

Comment on proposal for 33-37 Montreal St, Plan #HPBR-000272-2018

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Posted in group: **Historic Preservation**

To Whom it may Concern,

My name is Jim Cole, and my partner Hannah and I have lived at 45 Montreal Street since July 2015. We won't be able to attend the Historic Preservation board meeting on Wednesday night because we'll be looking after our 1-year old daughter. Since we can't attend I wanted to share my comments on the proposed development at 33-37 Montreal St.

First of all, let me say that as a resident of the Portland peninsula since 1998, and as a professional in my 30's who has been able to live and work in his home state, I love this city and am proud of how far it's come in 20 years. I am generally in favor of development, (although of course mindful of the need for affordable housing). But I'm happy to see new, modern buildings mixed in among the historic buildings in our neighborhood on Munjoy Hill - it's all part of the eclectic, diverse neighborhood we love. It's why we chose to live here in the first place.

I also am happy to see old, historic buildings be renovated, even if they're then sold at top dollar by developers. Our house is one of those buildings, purchased by a developer, updated and sold for a profit just over a year later.

I mention all of this just to point out that I don't have any reflexive opposition to development, modern design, new construction, flipping historic houses, developers making a profit, etc. Even when it's in our backyard.

That being said, after carefully reviewing the proposed development at 33-37 Montreal, it appears to be completely out-of-scale with the neighborhood we love, and it would do irreparable damage to the visual character of the street. There is no other structure like it in our residential neighborhood, and any comparison to the high rise at Promenade East, which is an outlier and not in the center of a residential street, doesn't pass the common-sense test. Regardless of the architectural style or materials, the scale and mass of the proposed development would stick out like a sore thumb, surrounded by mostly 1.5 and 2 story homes.

Montreal and Willis Streets are not Congress Street or even North Street. They have a small-scale, neighborhood feel that is hard to create, and easy to destroy. If you walk Montreal St down towards the prom, it's easy to see that the developers' comparisons to the few triple deckers or 3-units in the immediate neighborhood simply don't hold up. And while I appreciate their willingness to modestly revise the structure and building materials in their latest design, that doesn't address the fundamental issue of scale and mass.

If this development had existed, been under construction, or even proposed when we were considering purchasing at our house at 45 Montreal, we would not have paid a premium to live in this neighborhood, and I think many other potential buyers would have felt the same. This development would greatly diminish the very qualities that make this part of the Hill appealing to buyers; and ultimately, that doesn't benefit developers either.

To be clear, I think the existing building at 37 Montreal St is a beautiful, historic, and ideally I'd love to see it restored. I have no doubt that such a renovation (whether as a single family home or a multi-family) could be profitable in the current market on the Hill, as our house at 45 Montreal was. But if the property owner chooses to tear down the building(s), and is approved to do so by the Historic Preservation Board, I also have no real problem with the construction of modern buildings, multiple units etc. They can be boxes, they can have a flat roof, they can be orange, purple or green. Montreal Street will still be Montreal Street.

What we are hoping to avoid is only this: a single, monolithic structure, 4 stories tall all the way across, casting a large shadow and taking up two entire lots, with an underground parking garage that would feel more at home in downtown Boston.

This plan, which is so out of character with our historic/eclectic neighborhood, is something we can't support, no matter how much we want to see Portland grow.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment.
Best Regards,

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