

Linda Nettekoven

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

Good Afternoon Mayor and City Council, I wish to extend my strong support for the new, improved, more flexible DOZA Design Standards & Guidelines that you are considering, and also to call attention to a gap in what the DOZA proposal contains. The list of value statements that introduce DOZA include the following: “The design of new development should expand and amplify the character and identity of a place and its community, rather than diminish it.” I am still concerned that the Design Standards which are likely to govern an estimated 80% of our future projects will not be adequate to help us to avoid diminishing communities as we grow. Our Comprehensive Plan calls for 60% of the city’s projected growth to be absorbed in our designated centers and corridors. However, many of these districts have no plans or tools in place to guide this growth and change. Standards which allow a building project to move forward with few to no questions asked are in many cases a good thing. However, they leave no avenue for the developer to learn about or take into account a vision or adopted goals a community may have for the larger fabric of their area. And I want to stress I am not advocating for veto power or a reduction in proposed density for any community. BPS staff has already identified many of the missing pieces needed to close this policy gap in the section entitled Future Work. I’d like to suggest including an amendment that calls for the implementation of some of these & other ideas in the near future. Draw from the work of community volunteers involved in community-based planning efforts e.g., such as the Boise Design Guidelines, PDX Main Streets, the People’s Plan, Albina Vision, etc. Specific Comments:

Contextual Cues Even though our City has defined pattern areas and has acknowledged that one size does not fit all, we find many parts of our community without any means for defining character themselves or any recognition by BDS or developers of character they may have defined previously. (Please see Community Guidance section below.) Add a context elevation requirement for project submittals. Create context maps that describe area patterns that can be reflected objectively in Design Standards. Our City has produced much eloquent aspirational language, but we often lack the tools to implement it and the resources to evaluate how well the goals have been achieved. 2) Our City has produced much eloquent aspirational language, but we often lack the tools to implement it and the resources to evaluate how well the goals have been achieved. The current study didn’t include 3-story structures and didn’t make note of scattered vintage buildings along a corridor but seemed to include only blocks where these buildings were in the majority. Even scattered sites or a few buildings from a given decade, when clustered together provide relevant context clues. 3) Main Street Standards and Guidelines Create basic, style-neutral Main Street Standards for the areas

identified in the “Vintage Buildings Study” aka “The Low-Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis”. These could be used in other areas with a D-Overlay. Consider treating them as an optional “Main Street Bundle” with appropriate points for those developing new buildings in the midst of or near buildings listed on the HRI. The existing Sellwood-Moreland Design Guidelines could offer potential building blocks for new Main Street Standards.

4) Thresholds: The stated goal here is “to align the level of review with the level of impact a project will have on the community.” To set the threshold above 65’ would mean no opportunity for Design Commission Review in much of Northeast and Southeast Portland despite the level of impact a building this size would have on its neighbors along many of these narrow corridors bounded by narrow parcels. Setting the threshold at 45’ would capture anything above the allowable height. Or one could consider requiring setbacks above 45 feet if the threshold is to be kept at 65.’

5) Health Impacts: On a related topic, streets like Belmont, Division, Stark, etc., are narrow. We have yet to determine what kind of impact the creation of narrow “canyons” where there are blocks of buildings of very similar height 2(a term often used to describe Division) has on the trapping of heat (heat island effect) and air pollutants. Also, it may be difficult for trees to thrive on narrow streets populated with much taller buildings. Green roofs can address some of these concerns, but trees along a corridor do much to enhance the pedestrian experience and the community’s mental health.

6) Make Use of Community Guidance Sources There are many examples of Community Guidance available in past neighborhood and business plans and design guidelines, along with newer or emerging sources like the People’s Plan and the work of Albina Vision that amplify community concerns and preferences. Especially in areas where community-generated information is limited, any other clues to cultural context should be considered in trying to consider the context of an area, both its past and future. It is possible for staff and community members to reference these documents or other information while making it perfectly clear such informal guidance has no legal standing and will play no role in any staff review process or findings. Even before we began facing this past year’s multiple crises I think there was agreement that as a community we need more sound housing & commercial space of many types, in buildings old and new, while striving for greater affordability, along with climate-responsive design for our buildings and our neighborhoods. A greater focus on ant-racism, inclusion and equity must continue to serve as the cornerstone of our efforts. The development of better tools that encourage Portlanders of all backgrounds to care for and about the “places” where they live and work also can contribute to these other important goals. I wish to express my thanks to you, your staff, the team at BPS, the PSC and the many community members who are contributing to this effort. Sincerely,

Linda Nettekoven 2018 SE Ladd Ave Portland, OR 97214

Testimony is presented without formatting.