
Urban Forestry Commission

Public Comment

Ruth Ann Barrett, June, 2017

“Urban trees are the street kids of the forest.”

– Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of TREES*



NW Flanders at NW 3rd Avenue, Old Town Chinatown, Portland, Oregon, May 2017

CONTEXT

My Neighborhood of Old Town Chinatown has a bad reputation for poverty, crime, homeless folks, and blight.

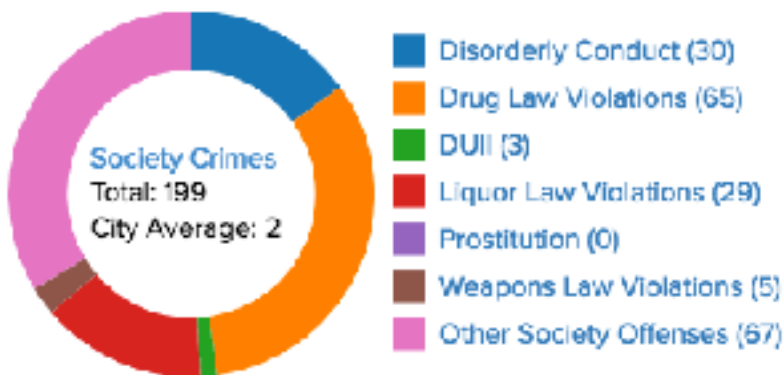
All of it is true.

It's the entertainment district.

Does anyone actually live here?

Yes.

There are approximately 4,000 residents. Median family income is \$16,201 as compared, for example, to ParkRose at \$29,358, or 42nd Ave at \$47,575. There over 6,000 employees.



The neighborhood has one of the highest percentage of white alone folks (77%), mostly men, but not the lowest proportion of black alone folks. Few seniors live here.

From the PDC's Five Year Plan for Old Town Chinatown (2014):

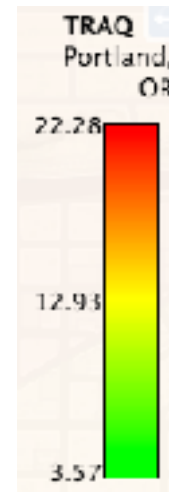
"There are a higher number of crimes reported in Old Town / Chinatown than in other areas of the Central City. Drug law offenses* represent a high percentage of these crimes, and are particularly concentrated in the neighborhood. Assault crimes are also more highly concentrated in Old Town / Chinatown compared to elsewhere within the Central City. This level of criminal activity has had an impact on the market's perception of the neighborhood and deters business growth, neighborhood investment, and tourist activity." This May, my neighbor in the building was murdered in the lobby of our building. It was a random killing. Safety is #1 priority. Or it should be.

*22% of all drug law violations in area with only 4,000 residents as compared to 10% in downtown with three times the population. (chart from portlandmaps.com)

Portland, OR	Value	City Avg
Population	148	109
Population Density	759	579
% Pop < 18	2%	18%
% Pop > 65	12%	11%
% Pop in Poverty	22%	7%
% Pop Poor English	2%	4%
% Pop with HS Diploma	18%	9%
% Pop of Color	25%	21%
% Pop Elderly and Isolated	8%	4%
% Pop Non-Regular Voters	8%	30%
% of Residences without AC	100%	40%
Mean BMI	25	25
TRAQ	20.47	12.93
Urban Heat Island	31.02	31.14

And according to the interactive map in heat islands, we don't have the largest population of those living in poverty despite the lowest MFI.

As to urban heat islands, if I understand the map correctly 31.02 puts us close to the high of 32.37. We suffer the consequences of traffic related air quality (TRAQ) at 20.47,



high being 22.28. Our neighbors already suffer from poor health.

Affordable housing has a history of being built in high crime areas. So here we are. Relying on "development" to bring trees to areas like ours, devastated by re-development, is in the hope and a prayer category not urban planning.

I want to emphasize that here in Old Town it gets mighty hot, we are primarily renters with limited incomes; we don't have air conditioning or even windows that open more than a few inches *unlike* many of the folks who work here in the City Center, commute from the burbs, and hold sway over the residents.

So why testify?

Priority of Inclusion

We aren't poor enough, are too white, have not been historically under-represented, and live on the Westside of the River. I'll get to our abysmal tree status in a minute.

Our neighborhood **will not be represented** on the Community Advisory Committee.

The "targeted neighborhoods" process I have experienced in regards to the Urban Forestry Commission's efforts to appoint people to an advisory committee doesn't cut it as

far as I am concerned. It is the primary reason I am spending time making my opinions known here.

If I'm all wrong and we Old Towners have already eaten up our share of the pie and are to give others a chance, use data and information, not *perceptions* to make cuts. Don't make the mistake that the Old Town Chinatown Community Association (OTCT CA) is representative of residents. It's a "hybrid" with most of the decisions made by business owners and people who do NOT live here, some do not even work here. Let me give an example.

Non-participation on important decision-making Committees, the Strategic Advisory Committee of the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic Design Guidelines, is one example of the logic used to exclude residents. The Deputy Ombudsman, Tony Green, in this instance cited they (Planning and Sustainability) were looking primarily for "technical expertise and cultural connections" to the historic district and design guidelines." Mr. Green added "City officials told me that they actively looked for a resident of the district to serve on the committee, but were unable to find anyone with sufficient interest, expertise and historic cultural connections prior to putting together the final membership. Unable to find anyone.

I'll not bother this time to escalate your "outreach strategy" to the Ombudsman office and the claim that exclusion is based on targeting people who have "*not* been as engaged civically to participate in these City processes such as joining a committee like this one" and ends excluding residents of Old Town and Downtown. (Chiao Yun Anny Hsiao letter of May 3 to Mary Vogel and Ruth Ann Barrett).

As to trees, here's what the neighborhood historians are protecting:

Tree Canopy Targets: The tree canopy targets are the one area in which the plan includes some level of specificity regarding existing conditions and future targets at a district level. However, we would note that the city was never able to provide any methodology explaining how the targets were derived and how they relate to broader tree canopy objectives for the city. Last week we were informed that the methodology is still being prepared. Typically you use a methodology to derive your targets...not vice versa. Overall the targets strike as low in several of the districts. We would particularly call out Old Town/ Chinatown where the city aspires a remarkably low 10% canopy cover. The explanation we received was that Old Town/ Chinatown is an historic district and it did not historically have a lot of trees. We would respectfully suggest that designation as an historic district was meant to perpetuate environmental deficiencies and environmentally destructive practices.

Sustainability* > Climate Justice > Health > Shade > Trees+

The primary reason for my comments revolves around participation. The second reason is about more shade and in the context of the health of our citizens, environment (global warming, toxins), and economy, a sustainability approach. While you are organizing your outreach and involvement efforts around trees, I'm talking shade both planted and built, like these structures I photographed recently in the Mission district of San Francisco.



A possible shade solution to consider for street-based gathering places like NW Flanders and Davis Streets between NW 4th and 3rd Streets?

I would humbly suggest the Parks and Recreation Commission, needs to reconsider how it **positions or frames** what it needs citizens to address namely the benefits of shade rather than just trees. I have been told by the ONI representative, Jacob Brostoff that all you really want to hear about is trees and that this next part of my testimony on [Eco-integrators](#)

needs to be addressed to the Planning and Sustainability Commission who might entertain the idea of a more holistic and sustainable approach to problem solving. Well, that may be so, but if you want citizen support of trees, I suggest you may be better served by talking about and addressing shade along with other benefits of shade to include beauty and health, the latter being what the Health Department talks about and the former often ignored as unimportant.

Your organization doesn't have to be reorganized to address shade, but a team could be put together, inter-disciplinary to use an academic term, to address major problems in specific neighborhoods. I call these teams eco-integrators, like system integrators in tech, who are the folks who offer a "solution" to solving business problems, rather than selling products. Our neighborhoods have problems. Heat islands are one of them. Trees contribute to the solution, but they are not the whole solution to providing shade and other methods of cooling our neighborhood.

Thank you for your attention and for the work you are doing to increase the number and kinds of trees in our City and to give a broader range of our residents a voice and role in decision making through inclusion, but I don't think my neighbors should have been excluded.

P.S.

Be tougher.

As to the very real problems of keeping the trees we have and adding new ones, this is part of the Tree+ conversation in situations where laws and regulations are not working and tree-related budgets are cut. There is a campaign in progress by EarthJustice that is applicable: [trees need a good lawyer](#). They play a critical role in meeting city-wide strategies such as healthy and connected neighborhoods and the Climate Action Plan.

Attachments

Here are relevant documents inspired by the beauty of a tree, comments about health and trees, a recent survey about trees, and the qualities citizens bring to the table and who are able to act independently of special interests.

Beauty: This Tree is Important To Me, Page 8

Health and Trees, Pages 9 and 10

Customization of Surveys, Page 11

Qualities Citizens Bring to the Advisory Tables, Pages 12 and 13

Related Websites



(1) www.spongyparkinglots.com

A group of highly experienced women propose “greening” surface parking lots, making them spongy and shady and starting right here with a lot owned by the City of Portland, managed by the PDC, and leased for 99 years to NW Natural Gas Co.

The site is also a PDC candidate, bottom left corner, for a parking building, stacks of automobiles in spitting distance of two major residential buildings. What’s the environmental impact on people and planet? Where’s the heat island data? And the Old Town Chinatown Community Association’s role is to demand more parking.

(2) ruthannbarrett.com, About my work.

(3) pdxdowntown.com, exercising my citizen muscle as recommended by Annie Leonard, Executive Director of Green Peace, U.S.A. and founder of Story of Stuff Project.

(4) earthsayers.tv, Voices of Sustainability, a ten year project advancing citizens speaking on behalf of Mother Earth and her children. The [Place of Portland](#), [Forests](#), and champions such as [Julia Butterfly Hill](#) are three of many special collections addressing People, Planet and Prosperity.

This Tree Is Important to Me



NW Flanders and NW 4th Ave.

I love it everyday from my window.

I don't know who "owns" it.

What kind of tree it is

nor who waters it.

It counts. We count.

"...perhaps it is enough simply to look at a tree."

—Robert Ulrich on the curative power of trees

Health and Trees

A Quick Look

Rich and Poor*



NW 11th Avenue in the Pearl



NW 4th Avenue in Old Town Chinatown

“A new study found that an additional ten trees on a given block corresponded to a one-per-cent increase in how healthy nearby residents felt.”

*The Parks and tree folks point out the obvious, “the tree canopy in Portland is not equitably distributed throughout the city: lower income neighborhoods have significantly lower tree canopy than other neighborhoods.”

Someone (unidentified) here in the neighborhood justifies our treeless-ness and the need to keep it that way as part of the historic nature of this part of NW 4th Avenue in the New Chinatown Japantown Historic District, where I live.

Tree Canopy Targets: The tree canopy targets are the one area in which the plan includes some level of specificity regarding existing conditions and future targets at a district level. However, we would note that the city was never able to provide any methodology explaining how the targets were derived and how they relate to broader tree canopy objectives for the city. Last week we were informed that the methodology is still being prepared. Typically you use a methodology to derive your targets...not vice versa. Overall the targets strike as low in several of the districts. We would particularly call out Old Town/ Chinatown where the city aspires a remarkably low 10% canopy cover. The explanation we received was that Old Town/ Chinatown is an historic district and it did not historically have a lot of trees. We would respectfully suggest that designation as an historic district was meant to perpetuate environmental deficiencies and environmentally destructive practices.

Comments on the recent tree survey: Customization

Want to increase response rates, signal to your citizens you know something about where they live? Many of the questions on a recent survey do not relate to my environment. Surveys, reports, and recommendations need to be CUSTOMIZED for major clusters of neighborhood environments, urban and suburban to start. Group neighborhoods by zip code, categorize them by type and then customize the survey questions based on type and based on a person's zip code they will be better able to answer your questions and you can ask more pointed questions?

If you have trees at the property where you live, why do you have trees?
Check all that apply.

- I want trees
- I have good places to plant trees
- Trees are affordable to buy and plant
- Trees are affordable to maintain
- I don't mind the work
- I know about planting or caring for trees
- Trees are a priority
- I was educated on the importance of trees
- An organization offered to plant trees
- Trees were planted on my property before I arrived
- I'm the property owner
- Other

If you don't have trees at the property where you live, why not?
Check all that apply.

- I don't want trees
- There are no good places to plant trees
- Trees are too expensive to buy and plant
- Trees are too expensive to maintain
- Trees are too much work
- I don't know anything about planting or caring for trees
- I have bigger priorities than trees
- I have never thought about it
- I'm not the property owner
- Other

What Citizens Bring to the Table - If Allowed To Do So

Resources of citizens include (but are not limited to) diversity, local knowledge, cosmopolitanism, real-time sensors, and subject experts.

Diversity

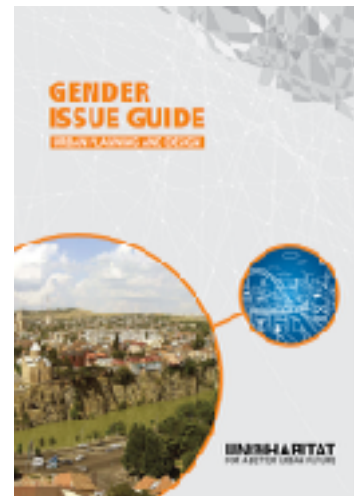
On race & architecture

Facing the design profession's diversity problem—and its changing future

BY CURBED FEB 22, 2017, 9:06AM EST

It will take a lot longer to diversify the professional classes in many fields, not to suggest the process

should not be a priority, but women and people of color are available now to integrate formal and informal working groups. Suburban values trump urban ones. Home owners trump renters. Native-born Portlanders trump newcomers. Developers trump residents. White and Male trumps all.



Local knowledge

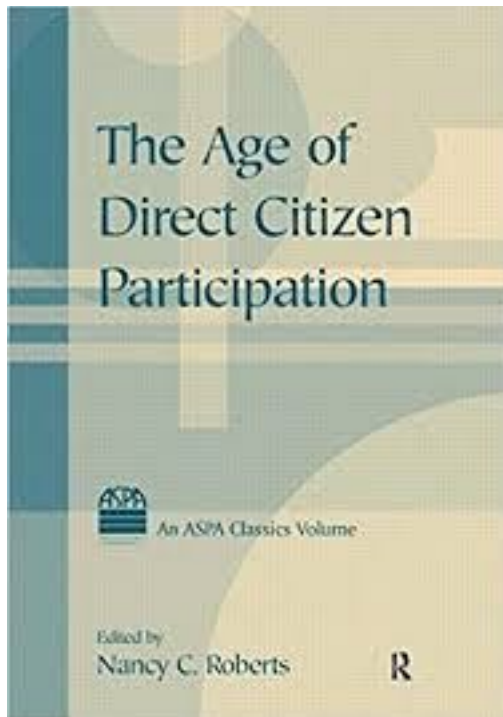
Odd to bring up as we are living in the same City, but then there are the 90+ neighborhoods and major differences exist between urban and suburban values, lifestyles, built environment, as well as big differences in race, age, and cultural diversity all of which contributed to how we experience and what expectations we have about what is need for their neighborhood. I understand Commissioner Eudaly is the first renter to be elected in twenty-eight years?

Cosmopolitanism

You won't see much innovation by keeping the business, technical and professional classes meeting among themselves as "stakeholders" separate from residents who are coming to Portland from different cities, countries and cultures.

Real-time Improvement sensors

One of the most interesting things about innovation is the best of ideas and solutions come from the user, individuals living with the problem (there is not just one kind of user). Our residents serve as sensors, providing valuable feed back creating a circle of continual improvement.



Subject Experts

There are residents who are also subject experts in areas that the architecture, design, planning, policy and elected officials do not have to include marketing, sales, information services, entrepreneurship, STEM, organizational development, deep democracy, and information technology.

Yet, research shows that citizen knowledge of the ABC's of government, especially how they are financed, is low, very low.

Ruth Ann Barrett
Sustainability Advocate
pdxdowntown.com

June 1, 2017

P.S. I included the cover of this book, part of an ASPA Classics Overview in part because in the mid-seventies I was Chair of the ASPA Committee on Women in Public Administration and was active in the Association while a staff member of the Institute for Local Self Government, the research arm of the League of California Cities. I was mentored by PA leaders including the former Mayor of Oakland, CA and the then Dean of Public Administration at Golden Gate University. Before coming to the Institute I worked in Washington, D.C. for the National Association for Community Development (NACD). We represented Community Action Agency (CAA) directors from across the United States. Much of the neighborhood movement in later years can be traced back to the the days of Community Action and the OEO when local residents received monies directly from the Federal government for projects *they agreed were important*.