



Planning
Urban Design
Place Strategy

412 NW Couch St, # 405
Portland, Oregon 97209
t: 971-245-4352
www.firstfortyfeet.com

MEMORANDUM

Sherwood Old Town Strategic Plan

To: Sean Conrad (City of Sherwood); Eric Rutledge (COS)

From: Jason Graf, (First Forty Feet); Tyler Sauter, (FFF); Sijin Sun, (FFF)

Date: July 1, 2025

Subject: Business Retention Survey findings and considerations for non-financial and financial incentives or programs to support Old Town Businesses.

Summary of Survey Findings

A business retention survey was conducted from early May to early June and received nine responses from Old Town businesses. The results reveal common challenges and opportunities tied to daily operations and long-term goals. Respondents expressed a need for simplified permitting, targeted incentives, infrastructure upgrades, and better communication with the City. Parking and trash management were also highlighted as key issues affecting Old Town.

Key themes from the survey include:

1. City Support for Businesses (Q17)

Survey respondents emphasized the need for:

- Streamlined permitting and development review
- Improved communication between the City and businesses
- Financial assistance or incentives (e.g., grants, fee waivers)
- Improved safety, lighting, and trash management

2. Policy and Regulatory Barriers (Q20)

Responses indicated the need for:

- Simplified permitting processes for small improvements
- Reduced or waived permit and development fees
- Better coordination across City departments
- Flexibility to allow outdoor uses such as displays and dining
- Clearer guidance and expectations for applicants

3. Preferred Financial Incentives (Q21)

- Businesses identified the following as the most useful forms of financial support:
- Tenant improvement grants or loans (75%)
- Façade improvement grants or loans (75%)

- Permit fee reductions or waivers (62.5%)
- System Development Charge (SDC) waivers (25%)
- ADA and accessibility compliance support

4. Preferred Non-Financial Incentives (Q22)

Top responses included:

- Expedited or streamlined permitting processes
- Zoning and design standard flexibility
- Job fairs and contractor connections
- Courtesy meetings with City staff
- Event coordination that supports customer foot traffic

5. Infrastructure Needs (Q23)

Businesses indicated that the following improvements would be most beneficial:

- Additional parking
- Paved alleys and improved drainage (especially behind buildings being renovated)
- Better signage and wayfinding to direct visitors

6. Networking and Collaboration (Q24)

- 56% of businesses expressed interest in participating in City-organized networking or collaboration events
- 33% indicated “maybe,” suggesting opportunity to increase engagement with targeted programming

7. Attracting New Businesses (Q26)

Respondents recommended the following strategies:

- Improved marketing and promotion of Old Town as a destination
- Incentives for new businesses (grants, loans, tax breaks)
- Events and activities that draw foot traffic
- More affordable commercial space

8. Trash Management (Q35)

Respondents supported:

- Shared dumpsters in alleys or enclosures
- More frequent trash pickups
- Recycling options and better street bin placement
- Addressing visual clutter and safety concerns from improperly stored containers

Recommendations for the Strategic Action Plan

In response to these findings, the following recommendations are designed to strengthen business retention, support small business vitality, and attract new investment in Old Town. The proposed strategies reflect a mix of financial and non-financial tools, infrastructure upgrades, and programmatic initiatives that align with the needs identified by survey participants.

A. Financial Incentives

1. **Façade and Tenant Improvement Program:** Consider appropriating some city funds to the existing Façade Grant program by prioritizing low-cost, high-visibility improvements—such as signage, lighting, and minor façade repairs—that enhance Old Town’s appearance. Focus limited funds on projects that improve public-facing elements or address code compliance and accessibility. The City could also explore partnerships with local lenders or regional programs to offer low-interest loans or in-kind support. Clear criteria and promotion can help maximize the impact of available funding while maintaining momentum.
2. **Permit & SDC Relief:** Provide fee reductions or waivers for small businesses or targeted use types. Focus fee relief on areas the City directly controls, such as local building permit fees and planning application fees. Consider offering partial waivers or temporary reductions for small businesses making minor improvements, occupying long-vacant spaces, or opening in targeted sectors (e.g., retail, food service). While full System Development Charge (SDC) waivers may be limited, the City could explore deferrals or phased payments for eligible projects to ease upfront costs without reducing total revenue.
3. **Alley Activation Mini-Grants:** Support property owners investing in alley-facing entries and infrastructure. Eligible investments could include exterior lighting, signage, painting or murals, new door or window openings, landscaping, paving, drainage fixes, or trash enclosure upgrades.

B. Non-Financial Support

1. **Develop a “Starting a Business in Old Town” Guide:** Create a clear, user-friendly guide or checklist that outlines the steps, forms, fees, and contacts required to open or expand a business in Old Town. Include diagrams, timelines, and FAQs to reduce confusion—especially for first-time business owners.
2. **Publish Permit Timelines and Process Flowcharts:** Develop and share visual process flowcharts for common project types (e.g., signage, interior remodels) with estimated timelines for review and approval. This improves predictability and helps applicants plan accordingly.
3. **Launch a “Quick Permits” Pathway for Minor Improvements:** Create a simplified, fast-track permitting process for low-impact upgrades such as paint, signage, lighting, window replacements, and interior finish work. Consider over-the-counter or expedited reviews for qualifying projects.

4. **Assign a Permit Coordinator or Business Liaison:** Designate a staff member to act as a single point of contact for Old Town business applicants. This person can help coordinate reviews across departments (planning, building, fire) and provide consistent information throughout the process.
5. **Clarify Eligibility and Timing for Fee Reductions:** If the City offers fee reductions or waivers under specific conditions, publish a clear summary of what is available, who qualifies, and how to apply. Include this information in the business guide and on the City's website to ensure transparency and promote uptake.

C. Programs and Services

1. Quarterly Networking & Mentorship Series

Facilitate regular gatherings for Old Town business and property owners to connect, share resources, and mentor new entrepreneurs. Each session can feature a rotating topic—such as funding, hiring, or digital marketing—and include guest speakers from successful local businesses or service providers.

- **Lead:** City of Sherwood Economic Development or designated Business Liaison
- **Partners:** Sherwood Chamber of Commerce, WorkSource Oregon, Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- **Addresses:** Networking, business mentorship, workforce development, ongoing support for entrepreneurs

2. Retail and Hospitality Recruitment Campaign

Develop and implement a targeted marketing campaign to attract new businesses that meet local demand and complement Old Town's character—such as cafés, family-friendly services, or evening entertainment.

- **Lead:** Economic Development Department
- **Partners:** Local commercial brokers, Business Oregon, property owners
- **Actions:**
 - Create promotional materials featuring available spaces and incentives
 - Promote Old Town's walkability, events, and community culture
 - Conduct targeted outreach to priority business types
- **Addresses:** Marketing, incentives for new businesses, affordable commercial space

3. Old Town Business Welcome Package + Incentives Toolkit

Create a resource kit for prospective businesses that includes available properties, startup guidance, local demographic data, and a menu of available incentives—such as reduced permit fees, small grants, or referral-based bonuses for opening a desired use.

- **Lead:** Economic Development Department
- **Partners:** City Planning and Building Divisions, Sherwood Chamber

- **Addresses:** Incentives for new businesses, streamlined support

4. Co-Working and Incubator Feasibility Study

Explore the potential for a small co-working hub or business incubator space in Old Town, possibly using underutilized City-owned or privately-owned buildings. The goal is to support startups, remote workers, and service businesses that need flexible space.

- **Lead:** City of Sherwood (in collaboration with regional economic development partners)
- **Partners:** Private property owners, Business Oregon, Mid-Valley SBDC
- **Addresses:** Affordable space, support for incubators

5. Integrated Old Town Event Strategy

Enhance City-sponsored and partner events (e.g., Cruisin', Wine Festival, Holiday Tree Lighting) with business-friendly features that increase foot traffic inside stores.

Tactics could include:

- In-store specials tied to event maps
- "Shop local" passports or prize raffles
- Temporary vendor spaces inside vacant storefronts
- Sidewalk activations during markets or parades
- **Lead:** Assistant City Manager (City of Sherwood) and Economic Development
- **Partners:** Sherwood Parks & Recreation, Sherwood Police Department, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Chamber of Commerce, Sherwood Center for the Arts, and local businesses or nonprofits depending on the event, Washington County- Explore Tualatin Valley
- **Addresses:** Foot traffic, visibility, marketing of Old Town

D. Infrastructure and Public Realm Improvements

1. **Parking Solutions:** Explore shared parking options, improved signage, and assessment of underutilized lots.
2. **Wayfinding Plan:** Improve directional signage and entryway visibility for visitors arriving from major roadways.
3. **Trash Consolidation:** Develop shared dumpster facilities or enclosures in strategic alley locations to reduce clutter and improve appearance.