Major Streets Revitalization Project- Portland

Over the years there have been efforts in Portland to improve pedestrian experience on major traffic streets. Initially, those streets were made wider than normal for increasing automobile and transport traffic. Some years later, much of the through traffic on main streets was replaced by the freeway system. However, many main streets remain as underutilized auto oriented streets because of the changes necessitated by the automobile.

West Burnside and NE Broadway are two examples of major streets that need attention, to return them to be part of the pedestrian realm of the city. The idea that such major streets should be consigned to the limited use of moving traffic, rather than a balance of uses, significantly reduces the pedestrian activity, density and quality of the central city.

Proposed, is that major streets be designed to work equally well for pedestrians, automobiles and public transport. Land ownership and intensity of pedestrian use along these streets should not be diminished by the lack of commercial viability often accompanying the favoring automobiles. Major streets should be designed to encourage active pedestrian usage as vibrant enjoyable places, while fulfilling their role as carriers of traffic and public transportation.

The example chosen is West Burnside from NW 24th Place to the 405 Freeway. This important street was widened from its initial two lanes to four lanes by removing parking and narrowing the sidewalks in order to move more traffic. Burnside is a major entry street into the city from the West Hills and the near suburbs. Its demeanor is that of a street that was designed to be auto oriented. This is confirmed by its numerous fast food outlets and lack of shopping. This important street is between two very vital neighborhoods and would normally be an active pedestrian place in the city. Additionally, there is much underutilized (fast food outlets) or vacant land along this street, which if built upon with sufficient density and proper design standards, would significantly improve the quality of the street. This would contribute to its vitality and livability, as well as to that of the two adjacent neighborhoods.

The studio will explore the problems and opportunities of this mostly single use street, through reading, site analysis, and design of the street. In addition, each student will design a building of their choice on one of the available sites.