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## Testimony to the Board on 33-37 Montreal

1 message

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Chair Sheridan and members of the Historic Preservation Board:

Neighbors living within a block of the proposed 33-37 Montreal development would like to bring several issues to your attention for remediation. We hope that the impact of this project on the neighborhood can be reduced and a more attractive building attained which does not interrupt the historic streetscape of homes which escaped the 1903 reservoir flood. The Conservation District has no meaning if the neighborhood character, including streetscape, is not conserved, and development pressure on the Hill makes this proposal an important precedent.

We are asking you specifically

**to deny the Alternative Review process to this project,**

**to use the full extent of your powers under demolition delay to require staff and developers to explore alternatives to demolition of 37 Montreal, and**

**to require full compliance with the ordinance's compatibility requirements with respect to the block within which the building will be located, with respect to scale, mass, size, surface treatment, roof profile, open space and active living space on ground floor garage level,**

1. Demolition delay: We understand the developers intend to take down 33 and 35 Montreal. We hope that the new demolition delay on 37 will be fully implemented by you and by city staff. The current effort, consisting of staff simply asking the developers if they have any interest in exploring alternatives to demolition (they said no), does not carry out the language of the delay in the ordinance, which requires the applicant to "actively pursue alternatives to demolition of the Preferably Preserved Building. You have the power to extend this delay to the full 12 month limit OR to find the building at 37 to be of historic significance. The delay allows you to press the developers to make a better proposal. We ask you to do so in order to improve this project. In fact our conversations with Historic Preservation Commissions in Massachusetts revealed that developers typically are not motivated to make changes until the time limit nears, or the possibility of landmark status for the preferably preserved building becomes real.

2. Compliance with Conservation District ordinance: The project as proposed does not conform to several requirements of the Munjoy Hill Conservation District ordinance.

First, the use of a terrace to create a foundation right on the property line violates **setbacks and open space requirements**. The terrace bulwarks are clearly walls for a parking structure and part of the building foundation. The height of these walls measures 12 feet at one point, looming over adjacent neighboring buildings. Just because there is a terrace above the first floor of a structure (as in this case), or decks, or a roof garden, does not satisfy open space requirements.

Secondly, this parking structure clearly is above ground on the Montreal St side, on the side facing MacArthur Gardens, and most likely on the Walnut St side as well (the elevation on this side remains hidden from us though the building will be totally visible from this public street). The zoning clearly requires **active living space** next to ground level parking, and this proposal fails to meet that test.

Thirdly, the butterfly roof in no way reflects **traditional roof shapes** in the neighborhood permitted by the ordinance, and contributes to the commercial and institutional feel of the building. In addition, the plans for roof appurtenances, such as elevator shafts, HVAC units, or decks, are also not revealed in this proposal. It is difficult to see how these could not be visible from the street given the shape of the roof.

Fourthly, the **windows** are of a style not found in the neighborhood, which features double hung sash windows. It is difficult to determine from the rough colored sketches how compatible **doorways** will be with the typical covered entry and paneled wooden doors of the neighborhood. All have front porches or stoops used by residents. Doors and windows and entry treatments should reflect the neighborhood.

Fifthly, the **surface materials** are not compatible with the neighborhood, which features clapboard and shingle buildings

for the most part. Updated composite materials of more compatible design could be integrated into the surface treatment if the building shape were not so jarringly incompatible with the immediate block. The proposed surface is busy and fails to conceal the mass of the building, has gratuitous color variations which do not allow the building to be "read" from the outside, and frankly is ugly and institutional. There are new buildings on the Hill which nicely reflect their neighbors while using non-natural surface materials; this building does not.

It is our belief that the design presented is not complete, lacking Walnut Street elevations and roof structures, and prematurely before the Historic Preservation Board.

Finally, the **mass and size** of the proposed structure completely fails the test of being compatible with the block in which the building is located, including structures across the street from it. The height of buildings on Willis and Montreal is barely two storeys, according to the city's own studies. The buildings at MacArthur Gardens are two stories tall and contain 8 units each. The typical structure on the block is a single family house. This structure would overwhelm and harm the streetscape. We think a better project could be designed.

All of the shortcomings cited above are reasons why the building does not merit **Alternative Design Review**. The ordinance clearly states that Alternative Design Review is a privilege, and the Historic Preservation Board has the power to deny it. The success of this building would be much greater if it followed the rules on roof types, mass and scale, windows and entries, and occupation of the first floor by a parking garage.

Here are our suggestions for the development.

1. **Deny Alternative Design Review for this project.** The proposed building would severely damage the historic character of the streetscape as proposed.
2. **Ask the developer to preserve 37 Montreal on the Willis and Montreal St sides.** It easily subdivides into 5 units, with a large premium unit on the third floor. Extend the building in the rear to incorporate an elevator and entrance to parking under the extension. Provide porches and stoops over the parking to reflect the streetscape pattern of front entries; these porches could connect with the generous porch on 37 Montreal giving the appearance of a typical Promenade Victorian and providing useable space for residents. Build the extension to match the height of the existing 37 Montreal St house, containing 4 units. While the extension could be of a modern style, its entries, windows, and roof form should integrate with the neighborhood. Total for the 37 Montreal St structure= 9 units.

You have the power to delay demolition and the power to declare 37 Montreal a landmark. Use it.

3. **Ask the developer to build a separate-appearing structure at 33-35 Montreal, with two linked buildings compatible in size and mass with the current streetscape.** The new structure could connect with new rear extension of 37 Montreal for the elevator, cellar storage, and underground parking. Keep the height of this structure to three stories to preserve the historic stepped down roofscapes of Montreal Street as well as views for the 37 Montreal top storey unit. By stepping down the structure, the parking can be truly underground. Understandably the view is highly desirable for the developers, and the new structure could support several units, including two premium units on the top floor, for as many as 8 units.
3. **Require the developer to stay within the bulk and mass limits of the existing buildings on the street, the largest of which are three storeys tall.** There is absolutely no logical reason for the existence of bulk and mass compatibility standards in the ordinances if they are not implemented. All the work done by Council, residents, and the Planning Board on a Conservation District becomes moot if the standards are not imposed. There is currently a 29 unit project under discussion for three blocks away, which would involve demolition of several single family homes built before 1930, and your work on this project will set a precedent for what happens all over the Hill.
4. **Make approval conditional on a return to the Historic Preservation Board for any alterations to size, shape, entry configurations including garage, or surface treatment of the building. Require full reveal of roof structures and Walnut St elevation for the proposal.**

We invite you to drive down Montreal St to get a feel for the stepped down streetscape and scale and mass of homes on Montreal and Willis and the careful restoration work done by resident homeowners. Please help us conserve this.

Sincerely,

Kevin Johannan  
Carol Connor  
Peter Murray  
Nini McManamy  
Karine Snyder