

# Planning and Urban Development Department

## Planning Division

---



**Subject:** R-6 Small Infill Design Review – 5 Merrill Street

**Written by:** Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer

**Date of Review:** Thursday, December 8, 2016

---

A design review according to the *City of Portland Design Manual* Standards was performed for the proposed new construction of a two-family dwelling at 5 Merrill Street. The review was performed by Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer, Nell Donaldson, Planner, and Jean Fraser, 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).

### 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 **does not pass** all of the criteria – please refer to comments below:

- As currently designed, not all Principle Statements are met.
- A licensed architect must be associated with the project
- Building elevations should include material call outs, average grade, and height information
- Staff encourages you to look at projects like 28 Waterville Street for contemporary architecture that successfully fits into the Munjoy Hill context.

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

*Principle A Overall Context* – **Not Met** – see below.

- **A-1 Scale and Form:** The building type proposed is most comparable to the double houses, which are found in this 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 recessed entrance,

- overhanging cornice at the fourth floor, and inset balconies. The predominant scale of the street and neighborhood is 2.5 to 3-story buildings. The overall scale proposed is one to two stories taller than the streetscape – that scale should be mitigated through massing, façade composition, and articulation elements. In regards to form, the overhang of the upper floors, and the square/cubic massing create a building form that does not reflect traditional residential forms. The result is a top-heavy mass that has little relationship to the patterns in the surrounding context. Though a contemporary interpretation is permitted or encouraged, a new design in this zone needs to show a recognition of and compatibility with the building patterns (height, mass, form, composition, proportions) around it.
- *A-2 Composition of Principal Facades:* The composition of the street-facing facades is consistent with context in terms of using relying on an overall symmetry that is oriented to the street. The composition implies a double-house typology although the interior organization does not, in fact, fall neatly into a true, split double house. **The proportion of the façade, however, is not consistent with any building type found in context – façade composition should emphasize either a vertical or horizontal proportion.**
  - *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. **The entrance faces the street, though is not raised with a stoop which is typical.**

*Principle B Massing – Not Met* – Buildings in the neighborhood of a similar type (double-houses) that are wider at the street use **changes in massing, like the roof form and bays, to mitigate the scale and provide a pedestrian-friendly, visually interesting street presence. The odd overhangs that appear above the ground floor are not a massing decision that is contextual.**

- *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.
- *B-2 Roof Forms:* The proposed project has a flat roof at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. **This does not appear to meet zoning stepbacks. The fourth floor should become more recessive to meet both the design guidelines and the zoning requirements.**
- *B-3 Main Roofs and Subsidiary Roofs:* There is a main roof form. **However, the stair overrun should be made more recessive – reduce or eliminate the cornice and windows.**
- *B-4 Roof Pitch:* The roofs are monopitch/ flat roofs.
- *B-5 Façade Articulation:* The project employs one (two required) of the required articulation elements –recessed entry. **The balconies currently do not meet the required size standards found in D-3.**
- *B-6 Garages:* **Garage door widths may be no more than 40% of the overall façade width.**

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

- *C-1 Entrances:* The entry is street-facing and emphasized with a recess. **Instead of the “column” trim detail proposed, use a method of emphasizing the entrance such as a material change in the recess or a canopy, or a stoop.**
- *C-2 Visual Privacy:* The ground floor currently does not include living spaces.
- *C-3 Transition Spaces:* The project uses a recessed entrance, the building is slightly set back from the street, the living space is elevated.

*Principle D Proportion and Scale* – Not Met – The overhang of the upper floors creates odd proportions. The overall proportion of the building is close to 1:1 but doesn't use a standard proportion system – in the context, building proportion is either clearly vertical or horizontal.

- *D-1 Windows:* The majority of windows are rectangular and have vertical proportion.
- *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 less than 6' deep, and therefore 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. The façade is composed to represent a double house though this belies the actual interior organization of space.

- *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:* The cornice line (though perhaps too historic a profile for the style and proportion of the 21<sup>st</sup> century building) and flared corners provide some articulation. The balcony details will create some shadow lines on front façade, though the balconies are recessed. No information about window reveals or trim is provided.
- *F-2 Window Types:* Two window types are used but with varying sizes, composition.
- *F-3 Visual Cohesion:* The visual cohesion of the façade is good – the transition from brick to shingle is rational and reflects the uses inside.
- *F-4 Delineation between Floors:* The floors are delineated by change of material and fenestration patterns, balconies, flare at corners.
- *F-5 Porches, etc.:* The entry is architecturally integrated as are the balconies.
- *F-6 Main Entries:* The main entry is recessed and faces the street directly. It is further emphasized by trim details – these are not successful and should be removed. Instead, a material change within the recessed entry would be more appropriate. Alternatively, the entry could be emphasized with a stoop or canopy as found in the context.
- *F-7 Articulation Elements:* The cornice is pronounced and appears to overhang at least 6"; the trim details are not clear; there are two façade offsets at the balconies of more than 12".

*Principle G Materials* – Met – The material choices are consistent with the neighborhood palette.

- *G-1 Materials:* The residential context is predominantly clapboards with occasional shingle or brick. Brick is used as a foundation/water table but occasionally is seen as the entire ground floor. Depending on how the façade composition changes, the transition from brick to shingle may also need to be revised to achieve compatible proportions.
- *G-2 Material and Façade Design:* The materials are appropriately placed according to their nature.
- *G-3 Chimneys:* Not applicable.

- *G-4 Window Types:* Two window types are used but with varying sizes, composition.
- *G-5 Patios and Plazas:* Not applicable.