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In regards to the proposed “land Use Action” I won’t continue along the lines that most are likely to follow, namely: mitigation of a known wetland. Instead, I will speak to another concern entirely (although not unrelated) which is nearer and dearer to my thoughts...*the forest*.

I have spent nearly all of the previous 25 years of my life dedicated to the health and preservation of trees (doing so even at the expense of my own well being at times). Having received my initial training first as lead climber, then becoming manager of residential projects for Joseph Harry Tree Specialists of Portland, Oregon, I have first hand experience regarding the impact of construction upon mature trees such as the conifers that currently reside on the lot in question. As arborists, we were often contracted as consultants for both commercial developments (such as the McMenamins Breweries) and residential projects (PDX *actually* has a tree preservation plan) to oversee both the health and survivability of these irreplaceable natural features. Unfortunately, even under ideal conditions the success of such mitigation was ever in question, as building contractors tend to follow a “business as usual” approach regardless of any stipulations they are supposed to adhere to. Recent intervention efforts for a concerned homeowner on Pleasant Beach Drive has only reinforced this hard-earned opinion, and has me conclude that such cognitive bias and/or blindness is systemic, regardless of region.

Just follow the money.

Imagine my shock when it was brought to my attention plans to not only build upon the tidal wetland zone at Manitou Beach, but right in midst of one of the last stands of mature conifers on the island. Initially granting the benefit of doubt, I assumed such must involve fantastically engineered pilings floating a raised platform in an area where mature (and failing- they are merely a transitional species towards climax forest development) Alders were to be cleared to make room for a hypothetical house footprint...but alas, no. The plan proposes nestling the house in midst these remaining irreplaceable conifers.

Exactly how will this be accomplished without severe impact upon the expansive root zones of these towering evergreens? Realize the basic “rules of thumb” regarding proper tree care tend to involve 3rds: never remove more than 1/3 the total canopy...never damage more than 1/3 the root zone...exceptions are sometimes made (and “miracles” do happen-dependent upon the species), but the consequences for failure as implied by this proposal are to be classified as “potentially catastrophic.” One must realize the rather tenuous grip these large trees already have in the soil thereabouts (essentially shallow surface roots barely penetrating the sand/clay/rock matrix of ‘old beach’).

Upon viewing the available sparse details for this proposed lands usage, experience would lead one to assume the hypothetical house in question will have a traditional perimeter foundation?

Trenching for such a footing alone would remove nearly 1/2 the root zone of each of these trees: not to mention the additional damaging effects of soil elevation and/or root compaction. Have we

considered the slow rate of decline for trees of such age and size would likely not be noticeable until well past the “5 year mitigation” point (assuming they don’t catastrophically fail during the first major windstorm)? Have we considered the consequences of failure will likely involve the remaining forest as well as property damage to adjacent homes? I would deem such potential outcomes “risky to the point of foolishness” (at best).

Perhaps my mistake is assuming “lot preparation” won’t simply be yet another clear-cut.

Given the current trend of development on the island (and the seeming lack of discretion) I have come to the rather regrettable conclusion that the only real “planning goals” for the island are revenue-based. The rate of new construction, and the seeming lack of regard for long-term consequences are appalling to one who first moved to this island and became enamored of its charming character 31 years ago. That once-rural maritime charm has now been culled for more suburbanite sensibilities it seems.

-Kirk Torren Smith

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