



Alberta Main Street

October 11, 2019

Andrea Durbin, Director
Bureau of Planning & Sustainability
1900 SW Fourth Avenue
Portland, OR 97201

Dear Andrea:

Alberta Main Street would like to voice its support for the **PDX Main Street Design Initiative**, a coalition of neighborhood leaders, business associations, and design professionals advocating for design and development standards that enhance the vitality of our local business districts. As the winner of a 2019 Great American Main Street Award, we understand the value of our unique local character and visual appeal, essential qualities for our healthy neighborhood commercial areas.

Alberta Main Street joins other neighborhood organizations, including the Hawthorne Business Association, the Sellwood-Mooreland Improvement League, the Division Design Initiative, Hosford-Abernethy Neighborhood District Association, Richmond Neighborhood Association, and the South Tabor Neighborhood Association (currently under consideration by the Woodstock Neighborhood Association after being adopted by their Land Use Committee) in its reliance on the PDX Main Street Design Guidelines. At their core, the guidelines are best practices for pedestrian friendly, context-sensitive neighborhood design.

We would also like to express our concern that the City of Portland has not given enough attention to the value of streetcar-era neighborhood business districts as part of the DOZA regulatory process. Along with the groups listed above, Alberta Main Street would like to request that staff and decisionmakers review and update the Vintage Buildings Study (BPS Low Rise Commercial Areas Study). In this study, staff did an excellent job of mapping core areas of important character. Despite their importance, we feel that the streetcar-era main street districts are not recognized for their contributions during the development review process, nor are they considered substantive pattern areas as part of DOZA.

As the DOZA report notes, “A concern of many people is that the rate of growth overwhelms and erases the legacy of these areas as various older buildings are replaced.” The City DOZA process has not addressed these areas which are a defining “pattern area.” The “Vintage Buildings study” (or the Low-Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis done in 2016) identifies 13 areas of special character that are architecturally and historically significant - yet most of the city is unaware that these important

streetcar-era districts lack historic or conservation district protections. To preserve the unique character of these districts, a set of Main Street guidelines should be adopted as a subset of the proposed Design Standards. We ask that you provide a staff recommendation to decisionmakers to:

1) **Address Main Street Pattern Areas with important defining character** (including those identified in the Vintage Buildings Study) and create a subset of Main Street Design Standards and Design Guidelines with both budget and work plan allocations as a time-sensitive next step.

2) **Encourage Design Commission Review for Vintage Main Streets at 40'** (lower than the 65' proposed city-wide). This is a much more appropriate height in our district with its CM2 zone designation. There are no structures in our district that currently exceeds 40'. One project was recently granted a 15' height allowance. While many residents remain critical of the project, it provides a good example of a development team responding to (at least some) resident concerns. This is exactly the kind of feedback that will continue to happen with a more appropriate building height triggering design review.

3) **Initiate a Simple Design Preference Survey** – A widely-disseminated survey to neighborhood and business organizations would go a long way toward creating a better understanding of what the community aspires to we address the growth and change facing Portland. As a city, we are known for local engagement as part of our planning processes. A Design Preference survey would be in keeping with this tradition.

These suggestions should not be considered anti-development. On the contrary, we encourage new businesses and investment in our Main Street district. But we do seek development that is consistent with neighborhood landmarks and district character. Design review for these unique areas will help to ensure that new investment and additional housing is compatible with and will strengthen our district.

Like other great cities, Portland is a city of neighborhoods. As Portland continues to grow, we need to ensure that the unique character and cultural assets of our local business districts remain intact. We know that you also value walkable neighborhood districts, and so believe that BPS will be open to these suggestions.

We look forward to continued dialogue with you and fellow neighborhood leaders.

Best regards,



Ann Griffin
Executive Director

cc: BDS Director, Rebecca Esau
Design Commission Chair, Julie Livingston
Planning and Sustainability Commission Chair, Katherine Shultz