

Neighbors:

You probably know that new city “residential infill” zoning rules are poised to alter our historic neighborhood. You may be wondering what such rules will mean for you and your family, how they came about, and how much you should care given the many challenges now facing Laurelhurst and Portland.

The "how" is understandable. Skyrocketing demand over the last two decades has driven home prices inexorably upward—so much so that Portland is now the leading U.S. market for infill investors. Not surprisingly, these developers have become one of the most powerful forces shaping local politics. At the same time, other forces have made all housing less affordable. Developers are using this temporary situation to push long-term changes in development rules.

These rules, championed by developers and endorsed by Portland's City Council, allow for the construction of triplexes and duplexes on every Laurelhurst street—and for six-plexes on 45 neighborhood lots. This would increase density and congestion in our already dense, congested inner-city neighborhood. But it will not provide the affordable housing solution our city needs. We know these units will be priced far above median Portland prices.

Without new protections, the new infill rules are likely to lead to a demolition epidemic led by profit-driven developers who will run roughshod over historic legacy *and* livability. The Laurelhurst of the future will feature towering multi-family units on every block, fewer small, more affordable historic homes, fewer mature trees, and increased congestion on streets and in schools.

Longtime neighbors know that historic designation has a long history in Laurelhurst. Some residents have been convinced that historic designation will result in a costly, lengthy process for all renovations. The truth is that the historic review guidelines will be developed by the neighborhood jointly with the city's historic program manager. The historic review process emphasizes street-facing facades and will not affect repairs, interior remodeling, landscaping or paint color. City fees associated with reviews

are usually nominal. The 20 to 30 percent of Laurelhurst homes that are not historic will be exempt from most review unless a developer proposes to demolish them, in which case the proposed replacement will have to be designed to comply with our neighborhood's historic guidelines.

In addition to protecting the historic character of Laurelhurst, owners of historic homes will be eligible for financial benefits for restoration and rehabilitation, such as state grants, federal tax credits and a property tax freeze.

I should point out that historic designation will not magically stop demolitions or change the new infill zoning rules. Accessory dwelling units and internal conversions to duplexes would be permitted. Non-historic houses can be replaced with new houses. But historic designation will be a strong disincentive for the infill developers who want to demolish historic homes and to build new large structures that violate our neighborhood's character.

Laurelhurst is one of the most historically significant and accessible planned communities in the nation, featuring a Frederick Law Olmsted street design, the Olmsted-influenced Laurelhurst Park that is itself on the National Register of Historic Places, Coe Circle, sandstone arches, a diverse mix of century-old small and large homes, and walkable, livable, tree-lined boulevards. Few early twentieth century neighborhoods have more documented architectural significance, intact historic fabric or cohesion. That history belongs to everyone. When it is gone, it is gone forever.

I encourage you to learn more about historic designation at historiclaurelhurst.com.

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