

May 12, 2021

MITHUN

The Honorably Ted Wheeler
Mayor, City of Portland
1221 SW 4th Ave, Room 340
Portland, Oregon 97204

Re: Design Overlay Zone Amendments (DOZA)

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of DOZA and about the positives of design review. I am a practicing landscape architect speaking on behalf of Mithun, a multi-disciplinary design firm based in Seattle. I had the privilege of speaking to the council 2 years ago, and much of what I said then still applies today, though our world is very different now. Portland is one of my favorite cities and it is a thrill to contribute to its built environment. I moved here to attend college and Portland was the first city I lived in with a walkable urban environment and the years spent there shaped my perception of how great cities should be designed for people.

Mithun has participated in multiple design reviews in recent years. Some of those in highly scrutinized central city neighborhoods, and most recently in north east Portland with the 5 acre Planned Development for the Pepsi bottling facility and the subsequent first phase of vertical development which will provide 218 units of market and affordable housing, commercial space, below grade parking, public plaza space and a publicly accessible woonerf-style street re-connecting NE Pacific.

Our office practices across the country, and I have been involved in design review processes in multiple cities, primarily on the West Coast. Portland's process, while rigorous, is unique in its interactive and collaborative approach, especially early in the design.

Applicants have an opportunity to present their projects and engage BDS staff and Commissioners in a conversation about how to respond to design guidelines, address the neighborhood's needs and desires, and contribute to the public realm. Unlike other municipalities, the multiple opportunities for conversation with the Design Commission, and the thoroughness of the application, can produce projects of high caliber without surprises late in the design review that can delay project permitting and construction schedules.

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The Design Advice Requests is essential to providing early feedback on the conceptual approach, massing, programming of outdoor rooms, contextual response, and circulation with time to respond before the details are developed. With the Pepsi Blocks project, conversations with the design commissions about the evolving context of Sandy Boulevard influenced our site planning, ground floor program and material choices for the better and the commission was a great champion in reconnecting NE Pacific in a pedestrian focused street.

The success of this process is also due to great partners. Our client, Security Properties, recognizes the value in the design quality of Portland and supports the development of project of permanence. We consider the committed BDS staff, who willingly work with us to streamline and facilitate applications, as partners. The collaborative attitude and varied experience of the Design Commissioners also contribute to the process. They bring an awareness of design and development challenges, an interest in protecting a high caliber of design, and a recognition of the evolving needs of the City.

The Design Review process requires the applicants to be prepared, dedicated and thoughtful in their decisions. But the results of this rigor speak to the city's commitment to build places that will last for decades to come. The attention to detail and fundamental moves, set up projects – and neighborhoods - for long term success.

Thank you,

Dorothy Faris
Partner, ASLA
