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March 6, 2018

Jeff Levine

Director of Planning and Urban Development

City of Portland

389 Congress Street

Portland, Maine 04101

Dear Mr. Levine,

I am writing in reference to the current moratorium on “tear-downs” in the Munjoy Hill neighborhood and efforts to create more constructive guidelines for future development in this area of Portland. Like many of my neighbors, I have been alarmed by the pace and appearance of new construction on Munjoy Hill since 2015. I applaud efforts to eliminate the use of “alternative design” standards in evaluating proposed new construction. I would also urge the City to adopt new design criteria and a review process that will keep construction design and massing more in keeping with existing homes on the Hill.

In addition to concerns about new or drastically altered buildings on Munjoy Hill, I would like to call your attention to a serious by-product of all the new construction – the destruction of many mature trees that have been an important part of the streetscape here for decades. In addition to creating a leafy, green backdrop for the life of Munjoy Hill, our trees provide several essential ecological services to this neighborhood and the entire city. Large trees in urban settings can effectively lower extreme summer temperatures by as much as 10 degrees. They soak up rainwater as it runs off of buildings, sidewalks and streets, preventing harmful chemicals from washing into our sewer system and eventually Casco Bay. Trees also improve urban air quality, soaking up CO2 and releasing oxygen – a single mature tree can release enough oxygen in one year to support two people. For every 10% increase in the tree canopy, ozone is reduced by 3 – 7%. Research has shown a 60% reduction in particulates from car exhaust fumes on streets lined with trees. In a 2015 report, the U.S. Forest Service noted that, “Small particles, ozone, and other pollutants worsen chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, and chronic pulmonary obstructive disease (COPD) and can bring on acute cardiac and pulmonary incidents, possibly leading to premature death. These problems affect about 1 in 7 Americans middle-aged or older according to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”

As developers receive permission to take down old buildings on Munjoy Hill, the City does not appear to have protected mature trees along the streets on City property. Even when developers replace trees removed during construction, they are planting small specimens with trunks about 4 inches in diameter in place of mature trees, sometimes 25 – 30 feet or taller, with trunk diameters of more than 12 inches and considerable canopies that provide the full range of ecological benefits. According to the City’s own records, more than a dozen mature trees have been removed on Munjoy Hill in just the last couple of years and many more are threatened by pending construction. While developers are removing trees to create unimpeded access to building sites, the city is losing air quality, water quality, and the ability to moderate extreme summer

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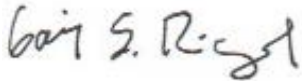
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temperatures. Pretending that these trees are at the end of their natural life span is disingenuous and not accurate; the Norway maples, oaks, and other shade trees typically have life spans of 150 - 250 years. Many of these trees are only about 50 years old. It is frustrating to watch the City stand by while a few ambitious developers enrich themselves at the cost of all of us.

Current mandated requirements for replacing trees amount to a small slap on the wrist to developers, a minor "cost of doing business". Our tree canopy is being destroyed, and it will be decades before any new plantings can make a meaningful contribution to the air quality and water quality of the City. I would urge you to review the extent of the damage already done and to strongly consider a complete and permanent moratorium on the killing of mature trees adjacent to construction projects on Munjoy Hill, regardless of new construction guidelines. Developers can work around existing trees – it just takes a bit of time and care to accomplish this. The City has a responsibility to all its citizens to protect the mature tree canopy and the biological environment, essential to our collective quality of life.

Thank you for considering this issue as you shape future zoning requirements for our City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gail S. Ringel". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gail Ringel