**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**RE PROPOSAL FOR DISCONTINUANCE OF OAK STREET BETWEEN SPRING AND PLEASANT**

**As received Dec 2009/Jan 2011**

**From:**  "Chris Sullivan" <chris@kitetails.org>

**To:** <JF@portlandmaine.gov>

**Date:**  1/7/2010 6:04:46 PM

**Subject:**  Oak Street proposal

Jean, I'm sorry for not getting back to you I've been in the shop the

last two days working on our new exhibit (opening Jan 21st). We share

your staffs concern about loosing the pedestrian right of way. We are

also wondering about the loss of the public parking spaces on the

street. There is about 10 spaces for cars along the garage side that are

available and would be lost. We are not certain if this will even have

an impact on us, but we are concerned because with each land purchase

around us we are finding less parking available.

Chris Sullivan

Director of Exhibits and Operations

Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine

142 Free Street

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Portland, Maine 04101

T: 207‑828‑1234 x234

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From: Christian MilNeil [mailto:c.neal.milneil@gmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2009 1:57 PM

To: Cheryl Leeman; Nick Mavodones; dss@portlandmaine.gov

Cc: portland‑bikeped‑comm@yahoogroups.com; Bill Needelman;

GAM@portlandmaine.gov; Hilary Frenkel; jaime parker; Nan Cumming;

jbeitzer@portlandmaine.com

Subject: Oak Street's value as a pedestrian connection

Dear CDC Councilors,

Scanning your recent meeting's agenda, I noticed that the new owners of the

Holiday Inn are petitioning the City to vacate Oak Street between Pleasant

and Spring Streets, in between the Holiday Inn and the adjacent parking

garage.

I'd personally like to register my disapproval of the proposal as it

currently stands. Oak St. may not connect for motor vehicles but it's an

important pedestrian connection between the Arts District and the

neighborhood around lower Danforth Street and Gorham's Corner. The new

workforce housing building that opened this summer, for instance, was sited

based on its proximity to jobs and services in the Old Port and along

Congress Street.

Right now, a pedestrian starting at the corner of Danforth and Maple Streets

(home to the above‑mentioned workforce housing building, as well as a large

cluster of office businesses) can currently reach Marcy's Diner or LL Bean

via an easy quarter‑mile walk via the Oak Street stairs ‑ roughly a 5‑minute

trip.

But eliminating Oak Street would leave an extremely long (0.25 miles)

stretch of Spring and Danforth Streets with no public connections to the

adjacent block. It would almost double the walking distance between Free

Street and Maple Street, to 0.45 miles. Psychologically the distance will

feel even longer, since the new trip would require a long out‑of‑direction

detour and a longer uphill climb. Invariably this will lead to fewer walking

trips, more parking and congestion problems during Civic Center events (due

to the fact that Danforth Street's parking lots would effectively be cut‑off

and underutilized), and less foot traffic for the neighborhood businesses on

either side.

That being said, the current state of Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant

Streets has a lot of room for improvement. It feels unsafe, especially after

dark, and it's uninviting to walkers, especially from the Spring Street

entrance. The City should negotiate a "win win" compromise that preserves

24‑hour pedestrian access, potentially via an inviting and well‑designed

sally port, while granting development rights above to the hotel's owners.

The negotiated pedestrian access way through the unbuilt MaineHealth office

building in Bayside might provide a good example of a possible solution ‑

there, too, there was a desire to connect a garage with its building, while

preserving public pedestrian access in between.

For the time being, with no concrete proposal from the hotel's owners,

vacating Oak Street would only undermine the center city's walkability and

economic development prospects, with no clear public benefit. Instead, the

city should maintain its rights to the street, but express a willingness to

work with the owners to find a mutually‑beneficial solution.

Cheers,

‑Christian

The Vigorous North:

A field guide to the wilderness areas of American cities.

http://www.vigorousnorth.com

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07:46:00

January 11, 2010

To: Chair Silk and Members of the Planning Board

From: Jaime Parker

Portland Trails

Re: Request to vacate Oak Street

Dear Mr. Silk;

I am writing to urge that the request by Lafeyette Portland LLC for the discontinuance of Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant Streets be denied. Having worked for years with Portland Trails to improve the pedestrian network in Portland, I can assure you that the loss of this important connection would be something current and future residents of the City would regret. As it exists this street is an extremely important connection for pedestrians, and if anything the link should be enhanced by the new owners.

Urban blocks should generally be between 400-600’ long, and this section of Spring and Pleasant Streets already has block lengths that are longer, and thus a barrier for pedestrians. Certainly it is important to work with developers and landowners to improve site design and function, but the City should rarely, if ever vacate streets. Indeed many of the barriers to a fully developed pedestrian network that Portland Trails and the City are working to overcome are a result of previous street Right of Ways being given up. The loss of grid connectivity in the Spring Street area is one of the more vexing remnants of Urban Renewal in Portland. We should be seeking to improve permeability wherever possible.

Thank you for considering this important matter,

Sincerely,

Jaime Parker

Trails Manager

Portland Trails

Portland resident

>>> "Nan Cumming" <nan@trails.org> 11/25/2009 12:39:39 PM >>>

Hi everyone,

I need to second Christian's thoughts here. I use Oak Street to access

Congress Street from Commercial Street all the time. Yes, the stretch

between Pleasant and Spring is somewhat unwelcoming, but I use it anyway

because it's a necessity. Getting around the Civic Center is difficult

enough (especially with South St a dead end), I can't imagine a good reason

for blocking pedestrian access in this area even further.

I urge you to reject merely vacating the street. I was part of the team

that developed the pedestrian access facility in the Maine Health building

that Christian mentions. Although the development did not go through, we

were able to agree upon a sound design. If the City decides to pursue

alternatives with Lafayette Hotels, I would be happy to share what I learned

through that process.

My best,

Nan

Nan Cumming

Executive Director

Portland Trails

305 Commercial Street

Portland, ME 04101

phone: 207 775‑2411

fax: 207 871‑1184

www.trails.org

nan@trails.org

From: Christian MilNeil [mailto:c.neal.milneil@gmail.com]

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To: Cheryl Leeman; Nick Mavodones; dss@portlandmaine.gov

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Scanning your recent meeting's agenda, I noticed that the new owners of the

Holiday Inn are petitioning the City to vacate Oak Street between Pleasant

and Spring Streets, in between the Holiday Inn and the adjacent parking

garage.

[rest of e-mail as above]

**PORTLAND Bicycle** – **PEDESTRIAN Advisory Committee**

**portland\_bike\_ped@yahoo.com**

**207-772-1597**

January 12, 2010

Re: Proposal to Vacate Oak Street

To the Planning Board of the City of Portland:

In a unanimous vote at its January 11th meeting, the Portland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee resolved to express its disapproval of the proposal to vacate Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant Streets as it currently stands.

This street-segment serves as a valuable and frequently-used pedestrian connection between the Arts District and the neighborhoods around lower Danforth Street and Gorham's Corner. Eliminating it would leave an extremely long stretch of Spring and Danforth Streets with no public connections to the adjacent block. It would almost double the walking distance between Marcy’s Diner on Free Street and the cluster of office buildings at Maple and Danforth Streets, from a direct quarter-mile trip to a meandering half-mile trip.

That being said, the current state of Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant Streets has a lot of room for improvement. It feels unsafe, especially after dark, and it's uninviting to walkers, especially from the Spring Street entrance. For many years now, the hotel has occupied city-owned land without permission or compensation, by using Oak Street and its sidewalks as storage space for trailers and vehicles. This could be a golden opportunity for the new owners to improve access to their business and provide a more welcoming experience for their customers.

Our Committee would be amenable to an agreement that allows the vacation of Oak Street with strict legal easements, design standards on future development, or other compensatory measures, but only if these measures would preserve and enhance round-the-clock public access through this important corridor.

Thank you for your consideration.

Christian MilNeil

Chair,

Portland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

**From:**  <rfoley8@maine.rr.com>

**To:** <JF@portlandmaine.gov>

**Date:**  1/7/2010 2:06:58 PM

**Subject:**  Oak Street

Ronald Foley

37 Pleasant St

Unit #4

Portland, Maine 04101

207‑272‑3552

Rfoley8@maine.rr.com

January 6, 2010

Jean Fraser

389 Congress St

Portland, Maine 94101

Dear Jean,

I would like to express my opposition to the proposed discontinuance of Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant Streets. I use that section of Oak Street on a daily basis, and know that other area residents are doing the same. I believe that closing this section would create a hardship for those who would have difficulty walking the added distance up to High St or down to Center St. to access the locations that the existing pedestrian passage now provides. I urge your careful consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ron Foley

**From:**  "Nathan Szanton" <nszanton@szantoncompany.com>

**To:** <JF@portlandmaine.gov>

**Date:**  1/12/2010 2:37:47 PM

**Subject:**  Proposed vacation of Oak Street between High and Spring Streets

Jean Fraser, Planner

City of Portland

390 Congress Street

Portland, ME 04101

January 12, 2010

Dear Jean,

I am writing to register my strong opposition to the Holiday

Inn's proposed vacation of Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant Streets.

I am the owner of 53 Danforth Street, a 43‑unit apartment building located

at the corner of Danforth and Maple Streets. I know that my tenants use

Oak Street frequently to walk to the Free and Congress Street area. If

this public way were discontinued, my tenants would have to walk all the way

down to Center Street or up to High Street ‑ a significant detour ‑‑ in

order to get to the vicinity of Congress and Oak or Congress and Casco

Streets. That would represent a significant step backward for the

pedestrian connectivity‑and thus, walkability‑‑of our City. It would

significantly erode livability of the Gorham's Corner neighborhood, an

important, emerging district of our City.

I regret that I will not be able to attend this evening's

workshop in person, but I trust that you will pass this message on to the

members of the Planning Board.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Nathan Szanton

Fore River Company 5 Milk Street P.O. Box 7525 Portland, ME 04112 (207) 772-6404

January 6,2010

Jean Fraser

Portland Planning Department

Ponland City Hall

389 Congress Street

Portland, Me 04101

Re: Oak Street discontinuance application

Dear Jean,

Thank you for the notice relating to the application filed to discontinue Oak Street between Spring and Pleasant

Streets. We own and manage the 90,000 square foot building at 562 Congress Street, which occupies the west side

of Oak Sheet between Congress and Free Streets.

Oak Street is a very important pedestrian connection between Spring and Pleasant Street-without it, the south side

of Spring Street would be perhaps the longest barrier without pedesffian access in the City. We areadamantly

opposed to removing this important public pedestrian corridor between upper Free Street and the Pleasant Street

neighborhood.

The City has recently convened a group to study alterations to the Franklin Arteial to minimize the obstacle it

presents.. It is not at all inconceivable that at some point in the future, the City will want to study alteration of Spring

Street to minimize the ill-conceived barrier which it forms. If Spring Street is re-designed in the future, the City

should have the ability to re-open Oak Street as a cross sffeet. A discontinuance now would eliminate that

alternative for the future residents of Portland.

Oak Street is an important view corridorto the harbor from the spine of the City. The City's existing policy of

preserving existing view corridors and encouraging creation ofnew ones should not be frustrated in this instance by

the contemplated discontinuance.

For the benefit of present and future residents of Portland,

1. please preserve the existing pedestrian route between Free and Congress Streets and the Pleasant Street

neighborhood,

2. please preserve the ability of future residents to r€connect Spring Street to lower Oak Streeg and

3. please preserve the existing view corridor,

Sincerely, eu.L-()-

Peter W. Quesada

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**Landscape Architects, Inc.**

Ms. Jean Fraser, Planner

Planning Division, City of Portland

389 Congress Street

Portland Maine 04101

**Re: Oak Street Discontinuance proposed by Lafayette Portland, LLC**

Dear Jean,

Thank you for taking the time to review the proposal by Lafayette Portland LLC to discontinue

Oak Street between Spring Street and Pleasant Street. It is our understanding that the applicant

wants to eliminate the public way with no proposed public walkway or parking. As currently

Proposed by the LLC there is no public easement that will connect Pleasant Street to Spring

Street in the area between the parking garage and the Holiday Inn.

As you know, Mohr & Seredin has been located on Pleasant Street for the past 20 years and we

are very familiar with pedestrian routes as well as parking patterns on Pleasant Street. The

portion of Oak Street that is proposed to be discontinued carries a significant amount of walking

traffic between our neighborhood. and downtown. South Street has no pedestrian access, up to

Spring Street and therefore the potential loss of Oak Street means that the neighborhood would

have to gain access to downtown via Center Street or High Street. We believe this will result in

a significant disruption of an established walking pattern and is similar in many ways to the

disruption of established circulation caused by Franklin Arterial which the city is now planning

to correct.

In addition to the disruption of the existing pedestrian walkway there will be a loss of unmetered

on-street parking on Oak Street. Our office staff utilizes on-street parking on Oak Street and we

know from our experience from the neighborhood that other businesses and residents use this

portion of Oak Street because it is unmetered. While the loss of 5 or 6 public parking spaces

may seem insignificant to the applicant, it will have a dramatic impact on the neighborhood and

our business because there are very few unmetered parking spaces within a quarter mile of the

section of Oak Street that is proposed to be discontinued.

We trust that the Planning Board will review the proposal and at a minimum require Lafayette

Portland, LLC to maintain a pedestrian connection and ideally provide a similar amount of

parking that will be lost if Oak Street is formally discontinued.

Stephen Mohr, ASLA

Tatyanna Seredin, ASLA

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**18 Pleasant Street, Portland, Maine 04101**

**(207) 871-0003**

