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23 April 2005

To: Mayor Tom Potter  
Portland City Council  
Planning Commission  
Gil Kelly Planning Director  
Jay Sugnet Office of Planning

From: Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association  
Diane Redd, President

The Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association voted unanimously at our April 20, 2005 meeting, attended by over 40 neighbors, to formally request the City Council, Planning Dept., and Planning Commission members to begin a process to look at how we can better prevent the growing problem of inappropriate, out-of-scale houses being built in established residential areas of the city. These houses are built to the maximum levels outlined in Title 33 and are grossly out of character with our neighborhood.

An example of this type of development can be seen in a new house being built on a 45-foot wide lot at 1537 SE 55th Ave. The house has a 10-foot high daylight basement, a 10-foot high first floor, a nine-foot high second floor and a finished attic. The house is at least 4700 square feet and is of a monstrous scale compared to the 1-1/2 story bungalows which populate the street.

We are enclosing a copy of this letter of request by our neighborhood land use chair, Dave Hilts. The intent of this letter is to enter into a dialog with city planners, neighborhoods, and interested parties to begin work on crafting a solution to his growing problem of out of character development in our single family neighborhoods. Dave has proposed some modifications to the current code which are designed to begin this discussion.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.

Attachments: letter titled Revision of Title 33 Zoning Codes

Revision of Title 33 Zoning Codes

It is our intention to begin a dialog with the City of Portland to propose modification of the Title 33 Code to better reflect and protect the character of Portland's existing neighborhoods. These modifications are intended to achieve the following goals:

1. Lessen impact on infill housing and remodels on existing neighborhoods.
2. Maintain character of existing neighborhoods.
3. Provide opportunity for lower cost housing (humble house idea).
4. Reduce the effect of recent zoning modifications which have had adverse impacts.

The majority of the houses in our neighborhood are modest in size and of similar construction. The larger homes are sited on larger parcels of land with large mature landscaping and trees. Homes tend to be similar in scale and are of a compatible design. We have front yards that provide green space and gathering spots for neighbors. Our backyards are adjacent to one another, providing privacy, light and space with well-developed, man-made and planted screens. Over the past several years I have noticed a disturbing trend in infill housing and remodeling in our neighborhoods. New infill housing and remodel projects are typically much larger in scale than the existing housing yet are in full compliance with current zoning.

There has been a steady increase of owner occupied properties the inner SE neighborhoods since the late 1970's. Owners have renovated these houses, raised families in them and their value has skyrocketed from an average of \$30,000 to \$300,000 over the past 25 years. Because the neighborhood's character is so appealing the potential value of new housing is also increased. This makes the possibility of a half a million dollar construction loan for a new house in our neighborhood a reality. The trend has been to build to the maximum allowed and we feel that this maximum does not meet the intent of the zoning codes. Title 33 has the following paragraph which governs height and reads as follows:

33.110.215 Height

- A. Purpose. The height standards serve several purposes:
- i They promote a reasonable building scale and relationship of one residence to another;
  - i They promote options for privacy for neighboring properties; and
  - i They reflect the general building scale and placement of houses in the city's neighborhoods.

There are unintended consequences which have resulted from the combination of Title 32 (the old subdivision code) and Title 33 the Zoning Code as well as the modification of the Main Entrances Section 33.110.230, 232 and 250E which eliminated the 'snout house'.

1. When Title 32 was combined with Title 33 the minimum lot size for an R5 zone was reduced to 3000 sq. ft. and by so doing the existing alternative development option allowed the placement of a duplex or attached house on

corner lots of 3000 sq. ft. We feel this should be reviewed. By allowing a duplex or attached house to be built on a corner lot of 3000 sq. ft. we feel there are impacts on the neighborhood which need public input and study.

2. The combination of Title 32 & 33 also eliminated the Solar Access requirement. This was in place to protect the access to the sun but also helped reduce the impact of new construction or remodeling on adjacent properties.

3. When Title 33 was modified to eliminate the 'snout house' there was public input and discussion. This modification has caused the unintended consequence of creating larger houses. The incorporation of a two car garage into the building envelope has the intended result of eliminating the 'snout house' however this has increased the scale of the house, removed the occupant's visual connection to the street, and created designs which loom over adjacent existing houses which are of a smaller scale.

Our existing neighborhoods are being asked to accept increased density to help slow down the expansion of our suburban boundaries into rural farm and timberlands and we feel it is very important to guide this development so that it will enhance our neighborhoods not destroy their character.

The following is an example of how the Zoning Code could be modified:

1. House plans more than 1 1/2 stories: Side yard setback should be increased and the allowable lot coverage should be decreased to limit the impact of the infill or remodel project.

2. House plans less than or equal to 1 1/2 stories: Lot coverage and side yard set backs can remain in place.

3. Revise the minimum lot size requirements for corner lots which allow for duplex/attached house development to 4000 sq. ft. If the corner lot is used for a single house then the 3000 sq. ft. lot size minimum would remain in place.

I propose that the City of Portland revisit the zoning code height and lot coverage requirements. The 30 foot height limit has been in place for many years but with the current trend of building large houses on small sites there is a conflict with the new building or remodel project interfacing with the existing fabric of our neighborhoods. Allowing 2250 sq. ft. of lot coverage for a 5000 sq. ft. site combined with building up to the 30-foot height limit creates a massive volume which towers over the adjacent houses. The mature tree canopy in our neighborhood is being reduced as these new housing projects fill the lots almost completely therefore limiting the ability to maintain existing large trees and prohibit the planting of new larger varieties to replace what have been removed.

Under my proposal, the infill or remodeled houses would have less of an impact by more closely matching the scale of existing houses in the neighborhood. These smaller scale homes would also be more affordable to

first time homebuyers. Lot size would control the scale of the development. This is in line with the existing qualities of our neighborhood where larger houses are on larger lots. Limiting the scale of the infill or remodel project by the ratio of height to lot size more closely reflects the character of the existing neighborhood. I feel that the decrease in density which would result in this type of plan would be offset by the reduced impact on our established neighborhoods.

Dave Hilts

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