

October 24, 2017

**INRE: Map Project Refinement Testimony
(Opposition to Natural Barrier Removal
NW St. Helens Road bordering Willamette Heights)**

TO: Portland Sustainability Commission

FROM: Jeffrey H. Courion
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Members of the Commission,

If anything, my years working for state and local government has taught me (including in-depth strategic policy for the second largest city in the United States) is that sound and sustainable policy must take into account understanding the backstory of existing community values that a new policy may impact. No singular blanket or cookie cutter policy can respectfully or inclusively honor a specific neighborhood, its people or a community. Policy must also cater to “why” people have chosen to live in a given community. It needs to incorporate and seek to preserve some of what constitutes the physical and spirited “sense of place” with which people identify. Renewing or altering any neighborhood with an eye only on the future without mediating existing community values activates resentment and alienation. I trust your consideration of this current policy matter has an inclusive and transparent process for its trajectory.

In this regard, I am strongly opposed to the proposed change to a neighboring property’s Comprehensive Plan/Zoning Map designation. Specifically, I oppose reducing or removing a “natural barrier” that is along the south side of St. Helen’s Road bordering Willamette Heights.

That barrier was intentionally designated as thoughtful public policy and has served for years as the fine line dividing and protecting a thriving family neighborhood from the adjacent highway, industry and commercial structures that produce air pollution, noise pollution and traffic congestion. The barrier was also designated where it intersects with NW 33rd as that location has a history of water run-off and dangerous landslides. The “natural” aspect of the barrier is a quality that accounted for and continues to honor the natural character of the community, which has long been a key value of residents.

It doesn’t take a fortuneteller to declare the highway traffic and will greatly increase and that the renewal of the old industry area will face major density.

Any enablement that could open the door to possible barrier removal opens a potential “Pandora’s Box” in terms of community and safety impact. The barrier must be sustained. I know all too well about the pursuit of variances used in city development project negotiations. I also know the potential regrets and damages that result from issuing such emergent variances that negate the intended grounds for existing policies and community conditions.

In this matter, I trust that as strategic planners of community and public service, you share the long-held values for sustaining this natural barrier and the public safety and community character it serves.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey H. Courion **POWER OF STORY**
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