# Portland 2.0?

*This is my interpretive narrative of pre-Portlandia, that rambunctious time in the 1970s that has taken on the coloration of a civic Golden age. I have started (not finished) this as part of helping myself put together the Portland 2.0 project. That project has generated considerable interest because it proposes to tackle a question on the minds of quite a few today: if we could do something big, something noteworthy, in the past, why does it now feel beyond us? The eagerness of the book group to talk about "whither Portland" is evidence of a lingering unease.*

*Many of us were part of this story so I anticipate no shortage of critiques and commentary.*

*I am particularly grateful to Mr. Feeney for his thoughtful insider's view of how Portland developed its signature reputation for integrated land use and transportation planning and its regional commitment to transit.*

*In what follows, generally I have not attributed quotations; most are from Carl Abbott's book, "Portland in Three Centuries."*

Prior to 1969, Portland, like most metropolitan regions, was happily and literally, motoring into the future. Spurred by federal investment in freeways, and policies promoting suburban growth and single family homes, families were getting off the buses and trams, buying cars, and moving into homes in the "bedroom" suburbs. The central city, jammed with people working in offices and cars parked in surface lots during the day, was increasingly dark, quiet and nearly deserted at night.

That the Willamette River was an open sewer and the city violated air quality standards most days were just more reasons to abandon the city.

As middle-class families with children flocked to the suburbs, the future for inner cities increasingly looked to be housing the poor, the elderly, and those most needful of social services and least able to pay.

Planning for the new American Dream of grass and garages blithely promoted this hollowing out of the cities by fostering suburban growth, sprawl, reliance on the automobile, and investment in sewers and other infrastructure in the suburbs.

Portland's leaders, all older white men, saw no reason to fret over this trend. They happily promoted new freeways that would tear up established neighborhoods, and construction of a major thoroughfare on Portland's waterfront.

Then something unexpected, something seemingly spontaneous happened to bend the trend, to set Portland on a path different from other cities. Using a label bestowed on that different path by one of the participants, we will call it Portland 1.0.

Looking back, we now almost see that time as a Golden Age. At the outset, it is necessary to say that referring to this era as a success is deeply offensive to people of color and others who were deliberately or inadvertently placed on the sidelines. This fact needs to be better integrated into the

story of Portland 1.0; it is not done so here. Nonetheless, it is a fact that Portland did develop a reputation believed by ourselves and others:

> I come from the fabulous–that is, the fabled–city of Portland. It's the place where all the neighborhoods are handsome, all the new development is good looking, and all the planners are above average.
>
> …Carl Abbott, historian

> Portland, Oregon, today is often referred to as a reference case for urban success and sustainability…. Today Portland receives a continuous stream of visitors to see the results of this 50-year legacy of civic action and innovation.
>
> …Ethan Seltzer, PSU urban studies expert

We will put the microscope later on what was intended and how the story evolved so intensely into a tale of a certain kind of "livability," but first: how did we happen to become a fabled city? Can it happen again? What were the particular characteristics that made it distinctive in Portland's history?

And to get to that, a brief detour through Portland's history, just for history's sake, and to see how, in retrospect, we have come to characterize our responses to change.

## Change and civic character

*"San Francisco is the girl you take to bed. Seattle is the girl you take to the dance. Portland is the girl you take home to meet mother."*

In contrast to its supposedly wilder sister cities, Portland, at least prior to *Portlandia,* generally has had a reputation as conservative, staid, stable - a reflection of the New Englanders who settled it. Historian Carl Abbott writes:

> By the end of the 1850s, something about Portland set it apart from the rowdiest of the West's instant cities.… The New Englanders and New Yorkers who dominated the city's economy… were true conservatives who wanted to reconstruct the society they had left behind while reserving a place for themselves at the head table.… To most visitors, Portland was a little island of New England on the western margin of the continent – handsome, energetic, steady.

The job of city government in the early years was to keep Portland "pleasant for its business and professional families."

The quarter-century following 1880 transformed the city, as the transcontinental railroads were completed, industry boomed, bridges across the Willamette were built, streetcar lines were electrified. And as immigrants poured into the city: in 1900, 58-percent of Portlanders were foreign-born or children of foreign-born.

> The Willamette bridges and streetcar lines not only allowed local builders to put up thousands of new homes on previously inaccessible land, but also made it feasible for the city's residents to assert themselves by race, nationality, and income. The process created a neighborhood pattern somewhat like an elongated archery target. Downtown was the bull's-eye, surrounded by a ring of neighborhoods for immigrants and unskilled workers. Further out was a second ring of middle-and upper-class neighborhoods, where more established or successful families lived.

With so many of the immigrant workers single men, (in the 1890s there were 3 men for every 2 women in Portland), free enterprise responded with appropriate (that is demanded) services that gave the town a new facet to its reputation and launched a long-enduring other facet: official corruption.

> Portland's well justified reputation as a wide-open town was an important factor in pushing the respectable middle-class into the new neighborhoods east of the river and the elite toward higher ground on the west. The increasing segregation of single men in a downtown district that met their needs and took their money also provided a prime target for moral reformers. The ensuing battles for temperance and clean living represented efforts to impose the standards of the native-born middle-class and to demonstrate that Victorian family values had triumphed over the raw frontier.

Parallel to these demographic and technological changes, Portland's middle class swam in the swelling stream of Progressivism that looked to clean and efficient government (mostly run by experts) and the City Beautiful. Citizens led the way. Energetic citizens promoted a comprehensive parks plan by architect Lewis Olmsted and an even more ambitious plan for making Portland an "ideal city."

In 1912, a commission appointed by the mayor "compiled detailed documentation on the extent of prostitution, the ubiquity of venereal disease, and the complacent attitude of the police and courts." A second, unsolicited report by the New York Bureau of Municipal Research excoriated the performance of 9 of Portland's 10 city departments.

"The impact of these reports prompted a call for the adoption of the commission form of government, as had recently developed in Galveston, Texas." In 1913, voters adopted this "reform" by 722 votes.

On the eve of WWI, rapid growth and change made Portland a city with a number of "characters" competing for, attention: brash boosterism (the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition), maintaining the reality and facade of respectable livability, keeping the poor and foreign from disrupting things, and the citizen energy generated by Progressivism.

Wartime, one of the great disrupters, brought a shipbuilding boom, housing shortages and a fear of foreigners. In its aftermath, Portland was a different place. Or, more likely and more telling, circumstance and outlook—the hopes and fears we all harbor—elicited a very different response than the optimistic pre-war period. Yes, the world had changed but we had changed with it.

Portland's intolerance had always been able to hide behind its image of middle class "respectability" and "progress." After the war, fear of Bolshevism, layered on top of post-war inflation and unemployment, spurred citizens to a reactionary politics. Now the return to "normalcy" was paramount. Thus, the KKK and demonization of the International Workers of the world, the IWW or "Wobblies" as tools of the Bosheviks.

> By the 1920s and 1930s, the city would slow down and grow more conservative, concerned with maintaining its obvious attractions rather than risking change. The city would continue to evolve, but more slowly and more cautiously, with an eye toward stable neighborhoods and low taxes.

> Portland in the 1930s was two cities side-by-side. Militant union members, skid road workers, and the periodically unemployed were the labor force that kept Portland factories and docks in motion as they had since the early years of the century. Middle-class visitor saw a different city – solid, sober, politically and socially conventional. They found it 'prudent and placid' in the words of journalist Freeman Tilden in 1931, more sympathetic with the ideas of Calvin Coolidge than Franklin Roosevelt." The city was "modest, comfortable, and conservative."

WWII was even more disruptive than the first Great War. Portland's population skyrocketed from shipbuilding. During the war years, one out of every three people was new. (My own parents moved from Klamath Falls for Dad to work in the shipyards. They bought in Lake Oswego First Addition because it was cheap—$2,500 for 800 square-foot bungalow—and close to work on Macadam Avenue.)

The consequence was not the first housing "crisis" the city had experienced but it did unleash a tornado of public and private activity to erect temporary housing with the expectation it would be torn down after the war. The Housing Authority of Portland was created as an emergency measure. Shipbuilder Edgar Kaiser had no time to ask permission so the first tenants of the 10,000 units planned for his Vanport project moved in six months after the contract was signed.

> Guilds Lake Courts and Vanport reconfirmed racial segregation as a fact of Portland life. The city's African-American population had increased from 2,100 to 15,000 during the war and presented portlanders with a new challenge that they largely failed to meet.… Housing lay at the heart of the racial tensions. In 1942, white workers complained about sharing shipyard dormitories with African-Americans. For both single black men in black families, little private housing was available outside the Albina neighborhood in nearby Northeast Portland. Neighborhood groups raised loud protests at every rumor of African-Americans moving into their areas."… As late as 1955, the Portland Realty Board acknowledged that its 360 members followed a 'code of ethics which prohibits them from selling homes in white districts without the consent of the neighbors. After the war, Portland slipped back into its comfort zone. "Writing two years later in the saturday evening post, journalist Richard Neuberger argued that 'most Portlanders, if polled by Dr. Gallop, would probably say they want to city to go on being a sort of place it has always been. That means a slow and easy-going trading center with lumber its principal shipment and scenery the great non-exportable resource."
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> In the first decade after the war, Portland voters consistently turned and spending measures that would have improved the quality of life.… Voters also turned down a 40 hour work week and pay increases for city employees. They rejected a proposal to establish low income housing in 1950 and bond issues for the zoo and symphony in 1952. Portlanders carefully filled school board positions with realtors who could be trusted to keep property taxes low. A climax of sorts to this conservative era came in the spring of 1958, when portlanders handed a stinging defeat to proposals for public transit funding and a 10 year capital improvement program.

In the Sixties the seeds of change were sown by demographic and national political trends but were mostly unnoticed by the old white guys comfortably stewarding Portland's repose.

Before turning to the Sixties, a note: throughout Portland's history, there are examples of how the direction and pace of social and economic change create winners and losers within the overall drift of civic life and politics of the time. For example, despite the record of the KKK and the turn toward a conservative civic politics during the 1920s, "prosperity during World War I and again in

the early 1920s because of a thriving timber industry made it easier for immigrants with children to move from core neighborhoods to the newly built middle-class housing."

Among other things, this is a reminder that attaching labels to historic moments or eras may be one of those useful distortions. Distorting because it masks the winners and losers, the cross currents. Yet, still useful because it gives us perspective that change is a constant.

## The shaping of Portland 1.0

So much of the Portland 1.0 story highlights the role of leaders—McCall, Don Clark, Goldschmidt, Straub, Lloyd Anderson—that it obscures what is arguably the most important ingredient: an aroused, energetic, optimistic younger generation of citizens. That a cohort of inspiring leaders happened on the scene at the same time may have been a happy coincidence but it took rare chemistry between them to make Portland unique. And the context within which that chemistry bubbled also mattered.

Leadership may been the spark, but the fuel for change was a generation activated in the 1960s by John Kennedy, civil rights, and opposition to the Vietnam War.

Historian Carl Abbott helps us see why context and understanding the historical moment and underlying social and economic dynamics are important for understanding the possibilities for "leadership:"

> Between 1960 and 1970, the proportion of Portlanders aged 15 to 34 had increased from 22% to 30%.… The new generation of voters had more interest in new ideas than in the battles of the past. In response, the average age of Portland City Council members dropped by 15 years between 1969 and 1973. Voters made similar changes in other local governing bodies and in the cities legislative delegation. This generational turnover transformed many basic assumptions of civic debate. The ideas of the older leadership had been formed by the tumultuous years that stretched from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s. Their goal for the postwar city with social and economic stability. The newer leaders, in contrast, came of age during the optimistic years of the Great Boom of 1945-74, which instilled a sense of possibility rather than limits." Page 146

(Are today's leaders more driven by a sense of possibility or constrained by a sense of limits?)

> Over the course of a decade, from the late 1960s to late 1970s, constructive activism by folks we can call quality-of-life liberals fueled a middle-class neighborhood revolution whose efforts are still obvious in the progressive Portland of the 21st century.

Bob and Allison Belcher organized a picnic on the waterfront 1969 to protest plans for a four-lane Harbor Drive.

> Riverfront for People was only one part of a much larger grassroots movement. In the half-dozen years between 1966 in 1972, largely self defined community organizations sprang up in every quadrant of the city to fight vigorously for neighborhood conservation in the face of urban renewal and highway construction. On the east side, neighborhood mobilization began in 1967 and 68 with efforts to provide local input for planning federally assisted programs. Portland Action Committees Together (PACT) organized half a dozen neighborhoods in southeast Portland to participate in anti-poverty programs. Southeast Uplift was a locally organized equivalent of Model Cities,…. On the

> west side, the Northwest District Association mobilized highly articulate professionals to fight industrial, hospital, and highway expansion. The Corbett-Terwilliger-Hill Park Association came together to resist new urban renewal proposals and respond to plans to convert an old furniture factory into the John's Landing commercial development.

Although still largely excluded from government and civic organizations, women emerged as powerful leaders of neighborhood and civic improvement groups.

They did it not just by digging moats around their neighborhoods, rather by partaking in a still inchoate movement to see the city as an organic whole in which what happened in Lents mattered to what happened in Northwest Portland. Elsa Coleman, neighborhood activist and later City Parking Manager captured the essence of what happened:

> A major effort in those years was the formation of STOP (Sensible Transportation Options for People). It was earlier mentioned that we stopped the Mt, Hood Freeway…. And I realize that it wasn't just about stopping the Mt. Hood Freeway; it was trying to organize support for a different way in Portland.

Organizing for a "different way" is a pretty good synopsis of the story of the region in the 1970s. Maybe the activists didn't see the whole so much as they were prepared to see it when articulated back to them by a group of leaders who happened onto the scene at the right time.

Angus makes an important point:

> Portland in the 1970's was still a small and provincial city struggling to emerge as the real thing. It already had emerging big city challenges – pollution, congestion, a school system slipping backwards, residential neighborhood instability, stores fleeing the downtown for a future defined by cars and shopping malls (the restaurants then weren't much to write home about either).
>
> Greatness (well, medium greatness) was contemplated even amidst the abundant difficulties. It was thought possible, perversely, because Portland still had a community mentality. The Mayor could pull the right people into a room where ideas could be floated and culled and adopted and taken away to act on.

## Citizens and leaders

They were leaders first and foremost united by their own passion for "preserving this special place" and their capacity to tap into that most Oregonian of values. On the surface, Goldschmidt in particular, was more driven by more socially-concerned values but succeeded in part because of the compatibility of his program with the more place-focused orientations of fellow leaders.

Tom McCall stands tall and strong in memory against "unfettered despoiling of the land."

Don Clark described his beginnings in politics: "I was a fiercely proud Oregonian. I really liked Oregon, and I thought Oregon was the premier place in the world, and I kind of wanted to keep it that way.…So when you ask what was the Portland story, mostly it was the place. A special place."

As he tells it, Goldschmidt started from a different motivation, having returned from working as a Freedom Rider in Mississippi and finishing law school, when he started working with Legal Aid

he discovered, “we were really just a smaller example of what was going on in Mississippi.” It is fair to point out that few remember this as the focus of his campaigns for City Council in 1970 or Mayor in 1972.

Regardless, history remembers Goldschmidt’s era primarily for the mark he left on the physical Portland: taming the worst of urban renewal and intrusive neighborhood development, a successful Downtown Plan, light rail and the Transit Mall. “By the start of his first Mayoral term, Goldschmidt and his staff had drawn on a ferment of political and planning ideas and sketched out an integrated strategy for the city that involved the coordination of land use and transportation policies.”

In looking back, both Goldschmidt and Clark say that Portland’s success probably would not have happened without Tom McCall setting a tone and SB 100, the landmark land use law, creating a legal push and bulwark against sprawl.

It is worth noting that so much that was innovative from that era, including SB 100 and efforts to stabilize neighborhoods, was about *preserving* the place that people have so treasured.

In retrospect, portrayals make Portland 1.0 out to have been a triumph of preserving livability, keeping this a pleasant, agreeable place to live and recreate. We will take a closer look below at whether livability was the essence of intentions behind it.

## Purpose more than planning

Ironically, because Portland’s reputation is as a mecca of good planning, there was no great plan for Portland 1.0. There was, rather, a broadly shared sense of purpose and direction (even if the direction started as “we don’t like the direction we are headed”).

Don Clark:

> Neil was important but neither Neil nor I could have done anything without the network of people, just ordinary citizens, who were on the same wavelength. All had an interest in the progressive movement, seeing things happen. [Governors] Tom McCall and Bob Straub were very important in setting the tone.
>
> [Regionally] We came together around a regional vision. They could see a region, a metropolitan area. A group of progressive leaders on the same wavelength. Had a regional vision, to make things work together better. Transportation, services. More rational intergovernmental relations. A commonality of progressive spirit.
>
> If there was anything that caused our triumph, if that's what you want to call it, it was that. *It was just all around us*.[emphasis added] Not just a few leaders but many, many people in the community.

From a summary of panel discussions of many people involved in Portland 1.0, including Mr. Feeney (Knight Foundation report):

> There was no grand plan, but there was a guiding vision. Initial discussions weren’t about what to build, or what not to build, but about what the city should be and what needed to happen to get it there. The conversations that kicked things off weren’t about solving the problems of “right now,”

> but about what the better city would look and feel like, and how it would work. There were, in fact, lots of plans, but individually they had little power.
>
> However, by creating them with reference to this larger discussion, and to a larger vision, small things got leveraged into larger things, and that helped to sustain action over the time that it actually takes to get things done.

So here is a proposition: so much of the progressive innovation and action that made Portland a fabled city was the creativity that went into figuring out out how to give force and effect to what "was all around us," to a "real sense that people were taking care of the place and taking care of each other through the engagement that they had in redirecting the city away from a path that was not working." Whether it was putting together the broad coalition of interests that made the Downtown Plan powerful or figuring out how to give some regular voice to neighborhoods or Feeney and friends meeting over retsina to figure out how to unite around a plan to share money from withdrawal of the Mt. Hood Freeway, there was a whole lot of "figuring out" going on. All based on a shared sense of purpose built the chassis of an aroused citizenry and given form and motion by leaders in tune with them.

The story of the creation and evolution of Metro, nationally renowned as the avatar of integrated land use and transportation planning, is more a story of garage-like tinkering over a period of time rather than a carefully crafted plan from the outset. Even its seminal 2040 Plan involved a remarkable amount of creativity and inventing along the way.

A corollary question to the proposition: was Portland (region) more effective when it was having to cobble things together from a shared sense of direction, when it was less a matter of formal planning and more a matter of figuring out how to plan? Were we more civically productive when we had fewer plans and more purpose?

Can good planning make up for the drift of civic engagement into either a formalized set of techniques and rituals or storming the gates to protest?

## Everything is related to everything

If Portland 1.0 emerged from a shared sense of purpose (shared not by everone but by enough) and a lot of figuring it out, there was a simple but powerful secret sauce: everything was related to everything. The pieces were knit together into an overall idea—vision if you will—of what Portland could be.

Alan Webber, one of Goldschmidt's early aides (and now Mayor of Santa Fe, NM):

> Once you know your definition of victory, then you can begin to connect the elements of your strategy into a coherent, internally consistent whole. But until you have answered that fundamental question, until you know the definition of victory, you really have no strategy. You have an assortment of programs, a loose collection of policy initiatives—but no clear strategy.

Knight report:

> The unifying notion here is that actions should be driven by ideas, not solutions. This is another way of saying that identifying overarching principles first enables solutions to emerge in a new and useful

context, rather than to drive the process with interest-driven actions from the outset. For example, in Portland the 1972 Downtown Plan really mattered. However, it arose not as a way simply to physically remake downtown, but as part of a larger strategy to remake the city.

The vision was comprehensive and expansive, about the whole place and the city writ large. Everything is related to everything.

In addition, a good vision allows leaders to take unpopular actions. That is, people are unlikely to embrace meaningful change without first seeing whether it works. Leaders often have to take the risk of committing to changes before people can know whether the changes are likely to succeed. The vision is the baseline against which the reasons and intentions and commitments of leaders are measured, or at least it should be.

Carl Abbott:

During 1973 1974, and 1975, Goldschmidt's team brought together a variety of ideas that were waiting for precise definition and articulated them as part of a single political package that offered benefits for a wide range of citizens and groups.

## Money is useful (for building projects, too)

Mr. Feeney has highlighted the importance of Federal funds in building light rail: “the freeway withdrawal money ($500 million in 1980 dollars, equal to $1.485 billion today!) was a unique element in all that came together in Portland to build light rail, foster cooperation and indeed make the land use dream come true.” I call attention especially to “foster cooperation.” The act of herding a bunch of contending local jurisdictions into a regional perspective is the bedrock on which so much of what makes this a “fabled place.”

From the Knight Foundation report: “Portland didn’t emerge because of a focus on creating stuff, but because of a focus on recreating and sustaining political culture.” As Feeney notes, the alliances painstakingly built, in part with Federal money, beginning in the Seventies are withering. Now money, or the lack of it, is a divider, not a uniter.

Portland has sent delegations to Los Angeles, to Seattle, to Denver to see how they have been able to pass huge bond measures for housing and for transportation. The answer: sales tax and a unified and supportive business community. Portland laments the answer but lets it go at that.

Portland has passed a $258 million housing bond measure two years ago and Metro will be on the ballot in November for $653 million. Polling apparently looks positive but strains among jurisdictions and many quiet doubts and unanswered questions about how much good this will do suggest that, even if successful, it may a Pyrrhic victory.

Several years ago Richard Meeker, publisher of Willamette Week told a friend he was reluctant to endorse a parks measure because he wanted to know how it fit into an overall urban strategy.

I expect this will become a question more often heard.

## Succeeding at Livability

Ethan Seltzer, one of the foremost students of urban affairs in Portland and nationally, in 2014 wrote:

> Portland, Oregon, today is often referred to as a reference case for urban success and sustainability. …Today, Portland receives a continuous stream of visitors to see the results of this 50-year legacy of civic action and innovation. National and international delegations come to see the physical results of these initiatives written in the urban form of the City and its institutions.
>
> In addition to early and significant commitments to environmental quality, SRO housing and services to the homeless, community policing, and an expanding parks and trails system, during this era Portland became known for:
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> - removal of a highway to convert a stretch of waterfront into a park;
> - cancellation of decades-old freeway plans and the transfer of those federal funding commitments into new and now iconic transit investments;
> - creation of a revolutionary downtown plan that rewrote the destiny of the Central City as a people place in a car era;
> - formal recognition of neighborhood associations as part of the governance apparatus for the city;
> - creation of a regional government, the only one of its kind in the US today, and its development of a regional urban growth boundary; and
> - adoption of a comprehensive plan consistent with Oregon's landmark statewide land use planning program, widely regarded as a model.

Carl Abbott, one of Portland's most thoughtful contemporary historian, is not alone when he says (in 2000):

> I come from the fabulous–that is, the fabled–city of Portland. It's the place where all the neighborhoods are handsome, all the new development is good looking, and all the planners are above average.
>
> At least that's what some of our press clippings would have us believe.
>
> In the current debate over smart growth, Portland is held up as a pattern and example to other cities.

In 2000, Congressman Earl Blumenauer held a series of informal discussions with local officials and citizens about "the Portland Story." Those discussions centered around "livable communities," growth management, urban form, transportation and land-use.

Smart growth. Growth management. Livability. Quality of life. Light rail. Downtown revitalization. Regional cooperation and civic innovation to achieve it. These are the elements of a story large enough to establish a national reputation. A story worthy of celebration. And to set a regional agenda for decades (at least as far as the story goes.)

> In 1995, Forbes magazine said of Portland: "A good quality of life, high immigration levels, and computer smarts helped make this rainy town a winner… a town that's far better than most for a young company to be in." In 1997, the cover of Time magazine featured Portland as one of the nation's 15 hottest spots for new kinds of job growth.

> Planners and dignitaries from around the country visited Portland to see for themselves how the urban growth boundary worked. In one month old of 1999 alone, Portland was praised for its livability by US a Weekend, Outside Magazine, Parade Magazine, and National Public Radio.…
>
> In winter 2000, Money magazine shows Portland as the "Most Livable City" in the nation…. Three decades of keen planning have reined in urban sprawl and given rise to a mini metropolis with short, easy to stroll blocks renowned for java joints, brewpubs and bookstores. The superb light rail network and a new streetcar system are helping to make it a cinch to get around.

## Was it really all about livability?

So, was it really all about livability in the sense portrayed above?

Although never mentioned, in the same 1973 address to the Legislature that is remembered for Gov. McCall's call to action against the "shameless threat to our environment and to the whole quality of life—unfettered despoiling of the land," he also said:

> Quality of life is the sum total of the fairness of our tax structure; the caliber of our homes; the cleanliness of our air and water; and the provision of affirmative assistance to those who cannot assist themselves. True quality is absent if we allow social suffering to abide in an otherwise pristine environment."

Alan Webber, looking back in 2013:

> Portland's vaunted livability was preserved, and today, 40 years later, it is easily America's favorite big-little city with an unparalleled quality of life, great coffee, artisanal restaurants, more breweries per capita than any city on earth, and its own cult TV show.
>
> [But] livability was never the goal. True, it was always a component of a well-integrated urban strategy. But it was always a building block, an essential Portland attribute and a deeply held Oregon value. But it wasn't the definition of victory for the city. It was an input for creating the Portland strategy, but it was never the sole output.
>
> So if livability was an input, not a final goal, what was the point of the exercise 40 years ago in Portland, the definition of victory?
>
> The answer was something we called the "population strategy

Here is Neil Goldschmidt, reflecting in 1994, on what that meant:

> …this would be the best city of its size in the world. There was never any other goal. We didn't know exactly what it mean't. But it meant every neighborhood had to be at the table. Downtown had to be better than it was—it had to be a place where you wanted to spend time. It meant that the diverse population of the city had to find its way in some sense of equity to be able to participate. And, frankly, that the rest of the world when it showed up would know that something had happened here that happened rarely in the United States.
>
> It is about basically whether you get the best life if you live in a city. That should be the goal, and it cannot be achieved without the kinds of schools we have come to depend upon. We never had any illusions, I think, any of us in city government but that the real war was going to be fought in the schools. The real estate agents were telling people: this is not a place to live.…

> During the time when I was Mayor, we had 4 of our black citizens shot and killed in a period of time that was so short it just made your head swim. We just hadn't trained our police officers. We hadn't, I think, thought through very much about what it is we expected of them, or expected of ourselves. It was very hard for people who were white living here, and still is I think to understand what it is like not to be white.

Even though passionate about "preserving this special place" and overtly proud of his work to preserve the Columbia River Gorge and Sauvie Island and leading the effort to stop the Mt. Hood freeway, look at the whole record of Don Clark. Pioneer of community policing. Established the Hooper detox center, County Health Clinics and Project Health to extend health care to the poor. After he left office Clark became director of the Housing Authority, founder of Central City Concern, and created a unused 12-point program for dealing with the homeless.

Although overshadowed by the mantle of livability and, lately, hipness, the intention of Portland 1.0 was as much about people as place. As much about seeing the city as a community of broadly shared opportunity as a nice place to live.

Goldschmidt's state of the city speech in 1979 talked about the core meaning of a city in history:

> The city gave to all the mobility of economic and political progress. In the city was hope, for in the city were jobs for all. Jobs for the untrained, and jobs for them to strive for.
>
> We have not developed a substitute yet for the city as the container in which economic progress takes place for those trying to fit into the national economy. No city program succeeds if it ignores this. No amount of services, no housing effort, no transportation system, no neighborhood livability program can fill the void.

The essential take-aways, I believe, are these:

- Unless "livability" is more broadly construed and accepted than currently woven into popular belief and even planning, it constrains our horizon and expectations for what could make Portland 2.0 as notable as Portland 1.0.
- A true urban strategy understands that all the pieces have to fit together. A concern for and relationship with schools was integrated into Goldschmidt's office. Both Don Clark and Neil acknowledged that part of their strength was a willingness to help each other's jurisdiction succeed based on a shared sense of direction even though it was often contentious.
- Intentional cities, cities in charge of their own destiny, are exercises in continuous communal knitting. Disparate grievances and hopes find expression in a larger and positive purpose. The first job of leadership is to articulate that larger purpose in a way that citizens can find their hopes and grievances. Chasing individual problems with collections of programs, whatever else it accomplishes, doesn't do it. I would argue it won't even do very much to fix the big problems. Nor will a formalized "visioning" or goal-setting process.
- Communal civic knitting partakes of old-fashioned politics more than formal planning.

## Where are we?

> *If we could but first know where we are, and whither we are trending, we could better judge what to do.*
>
> …Abraham Lincoln

Portland is thriving. The arts and culture scene. Food. Alberta Street. What a delightful playground for so many of us! Yet…

So many people stuck in traffic trying to get to homes they increasing cannot afford.

Displacement and the job market sorting out winners and losers--and increasing the gap between them.

Downtown too much seems a combat zone over who owns the streets.

Public process becomes  contests over the shape of the table and who sets the table and who gets to sit at the table.

Neighborhoods are increasing hip—so hip that they become almost gated communities if you are not hip or wealthy enough to buy your way into the rich cultural scene.

We can't seem to afford to take care of what we have much less build anything new.

Other places that used to flock to Portland to see how we do things are now destinations to which we send our folks to learn urban best practices.

If we are the paragon of urban planning, what's up? Are we even living up to our own hype about livability, not to mention getting serious about equity and treating the city as a place of broadly shared opportunity.

Writing in 1983, historian Carl Abbott: "the future will belong to leaders who can bring together grassroots activists and members of the civic elite in new coalitions for the improvement of Portland's Metropolitan environment and the lives of its citizens."

Here are assessments in 2004 from two of the foremost students of civic engagement in Portland:

> Critics point out the failure of Portland leadership to define and sees a rhetorical high ground that could help sort and order the hyper-pluralism of interest group skirmishing in a city that is now more than ever a mosaic of vulcanizing interest, lifestyles, income brackets and ethnic identities.… The simplicity of the Goldschmidt doctrine that 'neighborhoods in downtown need one another' is nowhere evident in current discourse about what Portland should do next."  (Witt)
>
> There are many ways to divide Portlanders, but so few effective ways to bridge these differences that Portland is on the brink of losing its civic exceptionalism. (Johnson)

The sense you get from our own book club commentaries and more broadly is unease over the fraying of the civic fabric that made Portland 2.0 notable.

One of the visible and troubling signs, noted by Feeney, is the divide between TriMet and Metro. Neither leaders not citizen activists seem to have a sense of ownership of the whole. Institutions, including schools, are left to their own devices. On his way out of office Charlie Hales told me he didn't think much about Metro; they did their thing, the City its thing.

All leaders talk about the loss of media coverage of local government. And the loss of strong, independent, civically engaged local business leadership.

Opinion researcher Adam Davis bemoans the growing disaffection with and ignorance about government. Younger people especially are just tuning out.

If our story was one of bending the trend, today's generation confronts a tougher trend to bend at the very time civic capacity has eroded. The circumstances in which Portland 1.0 played out in many respects were more conducive to success than facing Portland today. We faced trends we did not like but that seemed amenable to change. In part that was because the trends themselves were not daily pressing upon and irritating us as are traffic congestion and homelessness.

Angus: "Problems facing Portland are more complex, they involve more diverse interests that are harder to reconcile, the old tools for doing so don't work as well as they used to, we haven't figured out the new ones yet."

We had not yet soured on government as an instrument for pursuing shared social goals. As a generation we arguably were at the peak of benefiting from America's post-war moment of maximum meritocratic opportunity. Well-rewarded for our hard work, of course we were optimistic.Today's younger generation is mightily disinterested in any "lessons from the past." There is even a strain of anger about how we have left them a world of diminished prospects. Among organizations of color there is a rising impatience, even militancy.

Surely Portland can, and most probably will, muddle on and remain immensely attractive. For some. However, just as in Portland 1.0 we declared "we don't want to become Los Angeles," do we have the capacity today to declare "we don't want to become San Francisco"?

Here are some of the questions we intend to address in the Portland 2.0 project:

*If Portland 1.0 was a response to Portland being at an inflection point (in some ways self-created) in the late 1960s, are we at a new inflection point? Have we fully grasped our different circumstance today?*

*Can we find a way to celebrate and extend our livability successes without being held captive by them and without ignoring unintended consequences?*

*Are we even bold enough to question our own successes or whether other places have moved beyond us to become more innovative in pursuit of livability and shared success?*

*What and who got left out of the livability story of Portland 1.0? Do we care as much about the people who live here as the place we share, as much about our neighbors as our neighborhoods?*

*To what extent are the innovative neighborhood, civic and regional institutions we created still sources of innovation and civic energy?*

*What have been the consequences of formalizing and institutionalizing "participation"? Have we, in some ways, shrunk the civic space and broad ownership of the region as our mutual civic project?*

*Have we substituted planning for politics?*