



The Oregonian

DOWNTOWN IS GROWING UP

The building boom that's produced Portland's bumper crop of high-rises could spread, changing the look of the city skyline as Stumptown sprouts and soars

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So, you think Portland's downtown is almost filled up?

It's easy to believe, seeing a half-dozen or more tower cranes piercing the sky for about a decade. Developers have churned out an average 1.3 million square feet of condos, shops and offices each year since 1990. That's almost equal to two new Wells Fargo Centers -- at 41 floors, the state's tallest building.

A panoramic view of the skyline, photographed from a helicopter, brings the construction boom into a single, vast portrait of the Portland we know today. Take a look -- it won't stay this way for long.

Without so much as a zoning change, developers could double the 103 million square feet that now make up the central city. From the South Waterfront to the River District, from Goose Hollow to the Lloyd District, the city's zoning allows a virtual forest of high-rises. By the city's count, 400 acres of underused property -- think surface parking lots, or beat-up buildings worth less than half the value of the land they occupy -- is ripe for change.

No one knows how long it will take to fill all that land. At the current pace of construction, the doubling would take 75 years. It could take much longer: Downtown has plenty of competitors in the Portland region and worldwide. Or, perhaps the central city will boom beyond anyone's imagination.

Soon, "the city that plans" will launch an update of the central city, with new schemes for shaping the coming high-rise growth to fit the region's goals for urban containment. The present plan, adopted in 1988, opened the way for urban expansion into the Pearl District and South Waterfront. And an earlier 1972 Downtown Plan set out a vision for housing west of the Park Blocks that is only now bearing fruit.

These pages show some major recent and upcoming projects.

Who knows what's next?

-- Dylan Rivera

Downtown The region's traditional center of commerce. 232 acres Existing buildings: 37 million square feet
Projected increase: 17 million square feet

Office: 6.4 million square feet

Retail: 900,000 square feet

Housing: 8,954 units Strengths: The psychological heart of the Portland metro area, downtown has the highest concentration of employment, hotels, mass transit and non-mall retail. West End, Old Town, South Auditorium, Hawthorne and Morrison bridgeheads have buildable sites on cusp of transformation. Central

City's best bet for office towers and hotels. Weaknesses: High cost of development and parking. Many existing buildings complicate new construction. Homeless population scares off some employers, residents. Condo market lags Pearl District and South Waterfront. Lloyd District and Lower Albina

A mall, a convention center, two arenas and lots of underused land. Adjacent to Central Eastside Industrial District south of Interstate 84. 328 acres Existing buildings: 17 million square feet Projected increase: 28.4 million square feet

Office: 11 million square feet

Retail: 1.5 million square feet

Housing: 12,740 units Strengths: Lloyd area has zoning for the tallest, densest development outside the downtown core. Generous parking allowances compared with downtown. Great views west and east. Incomparable transit and highway access. Weaknesses: Arena and convention areas sleepy when those attractions are not in use. No neighborhood focal point. Not much built lately; major landowners passed on condo boom. Lower Albina nearly all industrial zoned, with Portland School District headquarters site a tough play. River District The Pearl District and Old Town north of West Burnside. 238 acres Existing buildings: 20.5 million square feet Projected increase: 21.7 million square feet

Office: 4 million square feet

Retail: 1.4 million square feet

Housing: 11,944 units Strengths: The Pearl comprises the region's strongest, most established urban condo market. Retail and restaurants draw from across metro area. North Pearl development sites ready to pop. Old Town section and Post Office hold potential, with complications. Weaknesses: Little employment presence aside from Brewery Blocks. Old Town stigma and historic district restrictions work against potential high-rise housing and offices closer to downtown core. North section still considered risky for offices. South Waterfront The city's newest urban neighborhood. 129 acres Existing buildings: 4.1 million square feet Projected increase: 25 million square feet

Office: 10.8 million square feet

Retail: 1.3 million square feet

Housing: 10,146 units Strengths: Plentiful vacant land with riverfront views. Oregon Health & Science University expansion forecast to last decades. Lush Pearl alternative now a proven high-rise, high-end condo market. Weaknesses: Needs roads, light rail and other infrastructure. A nonstop construction zone for decades to come. Biotech doesn't normally build to SoWa's tall, expensive, dense standard. University District Portland State University and its eastward expansion area. 50 acres Existing buildings: 3.9 million square feet Projected increase: 4.6 million square feet

Office: 1.4 million square feet

Retail: 200,000 square feet

Housing: 2,837 units Strengths: PSU on a growth path, led by student housing. Light rail soon to meet streetcar line. Fourth Avenue stretch developable. Nearby conversion of Portland Center from apartments to condos adds more homeowners to area. Weaknesses: Uncertain state funding for higher education over long term. PSU still an unproven employment draw. Students dominate housing market.