

My wife and I can barely contain our elation. It is not hyperbole to say this is this proposed rezoning of our block is the most exciting piece of mail we've received since we moved into our house six and half years ago. Our personal American Dream feels like it's stirring from the ashes. As first time homebuyers, we were not savvy or educated enough to understand that we had purchased a property zoned in some mysterious nether-land called "General Employment 1". After all, our house was built in 1917 with single family homes on either side of it. How could it be anything other than a residential property?

In February of 2014, we were confronted with the heart-wrenching reality of our oversight. This came in the form of huge trucks equipped with continuously running, diesel-operated refrigeration units, parked directly across the street from our front porch, shaking our foundation, rattling our windows and shattering our nerves. My wife and I were flabbergasted. How in the unholy stretches of insanity could anyone possibly think this was acceptable in a residential neighborhood?

We purchased our house with the ideal of having a place to call our own, investing in home ownership is a foundation of American culture, history and ideals, not to mention, a talking point of every responsible adult we know. "Renting a home is like throwing your hard-earned money in the garbage disposal," they said. "Buy a home. Build equity." This was a particularly tempting considering the rapidly declining existence of pensions and/or healthy retirement accounts in the private sector. If we made it to retirement age and Social Security still existed, home ownership was an absolutely essential piece of avoiding a diet of stale bread and rancid jam in our old age.

With these intentions, we borrowed money for a down payment, carefully pored over our finances, wrung our hands and made the leap. A few months later, we experienced the stomach-dropping fear and bewilderment when the housing bubble burst, the world plunged into the Great Recession and seemingly overnight we were horribly upside down on our mortgage. Then, we experienced a reduction in wages and despite all indicators that a strategic fault made more and more economic sense, we loved our home and faithfully continued to pay the mortgage. We acknowledged that we wouldn't be able to trade up anytime soon, but we figured that if we took care of our home, eventually values would go up and our sacrifice might be worth it.

Flash forward to a devastating Saturday evening, 24 hours after the refrigeration trucks showed up. Everything we worked for seemed to crumble amidst the uproarious, rumbling thunder of three continuously running diesel engines. At this point, we could barely hear ourselves think. It became painfully apparent how sound can be used as a method of torture, disrupting rest, cognition, and the ability to function normally (without wanting to jump off a bridge). I realize this may sound melodramatic, so I'll briefly elaborate.

We bought our home fully aware that it was directly across the street from a loading dock on a commercial building. We saw the trucks from Google Earth before we even set eyes on our future home. We dealt with trucks coming and going at all hours of the day and night for several years. Eventually, our bodies semi-adapted. Our brains learned to dismiss the loud beeping of a truck backing up in the middle of the night and the startling crash of a ramp lowering to unload. The sounds were annoying, but intermittent, and hence tolerable. We accepted these sounds for years with no complaint.

A couple years later, the tenant moved out, the building was empty, and the trucks were gone. Soon, we were in a battle with vagrants and addicts moving into the building's adjacent alley, fighting, cursing

and screaming at all hours. Graffiti and large piles of rubbish started showing up, too. Then, the parking lot was rented to a nearby auto-dealer and they began racing cars up and down our street. We did our best to grin and bear it. Our house wasn't in the perfect location, but it was still our house and we loved it. Looking back, though, the original trucks, the invasion of vagrants and the car lot were sunny dances in the park compared to the refrigeration trucks. This new situation made our home seem absolutely worthless. Everything we worked for seemed to be slipping away.

When we called the number on the side of the building, we were surprised and thankful that the owner himself answered. He said he had no idea the trucks would cause any problems and he had full intentions of being "a good neighbor". Since, all of my neighbors had already expressed grave concerns about the new tenant, the owner agreed to meet us all at once. A month went by and despite frequent communication with the owner and tenant, many promises and alleged good intentions, nothing productive was done to stop the refrigeration trucks from smashing into our lives and destroying our neighborhood and property—not just metaphorically. Twice now, trucks have backed up onto our property, smashed into our retaining wall and tore up our landscaping. The most recent time, they shredded the first flower's I've ever planted.

How can this type of activity occur directly across the street from a residential neighborhood? Our research revealed that we lived in a bizarre territory zoned for "General Employment 1". According to the City of Portland's website, this particular zoning is intended to "allow for a large range of employment opportunities without potential conflicts from interspersed residential uses" and is permitted to abut industrial zones. I can vaguely grasp that this must be an important "buffer" zone in city planning, I just couldn't understand why our block was in one. My wife and I felt completely defeated and at our wits end.

Meanwhile, the trucks kept rolling in. Multiple refrigeration units running simultaneously were clocking in at over 80 decibels when measured from my front porch. Conversations with the owner of the building across the street had devolved into him calling everyone "insane" because the sound of the trucks was "incredibly quiet" and it was "our fault" for purchasing a property in an industrial zone. My wife was in tears and we were both completely on edge and desperate. The noise was so extreme at night, it occurred to me there must be some kind of code governing this. Thankfully, the City of Portland has excellent online information and within seconds I was reading Title 18, Chapter 18.10 - "Maximum Permissible Sound Levels". To my supreme relief, even living in our strange zone, it appeared the refrigeration trucks were in violation of a City Ordinance.

After many hours of research, phone calls and emails, the one and only, Officer Paul van Orden (our personal super-hero), came to our property, made some measurements and determined the trucks were indeed violating a city ordinance during nighttime hours (between 10 PM and 7 AM). The relief was overwhelming. After a few more tortuous nights, the owner and tenant received notification and the trucks stopped running after 10 PM. We had won back our nights.

Unfortunately, because of our current zoning, the trucks are still permitted to run continuously during the day creating a very un-residential atmosphere and an extremely inhospitable environment if we ever want to sell our house. One of our favorite activities, having a sunset drink on our front porch after a long day at work, is rarely, if ever possible anymore. We can't even enjoy an evening barbeque from our back porch because the trucks are still easily heard. Overall, we still felt pretty defeated and hopeless.

Then, this exciting notification from the city arrived—a true beacon of hope. If our house becomes zoned for residential as proposed, my wife and I will be dancing in jubilant celebration. The entire block will rejoice. We will actually live in the residential neighborhood we thought we moved into. I am extremely heartened by this possibility and by the overall efficacy of our city government. From the police officers who helped keep the alley under control, to the law makers who had the foresight to regulate noise pollution, to Officer Paul van Orden who tirelessly strives to ensure the citizens of this great city have the right to quiet enjoyment, I am thankful. The proposed re-zoning would be the ultimate victory to wash away our struggles and a clear confirmation that Portland is The City that Works. My wife and I sincerely believe this would be the full resurrection of our personal American Dream.

Sincerely,

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