

# Proposal for Changes and Additions to Portland's Comprehensive Plan

- 1. Why the proposed changes are inadequate.***
  - 2. Why demolitions, as they exist now, are bad.***
  - 3. Suggested ways of addressing the problem of demolitions.***
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## ***1. Why the proposed changes are inadequate.***

The proposed changes to the City's Comprehensive Plan do not address the growing problem of demolitions of viable housing, followed by new construction. This has been the biggest source of land use complaints in virtually every neighborhood in the City. Any plan that fails to address this problem does not recognize what has become a catalyst for public demonstrations and neighborhood outrage.

## ***2. Why demolitions, as they exist now, are bad.***

Developers buy viable housing, demolish it down to the foundation, get a permit for a "remodel," and construct a new dwelling that is grossly out of scale in comparison to nearby dwellings. For the developer to recover costs and make a profit, the new dwelling typically is priced at an amount at least twice as great as the dwelling that was pulled down. Replacing one single-family dwelling with another is not "in-fill." A critical consequences of this practice are that it shuts out of the market a potential buyer of average income, and damages the character of a neighborhood by constructing something that does not match existing architecture or style. The pejorative term "McMansions" describes most of these new constructions.

Developers who do not intend to move into the new house have nothing invested in their work except potential profit. The neighbors who have remodeled their own homes, raised their children in those homes, fussed with their landscaping, have a deep and personal investment in what is erected next to them. They suffer without recourse the noise and dust of 6-12 months of unanticipated major destruction and then construction next door. Under existing regulations those existing residents have no voice. The developer can do virtually anything he wants, as long as his wiring and plumbing meet code, and then he moves on to another site in another neighborhood. A balance needs to be achieved between the years of invested interests of those who live in a neighborhood and what a developer who visits that neighborhood for a few months is allowed to do.

## ***3. Suggested ways of addressing the problem of demolitions.***

- a) Removal of more than 50 per cent of a dwelling, considering only the square footage of the portion above ground or above the foundation, should be regarded as new construction, rather than a remodel.
- b) The square footage of new construction should not be more than 20 per cent greater than the average of the original structure and the adjoining properties (those that share a property boundary with the new construction). For instance, if the original structure was 2,000 square feet, and the house on one side was 2,500 square feet, the house on the other side was 3,000 square feet, and the house behind was 1,800 square feet, the average of those is 2,325 square feet. An increase of 20 per cent would allow construction of a dwelling of 2,790 square feet (an increase in size of 790

square feet).

c) Any plans to demolish more than 50 per cent of an existing dwelling should require notification of nearby residents (for instance, at least three dwellings on either side and across the street) at least 30 days before demolition is to begin.

None of these are new ideas. They only need to be implemented. Developers will argue that it would become difficult for them to make a profit, but homes were never intended to become commodities that would be traded, destroyed, and “flipped” by those who have no intention of living in them.

The home pictured below is a classic Tudor style that is structurally sound. It was built in the 1930s using materials superior to those used in today’s construction. Its former owner, who is now in assisted living, spent about 40 years in this home with his wife, who died a few years ago. A developer bought it and has announced plans to tear it down, to be replaced with a “McMansion” of about double the square-footage, and to be sold at a price more than double what he paid. He has also declared that he will build out to the legal set-backs, a common means for developers to get as much square footage as possible. He will do this with a “remodel” permit, based upon leaving only the original foundation intact.



Other than whatever consideration we might grant for the profit made by one individual, there is no sound reason for a city to allow this kind of assault on a neighborhood. This is happening all over Portland and has resulted in “no demolition!” signs being posted across the city, to little effect. Portland is not unique. The same abuse of the property rights of existing residents is occurring all over the United States and has resulted in a variety of measures in other cities that are trying to mitigate the effects. Portland has not done anything yet, and has expressed, through elected officials, a lack of interest. We pride ourselves on being progressive and “user friendly,” but this issue makes a mockery of those notions.

respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James Wygant". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

James Wygant  
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