

# Mainstreet Style Design is Good for City

By MIDGE PIERCE

“Density with Sensitivity” is the motto of urban planner and architectural firebrand Heather Flint Chatto, who with longtime landuse activist Linda Nettekoven, launched the Division Design Initiative (DDI) that evolved into Main Street Design Guidelines.

DDI’s hot-off-the-presses toolkit, which originally focused on burgeoning Division, has been approved by Hawthorne and Division business groups, Hosford-Abernethy, Richmond Neighborhood Association and other SE groups associated with the four-year collaborative process.

The voluntary guidelines can be modified to influence architecture in town centers like

Montavilla and Sellwood and along other apartment and commercial strips throughout the city.

Sustainability, compatibility, equity, and historic preservation that include adaptive re-use of existing buildings are among the pillars of the project.

The booklet release coincides with the City Planner’s review of new standards for Design Overlay Zone Amendments (DOZA). Many DOZA concepts of scale, massing and sustainability are reflective of DDI recommendations.

Flint Chatto and Nettekoven seek to persuade the City to codify the DDI Guidelines for streetcar-era Main Streets and lower the 55-foot design review threshold that excludes many SE area buildings.

DDI guidelines draw from the best of old Portland’s architecture to inspire the new. The booklet shows how modern design can pay homage to a neighborhood’s history by following existing window patterns and minimizing blank walls. Avoiding overly boxy building forms can make buildings feel more human scale.

“Good design matters,” says Flint Chatto. “Buildings are our brand.”

People-friendly spaces are key. “All Portlanders need sun, light, air - room to foster community interaction with green spaces; gardens, benches, public art and the food carts that are becoming an endangered species – the very reasons people moved to Portland in the first place.”

Countering charges that the initiative is elitist and impractical for some neighborhoods, she says design, equity, densification and affordability are not at odds.

“All neighborhoods should have access to tools. No neighborhood should feel they are not important enough to have good design. Raise design equity. Lowering the bar is not the answer.”

Amid criticism that the voluntary guidelines lack teeth, Flint Chatto said the toolkit gives voice to communities. Design templates can provide predictability and reduce developer/neighborhood conflicts.

As a zero energy planner, a Woman of Vision award-winner and entrepreneur, she believes preservation can be a means to-

ward sustainable growth.

She abhors dumping multi-story buildings in landfills. “Nothing is sustainable about tearing down legacy buildings that contain old growth materials, throwing out those materials, then doubling down with the costs of doing it again.”

Where feasible, an alternative way to add density is to add extra stories to existing buildings, according to Flint Chatto and Nettekoven. With seismic mandates bearing down on older buildings officials fear are hazards, DDI suggests that retrofits, earthquake proofing and expansion could be done concurrently to add cost-effective living-working and rentable square footage.

Flint Chatto sees missed growth opportunities along civic corridors like 82nd, Powell, Sandy Blvd. With wide streets and empty lots, they are ideal for zero energy buildings,” she says, lamenting that builders gravitate toward “hot” markets that maximize profits rather than developing where growth is needed.

Flint Chatto and Nettekoven advocate incentives for retention of existing, historic buildings.

In a booklet addendum, Nettekoven writes that the City’s current, outdated Historic Resources Inventory includes dozens of legacy properties that should be preserved.

Others are clearly eligible and could be candidates for thoughtful restoration and the City has so far failed to fund an inventory update that could, in theory, stall demolitions.

For preservationists, this is the latest of a “thousand cuts” that show lack of forward thinking about preserving the past.

At a Richmond Neighborhood Association meeting, pro-growth advocate Doug Klotz charged that the plan was right for the “last Century” but no longer appropriate given demand, cost of housing and projections of population growth.

Flint Chatto responded. “Portland needs to be sensitive to its past, and responsive to the people here now. We need to pull together so that all neighborhoods have resources to address hopes and dreams for the future.”

For more information go to: [divisiondesigninitiative.org](http://divisiondesigninitiative.org).



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