



NEWS

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**American Planning Association Designates  
Pioneer Courthouse Square A 2008 Top 10 Public Space**  
*Downtown Portland's Central Gathering Place*

**Portland, OR** – The American Planning Association (APA) announced today designation of Pioneer Courthouse Square as one of 10 Great Public Spaces for 2008 through the organization's *Great Places in America* program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planners and planning play in creating communities of lasting value.

APA has singled out Pioneer Courthouse Square because of its role as Portland's premier downtown public gathering place, its integration with transit, and the precedent it set for developing similar public spaces elsewhere in Portland.

"Portland is rightfully proud of its livability and commitment to community engagement. Nothing exemplifies this more than our downtown Living Room, Pioneer Courthouse Square," said Portland Parks and Recreation Commissioner Dan Saltzman.

APA Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live. They are enjoyable, safe, and desirable. They are places where people want to be — not only to visit, but to live and work every day. America's truly great public spaces are defined by many unique criteria, including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community involvement. Through Great Places in America APA recognizes the unique and authentic characteristics found in three essential components of all communities — streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces.

"We're excited to select Pioneer Courthouse Square as one of this year's Great Public Spaces," said APA Executive Director Paul Farmer, FAICP. "Portland is to be commended for having taken a former downtown parking lot and turned it into the most popular downtown gathering space in the city," Farmer said.

Pioneer Courthouse Square was first proposed in Portland's 1972 Downtown Plan. The city purchased the land from its owners, the Frank & Meier Department Store, and held a design competition for the space in 1980. While the winning plan was selected from a Portland design team, no funds were available for implementation



until 1982 when the group “Friends of Pioneer Square” was formed and raised \$1.5 million so the plan for the square could be realized.

"When Portland's leaders made the bold decision to turn a downtown parking lot into a community gathering space they took a risk. It is that visionary leadership and willingness to risk some stumbles that make any large planning effort a success," said Portland Parks and Recreation Commissioner Saltzman.

The public space is surrounded by buildings with ground-floor activity on all four sides including the square’s namesake—Pioneer Courthouse, one of the country’s oldest functioning federal courthouses. Framing the northern and southern boundaries of the square are mature maple trees and Greek terracotta Stoa columns. Within these borders the space is subtly divided into two-levels to accommodate a west-to-east grade change that provides a massive, centralized arc of amphitheater seating. Other features include more casual places to sit, food and beverage vendors, and an echo chamber for smaller, more intimate events.

The square is tied to Portland’s Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail system. Transit stations are located on both the northern and southern sides with a third station planned to open in 2009 along the eastern perimeter on Southwest Sixth Avenue. The successful square attracts some 26,000 residents, workers, and tourists every day -- or nearly 10 million people a year.

The nine other APA 2008 Great Public Spaces are: Yavapai County Courthouse Plaza, Prescott, AZ; Santa Monica Beach, Santa Monica, CA; Union Station, Washington, DC; Central Park, New York City, NY; West Side Market, Cleveland, OH; Mellon Square, Pittsburgh, PA; Waterplace Park, Providence, RI; Waterfront Park, Charleston, SC; and Church Street Marketplace, Burlington, VT.

For more information about these public spaces, as well as the lists of the 2008 APA 10 Great Neighborhoods and 10 Great Street, visit [www.planning.org/greatplaces](http://www.planning.org/greatplaces).

This year's 10 Great Streets, 10 Great Neighborhoods, and 10 Great Public Spaces will be celebrated as part of APA's National Community Planning Month in October 2008, designed to recognize and celebrate the many residents, leaders, officials, and professionals who contribute to making great communities. For more about National Community Planning Month, visit [www.planning.org/ncpm](http://www.planning.org/ncpm).

*The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, are dedicated to advancing the art, science and profession of good planning -- physical, economic and social -- so as to create communities that offer better choices for where and how people work and live. Members of APA help create communities of lasting value and encourage civic leaders, business interests and citizens to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. APA has offices in Washington, D.C. Chicago, Ill., and Shanghai, China. For more information, visit its website at [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org).*