Section D  SPECIAL AREAS
In the Central City there are four special areas set apart by their unique identities: the Park Blocks, the South Waterfront Area, the Broadway Unique Sign District, and the New China / Japantown Unique Sign District.

The Park Blocks provide multiple functions. They serve as an important pedestrian promenade, a binding element between the University District and the River District, and as the city’s cultural spine. The South Waterfront Area continues to develop around the RiverPlace community, taking advantage of the opportunities that are presented by the location’s riverfront geography. The Broadway Unique Sign District is special particularly for its historic use of brightly lit and decorative signs. The New China / Japantown Unique Sign District possesses many extravagant and colorful features that create a sense of local character.
Map 2. The Special Areas

1. Park Blocks
2. South Waterfront Area
3. Broadway Unique Sign District
4. New China / Japantown Unique Sign District
D 1 PARK BLOCKS

BACKGROUND

The chain of Park Blocks through the Central City provides a unique environment and a special amenity for downtown residents, workers, and visitors. The Park Blocks provide opportunities to eat, shop, exercise, learn, and relax. During Portland’s history, the influences of different individuals, governments, and development markets subdivided the chain of Park Blocks, and today the Park Blocks can be identified in three sections: the South Park Blocks, the Midtown Park Blocks, and the North Park Blocks.

New development, adjacent to or facing the Park Blocks, has special opportunities to enhance the unique qualities of the different sections of Park Blocks. The South Park Blocks are part of Portland’s Cultural District. Institutional, residential, and commercial developments are located adjacent to the South Park Blocks and are highlighted by the Portland Art Museum, Portland State University, and the Portland Center for the Performing Arts.

The character of the Midtown Park Blocks is unique because these Park Blocks have been commercially developed. The narrow streets and consistent street walls of the Midtown Park Blocks help to develop a strong sense of urban enclosure and create an effective contrast to the rest of the Park Blocks.

The North Park Blocks are located in the Pearl District neighborhood of the River District. Buildings adjacent to the North Park Blocks use physical and visual linkages, such as balconies, large windows, and entries to connect to these Park Blocks. Rehabilitated or redeveloped industrial warehouse buildings facing the North Park Blocks have integrated bold architectural forms with new residential uses.
GUIDELINE

Orient building entrances, lobbies, balconies, terraces, windows, and active use areas to the Park Blocks.

In the South Park Blocks, strengthen the area’s emphasis on history, education, and the arts by integrating special building elements, such as water features or public art.

In the Midtown Park Blocks, strengthen the connection between the North and South Park Blocks by using a related system of right-of-way elements, materials, and patterns.

In the North Park Blocks, strengthen the area’s role as a binding element between New China / Japantown and the Pearl District.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

1. Strengthening the emphasis on culture and the arts along the South Park Blocks. Clockwise from upper left: the main entrance to the Portland Art Museum is lined up with this statue of Theodore Roosevelt; the relief carvings of trees on the South Park Apartments building evoke the tree-lined Park Blocks; this sculpted metal screen along Neuberger Hall at Portland State University depicts native species of plants; and artistic tiles that have been integrated into the fence at the University Apartments.

2. Enhancing connective elements along the Midtown Park Blocks. The upper image shows a view looking north along SW Park Avenue and the enclosure created by the narrow street. The flower baskets in the lower image can be used with other right-of-way elements such as historic light standards and street tree-grates, as well as paving materials and patterns, to strengthen the connection between the north and south sections of Park Blocks.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

3. Re-using existing buildings to reinforce the binding qualities of the North Park Blocks. Flanders Lofts is one of many warehouse buildings facing the North Park Blocks that has been renovated and structurally upgraded to include residential uses.

4. Enhancing the North Park Blocks as a local destination for families and office workers. The playground and basketball courts in the North Park Blocks are used frequently by residents and visitors and provide a central location for children who live in the area.
D 2 SOUTH WATERFRONT AREA

BACKGROUND

The South Waterfront Area is a 73-acre portion of the Central City between the South Auditorium District and the Willamette River. A primary objective for development in the area is to strengthen the downtown’s relationship with the Willamette River. This part of the Central City possesses unique opportunities for visual and physical connections to the water not available elsewhere. Development in this area should respond to the formality and openness of Tom McCall Waterfront Park, as well as the urban scale, form, and texture of the south downtown area. The South Waterfront Area also plays a vital role in linking the downtown to the North Macadam subdistrict, south of the Marquam Bridge.

GUIDELINE

Develop a pedestrian circulation system that includes good connections to adjacent parts of the city and facilitates movement within and through the area.

Size and place development to create a diverse mixture of active areas.

Graduate building heights from the western boundary down to the waterfront.

Strengthen connections to North Macadam by utilizing a related system of right-of-way elements, materials, and patterns.
Map 2-2. The South Waterfront Area
This guideline may be accomplished by:

1. Graduating building heights from the western boundary to the waterfront. This view of the RiverPlace community, in the foreground, was captured from the east side of the Willamette River and shows how the Central City buildings step down in height toward the Willamette River.

2. Developing a system of public streets and service streets. The upper image looks west on SW Montgomery Street and shows the urban character created by the street-orientation of the buildings. The lower image shows a semi-private service street that provides a good level of security, a hard-scaped surface, and a special paving pattern to differentiate it from the public sides of the building.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

3. Developing connections with adjacent communities. This is a view looking north at RiverPlace from North Macadam through the structural columns of the Marquam Bridge. Connections to this area and other adjacent communities are critical for the South Waterfront’s function as a link between the waterfront, the downtown, and inland communities.

4. Developing a variety of pedestrian routes. The Greenway Trail through this area (this portion is adjacent to South Waterfront Park) provides an excellent pedestrian and bicycle alternative to the nearby routes more heavily used by automobile traffic.
D 3  BROADWAY UNIQUE SIGN DISTRICT

BACKGROUND

Broadway is the brightest and busiest entertainment street in downtown. From the turn of the century through the 1940’s, movie and live theaters, nightclubs, hotels, and restaurants dominated Broadway Avenue. These same uses continue to thrive along Broadway, especially south of Burnside. The entertainment emphasis extends north from SW Madison Street along Broadway to West Burnside. The area also includes four blocks of West Burnside, east of its intersection with Broadway.

West Burnside, beginning with the White Stag (now “Made in Oregon”) sign above the foot of the Burnside Bridge, has traditionally been a brightly lit boulevard leading west to “auto row”, a small district of automobile dealerships and services to the west of downtown. Signs on both Broadway and Burnside have historically been larger, brighter, and more flamboyant than those found in the rest of downtown. The vital and festive atmosphere in this area has been maintained through the development of new signs that reflect the area’s roots as an entertainment district.

The Portland Design Commission has identified portions of these two streets as the Broadway Unique Sign District, affording opportunities for signs that contribute to the Broadway entertainment atmosphere, yet may be at variance with the regulations regarding signs contained in the Portland Zoning Code.

GUIDELINE

Provide opportunities for the development of large, vertically-oriented, bright, and flamboyant signs that add to the unique character of this Broadway environment.

Size and place signs and their structural support systems so that significant architectural or historical features of the building are not concealed or disfigured.

Ensure that all signs receive proper maintenance.
Map 2-3.
The Broadway Unique Sign District
This guideline may be accomplished by:

1. Developing vertically-oriented signs that are mounted close to the building’s facade, integrating the sign’s structural system. The sign on the left, at 42nd Street Station in the Hollywood District, uses neon lighting and old-style script to recall the historic styles of sign-making. The Office Depot sign, on the right, at SW 6th Avenue and Stark, echoes the vertical-orientation of historic signs and has successfully camouflaged its structural system against the building wall.

2. Using neon lighting to augment the lit signs. This example of neon tubing is under the canopy of the entry to the Broadway Metroplex at the 1000 Broadway Building. Neon is an easily-manipulated type of lighting that can convey a sense of energy and excitement through its implementation.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

3. Integrating elaborate displays that evoke the historic character of Broadway. The freestanding clocks on SW Broadway between Washington and Alder Streets echo Jackson Tower’s clock, in the background, and act as advertisements for the jewelry shops located within the ground floors of the adjacent buildings.

4. Designing distinctively new signs or re-using old signs. Clockwise from upper left; the Roseland Theater sign, the Saucebox restaurant and bar sign, the Broadway Metroplex sign, and the Paris Theatre sign.
D 4 NEW CHINA / JAPANTOWN
UNIQUE SIGN DISTRICT

BACKGROUND

New China / Japantown is the downtown’s only identifiable ethnic district. It is recognized as such because of its residents’ roots in Portland’s history. New China / Japantown is unique because of the distinct atmosphere created by applied ornamentation and decoration, rather than specific architectural forms. Awnings, medallions, and roof modifications have become important defining elements for the area. Signs advertising restaurants or other local businesses also play an important role in unifying and enhancing the unique atmosphere.

The Portland Design Commission has identified New China / Japantown as a unique sign district, affording opportunities for signs that contribute to the festive New China / Japantown atmosphere, yet may be at variance with the regulations regarding signs contained in the Portland Zoning Code.

GUIDELINE

Provide opportunities for the development of suitably ornate signs, using motifs, symbols, bright colors, and celebrative forms that add to the atmosphere and character of New China / Japantown.

Size and place signs and their structural support systems so that significant architectural or historical features of the building are not concealed or disfigured.

Ensure that all signs receive proper maintenance.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

1. Developing identifiable roof shapes that will add to the character of this area. This is a view looking south across the roofs of the Classical Chinese Garden. The roofs add character to the New China / Japantown Historic District and work in conjunction with the development of signs in the unique sign district to create a unique identity for the area.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

2. Developing signs that are unique to the area. The sign for this building, at NW 3rd and Couch, is made up of characters from the Chinese language and does not project from the building’s facade.

3. Incorporating sign design elements that reflect the diversity of New China / Japantown. The sign for the Republic Cafe uses sign design styles, symbols, and language from both America and Asia.
This guideline may be accomplished by:

4. Utilizing the top of the building for more than signs. The roof covering the loggia on the Tung Sung Building, at the corner of NW 4th and Everett, uses design elements such as ceramic tile roof shingles and ornamental statues along the ridge to enhance the atmosphere of this downtown community.

5. Augmenting the signs with other decorations. The House of Louie restaurant on SW 4th Avenue has several of these ornamental roundels along the exterior walls of the building. It also has heavily decorated columns at the entry and large neon signs on two sides of the building that all together evoke a strong character.
EPILOGUE

The Central City is the most dense, most used, and most active area in Oregon. It contains the highest level of city life and architectural sophistication. The City of Roses is Oregon’s premier urban setting, graced with culture, elegance, and style.

Design guidelines encourage a partnership between the public and private sectors aimed at complementing the urban setting with excellent design. This has been and continues to be a Portland tradition.

All projects are encouraged to develop to the full potential of the property as is permitted by the Central City Plan and any plan district regulations that deal with land use, land density, project height, development bonuses, etc.

All projects are encouraged to be urban in character and of the highest quality. The preceding design guidelines that deal with Portland’s personality, pedestrian emphasis, project design, and designated special areas are primary tools for ensuring that the desired levels of character and quality are achieved.

As a quality environment, natural and man-made, Portland is one of the finest cities in the country. Since the mid-sixties, Portland’s urban design consciousness has grown and, as a result, the city’s built environment is admired both nationally and internationally. The people of Portland have a commitment to quality. It is this broad-based public support and shared commitment that has resulted in the rich urban fabric and culturally-enlivened city that is enjoyed and shared as a community.