

Memo

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Mark Hinshaw LMN Architects
Date: November 26, 2014
Subject: Arch Bridge / Bolton Town Center Plan

We have attached a draft plan for your review in advance of the work session on December 1. As you know, this document represents the culmination of many months of hard work by hundreds of people. Although the plan was assembled by a team of architects, planners, landscape architects, economists, and transportation planners, the work of the team benefitted hugely from on-going participation by the Advisory Committee, which met regularly and robustly discussed issues and recommendations contained in the plan.

But beyond that, the citizen engagement process used to develop the plan organically has been the critical component. We had considerable assistance from the hundreds of people who showed up at a multiday series of workshops and later a public open house. Attendance at the workshops included the City's Youth Leadership Academy, who also gave us a number of spirited ideas. Moreover, we held interviews with many stakeholders at the outset of the planning process. In addition, we had on-going involvement by City of West Linn staff, who contributed useful observations and ideas, as well as staff of other agencies such as ODOT and Metro. In a sense, we were all a large, collective team, looking at the subject area and generating thoughts about its future potential. It has been a very rewarding process for the consulting team, as we rarely see this display of continuous participation by many different voices.

One of the findings that we made during the course of the planning was that regardless of the designation by Metro of a town center, this area did not warrant a "one size fits all" approach. Clearly, the portion of the study area north of I-205 was settled, mature and stable. The emphasis here is more on how the area will redevelop over time. There was no need to suggest major interventions or changes. Nonetheless, we have made some recommendations for this area that, we believe, will ensure its sustainability as a solid neighborhood into the future.

In contrast, the area south of I-205 is a very different situation. Very few people live there. Very few businesses occupy space there. It is a convergence of oddly angled roadways, confusing and dangerous intersections, and vacant land. It also contains fragments of a town center that once had been there before the interstate swept through, cutting it off from the rest of the community, and producing an area with little in the way of public appeal or amenities. While the City of West Linn has strived for decades to create a sound and livable community, this area seems not to match its potential.

The West Linn Paper Mill continues to be an active producer of paper and is willing to rethink use of its property, including access for its trucks. On the other side of the river, Oregon City is embarking upon a major reinvention of its mill site, as well as the renaissance of its historic downtown. The Willamette Falls continues to be a natural attraction for visitors and the Arch Bridge has been recently renovated.

This confluence of transportation, river, dramatic landforms, and history has a great potential to serve the community of West Linn well, with a bold and sensitive approach to redevelopment.

We have divided our recommendations into two groups. The first group recognizes the established areas north of the freeway and the second envisions the potentials inherent in the underutilized land and tangled transportation network south of the freeway.

Recommendations for the North Village Area:

1. Complete improvements to Willamette Drive/ Highway 43 consistent with plans

These would improve the safety of people on foot and on bicycles, as well as in vehicles by making changes to certain intersections, sidewalks and crossings. In addition, lighting, landscaping and other place-making elements should be a part of any street improvements.

2. Transform West Bridge Park, under the interstate freeway, to a true local park

This would provide enhanced public access to the river, and improve a trail that would eventually terminate in Willamette Park.

3. Redevelop the former Bolton Fire Station into low-rise/higher density workforce/senior housing.

With its proximity to services, park space, and the library, this would be an excellent use of city-owned property. Artfully-done interpretive displays incorporated into a new structure could describe the role of the previous fire station in the community.

4. Encourage limited redevelopment in a few selected locations on parcels flanking Willamette Drive.

With carefully applied zoning and design standards, these areas could accommodate new development such as townhouses and 2-3-story mixed use development. Design standards can ensure compatibility and prevent piece-meal redevelopment.

These four actions constitute the sum of what we believe to be appropriate for the area north of the freeway. But they could give the area a renewed vitality and identity in the community.

Recommendations for the South Village Area:

1. Create a new urban intersection

This would involve several key modifications. First, the Broadway right of way would be closed, eliminating one of the awkward and dangerous turning movements. Second, the current Mill Street would be vacated, eliminating another dangerous movement. Third, the gas station would be acquired and demolished, allowing that parcel to be used to build a new, right-angled, signalized intersection connecting Willamette Drive, Willamette Falls Drive and a new Mill Street. The new intersection and street segments would include generous sidewalks, protected bicycle lanes, safe crosswalks, and stops for transit.

- 2. Convert the right-of-way of Broadway into a terraced park with parking underneath**

This would provide green space for public use, connecting across the freeway. It would also provide shared public parking on one level below the park. The park could include a water feature or art work that could symbolize the new center and visually anchor the west end of Arch Bridge.
- 3. The City should partner with a non-profit to build workforce/senior housing on publicly owned property**

This would make use of a piece of property that is publicly owned and could help jump-start other redevelopment over time. This project would not depend upon the streets or intersection being rebuilt. Its development could proceed while the street work is being funded and designed.
- 4. Create a new Mill Street**

This street would replace the current Mill Street which involves an intersection on a curve very close to the Arch Bridge. The new Mill Street would be an extension of a re-aligned Willamette Drive in the new right-angled intersection. Mill Street would be designed as a highly walkable street, lined with shops, restaurants, services and public spaces. It would be landscaped and have many amenities for people on foot or using bicycles. New buildings would be required to add to the street-level amenities with generous storefront windows, pedestrian-oriented signs, overhead canopies for weather protection, and rich architectural details. It would also include shared on-street parking.
- 5. Build a new central “Market Square”**

This public space would intersect with Mill Street and provide for a variety of activities, including food vending, art displays, small concerts, crafts markets, and special events. There would be a permanent pavilion that could house some uses year-round but expand in better weather out onto hard and soft surfaces. The Market Square would have a connection up the hill to West A Street and down the hill to a broad public terrace that would overlook the river. It would be framed by adjacent buildings containing uses that spill out into the space. The Market Square is seen as a flexible, adaptable space that can accommodate many types of events and activities.
- 6. Encourage multi-story, mixed-use development in the core, including higher density residential development.**

On the parcels along the new Mill Street and the major new intersection, the City’s land use regulations should encourage a mixture of uses in buildings up to six stories in height. The economic study indicated that there would demand for a hotel in this area as well. This new development would share a centrally-located multi-level parking structure, which is far more cost-effective than each building providing its own parking. The garage would be available to the public for events and use by local merchants, as occasionally demand would exceed the capacity of on-street stalls.
- 7. Encourage residential development of moderate density outside the core**

Outside of the parcels immediately surrounding the new intersection, there are other parcels that could be ideal for urban type housing. For example, the row of parcels on Territorial Drive could be redeveloped into town houses. (Most of the properties have been recently acquired.) Further south along Willamette Falls Drive, there are some parcels that are occupied by single-family homes. Many of these are no longer homes but have been converted to office space. These parcels could be consolidated such that there could be a pocket of row houses or apartments that could meet the demand for housing from people who wish to live in close proximity to the South Village.

8. Construct multi-use trails.

Over time, the South Village should be part of a regional trail system that links West Bridge Park with Old Willamette. That larger vision will take some time to accomplish. In the meantime some trail connections can be built, such as designing Territorial to include a trail that winds up to the New Mill Street. There are other trails possible, such as one lower down the slope towards the river. There is the possibility of a trail that connects Mill Street with the City fishing pier. And other trails and pathways can pass through various areas, such as the terraced park on the vacated Broadway.

Implementation

The plan also includes a number of implementation steps, including a phased set of actions and possible funding mechanisms. It provides a regulatory framework and a set of design standards for new buildings. The plan also lists a number of key capital investments along with planning level estimates of costs.

We believe that this document, along with a series of more detailed appendices, equips the City with a sound set of directions and measures to accomplish them. It sets forth a broad, long-term vision but provides a practical means to achieve it. We are delighted to be part of this process that has culminated in this plan.