Elements that define the contextual relationship of buildings to adjacent properties and the surrounding neighborhood include building height and bulk, building setbacks, the location of windows, and the amount of landscaping.

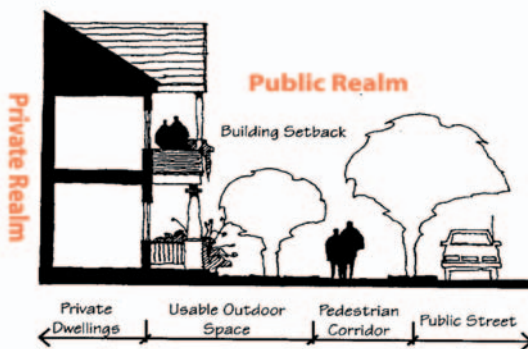


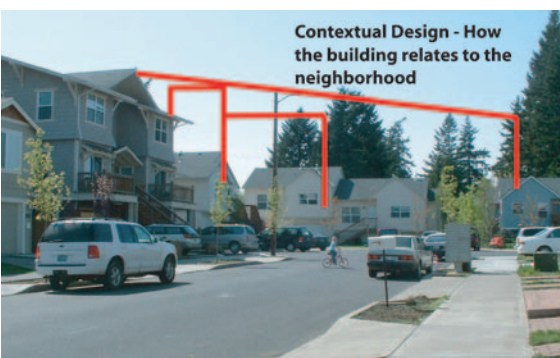
Illustration of public and private realms

Source: Image adapted from *Building Blocks for Outer Southeast Neighborhoods* (1996)

Multifamily Infill Design in Portland, Oregon

Multi-family infill development is a timely issue in Portland, Oregon. Growing in population by 27% between 1990 and 2000, the Portland metropolitan region managed to capture most of this growth within urban areas.³ Growth management tools, such as the regional urban growth boundary and the Metro 2040 Growth Concept, which stress build-out of urbanized land, are partially responsible for this success. Infill development is a critical component of these plans. For example, Metro's 2002 Residential Land Needs Analysis, estimated infill and redevelopment to account for 26% to 29% of all residential development in the region.⁴ In order to achieve these policy standards, infill development must provide more dwelling units than traditional single-family homes. Multi-family structures are typically the answer.

Being the largest city in the metropolitan region, much of the burden of managing multi-family infill development falls on the City of Portland. Through zoning regulations and development standards in Portland City Code, Chapter 33 Planning and Zoning (Zoning Code) the City attempts to: (1) encourage efficient use of land and public infrastructure; (2) promote positive relationships between new development and existing structures; (3) preserve desired features, such as trees and open spaces; (4) protect public health and safety; and (5) improve the pedestrian experiences and access to public transportation. These regulations include topics such as density requirements, building coverage, setbacks from lot lines, and landscaping. However, design is largely unregulated. Design guidelines apply only in specific districts of the City. In all other sections, the only control over the appearance of multi-family infill developments is the development standards of the Zoning Code. These standards do not always adequately accomplish good design.



³ Northwest Environmental Watch, *Sprawl and Smart Growth in Metropolitan Portland*, 2002, <http://www.northwestwatch.org/press/portlandgrowth.pdf> (May 30, 2004)

⁴ Metro, *2002-2022 Urban Growth Report: A Residential Land Needs Analysis*, December 2002, <http://www.metro-region.org/article.cfm?ArticleID=7596> (May 30, 2004)

About this Project

Portland Bureau of Planning’s Infill Design Project

In 2003, the Portland Bureau of Planning launched the Infill Design Project, a study intended to improve the design of multi-dwelling and rowhouse developments outside the Central City and in other areas where design standards do not apply. Headed by Bill Cunningham, City Planner, the project specifically focuses on new multi-dwelling development in R1, R2 and R3 zones. The goal of the project is to identify non-regulatory strategies for encouraging good development, rather than simply regulating against bad development. Potential products include a case studies document, which highlights exemplary development and/or a plan book of infill housing types that are marketable, meet community design goals and fulfill regulatory requirements.

The LIV-IN Project

The Outer Southeast Livable Infill Project, known as the LIV-IN Project, supplements the City of Portland’s Infill Design Project. Undertaken by six Portland State University graduate students during the spring of 2004, the LIV-IN Project evaluates the design of new multi-family developments in a study area located in Outer Southeast Portland.⁵ By focusing the study of infill design to a single neighborhood, the project was able to solicit input from infill occupants and those living in the surrounding community, as well as developers and architects of infill projects. This public involvement helped to clarify community design priorities and expose why infill is being built the way it is. This report presents these findings, along with recommendations to improve multi-family infill design.

Study Area

The study area of the LIV-IN Project covers approximately one square mile in the heart of the Powellhurst-Gilbert neighborhood in Outer Southeast Portland. As shown in MAP 1, it is bounded by SE 115th Ave. on the western edge, SE 129th Ave. on the eastern edge, Division St. to the north and Ramona St. to the south. Ramona St. is just north of the Springwater Corridor, a regional recreational trail that links the study area neighborhoods to Portland and to Gresham. SE 122nd Ave., a major north south arterial, runs through the center of the study area. Major east west arterials include Division St., Holgate Blvd., and Powell Blvd.

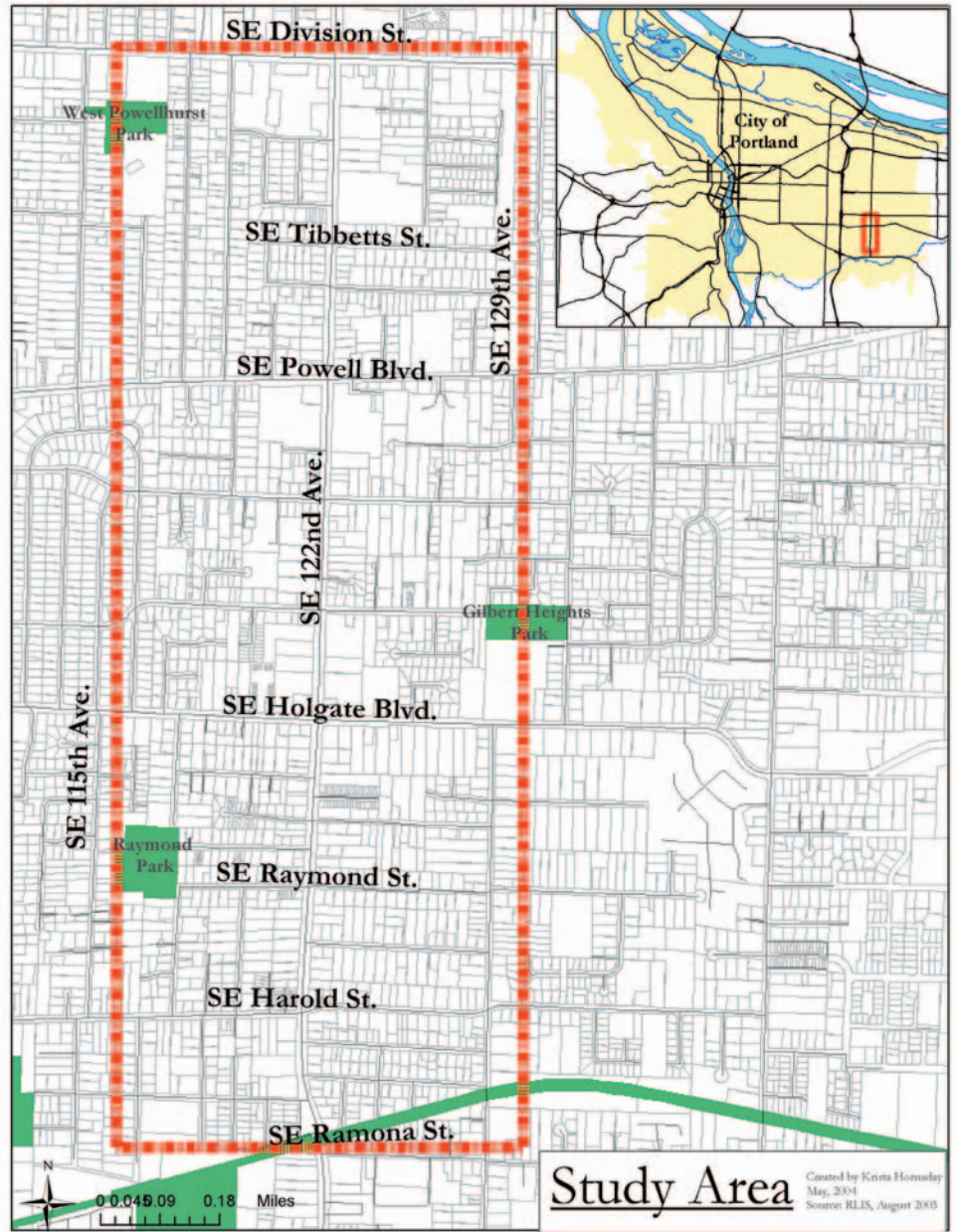
This study area was originally recommended by Bill Cunningham because of the large amount of multifamily infill occurring in the neighborhood, the concerns neighbors have voiced about the impacts of this type of development, and because there are no requirements pertaining to design in current plans or code provisions. Research showed that the study area also satisfied a number of criteria established by the LIV-IN Project team. These criteria included regional significance, appropriate zoning, future infill potential and a minimum of 30 recent multi-family developments.

⁵ As defined in the Outer Southeast Community Plan, Bureau of Planning (1996)

Project Comparison

Infill Design Project	LIV-IN Project
WHO: Bill Cunningham, City Planner, Portland Bureau of Planning	WHO: Six Portland State University graduate students
WHAT: Multi-dwelling and rowhouse development in the R1, R2, R3 zones	WHAT: Multi-dwelling and rowhouse development in R1 and R2 zones. There are no R3 zones in the study area.
WHY: To encourage design that meets design goals	WHY: To supplement to work of the Infill Design Project
WHERE: Portland, outside the Central City	WHERE: Along SE 122 nd Ave. between Division Street and Harold Street, 116 th and 127 th
WHEN: 2003-2004	WHEN: Spring 2004

Map 1



Project Goals

The LIV-IN Project seeks to accomplish three goals:

1. Identify community design preferences. This goal involves answering the following research questions:
 - What types of developments does the neighborhood prefer?
 - What design elements are priorities and how do they rank in trade-offs?
 - What present or future character should infill design be sensitive to?
2. Determine why new multi-family infill development is or is not fulfilling community design preferences.
3. Provide recommendations to improve the quality of new multi-family infill development and to realize community design preferences.

Data Collection

To achieve these goals, the study relied upon in-field observation, public involvement and research. These methods are briefly expanded upon below. For a complete description of the project methodology see Appendices.

Inventory of New Multi-family Developments

- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Regional Land Information Systems (RLIS) permit data was used to identify multi-family and rowhouse structures constructed between 1998 and 2003. Field observation was used to confirm the location of these structures and their primary design features.

Community Involvement

- Surveys were solicited from occupants and neighbors of recent infill to understand how well new development relates to the existing community, to understand who lives in the infill, and to identify potential opportunities for enhancing living environments for residents.
- A public workshop was conducted, which included a design preference survey, comment mapping exercises and discussion of urban design.
- Presentations and briefings were given at community meetings to obtain feedback on the scope and progress of the project.

Developer and Architect Interviews

- Developers and architects of non-profit and market rate developments of varying size and density were interviewed.

Urban Design Work Session

- Professionals from the fields of architecture, landscape architecture and urban design attended a work session to brainstorm ways to meet community design preferences within the constraints of the study area.

Research

- The Portland Zoning Code, crime data from the Portland Police Bureau, United States 2000 Census data and literature were all consulted to improve understanding of issues confronting multi-family infill design.

Community Involvement Summary

- 50 hours door-to-door survey work
- Over 500 surveys distributed to infill occupants and neighbors with flyer for Community Workshop
- Community Workshop (18 attendees)
- Four community meeting presentations



Residents expressed what they liked and disliked about their neighborhood and infill at community workshop.



Workshop participants took part in a design preference survey to identify design characteristics that were positive or negative additions to their neighborhood.

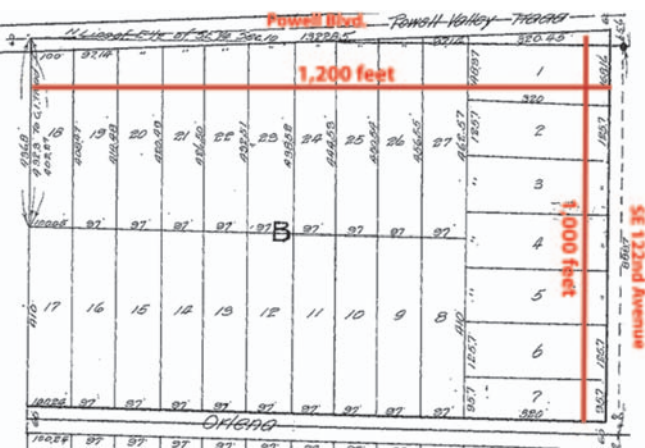
Existing Condition Analysis

Study Area History

Early settlers to the eastern part of Multnomah County were farmers. They made claims under the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850. This act granted 320 acres of land to a single man and 640 acres to a married couple if they had were able to prove that they had lived on the land and farmed it for a period of four years. Farmers moved their goods to market along a portion of the Oregon Trail, which is now Foster Road.

By the late 1800s an interurban rail line was operating along the Springwater Corridor. This transportation system transported people from the City's close-in neighborhoods to Estacada. Many communities, including the Powellhurst-Gilbert neighborhood, developed along this rail line and landowners began to divide larger tracts of land into smaller parcels.⁶

In 1909 the Greene-Whitcomb Company and Henry Everding created a subdivision called the Suburban Club Homes Tract. This subdivision straddled SE 122nd Ave. between what is now Powell and Holgate Blvd. It divided the land into six blocks with 27 lots in each block. Each lot was slightly less than one acre in size, with street frontage of approximately 100 feet, and depths of 320 to 410 feet. The result of this subdivision was creation of a street pattern of very large blocks (roughly 1200 feet by 1000 feet) with no interior streets. A review of Multnomah County survey records indicates that this subdivision was typical of other subdivisions created during this period. This plat and others like it created the framework for the connectivity issues facing the neighborhoods today.



The 1909 Suburban Homes Club Tract was platted with blocks over 1,200' by 1,000' with no interior streets.
 Source: Multnomah County <http://gjis.co.multnomah.or.us> (May 30, 2004)

The population grew slowly until the Post-War years of the 1940s when the availability of low cost housing loans fueled a period of rapid residential growth. This growth intensified the conversion of large tracts of farmland to smaller land for residential use. A similar period of rapid residential growth occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Multnomah County planning efforts during this time included the Multnomah County Framework Plan, adopted in 1977 and community plans for specific neighborhoods that were adopted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Powellhurst Neighborhood Plan was adopted in 1979.

The Multnomah County Powellhurst Neighborhood Plan includes a land use map that shows the established single-family development pattern with future commercial development concentrated at major intersections and multifamily development located adjacent to these commercial centers and along well-traveled streets. At that time, the majority of the area was developed with single-family homes on large lots.

The City began to annex unincorporated areas of the county into the City in 1960 to provide for the orderly development of public sewer and water systems.

⁶ City of Portland, Bureau of Planning, *Outer Southeast Community Plan*, March 1996

By 1994 all of the unincorporated areas of Multnomah County had been annexed either to Portland or to Gresham. The last major annexation occurred in 1994 with the annexation of outer southeast Portland into the City.⁷

The City underwent an extensive community planning process in conjunction with the annexation. The resulting Outer Southeast Community Plan and the Powellhurst-Gilbert Neighborhood Plan were adopted in 1996. The goals of these plans are to revitalize older neighborhoods and commercial strips, to plan for transportation infrastructure, and to prevent environmental degradation.

At annexation, existing Multnomah County zones were converted to similar City zones. In addition to this conversion, land adjacent to major arterials, SE 122nd Ave., Division St., Holgate Blvd. and Powell Blvd., were rezoned for multi-family development. This rezoning was done to encourage the development of higher density multifamily housing along streets served by public transit. Table 1 equates Multnomah County zones to City of Portland zones and compares potential housing unit densities.

Table 1 - Zoning Code Comparison

Multnomah County			City of Portland	
Zone	Allowed Density (units per acre)		Zone	Allowed Density (units per acre)
MR-4, MR = 3	7.2 to 16.1	<i>Converted to</i>	R2	21.8 to 32
HR-2, A-2	8.1 to 20.7		R2	21.8 to 32
HR-1, A1B	8.1 to 58		R1	43 to 65

Sources: Proposed Outer Southeast Community Plan, City of Portland, Bureau of Planning, February 26, 1995, page 2-6 Classification of Districts, (Adopted July 26, 1979). Handout received from Multnomah County Land Use and Transportation

Current Zoning Classifications

Table 2 summarizes the amount of land in each classification set forth in the Zoning Code. The area is largely residential with 57 % of the land zoned for single-dwelling uses and 32 % of the land zoned for multi-dwelling development. The multi-dwelling zones present are R1 and R2.

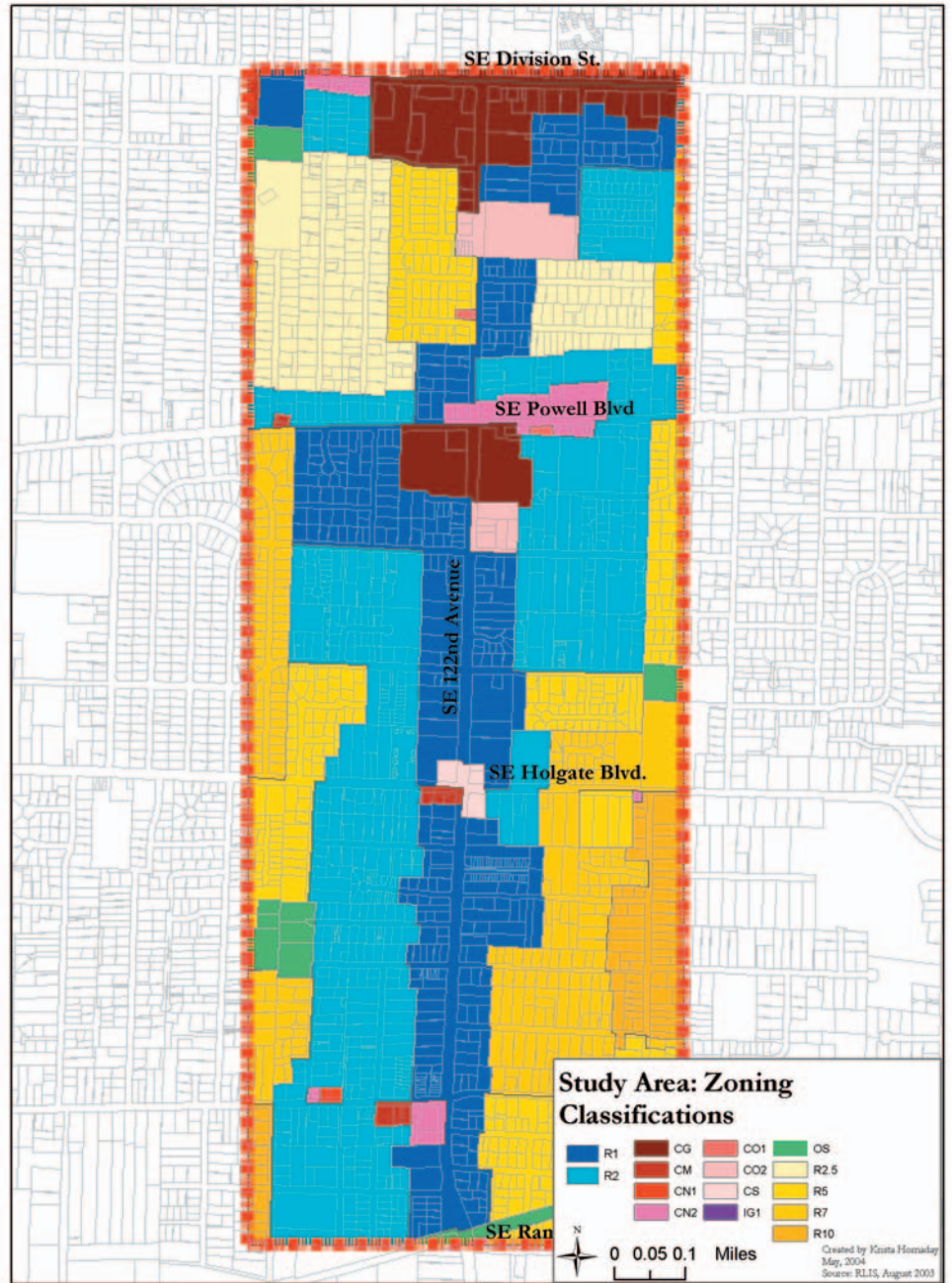
Table 2

Zoning Classification	% of Total
Single Family	57.5
Multi-dwelling	32.7
Commercial	4.5
Open Space	4.7
Industrial	0.4
Mixed Use	0.2
Total	100

Source: RLIS, August 2003

⁷ City of Portland, Bureau of Planning, Annexation http://www.planning.ci.portland.or.us/an_over.html (May 28, 2004)

Map 2



The R1 zone is a medium density multi-dwelling zone that is typically applied to land adjacent to transit streets and commercial areas. The average housing unit density is 43 units per acre, although density may be as high as 65 units in some instances. This zone is typically developed with apartments, duplexes, townhouses, and rowhouses. The R2 zone is a low-density multi-dwelling zone with housing unit densities ranging from 14.5 to 32 units per acre. Typical development types are the same as those in the R1 zone.

A summary of development standards applicable to the R1 and R2 zones, and a brief statement of the purpose for each standard are found in the Appendix.

Platting and Irregular Lots

The long lots created by subdivisions such as the Suburban Club Homes Tract create difficulty for developers to fit all the desirable pieces of residential development (i.e. driveways, adequate parking, buildings large enough to accommodate spacious living units, landscaping, and private or shared space) on individual lots. This is due to limited street frontage and long, narrow sized lots that vary significantly from the standard lot configuration of inner Portland.

Options for further dividing these lots are also limited and have created additional connectivity problems from those in the original plat. They can be subdivided into many lots served by a cul-de-sac, or they can be partitioned with a “flag” to provide new lots with access to the street. Neither of these options work to enhance bicycle and pedestrian experiences or to promote connectivity and access to public transit.

Transportation Infrastructure

Many smaller local streets are unpaved and have not been graded. They do not have curbs or sidewalks, and do not connect with other local streets, making them extremely difficult to navigate. Many survey respondents stated that traffic from new residents puts an increased strain on unimproved roads, thereby increasing already significant potholes. Lack of stop signs and pedestrian crossings cause safety concerns for residents, especially in light of the increased traffic associated with the infill developments.

The four main arterials: Division St., Powell Blvd., Holgate Blvd. and SE 122nd Ave. are developed with commercial uses. The Outer Southeast Community Plan Vision Map recognizes Division St. and SE 122nd Ave. as contemporary main streets. These streets differ from traditional main streets in several ways. Commercial development along contemporary main streets is spaced farther apart and located away from the street. Parking is typically located between the sidewalk and the front door of the businesses. These streets are auto oriented and unfriendly to pedestrians and bicyclists. This, in addition to the minimal street frontage of residential developments, creates problems in fulfilling future neighborhood livability goals.



Irregular flag lots such as this one on Powell Blvd. Create unique design issues for developers. This development shows the high percentage of impervious surface often found on flag lots.

Housing Stock

Data from the US Census Bureau indicates that 62 percent of existing housing units are single-family structures, 60 are mobile homes, and the remaining 32 percent of units are in multi-family structures.⁸ The largest portion of multi-family units is small multi-family structures with one to four housing units. Only three percent of the housing units are in very large multi-family structures with more than 50 units. Fifty eight (58) percent of units are owner occupied and 42 percent of the units are rented. These rates are comparable to tenure rates for the City as a whole (56 percent owner occupied, 44 percent rented).

The medium year of construction for all housing types is 1958. MAP 3 shows the age of housing structures classified as pre-WWII (1940 and before), post WWII (1940-1990) and recent developments (1990-present). This map illustrates the dispersal of housing age throughout, without concentrations of a particular era.

The single-family structures are predominantly small ranch houses on large lots. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis confirms that there are a number of tax lots where the assessed value of improvements (structure) is less than the assessed value of the land. The areas that may be ripe for redevelopment are shown on MAP 4.



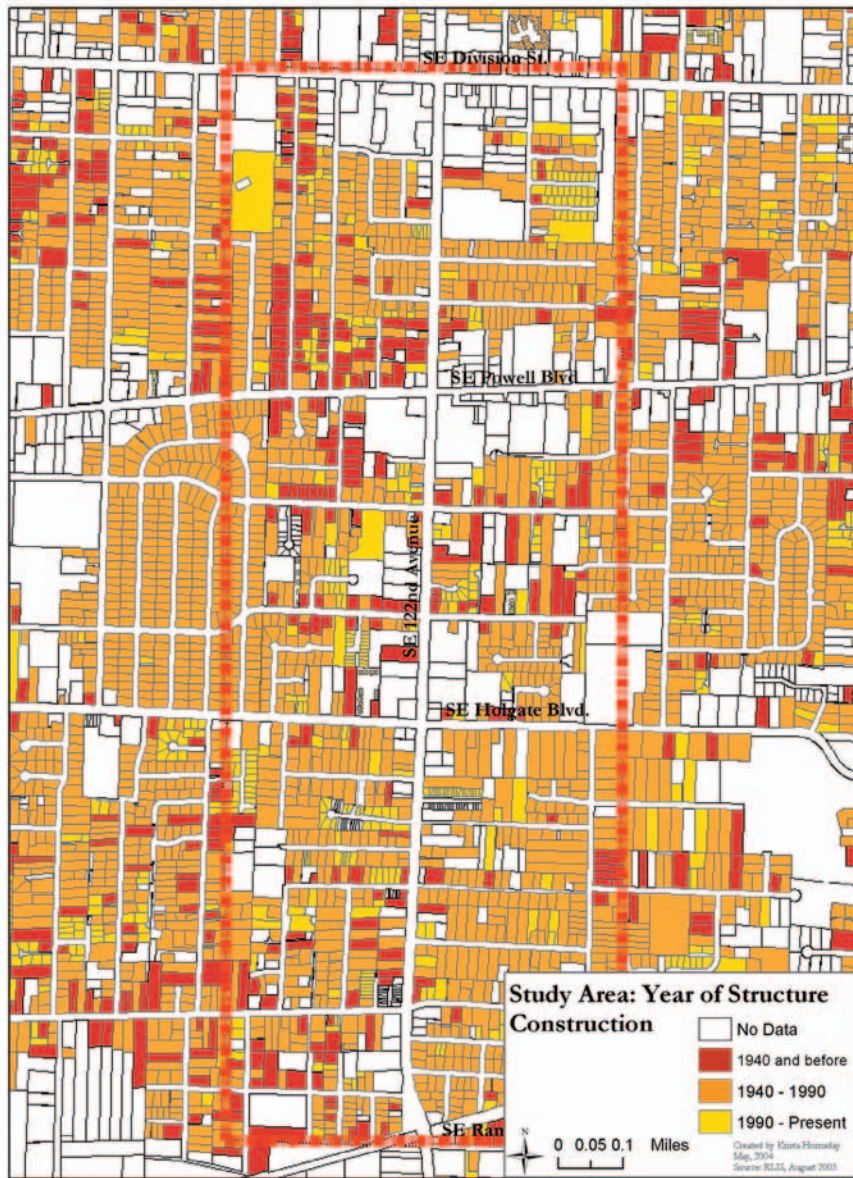
Post WWII residential development was primarily in the form of one story, ranch style homes such as this one.

Table 3 - Housing Units Classified by Size of Structure

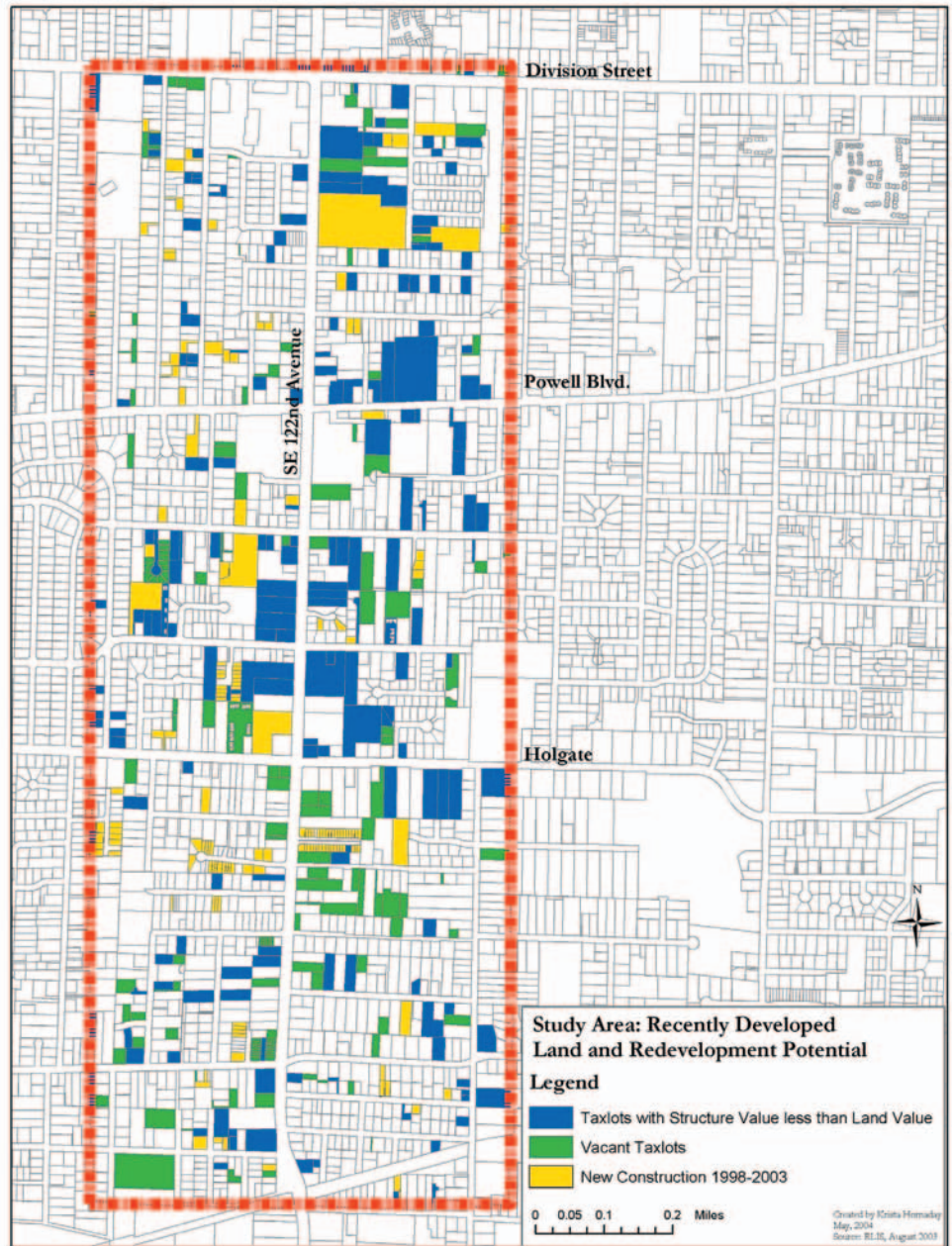
	Single-Family Structures	Mobile Homes	Multifamily			
			Small (1 to 4)	Medium (5 to 19)	Large (20 to 49)	Very Large (More than 50)
Number of Units	3,222	334	736	434	365	158
% of Total	62%	6%	14%	8%	7%	3%

Source: United States Census Bureau, 2000 SF-3

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, SF-3, <http://www.factfinder.census.gov> (May 30, 2004)



Map 3



Map 4

Affordability

Both existing neighbors (51%) and infill occupants (54%) rated affordability as the number one reason they chose to live in the neighborhood. Data collected for the 2000 Census showed that while housing value is less in the study area than in the City as a whole (\$133,167 compared to a \$154,900), the median gross rent is comparable to that of the City (\$574 v. \$579).⁹ New multi-family development rents collected as field data ranged from \$600-\$800 for 2-3 bedroom unit apartments.

Census data also indicates that the median household income in the study area is approximately 10% below that of the City as a whole. In addition, approximately 9% of households in the study area receive public assistance compared to 4% of households in the City.

The importance of affordability presents an interesting challenge in terms of design. In many situations, better design is more expensive which may increase the cost of housing, both rents and sales prices. Better design may also make the neighborhood appealing to higher-income people, which could potentially change the market. Thus, a challenge is to identify design alternatives that do not have a large impact on the price of housing.

New Multi-family Infill

This study evaluated 31 multi-family developments, varying greatly in style, type and site design (see Appendix A). Of these, 52% are apartment units, 27% are rowhouse units, 15% are plexes (duplex, triplex and four plexes), 5% are cluster developments (plexes with common courtyard) and 2% of the units are condominium units. Housing unit density for these projects range from a high of 41 units per acre (Holgate Terrace Apartments) to a low of 10 units per acre (duplex at 2926 SE 125th Ave.). This is important to the neighborhood because many of the developments in the inventory are surrounded by single-family homes in low-density residential zones with housing unit densities in the range of 6.5 units per acre to 9 units per acre.

Case Studies

The Holgate Terrace Apartments is the project with the highest housing unit density (41 units per acre). This apartment complex is located at SE 122nd Ave. and Holgate Blvd. and includes 72 units. No land use review process was required for the apartment complex as the project met the relevant development standards. The apartment building units overlook the parking lot that is located at the center of the complex. Landscaping is limited to planting strips in the parking lot and sidewalks as well as planting beds immediately adjacent to the buildings.

The largest rowhouse project is located on Long St., just east of SE 122nd Ave.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, SF-3, <http://www.factfinder.census.gov> (May 30, 2004)

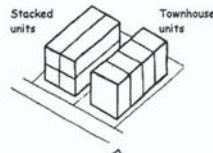
Study Area Development Type Inventory

Development type: Plexes

Number of developments: 11 (35% of total)

Number units: 56 (15% of total)

Example plex density: 30 units per acre



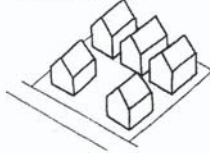
This development type includes duplex, tri-plex, four-plex, etc. with multiple units on one tax lot.

Development type: Courtyard Cluster

Number of developments: 2 (6% of total)

Number units: 17 (5% of total)

Example cluster density: 24 units per acre



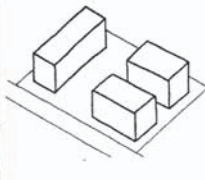
This development type includes developments with buildings arranged around a shared space or courtyard.

Development type: Apartment Complex

Number of developments: 6 (19% of total)

Number units: 193 (52% of total)

Example apt. density: 41 units per acre



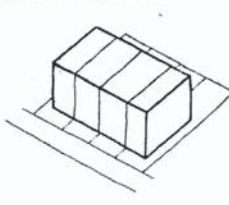
This development type includes clusters of buildings with multiple units.

Development type: Rowhouse

Number of developments: 12 (39% of total)

Number units: 106 (28% of total)

Example rowhouse density: 20 units per acre



This development type includes attached units, each with its own lot.

Housing unit density on this street is approximately 33 units per acre.

The rowhouses are surrounded by vacant land and additional multi-family development is expected on adjacent lots. Many of the units are owner occupied. Rental units are occupied by market rate renters and by renters that receive federal housing assistance. These rowhouse units offer individual enclosed garages, two bedrooms, two and one half bathrooms and a very small back yard.

A duplex at 2926 SE 125th Ave. is the least dense development in the study area, with a housing unit density of 10 units per acre. This duplex is located on a flag lot with a paved drive-way in the front and a small backyard. The surrounding area is developed with single-family homes and the landscaping is mature. Each unit has an enclosed single car garage.

Population Transition and Creating a Future Vision

U.S. Census data indicates that the age of the residential population is changing.¹⁰ The number of children under the age of 18 increased by 30% between 1990 and 2000 as did the number of individuals between the ages of 45 and 64 (40% increase) and the number of individuals over 65 (5% increase). These changes from 1990 to 2000 are different from the changes experienced by the City as a whole:

- Percentage increase in the number of children under the age of 18 is 30% compared to an increase of 17% for the City.
- Percentage increase in the number of individuals between the age of 45 to 64 is 40% compared to an increase of 63% for the City as a whole
- Percentage increase of individuals over the age of 65 is 6% compared to a decline of 3% for the City as a whole

In general this area has a higher concentration of children and those over 65 years of age than the City as a whole. This information is consistent with the survey demographic data collected, new infill occupants are younger in age with more children and the existing neighbors are aging, with a significant number over 65 years.

This difference in age between new and existing residents is accompanied by other critical differences including:

- Infill Neighbors
 - o Primarily homeowners (85%)
 - o Lived in their residence for a longer span of time than the infill occupants (68% had lived in the study area for greater than 5 years)
 - o Moved to the neighborhood because of the neighborhood character (43%)
 - o Perceive their neighborhood changing for the worse (68%) because of the growth in multifamily housing

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, SF-3, <http://www.factfinder.census.gov> (May 30, 2004)

- o Do not know residents of new multi-family infill adjacent to their home
- Infill Occupants
 - o Primarily renters (67%)
 - o Lived in the area one year or less (74%)
 - o Moved to the development because of the availability of homes (42%), proximity to family/friends (28%), and proximity to work (30%)
 - o Less likely than surveyed neighbors to identify neighborhood as an important reason for choosing the neighborhood (14%)

These differences between old and new residents, owners and renters, elderly and younger populations seemed to directly influence the perception of neighborhood change. Neighbors had chosen to live in the neighborhood of the past – suburban and private, while occupants of infill have chosen to live in the neighborhood of the present – higher density and growing.

Such a division in perception of the neighborhood and its direction make it difficult to identify unified design preferences. Additionally, the preferences expressed today may not be completely applicable in five, ten, or twenty, years from now as the area continues to change.

Crime

When asked in an open-ended question to identify the biggest concerns about living in their neighborhood, survey respondents most often answered crime and drugs. Such comments indicated that neighbors directly associated a perceived increase in crime with the new multi-family infill.

An evaluation of crime statistics available from the City of Portland Bureau of Police found that although the total number of crimes in the Powellhurst-Gilbert neighborhood increased 10% from 1998-2003, the rate per 1000 population (96) remains below the City of Portland average (101).¹¹ The majority of crimes in the neighborhood involve burglary, car prowls, and larceny and motor vehicle theft.

To the extent that good design can prevent crime, this topic is relevant to the LIV-IN Project; however, further research needs to be done to prove whether these concerns are warranted and to investigate methods for reducing crime.

Through community involvement, interviews and work sessions, findings about design of multi-family infill development emerged. These findings fall into several categories: neighborhood issues, design preferences, developer perspectives and zoning code concerns.

¹¹ City of Portland, Bureau of Police, *Maps and Statistics* <http://portlandonline.com/police> (April 30, 2004)

Findings

Community infill issues beyond design:

- Crime and Safety
- Traffic
- Street Improvements
- Litter
- Schools

Table 4 - Design Features Considered "Very Important"

Design Features	%
Sense of Privacy	84
Storage Space	58
Nighttime lighting	51
Individual entry	49
Enclosed garage	49
Balconies/Porches/Patios	49
Daytime sunlight	42

Comments on the private realm

- "I love almost everything about the development, inside and out. Needs more parking."
- "The dwelling looks nice on the outside and it is spacious on the inside."
- "It has a new modern look to it."
- "Very clean, upscale units."

Neighborhood Issues

Perhaps the most notable finding to come out of this study is that there are important infrastructure and public service deficiencies in Outer Southeast Portland, which for many people are of a higher priority than design issues. Poor street connectivity and unimproved roads were frequently mentioned concerns. Crime, traffic, litter and school overcrowding were also mentioned repeatedly. For many survey participants, these issues were synonymous with new development and took precedence over design.

Design Preferences

Design preferences fall easily into the private realm, public realm and contextual relationships. Two findings are important to mention prior to this discussion, however.

First, it should be noted that when discussing design preferences, participants were asked to focus on the area immediately surrounding their residences. Since very few of the new multi-family developments surveyed in this study were along SE 122nd and other main transit streets, the preferences reported in this documents are primarily for residential areas on side streets off SE 122nd Ave.. Discussions at the community workshop suggested that different preferences – for larger, more urban multi-family, structures - might exist along transit streets.

Secondly, it was found that significant sections of the study area lacked an adequate transition between the public and private realms. Many roads are unimproved, and even those that are improved lack curbs and sidewalks. Front porches and yards are absent on many of the new multi-family structures. This creates an uneasy feeling among residents and visitors to the neighborhood.

Private Realm

Occupants of the new multi-family infill developments were the sole source of information on how the projects function internally. Through information collected during surveys and conversations at the public workshop, occupants indicated that they are happy overall with the interior design of their units.

- **Lighting is sufficient.** Occupants surveyed generally responded "yes" (83%) that their units receive enough sunlight. Nighttime lighting on the site was "sufficient" (79%).
- **Interior design is more important to occupants than issues of exterior appearance.** Occupants rated internal design elements as "very important" while external elements such as building features common to the neighborhood and windows facing streets were rated less important. The ranking of design features considered "very important" appears in Table X. Furthermore, occupants who attended the community workshop frequently described their development in terms of the internal elements such as number of bedrooms, appliance amenities, garage size, etc. They seemed satisfied with the size, configuration of their units, and on-site elements.

- **Developers focus resources on private realm.** Developers said that they focus resources on internal design and functionality, as opposed to external elements. They stated that they build to market demand and that new occupants are interested in unit amenities and parking. Developers indicated that rental and sales rates for new infill is high, providing incentive to build more of the same.

Public Realm and Contextual Relationship

Both occupants and neighbors of infill provided perspectives on the appearances of the buildings and their relationship to the neighborhood. There is an obvious divide among opinions; occupants generally rated their buildings positively, while neighbors generally rated them negatively.

- **Opinions on the overall look of the buildings are split.** As Table 5 shows neighbors predominately rated the developments as “poor” or “average”, while occupants rated them as “excellent” or “average.”

Table 5 - Rating of Overall Appearance

	Neighbors		Occupants	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Poor	25	49.0%	5	11.6%
Average	18	35.3%	16	37.2%
Excellent	8	15.7%	22	51.2%
TOTAL	51	100.0%	43	100.0%

- **Opinions on the size of the buildings, relative to the neighborhood, are also mixed.** Table 6 demonstrates that the overwhelming number of occupants preferred the size of the buildings, while the neighbors found them to be too large.

Table 6 - Rating of Building Size

	Neighbors		Occupants	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Too Large	32	60%	2	5%
Too Small	2	4%	4	9%
A Good Size	15	28%	34	79%
Not Important	2	4%	2	5%
No Answer	2	4%	1	2%
TOTAL	53	100.0%	43	100.0%

- **The height and bulk of new housing should reflect the low-lying architectural character of the neighborhood.** Survey participants commonly cited lack of privacy (windows overlooking patios/backyards), no space between buildings (shadowing) and lack of transition between single-family homes and taller/larger developments as problems

“[Developers] just need to put more landscaping to give privacy and add beauty to the neighborhood.”
-Infill Neighbor, Bush Street

“The new three story development has windows that overlook our back patio, I won’t use our back area as much now; infringes on my privacy”.
-Infill Neighbor near Boise Street

“They [developments] are cramming up close to houses and there is no room for landscaping or yards.”
-Infill Neighbor, SE Powell Blvd.



Streets with unimproved parking areas such as this create issues for on-street parking.



This duplex with a single-family looked was ranking as a positive addition to their neighborhood by design preference survey respondents.



Mature trees characterize the neighborhood as defined by area residents.

with the new infill. When given the opportunity to expand upon this, people said that multi-family development over two stories and larger in bulk are seen as very negative additions to the neighborhood.

- **More parking is needed?** Parking is an important issue for community members; 63% of survey respondents answered that more parking is needed for new multi-family developments. However, based on discussions about parking at the community workshop, it appears that the neighborhood feels more on-site parking is needed because it is not acceptable to park on the street. People are uncomfortable with cars parked in front of their homes, a situation which may stem from a lack private-public realm transition on unimproved streets or the fact that many people do not know their neighbors or their cars.
- **Individual entrances and smaller building massing are desired to reflect the single-family character of the area.** Several design priorities relating to context sensitivity were highlighted in the survey and design preference survey. 49% of people said that multi-family developments with a single-family look would fit better with their neighborhood. A sense of individuality for housing units was one highly ranked way to achieve a single-family look (55% ranked as very important). A common opinion voiced at the community workshop was that buildings should be smaller in bulk and no taller than two stories high.
- **Trees are a unifying element of neighborhood character.** Mature trees were identified as an important feature of the neighborhood that residents would like to see preserved. Additionally, people suggested mature trees as a good way to screen the external appearance of new buildings. Residents expressed strong concern over the loss of mature tree canopy to make way for new development.
- **Open Space is desired on-site.** Shared open space for new infill was seen as a desirable element from the community perspective with 51% of occupants without a shared open space responding they would like to have one, and neighbors rating this element as "very important" (60%). Units gathered around a courtyard ranked well in the design preference survey, because of the obvious inclusion of open space. Neighbors prefer new infill to have an open space to fit with the trees/lawn character of the neighborhood as well allowing for space for children to play. Occupants would chose parking over shared open space if given a choice, but if they could have both, shared space would be beneficial to families with children.
- **Communication between developers and neighbors is lacking.** Lack of communication between developers and residents regarding public realm and context sensitive design leads to uncertainty by residents for

the future of their neighborhood. Community members expressed frustration with the lack of opportunity to share information for design improvements with developers and frequently suggested that more opportunities for discussion should exist.

Developer Perspectives

Based on the identified community design preferences, seven architects, designers, and developers were asked why public realm and contextual elements were a lesser priority than private realm elements. These professionals have all designed projects specifically in the study area, ranging in size and scale, also varying from subsidized to market rate housing.

Five reasons surfaced as to why new multi-family infill developments are not fully meeting community design preferences.

- Existing developments are meeting market success.** Developments are frequently sold to buyers, whether homeowners or property management agencies, prior to or by completion of the project. Additionally, occupancy rates of the existing developments are high. One 28-unit apartment complex filled within 5 months of completion. These two realities suggest that what is being built in the study area is meeting market preferences, if not design preferences. There is little incentive among developers to change what they are building.
- There is no identifiable character or context to relate to in the study area.** There is consensus among developers that the area around SE 122nd Ave. has no real character to consider when building. When asked how they would characterize the area, interviewees responded, “non-descript,” “mish-mash,” “no character,” and “lacking.” One even said, “Drawing on what is there would be a big mistake.”
- Odd shaped lots complicate design trade-offs.** Developers confirmed that long lots and flag lots complicate site configurations. Most chose the configuration of their site because it was the only option that worked, given the need for access, parking, individual open space and the other requirements of the Zoning Code. They also said that given a decision between open space and parking, parking would win out every time. Most developers said they try to fit as many units and parking spaces as possible on site to maximize return and because parking is an important amenity for buyers.



Speed of Change/Development

Aerial photographs show the change in tree/ open space coverage from 1996 to 2000 due to new infill development.

Community Design Preferences for Multi-Family Infill Development

- Larger multi-family units (e.g. 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms)
- Unit amenities, such as garages, appliances
- Lower lying multi-family structures of smaller bulk (plexes)
- Distinct appearance of units (individuality)
- Maintain mature trees on-site
- Landscape consistent with the neighborhood
- Usable open space
- Opportunity to discuss design with developers

“I like the fact that we have homes in stands of large trees most about my neighborhood and now all the [new developed] properties are clear cut of trees, some are 5 feet in diameter”.
- Infill Neighbor

“I dislike unknown cars parked outside my house.”
-Infill Neighbor



Shared open space was found to be a desirable design element by both occupants and neighbors.

- **Design is not a market priority.** One interviewee said, “75% of the reason for poorly designed infill in Outer Southeast is the result of developers trying to maximize their return... the other 25% is their unawareness of good design.” To developers the benefit of “better” design is lower vacancy rates and higher rents. But, “if you invest too much in design and your rents are too high, you will not turn the units over fast enough.” In other words, developers are attune to the price that residents of Outer Southeast Portland are willing to pay, and these rents do not support the costs of better design.
- **Amenity bonuses are not being utilized.** Chapter 33.120.265 of the Portland Zoning Code provides density bonuses to developers who provide the listed amenities. Many of the amenities encouraged are the same amenities that were repeatedly mentioned in design preferences. However, none of the developers reported using the bonuses. Primarily this was because the bonus of added density is only useful on larger lots. The long, narrow lots of Outer Southeast Portland are not favorable for higher-density. Developers pointed out they would be more likely to include amenities for cost-savings bonuses, such as expedited permitting.

An interesting divergence in opinions regarding design occurred between those developers who built market rate units and those who built subsidized housing. Perhaps due to greater cash flow, longer-term investments and socially minded missions, developers of subsidized housing, typically community development corporations, placed a higher priority on external design and its impact on the neighborhood. Generally, subsidized housing projects include outdoor play areas and private outdoor space, among other amenities. This mentality stood in stark contrast with market rate developers whose primary motivation was quick turn around sales.

Code Concerns

Lastly, the Portland Zoning Code was reviewed to determine where the Code was falling short of community design preferences. Several areas of concern were identified:

- **Development standards are written for development on flat, regularly shaped lots.** One of the key problems with the existing development standards is that they are not entirely applicable to the irregular lots in Outer Southeast Portland.¹² The Code was written with the regular lots of Portland’s 200 foot by 200 foot square blocks in mind, not for flag lots, or long lots that lack street frontage. This creates an inherent shortcoming in the City’s ability to realize preferred design in the study area.
- **Lack of transition between medium density multi-dwelling zones and low-density single-dwelling zones.** In many parts of

“The developments that relate well to my neighborhood are the ones that have green space or courtyards in the interior”.
-Infill Neighbor, SE 125th Ave.

“I am in favor of planned areas where one looks out on landscaping – rather than asphalt.”
-Infill Occupant, Boise Street Condos

¹² City of Portland, Title 33 – Planning & Zoning, Chapter 33.120.010 B.

the study area, medium density R1 zones directly abut low-density single-family zones, such as R5 or R7. Minimum setbacks in the R1 zone vary from 5 to 14 feet, in essence allowing a 45-foot tall structure within immediate proximity to one-story ranch style homes.

- Standards are intended for structures with public street frontage.** Many of the requirements of the Zoning Code are based on street frontage. For instance, front entrances must be within 8 feet of the longest street facing wall and 8%-15% of the street-facing façade must be windows. In situations where the lot is accessed by a private drive or alley, this private street serves as the basis for street frontage. On the long lots in Outer Southeast, private drives are commonly used for access. The result is not a pedestrian-oriented streetscape, as intended by the Code, but rather a series of buildings oriented toward driveways and not streets.
- Tree preservation is not required for multi-family structures.** Chapter 33.120.237B of the Zoning Code states the tree preservation requirements for multi-family dwellings. However, multi-family structures, those buildings with three or more units in them, are exempt from this standard. The result is loss of mature trees, which were identified as a key to neighborhood identity and which could potentially screen the structure.

“I am upset that we were not told about the building of these units or given the opportunity to voice our objections”.
-Infill Neighbor, Schiller Street

“No one seemed to make an effort to consult or even contact neighbors, not even adjacent property owners before building. There was no process made known to us to address play space for kids who might move in, preserving old trees on the property, or building design and orientation.
-Infill Neighbor and Powellhurst-Gilbert Neighborhood Association Member

Recommendations

As the third project goal suggests, this report is intended to inspire creative and proactive means to realize community design preferences for future multi-family infill. The following recommendations are put forth as a means to do so. Appreciating the complexity of the issues faced in Outer Southeast Portland, there is not one action that will comprehensively address these challenges, warranting a combination of actions to improve the livability of future multi-family infill development.

While many recommendations could be made to improve the quality of new multi-family infill development, the four recommendations discussed on the following pages were selected based upon their ability to accomplish the most significant change. It is recognized that some will be more difficult to implement than others, as they are dependent on the investment of a wider range of stakeholders and organizational change. In addition, the long and short-term feasibility varies for each.

Recommendations to improve the quality of multi-family infill development include:

- 1. Take a comprehensive approach to planning and design**
- 2. Define the transition between public and private space**
- 3. Use expedited and lower cost permitting to encourage amenities**
- 4. Maintain mature trees**

RECOMMENDATION #1: TAKE A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO PLANNING AND DESIGN

As this study demonstrates, there are constraints to addressing the future of Outer Southeast Portland through site-by-site design. The site-by-site approach is only effective to the extent that each site implements the larger community vision.

- **Plan and implement the infrastructure necessary for good urban design.**

Outer Southeast Portland is currently missing the basic infrastructure necessary to support the principles of good design. Issues such as poor street connectivity, inadequate street frontage and irregular lots make it difficult for individual sites to contribute positively to the neighborhood.

Resolution of these infrastructure issues was addressed in the Outer Southeast Community Plan, completed by the Portland Bureau of Planning in 1996. This plan established urban design and transportation policy action items for the neighborhood, such as establishment of appropriate block standards, a road plan to reinforce the area's character and a design overlay zone to promote attractive pedestrian oriented developments. The urban design and transportation policy action items of the Outer Southeast Community Plan must be implemented in order to provide a sufficient canvas for future development.

- **Revive the community vision.**

The main function of the Outer Southeast Community Plan was to create a comprehensive future vision for the area. This vision included dividing the large lots into smaller blocks with narrow streets, sidewalks and street trees. Under this vision, new buildings enhance the physical appearance of the neighborhoods and promote residential diversity. Commercial development occurs within walking distance and public transit is improved. To the extent that this vision is still relevant and applicable, it should be revived and serve as a unifying image for the community.

This study found evidence that the vision for residential areas on the side streets and the vision for SE 122nd Ave. may be different. This divide should be further explored, and if valid, incorporated into the existing community vision.

- **Use public investment to implement infrastructure.**

Some level of public funding should be used to implement the infrastructure needed in Outer Southeast Portland. This may include improving roads, enhancing streetscapes or purchasing open space. At the very least this public investment will provide the template for better urban design.



Large lots have been divided into smaller blocks with narrow streets, sidewalks, and street trees. This provides a cozy streetscape with safe walkways to stores and public transit. Courtesy of Southeast Uplift, Drawn by Cynthia Bankey, Architect

Source: *Building Blocks for Outer Southeast Neighborhoods* (1996)

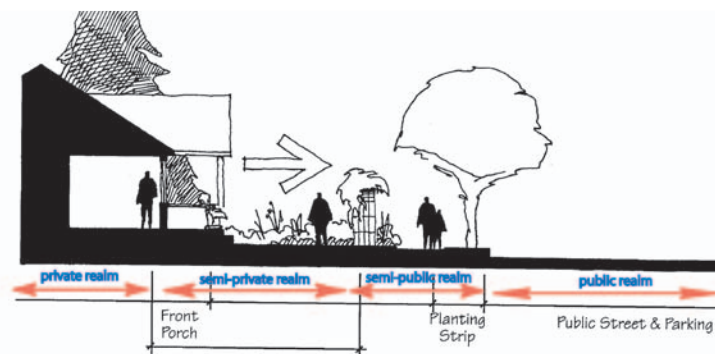
Considering that one of the key themes from the developer interviews was the lack of incentive to improve design quality, public investment may provide the catalyst needed to enhance private development. A sound public investment would signal design expectations to developers. It may also spark civic pride, inspiring the neighborhood to activate in response to undesirable development proposals.

With the proper infrastructure and a guiding vision in place, new proposals for multi-family infill development can then be evaluated based upon their individual ability to support the desired neighborhood vision. Aware and proud of this vision, the neighborhood will be in a better position to articulate to developers their preferences for new developments.

RECOMMENDATION #2: DEFINE THE TRANSITION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACE

As the findings suggest, large portions of the study area lack a clear transition between public and private space. This creates a sense of uneasiness. A clear transition between public and private space would help to alleviate this tension.

- Public and semi-public space should be publicly provided**
 The provision of infrastructure through public funding, as suggested in Recommendation #1, would account for the distinction of public space. Improved streets with curbs, sidewalks, street trees and amenities such as lighting, trash receptacles and benches would not only enhance pedestrian circulation, they would signal to the user that they are in the public or semi-public realm. Furthermore, these enhancements would delineate where on-street parking is acceptable making this unused resource usable.
- Encourage developers to delineate semi-private and private space**
 Continuing the transition from the public realm into the private realm, developers should be encouraged to add building design elements such as individual walkways, entryways and front porches to create a more welcoming transition into the semi-private and private realms. These design elements provide architectural detail, unit amenities highly-desired by occupants, and a sense of individuality, which was indicated as important by both occupants and neighbors. These design details may also reduce the surrounding neighbor's sense of the height and bulk of the new multi-family development, breaking up the building mass and adding interest.



Source: Adapted from the *Building Blocks for Outer Southeast Neighborhoods* (1996)



Boise Street Condos provide a clear transition between the private and public environment with porches, front yards and sidewalks.



This development lack transition elements, the cars are parked directly in front of the entrance.

Amenities that merit density bonuses in Chapter 33.120.265:

- Outdoor recreation facilities
- Children's play areas
- Three bedroom units
- Storage areas
- Sound insulation
- Crime Prevention
- Solar water heating
- Larger required outdoor areas

RECOMMENDATION #3: PROVIDE EXPEDITED AND LOWER-COST PERMITTING TO ENCOURAGE AMENITIES

Many of the design amenities ranking high among community design preferences are currently encouraged in Chapter 33.120.265 of the Portland Zoning Code. However, in exchange for these amenities, Chapter 33.120.265 grants developers density bonuses. Based on the conclusions of this study, density bonuses are an inappropriate incentive. Density bonuses are not favored by the community, nor are they utilized by developers.

- **Expedited and lower cost permitting are more appropriate bonuses**

Developers expressed that cost-saving incentives, such as providing lower-cost or expedited permitting, would be more widely used by developers and would be more likely to encourage the type of multi-family infill desired in Outer Southeast.

It is understood that lower-cost or expedited permitting may be a difficult incentive to provide for staffing reasons, but it is likely to be the most effective way to improve the livability of new multi-family infill developments.



Children's play areas

RECOMMENDATION #4: MAINTAIN MATURE TREES

Currently, multi-dwelling structures, or dwellings with three or more units, are exempt from the minimum tree preservation standards.¹³ Undoubtedly, the intent of this exemption is to prevent trees from interfering with density goals. However, the effect of this exemption is poor screening of larger structures and loss of community character.

- **Multi-dwelling structures should be required to meet tree preservation standards similar to other development types in the R1, R2 and R3 zones.**

All other development in the multi-dwelling zones is required to meet the T1 standard of Chapter 33.248. These standards require developers to comply with one of three options: (1) preserving at least 2 inches of tree diameter per 1,000 square feet of site area or 3 inches of tree diameter on lots less than 3,000 square feet in size; (2) planting the foregoing tree diameters; (3) making a payment to the tree fund. Such standards or similar standards should be applied to future multi-dwelling developments, with an emphasis on preserving existing mature trees or planting larger, more developed trees to replace lost vegetation.

Action on this issue is important, as mature trees were cited as a symbol of neighborhood identity, which is perceived as threatened by new multi-family infill developments. It was also recognized that larger, more mature landscaping could help to ease the transition from higher-density zones into the surrounding single-family neighborhood and mitigate the height and bulk of new multi-family developments, a major concern of neighbors.



Large trees and front yards characterize existing residences.



Mature trees on multi-family sites such as this one help soften the residential transition and contribute to neighborhood character.

¹³ Portland Zoning Code, Chapter 33.120.237 B exempts multi-family structures from meeting the T1 standard of Chapter 33.248. However, it should be noted that if a site is subject to a land division then other tree preservation standards might apply.

Lessons Learned

Multi-family infill development challenges metropolitan regions around the United States. Market demand and public policy propel these projects forward, while neighborhood opposition pushes them back. Design has been suggested as one tool to resolve this push and pull relationship.

The LIV-IN Project has investigated the potential for design to resolve infill issues in a study area in Outer Southeast Portland. At the conclusion of the project, three lessons stand starkly apparent—

1. Change is challenging. Outer Southeast Portland is in a period of transition from a suburban past to an urban future. This change is apparent in the zoning – the area is zoned for the density that the City envisions for 2040, creating transition issues in the meantime. It also shows up in the demographic profile, which is split between an aging generation and a recent influx of young couples and families. The pervasiveness of change in the neighborhood creates a sense of uncertainty, which some resent and others shy away from. The consequence is a loss of community cohesion, which sadly is the one thing the neighborhood needs to hold onto most.

2. Good design does not just happen. Advocacy is required. Certainly the City has a responsibility to regulate and encourage good design. Developers also have an ethical obligation to build structures that enhance the livability of the community. However, the future of multi-family infill design in Outer Southeast Portland is in the hands of the neighborhood. If the neighborhood wants to have control over the type of developments that are occurring, they must take an active role. This means strengthening the function of the Land Use Chair to monitor development activities, promoting neighborhood documents such as Building Blocks for Outer Southeast Neighborhoods, and initiating proactive discussions with developers about project design.

3. The benefits of design have limits. On some level, urban design can improve the appearance of a neighborhood. It can create attractive streetscapes and appealing facades. However, design cannot inherently create unity among a divided community, it does not always bring safety to areas of crime and it may not incite pride in places of neglect. These problems require human solutions, which stand separate from design. They require some indefinite balance of economic development, political will and social wellbeing, which reside in a community's heart, not on its face.

“The character of the neighborhood is in transition, changing from what it was.”
-Infill Neighbor, SE Powell Blvd.

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