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## Position Statement of the Burnside Neighborhood Committee on the Downtown Plan

Portland (Or.) Burnside Neighborhood Committee

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9/11/72

POSITION STATEMENT OF  
THE BURNSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEE  
ON THE DOWNTOWN PLAN

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Commissioner of Public Safety

The Burnside Neighborhood Committee is composed of people who live in the Burnside area and/or those who work there in social service agencies or their own businesses. The Committee was formed under the sponsorship of the Regional Alcoholism Board in order to respond to the multiple economic and social changes which are currently affecting the Burnside area and the skid road population.

The Regional Alcoholism Board has been actively working in the Burnside area for over a year to coordinate existing service agencies and to plan new treatment resources for the alcoholic segment of the population, including the \$1 million Public Inebriate demonstration grant application recently submitted to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

The Burnside Neighborhood Committee is still in the process of being formed. It is anticipated that it will become a permanent committee with the goal of continually monitoring the needs of the skid road community and of expressing concerns for this largely voiceless population. As one of its first activities the Burnside Neighborhood Committee has reviewed the Downtown Plan in light of its potential effect on the skid road community and has developed the following position statement.

Many aspects of the Downtown Plan met with the approval of Committee members, and, in general, it appears to be a sound planning base for the future of downtown Portland. However the Committee also has specific concerns:

1. A skid road community currently exists which has not been adequately recognized in the Downtown Plan in terms of provision for its continuance.

The residents of skid row, numbering 3,000 to 5,000 depending on the time of year, utilize the street atmosphere to provide the last vestiges of social contact in what is otherwise an isolated and meaningless existence. Most are elderly, but there are also young people and families living in the area. Most are poor, many are from minority groups, and many suffer from alcoholism or other illnesses.

Recent studies by the Multnomah County Health Department and the Hooper Detoxification Center show that the skid row population is less transient than had previously been assumed and more amenable to rehabilitation, but treatment efforts require a neighborhood base from which to operate.

The skid road community may not seem like much in terms of middle class standards, but it is all the residents of the Burnside neighborhood have, and it must be preserved if Portland is to be responsive to the needs of all of its citizens - not just those who are socially appropriate or visually pleasing.

2. Recognition of future housing needs of the skid road population as described in the Downtown Plan assumes the feasibility of relocation, largely because economic factors seem to make continuance of that population in the Burnside neighborhood very difficult.

However, the experience of other cities and of service agencies in Portland to date has been that relocation is also extremely difficult. Citizens in other neighborhoods of Portland are understandably opposed to becoming the new skid road area, and the alternative of scattering individuals out around the city only masks their social and health problems and causes

extreme distress and social displacement to the individuals involved.

To date there has also been no provision for citizen input to this relocation planning, as required by HUD regulations, which could seriously hamper future funding for replacement housing.

3. Many of the recommendations of the Downtown Plan are not weighed in terms of inter-relating social implications. For example, the proposed parking structures and other economic development north of Burnside would eliminate 847 of the existing 2000 hotel rooms available to residents of the area.

Coupled with the plans for expanding and refurbishing the Old Town area, the Burnside neighborhood is caught in a squeeze that has the potential of eliminating most of the resources now available to the skid road resident and thus force him to relocate at a time when the Regional Alcoholism Board is attempting to make a concentrated treatment and rehabilitation assault on the social problems of the area. Careful timing of construction activities seems to be essential during the three-year duration of the Public Inebriate grant if maximum benefits are to be derived from that expenditure of funds.

4. Most of the street and neighborhood improvements mentioned in the Downtown Plan are designed to make Portland more attractive. There are other badly needed civic improvements that would make the skid road area more livable such as public restrooms, transit banks, recreational areas and equipment geared to the interests of the population, etc.

Considering all of these problems and implications, the Burnside Neighborhood Committee recommends the following actions be taken by the city of Portland in

order to implement the Downtown Plan with the minimum amount of social disruption to the Burnside neighborhood:

1. Immediate expansion of detoxification facilities (i.e. the Hooper Center) by Multnomah County to make it possible for law enforcement and service agencies to pick up everyone on skid row who is in a publicly intoxicated state without holding such persons in jail.
2. Recognition of the Burnside Neighborhood Committee by the City Council and the Planning Commission as a neighborhood citizens' group, including notifying the Committee of any proposed zoning changes or requests for building permits or any similar changes in order to allow input into plans which have possible social impact.
3. Continuation by the City Council of the Citizens' Advisory Committee to the Downtown Plan on an expanded basis. Appointment of a member of the Burnside Neighborhood Committee, preferably a Burnside area resident, to the Citizens' Advisory Committee in order to provide continuing planning review from this segment of the population. The Burnside Neighborhood Committee further suggests that the Citizens' Advisory Committee be more fully utilized by the City Council in the future to provide repeated hearings and planning meetings with other citizens' groups and business interests.
4. Establishment by the Planning Commission of a task force on code enforcement (such task force to include a representative from the Burnside Neighborhood Committee) to study possible uses of code enforcement, subsidies to landlords, and other such measures in order to bring present housing resources in the skid road area to an acceptable level of sanitation and compliance with fire

regulations.

5. Recognition by the Planning Commission of the existence of the Burnside neighborhood and hiring of a full-time staff member to carry out planning responsibilities for the skid road area, such staff member to utilize the Burnside Neighborhood Committee to provide citizen input into planning decisions.
6. Commitment by the City Council to the provision of appropriate replacement housing for residents of the Burnside neighborhood in the same neighborhood prior to any reconstruction in the area, as already recommended by the Planning Commission.
7. City Council action towards seeking of federal funds from various sources for new and replacement housing, renovation costs, renter relocation funds, etc. and assurance of compliance with HUD regulations for citizen input into such planning.
8. Endorsement by the City Council and county government of the policy of full cooperation of police and law enforcement personnel in planning and implementing social programs in the skid road area, including providing funds to law enforcement agencies to enable them to assign personnel to work with groups like the Burnside Neighborhood Committee.
9. Recognition by the City Council of the role played by business interests in potential social disruption of the skid road area. Invitations by the Mayor to large and small businessmen to work with the Burnside Neighborhood Committee, and meetings sponsored by the City Council between the Downtown

Committee and citizens' groups to better coordinate planning.

10. Since the next three years will be critical ones for the population of the skid road area, the Burnside Neighborhood Committee needs commitment from the City Council that the Committee will have the opportunity to make known the unique interests and needs of the skid road population and to fully participate in the planning dialogue and decision-making process. The Committee suggests that the City Council hold additional hearings as new elements of the Downtown Plan, such as the traffic component and waterfront study, are completed in order to allow maximum citizen review and response as the Downtown Plan proceeds to be developed.