

## Polishing the Pearl's northern edge



### The Pearl District now

The neighborhood north of downtown has surged with the popularity of urban living in the past decade. Today, the city will begin revising plans for the 45 blocks north of Northwest Lovejoy Street and bordered by the Willamette River and Interstate 405, also shown in the map below.



## The Pearl's future?

Hoyt Street Properties, the Pearl District's largest landowner, is proposing tall, thin towers in the neighborhood's northern section. This rendering shows what Hoyt Street's land might look like if developed according to its proposal, but blocks closer to Interstate 405 owned by other landowners might rise as high. The city is beginning a new plan for the entire North Pearl area.



Source: Hoyt Street Properties, Boora Architects

ERIC BAKER/THE OREGONIAN

## Developers want to build more condos while planners consider office space and costs

By **DYLAN RIVERA**  
THE OREGONIAN

The Pearl District, Portland's successful experiment in creating an urban residential neighborhood with public and private investments, could double in population under proposals headed into a planning process that starts today.

The desire by developers to add thousands of new condos shows their belief in the depth of the urban housing market, even as the South Waterfront and West End develop with high-rises. A slowing housing market nationwide and in Portland could, however, raise risks.

For the city, the development satisfies its goals for high-density housing, part of the regional plan for containing growth within a strict boundary. But it also rais-

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es questions about costs for roads and other improvements and services.

Already, developers have produced more than 5,000 condos and apartments in the area north of Burnside since the city signed a development agreement nine years ago with Hoyt Street Properties, the Pearl's largest landowner. The pact led to construction of the Portland Streetcar, parks and a half-dozen buildings of affordable housing in the neighborhood, which replaced railyards and worn industrial buildings.

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Developers not part of the deal with Hoyt Street followed with their own condo projects in the burgeoning neighborhood, contributing to the influx of thousands of new residents.

"There was a vision and a dream of doing residential development in that area, and it's been wildly successful," said Troy Doss, a Portland senior planner. "But what we're hearing from the community is . . . why not do other things?"

## Discussing the plan

At a meeting today, city planners and landowners will start discussion of a North Pearl District plan, which covers about 45 city blocks north of Lovejoy Street, east of Interstate 405 and south of the Willamette River. If each block were built with 150 condos or apartments, it could produce 6,750 dwellings.

As the Pearl has grown northward past Northwest Lovejoy Street, the city, developers and neighborhood leaders will consider refocusing the district on a more balanced mix of office space, parks and housing.

Developers and city planners view the Pearl's northern expansion as a chance to improve on the shortcomings of the neighborhood's first decade, which has

drawn criticism for producing mostly short, squat buildings and little office space.

Hoyt Street has said it wants to build taller and thinner, taking a hint from the denser and taller South Waterfront district. And city planners have said they want to rethink 10-year old incentives that give developers more square footage in exchange for building above a minimum residential density, regardless of housing price range. Perhaps incentives should be used for more affordable housing, office space or green building designs, planners have said.

"An opportunity could be lost," said Tiffany Sweitzer, president of Hoyt Street Properties. "We're building so quickly that there are things we all should be looking at."

Developers face the new opportunities of a proven high-end condo market and the challenges of zoning restrictions that don't match their desires. Hoyt Street now asserts that zoning in that area, which includes 9 acres of its land, is out of date. Present height and zoning regulations, established 20 years ago and tweaked periodically, require low-rise development in the neighborhood's northern end, approaching the Willamette River and the Fremont Bridge.

## Floor-area ratios

Sweitzer bristles that the restrictions on development, measured in what planners call "floor-area ratio," are more restrictive for Hoyt Street than other area developers. A ratio of 4-to-1 would allow 40,000 square feet of development on a 10,000-square-foot parcel. Several of Hoyt Street's blocks along Northwest Naito Parkway have a 2-to-1 ratio, density common in

neighborhood commercial districts.

Some of the limits on development are of Hoyt Street Properties' making. In taking full advantage of the recent housing boom, Hoyt Street used development rights from many northern parcels, building larger buildings near Lovejoy, in exchange for reducing the floor-area ratio available for future buildings north of Lovejoy.

At a projected build-out of one condo tower a year, Hoyt Street would run out of development rights in 2009. Such a worst-case scenario would leave the developer with the ability to build nothing but surface parking lots near Northwest Naito Parkway, said John Meadows, with Boora Architects, which has been studying the area for Hoyt Street.

Hoyt Street decided it would be better to build denser in several blocks north of Lovejoy, Meadows said, even if it meant risking the inability to build more later.

"Rather than build four-story buildings everywhere, it makes more sense to build Lovejoy and (Northwest) Overton as a more urban place," Meadows said. "Even if they looked at the worst-case scenario, they'd build a better part of the Pearl."

Doss, the city planner, would not say whether the North Pearl District plan would include more floor-area ratio for Hoyt or other property owners. Instead, he said developers, residents and other stakeholders should focus on what style of development they want to encourage and work out rules over development rights later.

City officials have said they needed to revise plans for the North Pearl District area for years but never got around to it, so Hoyt Street has agreed to add an acre of

## North Pearl District plan

The Portland Planning Bureau and the Portland Development Commission are leading a plan for the northern acreage in the Pearl District. Here are some questions facing the city and developers:

- **Traffic:** How much more traffic can area streets handle? How should the city address needs? With changes to existing intersections, new roads, more frequent streetcar service or additional mass transit service?
- **Affordable housing:** How much affordable housing should the area offer and how will it be financed?
- **Parks:** How many parks are appropriate for the area? Should they be neighborhood or regional parks?
- **Neighborhood connections:** How should the Pearl District connect to the Northwest District neighborhood west of Interstate 405?
- **Centennial Mills:** If the historic building by the river is redeveloped as city leaders hope, how will access be provided from the Pearl District? What should be built across from it in the Pearl District?
- **Building form:** Should buildings be taller than those south of Lovejoy? Should the city approve taller, thinner buildings that would allow more light to reach streets, and distinguish the area from earlier Pearl District development?
- **Incentives for some development:** Should the city allow developers to build more square footage if they achieve public goals, such as more office space, affordable housing, environmentally sensitive buildings? For more information, call the Portland Planning Bureau at 503-823-7700. A Web site on the project is coming soon and will announce open houses and other chances for public comment, the bureau says.
- **Today's meeting:** A project advisory committee will meet at 5 p.m. today at 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave., Room 2500-B. Meetings of the committee, composed mostly of area developers and neighborhood groups, are open to the public.

land to a planned park in the district's northern end, to persuade the city to start planning talks.

It could take a year for a plan to go through planning and design commissions and reach the City Council, which would have the final say.

The first meeting of a project advisory group is at 5 p.m. today at 1900 S.W. Fourth Ave., Room 2500-B.

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