

Carolyn Swartz and Wayne Valzania
27 Merrill Street
Portland, ME 04101
and
28 East 10th Street 8D
NYC 10003

Planning Board
Planning and Urban Development Department
City of Portland
389 Congress St
Portland, ME 04101

Re: 30 Merrill Street

October 5, 2016

To the Members of the Planning Board and Planning Division Staff:

One of the big challenges in the jarring, unbalanced design for proposed development of 30 Merrill is that you can't measure the value of a neighborhood's character in dollars and cents.

And dollars and cents appear to be the only measure driving this tired, corner-cutting design.

This design reminds me of what the Berliners scornfully refer to as *plattenbau* (flat-build) construction. Just after World War II, the communist government – short of funds – had to scramble to create housing to replace hundreds, if not thousands, of buildings destroyed by bombs. The only criteria were fast and cheap, i.e. as many units as could be crammed into a single block. The buildings had no contour, no character, no pleasing detail. They were human warehouses: as many units as could be crammed into a single block. With Reunification, much effort has gone into remediation, adding contour and character to these structures. The city of Berlin recognizes that people were not meant to live in—or look out at—faceless boxes.

Back to the architect's justification of this particular faceless box. A few thoughts:

A metal bar "pays homage" to the neighborhood's bay windows? Let's be precise about language. Here, the same could be said about using glass.

Perhaps he thinks the “front door” pays homage to the stoops and steps that lead to welcoming entrances all over the hill. After all, it no doubt opens and closes to allow a person to pass through it.

The jolt of white that bisects the building vertically: I’m not sure what that pays homage to, since nowhere on Munjoy Hill is there precedent for this kind of color contrast. Perhaps the architect feels the white pays homage to the clouds.

Now let’s pay homage to safety. What kind of floodlights will be necessary to illuminate a rear or side entrance? And what impact will this have on the look and feel of the neighborhood at night?

Granted, esthetics are by nature subjective. But there is nothing subjective in the assertion that this design demonstrates zero sensibility for how life is lived - and has been lived for at least a century and a half – in the neighborhood of Munjoy Hill.

Finally, I’d like to note that not one of the Munjoy Hill homeowners or residents opposed to this design is against new development and changes in aesthetics resulting from new materials, advancing technologies and changing preferences and needs. Neither is anyone advocating against the expansion of the community.

By general consensus, however, this particular design is off the charts: both functionally and esthetically. I hope the Planning Board will send the designer back to the drawing board, and the developers see the value – to their future bottom line – in preserving the character of the neighborhood with more sensitivity and sophistication than is implied by this design.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolyn Swartz', written in a cursive style.

Carolyn Swartz