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Deb Andrews, Historic Preservation Program Manager, and
Historic Preservation Board
City of Portland, Maine

August 15, 2018

RE: Montreal Street Development proposal, 33 Montreal LLC, Tim Wells

Dear Ms. Andrews and Board members -

I am writing because I am alarmed about the latest proposal to tear down three buildings and replace them with a massive development project on Montreal Street. Many of us have watched project after project permanently remove historic buildings from Munjoy Hill and surrounding areas while replacing them with buildings that tower over the surrounding buildings and share few to no architectural design similarities with the neighborhood. Recent examples include several buildings on Merrill Street and others on the Fore Street of Congress Street (Sheridan, et al.)

The Montreal Street development is even worse in destruction and size than some of the past projects. The developers propose removing 3 buildings dating from the late 1800-1900. One of the buildings, 37 Montreal, is a prime candidate for renovation due to its architecture and its condition. It is not "unsalvageable." Many responsible developers have turned such buildings into "luxury" condominiums. Its Greek Revival architecture is typical of other buildings in Portland's Historical areas. It would be shameful to raze yet more buildings, especially now when serious discussions are underway about the potential for parts of the Hill including Montreal Street to become a historic district.

Even if the proposed wanton and ill-considered destruction occurs, that does not justify development of an airport style set of buildings as replacements. This part of the prom is the first view many tourists and others visiting the Prom see. It would severely degrade the neighborhood having 3 massive "modern Style" towering buildings.

People already question why in the past the city allowed the building of 2 huge apartment structures hulking over the Prom. To allow a design like the one proposed, that the developers say would be "compatible" with this huge apartment building, is to accede to their advocacy of creeping encroachment of oversized, non-compatible, structures into and on top of an established neighborhood of small one and two-story buildings.

(See: second attached document with Jean McNanamy's photos of the neighborhood). That is exactly what the ordinance change was meant to deter, and not what it contemplates.

They argue, "Munjoy Hill has many four-story buildings located next to smaller scale single-family or two family houses..." This puts me in mind of the sad little house now situated in a wasteland of four-story big boxes on Merrill Street.



Across the street from this house are more oversized box condo buildings, and on the other neighboring side, a 4+ story box building is also being erected (below). This is exactly what the city was trying to address in enacting the new ordinance.



It appears the 33 Montreal applicants are trying to convince the board that because inappropriate scale and mass buildings in other neighborhoods have been built, then they should be able to do likewise.

This piece of property on Montreal St. should be used as it was originally plotted, with accommodation for change. Not a wipeout of existing use. There is no reason the developer cannot profitably restore the building at 37 Montreal, and either restore or replace the other buildings on the adjoining property with something on generally the same footprint(s), mass and height of the buildings directly next to it. SEE: Nini Mc It is true that's not what they want to do. They have said it will cause them hardship and losses if they're not allowed to build a massive building. Every purchaser of property takes subject to city code and zoning. The fact that standards in the comprehensive plan have been disregarded in the past does not entitle these developers to have it disregarded now.

There is no adequate justification for building three out of scale structures in this location. From the affordability perspective, I would be very surprised if the developer will have anything in mind but million-dollar luxury condos, because of the potential expanded water views. Maximizing space for this reason seems to be the driving force of this design vs. compatibility with the existing neighborhood. We simply cannot reward developers for destroying existing salvageable and historic buildings by allowing them to then construct massive non-conforming buildings in the name of "workforce housing," or with the argument that other developers have done this kind of outsize building in established neighborhoods, so they should be allowed to do likewise.

We are interested to see how this first development proposal is received after helping to drive recent changes in the zoning process. People are at the point where we need to see the city is serious about listening to our concerns of the destruction of Munjoy Hill.

I hope planning will be responsive to context and receptive to recommendations of the Historic Preservation office. Neither the City nor the Hill has been well served by development driven by the anticipation of massive profit.

Sincerely,

/s/

Erna Koch