
Fwd: Munjoy Hill Planning

1 message

Jeff Levine <jlevine@portlandmaine.gov>
To: Jennifer Munson <jmy@portlandmaine.gov>

Tue, Mar 27, 2018 at 8:49 AM

For the Munjoy Hill file.

Jeff Levine, AICP
Director
Planning & Urban Development Department
389 Congress Street 4th Floor
Portland, Maine 04101
Phone (207)874-8720
Fax (207)756-8258
<http://www.portlandmaine.gov/planning>
@portlandplan

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From: **Stephen Gaal** <steve@gaal.com>
Date: Sun, Mar 25, 2018 at 12:27 PM
Subject: Munjoy Hill Planning
To: jlevine@portlandmaine.gov, "bsr@portlandmaine.gov" <bsr@portlandmaine.gov>
Cc: Wendy Gaal <wendy@gaal.com>

Dear Jeff and Belinda,

Thanks very much for the work both of you and the planning staff have put into the moratorium, the proposed changes to R-6 zoning and the consideration of an Historic District on the Hill. The interest in the subject has been great as evidenced by the attendance at the two listening sessions I attended and the MHNO meeting that featured Greater Portland Landmarks. I was unable to attend the ResponsibleR6 meeting on the 20th. Despite several attempts both in person and by email to get from that organization a list of their leaders and data that supports their claims, I have been unable to do so. Therefore I am not willing to give their claims any weight in my thoughts.

At the first listening session I stated that I asked, at the time of the R-6 revisions, if any "modeling" of the effects of these changes had been done by the planning board. I was told there had not. I requested that you do such modeling for any changes you now propose. I repeat that request. I think we could have avoided a lot of the issues we have seen if that analysis had been done.

My principal issues with the R-6 changes have been the ability of developers to demolish relatively small buildings and replace them with buildings of a larger footprint and significantly more mass due to reduced setbacks, relaxed height restrictions, and the building of "cubes" rather than the more traditional shapes. I think you are on the right track with the tentative proposals you laid out at the March 24th meeting.

Although everyone wants "affordable housing" on the Hill, as one gentleman stated, that horse has left not only the barn but is completely off the farm. MH is simply too attractive a location for those who can afford it to resist. Trying to stop that is likely trying to hold back the tide. You may be able to do it for a while but then you are overwhelmed, often in a catastrophic way. I think it is a fool's errand and should not be a principal part of planning objectives.

I like the demolition delay proposal. It provides a cooling off period and a time for discussion without actually preventing someone from taking that route if they are sufficiently motivated.

I own and live in a building on the Eastern Prom that is identified by GPL as a "contributing building." Next door is a non-contributing building. My biggest worry is that the building next door will be sold, demolished, and a 4-6 unit condo building will be built there that will overwhelm our property. I am counting on your R-6 zoning to prevent that from happening. I understand that the current building could be demolished under almost any scenario, but the replacement building should be of a scale consistent with its neighbors. I view an Historic District as the "icing on cake." Zoning regulations are the first line of defense to make sure that we all behave in a neighborly way when we live in close

proximity to each other. The HD designation helps preserve the look and feel of the neighborhood. I have lived in a place with extremely strict historic preservation requirements. (It took two months and a public hearing to change the mail slot on my door.) I have also lived in a place that had no zoning at all. I strongly prefer the former to the latter. I would be very happy to have my home be included in an Historic District. I believe it would make for the preservation of the very nature of the area which we all value. I also think that over time it would likely increase rather than decrease property values. I also support the idea that the HD should include North Street and the eastern part of the Eastern Prom with some additional side streets as opposed to the entire Hill. I have lived in NYC, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Boston. I can say from my own experience that these are, if not unique, fairly special areas of MH to preserve.

Finally, MH is not the only place to live in the city. I agree with the statements made by others that zoning changes allowing for increased density along off-Peninsula public transportation corridors should be considered.

I congratulate Jeff and Belinda for the thoughtful, respectful, calm, and measured listening posture you have both displayed at these meetings. Thank you.

Stephen Gaal
Portland ME
steve@gaal.com
(603) 651-9183 mobile

The Russian dissident and chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov drew upon long familiarity with that process when he tweeted: "The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth."