

# Best Practices @ Greater Portland Metro Region

## Feb. 15-17, 2023

### SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTARY

*Comments are used anonymously, unless someone tells Randy that s/he wants to claim credit for her/his idea!*

#### At the debrief in April, what should we talk about?

- “I think the region would benefit greatly from doing more convenings like this that engaged a more diverse set of folks and also allowed for a deeper dive into some of the work that was happening around the region and allowed people to connect it to state and federal initiatives as well.”
- “I think an additional meeting with the group of attendees would be helpful as even some of Randy's points needed context when he was speaking about things in the region.”
- In the future, a Greater Portland Metro Area tour should be organized “...focused on outcomes for communities of color to help the public sector to do a deeper dive on their plans and intentions”

**The Greater Portland Metro Area is defined as a 5 county area (Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington in Oregon, and Clark and Skamania in Washington), but what does it mean to “think like a region.” Are we all acting together to benefit each other (and, if we were, what would that look like)?**

- Interdependencies of the region were not well explored during the 3-day tour.
- “Some of the speakers were quick to talk about the diversity of their city (Hillsboro for example) but didn't go into any detail about how that diversity connects to their budgets or ways of doing business differently.”
- “Not having a regional mindset really limits things”
- Needed more discussion about other industrial concentrations, such as agriculture, food production (and food service).
- Does the importance of trying to attract big marquee investments (e.g. new chips factories) outweigh the importance of supporting and promoting small businesses, which employ many people in many different workplaces?
- A lack of coordination is an obvious issue in Wilsonville/Tualatin/Sherwood. Some asked: Since Wilsonville and Tualatin have more jobs than people, and Sherwood has more people than jobs, why don't they merge?
  - Wilsonville and Troutdale give significant tax breaks to businesses, and they can afford to do so because they have so much industry.
  - Their biggest challenges are housing affordability and mental health and addiction services.

- They reported general opposition to tolling. The representative from the Westside Alliance tried to get them to accept tolling will happen, and talk about what form it should take.
- “...with regards to Wilsonville and Tualatin having more jobs than people. They also mentioned that most of their people worked elsewhere. So folks are commuting in and out of the area.”
- Could Metro play a larger role in coordinating among cities to identify and implement regional strategies?
- Vancouver economic development honcho Patrick Quinton stated "We are in the forever business." (I liked that and hadn't heard it said that way before).
- Vancouver uses an equity index for all major city projects.
- Interstate bridge prospects improved after Congress passed money for infrastructure...and Vancouver accepted (welcomed?) the concept of the bridge serving both individual vehicles and mass transit...but details about the plan still raise questions. Has the need for massive bridge abutments and associated traffic noise been folded into plans for continued development of the Vancouver waterfront's capacity for retail establishments and entertainment?
- Strategies around homelessness don't appear to be communicated across city boundaries.
- The lack of coordination has, ironically, resulted in demonstrations of what works (e.g. in Vancouver & Gresham responses to helping houseless people).
- The houseless population moves around, with houseless people at times moving to Portland, and vice versa. Gresham appears to at least one observer to be “fine” with houseless people moving to Portland. Gresham was OK, however, with providing services to houseless people from Portland who come to Gresham to access services. Gresham reported they work closely with the County on homelessness issues (no surprise since that's where the money comes from), but not with Portland.
- **Portland** appears to be following its own strategy, because – according to Mayor Wheeler – Portland's problem is too big to be addressed by the more personalized/hands-on strategy followed by Vancouver and Gresham.
  - Wheeler said that homelessness causes drug abuse and behavioral health problems, not the other way around. (I've never heard that before and have no idea whether it's true).

**Using Tax Increment Financing(TIF) as a tool of redevelopment can have tremendous benefits – but how can benefits to the broader community be a) defined and b) ensured?**

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) was mentioned more than once during the presentations by individual cities as a way of financing urban renewal – or neighborhood improvements.
  - The [Cully neighborhood](#) is planning to use TIF to bring improvements to the neighborhood
  - Questions surround whether the benefits will go mostly to property owners
    - How can/should the benefits of tifs be monitored?
    - Who are the intended beneficiaries of the Cully redevelopment? (Has the community defined

**Prosper Portland's plans include assistance for small businesses – but does the assistance help small businesses enough or in the right way?**

- "...if I was on city council I would move all the business and industry functions from Prosper to Metro and create an IGA that governs how that work happens and is paid for."
- There is a "lack of awareness around the impact that main street businesses have on local ecosystems."
- Cities on the tour provided "data and a macro theory but no details on implementation."
  - Implementation is crucial!

**Recommendation: Collect information about promised / contracted services to help houseless people and hold the providers accountable to producing the promised services. Benchmark the programs against each other, so that scale and program breadth can be evaluated.**

- "...gather...the sizes/budgets/staffing of each of the homeless programs. Each of them have contracts with orgs...it would be good to know the size of those contracts and the services that are provided also. To the greatest extent possible, it would be good to begin benchmarking the programs against each other to get a sense for scale and breadth of the programs."
- Assemble a citizens' audit group to examine whether services for houseless people (and the building of affordable housing) are being produced as per the contract.
  - In Portland, could this be done through the city auditor's office?
  - Create a dashboard of services promised, vs. services provided.

**Downtown recovery is barely beginning in Portland, but is going well in other cities.**

- Portland: What are the best new ideas for a post-covid downtown? Turning around downtown will take at least 10 years, possibly a generation.
- The Eco Northwest data showed that the number of people moving from Portland to Vancouver (or Clark County) has remained the same over time, but the reverse flow has gone down. Eco Northwest said the positive trends for Portland had already started to slow down from 2017 on, and the pandemic merely aggravated it.
- Central City foot traffic of visitors is 27% of pre-pandemic, and 48% for employees. Monday and Friday are the worst. And there does not seem to be any further recovery; there has been no change in the last 6 months. Hotel occupancy is also down more than our comparison cities. This requires a rethinking of downtown.
- **Downtown Beaverton** has 4 million square feet of retail, with only a 1.5% vacancy rate.
- **Gresham** is relatively poor. They have about \$90 million in General Fund revenue, compared to \$120-\$130 million for Hillsboro or Beaverton, while Gresham has a larger population to serve.

**General topics were:** ....from intro: *Common themes included: homelessness (all cities experiencing record numbers of people unsheltered on their streets); housing scarcity/affordability; workforce development; livability (and frequently linked to this “placemaking”); taxes (and perceived benefits/government partnerships); social justice (DEI, environmental stewardship being central to Oregon’s economic development thesis); trying to look around the corner at AI and its possibilities. Also, for the smaller cities outside of Portland, a common theme was the region’s ineluctable ties to Portland, and Portland’s current quality of life challenges.*

...from [draft] travelogue: **Gresham, OR:**

- Oregon’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest city, over 120,000
- Mayor: Travis Stovall; Econ Dev: Erika Fitzgerald
- Adjacent to Portland (connected by light rail, bus), yet more affordable, Gresham is attracting displaced Portland working-class families, becoming the most diverse city in Oregon.
- Gresham’s unofficial slogan is: “Diversity, Energy, Opportunity.”
- Gresham is considered very business friendly and is home to Boeing, DeBeers, Microchip; other advanced manufacturers.
- Gresham strictly enforces no RV-living on city streets, no camping in parks; emphasizes a balance between a) compassion for those living outside in need of help; and b) keeping parks, trails, neighborhoods clean and healthy.
- Mayor Stovall is a tremendous asset. Equally at home (and genuinely connects with) communities of color; business leaders; city employees (including police); great example of a service leader.

**Organizer glad to help:**

- “It was a pleasure to host these events and I was so glad to be involved!”

**There’s work to do, but newfound sense of optimism:**

- I wanted to take just a moment to thank you for the time and effort you gave to the Greater Portland, Inc. Best Practices event last week. The organization, logistics and materials provided were excellent.
- The opportunity to hear both staff and elected officials from the seven cities and Metro in such a short and concentrated period was amazing. I was very impressed with how seriously every single one of them treated our group. It is a testament to the excellent relationships you have built with the decision-makers throughout the region and the importance the local jurisdictions place in Greater Portland, Inc.
- I had many “take-aways” from the presentations but overall, I am pleased to say that the most important of them was the sense of optimism expressed by the presenters and the effect it had on me and, I believe, our entire group. The sense of frustration, resignation and despair that has crept into my feelings about the City and our regional and State has been heavy over the last three years. The three days with the Best Practices group and our local government representatives dramatically changed my mind set and spirit. As one of our group said near the beginning of the trips, “ I still love my City but I feel like it doesn’t love me anymore”. For me, that feeling was dispelled by the earnest, competent work, and optimistic attitude of practically every speaker we heard.
- The message was clear...There is work to do and it is time to stop grumbling and put a shoulder to the yoke for a better Portland and Oregon.
- Thanks again for your great work on this.

### **Here are a few thoughts that have me up at night:**

The Portland – Vancouver Metro Region is experiencing many of the same problems that other U.S. metro regions are experiencing. The advantage we have is regional government and a history of regional thinking. I have lived in and am working in several places – Detroit, Philadelphia, SF Bay Area – that would die to have what we have, a regional government with teeth, a unified transit system, spectacular nature, a state-wide land use system that is envy of the world, and a history of regional thinking. I was hoping to see some of that on display as a unifying theme as we travelled around the region. I was saddened to see, instead, a region of disparate parts engaged in what seems zero-sum activity.

Yes, the regional brand was missing. What was also missing was a synthesis of the possibilities. It appears none of the presenters had stood back and surveyed our region and the current moment in time and tried to connect the dots. For example, when I heard 3-4 story tech and data centers in Hillsboro what I next expected was how such an innovation could become the basis for more efficient land use, perhaps with employment tied to transit and new housing. That would really be working within the Oregon Land Use system as was mentioned. When I saw that PGE was building sub-stations throughout the western portion of the region to prepare to serve future growth, and that the utility was focused on helping customers meet their climate, carbon and ESG goals/mandates I wondered why many of those stations appear ready to facilitate an expansion of the UGB rather than a focus on facilitating new patterns of employment/ housing density in partnership with transit. Do they know that such an expansion will facilitate more SOV travel, one of the primary contributors to negative climate, carbon and thus ESG outcomes?

The lack of regional and sub-regional strategic planning was evident in most of the presentations but especially in the afternoon session of day one focused on the south region. When I see that this sub-region has been gaining population and that Wilsonville and Tualatin have more jobs than housing and Sherwood the reverse (a dynamic known for a while) I wonder why Wilsonville, Tualatin and Sherwood are engaged in a zero-sum competition to alter their individual jobs-housing balance? What would have to happen to make that not the game? Perhaps a regional or sub-regional strategy for resource sharing built around an integrated and contiguous system of nature areas, mixed employment/housing/services communities served by a multi-modal transportation system.

It was interesting to see the focus on workforce and how our region's natural amenities continue to attract investment and how education quality and workforce training varies, depending on where you are within the region. Perhaps another dot-connecting opportunity.

While I was glad to see Vancouver and Gresham enjoying their moments in the sun it seems as though their success is somewhat predatory with Portland viewed as the hole in the donut. Again, I wonder what dots could be connected to make their success Portland's success and all cities within the region better and more livable.

As for Portland, it was good to see the initiatives around houselessness and crime. Those, along with the sobering assessment presented by ECO Northwest and the Inclusive Economic Development Strategy from Prosper Portland could provide a basis for the work to come on Portland. I agree with Ethan that Portland – all of it – needs serious attention and that turning around, or re-imagining downtown will be a generational project.

I have much more to say about these observations and would welcome a follow-up session to dig into these [and other participants'] observations. One final thought though, this one about the run-of-show. In retrospect the tour might have benefited from hearing from Metro first. Their observations about the larger systems and context might have provided a solid basis for questioning some of the initiatives presented in the other places throughout the region and helped to daylight the regional siloing which seems prevalent.

This was an excellent study tour in that it did indeed highlight lessons to be learned. It will have been of great value if we have an opportunity to take stock of what we saw and ask what are the big ideas? Perhaps this could be a launching pad for some new regional thinking. The Portland region has a great brand that is still attractive to many looking for something better than their dysfunctional places. But alas I fear it may be heading in an unfortunate direction...

... some comments on our recent GPI "[Best Practices](#)" workshops... city-by-city, ...plot-by-plot?

- great effort on HOUSING (esp. Vancouver)!
- most disappointing? .. ECONorthwest, METRO ... 50 year GROWTH plan (public Infrastructure)!

SUMMARY? GoodNew/BadNews, references

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GOOD NEWS: AGILE::Programs (public-private partnerships)

- Vancouver: [Pallet Shelter](#): \$10K per unit, RV housing w/restrooms (converted parking lots..w/solar?)
- Gresham: 66 day permitting for plot-by-plot development (Gresham)

BAD NEWS: GROWTH::Framework (the Great Transition)?

-> Disaster Resilience... event-by-event "build back Better"? (Q: who do you call?... "chronic CARE")

*WHATS MISSING?*

Q:who said: "The infrastructure will change more in the next ten years, than in our lifetime"

- a) John Kerry, US Special Envoy for Climate
- b) Jennifer Granholm, US Secretary of Energy
- c) Mary Barra, CEO General Motors
- d) [Henry Kissinger](#), former US Secretary of State
- e) Eric Schmidt, former CEO Google, Exec Chair Alphabet
- f) Dan Huttenlocher, Dean College of Computing MIT

reframing Metro: "This is our 50 year GROWTH plan..." ([2023 update](#))

-> Emerging Technology ([2018 update](#))

COVID-update: ... "the Great Transition"? ...Q: "who is the 50%"

- OFFICE: What %days will be Work-From-Home (WFH)?
- RETAIL: What % of shopping will be In-Home (delivery)?
- HOSPITAL: What %visits will be In-Home (telehealth)?
- UNIVERSITY: What %students will be OnLine (degrees)?

US.CENSUS: "what is our 50 year GROWTH plan..." ([flatline](#))?

=> Q: if 50% are over 50... what % of our Neighborhood activities are Health CARE (in-home)?

(how does activity-mix effect INFRASTRUCTURE upgrades)

SIMPLE-PLAN:: [Community Resilience](#) ..school-by-school?

-> Digital Infrastructure: [Oregon Digital Safety Net](#)



[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/stephen-green-6968b119\\_last-week-i-got-to-represent-business-for-activity-7033861621986856961-ZoUP/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/stephen-green-6968b119_last-week-i-got-to-represent-business-for-activity-7033861621986856961-ZoUP/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

**Stephen [Green](#), Jordan Geunther, Jackie Yerby, Ben McKinley, Suzanne Stevens, Anyeley Halova**

**[Stephen Green • Following Spreadsheet jockey, entrepreneur, author, recovering banker & VC, working tirelessly to support "underestimated" founders.](#)**

Last week I got to represent [Business for a Better Portland](#) at the Portland region's "Best Practices Tour" that was the brainchild of my man [Dwayne Johnson](#) with an assist by [Randy Miller](#). We heard from elected officials, economic development professionals and city staff about the region and what's happening in cities inside of it. The first two days covered outside of Portland the topic most mentioned was "Industrial Land" and how we just don't have enough of it.

Day three brought us to Portland where Mayor Wheeler took the podium to talk about public safety as the number one priority for the city. He was followed by staff from [ECONorthwest](#) & [Prosper Portland](#) who laid out the data on what Portland (commercial corridors across the city and downtown in particular) looks like post pandemic and a peek at the city's upcoming "Inclusive Economic Development Strategy."

Here are some of my personal takeaways from the three days listening...

- we need more regional coordination around economic development as the plight of the all the cities in the region is interdependent
- there is some great work happening that far too few people and orgs know about
- the public sector needs to find ways to proactively connect with local businesses that aren't large corporates
- we need to spend less time and energy trying to attract traded sector firms and more time helping local existing firms to become traded sector ones
- not having a business "air traffic control tower" really hurts our ability to scale good ideas and avoid repeating mistakes others have made
- all the cities in the region are becoming dramatically more diverse but that diversity is mostly not represented in how budgets are made or in the people making policy decisions about the path ahead
- while our image continues to be shaped by whats not working we need to be also talking about what is working, especially when it comes to main street businesses who are often not only surviving but also growing and becoming more resilient with little to no help from the public sector
- we need more regular tables like this that have no gatekeepers and are organized and run by not only economic development professionals but also trusted spheres of influence in communities of color

....I am more bullish on Portland than ever. I would love to hear from others who attended.  
[Dwayne Johnson](#) [Candace Avalos](#) [Tyler Bump](#) [Brittany Bagent](#) [Shea Flaherty](#) [Betin Ben McKinley](#) [Maribel De Leon](#) [Jackie Yerby](#) [Kimberly Branam](#) [Michael Williams](#) [Suzanne Stevens](#)  
[Mike Rogoway](#)

**[Jordan Guenther](#)****View [Jordan Guenther's profile \(He/Him\)](#) • 3rd+ I am a continuing education provider for personal trainers and fitness professionals. I use my experiences as a boxing coach to speak to companies about Leadership, Team Coaching and Team Building.**

4h

Very, very thoughtful stuff. I've been a portlander for 20 years and the change in the business dynamic in that time has been telling. Local, small, niche businesses are struggling to survive while entrepreneurs and others are thriving as they ride the wave of the tech company revenue that's been flowing in. How do we as a city support our artists, small business owners, start ups AND the big players with big staff of well paid specialists?

**[Jackie Yerby](#)****View [Jackie Yerby's profile \(She/Her\)](#) • 2nd Connector | Convenor | Collaborator**

1w (edited)

This is my second Best Practices trip. My first was Houston in January 2015. I always appreciate hearing from people I might not otherwise encounter. I appreciated the level of cooperation that I heard from the various city leaders. I would have liked to have heard more from people representing the agriculture sector and from people who could speak to the importance of the urban growth boundary. I would have also liked to have heard from people representing main street businesses. I'm glad that Margi Bradway spoke about the importance of small businesses as employers.

I'm also bullish on Portland and am hungry for elected leaders to guide us in creating a hopeful vision of ourselves and the future.

[Status is reachable](#)

**[Ben McKinley](#)****View [Ben McKinley's profile](#) • 1st CEO/Founder of Cascade Web Development, Co-Founder of Brandlive, Head Big Mountain and Backcountry Ski Coach with MRT.**

1w

I really enjoyed the Wednesday and Thursday programming. It was very interesting to hear how different cities/counties identified themselves relative to Portland and in their own terms. Some awkward diplomacy but a reminder more conversations and partnership only serve to help us all.

I also found it interesting how several professionals seem to move within the region. I hope they not only share their insights from previous posts but also endeavor to forge partnerships where they may not have been strong in the past.

It all highlighted to me the critical need for GPI to succeed with its stated mission. We really do need a regional strategy to succeed.

### **[Suzanne Stevens](#)View [Suzanne Stevens' profile \(She/Her\)](#) • 2nd Editor at [Portland Business Journal](#)**

1w

Thanks for the takeaways, [Stephen Green](#). I didn't attend this event but the discussion sounds right in line with conversations that I'm hearing happening all over Portland. After years of talking about our problems, it feels like we are moving into an action phase. Momentum is building and the solutions being explored are rooted in data, like the stats highlighted in the ECONorthwest study you referenced above.

We are launching a series next week called Advancing Portland in which we'll explore solutions to some of the city's most pressing issues, including affordable housing, Portland's reputation and morale, government leadership and more.

I, too, am bullish on Portland. Most of us are here because we love this city. It's certainly been good to me, and I'm excited to be part of rebuilding in a way that benefits us all.

### **[Anyeley Hallova](#)View [Anyeley Hallova's profile](#) • 2nd Founder at [Adre](#)**

1w (edited)

There is a difference between industrial land and "industrial-ready" land. I hope they talked about the difference. The second involves infrastructure investments which we need more of.

1 Reply 1 Reply

### **[Stephen Green](#)View [Stephen Green's profile](#) Author [Spreadsheet jockey, entrepreneur, author, recovering banker & VC, working tirelessly to support "underestimated" founders.](#)**

1w

That's a great distinction Anyeley from not only a financial standpoint but also a timing one. I think it also highlighted for me the lack of awareness around the impact that main street businesses have on local ecosystems.