The Future of the North Reach

Portland’s working harbor is a west coast trade gateway and Oregon’s largest seaport, where the state’s primary shipping channel, interstate rail lines, highways, and petroleum pipeline infrastructure all come together. This vital resource is an important part of the region’s economic prosperity. Despite strong regional and City support for industrial development, the harbor faces challenges ranging from transportation and infrastructure needs, to regulatory uncertainty, to the concern that industrial land is at risk for conversion to other land uses.

Recommendations:
- Strengthen land use regulations to protect the prime industrial land in the North Reach and support businesses that benefit from or need a riverfront location;
- Provide more predictability and flexibility for riverfront redevelopment and expansion; and
- Undertake public investments in infrastructure and land development to fuel private reinvestment in the working harbor.

The North Reach is an important part of the region’s ecological infrastructure. This stretch of river provides habitat for fish and wildlife and contains important vegetation such as the increasingly rare Oregon white oak. The current natural resources inventory that is used to inform development applications is over twenty years old and doesn’t reflect existing conditions. In addition, the existing greenway requirements do not adequately protect resources or address recently adopted watershed health goals, objectives, and regulations.

Recommendations:
- Provide an updated inventory of natural resources in the North Reach to inform development and restoration activity;
- Establish regulations to strategically protect and conserve natural resources along the river and in adjacent upland areas; and
- Develop a restoration program that optimizes efforts to improve fish and wildlife habitat in the North Reach.

Portlanders envision a vibrant Willamette waterfront where we can work and play. A key part of realizing this vision is to provide better access to and along the river for both recreation and transportation purposes. Much of the North Reach riverfront is occupied with industrial development that is incompatible with public access. However, there are opportunities to provide access in this constrained area that will enhance recreational resources and create valuable links in the regional transportation system.

Recommendations:
- Designate a continuous trail along both sides of the river that will be developed over time, as an off-street path or along an existing street or railway;
- Develop additional viewpoints that facilitate greater appreciation of the natural landscape and working waterfront in the North Reach; and
- Improve vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian access to Swan Island.

The river’s edge is important for the regional economy, provides important fish and wildlife habitat, and is critical for maintaining the health of the river and the watershed. There are many stakeholders—our regulatory, community, and tribal partners—with an interest in what happens at the river’s edge. With so many interests to consider, regulation and decision-making can be lengthy and complicated. Communication, coordination, education, and organization amongst North Reach stakeholders can be improved.

Recommendations:
- Implement process improvements to enhance permit coordination among City, state and federal agencies;
- Provide clear guidance for contaminated site cleanup and develop materials and strategies to help applicants through the cleanup process;
- Improve communication with our tribal partners; and
- Develop programs that ensure continued education and outreach on North Reach issues.
What is the River Plan?
The River Plan is the first update to the Willamette Greenway Plan in more than twenty years. The Plan will guide, inspire, and facilitate actions and investments along the Willamette River, building on previous work outlined in the River Renaissance Vision (2001), River Renaissance Strategy (2004), and River Concept (2006).

The River Plan is being carried out in phases, each focusing on a different stretch of the Willamette River: the North Reach, the Central Reach and the South Reach. The reaches are interrelated but distinct, and phasing allows planning to focus on the unique issues facing each reach. The North Reach is the first to receive detailed planning and is expected to be complete in 2009. Planning for the Central and South Reaches is just getting underway.

The North Reach
The North Reach extends roughly from the confluence with the Columbia River to the Broadway and Fremont Bridges (see map at right). The River Concept, endorsed by City Council in 2006, characterizes the future for the North Reach as follows:

The North Reach will continue to provide Oregon with access to global markets and support the region's economy as a West Coast distribution hub and a heavy industrial area. Environmental cleanup, recreational access, and watershed health actions will contribute to the harbor's long-term vitality.

River Plan staff have engaged property owners, members of interest groups, agency representatives, and the general public in the North Reach planning process for over two years. A River Plan / North Reach Draft was released for public review and comment on October 28, 2008. The draft presents new and revised zoning code regulations, and proposes a suite of new programs and public investments to support objectives in five topic areas:

- Economic Prosperity
- Watershed Health
- Access
- Riverfront Communities
- Working with our Partners

Please see inside pages for key recommendations.

Stay informed
Visit the project website to find out more information and sign up for our monthly electronic newsletter, River Plan News.

Project Contacts
Sallie Edmunds, River Planning Manager, (503) 823-6950
Shannon Buono, Planner, (503) 823-7662
River Team email - riverplan@ci.portland.or.us
River Plan website - www.portlandonline.com/riverplan

riverplan@ci.portland.or.us
www.portlandonline.com/planning/riverplan
(503) 823-2281

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