

Testimony against the Corner Lot Provision- zoning code 3310.24E

Laura Wozniak

7226 SW 29th Ave 97219

When we bought our house on SW 29th in 2008, I specifically asked our realtor to check the zoning because we enjoyed the walkable neighborhood with including small houses with sheltering Doug Firs. I was told that no duplexes or multiple family housing could be built except on Capitol Highway near us. A few months ago the neighborhood was shocked to discover that a little known "corner lot" provision allows any corner lot to be divided again to allow the construction of "attached" houses. We also discovered that, although it is difficult to remove a tree from your own property, any tree that would prevent new development can be removed. Current policy seems to exclude tree protection in R-5 and R-7 zones.

This came to light because a developer bought the historic Becker property of 10,000 sq feet. Al and Mary paid it off in the 1930s and intended it to go to family, but failed to specify their intent that it stay whole in the deed. Since Al is no longer competent, the property was sold to Dream Builder and the ramshackle old home was razed. At the time of the notice to divide it there were 14 trees on the lot, among them 5 large Doug Firs. A nice couple contracted with Dream Builder for a home on 5,000 sq ft which necessitated taking down the biggest tree, but they requested to save 2 large trees right on their property line, whose health is now endangered by phase 2. The demolition and felling of the huge center tree was no surprise. The shock came when a very FEW impenetrably worded notices were left at houses within 100 ft. Dream Builder intended to take down every remaining tree and fill the lot corner to corner with two attached houses. This was a blow to the people who had just spent money to build next door.

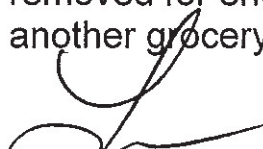
The corner lot provision makes this plan possible. It violates the character of the neighborhood and destroys the very qualities that made these lots desirable in the first place by eliminating every tree. Even today with half the lot developed, you can step under the old cedar by the road or into the center and notice the hush provided by the large evergreens, hear birdsong the rustle of foliage while breathing clean air filtered through thick towering greenery. It is cool in the summer, and sheltered from winds in the winter. Even during the worst storms this winter, no branches came down because the 100 year old trees protect and support each other. They serve as a repository for moisture and filter groundwater that feeds the headwaters of Stephens Creek 2 blocks away. In Multnomah Village there is already a problem with stormwater because of our soils and cumulative development. Groupings of old trees hold columns of

water that they transpire into the air and the understory, carpeted with needles, acts as a sponge slowing runoff much more effectively than concrete planters. Wildlife CANNOT survive only in isolated parks surrounded by acres of roof and cement or outside of the urban growth boundary. Wildlife migrate seasonally to breed and feed. The remaining urban forest in our neighborhood provides the last remnants of a wildlife corridor used by animals moving between the Coast Range and the River. Medical studies show that PEOPLE also need nature for our mental health, to mitigate lung problems and to heal from illness and injury.

I oppose zoning code section 3310.24E, which violates any reasonable understanding of Multnomah Village neighborhood character and the negotiated Comprehensive Southwest Community Plan. The corner lot provision could increase density by 40- 60% based on 10 houses/block. Such an increase is a significant change of our village character. No one seems to know how this contradiction to the single-family zoning designations was added into the regulations, but it essentially rezones each corner lot to R2.5 (multi-family) but without the public awareness that rezoning usually brings. Housing needs should not demand replacing small affordable houses with large pricey houses looming over their neighbors and attached houses, each priced at 500,000, with no yards on the corners. Each of these McMansions reduces the price of the small house next door.

Removing the corner lot provision should not harm builders since land prices on desirable corners will come down, but they will never lose money holding land in the village (Dream Builder owner Tim Walker says the Village is his favorite place since it is so desirable the property never loses value even during the worst of the downturn). The values are due much more to the appeal of the semi-rural forested beauty charm of the walkable neighborhood than to the inflated value of the corner lots whose "bonus value" has mostly been known only to builders.

Density is best clustered along major arteries where the trees are already removed for endless acres of parking to support unneeded strip malls, yet another grocery, 7-11, or bank branch.



Laura Wozniak
7226 SW 29th Ave
Portland, OR 97219
lawoz@comcast.net
503-312-6176