

# Kate Widdows

**#329858 | June 10, 2021**

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

Dear Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners, and Staff— As a contributing member of PDX Neon, a local advocacy group dedicated to the protection and preservation of historic neon signs, I'm submitting this testimony with the aim of preventing Portland's dwindling collection of beautiful, historic signage from being erased from our landscape. The changes we are proposing for the DOZA Amendments Package will not only help save Portland's beautiful neon signs from the wrecking ball, but will also support the work of local, highly skilled craftspeople in our city who make, repair, and restore these one-of-a-kind signs, by hand, every day — signs like the glorious Laurelhurst Theater, the dazzling White Stag rooftop sign, and George Morlan's dancing water heater king. Below is a list of changes we are proposing.

- 32.34.020 Section C • Designate neon signs as historic resources. Technical amendments, Item #6, section 32.34.030 • Correct the design guideline language regarding neon signs should be in more generalized by removing the term “sculptural.”
- Amend the language encouraging retention of character-defining details for storefront retrofits by adding the term “vintage signage” to the list of details. Main streets design standard bundle, Item #3
- Include additional standards requiring the preservation of historic neon signs.
- Include encouragement for the creation of new neon signage. Directive to create character statements, Item #8
- Amend the character statements to address neon signage. Other changes
- Make non-conforming signs to be legal by right. Doing this would save applicants the time and money, and reduce the uncertainty of the current process.
- Create more Special Sign Areas. Broadway, Chinatown, and Interstate are good starts for creating unique sign rules, but there are other areas of Portland with clusters of important signs that should be assigned further protection.
- Strengthen the rules governing Special Sign Areas. Design Review should be required for all Special Sign Areas, not just those greater than 32 square feet. Character-defining signs should be allowed to be restored, reconstructed or relocated without counting towards a site's maximum sign allowance.
- Place a moratorium on the removal of signs during the planning process for DOZA as well as the HRCF. We need to act now to protect Portland's unique neon works of art before it's too late. Thank you for considering our proposed changes to your amendments package. Sincerely, Kate Widdows

[pdxneon.org](http://pdxneon.org)

Testimony is presented without formatting.