

To: Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

As resident of the Buckman neighborhood at 1400 SE Oak Street, this letter is regarding the parcels at 1403 - 1415, and 1421 SE Stark street and your departments pending decision on possible zoning changes for these parcels.

It appears the city's inclination is to change the zoning designation of these parcels from residential to commercial. Changing the zoning to a *portion* of these parcels from residential to the lowest density commercial is agreeable with a few important caveats to be considered in the zoning code. First some quick comment on the neighborhood context of these parcels before clarifying my position.

This is a residential neighborhood with significant historic character and charm. Stark street is not a main artery or thoroughfare but rather a collector street and offers no public transit. This particular part of Stark is amongst a couple blocks that function as a sort of small-scale 'pod' with an eclectic mix of uses, but otherwise is predominantly residential as you move east of SE 14th. This 'pod' is small, intimate and neighborhoody. Positioned neatly between Belmont and Burnside streets - this area of Stark is the baby-baby sister to these more main east/west corridors. Nonetheless, this little pocket of inner SE has seen its share of recent change steer more commercial - in particular the zoning change and commercial renovation project at Washington High School. While I remain hopeful and optimistic, the jury is out as to what impact this overall development/use will have on the neighborhood. Times change and no one is deaf to that, but oversaturating with too much larger-density commercial development will absolutely re-shape and re-define this area. Not to mention there is a plethora of commercially zoned territory to the immediate west of this neighborhood. A balance must be struck so that the integrity of this SE pocket continues amidst the natural evolution of the times.

The parcels being considered for re-zoning have indeed been non-conforming uses of late, which I understand to be a goal of the city to rectify. At the same time these parcels have been used as modest, unobtrusive artist spaces congruent with the spirit of the neighborhood. They abut historic single-family residential parcels with turn of the century homes, and have presented no negative impact on those homes nor their surroundings. To use their 'non-conformance' as a platform to 'commercialize' this strip lacks a fundamental connection to the spirit of this place, and puts at risk its very well-being. Without proper conscientious consideration we could easily find ourselves with the type of development that alters the very essence of this neighborhood, leaving nearby properties, homes and residents as collateral damage to the convenience of clean paperwork.

It's also important to highlight, these parcels are currently for sale. Tenants have left or are leaving. So decision making for these parcels should not be backward looking, but forward thinking.

Key concerns in re-zoning to commercial specifically are:

- 1) ill-fitting size/magnitude/scale of permissible development
- 2) development that lacks congruency and fluidity with residential abutments and general lack of respect for the nature of residential abutment
- 3) allowing commercial zoning 'flexibility' without any legitimate protocols to encourage or ensure similar 'active-use' akin to the parcels' history
- 4) design integrity/neighborhood spirit sensitivity; historic preservation

This understood, for parcels 1403 - 1415 SE Stark, I can agree to the least dense commercial designation of CM1, IF:

- the max. allowable height is 35 feet, with a three story maximum
- building height is measured from the street entrance level at Stark Street
- Rigorous set back, step back, architectural articulation, natural light allowance, and green space requirements are embedded into zoning code to ensure congruent, non-abrupt relationship between said parcels and the turn of the century, early 1900 residential properties they abut
- privacy requirements are embedded into zoning code (limiting number of allowable units facing abutting properties, strict guidelines for number, size and placement of windows, strict guidelines on number, size and placement of decks/porches)
- 'active use' incentives exist: reasonable incentive or requirement is established for continued use of similar or neighborhood appropriate active ground floor use (otherwise, why not hold to residential zoning?)
- design review and neighborhood association correspondence are part of the development approval process (there needs to be a process and path for developer/neighbor correspondence and common ground agreements to take place)

For Parcel 1421 Stark, my opinion at this time is that it should remain R1.

- a small scale neighborhood such as this needs to have mechanisms in place to ensure there isn't a broad swath mega-development tactic akin to Division Street on this non-thoroughfare, residential street/area. Maintaining this parcel as R1 will help do so.

- this parcel's zone change recommendation is a late additional request/recommendation to a neighborhood already concerned.

- fairness: There is an appropriate place for a happy medium. I can support and feel comfortable with a portion of this landscape being freed up as lowest density commercial with the caveats mentioned, but going carte blanche with commercial re-zoning on this block could authorize a level of change that feels dangerous to the neighborhood. The land owner is actively selling off a series of properties so their request makes obvious financial sense, but the potential risk/detriment falls then on the neighbors rooted there.

- if I understand correctly, part of the city's hope/intention is to create development that accommodates an influx of people in coming decades WHILE at the same time upholding building design and aesthetic articulation integrity/variety. By accommodating 1/2 of the block's parcels as low density commercial and the other as continued residential, you enforce a mechanism for generating those design distinctions when these parcels develop. You also help insulate the risk of large monolith development that would be out of place.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you listen and consider the voices of the Buckman community seriously. Let us all agree we wish for a future Portland that is as unique, inspiring, and one-of-a-kind as we've known it to be!

Sincerely,

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