March 2020 MTNA Update

In lieu of the regular General Meeting cancelled this week due to Covid-19 concerns, Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association volunteers offer the following written updates. Updates include:

- Treasurer Report
- Announcements
- Neighborhood Clean-up Event/Fundraiser
- Hawthorne Road Work, two reports from two views
- Friends of the Park Report
- Southeast Uplift News

Treasurer Report
Update from Bing Wong

Checking: $3424.63
Savings: $1145.96
Total: $4570.59

Obligations:
Reimbursement: Stephanie Stewart printing copies ($2.50, $5.00) total $7.50

Annoucements

An **emergency relief fund for non-profits** hard hit by Covid-19 closures or increases in demand, has been set up by the Oregon Community Foundation. Donate here:
https://oregoncf.org/news/covid-19

City of Portland notifies citizens of potential **tree code amendments**:
https://mailchi.mp/portlandoregon/potential-tree-code-amendments-spring-3368457?e=ee20968518

Tree removal permit notice: 404 SE 70th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97215. The tree to be removed is a 48" split trunk Deodar Cedar located on the NE corner of the property. As required by Portland City Code section 11.50.040, there is a notification period of 45 days from the date of this notice before the tree removal can begin. This e-mail is informational only. You do not need to take any action, and it does not confer any right to appeal the issuance of the permit. Date of Notice: 3/3/2020

TaborSpace is closed until March 30 (as of March 15): https://taborspace.org/

PBOT (Portland Bureau of Transportation) cancels public outreach through March 29 (as of March 13): https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/ORPORTLAND/bulletins/28108c5

BDS (Bureau of Development Services) is closing 1st and 2nd floor customer areas indefinitely. Their permit strategy is evolving, here is the last update we were emailed on March

17th**: https://mailchi.mp/portlandoregon/temporary-closure-notice-march-3369681?e=ee20968518

Mt Tabor Tar and Trail run is scheduled in Mt. Tabor Park for Sunday, Oct 4, 2020. Learn more: www.runannie.net

Neighborhood Clean-up Event & Fundraiser
Update from Mike Turaski
The annual Mt Tabor / North Tabor neighborhood collection event (aka clean-up) will not occur in April. The middle school was only willing to let us use a small parking area (not the whole asphalt "playground" area that we have used in the past), which could only hold a few bins. The new City process for subsidizing the event also made it difficult to get certainty on the number of bins that would be funded. The indications we heard were that the City would fund approximately four bins. Last year we filled about seven. Add in the COVID-19 crisis, and trying to hold the event in April just did not make sense logistically, financially, or practically. We will re-group with North Tabor NA and SEUL, look for new locations, and try to come up with a financial approach that results in meaningful fund-raising. **This is our only fundraiser.**

Hawthorne Road-Work Project – 2 Reports

Update/ view from Mike Turaski
PBOT has expressed interest in meeting with the MTNA to discuss the re-paving project and opportunities for re-striping and safety enhancement, and to hear our input. They are wrapping up their info and idea gathering phase at the end of March, and will then be doing another round of involvement in May to share what they heard and discuss next steps. The way PBOT describes it, one of the drivers for this project is the opportunity to consider changes to lane configuration and pedestrian crossings in the near-term to take advantage of the sewer work and maintenance paving (see project website at: SE Hawthorne Pave and Paint)

It was explained to me as an opportunity to leverage maintenance dollars and small capital investments to make the street safer for all road users and more efficient for transit. Data provided by PBOT shows that there were five injury car crashes and eight bike injuries on Hawthorne between 20th and Chavez in the period 2013-17. And many other crashes and frequent speeding. (https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/753619)

Update/ view from John Laursen
PBOT will undertake a radical reconfiguration of Hawthorne Boulevard under the misleading title "Paint and Pave" This is for anyone who uses Hawthorne and cares about how it functions.

I went to the first public "workshop" about this on a Saturday afternoon at SE Uplift. It seems clear — both from what I've heard from folks in other NAs, as well as what I heard at the workshop — that a radical change to Hawthorne is in the works. This project is being billed as "Hawthorne Pave and Paint," but the real outcome appears to be a reconfiguration of the lanes to make the boulevard between Cesar Chavez and SE 12th a single lane in each direction with a turn lane in the middle (similar to what it is from 50th down to Chavez), thus putting Hawthorne on a "road diet," as was recently done with SE Foster.

The stated rationale is that Hawthorne is a "high-crash" corridor, a designation derived from the fatality that occurred at SE 43d in August 2016, and from interactions between bikes and cars at the intersections at 7th and at 11th. Changing the lane configuration between Cesar Chavez and SE 11th would do nothing to address either the circumstances that resulted in the fatality, nor the challenges at 7th and 11th. PBOT's website page (https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/59277) does not show a history of significant car crashes along the boulevard.

The last time there were major changes to Hawthorne – initiated in 1997 and completed in 2004 – there was a robust and prolonged public process. I served on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Hawthorne Transportation Plan. The CAC included representatives from each of the neighborhoods that abut Hawthorne (Mt. Tabor, Richmond, Sunnyside, Buckman, and Hosford Abernethy); members of the business community (both business owners and property owners); representatives from the Bicycle Transportation Alliance and the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition; and representatives from TriMet. The representatives from the bicycle and pedestrian organizations openly stated their desire to use the Hawthorne Transportation Plan for social engineering; their intent was to remove automobile traffic lanes from Hawthorne in order to make it so unpleasant for drivers that it would force people out of their cars. Representatives from other groups felt a strong responsibility to improve Hawthorne for *all* users, and that is what we worked hard to do.

We met monthly (and sometimes bi-weekly) with PBOT staff for a year and a half, and together we developed multiple options, which were honed and refined and presented to a broad cross-section of the public at open houses, and which ultimately were voted upon by the CAC after receiving and thoroughly analyzing feedback from the public. Included in those options were: 1) Hawthorne as it is now, two traffic lanes each way with a shared car/bike lane in each direction; 2) a single traffic lane each way with bike lanes at each side; 3) one traffic lane each way with a left-turn lane in the middle; and 4) two traffic lanes westbound and downhill with a single traffic lane plus a bike lane uphill.

There were advocates for each of these options, but ultimately we chose not to remove traffic lanes from Hawthorne because of the overwhelming negative consequences to the neighborhoods on both sides of Hawthorne, to small businesses on Hawthorne that depend on easy access for drivers and pedestrians, to Tri-Met, whose transit route would be considerably slowed, and to many bicyclists. Residents for blocks on either side of the boulevard did not want to push cars off of the boulevard thus increasing automobile traffic on the side streets. The neighborhood associations did not want to see more traffic on SE Belmont and SE Division, because those streets were already beyond their carrying capacity even then, more than two decades ago. Small businesses along Hawthorne did not want to reduce traffic on the boulevard, since that traffic also carries a major part of their customers. Bicyclists not associated with the BTA, and in particular bike commuters, did not want to push more cars onto the side streets, with would make otherwise well-functioning bicycle corridors like SE Salmon more dangerous and less comfortable to ride on. And Tri-Met was hugely concerned that the increased congestion on Hawthorne that would result from removing traffic lanes would cause the #14 bus – one of the most heavily used transit routes in the city – to traverse the boulevard much more slowly, thus discouraging commuters from using the bus to get downtown.

PBOT's "public process" is very different this time. It has consisted of a limited postcard mailing, an online survey that folks would find out about only through that postcard, and two so-called "workshops" in which participation amounted to applying sticky dots to predetermined alternatives. With this, the bureau is poised to reconfigure Hawthorne by removing a traffic lane in each direction with a left-turn lane in the center, one of the options that was resoundingly rejected earlier after a legitimate, thorough, and open public process.

This dramatic change is being justified as promoting safety along Hawthorne, and really, if it were to make the boulevard more safe, who would argue with that? Everyone wants more safety. You do. I do. But in this instance that rationale does not hold up to scrutiny. How does forcing through traffic off of Hawthorne and onto neighborhood side streets make anyone more safe, including the children who live on those streets?

 And here's the thing. We know the circumstances that were in place where the young woman was killed by a speeding driver on upper Hawthorne, the only fatality on the boulevard in decades. The configuration there is a single traffic lane in each direction with a center turn lane. That center turn lane, unfortunately, invites frustrated drivers to use it as a de facto passing lane. It's illegal, but if you've spent any time at all on that stretch of Hawthorne between 50th and Chavez you've seen people use the center lane countless times to pass a bus that seems to be stopped for too long, or a UPS truck or Amazon van that's parked in the traffic lane with its blinkers on. It's illegal, and fortunately the great majority of those drivers are not drunk and reckless, but people will inevitably use the center lane in that way. A lot. So if you were PBOT, and if safety were genuinely your goal, would you think the ideal improvement would be to take that exact lane configuration where the fatality occurred and replicate it for the entire length of Hawthorne? You would not.

If PBOT's true intention is to make Hawthorne safer, they know what the solution is. It was described to me at the "workshop" by a PBOT staffer in a rare moment of candor. The true solution is straightforward: Add more traffic lights in the stretch between Chavez and 11th. Add enough stoplights to make it possible to time the signals to the speed limit, which at present PBOT cannot do because the signals are so few and far between. Having a sufficient number of lights would allow that timing, which would greatly reduce the incentive to speed since drivers could not outrun the signal pacing; and it would cause traffic to move smoothly at the posted speed. Signals would also benefit pedestrians, who would have many more protected places to cross. A good solution for all users, and a genuine way to increase safety along Hawthorne.

But the current effort is not about increasing safety. It's about social engineering, trying to force people out of their cars, and using a stick instead of a carrot, which rarely turns out well. And here's the kicker. By flying this scheme under the radar with such negligible public participation, PBOT is expecting to make the change before the public has had a chance to understand the implications of what is being done, and to ask for a more thoughtful approach. Once PBOT has accomplished this, and regardless of whether there's a public outcry from citizens who find themselves negatively affected, there will be no going back. The current lane widths on Hawthorne are grandfathered in. Once they've been changed, state law will not allow them to be put back to the way they are now. PBOT knows this, and so do those of us who served on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Hawthorne Transportation Plan. Most people don't.

Will that force people out of their cars? Or will it just send more cars onto the neighboring streets? I think we know the answer.

Friends of Mt. Park Report

Update from Bing Wong

The annual membership meeting on March 9ᵗʰ elected 4 new board members. Friends of the Year award: Suzanne McCarthy. Special Merit Award: Shawn Snyder (seasonal park tech)

Special Notice: At the request of the PP&R the **Visitor Center is closed through April 17**.

Southeast Uplift Board News

Update from Sam Noble

At our March meeting Southeast Uplift formally awarded its small grants, as recommended by our small grants committee. https://www.seuplift.org/newsletter/2020-community-civic-engagement-small-grant-recipients/

In response to the novel corona virus, Southeast Uplift's building is closed to the public and staff are mostly working from home until at least the end of March. The March Land Use and Transportation meeting was cancelled. The Southeast Uplift board will not meet in April. More information will be available at the end of March.

As of March 12, the executive and finance committees (much smaller groups) were still planning to meet. The executive committee is holding its March meeting via video conferencing software Zoom.