Planning and Urban Development Department
Planning Division

Subject: R-6 Small Infill Design Review – 30 Merrill Street

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Date of Review: Wednesday, October 19, 2016

A design review according to the *City of Portland Design Manual* Standards was performed for the revised proposal for new construction of a multi-family dwelling at 30 Merrill Street. The review was performed by Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer, Nell Donaldson, Planner, and Shukria Wiar, Planner, all within the Planning Division of the Department of Planning & Urban Development. The project was reviewed against the *R-6 Small Infill Development Design Principles & Standards* (Appendix 7 of the Design Manual).

Review Process:

- First, staff establishes the building typology proposed by applicant (zoning determines allowable uses and dimensional standards).
- Second, staff reviews the neighborhood context to establish the predominant character-defining elements for that building type. It would not, for example, be reasonable to expect a multi-family building type to have the same scale, massing, or characteristics as a single-family building type.
- Third, staff reviews the streetscape and surrounding properties to understand scale, massing, characteristics, and building orientation/relationship to the street.
- Finally, with an understanding of the context, including character of street, neighboring property massing, scale, setbacks, and defining characteristics of similar building types in that neighborhood, three staff members review the project according to the principles and standards. The design review process is typically iterative and takes into consideration staff, public, and Planning Board comment in addition to rationale, parameters, and constraints provided by applicant and architect.

Comments from Planning Board and Public:

We heard concern regarding:

- Prominence of the street-facing entry
- Effectiveness of the massing and articulation to mitigate the scale in relationship with context (that includes a combination of single-family and multi-family types)
- Window types, proportion, and scale and compatibility with the context
- Quality of design compared with historic context

The project addresses those comments and concerns in the following ways:

- Full bay windows were added
- Fenestration at the bays were revised in scale and proportion
- Windows were added between the bays

- Side façade windows were enlarged
- Side façade now includes a green screen
- Street entry is further emphasized through the addition of sidelites, material change, and a stoop.

Findings of the Design Review:
The Planning Authority under an Alternative Design Review may approve a design not meeting one or more of the individual standards provided that all of the conditions listed below are met:

A. The proposed design is consistent with all of the Principle Statements.
B. The majority of the Standards within each Principle are met.
C. The guiding principle for new construction under the alternative design review is to be compatible with the surrounding buildings in a two block radius in terms of size, scale, materials, and siting, as well as the general character of the established neighborhood, thus Standards A-1 through A-3 shall be met.
D. The design plan is prepared by an architect registered in the State of Maine.

The proposed design **passes** all of the criteria – please refer to comments below.

Design Review Comments *(red text denotes principles or standards that are not met)**:***

Principle A Overall Context – Met – see below.

- *A-1 Scale and Form:* The building type proposed is similar to a double-triple with an additional unit on the 4th floor. Double-triples can be found in the surrounding context, however, the scale and form of those buildings are mitigated with the use of mansard or other similar roof forms on the third floor, pronounced and overhang cornice lines, bay windows, recessed entries with canopies. Of these formal and scaling elements, the project employs a canopy at the entrance, recessed entry, overhanging cornice at the third floor, and window bays. The fourth floor is made recessive to emphasize the contextual three-story massing of the main portion of the building relating more directly in scale and form with the triple-decker across the street.
- *A-2 Composition of Principal Facades:* The composition of the street-facing facades is consistent with context in terms of using symmetrical bays (in this case, four bays) that are oriented to the street. The windows were revised to be of similar proportion with those found in the streetscape. The windows in the bays are sliding doors and therefore of a different type than the traditional bay window. Staff found that the bays and the balconies bring articulation, vertical proportion, and human scale to the large windows.
- *A-3 Relationship to the Street:* The building placement is consistent with the spacing of the residential fabric – slightly setback from sidewalk to allow for stoops and provide privacy.

Principle B Massing – Met – Buildings in the neighborhood with similar massing and proportion (double-triples and triple-deckers) that are wider at the street use changes in massing, like the roof form and bays, to mitigate the scale (to be considerate of the smaller-scale single-family structures on the same street) and provide a pedestrian-friendly, visually interesting street presence. The revised design at 30 Merrill emphasizes the double-triple massing by creating a strong roof line at the third floor and varies the street façade with plane changes (bay windows).

- *B-1 Massing:* The principal mass is reminiscent of a double triple-decker found in the context – revisions to the cornice line at the third floor, the stepback of the fourth floor unit help to emphasize that three-story contextual massing. Bay windows were added to provide a façade plane change.
- *B-2 Roof Forms:* The proposed 7th unit on the top floor has been centered and stepped back with a material change – these three actions make that fourth floor recessive and the flat roof form of the primary mass is dominant.
- *B-4 Roof Pitch:* The roofs are monopitch/ flat roofs.
- *B-5 Façade Articulation:* The project employs three of the required articulation elements – covered entry, recessed entry, and bay windows. Small balconies are also used.
- *B-6 Garages:* Not applicable.

Principle C Orientation to the Street – Met – The project is oriented to the street with a street-facing door.

- *C-1 Entrances:* At least one entry is street-facing and emphasized with a canopy, recess, stoop, and material change.
- *C-2 Visual Privacy:* Visual privacy is adequately addressed; ground floor windows are higher than 48" above adjoining sidewalk grade; the ground floor is adequately raised above sidewalk grade appropriate for private residential buildings with living space on the ground floor (at least 24" is required by the standard).
- *C-3 Transition Spaces:* The project uses a canopy and stoop at the entrance, the building is set back with planters.

Principle D Proportion and Scale – Met – The façade elements are proportionate and scaled to the overall building.

- *D-1 Windows:* The majority of windows are rectangular and have vertical proportion; windows at bays are sliding doors and therefore taller than traditional bay windows.
- *D-2 Fenestration:* The project appears to meet the 12% fenestration requirement and appropriately scaled to the massing of the building.
- *D-3 Porches:* The balconies included in this project are less than 48 sf and do not meet this standard.

Principle E Balance – Met – The building façade composition creates a sense of balance with good use of overall and local symmetry and articulation of façade materials.

- *E-1 Window and Door Height:* The majority of window and door head heights align along a common horizontal datum.
- *E-2 Window and Door Alignment:* The majority of windows shall stack so that centerlines of windows are in vertical alignment.
- *E-3 Symmetricality:* Primary window compositions are arranged symmetrically around discernable vertical axes.

Principle F Articulation – Met – Based on the information given, it appears the project employs visually interesting and well composed facades.

- *F-1 Articulation:* Trim and balcony details will create shadow lines on front façade.
- *F-2 Window Types:* Two window types at street façade.
- *F-3 Visual Cohesion:* The visual cohesion of the façade is good – one siding material proposed with color variation.
- *F-4 Delineation between Floors:* The floors are delineated by fenestration patterns.

- *F-5 Porches, etc.:* The canopy is well integrated into the overall design and highlights the entrance. Balcony railings are used to provide articulation and shadow lines to the front façade.
- *F-6 Main Entries:* The main entry is emphasized with prominent placement facing the street, and the use of a canopy, recess, and stoop.
- *F-7 Articulation Elements:* The cornice has been revised to be more pronounced and have an overhang similar to those found in context multi-family buildings; the trim details are not clear; the façade offset is at least 12".

Principle G Materials – Met– The material choices are well-placed and the siding is a contemporary version of clapboard. The use of two tones and the cool grey color palette create a contemporary, graphic aesthetic. In most cases, the vernacular context relies on massing and detailing to provide visual interest with most facades having only one color.

- *G-1 Materials:* The residential context is predominantly clapboards with occasional shingle or brick. The proposal uses fiber cement clapboard with horizontal orientation – the reveal is larger than the traditional scale.
- *G-2 Material and Façade Design:* The materials are appropriately placed according to their nature – concrete base, clapboard above.
- *G-3 Chimneys:* Not applicable.
- *G-4 Window Types:* Two window types on street façade.
- *G-5 Patios and Plazas:* Not applicable.