
Fwd: Munjoy Hill proposed historic district designation

1 message

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

Tue, Mar 27, 2018 at 2:32 PM

For the Munjoy Hill file.

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From: **Karen Harrison** <karen.harrison.me@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Mar 27, 2018 at 2:30 PM
Subject: Munjoy Hill proposed historic district designation
To: jlevine@portlandmaine.gov, Belinda Ray <bsr@portlandmaine.gov>
Cc: estrimling@portlandmaine.gov, sthibodeau@portlandmaine.gov, bbatson@portlandmaine.gov, jcosta@portlandmaine.gov, kcook@portlandmaine.gov, Pious Ali <pali@portlandmaine.gov>, Nick Mavodones <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>, Jill Duson <jduson@portlandmaine.gov>, hbassett@portlandlandmarks.org

Hello,

I have lived at [34 Munjoy Street](#) (District 1) since 1993. I love my street, and I love my neighborhood, in which people are quick to help one another and respectful of differences. Over the years, I've seen my neighbors modify their houses in many different ways to make them more enjoyable, economical or useful. I like some of the changes and dislike others, but all of them represent people making the best decisions for their families.

I'm strongly opposed to any historic district designation for this neighborhood for these reasons:

- Historic designation restrictions on additions, renovations and demolitions will prevent people from making the best design and financial decisions for their families and their futures.
- Historic designation restrictions will reduce the energy and vitality of the neighborhood and discourage or prevent the use of high-quality, cost-saving contemporary materials and methods that reduce energy use, such as contemporary glazing products that look different than older glass.
- Historic designation restrictions have a disproportionate financial impact on people with fewer resources. This includes young people using "sweat equity" to fix up a dilapidated building, older people on fixed incomes, and good landlords who try to keep rents reasonable while maintaining their buildings for their tenants' safety and comfort.
- The historic district guidelines for renovations may not allow homeowners to conform to contemporary building safety standards, for example in the size of bedroom windows. This appears to be in conflict with Portland's current emphasis on tenant safety.

Some additional thoughts:

- Behavior can't be regulated through planning and zoning. Neighborhoods are better when people see each other coming and going – and I'd rather not look at garage doors when I'm walking around -- but if you allow garages to be built, locating them at the side or back of a building doesn't force people to interact with their neighbors if they typically leave and enter their residence through the garage.
- It's always unfortunate when someone loses the view from his or her home, but that happens everywhere, and that's why houses and apartments on Eastern Prom (or, for that matter, Central Park West) cost more. It's unreasonable to attempt to freeze all of the current views, many of which are enjoyed by residents whose buildings blocked others' views when they were built.
- It seems that [118 Congress Street](#) has become the poster child for people who are upset about development on the Hill. But there are other ugly buildings on that side of Congress between Munjoy and St. Lawrence, such as the MHNO building at 92 and the bleakly utilitarian Cummings Center and fire station at 134. And 118, for all of its faults, includes street-level retail.
- At the community meeting on March 22, we watched a slide show on the history of development on the Hill. I'm pretty sure that around the turn of the last century, the people living in houses built 50-75 years earlier were horrified by the arrival of the apartment buildings now considered quaint and historic.

I respect the depth of knowledge and tremendous love for Portland's older buildings shown by the staff of Greater Portland Landmarks and the City's Historic Preservation team, but I'm afraid that "if you've got a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." I don't think that the problems presented by development in this neighborhood can be reasonably and fairly addressed by an historic district designation. I'd rather not live in a neighborhood of compulsory architectural styles, frozen during a random year when photographs happened to have been taken. I'd like to continue to live in a vibrant, energetic, live-and-let-live neighborhood.

Thanks for listening,
Karen Harrison