Healthy City, Healthy World

How can this infrastructure project be used to encourage and promote a healthier urban environment, support healthy economic development, and be used, as all development should be used, to enhance our region?

The new I-5 bridge design has been causing a lot of consternation in recent months, but the discussion has brought to light an unseen part of our city. The bridge is a regional connection between Oregon and Washington, tying together Portland and Vancouver. It is also part of the west coast transportation system, which links all of the major cities along the Pacific Coast. Rather than leaving vast areas adjacent to the bridge to develop as they may, what intention can we bring to this key tract of land? How can this infrastructure project be used to encourage and promote a healthier urban environment, support healthy economic development, and be used, as all development should be used, to enhance our region? This studio will begin by looking at the larger picture of the issues driving the discussion and identify goals and values for urban design in this part of our city. We will identify specific building types to design as a model to generate a healthy neighborhood and relationship to the river in this part of our city. We will assume a bridge is a given – either the current one or a new one. Our goal will be to focus on the surrounding area, to identify a design path that encourages a community and interrelationship between the components of this part of the city that reflect the values of our region.

The first three weeks of the term will be spent in an intensive immersion of the existing situation and creating a framework for a vision of what could be there in the future. We will have guest speakers from different disciplines who have expertise in the aspects of this design problem. When this phase is completed, two or three sites and building programs will be identified as examples to pursue. Students will each select one site with one building program to design in detail for the remainder of the term. The goal is to understand how each structure or building we place in a context, has the ability to help shape what is to come.

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Susan has taught at the U of O Portland Center for the past ten years. Prior to that she has taught design at UCLA and Harvard. She has worked at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Perkins & Will and Koning Eizenberg. In her own practice she simultaneously inhabits the world of art and architecture through work in glass, color and space. Susan is immediate past president of the Architecture Foundation of Oregon, which recently sponsored, in conjunction with PDXplore, a forum called “Crossing the Columbia: What Does it Mean?”