
Chair's Letter

Central City Urban Renewal Review Committee

To the Members of the PDC Commission and Interested Citizens:

Background:

Through the process in winter 2004 that resulted in the 4-year extension of the Downtown Waterfront Urban Renewal Area Plan (DTWF), City Council requested PDC study how portions of the Old Town/Chinatown neighborhood could be moved from the DTWF Urban Renewal Area to the River District Urban Renewal Area.

In June 2004, the PDC Commission initiated a study and charged a Review Committee with completing work which responded to City Council's request.

In November 2004, the Committee completed its analysis on moving OT/CT and presents to the Commission the attached recommendations as well as financial, legal and other technical background that were developed by the Study's Technical Team.

Vision for the Future of Old Town/Chinatown, the Downtown Waterfront and River District:

Maintaining and improving a livable, economically viable, and well-planned Central City is critical to Portland's standing among elite mid-sized American cities. One of the most powerful tools to achieve this objective is tax increment financing (TIF). Among its uses, TIF provides direct investments for housing; infrastructure; and development of commercial and retail space. TIF also yields indirect benefits such as the effect renewal has on providing jobs, improving transportation systems and other economic development benefits which also result in relieving pressure and costs from the social service system managed by taxing jurisdictions such as Multnomah County.

The Downtown Waterfront is Portland's oldest operational urban renewal area. Since its creation in 1974, urban renewal has leveraged investments which have strengthened Downtown Portland's role as the regional center for finance, trade, education, culture, retail, professional and governmental services. While the district has seen vast improvements from Union Station south toward Riverplace; one particular neighborhood within these borders still has significant needs – Old Town/Chinatown.

Old Town/Chinatown stretches from the Steel Bridge to the south to Oak Street and from the Willamette River west towards Broadway. This area has seen new investment evidenced by the presence of NW Natural, the Port of Portland and other new office buildings; yet there are large areas that are still on the cusp of renewal and revitalization.

The opportunity to harness the financial strength of DTWF for emerging investments along the waterfront near the Skidmore Historic District in OT/CT for a new and improved fire station; a range of housing uses; a welcoming pedestrian environment as well as stimulate commitments for private investment was one of a many important factors led to the first Review Committee recommendation.

Concurrently, the Committee recognized the need to keep commitments for new parks; more affordable housing; and other projects which guide the River District's investments over the next 4 to 5 years. As that district ages, and uncommitted resources become available, stakeholders may agree the River District could also do its part to address remaining blight in some areas that are currently part of Old Town/Chinatown. It was this belief that led to the second recommendation by the Review Committee.

On behalf of the entire Committee, we appreciate the seriousness to which the PDC Commission responded to the Council's request. I also extend my appreciation to the League of Women Voters; Multnomah County; the Portland Business Alliance, and the Portland Planning Commission who have a strong interest in making Portland a better place to live and work.

Participants and Research:

The Review Committee was comprised of the following individuals:

- Janice Wilson, Commissioner, Portland Development Commission (chair)
- Debbie Aiona, Past President, League of Women Voters
- John Ball, Chief of Staff to Diane Linn, Multnomah County
- Sandra McDonough, President and CEO, Portland Business Alliance
- Ethan Seltzer, President, Portland Planning Commission

The Technical Team included:

- Rashid Ahmed, Economic Development Dept., PDC
- Diane Arakaki, Finance Department, PDC
- Matt Baines, Legal Department, PDC
- Karen Bean, Office of Mayor Vera Katz
- Graham Clark, Portland Planning Bureau
- Eric Johansen, Debt Manager, City of Portland
- Harvey Rogers, Preston Gates Ellis LLP
- Ken Rust, Chief Financial Officer, City of Portland
- Jeff Tashman, Tashman Johnson LLC
- Patricia Tigue, Debt Management, City of Portland
- Keith Witcosky, Development Department, PDC

Project Manager

- Nancy McClain, Chief Financial Officer, PDC

The following materials are submitted for your consideration.

1. The Review Committee Recommendations
2. Appendix A – Sources and Uses
3. Appendix B – Downtown Waterfront Project Details
4. Appendix C – Old Town/Chinatown Project Details
5. Appendix D – River District Project Details
6. Appendix E – Response to Question #1 of the Study Charter
7. Appendix F – Technical Responses and Research Background
8. Appendix G – Charts and Illustrations
9. Appendix H – Key Concepts and Terms
10. Appendix I – Maps
 - Combined map of all Central City urban renewal areas.
 - Forecasted Old Town/Chinatown Projects 2004/2005 through 2008/2009.