

NEWTRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

*"All new things built with the idea of preserving the beauty of the city
and adding to it" A.E. Doyle, September 16, 1906*

October 1, 2014

Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission
1900 SW 4th Ave, Suite 7100
Portland, OR 97201

Re: West Quadrant Plan Comments and Recommendations

Dear Planning and Sustainability Commissioners,

Thank you for the skill and sensibilities you, city staff, other commissions and members of the public have contributed to the West Quadrant Plan, especially by supporting the importance of historic resources for Portland's livability. Please accept these comments of support for your work and the suggestions. I hope they bolster your efforts to promote genuinely sustainable and community enriching urban development as you go forward with refinement of the Plan.

Background

The best way to preserve our irreplaceable historic resources is to understand their relevance to the present and include them in plans for the future. Despite more than a few dark moments and considerable current challenges, Portlanders have a consistent record of valuing historic resources as much as we value other resources. During my tenure as chair of the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission a decade ago, the City Council enacted Historic Resource Code Amendments that offer a carefully designed and negotiated combination of incentives and regulations intended to make the preservation of Portland's Architectural Heritage more attractive, and thereby more likely than it was under the previous version of the Zoning Code. I believe that work by the current Landmarks Commission itself continues a valuable appreciation and conservation of the city's history in relationship to Portland's present and future that started long before any of our involvement. Organizations such as the Bosco-Milligan Foundation and Restore Oregon continue the critical efforts, as do neighborhood groups and expert individuals.

A.E. Doyle, architect of the Portland Central Library and over 20 downtown commercial buildings said *"All new things built with the idea of preserving the beauty of the city and adding to it."* Doyle's statement implies a continuity of our heritage.

Mr. Doyle's grandson, George McMath was among the first leaders of the Landmarks Commission. Mr. McMath was followed in the chair by his partner, the architect and author Bill Hawkins, who documented residential history and, of course, is the force behind documentation and appreciation of the cast iron in the Skidmore/Old Town Historic District. As a recent Commission chair, the late Art DeMuro was a lover of heritage and a successful developer. Mr. DeMuro was in a unique position. He was able to reinforce the genuine value of living tradition by bringing together a variety of interested parties and by setting an example for action.

The Skidmore/Old Town neighborhood Mr. Hawkins documented is Portland's only National Historic District, and is adjacent to the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District. Both are in Old Town/Chinatown which is currently under tremendous pressure for potentially incompatible development.

Public policy that limits sprawl and encourages density is the right thing to do. It will help make Portland livable as we grow. Landmark structures, designated Historic Districts and historic neighborhoods citywide, however, face the immediate risk of being destroyed by unsustainable efforts toward development. Portland's current Historic Landmarks Commission testimony deserves support in part because the Commission calls for protecting and enhancing our urban environment. These efforts are not in contradiction with increases in density.

Oregon's heroic Governor Tom McCall pioneered conservation of our most precious resources. He said "Heroes are not giant statues framed against a red sky. They are people who say: This is my community, and it is my responsibility to make it better."

An historic resource provides character; a pleasant or breathtaking backdrop for life. Form, scale, texture, color, detail, even a quality of light can make connections to our heritage... tell us about our past by existing in the present and providing for the future. Conserving and reusing it adds measurably to genuine economic, social and environmental sustainability. Living, working and playing among these structures and spaces is a delight for many people. Ten years ago, the mayor assembled a national panel of experts in planning and commercial development to work with staff to help develop a vision of the Mid-Town Blocks bordered by SW Taylor, Burnside, Park and Ninth Avenues. The streets feel narrow and were defined by a texture of historic buildings. That panel suggested that Portland could reap substantial economic benefits from reinforcing and developing the rich historic character and scale already present in those blocks. Their future, and the future of other exceptional places, continues to hang in the balance.

A specific suggestion for improvement of the draft WQP

At this point, I remain concerned that certain provisions in the draft WQP do not yet support the livability that should be our legacy. The plan is comprehensive, yet largely misses that opportunity for livability provided by historic resources.

Consistency within the Plan is a fundamental issue. Inconsistencies weaken and confuse the Plan's intentions. The concerns arising from inconsistency represent and illustrate a basis for more specific concerns and suggestions already raised in greater detail by much of the voluminous and carefully researched testimony of others.

The Draft WQP is internally inconsistent regarding the conservation and use of historic resources. The inconsistency is evident in both written and graphic form. In the text, the early (or later) parts of the plan refer especially to the importance of existing historic structures and

spaces. Later (or earlier) parts seem to contradict or not introduce that importance. The graphics should also reinforce and explain the text.

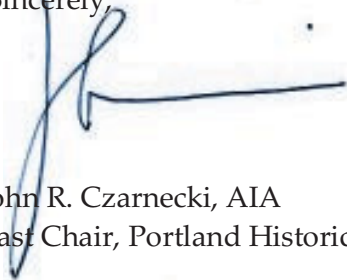
Text on page 79 of the draft WQP reads: *“Retain the personality and character of the West End by encouraging preservation rehabilitation of existing resources that represent a wide range of architectural styles. Encourage infill development that respects the district’s diverse urban character.”* This intention should be introduced on p.27, under *“Attractions and Special Places”* Please include the ***bold italicized*** language in the HISTORIC DISTRICTS paragraph...*“Districts **may be significant for different reasons and have their own character” but all include structures and spaces that reflect historic social and architectural characteristics. Their value can be further enhanced by use as precedent for future sensitive development in the historic context”***

The images on pp.73, 83,107 describing the West End, Goose Hollow, and OldTown/Chinatown (especially iconic structures in China Town) inaccurately or at least inadequately depict those very neighborhoods described in the text as exhibiting historic character. Representative images of the Flats in Goose Hollow (which are described as unique) are not included in the Plan. Although few in number, representative images provide the city, citizens and potential investors with an initial visual basis on which to understand the written Plan intentions. We are missing opportunities to express the intrinsic and economic value associated with particular positive qualities of urban livability.

I hope you take these suggestions to heart as the Plan continues to be refined.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. It’s important to remember that history has filled our hands, not sullied them, and whether they are buildings, public spaces or neighborhoods, we should treat historic resources as we would any other resource. We should understand their extent and qualities, conserve them, and use them wisely to enhance our environment, directly and as valuable precedent for successful future development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John R. Czarnecki', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John R. Czarnecki, AIA
Past Chair, Portland Historic Landmarks Commission.