Place Making in Small Towns

The Innovation Gateway Project (IGP) outlines a range of strategies for the city's revitalization which leverage the intrinsic qualities of place in and around John Day, Oregon. At the heart of this plan to enhance John Day as a "thriving rural community" is the understanding of placemaking. Effective placemaking fundamentally begins with the initial insights and perspective of the people within the community itself including its history, critical issues and what is relevant and meaningful to the people that live there and visit. The Innovation Gateway Project Concept Plan was launched and envisioned through a community driven process and proposes an innovative, restoration of the John Day River with proposed new uses and amenities to achieve its goals.

Innovation Gateway Concept

The John Day Innovation Gateway envisions the revitalization of the former Oregon Pine mill site and adjacent riverfront properties as a dynamic, thriving and welcoming public space. The John Day River is a central, cohesive element of the Innovation Gateway, with public trails winding through restored habitat along the riverbanks, creating the connective tissue for a wide range of new land uses and a bold vision for the use of reclaimed wastewater. These improvements offer significant public investments for John Day's future and support the City's initiatives to maximize innovation and efficiency, build partnerships and spur a sustainable and resilient economy that retains and attracts a range of residents and businesses to John Day.

The Innovation Gateway is part of John Day's integrated park system strategy to improve the overall health of the community and provide open access to the John Day River. It extends the existing trail system, creates access to parks for under-served and economically distressed neighborhoods, and lays the groundwork for future amenities including a new community pool and restored riverfront.

The Oregon Pine Mill Site – Vision, Sustainability and Smart Growth

At the western end of the Innovation Gateway Plan Area is the former site of the Oregon Pine Mill. The design of the landscape and structures here are part of a core strategy to achieve several identified objectives of the IGP. These include, among others, unifying (through a comprehensive vision) the design of the site and its land uses; creating a beautiful scenic environment that promotes community gathering and the launch of new opportunities; restoring public access to the riverfront and enhancing planned and existing amenities which support conservation, renewable energy and more sustainable development through the incorporation of locally sourced materials and energy conscious technologies.

The redevelopment of the former Oregon Pine Mill creates a vibrant first impression of John Day and signals momentum for the city. The vision for this site emphasizes public amenities that bring the John Day community and visitors together and interpret the unique history and character of the city.

Building on the History of the Oregon Pine Sawmill

The historic Oregon Pine Sawmill was the center of activity for much of the region for decades and a foundation for local culture, lifestyle and economic stability. The proposed Event Center and Hotel development project at the Sawmill site incorporates the Innovation Gateway Principles and is designed to reflect the industrial heritage of the sawmill building while celebrating a new capacity for growth, community and life along the restored John Day River.

The Existing Sawmill Shed Building and Proposed New Hotel

The existing sawmill shed structure, oriented perpendicular to and located south of the river, has two levels, both approximately 6,000 SF, measuring 36'-0" x 179'-0" and comprised of wide flange columns and beams clad in

uninsulated sheet metal. The upper level is one large volume with a low slope shed roof, and the lower level is heavily divided by steel columns in roughly 8x8' and 10x10' grids.

The concept for the site includes the adaptive reuse of the sawmill shed building as an event center that shares some programmatic functions and amenities with a new three (3) story 50 room hotel directly adjacent to the river.

Structural Assessment

The adaptive reuse of this building is based in supporting conference room occupancy within the existing robust structure. The structure includes W 6x20 steel columns on a grid pattern of 8 ft, 10 ft, 10 ft, 8 ft o/c in the East/West direction and 8 ft o/c in the North/South direction. The column sizes switched to W 8x31 members in the center section where some larger equipment was assumed to be supported. The floor beams run East/West and are W 10x30 beams at the 6" columns and W 10x39 at the 8" column areas.

The proposed new floor can be a concrete filled metal deck spanning the 8 ft between beams. Through initial analysis - the existing steel was found to be able to support the concrete deck along with a 100 psf live load (conference center) and be around 30% stressed. Based on review, the old mill loading was likely 250 psf live load capacity (heavy storage) or probably more likely the steel was sized to carry the heavy machinery that has since been removed. It is also possible to re-frame or re-locate some of the existing framing to reduce or eliminate the current change in elevations that occur on the main floor level.

The lateral system of the existing sawmill appears to be steel knee-braces located at previous equipment locations. The knee braces are not an adequate lateral system for the proposed new occupied public space. Adding concentric steel braces between columns (ground level to main floor) will be an easy way to add the lateral capacity needed for the addition. Based on the geometry of the building, there will need to be two or more interior braces (1/3rd points) that frame one of the bays going East/West along with the 4 perimeter walls.

The upper part of the building is a pre-engineered metal building that was customized to fit over the existing steel framing. This framing is assumed to be demolished as part of the adaptive reuse as an event center and replaced with new structure. The lateral system for the pre-engineered system frames were either not installed or demolishing with the equipment removal.

In summary, the existing steel framing on the main floor down to the foundation can be repurposed for use as the base of the new proposed event center building.

Structural Notes provided by James G. Pierson Structural Engineers, Portland Oregon

Proposed Event Center, Hotel and Open Space

Located along the western edge of the city along Hwy 26, the Event Center and Hotel is a likely first stop for visitors to John Day. The Event Center and Hotel driveway is located approximately 1,100 ft east of Patterson Bridge Rd, per the previous transportation study in the Innovation Gateway Area Plan. The parking lot provides 80 parking spaces and RV spaces to serve hotel guests and visitors, and incorporates planting of climate adaptive annual grasses, shrubs, and trees that complement the surrounding natural landscape and screen the parking lot from Hwy 26 and the John Day River. North of the parking lot, an entry plaza leads to the Event Center and Hotel as well as trails connecting to the rest of the Innovation Gateway site.

The proposed structure has three main components – an event hall, restaurant, and overnight accommodations (hotel). All three program spaces are entered, formally, through a shared lobby, providing a centralized point of welcome and visibility for staff operations. North of the shared lobby, a plaza welcomes hotel guests and visitors to observe wildlife and enjoy food and beverages from the restaurant. The sawmill shed building itself is sited within

the newly developed Water Gardens, which feature a diverse collection of rushes, sedges, and floating flowering plants. Initially fed with ample well water, the Water Gardens will showcase reclaimed water from the new Waste Water Treatment Plant once it is operational. Boardwalks punctuate the Water Gardens and provide quiet spaces to observe the seasonal changes and wildlife attracted to the Water Gardens and adjacent Restored Wetlands.

The event space within the adapted Sawmill Shed building offers 2,300 sf of flexible space, capable of hosting a variety of activities including conferences, weddings, local community functions as well as housing a potential commercial food or beverage operation. It provides unfettered views to the river, neighboring wetlands, and mountains beyond. An open-air porch for viewing wildlife and activity on the boardwalks below is included. This viewing deck has a symbolic, lantern-like presence in the evening, exposing the existing sawmill structure by pulling the metal envelope back, and wrapping the ends with slats reclaimed from wood previously produced by the mill – signifying the building's evolution and providing solar shading for the event hall.

This language of reclaimed wood appears in other forms throughout the hotel and connective lobby, as cladding or forming operable exterior shades to help the building adapt to strong summer sun. The roof and floor assemblies in the lobby could be constructed of mass timber – an inherently beautiful material that would provide a warm interior environment and showcase a new technology in the timber industry. Utilizing mass timber would dramatically decrease the carbon footprint of the building by eliminating the need for concrete, speeding up construction, and lowering transportation costs. More importantly, mass timber has the potential to evolve forestry practices and breathe new life into communities throughout the region by utilizing smaller diameter trees including those affected by disease or fire.

The predominant exterior material of the Event Center is of distressed or treated steel panel, (i.e. corten steel) to tie the adapted building to its original industrial roots as a sawmill. This steel can also be used at the entry and hotel base and/or within the designed landscape elements to unify the projects main program elements architecturally.

The exterior envelope of the hotel is intended to complement the more industrial language of the steel-clad event center – and features a resilient wood – potentially locally milled juniper, or cedar boards - to establish a warm, regionally relevant character as a place of rest and hospitality and to tie it to the river setting and the individual cabins beyond.

The hotel offers fifty guest rooms in the main three-story structure sited parallel and alongside the river as well as the eight cabins clustered to the north across the river and accessed from the refurbished Johnson Bridge. Both the hotel units and cabins could be comprised of prefabricated modular units - lowering costs and speeding up the construction schedule. The modular cabins would be set on ground screws to minimize impact to the land and offer protection from flooding. The modular cabins would be especially attractive to outdoor enthusiasts, astronomers, birders, and visitors throughout the region by creating a unique setting for them to explore and integrated into the larger trail and boardwalk system.

Wrapping the Water Gardens on the north, east, and south, the Restored Wetlands store seasonal flood waters and support wildlife with native shrubs, grasses, and trees. A network of boardwalks, overlooks, and pathways provide places to view and enjoy the Restored Wetlands from multiple perspectives.

North of the Restored Wetlands, the former Sorter Shed is repurposed as the Community Pavilion. This open park pavilion can be used for a variety of community events including farmers markets, performances, food festivals and large community gatherings. The pavilion will also support large events and gatherings in the Event Lawn to the north, and plazas along the north and south edges of the Community Pavilion. A network of pathways connect the Community Pavilion area to river access and the Community Garden and Greenhouses.

Greenhouse / Community Garden – Nick to Add

Project Opportunities:

The adaptive reuse of the Sawmill Shed Building and its site is a significant placemaking opportunity along the John Day River in which the unique natural beauty of this section of Eastern Oregon can be understood within the historic and cultural context of a once thriving mill town. The 12,000 SF existing sawmill shed building that once served a critical production role within the Oregon Pine Sawmill can now serve as the key structure of a new Event Center and Hotel – creating a visible, architectural tie to John Day's history shaped by the mill.

The Event Center and Hotel project includes several significant opportunities to directly fulfill the broad goals of the Innovation Gateway Project.

Most important is that all eight (8) IGP Guiding Principles can be realized through the approach to the architecture of the Event Center and Hotel project:

1. Create a thriving destination
2. Attract investment and jobs
3. Honor John Day's identity and character
4. Promote a connected and healthy community
5. Create opportunities for walking and biking
6. Provide public access to the John Day River and Canyon Creek
7. Efficiently use public resources and land
8. Support innovation in conservation

Additionally, a new destination Event Center and Hotel at this strategic location is envisioned as the new western gateway of the Innovation Gateway Project – and the City of John Day, itself. The following smart growth-oriented actions from The Innovation Gateway Project can also be realized with the redevelopment of the Sawmill Shed site:

1. Strengthen Downtown
Given the challenges of surviving in a small market, future redevelopment on the Innovation Gateway site should strive to complement and support Downtown, not compete with it.

Effective Community Design includes a "framework" that organizes and connects places within a community. An Event Center and Hotel at this location creates the western anchor for the Innovation Gateway Plan – establishing a new relationship to the downtown core of John Day that enhances its meaning, as well as a launching point for uses across the restored Johnson Bridge to the north of the river.

2. Promote mixed-use, compact infill development
The study area is a great opportunity for infill development on a 'brownfield' site within close proximity to existing urban services and with good potential for active transportation connections to the rest of John Day.

While the Sawmill Shed site is arguably more industrial in nature than downtown John Day – the idea of establishing a "critical mass" of program through the designed relationship of an Event Center and Hotel can be a relevant approach to inviting new activity, commerce and unique experiences along the river.

4. Foster a strong sense of place
The John Day region has a very distinctive identity as a rural 'frontier' town with a long history of self-reliance and connection to natural resources. New development should recognize and strengthen the region's physical and social character.

The Event Center and Hotel project – anchored by the adapted reuse of the Sawmill Shed building along

the river - is an opportunity to interpret John Day's identity - directly reflecting its history, culture and future as an enhanced destination through its program and architecture.

5. Capitalize on views and connections to John Day's natural assets

The John Day river flows through the study area and the City has long 'turned its back' to the river, an attitude which probably stems from the past degraded nature of the riverbanks due to dredge gold mining and subsequent use of the banks for industrial uses. The river is planned to be restored and is envisioned to become a positive asset for the community and a focal point for new development and recreation that attracts visitors, employers and new residents. Views of the Strawberry Mountains and Aldrich Range are reminders of John Day's position within a remarkable context of natural beauty.

Significant hospitality and culturally based programs located at the Sawmill Shed site are a strong response to the reconsideration of the role of the John Day River. Both the proposed Event Center and Hotel will be driven by a direct engagement of the river through views, access and enhanced connectivity to the balance of the Innovation Gateway Area.

7. Encourage walking and biking

In addition to the design of complete streets, new trails should be designed throughout the study area to link destinations and connect to the existing city trail system.

The Event Center and Hotel will form a significant new community destination – anchoring the city trail system at the western end of the Innovation Gateway Plan area. The Hotel will provide needed accommodations at this location for outdoor enthusiasts, special events and travelers.

8. Coordinate City and County actions and foster collaboration and partnerships

A variety of local, regional and state organizations can partner with the City to help ensure implementation.

The Event Center and Hotel project will foster new forms of sustained program partnerships in addition to initial development and fiscal mechanisms that can drive the project forward.

Finally, as envisioned, The Event Center and Hotel project can create opportunities for local businesses to contribute to the actual development of the project through the supply of locally sourced and produced materials, labor and initial, as well as, on-going programmatic leadership.

John Day River Context

Approximately one mile of the John Day River flows through the project area. Canyon Creek, which is a significant tributary to the upper John Day, flows north through town and enters the mainstem within the project area. A smaller tributary, Davis Creek, flows from the north and enters the mainstem just across from the Canyon Creek confluence. The river and tributaries provide important aquatic and riparian habitats for fish and wildlife species. The river, riparian zone, and adjacent floodplain areas have been heavily impacted by past and current land uses, which have substantially changed conditions compared to those that existed historically. This project provides an opportunity to improve some of the river-related functions and features, including fish habitat, aesthetics, and recreational access.

This portion of the upper John Day River is designated Critical Habitat for Middle Columbia Steelhead, which are listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Several limiting factors and threats have all occurred to some degree within the study area, either in the past and/or currently. This reach of river, and the surrounding valley bottom, was heavily impacted by dredge mining for gold and silver in the early 1900s. The river was relocated from its original position and essentially left in a straight ditch through the project area. Dredge mining not only directly damages habitat, but it also changes the way that the river and floodplain function, removing the meandering pattern that helps maintain pools and riffles in natural rivers. The river also now inundates its floodplain much less frequently than it would have prior to dredging. Natural rivers of this type typically inundate their floodplains at least every year or two, and sometimes more frequently. Floodplain inundation is important in

that it provides access to slow water rearing habitat for fish during high flows, and results in dynamic channel changes that are necessary for creating and maintaining habitat over time. Reduced floodplain inundation results in a much less complex channel with poorer habitat conditions for fish. Furthermore, reduced floodplain inundation can also increase flow velocities, potentially increasing flood levels and associated damage to human infrastructure in downstream areas.

Contemporary river conditions include an incised (i.e. deepened) river channel with a lack of habitat complexity. Many of the components that are important for fish habitat are missing. This includes deep pools with cover, instream large wood, and vegetated riparian zones. A lack of shading from streamside vegetation results in higher stream temperatures, which negatively impact steelhead. The riverbanks have also been treated with bank armoring in numerous locations. This riprap and concrete armoring reduces channel complexity, limits the ability of vegetation to establish, and prevents the river from being able to migrate (i.e. move around as natural rivers do) and develop a natural meandering pattern. Overall, aquatic habitat has been significantly impaired in this once dynamic and complex reach of river.