

Vincent Dawans

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

Dear Portland City Council: I have been a resident of Portland since 2007. I chose to move to Portland because I liked its large peri-urban environment mixing residential and commercial uses. When done right, mixed-used cities are great example of livability, and Portland has been blessed to benefit from an organic growth leading it down that path. Density is key to a healthy and vibrant mixed-used city. Density comes with a real challenge however: the higher is gets, the harder (and expensive) it is to fix design mistakes. I should know. I was born in Brussels, Belgium in 1971 and lived there until the age of 25. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Brussels went through a period of rapid growth and redevelopment. Many historic buildings were demolished and replaced with generic modern ones that didn't take any sense of place in consideration. The damage was so deep and the outcry so wide that the term Brusselization was coined to describe "the indiscriminate and careless introduction of modern high-rise buildings into gentrified neighborhoods" and has become a byword for haphazard urban development and redevelopment. 30 years later, the scars of the 1960s and 1970s are still visible and will probably never totally heal. The silver lining is that Brussels served as an early warning and spurred strong design requirements throughout European cities. Recent development in Portland has been largely positive without stronger design reviews. Yet even a large number of good examples of developments can be overshadowed by a few bad apples. What happened in Brussels is a cautionary tale: the lack of design review is ultimately anti-growth and anti-density, because it eventually equates density with bad design in people's minds. Good design is pro-density because when people experience good high-density design, they not only like it, but want more of it. High-density when done right brings more amenities, both private and public, better access to a wide variety of options on a smaller footprint. It is in that context that I strongly encourage City Council to consider endorsing PDX Main Streets Top 5 DOZA Design

Recommendations: 1. Add Main Street Design Standards. One of the key aspect of Portland is that it is a city of neighborhoods. We can do much better than what DOZA is currently offering. Let's write custom standards that highlight and promote the uniqueness of each of our Main streets throughout the city. 2. Align review height across the city in a coherent way. It is hard to understand why many of our main streets would see design reviews trigger at 65 or 75' considering that in most cases zoning doesn't even allow buildings that high. At the minimum, what is good for downtown is good for our neighborhood Main streets, so please align reviews at 3-4 stories or 40-45' city-wide. 3. Brussels demolished countless historical building of significance, including by famed architect Victor Horta. That was over 50 years ago. What is our excuse going to be in 2021? The Low Rise

Commercial Storefront Analysis (aka the Vintage Main St Centers Study) identifies vulnerable areas of special character. We need to add Demo Review for these areas as well as architecturally and culturally important buildings in the inventories already available for Montavilla and for Division, Hawthorne, Sellwood-Moreland by PDX Main St. 4. Require context criteria for permits. A building isn't an island. It exists in relations to the space around it. Contextual site plans and context elevations are needed for a full picture of impact. 5. Promote community based planning. We each live in specific areas of the city, each with their specific history and characteristic. Let's embrace diversity and promote local decision making in design. After all it is us the residents that have to live with design mistakes, and we deserve a seat at the table when new developments impact our own living environment. Sincerely, Vincent Dawans

Testimony is presented without formatting.