

## Why I love living in the East End 3/1/18

The other night at the first of two city sponsored “listening sessions” at the East End School, Councilor Ray asked the audience to share what they liked about living in our neighborhood on Munjoy Hill. I had come prepared to say several (negative) things about inappropriate architecture, noisy tear downs and shrinking green space, but I had not thought about publicly sharing what is so positive about life up on the hill. I have been pondering the question and think it’s a good one so here is my response.

My husband Peter and I live at 104 North St in a house we built 5 years ago. Prior to that we lived on the West End, in a home that had become too large and which required more energy than we had to maintain it. I dragged my feet making this move, having lived in the West End my whole “Maine” life, which has spanned 43 years. I loved the only neighborhood I had known in Portland, where my kids went to school and where many of my friends lived.

We took a deep breath, sold our house and made the move. I am happy to say neither of us has ever looked back; we are so pleased with our decision to downsize, simplify and move. I should add here that we built on a vacant lot, which once housed a 4 story apartment building. First a fire destroyed it and ultimately, the city demolished it in the 70’s. We have a spacious back yard, home to my two hives of honey bees and 6 chickens. We all feel like we have the best view in the city and we all could be happy not moving from our property all day. But we have dogs....

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A good deal of my delight in living in my new neighborhood comes indirectly through our dogs. They get about 5 walks a day. There is not a walk I don't enjoy....especially in warmer weather as we get a chance to greet our neighbors. This is of course due to the fact that they are hanging out on a porch, working in a front garden patch or doing some maintenance on their house. The building projects in the area keep us entertained and for the most part, we are happy to see new hill residents making the East End their home.

The problem comes with condos and new homes with garages on the street. In a sense, the people who live in this type of dwelling, are "dead to us". We don't meet them or see them about since often they zoom down back stairs or an elevator to a garage and leave. I realize not everyone can afford a single family house or a duplex and that apartments and condos are a part of the neighborhood fabric. But when these new buildings maximize the lot space to reduce the possibility of some green, be it a lawn, a tree or some spring bulbs, the positive experience of walking the dogs is impacted. Looking at humans is a lot more rewarding than looking at a garage door.

So, yes, I am concerned about the direction our neighborhood is headed. I will continue to find joy in walking the neighborhood with my dogs, stopping at Rosemont for a free dog biscuit or Colucci's for a 25 cent homemade one, passing the Whitten's beautiful meadow on St. Lawrence St. and enjoying the spectacular views of the bay along the prom. But the demolitions are concerning. The cheaply manufactured boxes that replace the tear downs are dispiriting. They feel greedy and worrisome as the new

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inhabitants will likely be older and here part time. That tips the makeup of a neighborhood. I would like to see the “human bus” leading MORE kids to the East End School each morning from my perch on my front porch. More young people needed! More housing with eyes on the street! More green space and access to views!

Before moving here I might have called the West End Portland’s Jewel. I have changed that tune. We are so lucky to live here. But we need the city to protect this desirable jewel, as it did years ago, with the West End. I hope you will come up with a good solution and I am happy to be a contributor to that solution.

Sincerely,

Deborah Murray

104 North St.

[debbym@gwi.net](mailto:debbym@gwi.net)

207 653-5143 Cell