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# The Southwest Portland Post

Southwest Portland's Independent Neighborhood Newspaper

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## Portland planning commissioners receive guided tour of Southwest

By Lee Perlman  
 The Southwest Portland Post

Slopes in steep, landslide-prone terrain standing clear-cut and bare. "Skinny" houses spaced less than five feet apart. Streets with no place to walk other than in traffic. Intersections that are accidents waiting to happen – or happen again.

For three and a half hours last month, Southwest neighborhood leaders took the Portland Planning Commission on a bus tour of their community that illustrated the issues they have been dealing with for years. Southwest Neighborhoods Inc. (SWNI) land use committee chair John Gibbon was the main tour guide and narrator, but he had plenty of help.

The tour was the latest of several such excursions the commission has taken of parts of the city. They have previously toured east and central northeast Portland, always accompa-

nied by commentary by either Bureau of Planning staff or local volunteers. In this case, volunteers did nearly all the talking.

Former Southwest Hills Residential League (SWHRL) chair Jim Thayer technically did not go on the tour; instead it was brought to him at the confluence of Southwest Campus and Cardinell drives. There a steep hillside with a history of landslides, the potential future site of 36 housing units, lies bare after the City Forester gave his blessing for all the trees to be clear-cut, Thayer said.

The development approval includes a condition that the developer replant 96 trees and 156 shrubs on the property, "but we have no way of knowing if the city will maintain the agreement," Thayer said. In addition, traffic from the project will use Cardinell, a very narrow winding street. "This will put a huge burden on the neighborhood," Thayer said, but the land use review did not provide an opportunity to bring it up.



Portland Planning Commission members and Southwest coalition leaders climb a stairway July 22 at Southwest Cardinell and College streets in the SWHRL neighborhood, part of a half-day tour of the Southwest area. (Post photo by Lee Perlman)

Dave and Dixie Johnston of Collins View, who joined the tour at a pre-arranged meeting place, had similar issues in their neighborhood. The clay

that makes up most of the soil in this community is "like cement when it's dry, but when it's wet it's like soup,"  
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## Maplewood activists see "McMansions" replacing trees and older cottages

By Polina Olsen  
 The Southwest Portland Post

When Micki Carrier moved to the Maplewood neighborhood five years ago, large, beautiful trees shaded her street. Then, according to Carrier, builders snapped up land and things started changing:

"Either they built from scratch and foliage was moved out of the way or they tore down tidy little ranch homes and made room for the biggest houses possible. When these incredibly large barn shaped structures go up next to little ranches, they look terribly out of place."

The problem of teardowns, of course, isn't limited to the Maple-

wood neighborhood or to Portland. Around the country, trees and older homes are routinely demolished and replaced with houses that dwarf nearby structures and take up most of their own lot. Issues extend beyond changing the character of old neighborhoods:

"We had bio-mass that mitigated storm water and put oxygen in the air," said Todd Williamson whose Maplewood cottage shares the yard with his business, the Sacred Onion Yoga Studio. His neighbor's basement only recently started flooding. Williamson blames the change in foliage.

"Builders put in something that will grow to 20-30 feet as a replacement for something that sucked up 100 gallons

of water a day," said Williamson.

John Gibbon, land use chair for the Southwest neighborhood coalition, questioned Portland's one-size-fits-all approach to building regulations. "The city's had a problem with combined storm sewer overflow," he said. "They are requiring new home builders to put the storm water that falls onto the property into ground on the site."

While this works in some areas of the Southeast, the Southwest has different topography. "It leads to water bubbling up on a downhill neighbor's yard or basement." Before, trees on the undeveloped site slowed down storm water and soaked up the rain.

According to Gibbon, teardowns aren't a major issue in other Southwest communities but large houses on small lots are. Residents complain about blocked sunlight and loss of privacy as new three-story houses tower over older one-story homes. "Big back yards are going away and people are putting in flag lots," he said. "And,

houses are fitted on spots that once seemed impossible to build on."

Both Williamson and Carrier have become Maplewood neighborhood activists. They've testified at City Hall and escorted officials on neighborhood tours. While most city officials agree in principle, the solution requires a change in building codes, an action many are reluctant to take.

"The city wants higher density for the growth boundary thing and they also want more tax revenue," Williamson said. "My fear is by the time we get around to changing the codes, it's too late, and they've changed the whole character of the neighborhood."

West Portland Park neighborhood activist Amanda Fritz agrees. She's worked on this issue for about 10 years. "We've made attempts to fix it but there hasn't been the political will in the city council to restrict home size or to put in neighborhood compatibility standards," she told *The Post*.  
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Micki Carrier and her Chihuahua "Sasha" discuss Maplewood neighborhood issues with Todd Williamson. (Post photo by Polina Olsen)

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