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# The Southwest Portland Post

Southwest Portland's Independent Neighborhood Newspaper

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## Neighbors plan for the future of Hillsdale town center



By Lee Perlman  
The Southwest Portland Post

As wonderful as the Hillsdale Town Center is, city planners and community leaders have no lack of ideas about how it could be made even better. The question is where to start?

About 35 people gathered at Wilson High School last month to weigh in on this question. It was the second in a series of meetings for the Bureau of Planning's Hillsdale Town Center Study.

Planner Brian Sheehan and consultant Paul Rawlowski of SERA Architects provided a gathering at a September meeting with information they had gathered about the area. At the third meeting, 7 p.m. November 12, also at Wilson, people will be asked to indicate their preferences between several development concepts.

At the October meeting Sheehan suggested providing some attention to the north end of the district, providing safer connections between the library, the school and DeWitt Park providing for future development. And perhaps creating a new plaza.

Rawlowski said a gas station there could be redeveloped "some day when we run out of petrol." Hillsdale Neighborhood Association chair Don Baack argued that this was not a priority; instead, the city should concentrate on the Portland School District's property on the south end, home to the Hillsdale Farmer's Market and the site of a future potential plaza that the neighborhood has devoted a year to planning for.

Another Hillsdale board member, Richard Stein, said, "I'm not on board

with this either. This area is zoned residential. A plaza needs businesses around it to be successful, and (Sheehan) says there aren't zone changes as part of this. There's a disconnect." He suggested focusing in on the around Casa Colima Restaurant, which several people spoke of as the heart of the district.

Another participant said such a project would be "a new thing with a higher risk. We could end up with a dead plaza."

Neighborhood activist and journalist Rick Seifert differed on this. "The Lance Johnson property has gone from having one house on a lot to ten, and others will follow," he said. "Unless we bring some order to this, everyone will do their own thing, and it will be a hodge-podge."

Sheehan agreed, "Depending on how you cut up those properties, you may or may not get good connections." Another resident said that Hillsdale need not necessarily confine itself to one plaza.

On the south end, Rawlowski suggested the proposed plaza be sited near a new school, both closer to the town center, with playing fields re-aligned to the west and south, and the Farmers Market site on the east end.

Thomas Benke, a girl's softball supporter who has been critical of proposed public use of school district property, questioned whether the Market should remain in its current location permanently. Baack and Sheehan said that the market seemed to be doing well where it is.

"That's different information than I have," Benke responded. He suggested that the group consider as a model downtown Sherwood, where there are streets with no curbs that can serve multiple purposes.

Kristy Braidwood was concerned about a driveway on the east end of the property where heavy auto and pedestrian traffic make a dangerous mix. By its presence, "You encourage

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On October 8, a house on Southwest Burlingame Place in Hillsdale was destroyed after it slid down the hill and landed on properties along Terwilliger Boulevard. The owner of the home, Kathy Hendrickson, was rescued by neighbors just in the nick of time. No one was injured in the slide. The habitability of six other homes have been affected by the landslide. At press time, the City of Portland had declared the site a disaster area and had stepped in to help stabilize the slope against rain and further slides. Cause of the landslide is still under investigation. Insurance companies may require property owners to file lawsuits to sort out the damage. A disaster relief fund for the Hendrickson family has been set up at Umpqua Bank. For the other six homeowners, a relief fund has been established at U.S. Bank. (Post photo by Don Snedecor)

## West Hills landslide threats subject of panel discussion

By Lee Perlman  
The Southwest Portland Post

When actor-producer Michael Douglas was working on "The China Syndrome," a 1979 film about an accident in a nuclear power plant, he asked an expert how real the hazards the film portrayed really were. "Let me put it this way," the man replied. "It'll be a real race to see which comes first: your film or the real thing." In fact the film's opening and the Three Mile Island disaster occurred during the film's first run, helping boost the live gate.

Southwest Hills Residential League chair Jim Thayer had similar "luck" last month when he scheduled a panel discussion on West Hills landslide threats. Days before the meeting, a house slid down a slope above Southwest Terwilliger Boulevard. The SWHRL meeting drew 200 people.

According to the principal speaker, Scott Burns of Portland State University, "Any time you have landslides you have three ingredients: steep slopes, unstable geology, and water - and in the West Hills you have all three strikes."

Of course, much of the terrain is steep, much of it extremely so. The soil is a substance called Loess, dust blown in from the plains. "When it's dry it's as hard as concrete, but when it's wet it's

very unstable," Burns said. "Many sites in the west hills are ripe for slides; all you need is water," he said. "Any time you have a slide, you look for concentrations of water."

That is also what you should look for to ensure against such events, he said. "You can't control either the slopes or the geology, so watch for water. During dry times, look for leaks. During the winter, make sure your water collection systems are working properly." Do not think about disconnecting your roof drains, as city bureaus have urged, he said; this is an environmentally friendly thing to do on flat land, but on slopes, "Water belongs in pipes," he said.

Once a slide starts, it remains unstable, he said. In fact, this was the origin of Washington Park. In 1894, during the course of development, excavators cut off "the toe of an ancient landslide." Realizing what was happening, the city put up 30 retaining walls, and bought property from five large estates "where the tennis courts are now."

Realizing the ground was forever too hazardous to build on, the city put the land to other use.

In 1996, when the city experienced "eight inches of rain in four days," there were 350 slides of varying degrees of severity. Burns helped survey them and found that "ten percent could have been

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