Celebrating History: Chinatown/Japantown Planning Forum

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Two Districts... Two Identities

• Skidmore/Old Town
  – National Historic Landmark District
  – Significant for its cast iron architecture
  – 55 “contributing” historic buildings
  – 29% surface parking lots

• New Chinatown/Japantown
  – Significant for Japanese and Chinese cultural history
  – Historic architecture
  – 34 “contributing” historic buildings
  – 25% surface parking/empty lots
Geographically Small Districts
Linked by an Overlap
Preservation Goals

THIS...

Not This!
Preservation Goals

THIS...

Not This!
Preservation = Jobs + Sustainability

- Rehabilitation creates more jobs than manufacturing or new construction
- 75% of the economic benefit stays local
- 83% of Oregon's tourists are cultural and heritage travelers
- Reuse maximizes existing infrastructure
- It takes up to 80 years to recoup the environmental impacts of demolition & new construction
Preservation Matters

• Livability
• Authenticity
• Craftsmanship
• Continuity
• Reuse & Sustainability
• Respect for our Elders
• Sense of PLACE

Preservation is simply having the good sense to hold on to things that are well designed, that link us with our past in a meaningful way, and that have plenty of good use left in them.

- Richard Moe, past president, National Trust
What Does Success Look Like?

- A District That Tells Its Unique Story
  - Restored historic buildings
  - Compatible new construction
  - Public spaces that attract & connect people

Oregon Encyclopedia image
Characteristics of a Healthy Historic District

- Well-maintained buildings that retain historic integrity
- Vibrant activity day and evening
- High occupancy on all floors
- High percentage local ownership
- Low crime rate
- Few surface parking/empty lots
- Well-visited by tourists
Principles for Compatible Infill

- The DISTRICT is the resource, not its individual parts – consider the collective whole
- Reinforce the historic significance of the district – continue to tell its story
- Complementary massing, scale, siting
- Design that’s differentiated, but doesn’t compete with or overwhelm historic buildings
Challenges

• Demolition-by neglect
  – High cost of rehab/seismic
  – Insufficient incentives

• Zoning

• Absentee ownership

• Profitability of surface parking
  – Inflated land values
  – Cost of underground parking

• Lack of vision for district
  – What does it want to be now?
Opportunities!

- Great location
- Differentiate the district
- Leverage available incentives
  - 20% federal tax credits
  - Special Assessment
- Fund seismic upgrades
- Balance uses
- Innovate parking solutions
- Create compelling public spaces
Thank You!