185th Avenue & TV Highway
Commercial Area and TOD Concepts

Visual Assessment

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Introduction

Purpose
This report presents a visual assessment of the SW 185th Avenue/Tualatin Valley Highway (TV Highway) Commercial Area, referred to as the Focus Area in this report. The Focus Area includes land within a one-quarter mile “pedestrian shed” of the intersection of SW 185th Avenue and TV Highway. The area extends from SW Blanton Street in the south to near SW Johnson Street in the north, and from SW 192nd Avenue in the west to SW 178th Avenue in the east.

The purposes of this report are to:

a. Familiarize the project team with the visual and physical conditions of the Focus Area and the surrounding context.

b. Identify opportunities and constraints for the Aloha Tomorrow project regarding land use, urban form, and design.

c. Document key visual conditions.

About Aloha Tomorrow
Aloha Tomorrow is part of a comprehensive, inclusive, and multi-year planning process by Washington County to define the vision and implementation strategy for the Aloha-Reedville area. A major milestone was reached in March, 2014 with the completion of the Aloha-Reedville Study and Livable Community Plan. The community vision in that plan includes:

- Establishing and reinforcing a community identify through gateway or entry features and signage.
- Making Alexander Street into more of a “main street,” including a place for people, bikes, and cars to cross 185th Avenue.
- Connecting the 185th Avenue and TV Highway commercial area with other places, including parks, the post office, the library, schools, churches, and bus stops.

1 The Focus Area is the area referred to as the Aloha Town Center Focus Area in the Aloha-Reedville Study and Livable Community Plan.

This visual assessment is part of a follow-up to the Aloha-Reedville Study and Livable Community Plan called Aloha Tomorrow. The objectives of Aloha Tomorrow are to:

- Refine the land use vision and potential implementation steps for the Focus Area.
- Identify potential design alternatives for high capacity transit service in the corridor for further evaluation.
- Identify and plan for potential transit nodes and surrounding transit-oriented development land uses in the corridor.
- Provide a test case for the preservation and development of affordable/workforce housing in an area that has yet to experience significant gentrification.
- Identify strategies that will mitigate the involuntary displacement of existing residents and businesses.
- Identify steps to ensure that housing, regardless of market segment, is safe and attractive in the context of heavily used transportation facilities (including TV Highway and the Portland & Western Railroad).
Introduction

The Focus Area and study area for Aloha Tomorrow are shown in Figure 1. As described above, the Focus Area is located in the center of the larger study area. For context, this report includes a generalized visual assessment of the areas to the west and east of the Focus Area.

Process and Method
This report was prepared through a short and focused process that took place in January, 2017. Key steps included:

- Preparation of base maps and compilation of existing photography.
- A visual study of the Focus Area using Google Earth, and two field tours on January 16th and 18th.
- A project team “tabletop” work session on January 18th to annotate a large base map and discuss opportunities and constraints.
- Preparation of the report by the Angelo Planning Group and Walker Macy team.
- Review by project participants and finalization of the report.

Context
The Aloha Focus Area is the central portion of Aloha Town Center, as designated on Metro’s 2040 Growth Concept Map and adopted by Washington County. Within the urban areas of Washington County, it is centrally located and connected by two regional corridors: TV Highway and SW 185th Avenue. More locally, the Focus Area is just two miles from three important urban centers and communities, which have been the subject of extensive planning and are expected to be high-growth areas in the next 20 years: South Hillsboro, the Tanasbourne/AmberGlen Regional Center, and the Downtown Beaverton Regional Center.
Residential Form

Overall, the Focus Area has a wide mix of uses, building forms, building ages, and conditions. The area lacks a cohesive pattern and style, other than dominance of auto-oriented development. There is a full spectrum of housing types and residential forms in the Focus Area, including single family homes, duplexes, triplexes, two- and three-story townhouses, garden-style apartments, and three-story walk-up apartments. Housing in the Focus Area serves a wide range of income levels, family compositions, and household sizes.

The Residential Form map in Figure 3 shows the distribution of residential form, using building height as an index to define smaller, medium, and larger structures. The pattern is relatively diffuse, reflecting the incremental transition of the area from its original single family residential form to a wide variety of residential types through redevelopment. Many redeveloping tax lots are long and narrow, which accommodates new duplexes and townhomes but results in many awkward configurations where front doors face back walls and garages of adjacent homes. This pattern also makes it difficult to connect streets, exacerbating the lack of connectivity in the area.

The variable pattern of small, medium and large buildings lacks a clear coherence—this may change as more infill occurs near the center of the Focus Area. The largest apartment developments are currently located between SW 185th and SW 182nd Avenues, about 200 feet north of SW Alexander Street. The areas north of SW Alexander Street and south of SW Shaw Street include a mix of townhouse-type apartments, townhomes, duplexes, and single family homes. Beyond the central parts of the Focus Area, properties are developed primarily with single family homes.

As documented in the Aloha-Reedville Study, neighborhoods in the Aloha-Reedville area are generally well-maintained and modest in design, with more affordable homes than many other areas in Washington County and the Portland Metro Region. In terms of land coverage, the area is largely built out, with new development or redevelopment happening incrementally through infill and redevelopment.

1 Aloha-Reedville Study and Livable Community Plan, page 41.
Townhomes are a prevalent infill housing form in Aloha. Narrow lots present a challenge to having street-facing front doors on neighborhood streets.

Many townhomes have raised entries and are tall compared to their older neighbors. Raised entries can pose challenges for seniors and people with disabilities.

Although not as prevalent as other forms of housing, there are a variety of smaller single family homes dotted throughout the Focus Area and farther from TV Highway.

A diverse mix of duplexes and triplexes provide options for affordable homes to a range of families, while preserving Aloha’s small-town feel.
Commercial development in the Focus Area is generally small scale, with many locally-serving and culturally diverse businesses. Overall, commercial development in the area is very auto-oriented and lacking in pedestrian facilities and amenities. The area also lacks a sense of a clear commercial and community center.

Along TV Highway, the prevalent form is strip centers and small “pad” buildings, characterized by parking lots adjacent to streets, and a wide variety of building designs, materials, and signage. Landscaping is minimal on most properties. Many businesses have access directly from TV Highway. The multiple driveways and parking area, together with the high traffic volumes on TV Highway, amplify the auto-oriented character of the corridor.

SW Alexander Street is a marked contrast to TV Highway; it has a much “quieter” character with a mix of small businesses, multi-family development and single family homes. The businesses along SW Alexander Street include street-facing retail, but without traditional storefront and “main street” elements such as on-street parking, sidewalk zones, and interesting facades. Close to SW 185th Avenue, there are backs or sides of buildings that face SW Alexander Street, as well as parking lot accesses. East of SW 185th Avenue, there are newer medical office buildings with a “campus character” of landscaped yards and preserved trees. The continuity of the street as a retail destination is interrupted by the impassable intersection at SW 185th Avenue. SW Alexander Street has an impressive array of mature trees along the street and in yards.

SW Shaw Street is a frontage road to the south of TV Highway. It features a mix of homes and businesses. It shares some of the same auto-oriented characteristics as TV Highway described above, but is less auto-oriented due to the mix of uses, trees, smaller parking areas, and lack of direct access from the highway. SW Shaw Street is more of a “neighborhood edge” street.
A few houses on SW Alexander Street have been converted for other purposes, such as the Mexican restaurant shown in the photo above, or childcare.

Some new, small businesses can be found off TV Highway, near the commercial area.

SW Shaw Street is a very auto-centric with tire shops, mechanics, or storage facilities, but it also includes neighborhood amenities like a butcher.

SW Alexander Street is a mix of homes and businesses. A few of these businesses include parking access to both TV Highway and SW Alexander Street.
Civic Spaces

Places for civic gathering are not immediately evident when passing through the study area, but they do exist. The Aloha Grange, on the corner of SW Alexander Street and SW 185th Avenue, is the most visually prominent civic building. While the Grange does provide valuable indoor space for community events, there is currently no obvious, central, and public outdoor gathering space that supports civic activity. The importance of the Grange is diminished by its condition (it needs repair and maintenance) and its location between the strip center and the inhospitable intersection of SW 185th Avenue and SW Alexander Street. Pedestrians, cyclists, and cars are currently blocked from crossing SW 185th Avenue at this key intersection, leaving the Grange disconnected from its context.

There are multiple institutions, including churches, schools, and a local post office, that provide centers for community activity. These institutions, while not always used by the public at large, are important components of civic life and activity in Aloha. The location of the post office south of TV Highway does not provide easy pedestrian or bicycle access from most of the Focus Area. See Figure 5 for locations of some key civic amenities.

Parks in the larger study area provide additional civic space to the general public; however, within the Focus Area there are few parks and open spaces that support civic life and activities. The future THPRD park on Alexander (number 3 in Figure 5) presents an opportunity to fill this need. Parks and open spaces in the study area lack activation by nearby commercial or other uses. This lack of activation presents a unique opportunity to introduce a mix of uses near open spaces in order to activate them as civic spaces.

One unique example of civic identity in the Focus Area is the food cart pod located in a parking lot on the intersection of SW Alexander Street and SW 178th Avenue. This small hub of eateries also serves a social purpose by providing a visible outdoor gathering space for people to eat, talk, linger, and observe daily life in their neighborhood. Legally incorporating this type and scale of commercial activity has great potential as a means to activate public open spaces in Aloha.
The THPRD-owned open space adjacent to the Living Hope Fellowship Church’s property provides space for events and recreation. The park can currently be activated by church uses, and vice versa. It is anticipated it will be redeveloped by THPRD to include improved recreational facilities, which can influence or be integrated with the design of the surrounding area.

The Aloha Post Office is a highly-used civic building. While it is not a gathering place per se, it creates a hub of activity just south of TV Highway on SW 185th Avenue.

There are many church properties dispersed throughout the study area. They serve as important components of civic life, and provide places to gather.

Barsotti Park—located south of Blanton Street, just south of the study area—provides a gathering space, play areas, and a community garden.
Street and Pedestrian Network

The street and pedestrian circulation system reflects the inconsistent and rapidly evolving nature of the Focus Area. Sidewalks and paved paths are discontinuous or missing throughout much of the area. Older street improvement standards have resulted in mostly curb-tight sidewalks, so street trees are either absent or in yards and there is no buffer between pedestrians and the roadway. New standards require a planting strip where possible, with room for shade trees that will make walking more pleasant. The combination of the variable street standards and discontinuous connectivity contributes to an overall lack of physical coherence in the area.

The lack of a crossing at the intersection of SW 185th Avenue and SW Alexander Street is both a pedestrian barrier and a major impediment to the vision of a successful Main Street along SW Alexander Street. Recent intersection improvements at TV Highway and SW 185th Avenue have made crossing easier at that intersection, particularly to access bus stops, but TV Highway and the railroad remain significant barriers to pedestrian movement in the area.

Perhaps as a result of its rapid development from a quiet suburban area into a mix of commercial and residential uses, there is very little evidence of a complete bicycle network. TV Highway is the only street with continuous bike lanes that extend the width of the larger study area. Some other streets have fragmented bike lanes, such as SW 185th Avenue, which has a lane that extends south from SW Johnson Street but ends abruptly at the intersection with SW Alexander Street. No other streets in the Focus Area have bike lanes, however many of them may be low-traffic enough to serve effectively as shared streets (see Figure 6). Continuous streets parallel to TV Highway such as SW Blanton Street and SW Alexander Street could potentially serve as “neighborhood greenways,” or shared streets with low traffic volume that give priority to bicyclists and pedestrians. Similarly, SW Shaw Street could become a portion of the regional Turf to Surf Trail alignment in this area.

Currently, the area lacks a connected street grid and thus lacks pedestrian connections between destinations. Pedestrian improvements should be prioritized to target streets that serve as north-south (SW 192nd, 187th, 185th, and 178th Avenues) and east-west (SW Johnson, Alexander, and Blanton Streets, and TV Highway) connectors. These streets span the larger study area, linking to more complete sidewalk systems in the City of Beaverton, and destinations such as parks, schools, churches, other civic uses, and transit stops. As the area redevelops, disconnected neighborhoods can be ‘stitched’ together at a finer grain with pedestrian connections that supplement the street network.

Sidewalks in residential areas are often incomplete. Streets that once served purely residential neighborhoods exhibit a rural character, with ditches and intermittent sidewalks, making walking difficult in places.
Bus stops along SW 185th Avenue are often surrounded by a sea of asphalt and concrete, with no greenery, elements of visual interest, or refuge for pedestrians aside from bus shelters at major transit stops.

In commercial areas along TV Highway sidewalks are more common, although they are typically curb-tight. In places such as the west side of SW 185th Avenue, this makes for an unpleasant pedestrian experience—particularly next to the Grange, where the sidewalk narrows to 3’ along a busy street with fast-moving traffic.

Many smaller streets in the area are missing sidewalk connections, but do have adequate right-of-way for completing those connections.

The intersection of SW 185th Avenue and SW Alexander Street is a highly-desired location for a pedestrian connection, but the crossing is currently blocked by a median and bollards. The location’s proximity to the major intersection of SW 185th Avenue and TV Highway presents another challenge to creating a pedestrian crossing.
Trees and Green Spaces

The Focus Area is framed by an impressive urban forest, with some of the oldest trees perhaps relics from a time when this was a rural area with vast acreage and large lots. Mature trees and treed horizons are visible along almost every street, except for TV Highway. Some streets have tree canopies arching over them. Figure 7 shows existing tree canopy coverage.

This urban forest is one of the most positive visual and experiential attributes of the Focus Area. It defines an identity and provides value to existing homes and new infill development. Existing trees in residential neighborhoods add to the character of the area and can be incorporated into future street improvements -- for example, by allowing a variable planter width so that the sidewalk can skirt existing trees within the right-of-way. Washington County lacks regulation for tree preservation on private property, but trees within the right-of-way should be preserved where possible. Incentives should be explored for tree preservation during redevelopment of private property.

Many larger trees thrive on the grounds of civic uses, such as the Living Hope Fellowship Church, and the future park parcel to the east. Other parks in the area also feature mature trees, notably in Arnold and Melilah Parks (see Figure 7 for location of these parks). The latter are part of a series of natural areas and parks that trace the course of the small creeks flowing northwards into Beaverton Creek (itself a tributary of the Tualatin River). Strengthening these natural corridors with protected land in public parks or private easements will help retain a natural framework that builds the study area’s identity and sense of place.

Melilah Park is the only existing public park within the focus area. The THPRD-owned parcel on SW Alexander Street will be designed as a park in the future. Adding public open spaces to the core of the Focus Area--with programming that meets community needs--would benefit the surrounding residents and businesses and would strengthen the area’s character.
There are several large lawn spaces in the Focus Area, some associated with churches, and others that are simply vacant land.

The Living Hope Fellowship Church’s property, adjacent to a THPRD-owned future park, contains a beautiful stand of mature oak trees. There could be an opportunity for shared recreational or event use between these parcels.

Many existing trees are far enough from the right-of-way to allow for completion of the sidewalk network without removal.

Melliah Park includes several pedestrian cut-throughs with signage, allowing pedestrians to access the park from several surrounding streets.
West Area

Along TV Highway and west of the Focus Area, commercial development is generally newer, and includes more national chains mixed with the local businesses. Buildings are larger, including a few large-format retail uses, and generally have more modern building designs, landscaping, consolidated access points, and extensive parking. The Safeway-anchored shopping center is the largest commercial development in the area and the only large grocery store within walking or biking distance of adjacent neighborhoods. The SW Alexander Street side of this center includes the backs and sides of the retail buildings for a distance of about 1,000 feet. West of SW 209th Avenue, the north side of TV Highway has more of an industrial character, with outside storage, fenced frontages, and land-intensive uses such as RV sales.

Homes west of the Focus Area are predominantly single family, with only a few multifamily homes. The network of sidewalks through the residential area is more complete compared to that of residential areas near the Focus Area. The tree canopy, on the other hand, is less dense, most likely due to the area’s more recent development compared to its central counterpart.

Except for the school playground area, there are no parks within the western portion of the study area. A small wetland located north of SW Alexander Street is the only natural greenspace in the area. Civic spaces include Reedville Elementary School and the American Legion Aloha Post.

The industrial area south of TV Highway and west of SW 198th Avenue is comprised of the original Intel campus, businesses in the Industrial Way area, and the Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue District facilities. The larger building developments generally have good landscaping, modest signage, and consolidated access. The Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue community rooms are highly used and valued by the community.
The first Intel campus, located near SW 209th Avenue and TV Highway, is the largest single employer in the area. Parks and greenspaces in the west area are limited to several wetland natural areas near SW Alexander Street.

Public schools play an important role in the community by providing parks, playgrounds, and civic space, in addition to providing education. Civic spaces are not just limited to schools—organizations such as the American Legion provide community service for the surrounding area.
East Area

The area east of the Focus Area is a mix of housing, businesses, civic spaces, and parks and greenspaces. Although not as dense as the commercial area, housing east of SW 185th Avenue includes old and new single family homes, apartments, duplexes, and condos. There are still single family homes on relatively larger lots, but that condition is gradually decreasing as new infill subdivisions occur in the area.

Businesses transition to auto-oriented services when heading east on TV Highway and SW Shaw Street from the Focus Area. SW Shaw Street has many auto-repair shops and small industrial services mixed with housing.

The east area has readily accessible civic and park spaces both within the area, and nearby. Schools and parks along SW Blanton Street include the International School of Beaverton, Faith Bible Christian School, Arnold Park, and Barsotti Park. The Tualatin Hills Nature Park on SW 170th Avenue provides a signature regional greenspace within walking distance of the surrounding neighborhoods. The civic uses are an important part of the overall form of the area, providing community gathering places and adding variety to the residential development pattern.

Most of the streets around TV Highway in the east area were designed to serve neighborhoods that were much more rural in nature. They are generally narrow and lack sidewalks. Sidewalk connectivity in the area is intermittent, with new but often disconnected sidewalks constructed as new development or redevelopment occurs.
FIGURE 9: EAST AREA

Compared to the central and west areas, the east area offers better access to nearby parks and natural spaces, including the recently-completed Barsotti Park.

There is a mix of housing in the east area—mostly old and new single family homes, as well as some duplexes, apartments, and condos.

The area east of the SW 185th Avenue/TV Highway Commercial Area includes several modest single family homes on relatively large lots.

Most businesses east of the commercial area are located on SW Shaw Street and are auto-oriented in form and use.
The following observations and opportunities are based on the field work, team work session on January 17, 2017, and the findings of this Visual Assessment. They are not in priority order.

a. Sidewalks, pathways and pedestrian-oriented development are a fundamental need for the Focus Area.

b. A safe pedestrian crossing is needed at the intersection of SW 185th Avenue and Alexander Street.

c. There is potential for a central core to the Focus Area, where mixed use, affordable housing, 3-5 story building scale and “complete street” improvements would be prioritized. The central core includes the Community Business-zoned properties north of TV Highway, between SW 187th Avenue and SW 178th Avenue. The Living Hope Church and Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District sites are potential civic anchors at the east end of the central core.

d. The Focus Area boundary is a reasonable approximation of the quarter-mile “pedestrian shed”. The area along SW 192nd Ave (north of SW Zoe Lane) along SW 178th Ave (north of SW Wakem Street) are slightly beyond the quarter-mile catchment.

e. Tualatin Valley Highway is a significant barrier to pedestrian movement, so the Focus Area south of TV Highway is effectively its own pedestrian shed with little functional relationship to the northern area except for crossings by transit users.

f. Casual and unauthorized crossings of the railroad exist today and will continue to be used. The County should work with the railroad to explore authorized railroad crossings aligned with transit stops. Crossings will increase over time as redevelopment occurs.

g. Alexander Street has good potential for a pedestrian-oriented Main Street. However, it will require a clear vision and implementation strategy because it will be a retrofit as opposed to the revitalization of a historic Main Street.

h. Shaw Street has potential for additional multi-family housing mixed with retail and services that serve the adjacent neighborhood. Shaw Street also has potential for an east-west pedestrian and bicycle route—the Turf to Surf Trail.

i. Today, the cultural diversity of Aloha is not readily apparent from the built environment, and needs to be.

j. Mature trees make a significant positive contribution to the visual character of the area today. The process should explore how they might be incorporated into the future of the area, given that there is currently no tree code in effect.

k. In addition to the central core, “complete street” improvements should be prioritized for the key north-south streets (SW 192nd, 187th, 185th, and 178th Avenues) and east-west connectors (SW Johnson, Alexander, and Blanton Streets, and TV Highway).

l. As the area continues to redevelop and transportation improvements are made, pedestrian-scale lighting and street lights will be important for pedestrian comfort and safety.