

memo

to	Dustin Nilsen and Will Norris, City of Hood River
from	Alex Dupey, AICP, Nathan Polanski, PE, MIG
re	The Heights Streetscape Plan
	Draft Stakeholder Meeting Summary
date	May 10, 2021

This memorandum summarizes the major themes identified during a series of small group interviews conducted in April and May 2021. These interviews were conducted by MIG, Inc., the consultant project manager, and the Next Door, part of the consultant team charged with facilitating meetings with primarily Spanish-speaking participants. Stakeholder meeting were organized to gather input on the project area from individuals and groups with a specific interest in the area (e.g., they own a business in the Heights) and provided an opportunity for the project team to explore specific issues in depth. Meetings were captured using one to two notetakers. Summaries are attached as Appendix A at the end of this document. The project team facilitated the following small groups (attendees does not include City staff or consultant team members):

- Landmarks Board (Cindy Walbridge, Jeff Dellis, Cathy Orfall. Jennifer Kaden, Arthur Babitz), May 4 11:00am-12:00 pm
- Latinos en Accion (see attached summary notes for attendees), April 8, 5:00 pm
- Latino businesses in the project area (seven attendees), April 7 6:30-8:00 pm
- Up Valley community members (Randy Franz, Heather Staten, Jonathan Graza), May 4 1:00-2:00 pm
- Community organizations that have taken an active role in previous planning efforts or provided previous input on the Heights (Megan Ramey, Tina Lassen, Kristi Chapman), May 6 4:00-5:00 pm
- Businesses (Katie Kadlub. Businesses were invited but did not attend), May 7 3:00-4:00 pm

Each group was asked similar questions as well as questions specific related to their areas of interest. The following themes emerged from the interviews.

Preserve the Area as a Local Destination

Most participants characterized this area as "locally serving" and distinct from Downtown or the waterfront that may be more tourism focused. It is a location where area residents go to get everyday items. It is also an area between the hospital and community college, with a unique set of services. One

participant said, "**it is comforting to be in the Heights**." While some meeting participants felt the Heights should be local, there was an understanding of the need for strong connections to other parts of the city and agricultural areas and Mt Hood to the south when talking about how the Heights fits in with the broader Hood River context.

A number of meeting participants spoke about the evolution of the area over time. Past infrastructure projects, such as the roadway fill and culverts across Indian and Adams Creeks, led to area's development. Over time, the farm to market road changed with the creation of the 12th/13th couplet that has changed the district. While the local focus of the Heights as a neighborhood has remained, **many respondents felt the streets are more about moving cars as opposed to supporting a walkable district and adjacent neighborhoods**.

Slow Down Traffic

There was general consensus among participants that speeds are too fast in the Heights. Northbound motorists on 12th Street do not slow down upon entering the couplet and commercial area. One participant suggested that because the southern entrance to the Heights is particularly car-centric; enhancements for people walking and biking are needed and **bicycle lanes south to Elliot Drive should be considered**.

Similarly, southbound traffic on 13th enters the Heights moving quickly through the May Avenue intersection. A number of participants said maintaining access to businesses and parking on both sides of the street is important because 12th and 13th Streets are hard and unsafe to cross and people don't have to cross the street.

Make Crossing Streets Safer

There was general consensus among all meeting participants that crossing 12th and 13th Streets was dangerous for people of all ages and abilities. One participant labeled the 12th/13th Street couplet **the "Great Wall" for pedestrians**. Intersections at both ends of the Heights (May to the north and Belmont to the south) do a poor job of setting the tone for speed and safety within the Heights. A number of problem intersections were identified specifically:

- Belmont Avenue intersections: Drivers are travelling at high speed as they enter the Heights from the north on 12th Street. The 12th Street/Belmont intersection does not provide visual cues that drivers are entering a pedestrian area. A number of participants also said the 13thStreet/Belmont Avenue vicinity is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists because of limited sightlines along the curve and long crosswalks. Vehicles are also increasing speed as they leave the Heights on 13th Streets.
- May Street intersections: Drivers are generally travelling fast southbound on 13th Street through this intersection, particularly during the winter when stopping on the hill could make it difficult to maintain momentum. Participants said that the fast moving traffic and general lack of traffic control makes this area dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. The free right turn from May Street to 13th Street is also challenging. Similarly, the right turn lane on 12th Street to eastbound May Avenue was also identified and dangerous; although there is a signal at this intersection, several participants said they feel unsafe crossing the street and it is challenging for pedestrians from the Hospital to access businesses south of May Street.

• **Taylor Avenue/Pine Street intersections:** Many meeting participants said this is a primary east/west corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists and also primary route for students crossing the streets to attend the schools and access parks in the area.

Participants also said that it is hard to see traffic because of **limited site distance at intersections** throughout the Heights. Participants who drive in the area said cars are parked too close to the intersections, requiring them to edge out into traffic (while also blocking sidewalks). Participants who walk in the area said they have a hard time being seen, and with the speed of cars, do not feel comfortable stepping into travel lanes. **Suggested changes to the corridor included slower speeds, bulb outs, and reconfiguring parking to improve visibility**.

Improve Connections to Neighborhoods and Schools

Participants in all of the stakeholder meetings talked about the benefits of living in or near the Heights. Services are generally within walking distance and side streets are relatively quiet. There was general consensus that safe pedestrian connections from the Heights into the neighborhoods is important, as is being able to cross 12th and 13th Streets safely (described in more detail, above). The long-term desire is for safe streets to support neighborhoods and businesses.

Some participants highlighted the need to provide safe connections to schools. While kids are within walking distance of schools, participants said some parents will drive kids even short distances due to pedestrian safety. Participants also suggested that this project align with the results of City's current **Safe Routes to School Project** now underway in the area (NOTE: the projects are coordinating).

Improve Bicycle Connections and Amenities

Potential future configurations of bicycle lanes on 12th and 13th Streets were discussed, including whether those should be two-way, the type of separation needed, and other details. One participant noted that two-thirds of the right-of-way is dedicated for vehicles and questioned whether that is appropriate for the Heights. Another noted that there are very few bicycle racks or existing facilities for people biking in the Heights. Comments from participants generally fell into these categories

- **Dangerous conditions in the Heights**. The current road design is very dangerous for cyclists because of a lack of bicycle lanes, fast traffic, and poor sight lines. As a result, cyclists ride on the sidewalk, which affects pedestrians.
- **Motorists are uncertain**. For motorists, bicyclists are a challenge because they are unpredictable. Some participants complained about having to share vehicle travel lanes with cyclists.
- The area needs better, more connected bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Heights should be better connected for bicycles and pedestrians. There were many opinions about how that might occur and whether that includes removing parking and/or travel lanes, adding bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, or some combination of those elements.

While many people supported adding bicycle lanes on 12th and 13th Streets, there was a broader discussion in a number of meetings about the highest and best future use of the right-of-way. This included discussions about wider sidewalks, preserving on-street parking, or adding other amenities that would use the existing right-of-way. Some said this is a discussion about which values should be prioritized and whether that is motor vehicle mobility, pedestrians and cyclists, or a more balanced approach.

Several participants also noted that A Street and Wilson Street are important east/west connections for people biking.

Build on the Area's Character and History

Participants talked about the Heights' many local businesses that are regular stopping places, including up-valley residents who come to the Heights instead of other locations. The area also has a high percentage of Latino/a-owned businesses, which creates a unique location and hub within the city. Some participants talked about its history as a gateway to orchards and Mt. Hood, as well as an area with historic Main Street qualities that are different than Downtown. Many are worried that this character will be overshadowed by new development but recognize the opportunity to invest in infrastructure (transportation system and utilities) to support community and future needs.

Manage On-Street Parking

Every stakeholder group talked about parking and there is no agreement on how on street-parking should be allocated in the Heights. Businesses would like to maintain parking and some suggested that it be metered (others were very against metered spaces). There were also discussions about whether onstreet parking should convert to bicycle lanes, parklets, or other uses. Up valley participants were against any changes to on-street parking but acknowledged the need for safe places for people to bike. Others are concerned that permitted future residential development in the Heights will take all of the on-street parking now used for businesses. There were, however, generally two points of agreement:

- Current parking in the Heights is dangerous because it is too close to corners, which makes it dangerous for motorists as well as pedestrians and cyclists.
- Side streets are underutilized, and may some have opportunity to provide additional parking if reconfigured, such as converting parallel parking to angled parking (there was no discussion of back-in parking).

Conclusions

Meeting participants we very engaged in the discussion and want to stay involved in future meetings and activities in the Heights. While there is general consensus on a number of topic areas, use of existing rights-of-way, parking, urban form, and other elements will require additional public input as part of the concept development process that will occur in Phase 2 of the streetscape plan. As in-person communication becomes more feasible, additional outreach will be required with local businesses to supplement this initial stakeholder assessment.

Attachments

- 1. Heights Streetscape Plan: Stakeholder Questionnaire (2 pages)
- 2. Notes from Stakeholder Meetings (14 pages)



THE HEIGHTS STREETSCAPE PLAN: STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRE

General:

- 1. What do you think are the biggest opportunities and/or challenges with transportation in the Heights today? What do you think is needed to address the challenges you have identified?
- 2. What do you think can be done to improve traffic and/or make intersections safer than they are today?
- 3. What attracts (or detracts) you to the area? If the corridor were to change by adding landscaping, lighting, and other streetscape features (e.g. benches, planting, street trees), do you think that would change your perception of the area? Should the corridor be left alone?
- 4. If you could pick one thing to change in the area, what would it be?

Business owners/operators:

- 5. Why did you choose to locate in the Heights?
- 6. Are there particular features that you think could be improved along the corridor to support your business?
- 7. Do you have off-street parking? If so, how do people access the lot? Do other businesses use your lot or is it reserved?
- 8. Do you think on-street parking is well used? Who do you think uses it most regularly (e.g. visitors, employees, business patrons)? What if on-street parking were used for something else, like bike lanes or wider sidewalks with additional seating?
- 9. How does your business receive deliveries? For example, do they come to the front or back door? Do you know the type of delivery vehicles that are typically used and where and how they access your business (e.g. off-street parking lot, on-street parking, alley)?

Active Transportation:

- 10. Do you consider this to be a safe (e.g., accessible, comfortable, easy to navigate) environment if you are walking or riding a bike? What are the biggest challenges for bicycles and pedestrians in this corridor?
- 11. What do you think would make it more comfortable for cyclists and walkers to use the area? What would it take for you to walk or ride your bike in the corridor (if you don't already)?
- 12. Who are the people walking, biking or taking transit in the corridor? Do they take transit or other modes of travel to get to jobs/businesses? For transit riders, are there areas with a higher density of riders?
- 13. If you are on foot or bike, are there particular locations along the corridor that attract people? Are there other connections in the area that people are traveling to?
- 14. In your opinion, what is the most challenging or dangerous location for crossing the road by foot?
- 15. What improvements do you think are most needed in the corridor to improve multimodal travel? Are there examples that you think would fit well into this corridor?



16. How well do you think transit serves this area?



THE HEIGHTS STREETSCAPE PLAN: STAKEHOLDER QUESTIONNAIRE

General (Both Groups):

- 1. Can you raise your hand if you saw the City's online survey for The Heights Streetscape Plan Project? Can you raise your hand if you took it?
 - Only 2 have heard of this project before this meeting.
- 2. Do you think the streets in the Heights (see map below) work well for people driving, walking, biking, and taking the bus?
 - It seems perfect to me that they do this type of remodeling and have the streets outline so bicycles can have their own lane.
 - I have seen that there is more traffic every day, so I agree that the renovations should be done
 - I don't think they are safe
 - No, the streets are not safe, people who come from outside go in the opposite direction on the street going down the hospital even if there are signs. This just happened to me last week
 - I worked right at the corner on Belmont and 13th and I have seen almost every two weeks someone driving the opposite way.
 - Also where Pine Street is, the cars can't see the area where pedestrians cross the street so I think it is a good plan to do this renovation
 - There should be a lane for people who ride bicycles and also a yellow light for pedestrians who cross the street, they are hard to see when crossing because of the cars that are parked.
 - It is super difficult to pass between Belmont Street and 13th Street because there is not good visibility when we want to pass towards Belmont.
 - There is no good visibility across the street to the paint store. Where the US Bank is, it is very saturated with cars.
 - It is also difficult for me to cross the street where Pine Street and the mail office is
 - I also agree with the person who said that there is poor visibility when trying to cross by car between the US Bank, parked cars obstruct visibility for cars, pedestrians and cyclists
 - Participant ask: How far are 12th and 13th streets considered for remodeling? Dustin answered from North May Street to Belmont



Business owners/operators:

- 1. What do you like about the Heights business area and why did you choose to locate your business in the Heights?
- 2. Can you describe the current parking options for your business? Would you like to see any changes in parking options in the Heights?
- 3. What if on-street parking were used for something else, like bike lanes or wider sidewalks with additional seating or trees?
- 4. Can you describe how deliveries access your business?
- 5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your business being in the Heights?

Latinos En Accion

- 1. Do you spend time in the Heights? What do you do in the Heights?
 - It is a place of business and restaurants and I used them to go to eat
 - Gasoline (fuel station) is important to me

2. What do you think attracts people to the Heights?

- The Saint Mary's church is in the area and I think that attracts a lot of us
- I live in the heights by OCH area and the truths is that I like it a lot because I can find things that are necessary for me. I can walk to a lot of places. When driving when I am getting closer to 12 ant 13 it gets a little more difficult to drive for me.
- I feel this remodeling plans are very important because this are the 2 streets that take us to downtown Hood River.
- Food businesses
- Is a commerce area, the church, coffee shops, and restaurants. And yes there should be more marked crossing areas well identified for pedestrians.
- The corner between Belmond and 13 is very dangerous to pass because it is not well marked for the crossing
- Also to cross the street to get to the Thai House restaurant gets a bit dangerous because the cars sometimes come at high speed
- I think that the people who use the heights more are the people who live in town, I think that tourists stay more in downtown. We locals use it for restaurants, services and for work too
- Parking is a big problem in the heights, parking on the streets causes no visibility
- Flashing lights for pedestrians
- Maybe a stoplight at 13th street



- I agree with the traffic lights because there are many people who like to use those streets for exercise such as running and there are many places where it is not possible to cross safely
- There should be another area where cars can park. And that that area will only be used for walking
- Participant question: All the ideas we are giving are good, but does Dustin already has his plan made and if yes changes still can be made? Dustin: Right now the project is to listen to ideas and voices, we don't have a design, and we don't have a plan. We need to make a plan and for now we are just listening to the community. This plan is 15 to 18 months before starting to build.

3. What do you think are the biggest concerns for the Heights residents and business owners?

- Parking
- A safe place to park
- We live in a city where it snows in the winter and sometimes it snows a lot. So it is very difficult to clean the streets when there is snow and the drainage is covered with snow. It is a big problem. It would be better if the parking was not on the streets so that they could be better cleaned in the winter.

4. Are there locations that the community gathers in the area?

- I feel that people gather in the corner by el Potrillo and Chicken Teriyaki Restaurant

If so, what draws them there? If not, what specifically would help draw the Latino/a community to new gathering areas?

- parking near by
- Benches to make it look more beautiful
- Hours to park on the street
- The businesses that exist in downtown are not the same as those above, bringing more businesses, more restaurants, brewers to attract more tourists to the heights. (I don't want it to be filled with bars either)
- Benches on the sidewalks for pedestrians to rest
- Boutiques to attract more tourists
- The business façade
- Stores of different cultures, that there would be more opportunities for small businesses
- Better not bring more restaurants here because otherwise they will raise the price for us
- Organize something like the first Friday



- Benches to sit down
- Build a kiosk/refreshment stand
- A sky transportation like the one at OHSU to go down to downtown
- Events with Music in Spanish to dance

5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

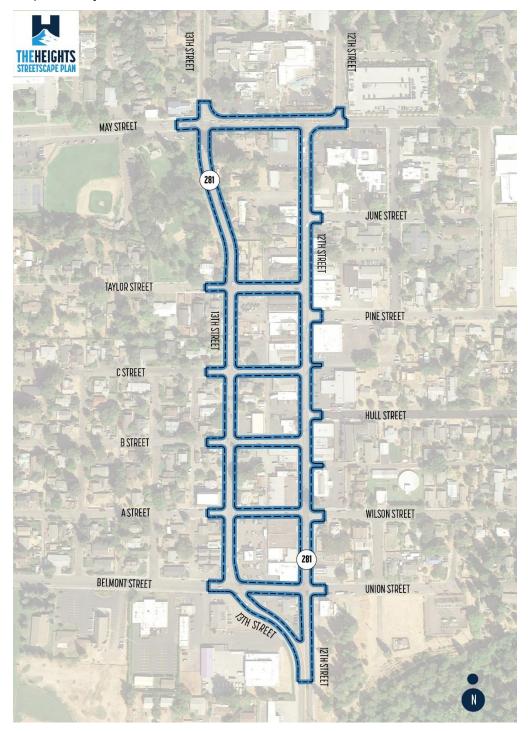
Participant asked:

– After the focus group, how are we going to know how they took into account our opinions in the plan?

Dustin: This is the first part of the project. We will hopefully have more meetings in person throughout the year after this focus group. We will have more meetings with other URACs, committees, boards, more ideas from the community and other community organizations and then we will show elected officials. Then we will return with more information and as the plan progresses that is where the ideas will be seen.



Map of Study Area



Heights Focus Group for Latino Business

April 7, 2021 6:30 PM-8:00 PM

Notes by Joel Pelayo Facilitator by Gabriel Muro

Participants: Rosa Ayala Taqueria Ayala, Nabor Matias (chicken Teriyaki), Teresa Ocampo Chiken Teriyaki, Abby Capovilla, Mary Ortega Lake Taco, Dustin Nilsen, Emmanuel Flores, Mayra Ceja and Liliana Justo Bello The Next Door Economic Development.

- **Emmanuel Flores** works in the area of Belmont he is from The Dalles. Mary Rivas owns the Lake Taco. She said Hood River is growing a lot and the housing is very expensive.
- **Dustin, Director of City planning of Hood River** says it is very important to listen the voice of the community.
- **Rosa Ayala** has been living in this area for 15 years in Odell. She owns the business of Taqueria Ayala. She wishes to listen about what others think.
- Maryra Ceja has been living in Odell for 10 years. She said, "I like that Hispanics are included." I see lots of traffic on the streets 12th and 13th. As an open place it is very difficult because there is no place for parking. I know other business from outside will come here. My business is small and it is not fair we live here, but they can come in too. It is important to listen how this will benefit us.
- **Dustin** was talking about the project plan, what is going to happen. It is an important part of the project for the community to be heard. We need to hear their ideas about security, traffic, etc. This is the first step, to plan focus groups to learn what they think about safety, pedestrians, cars, bicycles, etc. The next parts of the project we will continue with the design then the construction.
- **Gabriel** asked to raise your hand if participants have been having access to the survey: Only Mary Ortega raised her hand, the majority have not heard about it.
- Do you think the streets of the heights work well for the people... Cars do not respect the speed limit. And drivers from outside the area take the wrong way on 12th street.

What do you like about business area of the heights, why do you decide to put your business in this area? Would you like to see any changes, options for parking?

Mary Ortega (Lake Taco): When we installed our business, there was not too much traffic. It was more accessible, more independent from the tourism. Now there is too much traffic and it is more out of control. It is more difficult to cross the streets for pedestrians, there are not good signs, and we should focus more on the pedestrian's safety.

Liliana Justo Bello, There is too much traffic. Lots of business are hidden, and some have better location than others. The real problem is that there is not sufficient parking, some are OK and others are not.

Mary Ortega: At our location parking is not working, but other business have little availability. Driver's park on the close streets and walk over.

One customer said "They will start to build apartments close to the Jackson Park."

Mayra: I agree with Mary Ortega we need more parking. It is important that the parking will be free, no charge for the parking.

Mrs. Ayala There is no parking now and so people leave.

Liliana Justo Bello: There are lots of conflicts for the business. There are big buildings, also there are churches and many visitors.

If you do something different you should consider the Summer traffic flow and now with the COVID the tourism has come more into the Heights.

If you are going to charge for parking, we will have very difficult times.

Gabriel Muro: I believe it will be fluid in terms of traffic flow. There are hours that are very busy and others less so.

Liliana Justo Bello: There are banks, and when their parking is full, the drivers park outside on the streets.

Mary Ortega: Is very close to the hospital, also there is a fire department, the traffic is congested close to emergency vehicles.

Gabriel showed us the street plan

Nabor: I would like to see 12th street to be blocked at the exit close to Juanitas. There have been several crashes. We should leave the exit area free, or add the modification like a tree that provides shade, a garden place to purify the air.

What about using it for to bicycles, sidewalks, benches, etc.

Mayra: I know it is important for pedestrians and the bicycles not circulate out of their lane and I'm afraid to hit them. They are careless. I would like more space for parking. Sometimes I do not support room for benches, because they will take out space for parking.

Mary Ortega: The streets are very narrow. They were not planned well, so the traffic is very congested. At May Street there are two schools, lots of school buses and lots of bicycles. Not sufficient planning when they built many of the buildings. At Juanitas, there are people that do see well and they are affected by the lack of a clear view of traffic. If this remodeling is to going make it more fluid, that is good.

Nabor: I agree, there are problems with routes of bicycles. Maybe they could be restricted on a different schedule, like prohibited at late afternoon? It could prevent lots of accidents. It will help with the congestion if we can use the schedule with not much traffic for bicycles. **Teresa Ocampo** If you build lines for bicycles, I think that there are small business that will be blocked. If there are pedestrians walking with their dog that is not easy to see them either.

Mary Ortega: One option is on Belmont Street where you could build a big parking lot that could benefit the heights. There is not much housing there now and this will help.

How is your business deliveries load and unloading?

Nabor: It is necessary to pave the access to business. There are parts of the streets where the taqueria is located that is full of holes right now.
Mary Ortega: If people park on 13th street the neighbors are not happy, because they do not have sufficient space. It is complicated and it is dangerous. They do not have sufficient space there are big trucks, it is complicated.

Anything else you would like to share?

Mayra: I have a small business, and I put a sign on the side walk that calls the attention to customers. I had some flashing lights too. After two months the city sent a paper saying I need to remove it all because I'm not suppose put up any signs. The economy is not going well, and this is unfair. **Mary Ortega**: They will be increasing costs to lots of things, it will need to balance costs & profit for different business, because for sure costs will increase.

Rosa: We are paying for everything they do not allow us install signs, not even a small taco sign. I put out a table and they did not accept that either. One pays for everything and I don't know why.

Nabor: On the small street (alley?), they could plant grass in order to prevent the accumulation of garbage.

Liliana Justo Bello: Signs are not professional, the way they are exhibited. At times. It does not add visibility, but it is very important to create a solution.

Questions to Dustin

Will you charge for parking? There is no plan to charge for parking. At the city center they charge because there was no parking! Any decisions will be at the design phase, they are just starting, and they are taking inputs from the community.

Liliana Justo Bello: What factors are taking into consideration for this project about safe streets? Factors include bicycles on the main street, housing, schools, and creating the future. We are just taking information and we know the impact of the main factor is the safety.

Nabor (Chiken Teriyaki): As my personal opinion, I would like to install parking meters. It is better than parking machines, because it will reduce impact on business.

Dustin answers: there is no guarantee, is not in the plan, we have them at the city center because it is congested!

Liliana Justo Bello: How long it will take?

Dustin: 15 to 28 months

Mary Ortega Lake Taco: Living here is related to Cascade Street, where Taco Bell is located and there will be another project.

Mayra: Maybe they will charge for parking in the future. It's clear it will be traffic congestion and crowded. It is happening already, they are cheating.

Dustin: it is not in the plan. When we have problems at the City Center, it was a normal solution, so it could happen.

There will be another meeting?

Dustin: Yes, many. We do not have one programed, I hope we can have one inperson. There will be more meetings including Latinos.

Liliana Justo Bello: There will be follow up as the project continues?

Gabriel Muro: Is it written in stone?

Dustin: Something will happen depending how the changes happen

Abby: There will be an opportunity of working together. I hope we accomplish a lot in the future, it will be something!



NEETINGS

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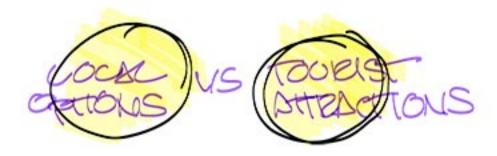
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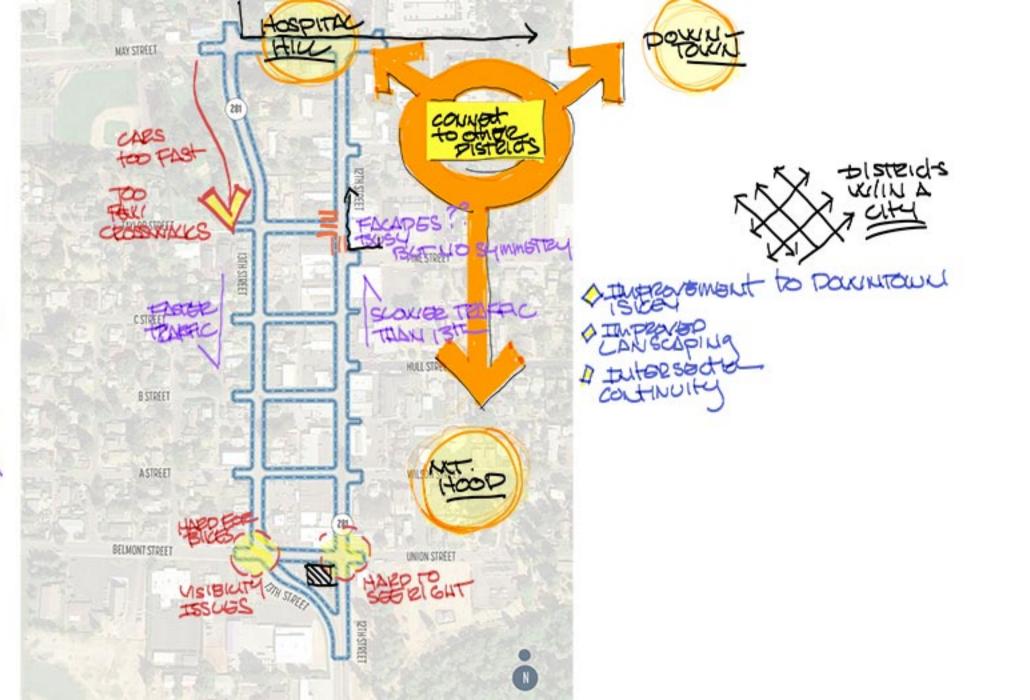
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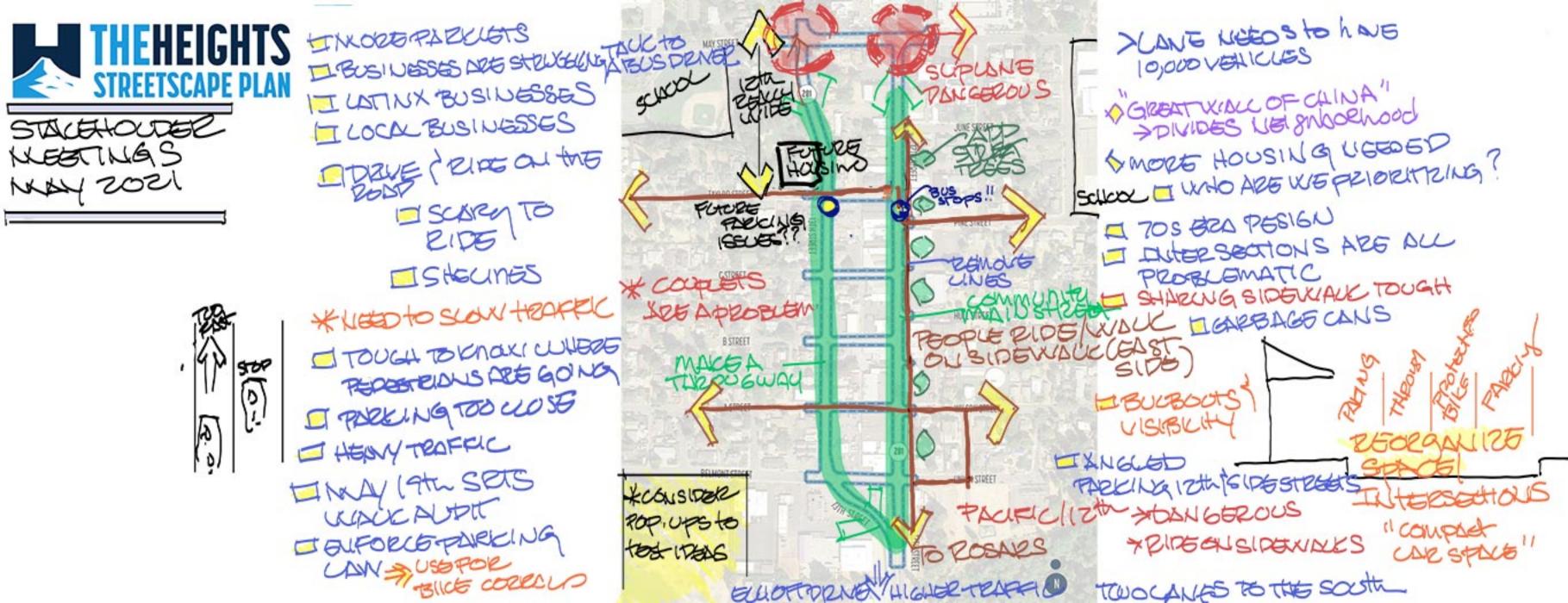
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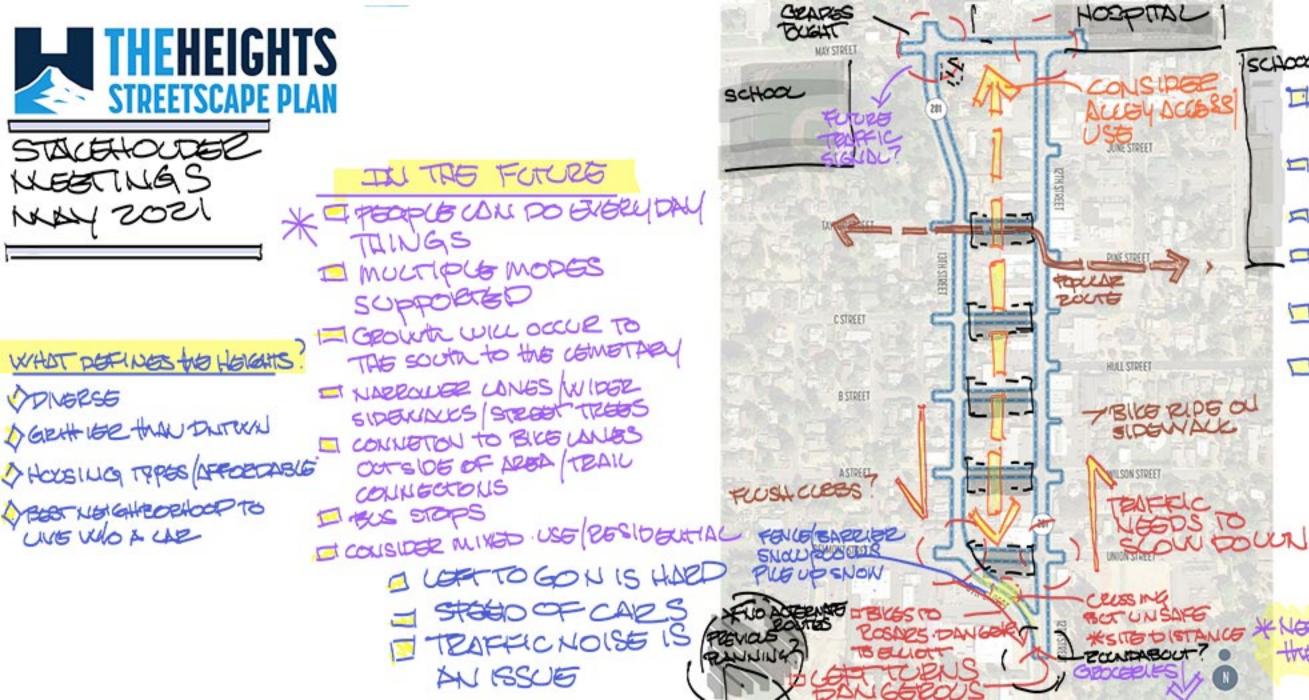
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