

An aerial night view of a city skyline, likely Hong Kong, with numerous lights reflecting on the water. The image is dark, with the city lights providing the primary illumination.

HKIUD Conference: Urban Design as Public Policy

# Strategic Vision to Realization

New frameworks for better community

March 31, 2012 Hong Kong

Arun Jain, Urban Designer, Urban Strategist

HKIUD Conference: Urban Design as Public Policy

# Strategic Vision to Realization

New frameworks for better community

March 31 2012 Hong Kong

Cities are created through a mix of circumstance and deliberation over time. Their relative success and that of the communities in them is largely based upon their current and inherited social, political and economic cultures. Indeed, if examined closely, the physical form of a city reflects this multi-dimensional evolution.

As uncertain times move us into a new paradigm, we are compelled to realize that our increasingly economic (i.e. growth oriented) basis for development has squeezed social considerations to the barest of essentials. The emergent challenges for the public and private institutional engines of cities are then to find better ways to ensure that our overall quality of urban life improves while remaining resilient to the absence, or stagnation of growth and resources.

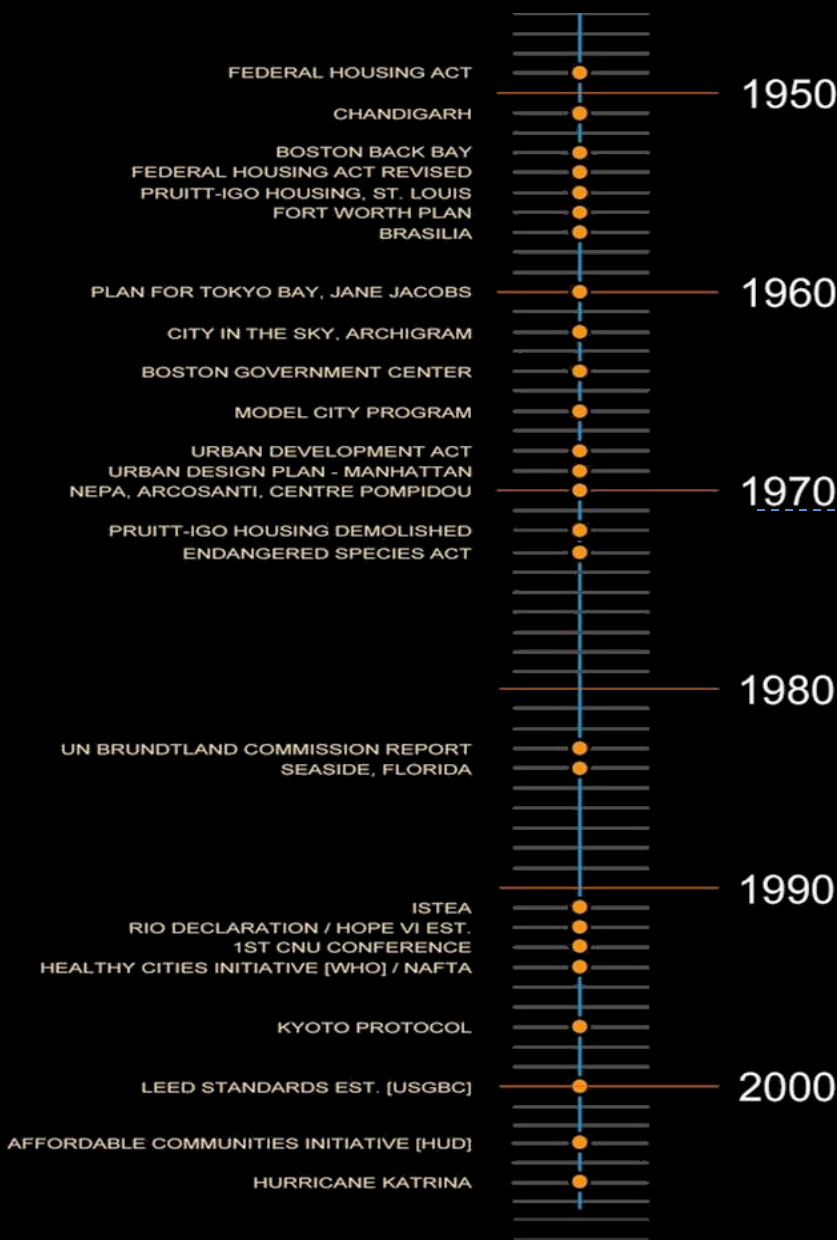
Such pressures imply a need to collectively get more strategic about investing time, money and attention to the aspects that will most ensure the full dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental).

Arun Jain Urban Designer, Urban Strategist

# Theory vs. practice

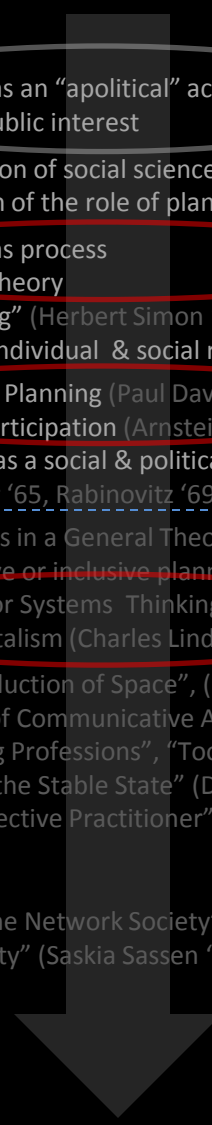
(why planning fails)

# Theory

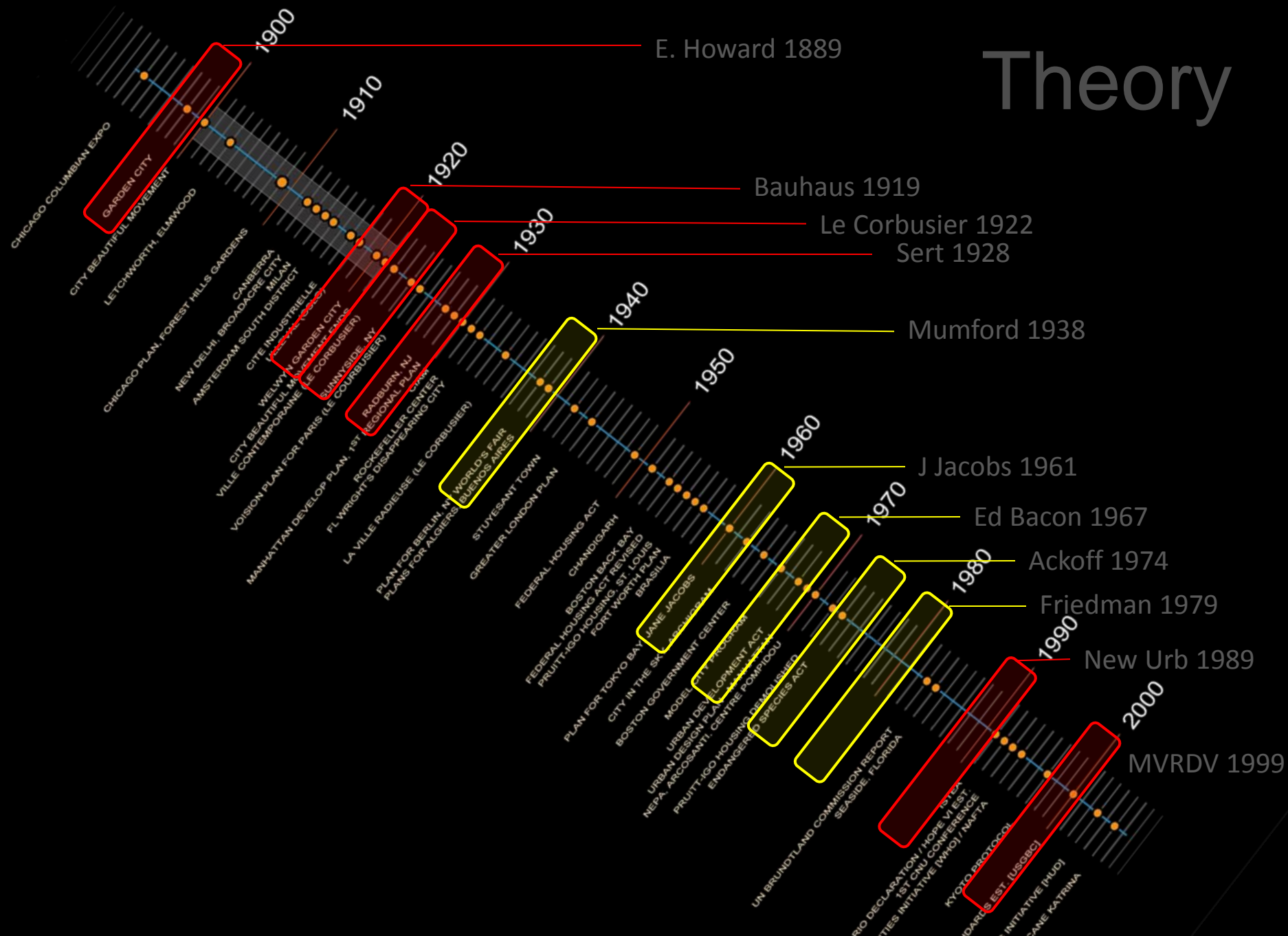


- 1950 ■ Planning as an “apolitical” act designed to protect public interest
- Introduction of social sciences & evaluation of the role of planning
- 1960 ■ Planning as process
- Decision theory
- “Satisficing” (Herbert Simon ‘45-’69)
- Limits of individual & social rationality
- Advocacy Planning (Paul Davidoff ‘69)
- Citizen Participation (Arnstein ‘69)
- 1970 ■ Planning as a social & political act that is *not* value neutral (Altshuler ‘65, Rabinovitz ‘69)
- “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning” (Horst Rittel ‘73)
- Transactive or inclusive planning (Friedman ‘73)
- Synoptic or Systems Thinking (model based ends & means)
- Incrementalism (Charles Lindblom ‘84-)
- 1980 ■ “The Production of Space”, (Henri Lefebvre ‘74, ‘91)
- “Theory of Communicative Action” (Jurgen Habermas ‘81)
- “Disabling Professions”, “Tools for Conviviality” (Ivan Illych ‘73)
- “Beyond the Stable State” (D. Schon ‘73)
- “The Reflective Practitioner” (D. Schon ‘83)
- 1990 ■ “Rise of the Network Society” (Manuel Castells ‘96)
- “Global City” (Saskia Sassen ‘91, ‘01)

Declining relationship between theory and practice



# Theory



# Then & now...

## THEN

- Manifestos to underscore the importance of design
- Imposed hierarchies
- Utopian constructs
- Aspirations, solutions without knowledge
- Architecture driven solutions

## NOW

- Consensus driven outcomes
- Prediction based plans
- Guilt driven responses (environment)
- Fast results & gains
- Infrastructure as driver
- Resource issues
- Multidisciplinary responses
- Apathy & fear...

# Practice

- Planning is largely ad hoc and reactive
- Future plans are increasingly based upon models
- The current paradigm tends to be heavy on aspiration
- A general obsession with growth
- Planning as a “contact sport”
- Inability to focus on only a few “achievable” goals

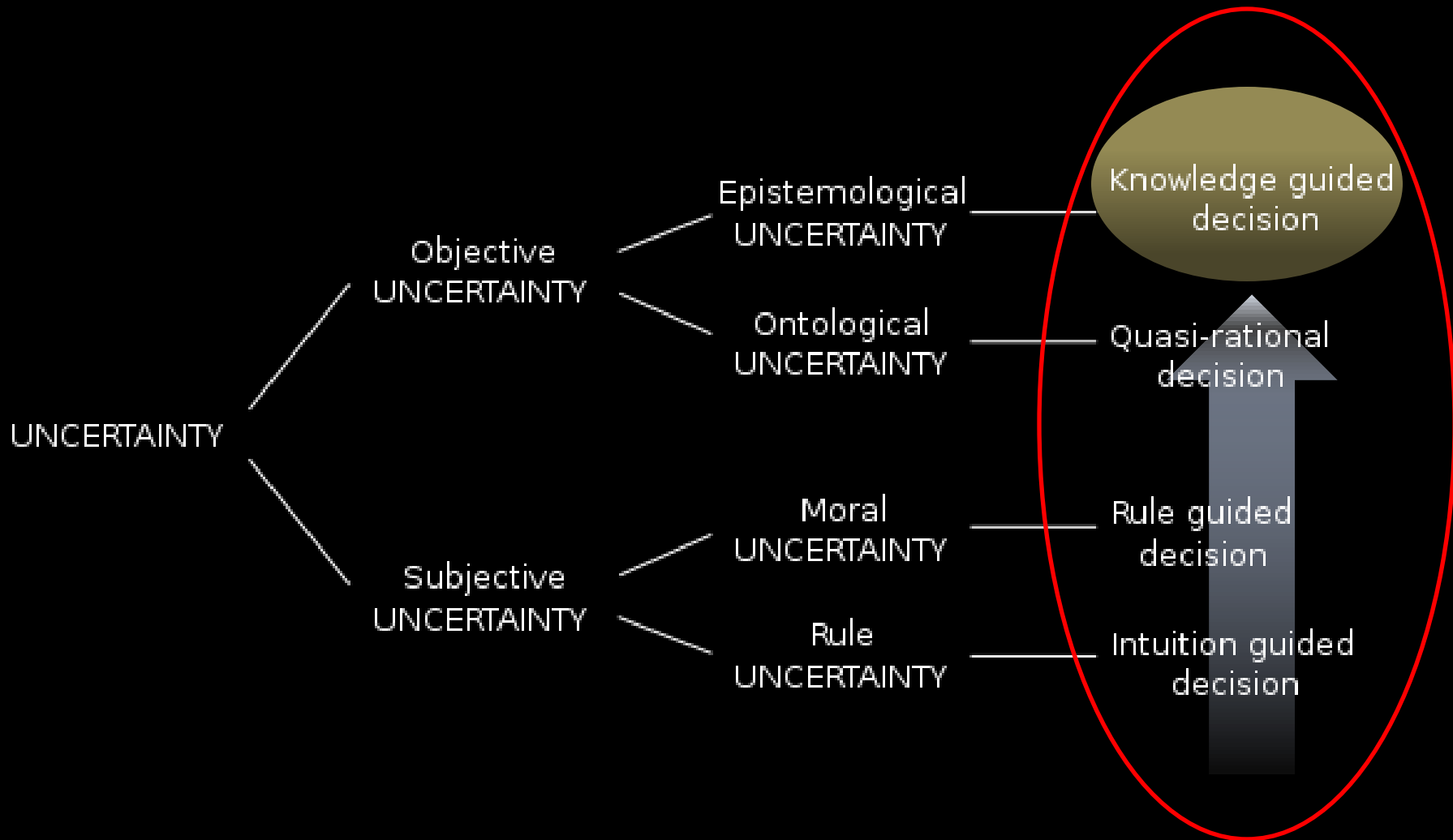


# Theory vs. Practice

- No patience for theory
- No clear translations of theory to implementation
- Failure of planning to plan for uncertainties
- A lack of consensus on a common “social agenda”
- A failure of education/comprehension/understanding?



# Not knowing



# Not knowing

The quality of your life is in direct proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably deal with...

Anthony Robbins





# Avoiding the “ostrich trap”

*What is much more sensible, is to say, "Well, this is what I think now, but I am going to come back and look at this again and again. If, as the future comes nearer, I find my predictions were wrong, I am going to change what I did. Not only that, I am going to design my decision in ways which allow me to change easily."*



Guy Burgess

Co-Director, Conflict Research Consortium University of Colorado, Boulder

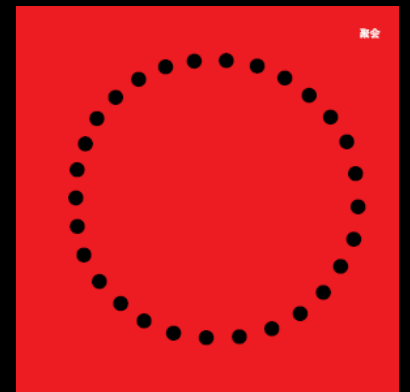
Business-as-usual won't work!

The challenges of  
contemporary  
urban life



Today...

incrementalism **vs.**  
integrated thinking



Today...

not in my backyard vs.  
yes, in my backyard



Today...

“them” vs.  
“us”



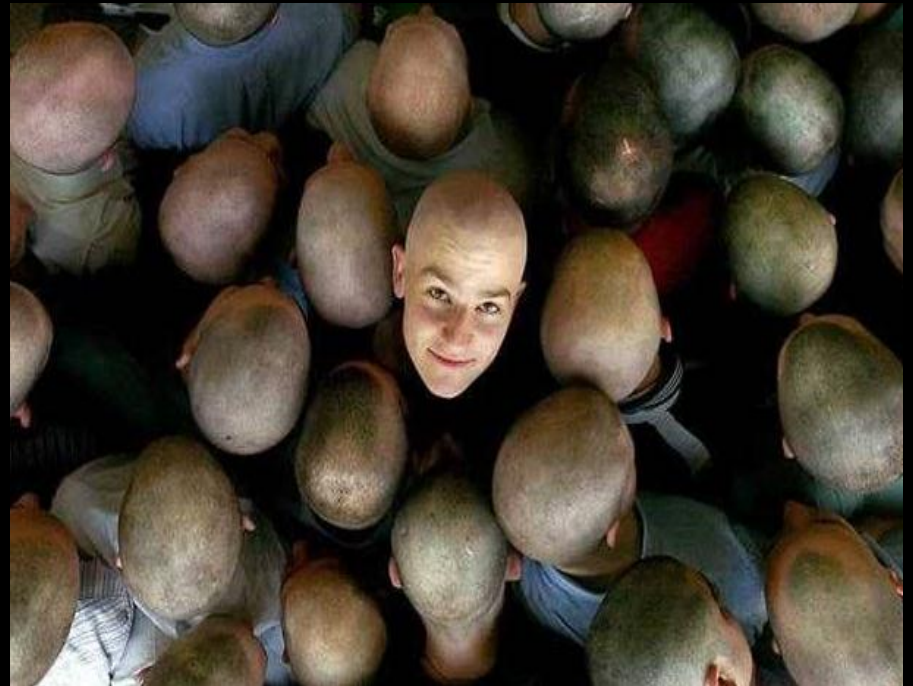
Today...

form vs.  
culture



Today...

identity vs.  
generica



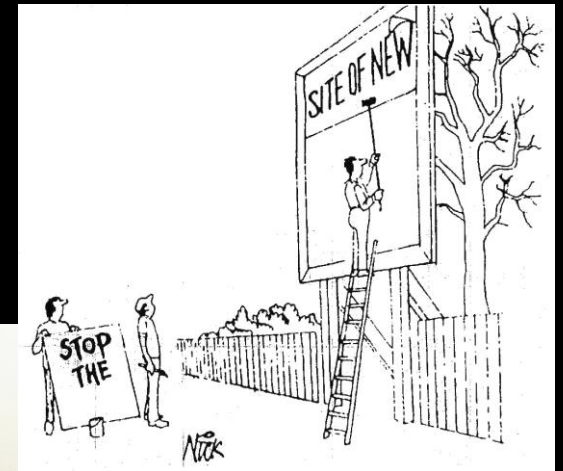
Today...

depersonalization vs.  
individualism



# Today...

democratic fatigue vs.  
autocracy



Today...

playing it safe vs.  
risk



Today...

Fundamentalism vs.  
moderation



Today...

need vs.  
want



Today...

fear vs.  
apathy

Health

Relevance

War

Hunger

Climate Change

Fundamentalism

Resources

Consumption

Epidemics

Affordability



The challenges  
of cities...



# Our emerging paradigm

- We can't assume growth will happen
- Continued global fiscal contraction
- Declining resources
- If we plan it, will it happen?
- If we build it, will they come?
- Can we enforce everything we want?



Understanding complex environments

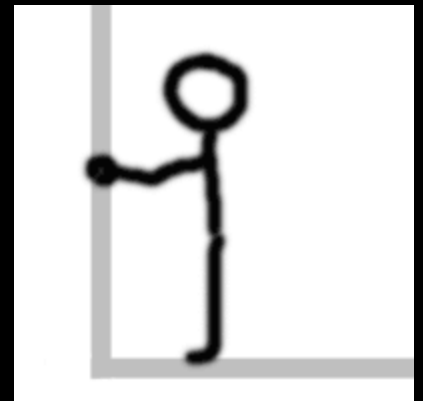
If you didn't know  
anything about the future

What kind of city  
would you want  
anyway?



# Social Struggles

It's getting harder!



# Growing unhappiness

- Reasonable (problems we try to solve)
- Unreasonable (problems we manage)



# Our inability to keep up

- Physical
- Social
- Economic



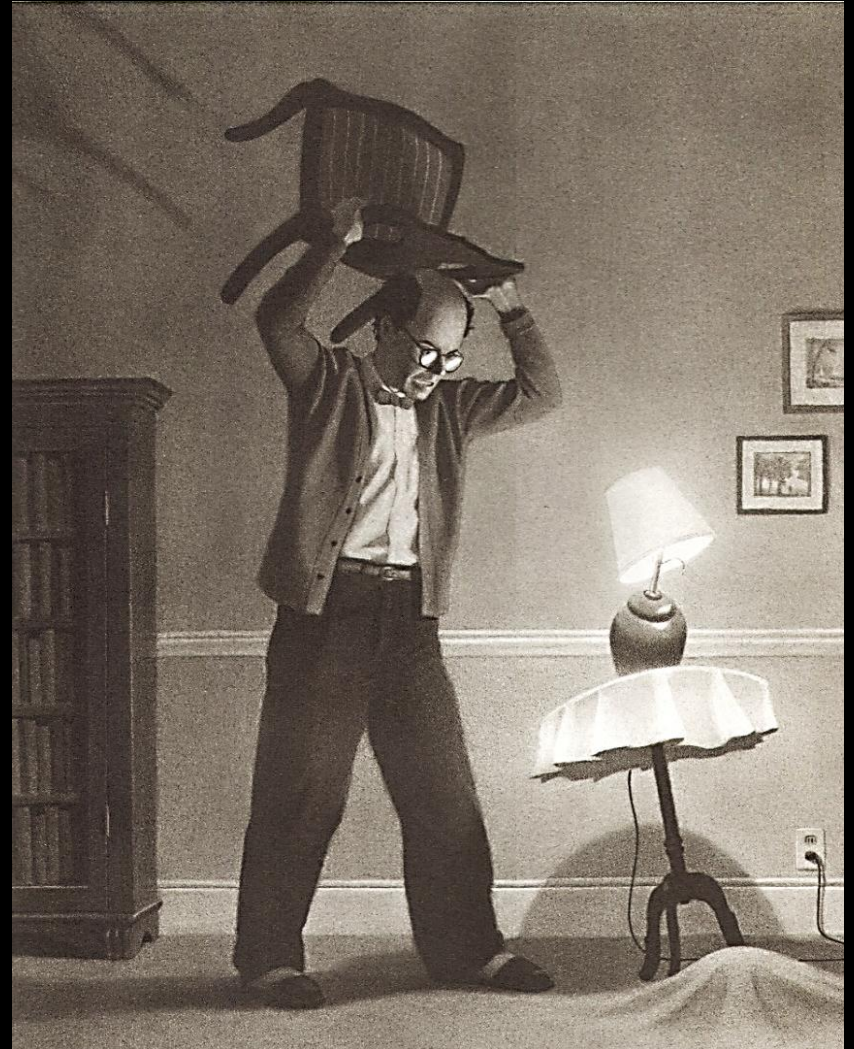
# Managing change effectively

- Slow incremental shifts
- Rapid (dramatic or catastrophic)



# Fear of change

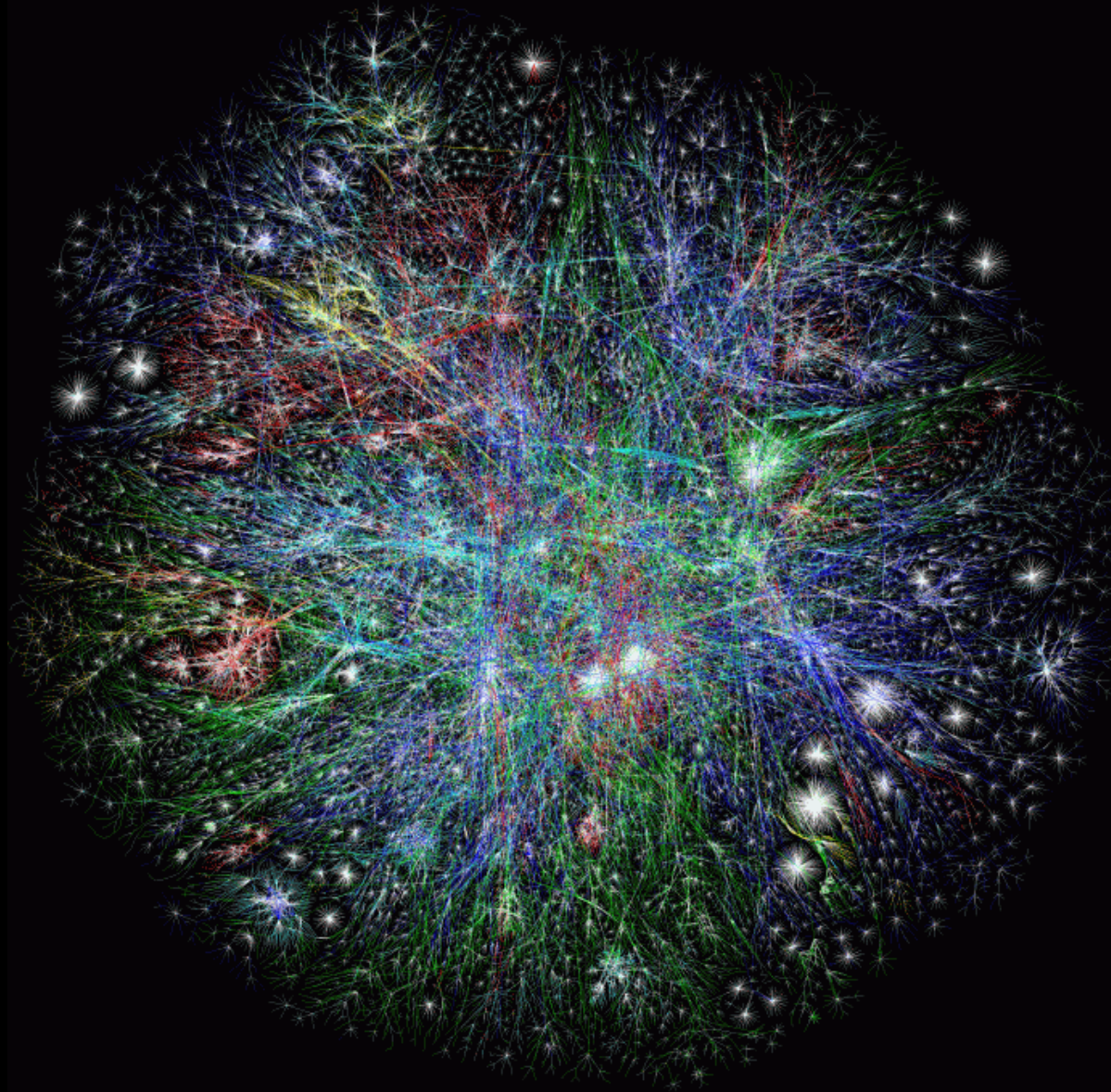
- The myth of stability
- Homogeneity = identity?



# Emerging urban problems

Issues that will dominate us

# Complexity



# Livability

- Integrated thinking
- Adaptability
- Resilience
- Coherence
- Quality
- Diversity
- Balance



# Infrastructure

- Keep what we have
- Manage what we want
- Rethink what we need
- Restructure



# The public realm

- Is it really public?
- Are we designing it as we will use it?



# Radical change

- Can we handle sudden change?



# Mobility

- Mobility at all scales
- Integrated systems



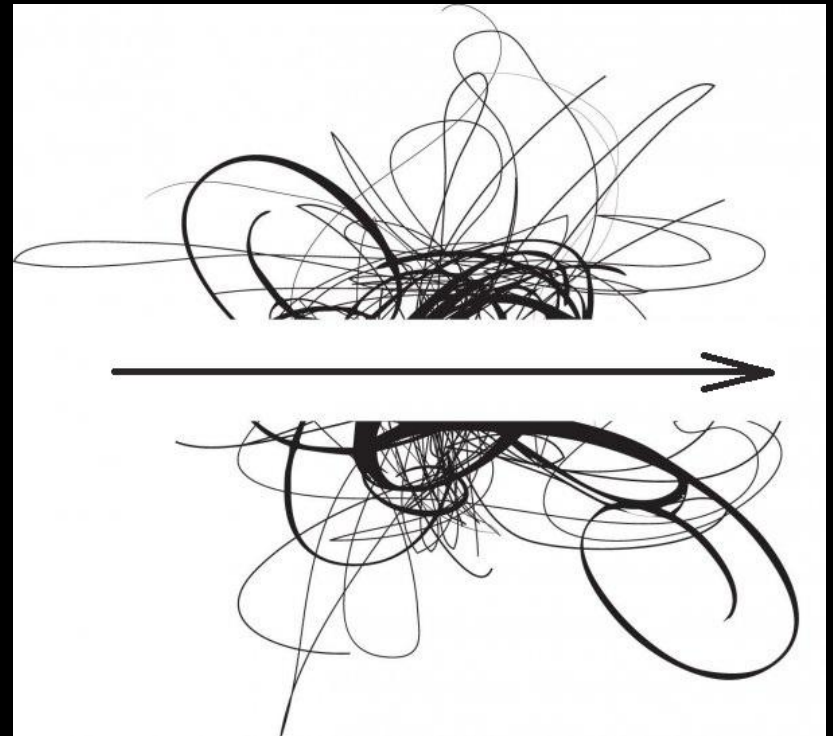
# Resources

- Money
- Expertise
- Comprehension
- Will



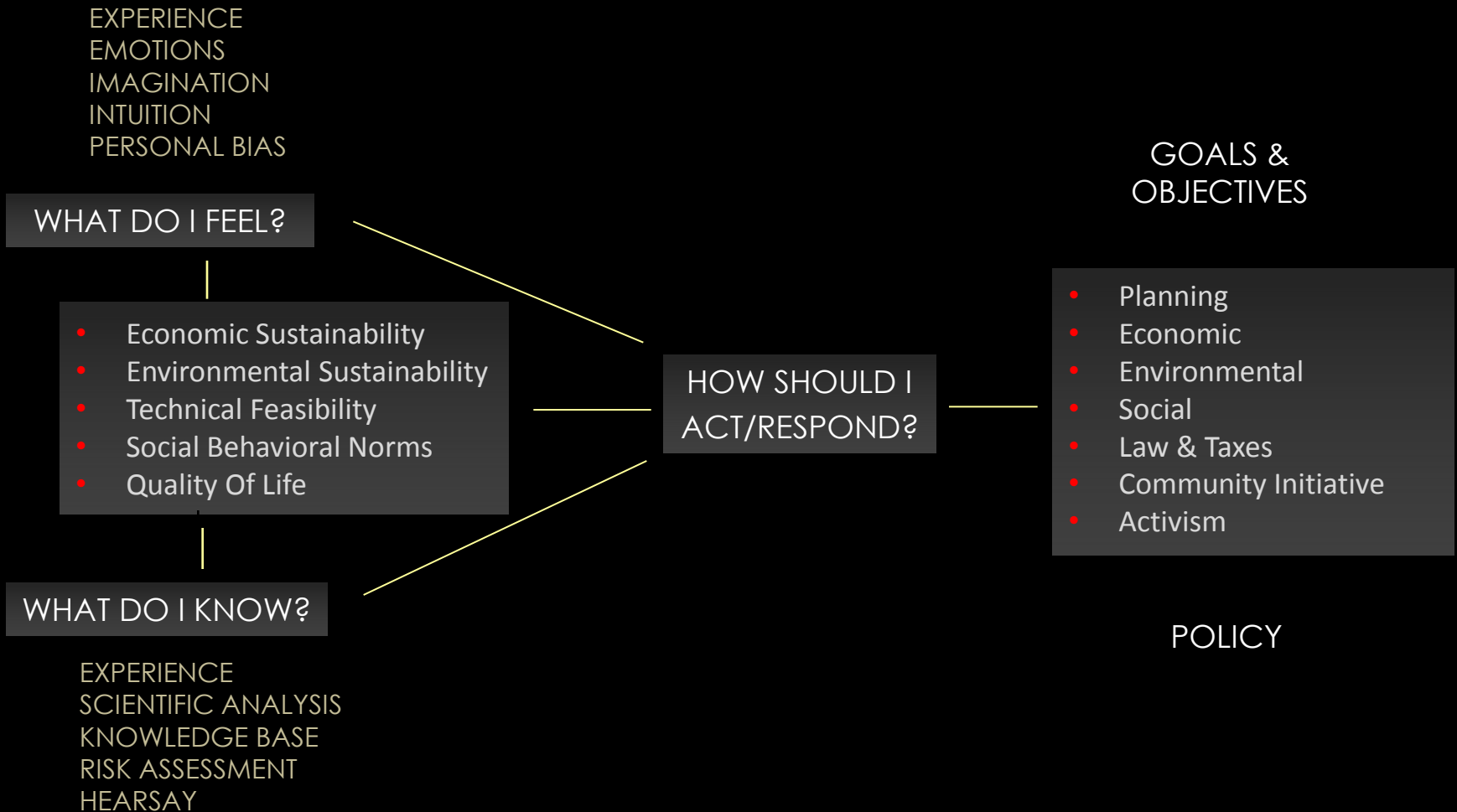
# Politics

- The system
- Human nature
- Institutional habit/tradition
- Culture/personalities



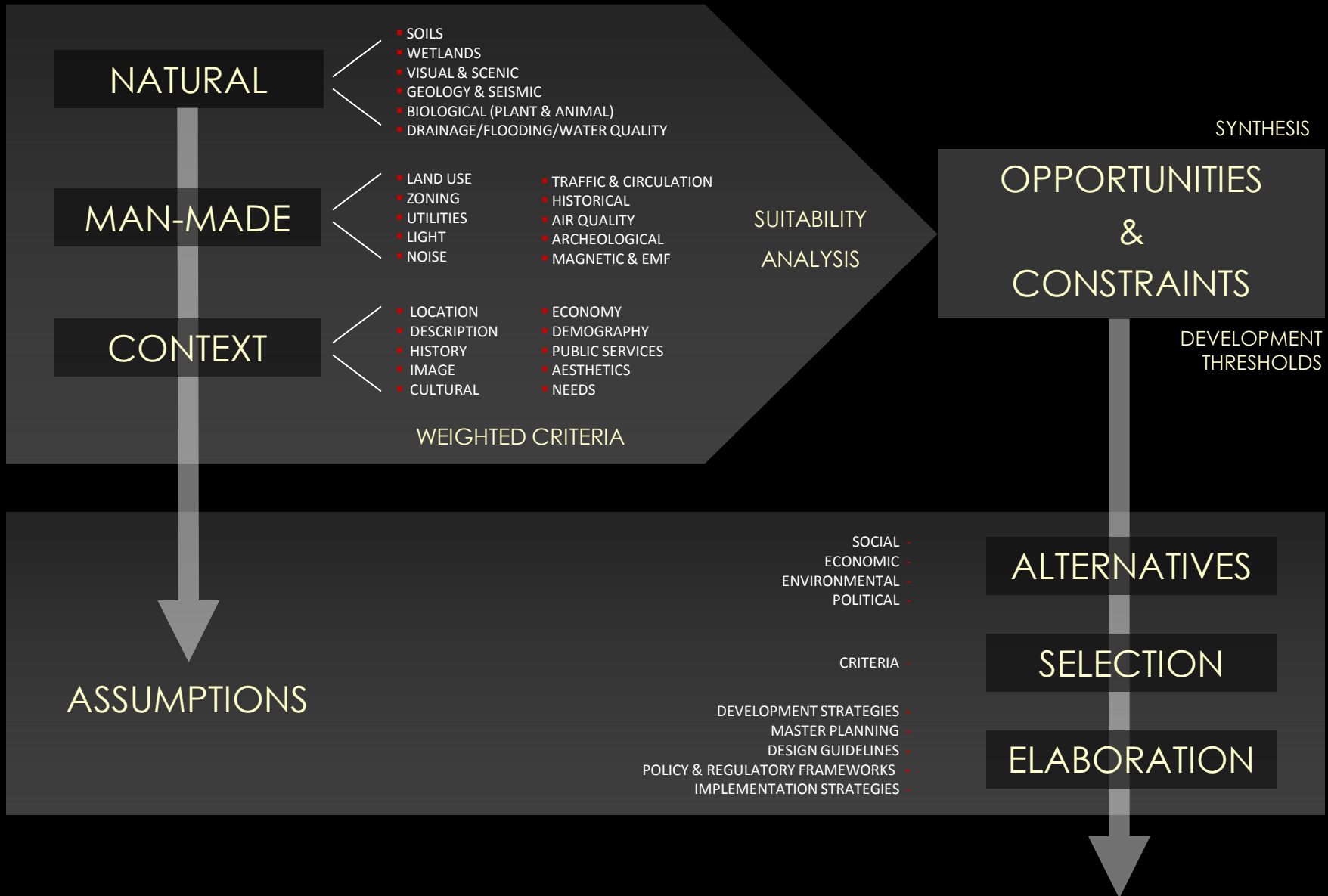
Addressing the “New Normal”

# Feeling vs. knowing



CLARIFY THE DISCUSSION & DECISION BASIS

# Have a clear logic



# Attitude

Be deeply “integrating & strategic” ...



# Transit Mall

A flexible framework as guide...

**MALL ELEMENT**

**BENCHES**

<b>Applicability:</b>	X	X	
<b>Current Presence:</b>	X	X	X
<b>Relevant Room(s):</b>	All		
<b>Relevant Stations:</b>	All		
<b>Context Comments:</b>	Consider existing city bench standards.		
<b>Inclusions &amp; Exclusions:</b>	Bench placement and design may remain constant throughout the mall but also contain variable elements such as color and material to distinguish individual rooms and station areas.		
<b>Comments:</b>	Station area benches may be integrated with platform and shelter design.		
<b>Element Bundling:</b>	Integration possible with shelters, landscaping, signage and other sidewalk elements		
<b>Priorities:</b>	Design and cost considerations are high priority. South Mall benches: not an immediate priority		



**STATUS ASSESSMENT - FACTORS/DETERMINANTS**

Cost Factor	Technical / Performance Factor	Design Factor	Maintenance Factor	Sustainability Considerations	Iconic Value	Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Replacing existing benches is expensive.</li> <li>- Replacing existing benches are expensive.</li> <li>- No new Benches are assumed</li> </ul>	<p>New or repaired benches should be durable and comfortable.</p> <p>All benches should discourage skateboard and non-seating activities.</p>	<p>Designs should be consistent throughout the mall, but allow variation.</p> <p>Benches may be integrated with bus &amp; rail shelter designs.</p> <p>Bench designs should have arms to facilitate accessibility and discourage lying down.</p>	<p>Designs with interchangeable parts and repetitive/stock parts and systems are preferred.</p> <p>Where provided, new or repaired benches must be durable and withstand weathering.</p>	<p>Use of recycled and/or sustainable materials preferred.</p>	<p>Existing benches have some iconic value</p>	<p>June 15, 2005</p>

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** Existing mall benches are in varying condition and do not represent a significant iconic value. Development of a new family of benches with common construction type and basic shape and scale, with opportunities for location specific detail or accessorizing is recommended. Design aspirations and budget pressures may require preserving or refurbishing existing mall benches although repair and replacement value for the current design is limited. New benches can be integrated with other mall elements to reduce visual clutter. Variations may help define urban rooms and station areas. Ideally, new benches wherever provided should be simple in design, more durable, and less expensive to replace.

# Attitude

Push for big ideas that  
work over time...



Leiden CS

Leveraging more



# Attitude

Basics first, architecture  
later...



# Burtonsville

Don't solve the wrong problem



Burtonsville

# Attitude

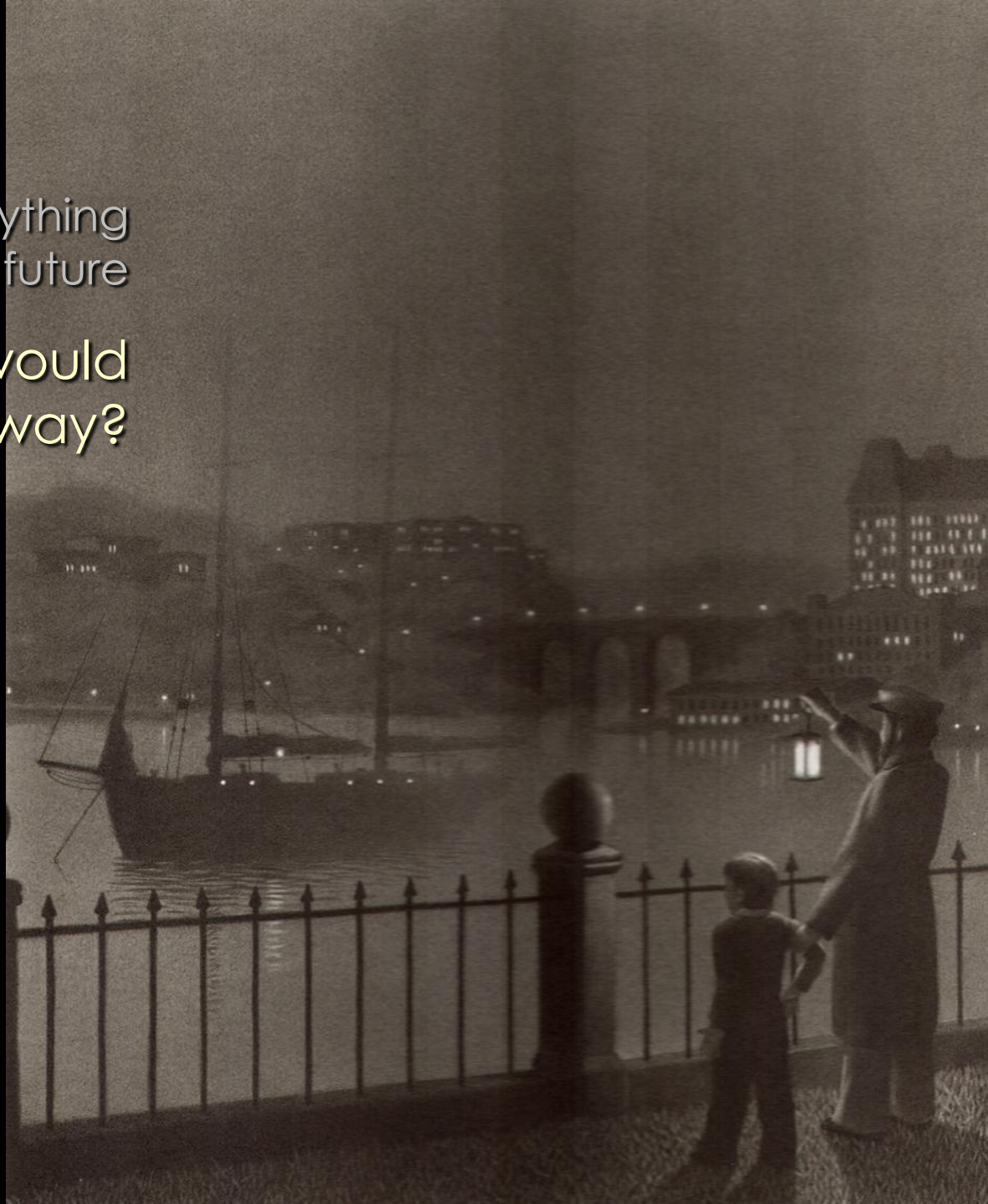
Cumulative & pragmatic  
approaches...



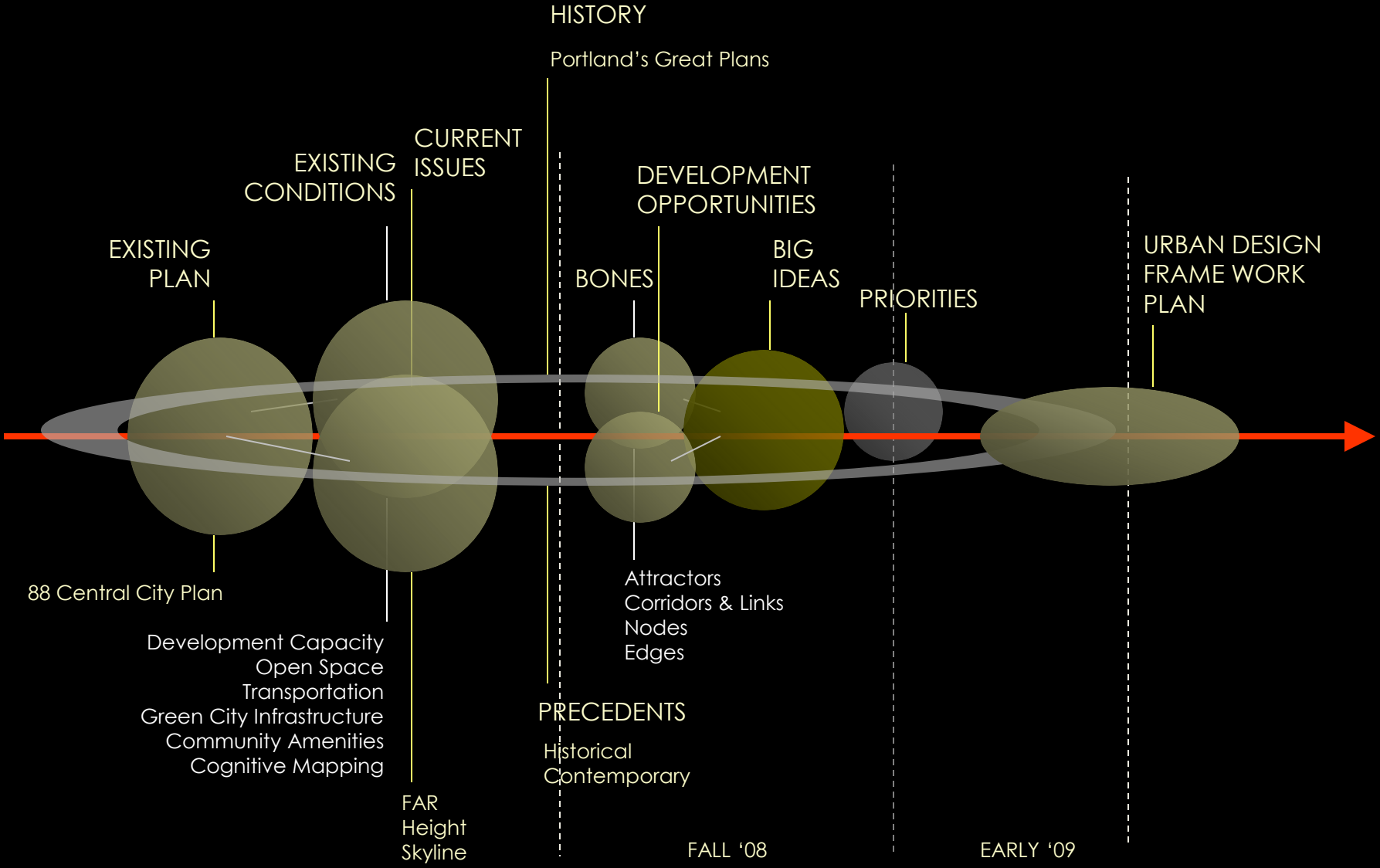
If you didn't know anything  
about the future

What kind of city would  
you want anyway?

A framework for  
Portland



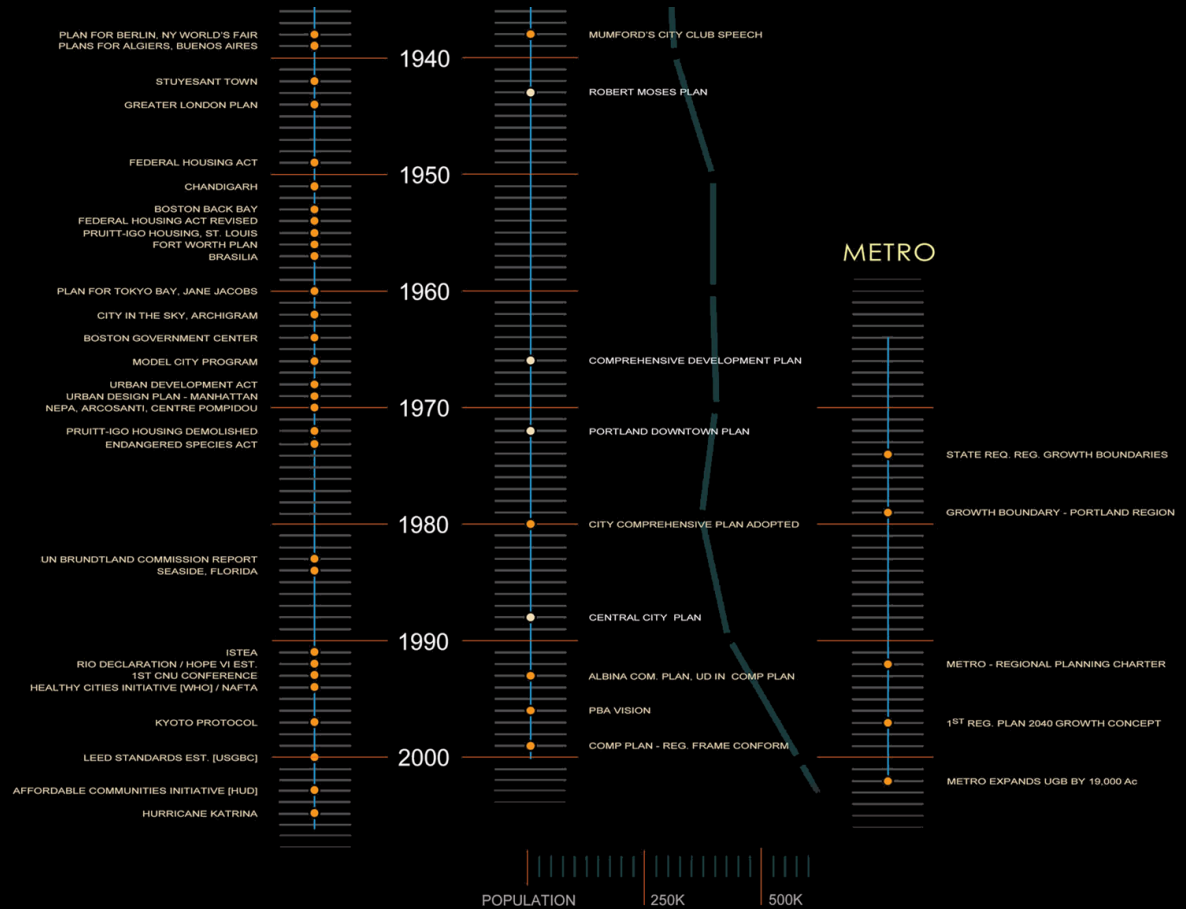
# Method



# History

## Portland's Great Plans...

- 1903 Olmsted
- 1912 Bennett
- 1921 Cheney
- 1932 Bartholomew
- 1943 Moses
- 1966 Comprehensive Plan
- 1972 Downtown Plan
- 1988 Central City Plan



SHOULD WE BE LOOKING AT PROJECTS INCREMENTALLY?

# Precedents



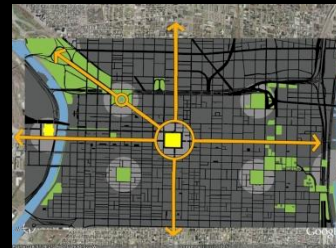
Barcelona



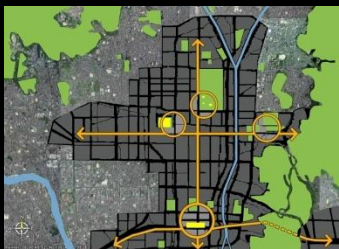
Glasgow



Edinburgh



Philadelphia



Old Kyoto



Savannah

ARE THERE BETTER WAYS TO  
LOOK AT THE CITY?

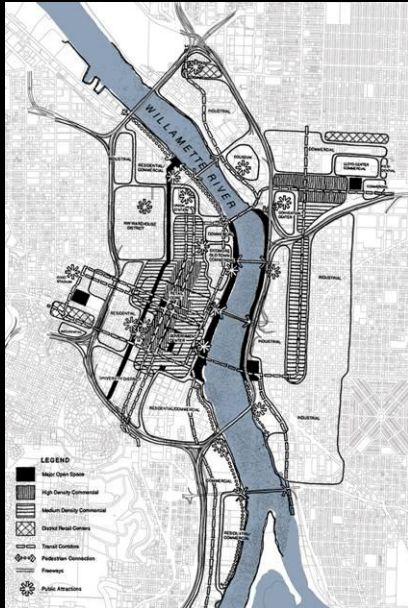
# Precedents

## Criteria

- Cities with recent downtown plans
- Cities with central city & urban design elements
- Cities with distinct attitudes

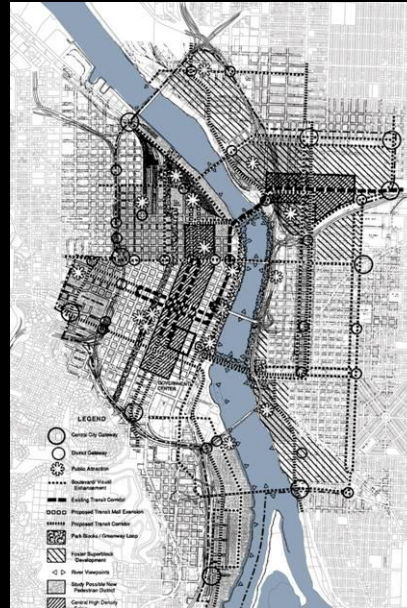


# Current Plan



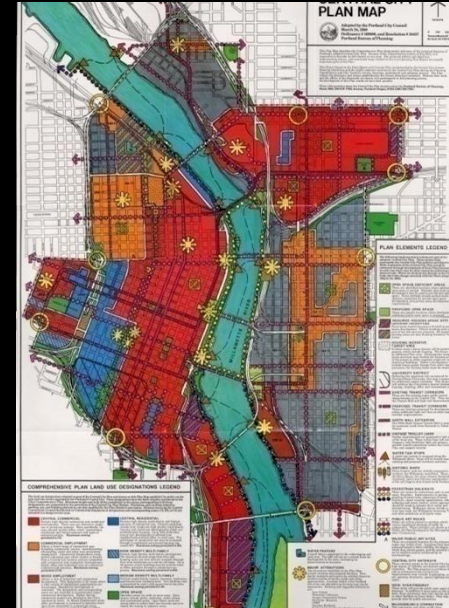
## CONCEPT PLAN

- FOCUS ON THE RIVER
- CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT ALONG TRANSIT CORRIDORS
- RETAIL OFFICE CORES, LOW DENSITY COMMERCIAL AREAS & INDUSTRIAL USE
- A CLEAR & COMPREHENSIVE PARK & OPEN SPACE SYSTEM



## POLICY 12

- RICH PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENTS
- EXCELLENCE IN BUILDING DESIGN
- HUMAN SCALED BUILDINGS, STREETS & OPEN SPACES
- DISTRICTS WITH DISTINCT CHARACTER & DIVERSITY
- CLEAR & PROTECTED PUBLIC VIEWS
- HIGH DENSITIES AROUND TRANSIT CORRIDORS & TRANSITIONS TO RIVER



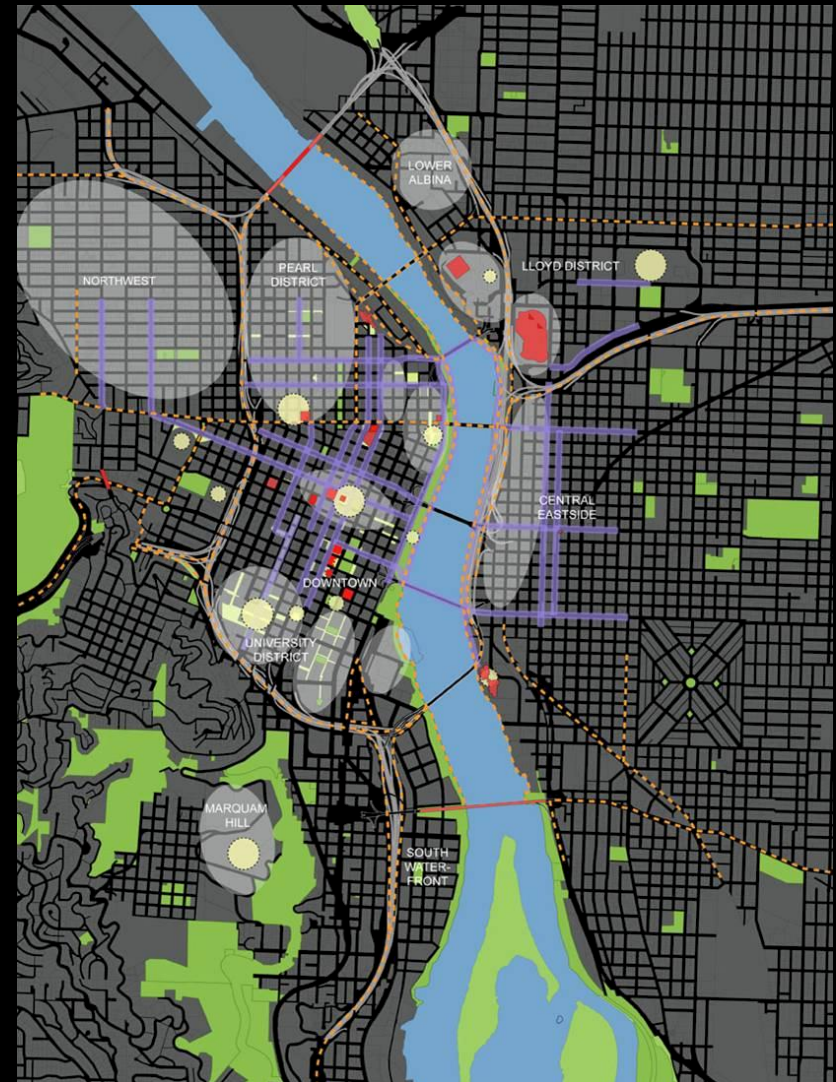
## CENTRAL CITY PLAN MAP

- CENTRAL CITY GATEWAYS
- MAJOR ATTRACTIONS
- EXISTING & PROPOSED TRANSIT CORRIDORS

# Cognitive mapping

- Districts
- Landmarks
- Paths
- Nodes
- Edges
- Existing Conditions
- Inconsistent Plans

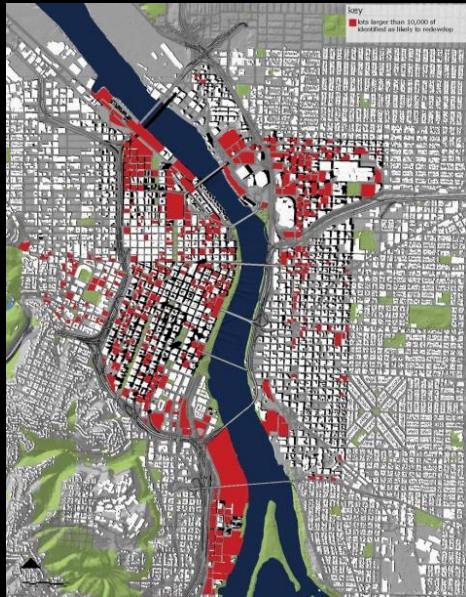
HOW DO WE CAPITALIZE  
UNIQUENESS?



# Better questions

(without presumptions of the solutions)

## Height (ZONED VS LIKELY)



- What the standards allow

- What's more likely



ARE THERE BETTER WAYS TO  
LOOK AT THE CITY?

# Focus issues

## Skyline & Visual Identity

- Skyline today
- What the standards allow
- Likely maximum outcome



# Assess why people want to be there!

People congregate because they have...

- A “need” (i.e. transit hubs)
- A “want” (i.e. something uniquely appealing)



Evolved



Designed

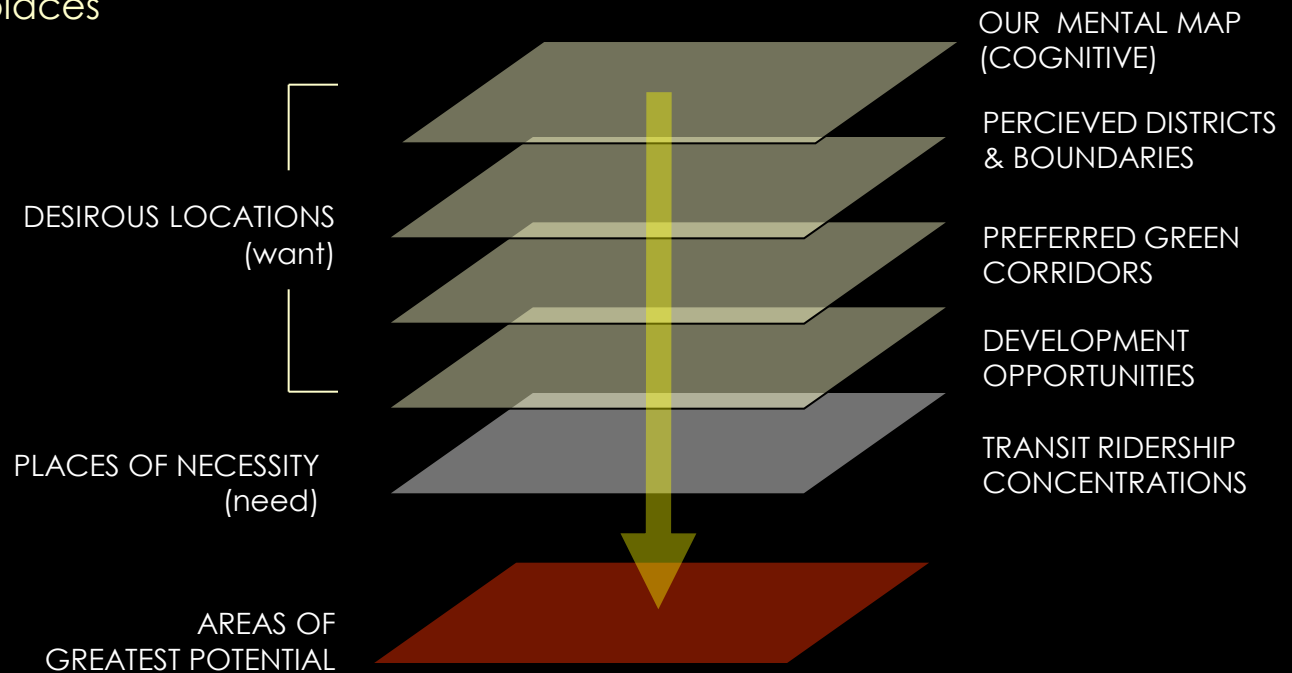


Appropriated

# Assembly

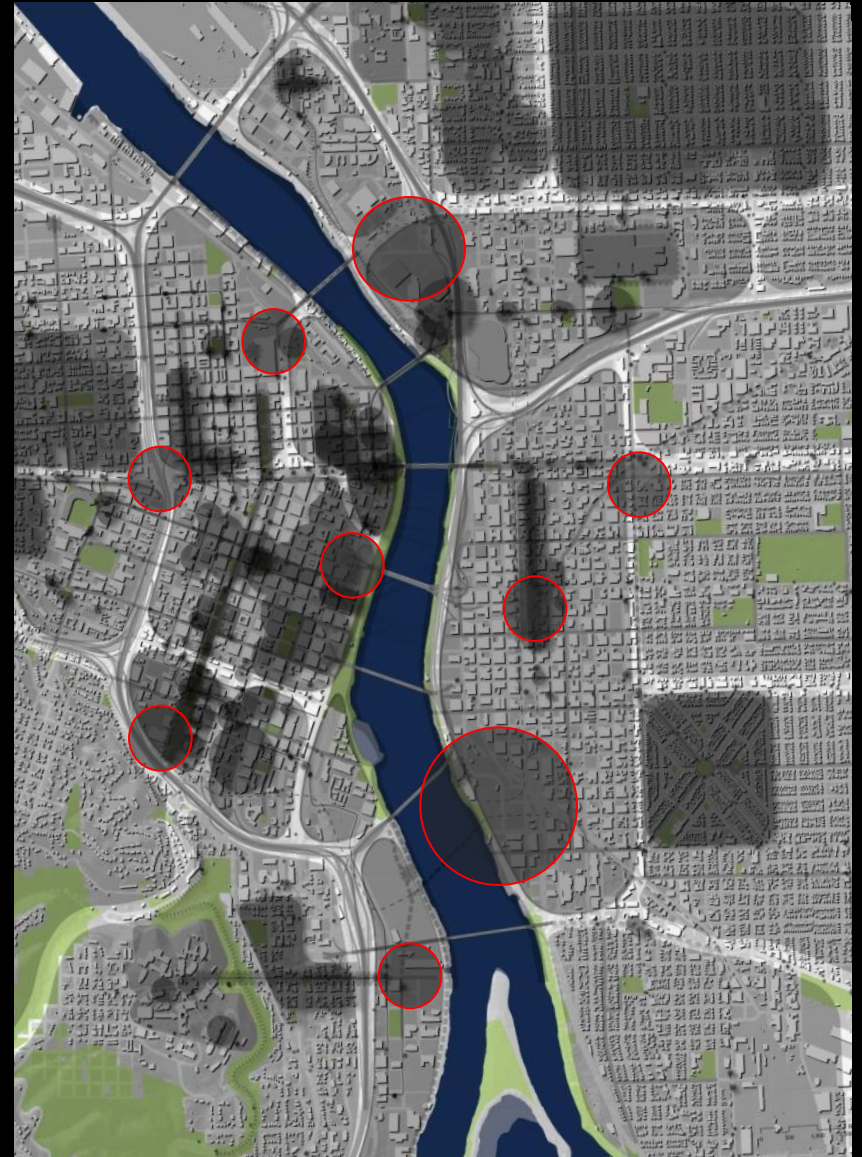
## A. Identify convergences:

- Understand and map where people congregate or could congregate (need vs. want)
- Identify which places are the most able to become great places (criteria)



# Assembly

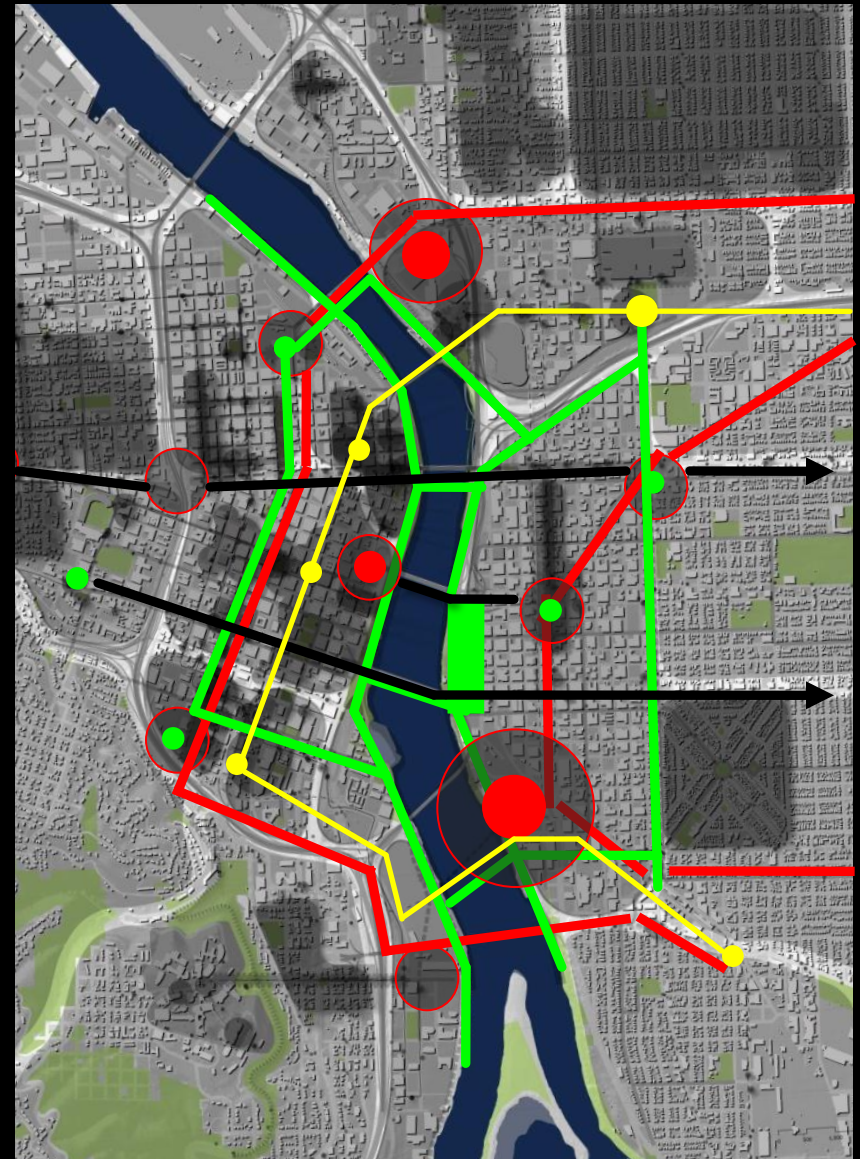
Reasons to be there....



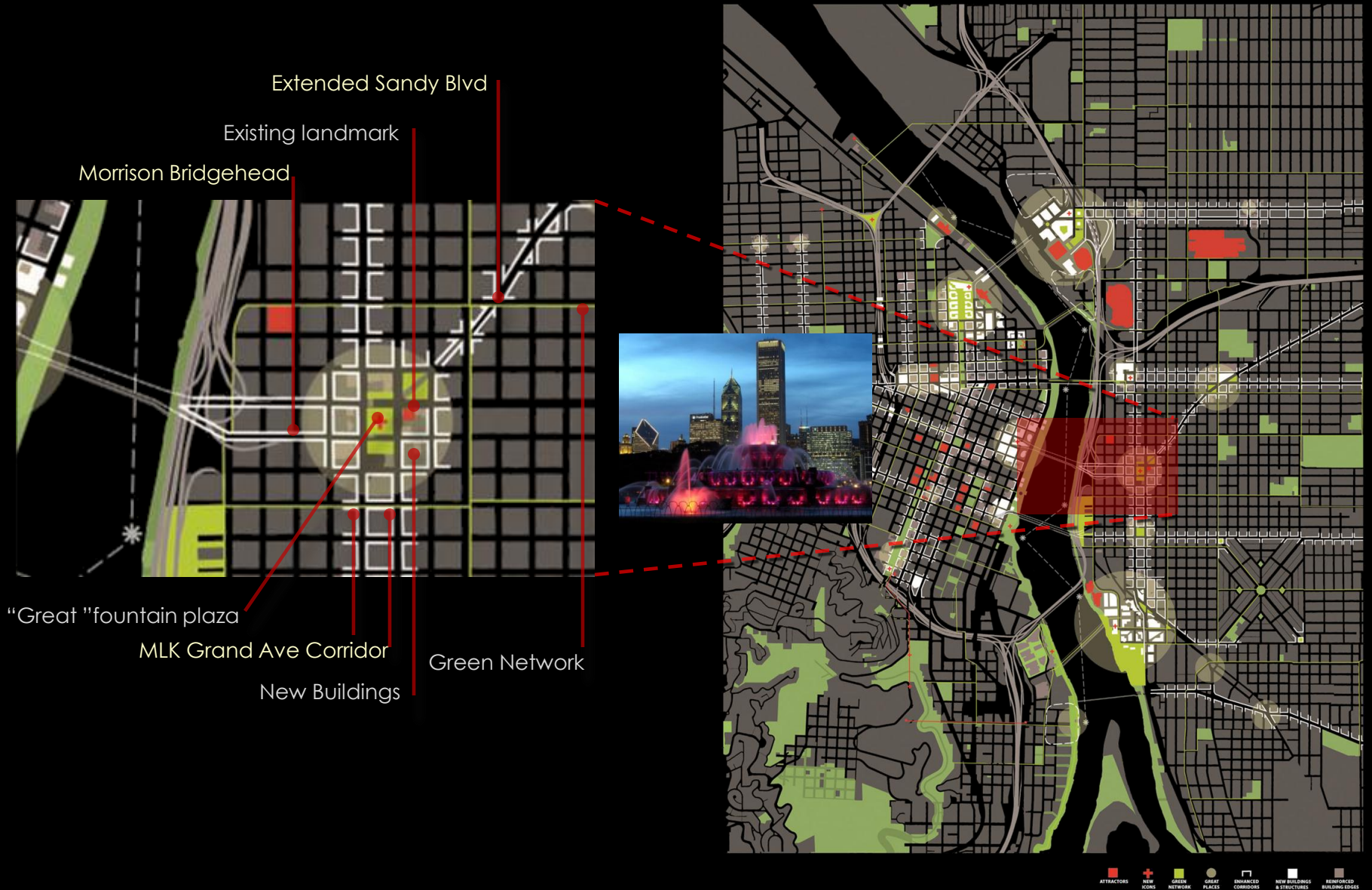
# Framework concept

## B. Link convergences:

- Identify where links and connections will reinforce the convergences (place-making nodes)
- Identify “green” networks and preferred movement corridors that compliment convergences (place-making nodes)



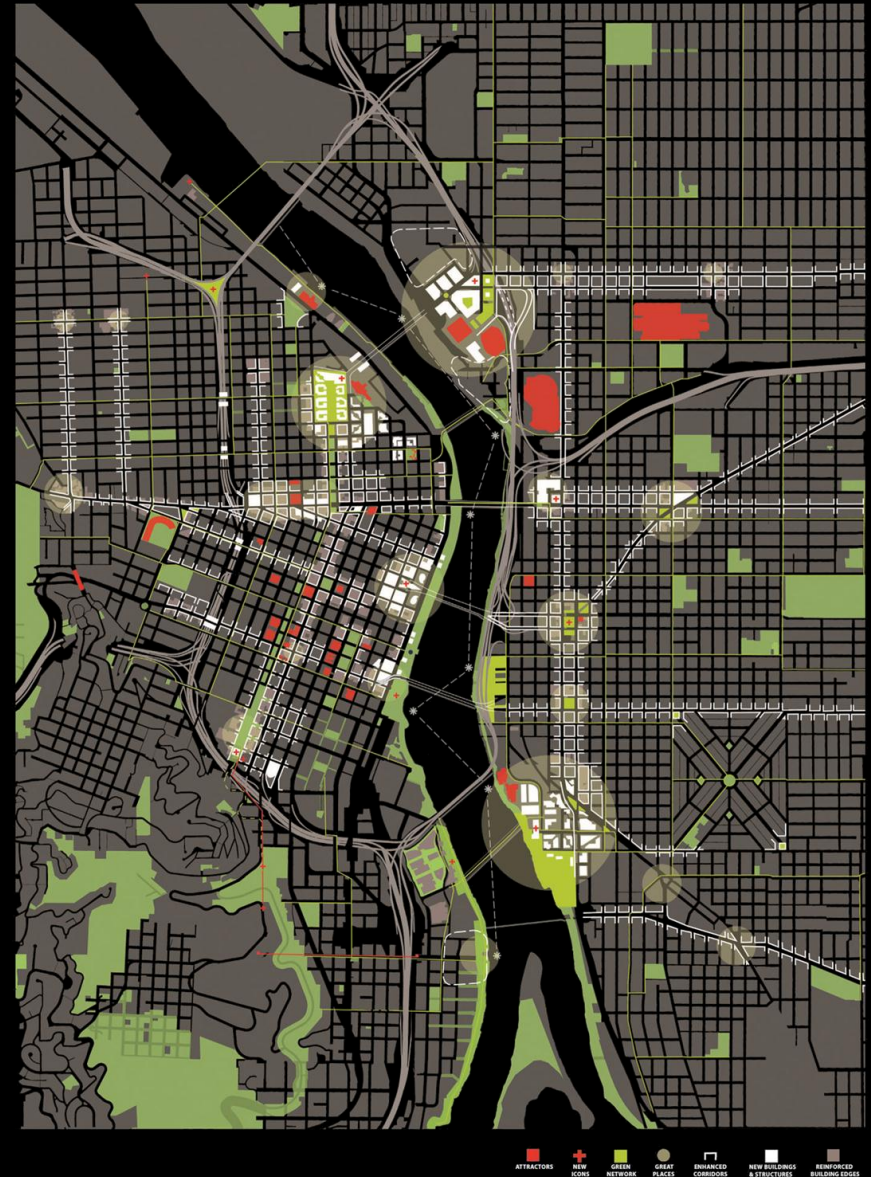
# Urban design framework



# Urban design framework

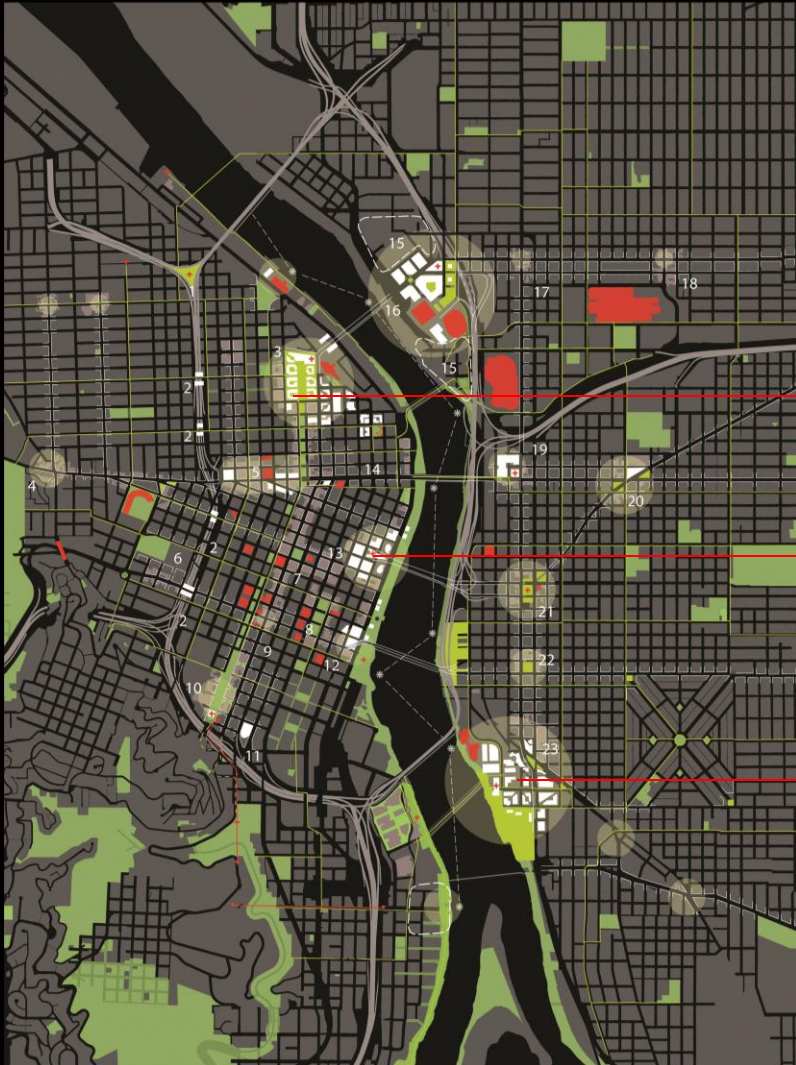
Directing development..

- Places as catalysts
- Ground level emphasis
- Intent vs. Outcomes
- Flexible approaches



# A basis for intelligent dialogue

- 1 **Fremont Bridge Triangle:**
  - Ground level civic/parks use/potential architectural dome/icon/bridgehead
- 2 **I-405 ramps:**
  - Enhance I-405 crossings for "Ponte Vecchio"
- 3 **USPS:**
  - Institutional use (university, office campus, etc.)
  - Public space
  - Celebrate end/ start of North Park Blocks
  - Connections through to Union Station/ Old Town/Chinatown
  - Great architecture
  - Prominent Broadway bridgehead architecture
  - Shorten Broadway ramp
- 4 **Burnside @ 23rd:**
  - Extend Washington to Burnside - connect to Morrison Bridgehead
  - Start/ end of enhanced Burnside corridor
  - Prominent architecture
- 5 **West Burnside-Brewery Blocks:**
  - Adjust on-ramp configuration to recover a new development block and maintain Burnside's continuity
- 6 **Lincoln High School**
  - Integrate new LHS Development program into surrounding community/development
- 7 **Pioneer Square**
  - Transparent facade will complement Pioneer Square
- 8 **Civic Center**
  - Re-design public parks & streets around them to enhance "civic" nature & re-orient buildings
- 9 **Broadway and Jefferson**
  - Broadway (2 way to Jefferson)
  - Important intersection transition in character of Broadway
- 10 **PSU Park Blocks**
  - Jeffersonian campus
  - "End piece" to Jeffersonian campus
  - Green bridge & connection
  - Funicular incline? Connection to OHSU
- 11 **South end of Transit Mall**
  - Great building with atrium (overlook) at "end of Transit Mall" (significant building)
- 12 **Hawthorne Bridgehead (West)**
  - Performance Bowl w/ stage (amphitheater)
  - Re-align ramp to Jefferson (two-way)
  - Hawthorne Bridgehead (iconic building)
- 13 **Morrison Bridgehead**
  - Develop as unified multi-block project (integrate MAX stop)
  - Make an "icon"
- 14 **Steel Bridgehead**
  - Tall structure to enhance bridgehead
  - Consider architecture that reflects modern China



- 15 **Areas surrounding Rose Quarter**
  - Future mixed-use development (Lower Albina)
  - Future high speed terminal and associated development
- 16 **Rose Quarter**
  - Complimentary daytime uses with event facilities
  - Iconic building + plazas
  - Ceremonial approach to civic performance halls/ events
  - Relocate ramp
- 17 **MLK and Broadway/Weidler**
  - Surrounding architecture to enhance intersection
- 18 **Broadway/Weidler and 15th**
  - Surrounding architecture to enhance intersection
- 19 **MLK and Burnside**
  - Architectural prominence (bridgehead)
  - Mixed-use development
  - Marker on MLK corridor
- 20 **Sandy and Burnside**
  - Celebrate intersection as key transition between Sandy & Burnside
  - Start of enhanced Burnside corridor
  - Signature architecture
  - Articulated building and ROW design
  - Emphasis on public realm
  - Insert monumentality
- 21 **Morrison Bridgehead (east side: MLK and Morrison)**
  - Great monument/fountain
  - Major bridgehead (Morrison)
  - Celebrate end of Sandy Corridor
  - Start/end of MLK/Grand retail/mixed-use corridor
  - Buildings to frame/ be actors in this ensemble
- 22 **MLK and Hawthorne**
  - Significant architecture to frame Hawthorne landing
- 23 **OMSI**
  - Collection of civic institutions/museums
    - Science
    - Hall
    - Aquatic
    - Fairgrounds (Rose/Beer/Waterfront/Blues)
    - Opera house and drama school
    - Nexus of light rail and streetcar (multi-modal)
  - Start/end of MLK/Grand corridor
  - Link between Springwater Corridor and Eastbank Esplanade

Infill

Bridgehead

Riverfront

- Lighting**
- Night and dark sky lighting plan
  - Landmark skyline lighting strategy

- Color**
- Sight banner/façade/public space/element design strategy (to compensate for dull days)

# Attitude

Look to other  
disciplines...



# Better approaches

What is absolutely needed for success?

---

Strategy 1

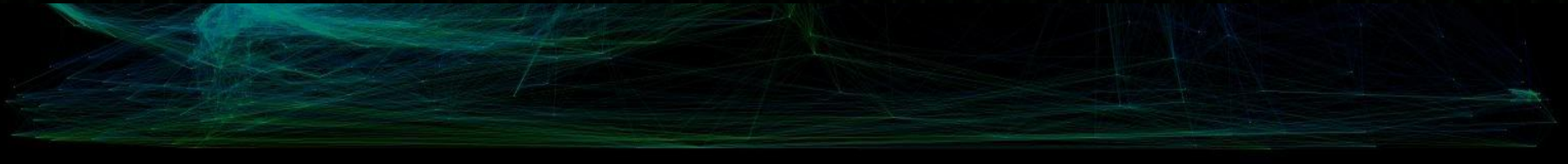
Strategy 2

Strategy 3

Strategy 4

---

What will guarantee failure?



# Emerging Opportunities

Helping solve new  
problems...



# Emerging Opportunities

- Providing early diagnostics at the system level
- Developing strategic frameworks - streamlining investment & response
- Creating alternatives to growth based planning & investment (reinforcement & consolidation)
- Helping restructure
- Redefining the ownership & integrating the management/maintenance of the public realm
- Expanding the scope & timeframe of public & private intervention



... In conclusion



# Things we can do

## Rethinking our urban future

### Ask yourself...

- If we have to stop will we have a disaster...  
but if we continue will we have a bigger one?
- Does improvement always have to be about growth?
- Is your solution driving the problem?



# Things we can do

## Rethinking our urban future

### Frameworks before plans...

- Provide purpose and intent without being prescriptive
- Help integrate social, economic, infrastructure & aesthetic needs
- Allow cities to be themselves –i.e. evolve and stay unique



# Things we can do

## Rethinking our urban future



If we want to avoid generic cities  
then we must stop having generic  
approaches and responses to them

Things we can do

# Rethinking our urban future

Thinking about uncertain futures means being able to imagine many versions of them...



Things we can do

# Rethinking our urban future

We need to respond and serve the culture of cities but not dictate them...



Be Brave...

