

# IDENTITY BUILDING & REVITALIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

created for  
Downtown Gresham



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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“It is one of the great purposes of [Central] Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God’s handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.”

—Frederick Law Olmsted

When Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux designed Central Park, they were guided and impassioned by a grand story about the Park’s purpose: the notion that everyone in the great city of New York deserved a place to experience natural beauty.

That ambitious idea helped their project move forward cohesively, in the face of thousands of disputes and proposed changes. Their story about a place of beauty for everyone anchored countless decisions: about how to accommodate horse-back riders and carriages, as well as pedestrians; about whether the Park should look natural or be filled with formal gardens; about whether to build playgrounds; about what kinds of trees to plant; and, about what the entrances should be called.



Central Park Historic Photograph Taken Prior to 1923

What is true of Central Park is also true for downtown Gresham: it needs a compelling story—a shared idea of direction, experience, and values.

Bringing improvement to the city’s historic core is going to require passion and change—both of which will naturally give rise to forks in the road, moments where choices will need to be made.

Should an onstreet parking space be taken away to provide for outdoor restaurant seating? Should bike corrals be constructed in downtown, and if so, where? Is urban renewal needed, or not? A shared and strong sense of Civic Identity allows stakeholders to cohesively answer these types of questions, and is what will lead to an integrated downtown revitalization effort that builds a uniquely Gresham experience.

To assist the city in developing a shared story for its downtown, a workshop was conducted on September 20, 2011 at Gresham City Hall. The goal of the meeting was to determine what story Gresham was telling now and what it might want it to be in the future.

## Acknowledgements

This work was made possible through support from **Metro** and the **City of Gresham**. Invaluable assistance was provided by the **Historic Downtown Gresham Business Association** and the **Gresham Downtown Development Association**. And, it couldn't have happened without the participation of downtown Gresham stakeholders. Thank you all.

Gresham has an historic core with a wonderful mix of businesses, and an appropriate scale of building infrastructure, to be able to achieve a higher level of vitality right now. In order to leverage Gresham's existing strengths, stakeholders—property owners, business, residents, and the public sector—are going to have to work together and focus heavily on all of the elements of the city's story in the months and years ahead.

The information gleaned from the workshop suggests that there are abundant

opportunities for telling a new story about downtown and improving economic performance and placemaking.

For instance, stakeholders can target changing the physical story downtown is telling immediately. By improving storefronts, adding color (lots of color), and tenanting for activity, downtown would be transformed.

During the story-framework meeting, many people talked about the fact that Gresham didn't *feel* as if it were the fourth largest city in the State. That conflict between small town and big city is going to be evidenced in many ways while reshaping downtown, which used to be the center of an agricultural community. A place where people came for essential services. Now, downtown can be a one-of-a-kind place that expresses and celebrates Gresham's status as a larger city in Oregon.

Lastly, Gresham's location and environment were considered in more detail. Downtown should strengthen its image of approachability and authenticity, as well as heighten awareness about the city's unique location as a gateway to outdoor recreation, which will help to attract new residents and new businesses.

This report is divided into two sections. The first, *Civic Identity Findings*, provides more detail on the workshop and its outcomes. The second section, *Revitalization Recommendations*, gives concrete and tangible ideas for change that are consistent with the story downtown wants to tell.

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## CIVIC IDENTITY—FINDINGS

In April of 2011, downtown Gresham began a Revitalization Curriculum that was designed by Civilis Consultants to bring more vibrancy and economic success to the historic core of the city. As a part of this work, stakeholders learned the building blocks that contribute to successful downtowns, toured a vital district with similarly scaled infrastructure, and considered various recommendations for improving downtown.

The last step in the curriculum was a Civic Identity workshop, which was held on September 20, 2011 at Gresham City Hall. There, downtown Gresham stakeholders contemplated their commercial district and what it was communicating to the world at large through its buildings, people, businesses, roads, sidewalks, and events. The goal of the workshop was to determine what story Gresham was telling now, and consider what parts of the story should continue to be advanced, and what parts might need to be changed.

To bring focus to the story of downtown Gresham, we utilized a series of questions designed to illuminate the four elements found in any successful story: Characterization, Objective, Relationship, and Environment. This is called the CORE story framework.

### STORY FRAMEWORK

**Characterization**

**Objective**

**Relationship**

**Environment**

### Characterization

For a city, Characterization is everything that a city presents to the world physically, such as streets, buildings, signage, lighting, homes, yards, parks, and natural environment. Physical communications also contribute to this element of story through brochures, billboards, print ads, and TV advertising. All of these things are contributing to how downtown Gresham represents itself. Examples of characterization in a city might be the things that communicate whether a city is dense, urban, blue-collar, wealthy, suburban, elite, rural, safe, dirty, bright, optimistic, abandoned, depressing, or hip.

Much of the work in the revitalization curriculum focuses on the area of Characterization because changes in physical appearance are some of the easiest, and quickest, ways to begin telling a different story in a downtown.

On the following page is a word cloud that shows the perceptions relayed by downtown stakeholders during the workshop about Gresham's historic core in the past and in the present. (In a word cloud, the most frequently used words are the largest, and the least frequently used are the smallest.)



HOW DOES DOWNTOWN WANT TO BE CHARACTERIZED IN THE FUTURE?



Remember that when looking at a city, there is never a critique of characterization. There is no judging about what is good or bad; the goal is simply to see what is there and learn what story is being communicated. Then, it can be decided which part of the story should be advanced, and which parts should change.

## OBJECTIVE

In this portion of the workshop, many of the questions focused on what the people of Gresham, as a whole, are passionate about, what they want to feel, and what downtown's driving motivations should be.

Although Objective is the heart of the story framework, it often seems abstract when we begin tackling it in the workshop, because it includes such unusual questions as, "If Gresham were a person, based on how it presents itself today, what would it most want to feel?"

These aren't typical ways that we think of cities and the people who populate them. But, this idea of who and what the people of Gresham are about, and what downtown should stand for, is vitally important to bringing life to the downtown.









area. Portlanders heading out of town on Fridays were included in the class of commuters shown in the word cloud below.

There has been a large influx of minorities to the greater Gresham area over the last decade and people felt pretty strongly in the workshop that the Hispanic and Eastern Europeans who have relocated to the region do not feel a connection to downtown.

Young people are also a group that I have heard aren't relating to downtown, but they were not discussed in these particular questions during the workshop.



## ENVIRONMENT

This is a very overlooked part of the story framework for most cities. In the Environment word cloud to follow, some interesting themes emerge for downtown, and for the city as a whole.

The first is that Gresham self identifies as strongly **suburban**. The second is that people see themselves as a gateway to outdoor recreation in the **Gorge, Mount Hood, and Bend**. There definitely is a strong tie to Mount Hood, and in conversations, most felt that Gresham had done little to capitalize upon their status as a portal to the east.



*One day a man was in bed and he felt thirsty. He got up, walked to the kitchen, poured a glass of water and drank it.*

Not very interesting. So, what would make this tale more compelling?

Something that prevented this character from getting a glass of water. Maybe his legs don't work, or he is tied to the bed, or he has a fear of water. It is the conflict that makes the story engaging.

From a municipal perspective, the hurdles a city faces are often the most interesting parts of a city's story. Also, the intersection of these conflicts are usually places where obstacles to change and revitalization arise.

### STORY CONFLICTS

<del>car vs walkable</del>	<del>friendly vs schizophrenic</del>	quaint vs big-box
cute vs strip shopping	sleepy vs vibrant	safe vs cutting-edge
popular vs stress-free	comfortable vs trendy	busy vs consistent
farm town vs city	<del>family vs crime</del>	<del>poverty vs commerce</del>
historic vs suburban	hip vs awkward	unsure vs sophisticated
respected vs afraid	irrelevant vs noticed	accepted vs seeking
small town vs center	guarded vs friendly	traditional vs diverse
<del>commuters vs residents</del>	<del>hidden vs central</del>	<del>connected vs disconnected</del>
<del>transit vs car</del>	<del>hardscape vs urban forest</del>	gateway vs edge
<del>trees vs strip malls</del>	<del>scenic vs rundown</del>	changed vs traditional
<del>unsafe vs family oriented</del>	pass-through vs walkable	<del>safe vs crime</del>
changing vs dislike change	<del>dead vs fun</del>	sleepy vs potential
<del>easy to navigate vs hidden</del>	<del>free parking vs hard to park</del>	historic vs changing

Above are some of the conflicts that came out of the civic identity questions that stakeholders answered in the workshop. The conflicts which are red-lined are eliminated because those have obvious negative vs positive tensions, so there isn't anything interesting about resolving them. For instance, with the conflict "safe vs unsafe," it is clear that most people would want this to resolve toward become safer. Additionally, the essential conflicts are those that are human, so those that don't imply human frictions are also removed.

From the remaining collection of conflicts, which are more interesting and arduous to settle, the goal is to sift through and try to find a Super Conflict, one that can encompass all of the rest.

Gresham's Super Conflict was implied in one of the direct descriptions that came out of the question and answer session: **Gresham seemed like someone who grew up as a farmer, but upon adulthood, found that farming was no longer relevant.** Many people discussed Gresham's tendency still to think of itself as a farm town, when in reality, it is the fourth largest city in Oregon. And that is the Super Conflict identified in the workshop.

### ***SUPER CONFLICT: Small Town vs City Slicker***

This Super Conflict will be at the heart of nearly every difficult decision related to downtown revitalization, particularly if the core of the city is going to be the place that expresses Gresham's status as one of the larger communities in the State of Oregon. Demonstrating a more urban side of the city, one that appreciates and celebrates its historic context, will naturally bring it into some tension with the smaller town, suburban focus of the rest of the city. And that is okay. A downtown can provide a different experience than the rest of the city that surrounds it.

In fact, it is this contrast that will make the historic core more compelling and memorable. One of the most engaging stories downtown has to tell comes out of highlighting the physical story implied by the Super Conflict. Emphasizing the contrast that exists between the historic core and the automobile-centered form that surrounds it is the key to providing more distinction for downtown so that it can be perceived as a "found place" instead of as a "hidden place" that is not so different from what encircles it.



*Small Town vs. City Slicker*

## **IDENTITY SUMMATION**

Downtown can offer an experience that is not available anywhere else in the city of Gresham, that of a fabulous pedestrian and cycling district with a strong collection of engaged, active, passionate, connected, and dedicated local business owners. This historic core should be the place where citizens come to access Main City Park and the Springwater Corridor Trail. It should also be the part of Gresham that expresses its status as the fourth largest city in the State. Downtown can embody what is uniquely Gresham by creating a startling differential between the core and the suburban form that surrounds it. In these ways, it will find its own niche and be recognized and appreciated for the gem that it actually is.

## REVITALIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Faced with the challenge of fostering revitalization, stakeholders often focus exclusively on Characterization—the physical manifestation of story. Characterization is important, but a vibrant mixed-use district typically has a more complete story. Great districts are built on compelling and shared visions about all elements of the CORE framework—the physical things you see, as well as the less visible, but equally essential, relationships between stakeholders, marketing with clear objectives, and leveraging environmental strengths.

These recommendations provide suggestions for projects that would improve all areas of downtown Gresham's story framework. These ideas, designed to bring positive change to the historic core of the city, are informed by the workshop and the time spent together with downtown stakeholders during the Revitalization Curriculum.

With a strong idea of the story Gresham is telling now, and a clear sense of what story downtown might want to advance in the future, downtown stakeholders can formulate an integrated plan of action.

When, in what order, and by whom, these recommendations are implemented will be a function of where there is passion, funds, and capacity. Generally though, it is best to tackle short-term projects first in order to build a thirst for victory built from early success.

### RELATIONSHIP

### Focus and Expand Organizational Capacity

*Downtown Gresham used to be the center for essential services in the city. Now, it can play a slightly different role: center for community connection. Weaving downtown stakeholder groups together is the first step in creating the social fabric that people want to experience when they are in a mixed-use environment.*

Successful revitalization stems from fruitful and collaborative relationships between community members. Because of this, improved economic performance will require the participation of all stakeholders: residents, property owners, business owners, and the public sector.

In a smaller downtown, like Gresham's, there is not enough capacity to have separate, distinct organizations representing various stakeholder groups because it dilutes efforts and funding sources, while leaving residents out of the equation entirely. In general, organizations that are inclusive of ALL of the people who benefit from revitalization in the core are preferable, such as Downtown Associations and Main Street organizations. They create an umbrella under which all stakeholders can participate and impact downtown in a positive manner.

Although there was an unsuccessful attempt to create a Main Street organization recently, downtown stakeholders should not give up. Continue to explore why the effort did not succeed, and make it a goal to create a single umbrella organization in the future that can meet everyone's needs.

As that exploratory work is being conducted, all downtown stakeholders should be collaborating on defining and prioritizing a short "to do" list of projects that will further downtown's story. The projects selected should be achievable, and should intersect with where there is a lot of energy and excitement on the part of the people who will implement them. The Historic Downtown Gresham Business Association (HGDBA), and the Gresham Downtown Development Association (GDDA) should also be figuring out how to share the tasks that a single downtown entity would typically manage, such as:

- Seeding and managing stories in the press about downtown.
- Creating and coordinating events.
- Managing and/or promoting storefront improvement programs.
- Catalyzing streetscape improvement and public art.
- Spearheading marketing and branding efforts.
- Fundraising and writing grants.
- Acting as a liaison and organizing efforts of all organizations that also touch on downtown (such as the City of Gresham, Main City Park, the plaza, the library, the chamber of commerce, the historical society, and East Hill Church).

Economically successful downtowns are environments that, in total, are much greater than the sum of their parts. Each visitor that comes to downtown Gresham for a particular business or event, should be enticed to stay, explore, and return. And, in the long term, it should be someone's job to spearhead the creation of that district-wide experience. The more unified and connected the people of downtown are, the greater the experience that downtown will provide for visitors and residents alike.



*Revitalized Area of Downtown Tacoma, Washington*

## CHARACTERIZATION

## Use Downtown Buildings to Tell a New Story

*Each and every building needs to tell a story of vibrancy, excitement, and history. If a downtown looks dull and run down, then it feels dull and run down, and visitors aren't encouraged to stay and participate in all the offerings available.*

In animation, there is a saying that if you nail the walk, you nail the character. Why? Because you can tell a lot about a person just from this one physical characteristic. A downtown environment, particularly one with historic infrastructure, is exactly the same. One of its primary features is the quality and density of its infrastructure. It is what makes a first impression on every visitor.

Improving this one single area of downtown's story can dramatically change its course for the better.



*Create a Great Walking Environment!*

When considering this idea of the physical story buildings are telling, keep in mind that everything needs to be designed for three miles per hour. Why is that? Because that is the speed that people walk.

Economically successful downtown districts are great walking districts, and to engage visitors who are on foot, design must reflect the needs of those traveling at three miles per hour. The level of detail a pedestrian absorbs is much greater than a driver in a car going 25 or 30 miles per hour, and even greater still than a driver on one of the arterials surrounding downtown. This means more details, more physical articulation and texture, more color, more to delight all of the senses.

### *Front Doors*

The first buildings that should be slated for improvement are those at the best entrance to downtown: the area directly across from Main City Park.

This includes improvement of the parking lot and banning beige! Introduce color, color color in the buildings that are the gateway to downtown from Main City Park. Perhaps remove the rockcrete-type finish that hides the gorgeous original brickwork underneath. Restore the windows and further activate the mini plaza on SW Powell Blvd. The front door to downtown should mirror the park's greenery.





The view for drivers and pedestrians traveling along Hwy 26 or visiting Main City Park, the best gateways to downtown.



### Facade Improvement and Color Consulting

Facade improvement programs and color consulting are vital to changing the story told through infrastructure. (It should be noted that these programs are most successful where there are close connections between ALL stakeholders. The *Relationship* part of the CORE story framework is needed to get the *Characterization* work underway.)

Downtown Gresham has great buildings. Dress them up with color so they contribute to downtown’s story. Currently, almost every building in the core is painted some form of beige: white beige, grey beige, dingy, drabby beige. This does not tell a story of vibrancy, nor is it inviting.

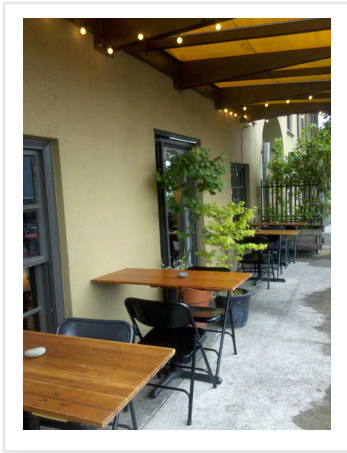


Facade improvement programs should:

**Encourage color.** Beige color schemes should not be allowed, and at least three-color paint jobs should be required. The services of a color consultant should be made available for those property owners who only want to paint and just need help with color. Color is the single easiest, and least expensive, way to change perceptions about a downtown.

**Regulate awnings aggressively.** If a business is not going to use the space under their awning to create an outdoor room that is essentially an extension of their store to the sidewalk, then the presence of an awning detracts from the street environment.

*This canvas awning has a low profile that does not disrupt the look and feel of the historic building to which it attaches. The restaurant uses it to create an outdoor room that adds to sidewalk ambience and street level dialog.*



*These awning systems obstruct the pedestrian view of historic infrastructure from the sidewalk, eliminate storefront light by blocking transom windows, and dominate storefront displays, detracting attention from ground floor businesses.*



**Be creative.** For instance, consider larger matching grant programs that would reimburse interior renovation to buildings if it would bring positive change to the district, such as converting vacant second floor space into residential apartments, or taking landmark buildings and historically renovating them.

**Encourage larger buildings to be broken up into smaller storefronts.** The more activity at the street level, the higher performing the district.

## ENVIRONMENT

## Create a Pedestrian/Cyclist Super District

*One of the most interesting findings in the Marketing and PR Workshop was the lack of interaction between the two environments represented by Main City Park and the historic downtown, even though they are directly across the street from one another.*

*The Springwater Corridor, Main City Park (with the Japanese Garden renovation underway), and historic downtown should have an integrated identity that is particularly appealing to pedestrians and cyclists.*

### Connect with Main City Park

Currently, there is a wide street with heavy traffic that divides two of the most important elements of downtown: the park and the historic portion of the city.

There has been significant improvement and greening to Highway 26 near Main Street. In the long-term though, the two puzzle pieces of the park and downtown will fit together better if continued road dieting happens along this boulevard.



*A Long Crossing Between the Park and Downtown*

A test of streetscape design success would be to sit at a table outside of Jazzy Bagels and see if it is possible to have a chat, at a relaxed conversational decibel level, while traffic is traveling nearby.

Additional ideas include:

- Create programming in downtown on the weekends that might be appealing to the Hispanic community that frequents the park. An event such as having salsa lessons and an outdoor salsa band/dance at the plaza would attract people of all cultures from around the region.
- Link with the passion for the restoration of the Japanese Garden. Provide discounts to volunteers at local restaurants during the renovation. In the long run, individual businesses could offer programming, lectures, and food that might dovetail with the Japanese Garden.

## *Connect with the Springwater Corridor Trail*



*The View to Downtown from Springwater Corridor*

As a part of the Main City Park master plan, an “attractive north/south walking and biking promenade through the park” is envisioned that will “create a sense of place, incorporating plaza designs at the south end of the trail where it abuts the Springwater Trail,” according to the city of Gresham. Creating more physical connectivity is great. When moving forward with this project, slated for 2012, design consistency between the trail and downtown would help to meld together the identity of these two places.

Other ways to connect with the trail include:

- Utilize the gateway parking lot on the corner of Powell and N Main to offer bicycles and roller blades for rent.
- Recruit bike friendly brew pubs and other businesses to the downtown.
- Bike events should be planned that terminate, or originate, in downtown that can also draw from other regional communities on the trail.
- Bike corrals should be installed downtown.
- Create a food kiosk at the trail head that downtown restaurants can staff on a rotating basis.

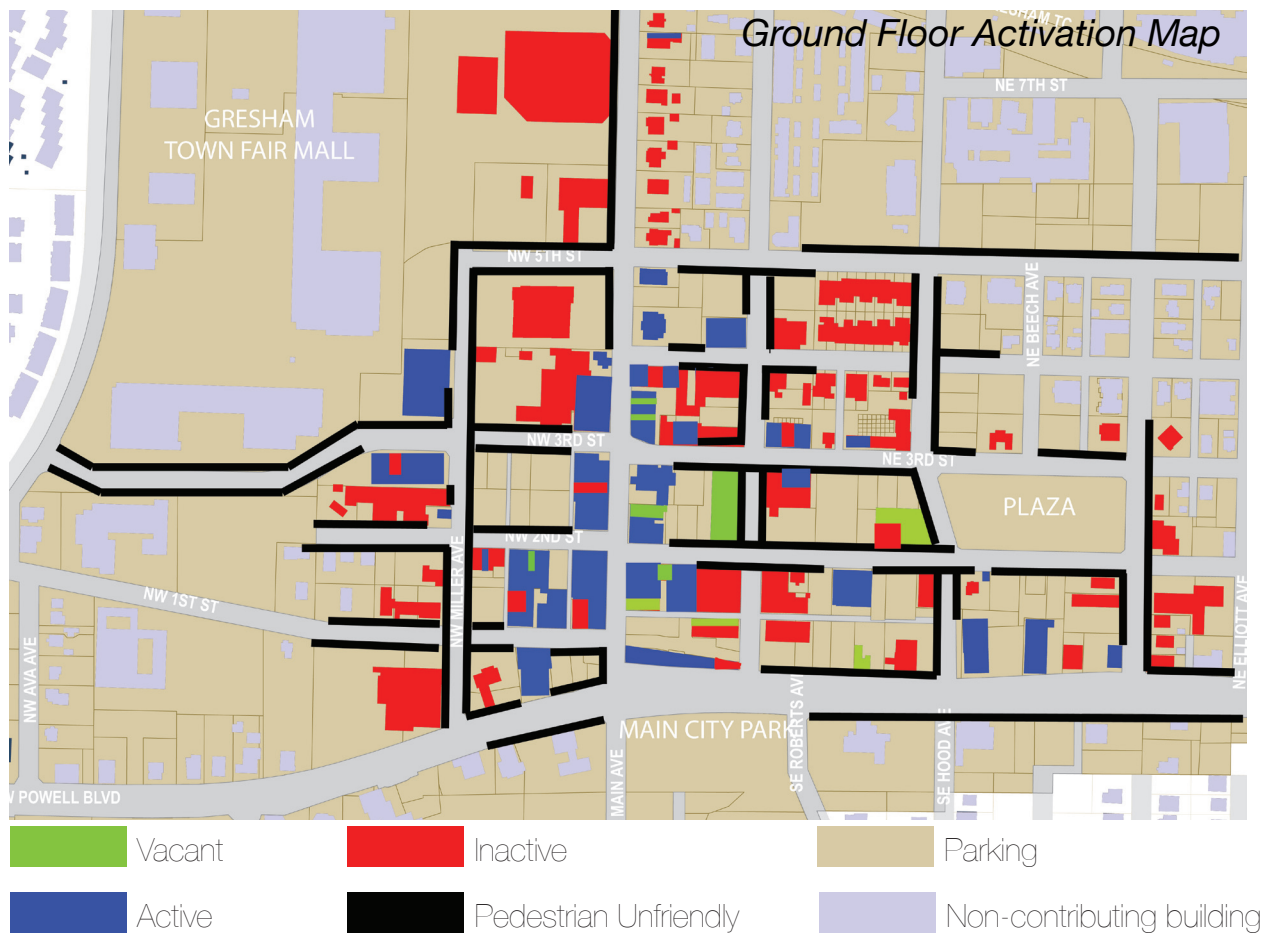
## *Improve Pedestrian Connectivity in Downtown*

Pedestrians hate blanks of any kind. And, since downtowns depend upon pedestrianism, blanks must be mitigated at all costs. Downtown blanks can come in many forms: inward facing office uses, empty lots, and building walls that lack color, ornamentation or windows.

As a part of the revitalization curriculum, a ground floor activation map was created for downtown to a) study ground floor activity, from which districts gain their identity; and, b) to determine which streets have the most activity.

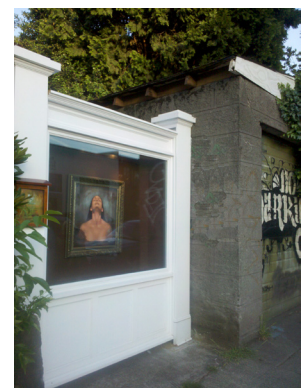
In this map, which is shown on the following page, red is inactive, blue is active, and green is vacant. And, the black bars indicate sections of street where there are blanks. As the map shows, outside of Main Street, there are not a lot of compelling areas to walk in the

downtown because there aren't a lot of continuous blocks with active ground floor uses. The long-term goal for downtown Gresham should be to mitigate these blanks and begin creating walking circulation throughout downtown.



Possible infrastructure approaches to improving pedestrian connectivity in downtown include:

- First, focus on connecting some of the downtown's best assets: N Main Ave, the library, and the plaza. This means better integrating the offerings on NE 2nd St and NE 3rd St.
- Along the edge of parking lots, create landscape and hardscape that is compelling to pedestrians. Think of them as tiny little pocket parks.
- Intersperse a self guided sculpture walk with rotating art displays, like the one pictured here. The City of Chico, CA has a rotating art exhibit in plexiglass frames mounted on building walls throughout their downtown. This would also contribute to Art Walk, an already successful event in downtown.



*Outdoor Painting Display*

- Add more trees along these corridors because walking is always encouraged where there is a mature tree canopy, even if there are blanks. This landscape improvement could mirror Main City Park designs.

## RELATIONSHIP

## Bring On the Activity!!

*As discussed previously, downtown districts get their brand, their identity, from the ground floor uses in the area. The more active and engaging the street-level tenants, the more successful the district because more people relate to it, and to each other, while they are there.*

*Every business with ground floor space should find ways to contribute to the street level dialog that helps to build relationships with visitors. This can be done through event planning, merchandising and displays, and bringing the experience that a store or restaurant has to offer out to the sidewalk.*

### Leverage Themes

Two of the biggest business themes in downtown Gresham relate to food and salon/spa services. It was interesting in the workshop that the food service uses were widely considered to be the most beloved businesses that people in the community had built a connection to, there was almost no relationship with and between the salon and spa uses downtown.

#### Salon/Spa

The businesses in this industry sector have become too much of an island. Clients roll up, get their services, and leave. This is not a successful model for a vibrant downtown environment. Encouraging more interconnection between salons and spas and the rest of downtown will make a huge difference. Possible approaches include:

- Create a ladies night out series of monthly events for the salons. They could test new makeup, do makeovers, have fashion shows, offer wine, have beauty, craft, and clothing makers display their products.
- Work with all salons to create a small storefront area for products, and encourage consignment sales of things like jewelry, accessories, and handbags. They could even partner with the library and hold small classes.

- Improve the exterior of the salons so they are engaging and inviting and interact positively with other nearby businesses.
- Cross pollinate between downtown businesses and the salons/spas, such as offering snacks from nearby restaurants to local patrons, or library books for them to read while they are getting their hair dyed.

## Food

It is clear that much of the identity of downtown comes from its food service industry. Stakeholders should continue to make connections between food and the community, with programs such as the following:

- Heavily market to employees and residents nearby. People love special discounts, even if they are nominal. It makes them feel special.
- Market downtown as a restaurant district.
- Pair up with local events: coupons for ladies night out, dinner before a dancing event at the plaza, etc.
- Hold brewing classes and tasting parties, which could be paired up with other area restaurants or businesses.
- Establish food festivals where each restaurant prepares a small dish that everyone walks around and samples. These dishes could be ingredient-based, speed-based, cost-based, or origin-based and could also include a contest or voting element, as well.
- Offer more programming in the restaurants. Trivia, music, poetry slams, etc. Remember, Phil Stanton at Mississippi Pizza brings approximately 175,000 people per year to N Mississippi with the daily programming at his place. That is roughly double the visitors for the Gresham Farmer's Market.

### Food Themes

Thai  
Mediterranean  
Italian  
Asian  
Brewpub  
American  
Pizza  
Beer making supplies

## *Tenant for Value*

One of the keys to building long-term value and economic success in a downtown district is to tenant ground floor spaces with outward facing uses that engage in street level dialog.

Anything that helps to build the community fabric is welcome, since that is the draw for downtown.

There are two components to tenanting for value. The first is to finish spaces so they have high ceilings, copious natural light with generous storefront windows and original building finishes, such as wood floors and exposed brick. In other words, create compelling, interesting and original warm shell space for businesses. The second is to tenant buildings with active ground floor uses that are engaging to pedestrians.

A small downtown is a place where visitors can get to know the craftspeople and store owners behind the counter. This is part of the magical fabric of an economically successful downtown. This artisanal connection is the reason why downtowns should consider targeting production/showroom operations. Examples might be a paper arts store that has a wedding invitation letter press business in the back, or a small handbag manufacturer with a retail showroom in front. These businesses help to solidify the image of downtown being the home of unique expertise that cannot be found at a mall.

## *Event Planning*

Christmas Lighting, Art Walk, Halloween, the Car Show, the Farmer's Market and the Teddy Bear Parade were all listed as beloved events in downtown during the workshop. The Bed Races were also mentioned, but often people felt these weren't being leveraged for maximum return for the downtown.

This is a great collection of downtown events that are city-wide. There is still room to build upon this though, such as:

- Encourage and facilitate single-store event planning. This could involve some of the ideas mentioned previously—trivia night, music, open mic, comedy, spelling bees, and classes. It could also involve dancing, lectures, book signings, author readings, or hosting a downtown social just for fellow stakeholders.
- The workshop showed that people in Gresham are passionate about their pets, and especially their dogs. With the dog and pet oriented businesses that are downtown, including veterinary care, there are myriad event options available, from dog walking, to proper pet care lectures, to training tips.



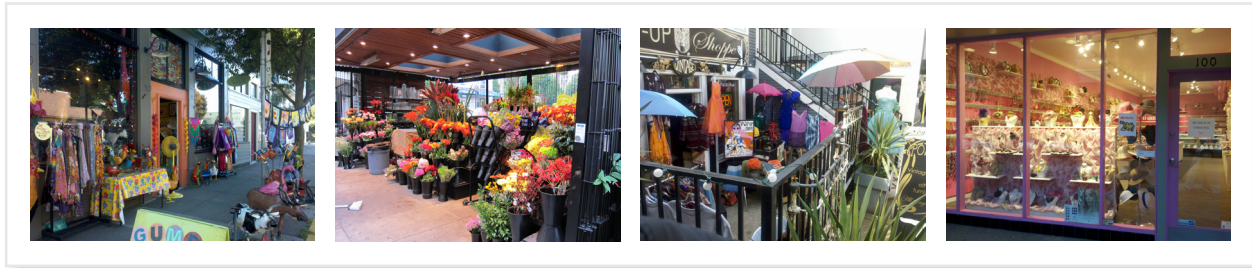
*More Events for Pet Lovers in Downtown!*



- Create recurring events that are off-season friendly, don't weight everything toward the summer.

### *More Street Level Dialog*

Introduce more sidewalk tables, planter boxes, merchandise on the sidewalk, lights in the trees, storefronts that are engaging at night when retailers are closed, dramatic sconces on buildings at night—anything that visitors can appreciate at three miles per hour!! Please see the pictures below for examples.



### **OBJECTIVE**

### **Improve Branding, Marketing, and PR**

*The myriad moving parts that constitute a mixed-use district all contribute to its identity, whether anyone means them to or not. And, as we have covered, it is important to understand the many ways a place may be indirectly helping, or hurting, its own brand. But that doesn't mean downtown can sit back and let its buildings and businesses do all the heavy lifting when it comes to identity building. The stakeholders in the historic core of the city need to actively demonstrate to the world, who they are, what downtown stands for, and why it's special.*

### *Branding*

Downtown should begin making forays into more formal branding and marketing work, taking small steps and seeing what sticks.

It is important to remember that branding is not bragging. Visitors want to make up their own mind about whether downtown is fabulous. They do not want to be dictated to and told what to think.

Great branding comes from great stories. And because great stories all have conflict and authenticity, the first place to look for tension is the Super Conflict that came out of the workshop: Small Town vs. City Slicker. Downtown is uniquely poised to straddle these two

worlds. Downtown can reflect more of the big city part of Gresham's identity, but still retain the unique small town character of the city.

And the Super Conflict is just a jumping off place. As you will see below, there are many catchy elements of story that could be effective for downtown, including:

- It was oft repeated in the workshop that downtown was hidden and unknown, both to Gresham residents and to regional residents as well. A humorous and authentic campaign that would introduce downtown to residents could be built upon this idea that *Yes, Gresham has a downtown!*
- Leverage the Super Conflict and show how downtown has elements of both the big city and the small town. You can buy a ghillie suit and gourmet dog biscuits downtown. You can get a root canal or purchase a hot outfit for a night out on the town. You can't do that in a mall!
- Do not focus on "Buy Local" campaigns. The concern with this strategy is that it implies that a consumer is making a sacrifice by buying local, but should do so anyway because it is the right thing to do. This is not the message downtown wants to send.
- Consider a marketing campaign that introduces downtown's most important resource: local business owners. There is a wide variety of offerings available downtown, and the passion and knowledge that business owners bring to their work is what positively differentiates them from national chains. The fact that a person can go to a restaurant and meet the owner is fantastic. Obviously, it's not something you experience if you eat at an Olive Garden or a PF Changs.
- There should be no ambiguity as to where someone is referring if they say, "Downtown Gresham." Marketing work should increase name recognition for downtown, or narrow its focus to the part of downtown that maintains an original, and more historic, grid network.
- Tying into the idea that the city is a gateway to outdoor recreation, a billboard campaign targeted at people heading out of town could read: *"If you lived in downtown Gresham, you would already be skiing!"* (or windsurfing, or...)

## ***Best Practices***

Retail is both an art and a science. To help raise everyone's game, a best practices committee should be formed by businesses. This committee should begin tracking performance and start a culture of information sharing so everyone can learn from each other about what works and what doesn't, on topics ranging from leveraging events to merchandising for success.

This best practices committee should offer quarterly speakers for the retail district that can give concrete suggestions about how to improve business, and they should focus on every aspect of being a commercial concern, such as marketing, accounting, retailing, lighting, color, inventory, human resources, and supply chain.

## **CHARACTERIZATION**

## **Consider Urban Renewal for Downtown**

*The following list of potential projects, some shorter-term and some longer-term, would assist with improvement downtown. However, many may require significant outlays of capital to accomplish. If Gresham finds that the continued enhancement of the physical environment in and around downtown is difficult to finance, then the city may want to consider creating an urban renewal area for downtown.*

- Improve pedestrian connections to Max.
- Repurpose the Town Fair Mall.
- Improve connections with Civic Neighborhood.
- Create a road diet on SW Powell Blvd.
- Spur further mixed-use infill construction near the plaza and between Town Fair Mall and N Main Ave.
- Spur more facade improvement.
- Support change-of-use improvement programs.
- Tackle street improvement projects on key downtown walking corridors.