For Immediate Release

Four Groups Appeal City Council Vote to Amend Portland’s Central City 2035 Plan in Effort to Protect New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District

PORTLAND, OR – June 27, 2018 – Restore Oregon, along with fellow petitioners, Bosco-Milligan Foundation/Architectural Heritage Center, Portland Chinatown Museum, and Oregon Nikkei Endowment have filed an appeal of the Central City 2035 Plan (Plan) in a move to protect the New Chinatown/Japantown historic district from out-of-scale development and in protest over the lack of public process.

Portland’s Central City 2035 Plan sets the goals, policies, and zoning to guide development over the next two decades. On June 6th, Portland City Council passed an amendment to the Plan that not only directly contradicts Oregon’s statewide Planning Goal 1, which requires citizen involvement in all phases of the planning process, but also negated over two years of deliberation and planning by City staff and community members, including Restore Oregon, to establish appropriate height limits for the New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District.

“While Restore Oregon commends several aspects of the Plan aimed at retaining the City’s historic fabric, it places Portland’s New Chinatown/Japantown Historic District, along with other historic districts at risk,” said Peggy Moretti, Executive Director with Restore Oregon. “With no real notice, no public process, and ignoring the objections of the neighborhood, a last-minute, backroom decision was made to rezone over 45% of this small 10-block historic district to allow new buildings up to 200 ft (approx. 20 stories) – a height which will never be compatible with historic 2-or-3-story buildings.”
After two years of public process, City staff recommended a maximum height of 125’ (approx. 12 stories), which made compatibility challenging, but was believed to be a reasonable compromise, reached by a public process. Then on April 4, 2018, City Council decided to spot zone one specific vacant lot in the district, Block 33, to a maximum height of 160’ because the owner/developer of the property said they could not make a profit at 125’. Restore Oregon’s testimony cites several compatible infill development examples.

On May 30, 2018, with NO analysis or public testimony allowed, City Council voted to increase the height of Block 33 - and an additional four blocks of this small, ten-block district - to 200’, plus allow greater massing on Block 33. This height would completely overwhelm the nearby historic buildings, most of which are one and two stories, and would overshadow the Lan Su Chinese Garden.

The appeal petitioners and many others believe ample housing can be created at the staff-recommended lower heights and are troubled by the precedent this could set for other historic districts.

“This is the only district in Portland that was designated as historic due to its cultural significance, so we are compelled to protect it. ” notes Moretti.

About Restore Oregon: Founded in 1977, Restore Oregon is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization which advocates for sound preservation policy and legislation. Our mission is to preserve, reuse and pass forward the historic places that create livable communities. Each year, we provide statewide educational programming and technical assistance, while working to save the sites and structures featured on our annual list of Oregon’s Most Endangered Places. We hold over 40 conservation easements on historic properties, thereby protecting them in perpetuity. Learn more at www.restoreoregon.org

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Preserve, Reuse, and Pass Forward the Historic Places that Make Our Communities Livable and Sustainable