

Vision 2020
DISCUSSION SUMMARY
April- July 2007

A group of local business and government leaders representing some of the primary employers in Salem's downtown core began discussing the future of the core area in April and May of 2007. In June 2007, a series of interviews were conducted with each member of the Vision 2020 group to further gauge perceptions about the core area.

Overall, participants in the June interviews reiterated optimism and excitement for the future of the core area. The interviews revealed consensus that a coordinated vision is needed to ensure the core remains vital as the City around it grows. Discussions also highlighted growing partnerships, shared needs and challenges, and emerging big ideas. Participants identified the core as the "living room for Salem", and as "an atmosphere" – much more than a shopping district.

Strengths and Weaknesses

- Participants viewed as unique strengths the area's **unique historic character**, proximity and access to **parks** and **waterways** meandering through the core.
- The **diversity** in the downtown core (of businesses and of uses) was viewed by some as its greatest strength. Others cited lack of a clearly articulated niche as a resulting weakness of this diversity.
- The high volume of **vehicular traffic** was seen by some as a strength in increasing visibility and access to retail businesses in the core. Others identified conflicts between pedestrian and vehicle circulation and stressed the importance of creating a pedestrian friendly core.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Several of those interviewed felt the core area, as defined, **could be too broad** in scope and size. Some questioned the inclusion of West Salem in the core boundary.
- Developing the **vision for the core** was viewed as a critical opportunity for Salem, for the core, and for the greater collaboration among organizations and businesses operating in the core.
- Once articulated, the vision was seen as an important **marketing tool** to attract new businesses and employees to the core and to integrate into participants' own projects.
- Participants offered several critical **opportunities to capitalize on the core's strengths** – enhancing and expanding the core's niche, connections and connectivity, gathering places, and sense of ownership.
- Many cited a perceived need to develop a **public square** or boulevard for people to gather. Others cited Eugene's negative experience with closed streets as a reason to keep streets open to vehicles.

A summary of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities resulting from the insights shared in April and May discussions of the Vision 2020 group and the June interviews follows.

Strengths

Diverse Center of Activity

- Diverse business mix, including successful department stores, specialty shops and other uses creates a distinctive niche among retail areas. Salem Center is viewed positively, as bringing people downtown.
- The core area is home to some of Salem's large employers. This brings many employees into the core each day. "People work, play and are rooted here."
- High vehicular traffic is viewed positively by some as a key to maintaining visibility and access for retail businesses.
- A strong arts and cultural community, with frequent events in Riverfront Park festivals, on First Wednesdays, at Bush Barn, etc.

Recreation and Amenities

- Recreation, amenities, potential for enhancement at Pringle Creek and Mill Creek with trails and corridors. Both creeks wind through the core and terminate into the park system and provide access to the Willamette River. Connections are planned to Riverfront, Wallace-Marine, Minto-Brown Island, and Bush Parks.
- Presence and proximity to water and parks, family activities.
- Core area has sky bridges and other pedestrian amenities.
- Substantial recent City investment in infrastructure, streetscape, and business façade improvements.
- Transit's free ride zone operates inside the core.

Unique Character

- Housing is developing in the downtown core; City policy encourages residential development in the core.
- Historic character; Buildings in the core are architecturally unique.
- Vital residential neighborhoods directly surrounding the core strengthen its visual appeal and create a customer base within walking distance.

Challenges

Lacking Identity

- Downtown Salem has no clear identity about who we are and where we're going. We need to expand the sense of downtown, as a whole, and as a community.
- There is not a cohesive plan or group to coordinate the core's retail component.
- The core lacks view corridors linking downtown and employers to the River and other amenities.
- For the retail sector, referring to "downtown" implies a less than desirable location because downtowns are usually perceived as being in decline.

Divisive History; Underinvestment

- Tradition of core area employers operating in a vacuum, and in some cases, history of conflict and adversarial relationships among businesses in the core. There has not

been one strong voice for downtown business and little evidence of strong collaboration among the larger employers. The internal division is the core's biggest threat.

- Several participants also cited a growing conflict between expanding housing and other uses in the core.
- Apparent unwillingness of some business or property owners to invest in their buildings. Some cited absent building owners, ownership of trusts or multiple owners.
- No financing plan exists to implement a needed long range parking strategy.

Sharing the Streets: Vehicles, Pedestrians and Bicycles

- Wide boulevards are daunting: provide for ease of transportation but not intimate. Traffic needs to circulate to the east and through the center because of the way the City is built. It is challenging to incorporate streetscape to create feeling of intimacy for pedestrians amidst the current circulation patterns.
- Must find a way to get goods and services through downtown and beyond, including connectivity to West Salem, balancing recreation opportunities with customers and business needs.
- Perception that vehicles dominate the core, at the expense of bicycle and pedestrian connections. In some cases, these efforts have resulted in separation of pedestrians from the core rather than integration or opportunities for congregating activities.
- Public transportation services need to connect to businesses directly, on a regular, frequent, and reliable schedule.

Capitalizing on Our Assets

- Large street trees hide architectural uniqueness of core buildings.
- The Willamette River is present but underutilized.
- Several interviewed viewed increasing development (including retail development) occurring outside the core as a threat to the area's continued strength and attraction.
- Location of Saturday Market does not celebrate the core.
- Not enough youth activities available in the core.

Dominant Public Uses

- Many of the uses in the downtown core do not generate tax revenue, but require service to be provided. Together, these uses have a big influence on the core and bring a large portion of employees into the core.
- Some organizations operating in the core have a much broader constituency than the core or Salem, so a focus on the core competes with other priorities.
- Government defines us: a perception of some that the core's identity is dominated by its distinction as the state capital.

Opportunities

Enhancing Connections

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation along waterways, trails, and through parks. Create signage to make pedestrian routes visible and develop missing connections. Traffic calming and pedestrian islands could further encourage pedestrian enjoyment and safety in the core.

- Every customer is a pedestrian at some point. Need to make the downtown pedestrian friendly and open. Find a way for people to park and walk where they need to go, despite the weather.
- Establish an ethic to open or daylight waterways as development occurs in the core. Create safe and friendly pedestrian and visual corridors with signage and lighting.
- Develop new parking facilities with shuttle, trolley or other connectivity to allow employees and customers to park once. Some suggested establishing a network of parking structures outside the core area with transit, shuttle or other frequent service to connect employees and customers to businesses in the core.
- Larger employers could offer employee incentives to encourage use of park and rides, flexible schedules or other methods for reducing vehicle congestion and parking.
- Plan and advocate for future commuter rail connections to Wilsonville. This is viewed as a critical connection for large employers in core to attract employees.

Expanding the Core's Niche: Retail, Natural and Cultural Amenities

- There is currently no way of knowing when you're in the core. Define entry ways to the core from all directions. One suggestion: pick entry points from each direction and begin making the investment.
- Capitalize on arts and culture niche growing on State Street – funky, artsy retail space with outdoor seating.
- Create outdoor theatre or music program – in partnership with existing organizations.
- Preserve and enhance the core's historic and natural assets. Make historic information more accessible through tours or plaques at key locations or buildings of historic interest.
- Create more opportunities for employees in the core to linger, eat and shop by extending hours, creating more diversity of shopping and restaurants with outdoor seating and other amenities.
- Remove triangle building (Frye Warehouse) on Boise property and open views from Conference Center to the River.
- Tell the story of downtown better. Develop activity flyers to get word out about activities in the core and bring more people downtown. Flyers could be circulated to employers and businesses in core area.

Creating Broader Sense of Ownership

- Extend property owner feeling of ownership out to the curb.
- Encourage business community, private sector and non-taxable uses to invest in the core. Attract corporate headquarters to the core.
- The Downtown Improvement District (DID) could become the voice for downtown, inside the core. Organization will need formal recognition as the representative of downtown.
- Create public gathering places, a plaza or public square, to encourage people to interact and share. Many cited as examples the plazas in European cities, close to retail and restaurant, outdoor seating, and welcoming to all.