

Jonathan Konkol

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Testimony to **Portland City Council** on the **Design Overlay Zone Amendments, Recommended Draft**

Greetings, I am writing to provide my feedback on the proposed Design Overlay Zone Amendments. I am an urban designer and APA certified planner, practicing in Portland for over a decade. I thank the City for taking the initiative to revisit its design requirements. In the past decade we have seen a large wave of development, much of which is of questionable design merit. We will need to accommodate an additional 260,000 residents in the next decade, so it is clear we will need much more development. It's not a question of if we grow, it's how we grow. Design standards are an insurance policy against bad design. Best practice is for Type II administrative design review to steer buildings toward a traditional, unobtrusive form that is consistent with the baseline character set by Portland's pre-WWII patterns. For projects that aim to be design-forward, it is appropriate to allow much broader scope, through a Type III review with design guidelines and a public process. Most architects don't have the chops (or the budget) to pull off an exemplary modernist structure. Those that do are well served by a type III process. For the rest, the path of least resistance for functional investment buildings should be to blend seamlessly with our legacy architecture. It has the added bonus of being difficult to get wrong. The City should tighten design standards to reflect this less risky approach. Simple buildings without trendy add-ons will serve the city better over the long run. Citizens by and large do not oppose accommodating our residents in larger new buildings. The principal objections I encounter are the loss of historic buildings and the fear that ugly, disharmonious structures will replace them. To the former point, the City must take steps to incentivize preservation of the structures identified in the 2016 Low-Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis. To the latter, design review should be mandatory for all buildings of four stories or more, and design standards for Type II reviews should reflect a bias to the patterns of existing prewar foundational fabric. Citizen contributions to design planning reflect the stated preferences of the community and as such should be granted a pathway to incorporation into Portland's land use code. Over two decades ago, the City of Portland began the work of creating specific design guidelines for top level districts around the city, only to abandon the effort before it was completed. Reengaging this process will restore the trust that many citizens have lost in Portland's ability to manage growth with sensitivity and nuance. Thank you for your consideration, Jonathan Konkol, AICP 2515 NE 9th Ave #8 Portland, OR 97212

Testimony is presented without formatting.