

Google Groups

Preservation/Management of Munjoy Hill Development

Berry Manter <berrymanter@yahoo.com>

May 5, 2018 6:32 AM

Posted in group: **Planning Board**

Dear members of the Portland Planning Board, Jeff Levine and Belinda Ray.

I'm writing to express my concern regarding the trends on the currently vulnerable Munjoy Hill. Your responsibility in determining the future of one of Portland's oldest neighborhoods can't be underestimated. Thank you, in advance, for taking time to read this.

I had to look up the definition for "gentrification". Its happening here. Change and development of the hill is certain, and compels the need to wisely manage and keep the longterm picture vs. short term ephemeral gains in focus. Your decisions determine the face of Portland for centuries beyond our lifetime .

I have the right metaphor, I think, to put this into tangible size. It came to me this morning as I stepped out of my PJ's into yesterday's jeans — a daily uniform exchange similar to your own. Clothes and our homes are mirrors of us, each subject to whims of our culture, survival, fashion, identity. Each the vital indicator of an era. We pinpoint a date of a photo by the clothing worn or the details of architecture.

My mother born during the depression valued quality clothing and said a well made garment held its value and was money well spent. I still wear clothing she purchased in the 1940's, items a young working woman had stretched her budget to buy. She wore her timeless classics all her life. You cannot find the tailoring details or quality of material and construction in today's garments.

Our old working class New England architecture is also timeless, classic and enduring. The exterior details of trim, windows, porches and overhangs are nearly impossible to recreate today. Timbers from the bones of old buildings were harvested from old growth trees that no longer exist. While many old buildings are outwardly simple, a good architect can point at the precision of lines and pitch of a roof, the ascending and diminishing window size creating perception of height and lightness, the humble elegance of side lit front entries. Early residents took pride in their homes. It spoke of who lived inside.

Take time for this: stop and notice how you *feel* when you pass by our older properties with intentional placement on their lot, a sense of continuity within the context of their neighborhood, the intentional welcoming entry way, porch, gardens. Notice just which buildings in Portland the tourists capture on their smartphones as they wander about recording what brought them here. This is identity, a sense of place that makes Portland what it is. Too much of the new construction fails to honor this.

Return to the metaphor in clothing: How old are your clothes? Flash change fashion and inferior construction generate our current era of insatiable consumption and disposable clothing— the precise intention of an industry seeking cheap product and high profit. Bales of obsolete clothes are shipped to the third world. More lie compressed in landfills. The vintage pieces in my own closet hold their rich history and will live acquire more because someone sewed them to endure and I care enough to ensure they live on long beyond me.

This mirrors the trend in our housing stock here. The places developers insist need tearing down are actually still "young" when compared to the bloated cement board and synthetic covered boxes of questionable design and materials — how will this new construction stand the test of time? To what longterm environmental trade off?

Most importantly, ask yourself how you *feel* when you stand and really look at what's currently being built across the city, because this *feeling* is the vital test of human values and our culture. Does much of the new construction look like cheesy schlock? Does it mirror what's packed on the fashion clothing racks at the Mall?

I sincerely implore all of you to look favorably on granting sweeping protective historic districts across the Hill. Is the rash of new construction at the expense of one of Portland's oldest neighborhoods yet another Trojan horse of an "urban renewal" of our century? Will our grandchildren sigh and shake their heads just as we all currently do looking at the scheme of prior generations and the regretful destruction of the '60's? Please do not trade fleeting profit for centuries of regret. "New" is not necessarily better. The real cost of the losing Munjoy Hill's heritage is great. And, its in your hands.

Please, support the protection of the housing stock of Munjoy Hill as outlined and supported by MHNO (Munjoy Hill Neighborhood Assoc.), Greater Portland Landmarks, and MHCC(Munjoy Hill Conservation Collaborative).

5/7/2018

Preservation/Management of Munjoy Hill Development - Google Groups

Sincerely,

Berry Manter
46 Eastern Prom
Portland, ME 04101