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founders:
Kate Widdows
Michael Mintz

May 11, 2021

to:
City of Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability
1900 SW 4th Ave
Portland, OR 97201

re:
DOZA Recommendations

Greetings Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners, and Staff —

I am writing this testimony as a contributing member of PDX Neon, a local advocacy group dedicated to the protection and preservation of an oft overlooked treasure in Portland's landscape: the historic neon sign.

Every city has its own unique collection of historic neon signs, and Portland is no exception. These glowing gems have become nothing less than irreplaceable cultural icons, and essential elements in the visual identity of our city. Think of the Alibi Lounge's fiery red lettering; Portland Outdoor Store's cowboy on a horse; Chin's Kitchen's dumpling-eater in Hollywood. These and scores of other beautiful signs — which are unique to Portland alone — are known and cherished by Portlanders, tourists, and sign lovers everywhere. Signs like this disappear from the American landscape every single day. We need to act now to protect these important works of folk art before they are gone forever.

The changes we are proposing for the DOZA Recommendations document will not only help prevent Portland's beautiful neon signs from being tossed in a dumpster, but will also support the work of local, highly skilled craftspeople in our city who make, repair, and restore these one-of-a-kind signs, by hand, every day.

The DOZA recommendations make mention of neon on p. 32 of Volume 3, suggesting that adherents to the guidelines "*maintain a site's uniqueness by re-purposing architectural elements, such as sculptural neon signage and character defining canopies.*" My suggestions are as follows:

- 1. The term "sculptural" is too specific. Please update the language in this section to include "historic and/ or noteworthy neon signage,"** as most of Portland neon signs are not "sculptural" or necessarily designed to fit with a building's architecture (as is currently shown in the single photo example of Signal Station in the St John's neighborhood).
- 2. Please include additional examples of neon signs in the Citywide Design Guidelines, in order to further illustrate the need for protecting a variety of sign types.** This potential showcasing of neon signs (as is done on page 32) will provide a quick visual reference so that users reviewing developments across the city will be more inclined to protect and preserve important and/or historic neon signs.
- 3. In the Design Standards section of the document, please add additional standards requiring the preservation of historic neon signs, as well as encouragement for the creation of new neon signs,** as currently there is no mention of neon signage, or the preservation of historic signage, in this section.
- 4. Please support the adoption of a neon sign Historic Resource Survey as part of the upcoming Historic Resources Code Project.** This survey will lead to the development of much needed new options for protecting historic neon signs from demolition.
- 5. Additionally in regards to the Historic Resources Code Project, we request that you add your support for assigning landmark designation to Portland's most important signs.**

We appreciate the time you've taken to make improvements to the zoning code, and we thank you for considering our proposed changes to your document. We hope you agree that we need to act now to protect Portland's beautiful neon works of art before it's too late, and that adjusting the zoning codes is an excellent vehicle for achieving these protections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Widdows", written in a cursive style.

Kate Widdows
pdxneon.org