

## A Host's View of the Irvington Historic District

Testimony to the Planning and Sustainability Commission by Jim Heuer, Oct. 20, 2020

### A City of Neighborhoods – Travelers' Delight

It was 2010, and Travel and Leisure Magazine opened my eyes to the potential for Irvington to provide a great vacation experience for travelers. Their readers rated top tourist cities by a bunch of dimensions, one of which was "Noteworthy Neighborhoods". Here are their findings:

## Quality of Life and Visitor Experience

### NOTEWORTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

		VISITOR   RESIDENT	
RANK	CITY		SCORE
1	Charleston		4.69
2	Savannah		4.68
3	San Francisco		4.65
4	New Orleans		4.54
5	New York City		4.52
6	Providence		4.50
7	Chicago		4.49
8	Boston		4.48
9	Portland, OR		4.44
10	Seattle		4.36
11	Washington, D.C.		4.34

- > ALL
- > CLEANLINESS
- > ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLINESS
- > NOTEWORTHY NEIGHBORHOODS
- > PEACE AND QUIET
- > PEOPLE-WATCHING
- > PUBLIC PARKS AND OUTDOOR ACCESS
- > PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLINESS
- > SAFETY
- > SKYLINE/VIEWS

*Travel and Leisure Magazine Tourist Survey Results, 2010*

Here we find Portland in the rarefied company of Washington, DC, and Boston, and only a few points below New Orleans with its storied Garden District. Here was an indication of what the 35% of Portland tourists seeking "cultural tourism experiences" are looking for. (Perhaps not surprisingly, Portlanders themselves rated Portland much lower in this dimension – what is in front of our eyes every day becomes commonplace!)

### The Hosting Experience – Seeing Irvington Through Fresh Eyes

Fast forward to 2016 when my husband Robert and I completed an ADU in the basement of our National Register individually listed home in the Irvington Historic District. By early 2017, we had our City license and began advertising on AirBnB and VRBO (Yes, we realize the preference would be for this to be a long-term rental, but frankly the high cost of the construction has demanded we ramp up the revenue. After a few more years, we're expecting to switch to long-term rentals.)

In these last 3-1/2 years we've been able to understand our neighborhood as it has been seen by our **more than 1000 guests from all over the U.S. and Canada and more than a dozen foreign countries.** They have marveled at the beauty of our streetscapes, taken huge pleasure in walking and biking around the area, and praised the summer-time strolls toward shops and restaurants along our leafy streets lined with beautiful gardens and architecturally interesting houses and apartments. Special note has often

been made about the lush gardens in all styles and varieties planted in the deep setbacks from the street, mandated by the visionary Elizabeth Irving who planned this neighborhood to face the street with its natural beauty, rather than hiding it in the back as found in so many cities.

### Learning from Leading Tours – Helping Portlanders Discover Their History

About the same time we started our ADU project, we developed two walking tours of the Irvington Neighborhood open to locals and visitors alike. Conducting two such tours a month during June, July, August, and September (until stopped by Covid-19 in 2020), **we have shared the history, architecture, and lore of this neighborhood with hundreds of visitors**, collecting nearly \$2000 in the process in donations for the Irvington Community Association’s Charitable Giving Campaign.

What we learned from our tour guests was that many who didn’t live in the neighborhood had enjoyed walking and bicycling through Irvington for years, and often wondered how it had retained its beauty and historic charm. They were excited to learn the fascinating history of building, decline, and rejuvenation that is on display in this Historic District.

This then suggests **the contribution of Irvington and our other historic residential districts as an attractor for locals and visitors alike. It’s a veritable public art gallery of creatively designed and beautifully preserved historic early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (and even some fine 19<sup>th</sup> Century examples) homes and buildings – both small and large -- that invite strolling and exploring just as the nooks and crannies of the Portland Art Museum do – but is free to everyone!**

During this Covid-19 hiatus in our Irvington walking tours, we are developing yet a third route for a walking tour. We invite Planning and Sustainability Commission members to sign up for our walking tours next year. Be sure to check out the latest schedules at [www.irvingtonpdx.com](http://www.irvingtonpdx.com) for dates and reservation information.

### About the Writer

My name is Jim Heuer. The home that my husband Robert Mercer and I own is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and a contributing property in the Irvington Historic District. In 2001 we applied for the State of Oregon Special Assessment, which gave us a 15-year tax break in return for an expenditure of many tens of thousands of dollars for rehabilitation and restoration. Then in 2017, in part to help pay for our much higher property taxes after the end of the Special Assessment break, we constructed a 750 square foot Accessory Dwelling Unit in our basement – during which we applied for a Type II Historic Resource Review.

In addition to “hands-on” preservation activities, my involvement with the historic preservation community includes:

- Lecturer on Portland architectural history for the Architectural Heritage Center (AHC)
- Past membership on the Board of Directors of the AHC
- Membership on the Irvington Community Association Land Use Committee during which time we reviewed approximately 600 historic resource review applications and assisted hundreds our neighbors navigate the process
- Twenty year member of the Irvington Community Association’s Historic Home Tour Committee
- Past Chairperson of the Portland Coalition for Historic Resources
- Member of the Regulatory Advisory Committee for the re-write of the Goal 5 rules

- Member of Senator Dembrow's 2019 legislative task force on historic preservation
- Member of the Architectural Historic Center's Education and Advocacy Committees
- Docent with Robert Mercer for history and architecture walking tours of Irvington, Ladd's Addition, Portland Heights, Willamette Heights, and other historic Portland neighborhoods

Note that reference above to organizations I have served is for general information only to explain my interest in and qualification for submitting this testimony. The ideas expressed in this document are mine alone, and there is no intent to suggest support by any of these organizations of anything I have written.