

Old Town Lanterns Lighting--a celebration of community, culture, and collaboration

You are invited to attend the unveiling the Old Town Lanterns Project—a symbol of Old Town’s hope and resilience. The event will celebrate the lighting of the new array of 80 Chinese and Japanese lanterns installed overhead on NW Third Avenue between NW Couch and Davis Streets in Portland’s Old Town.

Thanks to the Old Town Community Association and the financial support from Portland’s Public Environment Management Office and Venture Portland, the lanterns are a testament to what we can achieve together, while bringing a much-needed positive spotlight to Old Town. Your presence will amplify the joy and significance of this occasion, celebrating our collective success in casting Old Town in a new, glowing light.

Event Details:

- Date: May 10, 2024
- Time: Chinese or Japanese drummers will start at 7:30p; Presentations at 8:00p
- Start at Portland Chinatown Museum for brief presentations, then outside to light them up!
- Location: 127 NW Third Ave, Portland & Third Avenue

Old Town Lanterns Project Story

The Chinese and Japanese people have long traditions using lanterns, both for ceremonial purposes and illumination, symbolizing hope and perseverance. Old Town has its own tradition of hanging lanterns from our lamp posts, and they also can be seen regularly at Lan Su Garden and other Chinese and Japanese cultural sites in the neighborhood.

As a part of a broad vision for enhancing Old Town’s streetscape environment to reactivate the neighborhood in 2022, we proposed installing illuminated Chinese and Japanese lanterns across the streets of the Chinatown-Japantown Historic District to celebrate the neighborhood’s cultural history, add festive color and additional lighting for public safety. The district spans from Burnside to NW Glisan Streets and NW Third to Fifth Avenues.

Start-up funds were provided by Portland’s Public Environment Management Office (PEMO), supplemented by additional funds from Venture Portland to create one block as a Pilot Project to demonstrate the significance of the concept and devise strategies for permitting and compliance for this unusual project before tackling implementation through the entire district. Many agencies had their own requirements to meet. These included satisfying Portland Fire and Rescue, Portland Bureau of Transportation, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability’s Historic Resource Review, Bureau of Development Services, and Portland City Council.

The Lanterns Pilot Project is on NW Third Avenue between NW Davis and Couch Streets. It consists of five permanent strands of cables supporting lights and lanterns. Each strand has 16 lanterns for a total of 80, half Chinese and half Japanese. The lanterns will bring a festive atmosphere to the street, day and night, with color, historical symbolism, and light at nights for increased safety on the street.