

Key HRCP Concerns & Messages for City Council

Oct. 27, 2021

Concern: Erasing History

Message to City Council:

- Before the creation of the Irvington National Register Historic District in 2010, demolition of historic homes in Irvington was routine.
- Since 2010, Irvington has enjoyed protections from demolitions of historic buildings. Unfortunately, the proposed changes would make it easier for the city to take demolition protections away.
- There is value and grace in recognizing a profound duality: Let society be judged not only by what we create, but also by what we refuse to destroy. Demolitions are the least environmentally sustainable option in this whole equation.

Concern: Landmarks Commission

Message to City Council:

- The Portland Historic Landmarks Commission makes the big decisions about protecting historic places and advises City Council on policy.
- The proposed changes reduce their role and the standard for membership so that not one member would need to have any preservation-related expertise.
- Portland deserves a strong, qualified Landmarks Commission to make sound decisions on designation and evaluation of alterations to major historic buildings.

Concern: Defining Affordability

Message to City Council:

- As Portland searches for the best paths to more affordable housing, Irvington has a strong history of providing “Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing” in the 2,200 multi-family units in the Historic District.
- But the new proposals emphasize demolition and replacement over cost effective ways to expand housing opportunities without demolition. We can’t demolish our way to affordability.*

Concern: Thoughtful Solutions

Message to City Council:

- Irvington is pro-density, and it can continue to be achieved with thoughtful design. With approximately 70 Accessory Dwelling Units, Irvington has proven that ADUs can increase housing capacity.
- We have many examples of adaptive reuse, such as duplexes and triplexes carved out of original single family houses (6,000 new housing units were created this way in Portland in the 1940s).
- New zoning code changes allow these conversions today, without sending perfectly good buildings to the landfill.
- We support the limited HRCP provisions for adaptive reuse and encourage the City Council to consider ways to incentivize it more extensively as was done in WWII.

Concern: Changing Rules

Message to City Council:

- At a time when many chose to rent or buy elsewhere, many current residents sought out Irvington and worked hard to restore homes in disrepair, reasonably expecting the city to continue historic protections that create a public asset for all who live, work, or visit a historic district.
- More than 700 home owners have gone through a historic review process in 10 years, not short-cutting anything. With the proposed changes the city could say, “Well, we didn’t really mean it...”
- HRCP itself does not remove any protections. Keep it that way.
- HRCP does provide an easier path to removing protections, which we deplore.

Concern: Cultural Tapestry

Message to City Council:

- Greater diversity makes any neighborhood more vibrant. One of the first African American families in the neighborhood moved to Irvington in 1912, Beatrice and Edward Cannady. She was one of the most prominent civil rights activists of the time.
- While there were deed covenants north of Tillamook Street starting in 1891 and expiring in 1916, these covenants mentioned race in the context of Chinese, who

were, at that time, subject to the Federal Exclusion Acts of 1872. That's not justifying anything, nor should it be used to shape decisions in 2021.

- Important to know: Approximately 70% of all homes and buildings built in Irvington were constructed either after those covenants expired, or were in areas that never had covenants.
- As of Aug. 2019, 47% of the 340 students at Irvington Elementary were students of color.

Concern: Modeling Civility

Message to City Council:

- To those whose views differ from ours and opt for name-calling online or flame-throwing in writing: Let us appeal to the better angels of our nature, finding reasonable solutions that benefit future Portlanders.
- We achieve that more quickly via meaningful dialogue and seeking to understand than by presuming we can benchmark against, for example, what any of us paid for rent 20 years ago. Let us work together for the sake of a city we love.

Thanks in advance for your help in preserving special places for the future benefit of all Portlanders. Every voice matters and we especially need yours at this consequential time.

**For some added affordability context: In 2019, the Portland median family income for a family of four was \$80,212, and the HUD rule is that monthly rent less than 24% of that is "affordable", meaning \$1,604 or less in Portland. Take a look on Craig's List to see what two-bedrooms currently rent for in Irvington. Let's agree on what the end goal is so that any code changes can align to that so that progress can be measured and success ensured.*