

Concordia Neighborhood Association



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RE: DOZA Proposal

May 9th, 2021

To:  
Portland City Council

Mayor Ted Wheeler ([mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:mayorwheeler@portlandoregon.gov))  
Commissioner Carmen Rubio ([comm.Rubio@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:comm.Rubio@portlandoregon.gov))  
Commissioner Dan Ryan ([CommissionerRyanOffice@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:CommissionerRyanOffice@portlandoregon.gov))  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty ([joann@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:joann@portlandoregon.gov))  
Commissioner Mingus Mapps ([MappsOffice@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:MappsOffice@portlandoregon.gov))

1221 SW 4th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Portland City Council Members,

While we do not disagree with the aims of the DOZA process, we feel that the adoption process for the standards associated with the DOZA project must be paused. We are not opposed to the FAR, height, or density allowed under the base or overlay zones; what we object to is the clandestine manner in which the DOZA project standards<sup>1</sup> have been developed and are proposed for adoption, without any meaningful review cycle with the community.

The proposed standards have never been summarized, illustrated, and shared to give neighborhood or community groups the opportunity to provide input.

There is no summary of the proposed standards that has been shared with communities to make the topic digestible and understandable. There is no summary of the standards available on the DOZA website, nor is there any record of the creation of such a summary, or the sharing of it with neighborhood coalitions, main street business associations, or community groups.

The standards are overly complex for the public and difficult to digest in their current form, as text-format, un-illustrated code, without accompanying summary materials and public engagement to explain and illustrate the design standards so that they may be understood, at the very least, by community leaders who are already versed in the basics of Portland's land use system (though, arguably, the Comprehensive Plan would provide guidance that their content should be made understandable in a robust and inclusive manner to any citizen of the city, not just those with a certain level of education and training).

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<sup>1</sup> This critique is specific to the standards, which are binding, and not the guidelines, which are only advisory and have been shared widely with many different groups.

In this age where we have a general consensus in the city of the importance of involving BIPOC voices in planning decisions, we can find no record of any meaningful BIPOC participation in the development or review of the proposed standards.

Because there has been little to no neighborhood review offered of the standards, the impression given to the public is that the DOZA process was conceived and run by modernist architects, for modernist architects, to run roughshod over the traditional character of the city's streetcar-era neighborhoods. We believe that the citizens of Portland should also have a voice in deciding what the binding design standards for our neighborhoods should be.

Portland's neighborhood main streets are filled with significant examples of traditional architecture, places we value that represent our history, and are defining elements of the present moment that Portland residents know and love. On page 43 of the Staff Report, the Future Work section highlights critical work needed to ensure we do not aim for the future at the expense of our smaller narrow main street centers:

*"...project staff also acknowledge the historic and community value of the places studied in the Analysis. The identified areas comprise Portland's earliest building blocks that still define today's neighborhoods. The buildings that make up these areas are a lasting testament to the physical characteristics that the design overlay zone espouses: defining context, contributing to the public realm, and designing for quality and resilience through generations of merchants, residents, and visitors. They embody the image of what makes Portland, Portland." (Pages 51-52, DOZA Recommended Staff Report)*

The character statements that the proposal includes as a stopgap measure have no timeline, nor budget, and are not binding, nor will even apply unless a project goes through a discretionary Guidelines track, which make them nearly irrelevant to most projects, including those under 75' and the vast majority of development that will use the Standards track. Lacking tools for these places makes them vulnerable to being lost nearly overnight, as seen on Division and Williams, without any community voice in the process of setting the standards for new redevelopment.

Although context will certainly evolve, there is a significant difference between having current character evolve to reinforce a desired District future character, or having it erased and replaced without community input.

The process that has led to the proposed adoption of DOZA's design standards (separate from the guidelines) appears to not be in compliance with the following Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies:

**Goal 2.A, Community involvement as a partnership**

*"The City of Portland works together as a genuine partner with all Portland communities and interests. The City promotes, builds, and maintains relationships, and communicates with individuals, communities, neighborhoods, businesses, organizations, Neighborhood Associations, Business Associations, institutions, and other governments to ensure meaningful community involvement in planning and investment decisions. Partnerships with historically under-served and under-represented communities must be paired with the City's neighborhood organizations to create a robust and inclusive community involvement system."*

A genuine partnership would include full, open, and honest dialogue over design standards prior to their adoption, including with the organizations listed in Goal 2.A. We don't see evidence that the standards have been the subject of such a dialogue with these groups in the process leading to their proposal for adoption.

**Goal 2.B, Social justice and equity**

*"The City of Portland seeks social justice by expanding choice and opportunity for all community members, recognizing a special responsibility to identify and engage, as genuine partners, under-served and under-represented communities in planning, investment, implementation, and enforcement processes, particularly those with potential to be adversely affected by the results of decisions. The City actively works to improve its planning and investment-related decisions to achieve equitable distribution of burdens and benefits and address past injustices."*

It is entirely unclear how the process that has led to the proposed Design Standards meets the spirit and intent of Goal 2.B; it is much clearer that there is a potential for community members to experience adverse effects as a result of the decision to adopt design standards that were not developed through an inclusive partnership with the community.

**Goal 2.C, Value community wisdom and participation**

*"Portland values and encourages community and civic participation. The City seeks and considers community wisdom and diverse cultural perspectives, and integrates them with technical analysis, to strengthen land use decisions."*

If Portland truly values community wisdom and participation, then it would hit pause on the effort to adopt the new Design Standards, to allow time for the proposed standards to be properly summarized, illustrated, and explained simply to the community; this is not enough, however. The city must run feedback loops with the community and listen to, hear, and incorporate community input into a revised draft of the standards, as appropriate.

**Goal 2.D: Transparency and accountability**

*"City planning and investment decision-making processes are clear, open, and documented. Through these processes a diverse range of community interests are heard and balanced. The City makes it clear to the community who is responsible for making decisions and how community input is taken into account. Accountability includes monitoring and reporting outcomes."*

It is very unclear how the proposed Design Standards have been clearly and openly documented, or that the decision-making processes that have led to their proposal for adoption comply with the intent of Goal 2.D. For this reason, their adoption must be paused, and the community must be given the opportunity to understand and give input on the proposed standards.

**Goal 2.E: Meaningful participation**

*"Community members have meaningful opportunities to participate in and influence all stages of planning and decision making. Public processes engage the full diversity of affected community members, including under-served and under-represented individuals and communities. The City will seek and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected by planning and decision making."*

There does not appear to have been a pathway offered for community members to have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the development of the design standards. We have records of the design *guidelines*

being explained to the community, but not the *standards*. For this reason, the adoption process must be paused to allow input to be given on the *standards*.

**Policy 2.14, Community influence.** *“At each stage of the process, identify which elements of a planning and investment process can be influenced or changed through community involvement. Clarify the extent to which those elements can be influenced or changed.”*

We can find no instance during the development of the design standards where the community was clearly shown which elements of the process could be influenced or changed through community involvement. We therefore see no evidence that there was any effort made to comply with Policy 2.14.

**Policy 2.18 Best practices engagement methods.** *“Utilize community engagement methods, tools, and technologies that are recognized as best practices.”*

We don't see that any effort was made to deploy community engagement best practices in developing the design standards proposal. Best practices might include illustrating how the standards would look on a commercial street, producing a clearly-understandable chart showing where the point system is needed or how it is used, or illustrating the standards using a sketch of a prototypical building, with elements of the standards shown to depict how the requirements add up to a complete building. Nor was a charrette or other workshop used to allow for the community to see these effects, then provide meaningful input in realtime. We don't see that virtual focus groups were used during the COVID quarantine, or that a meaningful online open house was produced. In short, we don't see an example of a single community engagement best practice that was used, much less best practices in the plural.

**Policy 2.22 Shared engagement methods.** *“Coordinate and share methods, tools, and technologies that lead to successful engagement practices with both government and community partners and solicit engagement methods from the community.”*

We have national experts in community engagement best practices who live and work in Portland. We don't see any evidence that they, nor any other community members, were sought out in order to solicit engagement methods.

We therefore are calling on the adoption of the DOZA standards to be paused, until their adoption process can be brought into compliance with the adopted Portland Comprehensive Plan. While it is paused, these are the top five recommendations for revisions to the standards, and to the approval process for projects on the discretionary path, that we recommend the City enter into dialogue with the community about adopting; these are based on feedback collected through the PDX Main Streets design initiative, which has been involved with neighborhoods and business districts in a years-long, community-driven effort to develop a set of community-based design guidelines for our streetcar-era main streets:

1. **Thresholds for Design Review on small narrow Main Streets should have parity with Downtown at 45'.** We recommend a 3-4 story or 40-45' threshold'; the proposed 75' threshold is NOT “scaled to impact” and won't be relevant for most of the City. Or, if the 75' threshold is important to keep for economic viability reasons, then step-backs must be required above a certain height, one which has a relationship to the width of the street.
2. **Adopt the Main Street Design Standards** - See PDX Main Streets “DOZA Dozen” recommended main street pattern area standards (separate testimony). Many of these patterns contribute to greater

affordability because they are simple and cost efficient to build. Per the DOZA Dozen, Affordability Standard:

We see three potential regulatory options for adoption of the Main Street Design Standards:

- a. Adopt as either a distinct Main Street “Plan District” for the areas in the Low-Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis (aka the Vintage Main St. Study); or
  - b. Integrate into the general D-Overlay general design standards; and/or
  - c. Adopt for specific Main Street areas (e.g. Hawthorne Blvd) and Plan Districts (e.g. Division Street) where there is demonstrated community support (Neighborhood Association letters, business district letters, adopted PDX Main Street Guidelines, etc)
3. **Add Demolition Review** (stronger than Demo Delay) for buildings in the areas of the Vintage Main Street Study (Low Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis) and those in the Hawthorne, as well as vintage buildings Inventories already created for Montavilla (by BPS) and for Division, Hawthorne, Sellwood-Moreland by PDX Main Streets.
4. **Require Context Criteria in BDS Application Submittals for Discretionary Review.** To ensure sufficient evaluation of building and site conditions and impacts when the discretionary, guidelines-based path is chosen, require that each application include:
- Context Plan showing proposed footprint of project, adjacent lots with building footprints and windows facing project site.
  - Context Street Elevations showing proposed project and adjacent buildings for commercial, mixed use, 3-stories and over Residential, and Institutional buildings, including windows facing the site at each elevation.
5. **Direct Staff to adopt a Community Based Planning Policy:** There is currently no pathway for community led planning efforts to gain official recognition by the city. When local budgets and staff are limited, City staff should not be dismissing community led planning processes, such as the PDX Main Streets design guidelines and the extensive community led planning work involved in the creation of its main street design tools. We need a pathway to ensure that work like the Albina Vision, Boise Design Guidelines, Sellwood-Moreland Design Guidelines and others, has a pathway to gain recognition if best planning practices are followed, and widespread community support can be demonstrated. We’re not recommending this as a way to reduce FAR or height entitlements, but rather to ensure that Portland residents have a say in the design of future development in our own neighborhoods.

The adoption process for the DOZA design standards must therefore be paused to allow sufficient time for the community to be involved in the development of these standards, and for full and due consideration of these suggestions.

As further proof that the DOZA process has been rushed, and has not even received sufficient staff oversight, much less been driven by any sort of meaningful community involvement process, look no further than pages 48 through 50 of Volume 1, the Staff Report of the Recommended Draft of the Design Overlay Zone Amendments, from November 2020. These pages are filled with what is known as *lorem ipsum*, which is the term commonly used in publishing and graphic design to describe placeholder text used to demonstrate the visual form of a document or typeface without relying on meaningful content. Lorem ipsum is typically used as a placeholder text before final copy is available. We understand that this is placeholder text for future character statements for individual areas around the city, but we believe that no document headed to City Council for adoption should ever, ever, include *Lorem ipsum* text.

We feel that this is perhaps a metaphor for the adoption process for the DOZA standards. They're not ready for adoption. In their current state, they are a placeholder for standards developed through a true community-driven process, one that still needs to take place in order to produce community-based design standards for Portland's neighborhoods.

Signed,

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Peter Keller

Chair, Board of Directors

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