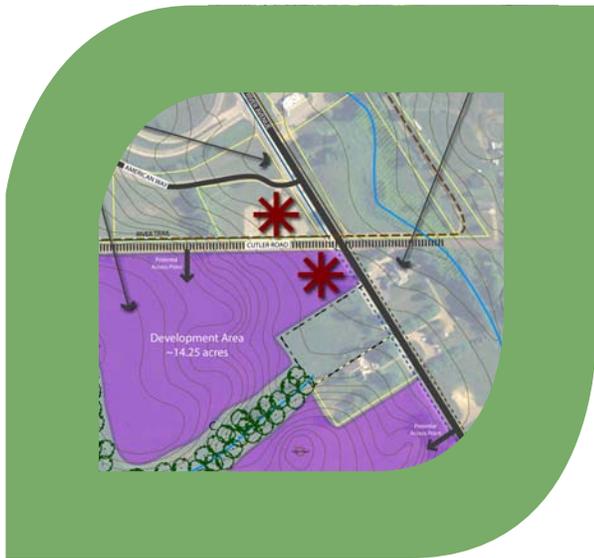


# *Subarea Concept Plan*



*draft: april 8, 2010*



## **Why do we plan?**

The goals and strategies of the 2008 Portland Master Plan specifically address the 58 acres, located at the southwest corner of the Grand River Avenue and Cutler Road intersection, purchased and annexed by the city in 2007. The Future Land Use Map identifies the site as a potential mixed use area. The Plan further recommends the development of viable land use and development strategies for this site. To achieve that goal, LSL Planning, Inc. was retained by Portland in 2009 to assist the Planning Commission and Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and to prepare a master plan for the area. The resulting subarea plan takes a proactive approach to site development and encourages growth in harmony with the vision, values, and overall character of Portland. It also helps guide future development by addressing:

1. Vision, values, and character for the property;
2. Site specific opportunities and constraints;
3. Conceptual site development plan; and
4. Implementation actions and strategies.

## **Planning Process.**

The process to develop the subarea plan progressed with regular feedback from city staff, the EDC, and the City Planning Commission. It included several key steps:

1. Analyze site
2. Identify opportunities and constraints
3. Develop concept alternatives
4. Hold a joint visioning session with EDC and Planning Commission
5. Develop a Concept Development Plan

## **Overview.**

### **Context**

The City of Portland, with an estimated population of 3,800, is located along the I-96 corridor approximately 25 miles from downtown Lansing and 45 miles from downtown Grand Rapids. The site is located near the I-96/Grand River Avenue interchange in an area where land use patterns



shift from higher density commercial and residential to a more rural and agricultural pattern, south into Danby Township. The parcel is vacant with no improvements and has historically been farmed. The property has rolling terrain with views of the city and highway at its highest point. Large trees dot the perimeter and a small but dense forest is located in the southwest corner. Two drainage channels divide the property into three segments. These channels eventually converge with the Looking Glass River. The property has continuous frontage on Grand River Avenue, except for a 1.8 acre out-parcel with 200 feet of frontage, located approximately 430 south of the Grand River Avenue and Cutler Road intersection. That parcel contains a residence and a locally owned business. Other nearby businesses include a fast-food restaurant, a veterinary practice, a small medical office building, and an auto dealership.



58-acre site (outliend)

**Site Access**

I- 96, located to the north of the site, connects Detroit (in the east), with Grand Rapids and eventually Muskegon (in the west). Michigan Department of Transportation estimates show between 30,000 and 32,000 vehicles travel the interstate daily near Portland.

The site fronts on Grand River Avenue, a primary regional corridor that parallels I-96 through Ionia County and continues into Eaton and Kent Counties. It carries approximately 3,200 vehicles daily in the vicinity of the subject property and is maintained by the Ionia County Road Commission.

Cutler Road parallels the north property line and is a gravel road connecting Grand River Avenue to Charlotte Highway. It currently serves one commercial property and a religious institution.



# Existing Conditions

## **What is on the site now?**

It is important to understand the most appealing site characteristics (opportunities), and challenges that will need to be addressed (constraints) to prepare a realistic and manageable development plan. The following correspond to the letters indicated on Map 1.

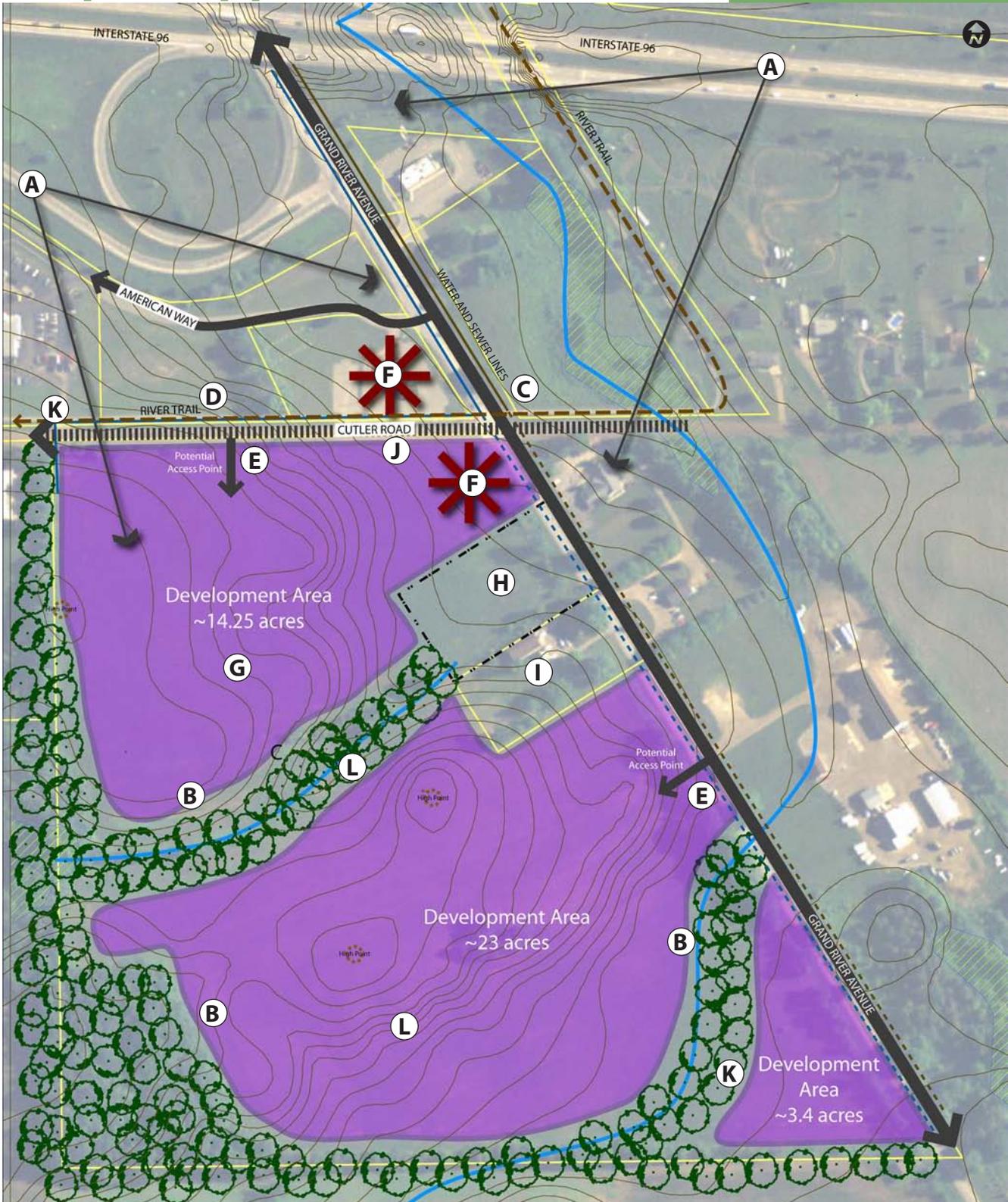
## **Opportunities.**

- A. The site is highly visible from westbound I-96 as well as from eastbound I-96 to the Grand River Avenue exit ramp.
- B. The site has several natural features including two drainage channels, forest, and sloping terrain. Development should integrate with and compliment these.
- C. Water and sewer are available at the intersection of Cutler Road and Grand River Avenue and can be extended south along Grand River Avenue to serve the remainder of the property.
- D. The Portland River Trail is located on the north side of Cutler Road and is a great asset and attraction for the community. This site offers the potential to create a River Trail extension offering a non-motorized connection from the existing trail to future pathways.
- E. The site is easily accessed from Grand River Avenue and Cutler Road.
- F. The development character of the entire site can be affected by what happens at the southwest and northwest corners of the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Cutler Road. These sites must be carefully considered.
- G. With the exception of parcels marked “H” and “I” on Map 1, the City of Portland owns the entire 58 acre site, allowing for greater control of development on the property.

## **Constraints.**

- H. An agricultural supply store is proposed for this site. While the use may not be aligned with the vision, a retail business is appropriate for this location.
- I. This out-parcel potentially makes development of a unified character along Grand River Avenue difficult. If acquired, it could easily be incorporated with the overall development plan.
- J. Cutler Road will be a primary entryway. It is currently gravel and will need to be paved.
- K. Cutler Road reaches a high point at the west property line, which has sight distance implications for access.
- L. While natural features can help integrate development, they also pose a constraint whereby natural drainage, topography, and woodlands will need to be carefully considered during development.

# Map 1: Opportunities & Constraints



## ***What do we value?***

### **Vision, Values, and Character.**

An overall vision for the site helps guide the concept plan and provides a foundation for regulations to achieve a desired development pattern. The process to define a vision began with a review of the 2008 update to the City's Master Plan. The following statements from the Master Plan are pertinent to the subarea and were used as touchstones to define the values and character elements for the site:

- Maintain small town charm
- Blend modern development with historic architecture
- Enable attractive and healthy community growth
- Water resources are important ties among neighborhoods and commercial nodes
- Pedestrian orientation is key to future growth with ties to the community trail system
- Accentuate natural features
- Streetscape and pedestrian amenities are thoughtfully incorporated throughout the city
- Eye for detail promotes a high level of community interaction and cohesiveness
- Additional areas incorporated in the city are developed to mesh with existing development, providing ties into older neighborhoods via street, sidewalk, and trail system
- New commercial development outside the downtown will be of a different nature to provide distinct business areas that do not unduly compete with one another
- Non-core business districts will focus on larger-scale, higher intensity retail and service activity

## ***What do we want?***

The Planning Commission and EDC began to define values and character elements during a joint visioning session held January 25, 2010.

Participants identified examples of desirable development and features



to incorporate into a plan for the property. These included:

- Attractive water features
- Limit vehicular access to the site from Grand River Avenue
- Integrate development with the natural topography of the site
- Provide landscape buffers to protect adjoining residential properties
- Provide common stormwater detention/retention facilities for the entire development
- Take advantage of the site's unique visibility from the highway
- Enhance natural water courses to create greenways throughout the site
- Employ an overall design theme to create a unified character
- Provide safe and convenient pedestrian and non-motorized access to and within the site
- Enhance entrance features to create a welcoming atmosphere
- Provide internal street and drive patterns that are safe and intuitive
- Use native vegetation and natural landscaping whenever possible
- Maintain a scale of development that is in character with the small-town atmosphere of Portland
- Utilize green building technology and promote long-term building and community sustainability
- Use high quality building design and materials
- Allow a mix of compatible uses
- Provide an overall campus-style of development

**"With the topography and visibility from the highway, this site will be a billboard for our community."**

*-Julie Clement, Portland City Council*

### ***What don't we want?***

Several undesirable development options were identified during this process:

- "Big Box" style development
- Large "seas" of parking
- Being an unfriendly neighbor
- Lack of trees and landscaping
- Low quality building materials (i.e. sheet metal)
- Incompatible uses



## Example Educational Uses:

- *Satellite Campus*
- *Trade/Technical School*
- *Continuing Education/Life-Long Learning Center*

## Example Medical Uses:

- *Specialized Medical Offices*
- *Urgent Care Center*
- *Laboratories and Research*
- *Rehabilitation Center*

## Use.

As indicated by the Planning Commission and EDC, uses should create head-of-household jobs. These types of jobs are career-oriented, typically well-paying, positions that encourage the permanent relocation of individuals and families to the community. This type of employment helps stabilize not only Portland's economy, but the economy of the region as a whole.

Portland has a unique, historic, and vibrant downtown with retail, restaurants, and professional services. History has shown that in a small-town setting, competition from commercial development outside the traditional downtown can adversely impact the vibrancy and economic stability of the downtown. Portland values the unique, convenient, and small-town charm of its downtown. Therefore, new development outside the downtown should be different and create distinct business areas that do not create undue competition.

## Future Uses

The following uses for the site fulfill the need for head-of-household jobs and do not create direct competition with the downtown. The following descriptions and examples are intended only as a general guide for the type of uses desired for the site. Innovative, unique, and creative uses, or mixture of uses, are highly desirable.

### 1. Educational Facility

West Michigan is home to several world-class public institutions such as Michigan State University, Western Michigan University, Grand Valley State University, and Ferris State University. The region is also served by several private and community colleges offering a wide range of academic programs and classes. In Michigan, the number of jobs in the education/training profession is projected to grow 9% by 2016. Therefore, a satellite campus of an educational institution would not only provide jobs, but also advanced educational opportunities for residents of the region.

### 2. Medical Technology

Portland's close proximity to Sparrow Health Systems in Lansing and Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids makes Portland an ideal location for expanded and specialized medical facilities or laboratory space. An urgent care, or similar 24-hour emergency center, is also an identified community need. By 2016, the number of health care professionals/technicians and health care support jobs in Michigan are projected to increase by 15% and 20%, respectively. The life, physical, and social science industry is also expected to expand in Michigan, growing 9.2% by 2016. Portland has the opportunity to accommodate such uses and capitalize on these rapidly expanding fields.

### 3. Entertainment/Recreation

The desire for entertainment/recreational uses builds upon Portland's history as a destination for outdoor recreation. Walking and biking on

the Portland Rivertrail, kayaking and tubing on the Grand and Looking Glass Rivers, and a wide variety of park space (i.e. ball fields, horse arena, picnic shelters, etc.) attract numerous visitors and residents each year. An entertainment/recreational complex on this site could bolster the city's reputation as a regional recreation, health, and wellness destination. However, this type of use would not provide as many head-of-household jobs as other desired uses.

#### **4. Alternative Energy/Light Manufacturing and Industrial**

High energy costs and concerns regarding fiscal, social, and environmental community sustainability have led to an increase in the number of "green" jobs throughout the state and nation. Green jobs are positions within the following five sectors; 1) agriculture and natural resource conservation; 2) clean transportation and fuels; 3) increased energy efficiency; 4) pollution prevention or environmental cleanup; and 5) renewable energy production. The number of green jobs in Michigan increased 7.7% between 2005 and 2008, and continue to grow. A green technology related facility would also provide an opportunity for head-of-household employment.

The movie and film industry has also received growing state support with tax credits and incentives to attract the industry to Michigan. Several large film industry support operations have been proposed across Michigan and animation, post-processing, and editing facilities could provide investment and employment for the Portland area.

#### **Mix of Uses**

Mixing compatible uses in an area can result in dynamic and exciting environments, create a sense of place, and establish a sustainable business community. Therefore, due to the size of the site and volatile market forces, a mix of like-uses are desired. For example, a university satellite campus specializing in green technology development coupled with a start-up research and development firm and associated manufacturing and support facilities would result in a synergistic business environment. Uses that may not be in the same economic sector, but that are of the same intensity, could also coexist. A specialized medical office, a small hotel with meeting space, and a medical learning center could create a desired synergy.

Compatible uses also include support facilities such as small commercial and service establishments oriented to serve the primary use and/or highway travelers. However, such uses should be carefully considered as they may unduly compete with downtown.

#### **Other Uses**

While the uses desired by the EDC and Planning Commission are ideal for the site and community, an unpredictable economy and volatile market influence future development. Therefore, the City, EDC, and Planning Commission should reference the overall vision, values, and character elements when considering future land uses for this site and surrounding area.

### **Example Entertainment/ Recreational Uses**

- *Indoor Water Park*
- *Hotel/Conference Center*
- *Regional Recreation Complex*

### **Example Alternative Energy/Light Manufacturing & Industrial Uses**

- *Solar Panel or Wind Turbine Production*
- *Value-Added Agriculture*
- *Research and Development*
- *Film Industry Production*

# Alternative Concepts

## **Plan Development**

Two concept plans were developed and presented at a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and EDC. Alternative #1 is a more typical style of development and includes:

- Major buildings are oriented North/South or East/West
- Buildings are set back from roads and drives
- Vehicle-oriented design
- Development dominates natural features

Alternative #2 features a campus-style building arrangement:

- Central square is a focal point of development
- Buildings are integrated with natural features
- Balance of pedestrian and auto-oriented design (mix of large and small building setbacks)

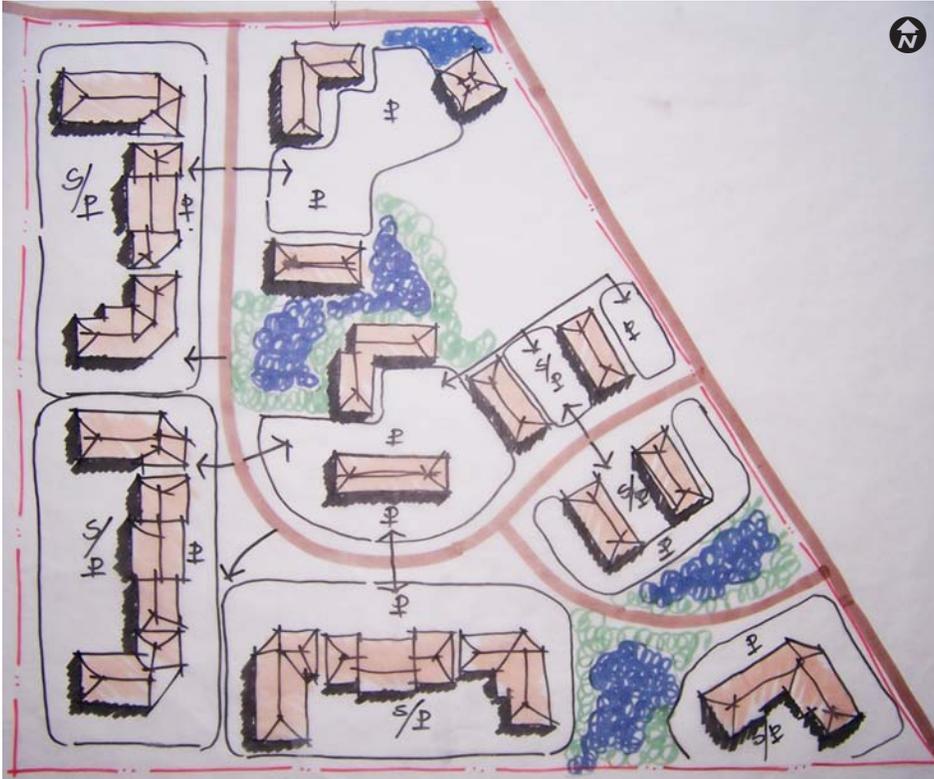
Planning Commission and EDC members overwhelmingly preferred Alternative #2, which was further refined to reflect desired community values, vision, and character elements.

*“There needs to be a unified theme that makes this development unique.”*

*-Joel VanSlambrouck, Portland Economic Development Corporation*

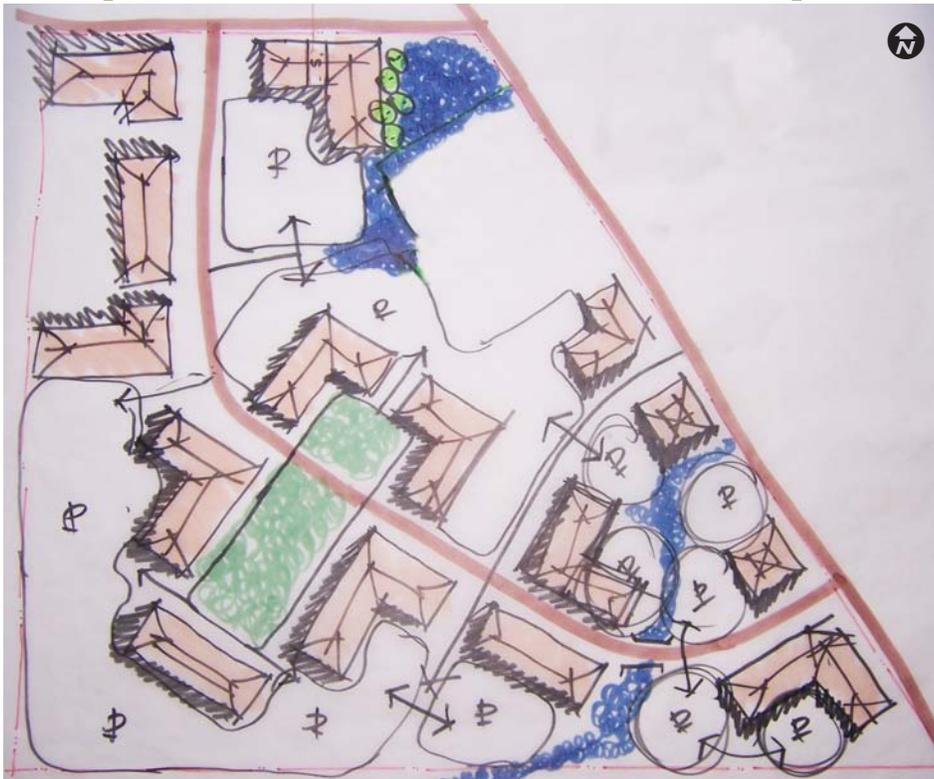


## Map 2: Alternative Concept #1



suburban-style development

## Map 3: Alternative Concept #2



campus-style development

## gateway features



### **How will it look?**

The concept plan is the visual representation of the desired values, and character elements. It also highlights and builds upon site opportunities and appropriately responds to constraints.

While the plan serves as a general guide for future development, it is not meant to be the final plan for the site. Rather, it translates community desires into a dynamic and flexible diagram that will help define regulations to achieve the vision.

The following correspond to the letters indicated on Map 4.

### **Concept Plan Elements.**

- A. Campus-Style Public Green.** The focal point is the campus-style green space located near the center of the site. This public space emulates the character of a university “quad” or town square. The 1.75 acre lawn is framed by 1.5 to 2 story buildings that create a sense of scale and define the public realm. The central campus incorporates natural landscaping, water features, public art, gathering areas, and/or other defining features.

The tree-lined street encircling the green space is narrow and a minor connection between the main road and parking lots. Building entrances should face the green and on-street parallel parking for visitors and guests be provided. Employee and service entrances are located on the parking lot side of buildings.

The green space and surrounding buildings are located atop the high point thereby integrating development with site topography. This location maximizes visibility from 96.

- B. Site Access.** A single main road connects Cutler Road and Grand River Avenue and provides access to interior buildings, parking lots, and service areas. It is flanked by a ten foot parkway on both sides of the street and a ten foot asphalt path connecting the site to the existing Portland River Trail. The curb cuts are well spaced from the intersection of Cutler Road and Grand River Avenue to allow for adequate site distance and vehicle queuing.

## campus-style common space



# Map 4: Concept Development Plan

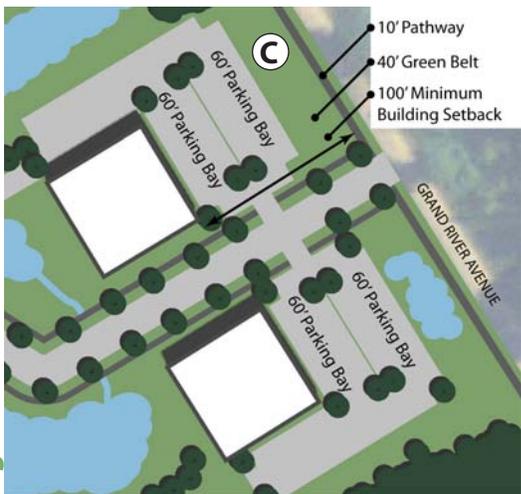


figure 1



figure 2

# Concept Plan

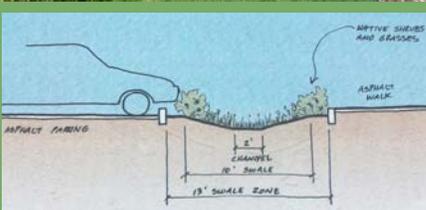
To provide safe and convenient access, direct access along both Grand River Avenue and Cutler Road are limited. In fact, most properties with this frontage share access via the main internal road. However, two other access points are provided on Grand River Avenue; the first, B1, provides access to a proposed retail store, while B2 is primarily a service entrance. A driveway on Cutler Road (B3) provides secondary service access. Driveways should also align with existing cross-street drives where possible.

Overall site entrances include gateway features that assist in wayfinding and create a sense of identity. They include landscaping, water features, uniform signage, and architectural or public art.

- C. Grand River Avenue Character.** To build on the unique character of Grand River Avenue as a transition area between highway commercial to the north and rural lands to the south, the plan responds accordingly by providing green space while still accommodating a limited amount of parking along the road frontage (see also Figure 1). It also accommodates:
  - 10' wide asphalt pathway connecting to the Portland River Trail
  - 40' vegetated green belt adjacent to the right-of-way that may include stormwater management
  - 100' minimum building setback
- D. Corner of Cutler Road and Grand River Avenue.** With a corner location, frontage on two roads and visibility from I-96, this site is highly desirable. However, due to topography, it is also the low point and the logical location for stormwater management (see Map 4). Rather than viewing this as a negative, such a facility could be coupled with a water feature, natural landscaping and well designed site signage to create a grand entrance, not only to the development but the community as a whole.

Conversely, given its highly visible and desirable location, pressure to develop at this location may prevail, requiring an alternate approach to stormwater management. Therefore, Figure 2 shows

vegetated swales



water features



site development that accommodates a larger development footprint coupled with a smaller stormwater facility. This location should nevertheless continue to be viewed as a key location as it can set the tone for quality and character. This suggests a well designed site plan, high-quality building materials, and thoughtful and attractive landscaping.

**E. Stormwater Management.** Two drainage channels currently carry stormwater from the southeast corner of the site to the northeast where at Grand River Avenue a culvert allows it to flow to the Looking Glass River.

Several quantity and quality management facilities can be accommodated on the site to address post-development stormwater discharge. These should be located along natural drainage ways and be incorporated as design elements into the overall site plan. This could be accomplished by using appropriate native vegetation and a more natural planting scheme.

In addition, the proposed greenbelt along Grand River Avenue could also accommodate stormwater management as could innovative techniques within parking lots, along streets and drives and landscaped areas. The following methods should be explored and applied:

- Vegetated swales and parking lot islands
- Rain gardens
- Vegetated roofs
- Stormwater capture and reuse
- Pervious paving material

**F. Landscaping.** A landscape design that is more natural in form and character, rather than formal and symmetrical, is more appropriate and a better response for this site.

Landscaping should also result in well-designed and attractive arrangements that are drought tolerant. Trees should line access drives and streets and also be located in parking lots to break up the monotony and expanse of large paved areas. Existing trees and vegetation currently create natural buffers between the site and surrounding properties, therefore, they should be retained where possible. Pockets of landscaping can also be used to better integrate stormwater management facilities and

**building & natural features integration**



**rain garden**



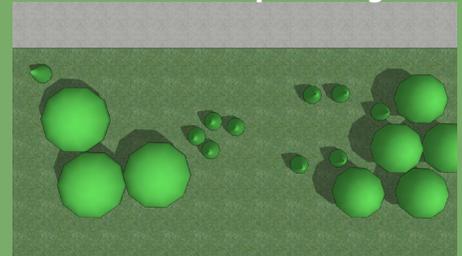
**vegetated roof**



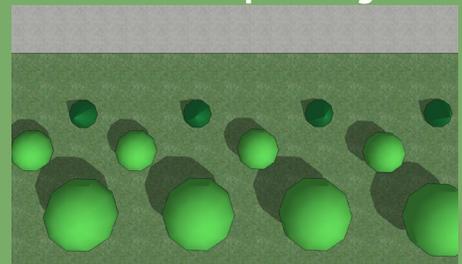
**pervious paving**



**natural landscape design**



**formal landscape design**



buildings into the site.

- G. Building Design.** Buildings should be designed and arranged to create a campus-style atmosphere with clearly defined outdoor spaces. Building materials must be durable and high-quality including brick, stone, architectural steel and glass and decorative masonry block. Building entrances must be clearly defined, face public streets and drives and be inviting and attractive to visitors, employees and the general public.

In general, one to two stories are envisioned, but a minimum building height of 16 to 22 feet should apply to maintain a consistent sense of scale and enclosure throughout the development. Due to topography, buildings must integrate with the site, avoiding forced grade conditions and forced walkouts.

Portland values long-term sustainability and therefore, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building standards are encouraged for all site development. The use of on-site alternative energy production (i.e. wind, solar, geothermal, etc.) should also be explored and supported.

### natural landscape examples



## building design examples



**What are the next steps?**

The following table summarizes recommendations and actions to implement the plan.

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Responsibility</b>
Review Zoning Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the current zoning ordinance to ensure parking, design, and use standards are appropriate and allow development per the Concept Plan.</li> <li>Consider a form-based zoning district if current regulations are found to be inadequate.</li> </ul>	City Staff, Planning Commission, City Council
Streamline Approval Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the current development approval process and consider ways to streamline or fast-track development proposals.</li> </ul>	City Staff, Planning Commission, City Council
Develop Marketing Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate marketing and outreach efforts to potential developers, business operators, educational institutions, etc.</li> <li>Develop marketing materials, for the site and the City as a whole.</li> <li>Update the City web site to promote development opportunities.</li> <li>Explore, adopt, and market various financial incentives to spur development.</li> </ul>	Portland Economic Development Corporation, City Staff
Review Surrounding Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the current zoning ordinance and master plan for properties surrounding the site to determine compatibility with the Concept Plan.</li> </ul>	City Staff, Planning Commission

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Responsibility</b>
Public Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin planning for public improvements including utilities, stormwater management, and road improvements.</li> <li>• Explore various funding sources to offset the cost of public improvements including grants, public-private partnerships, etc.</li> </ul>	City Staff, City Council, Planning Commission, Economic Development Corporation
Rezoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following zoning ordinance amendments, consider rezoning the site to expedite development.</li> </ul>	Planning Commission, City Council
Facilitate Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solicit and select a developer to implement the Concept Plan.</li> <li>• Explore and obtain public funding to support project implementation.</li> </ul>	City Staff, Economic Development Corporation, Planning Commission, City Council