

October 17, 2018

Chair Sheridan and members of the Historic Preservation Board:

Tonight the hopes and efforts of Munjoy Hill residents who have worked hard with city staff, the council and planning board to protect and preserve the Hill's architectural heritage are being tested: either the new ordinance establishing a Conservation District works, or it doesn't.

You and staff have worked with the applicant for the Montreal St project to help them conform to the Historic Preservation New Construction standards. You have asked them to reduce the bulk and mass of the project and told them that profitability is not a consideration under the ordinance. As a resident of the immediate neighborhood of this project, I find it disheartening that the applicant has not only failed to reduce the massing of the project, but has actually increased the proposed number of units to 15.

The overall context of the neighborhood and the immediate block is of much smaller buildings, with a stepped streetscape and an average building height of 2.5 storeys. It is specious to include comparisons to buildings on the other side of the Hill, down on Sheridan Street, or 340 Eastern Promenade as exemplars—340 Eastern Promenade could not be built today and in fact that building motivated improvements to zoning for the Hill.

33-37 Montreal is still too tall and wide. The garage wall on the northeast side facing the Promenade—from which it will be readily visible—is still too high. The massing principle appears to not be met, but since the applicant has not yet told us the dimensions of the building, it may be even more out of scale than the proposal published for our review..

The two principle facades do not relate to each other at all and the building has a Hollywood quality, oddly connected at the Willis-Montreal corner like two separate stage sets—the Willis Street side is a row of more compatible townhouses, the Montreal St side still looks like a medical office building. The contrast with the very readable single and multifamily homes already on the two streets could not be more stark. The Scale and Form principle is not met.

The facade facing Willis Street holds some promise that the neighbors across the street will get to know the townhouse residents. But the facade on Montreal is remote from the street and lacks the pedestrian connection typical of the neighborhood. In fact, it is likely residents will not use the front entry, wherever it is (the building reads poorly as to where residents actually enter) —preferring to use the elevator and garage door. Height at the lower Montreal end of the building is still intimidating and the applicant has failed to step down that section to meet the neighborhood streetscape pattern of stepped roofs. Orientation to the street is not met.

The materials and articulation have produced a busy, hard-to-read building. The neighborhood is characterized by clear front entries, a single type of cladding material for each building, and where bays are part of the facade, they are covered with the same cladding material as the main structure. The articulation and materials standards are not met.

Finally, the applicant continues to present a building without measurements. How are we to evaluate massing, proportion and scale, and the other Principles, with confidence if the actual size of the building, and therefore its exterior treatment, is still withheld from public view?

33-37 Montreal sold for \$675,000 to its present owner—a bargain price on Munjoy Hill, where buildable lots are now going for half a million, for a rare, single family house. It could readily and profitably be renovated to six lovely condos with coveted views, on site parking, and a gracious entry with green space. Although the Historic Preservation ordinance does not consider profit as a standard for approval, we must acknowledge the pressure brought to bear

upon city staff and members of public boards by developers. And we must keep in mind the fact that these properties hold potential for many other buildings besides the oversized block proposed here.

This building is not ready for any kind of approval and demolition should not be granted until a more complete design showing compliance with the New Construction Principles is presented. Kicking the can down the road with conditional approvals leaves negotiations between staff and developers out of public view, and threatens the intent of the new Conservation District.

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