

David Keltner

#309722 | May 14, 2021

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

Dear Mayor and Council members, I was scheduled as the last person to testify regarding the DOZA proposal but was unable to connect. Thank you for inviting me to submit this written testimony. I am the owner of a 60-person architecture firm that has practiced in our city for 35 years. I have taken more than a dozen projects through the design review process including multi-family housing and served on Design Commission for 5 years. My experience on both sides of Design Review, as an applicant and as a commissioner, demonstrated there are two distinct applicants moving through the process. Applicants that are skilled at knitting buildings into the urban fabric of our city and who genuinely care about making our city better, and those who see our neighborhoods as a distraction from their development goals and design review as a hurdle to overcome. Consistently, those that approach their work as a contribution to our city sail through the design review process, and those who see their work as self-serving and autonomous struggle. This proposal is not about affordable housing. It is an effort to remove a process a specific group of architects and developers are bad at. It is not about cost. Significantly market forces and funding sources dictate the same financial constraints regardless of the approach to design review. Projects that breeze through are no more expensive than projects that flounder. It is all about the focus of the design work, the way resources are allocated within the projects, and the skill of the designer to make great urban contributions with tight budgets. The Oral testimony Wednesday reflects these two groups. Those who have struggled with design review and those who haven't. The primary goal of the organization behind this proposal is not to champion affordable housing in all of our neighborhoods. This is a great goal we should all support. The real goal is to eliminate design review from our city and this is the first step toward that end. The way design review has been portrayed is misleading and the scope of this proposal is much further reaching. Building more affordable housing faster and throughout the city is a goal that is much more widely supported than a stand-alone proposal to eliminate design review to make it easier for a specific group of applicants who struggle with it. PNW has worked hard to conflate their goal of eliminating design review to this much more popular goal promoting affordable housing. The idea that design review is a barrier to affordable housing is false. In fact, the opposite is true. This is clear to those who serve on the commission and anyone who witnesses the process weekly across hundreds of cases. Design review is only a barrier to those who approach it that way and who ignore Portland's goal of creating a denser more affordable city that is also a great place to be. Design review does not require buildings to be more expensive and the added money to go through the process is negligible (less than .2%) for most projects. Type III design review is not a

vehicle for Nimby's. While the appeal potential is certainly problematic, the review itself is not the problem. In the extremely rare cases where an appeal has been pursued design review had already approved the project. There has never been a case where a Nimby neighborhood appealed a project to design review and had it shut down. It is not a thing that has ever happened. Design Review is a champion of our city's goals of affordability and density. This proposal casts an ally as a problem and misses the actual problem which is the ability to appeal these projects. This proposal disguises the reality of its scope. Because of inclusionary housing requirements any project over 20 units must have 1 affordable unit. When a building has 1 unit, the entire building is considered 'affordable'. While seeming to remove design review only from affordable housing, it is actually removing design review from every housing project over 20 units. The next step for this group will be an attempt to remove design review in totality. A point system is being proposed as a replacement. This would eliminate dialogue and discourse from the artful work of knitting buildings into their context; into the wonderfully idiosyncratic and varied character of our neighborhoods. There is no point system or standard that can replace creative dialogue without losing the richness and diversity that makes our city great. Human beings are better at doing this than scorecards and systems of standards that can be gamed and manipulated. If this proposal is adopted, it will start the process of eliminating people and dialogue from the the making of our city. A dialogue no different than the one you have engaged by considering this testimony. This proposal is misleading in its scope, serves developers and architects who want to avoid dialogue with the neighborhoods they are impacting, and falsely connects a flawed appeal process to design review which is a champion of density and affordable housing. Thank you for your consideration. David Keltner Hacker Architects Principal

Testimony is presented without formatting.