

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Land is scarce and expensive and growth by infilling is inevitable, even within our historic districts. How can we do it responsibly?

Preserving our Crown Jewels—Responsible Infill

Article and Photographs by Kerry VanderZanden, Forest Grove Architect

The pressures on Forest Grove's historic properties are enormous, both on individual homes and on neighborhoods. This article provides one professional's perspective on how to move forward responsibly.

Where do we build? Regional growth and local growth is inevitable. Given a choice, many people would prefer a five-acre lot with a view and a couple of horses running in the field or a quiet, slow-paced neighborhood that denotes a high quality of life where everyone knows their neighbors. We have the latter, and they are our historic districts.

Housing in our various designated historic districts are the jewels in our crown that we call Forest Grove. Many articles, walks, talks, ohs and ahs describe the various styles, the various patterns of our community and our neighborhoods. They follow historic designations such as Queen Anne, Cottage, Foursquare and bungalows. We also have seen those houses in many a neighborhood that, well...do not belong. There are some of those too in Forest Grove.

Architecture in Historic Districts can be an ever changing process. What worked 50 or 60 or more years ago or even 5 or 10 has changed and is still changing, but a central theme of a warm and functional home has not. Many families will be drawn to an older historic home until sometimes they see what kind of work it will



Replacement garage designed to match the existing house. The garage also has a self-contained apartment above.

take to bring back its luster. Another reason is the connection to the neighborhood and a common unified desire to live in an older home in an older neighborhood with neighbors that more than likely have similar lifestyles and a desire to hold on to history. New subdivisions have a different style but one day may have that same feel - more about that later.

Many older homes have already changed once or twice or more in their lifetime. A filled-in porch, a bathroom fit in somewhere, a new window here or there, an attic turned into a room, a basement renovated or even dug out. We have made these changes due to life changes or values over and over again. Many changes will be undone with the next owner but we still love those older homes and will do what we need to keep the warmth that it displays and that historic value.

How a home functions today has changed, which forces us to take the historic home and change it, and change it and change it again. There are several areas that are often looked at: (1) The kitchen doesn't work with new appliances. (2) The house is too cut up and has smaller rooms which are not conducive to family gatherings. (3) Not enough storage or closets in the bedrooms. (4) Bedrooms are too small, often with headroom problems. (5) No master bathroom. (6) Not accessible as the home owner grows older. (7) Etc., Etc., Etc.

Today a lot of newer subdivisions will have 5 or 6 house plans that are built over and over again but unlike days of old, these houses may only be painted differently. One may have brick or stone or shingles or lap siding. They sometimes look nice but...there is no pride put into the home by the contractor. They are 10 feet apart with windows looking into the same windows on the next house because the developer doesn't

want to deviate from the plans. They have a margin of overhead that they must keep.

In a historic neighborhood, if you look closely, you will see similar houses and plans. They could be set 5 or 10 feet apart and on 50 foot wide lots just like any new subdivision, but they are each unique. The contractor has put into it a pride of craftsmanship with a diversity of texture, scale and details that are often overlooked today.

What an architect, designer contractor or developer must do today is to continue to add to the texture, scale and detailing of the neighborhood while meeting their clients' needs and still keep their margin of profit. It *can* be done and is



done every day. They must put that pride back into the project. They must push themselves and their clients to have more than just "I need 3 bedrooms and a media room and of course granite counter tops." They must be simple yet creative. They must experiment with new ideas and concepts to understand what is important to their client, neighborhood and the house itself. This new house, remodeled house or new addition has not just an influence on the owner but on the

entire neighborhood. A house has an immense influence upon its inhabitants more so than a school, university or work place. It determines a quality of life that is permanent and will be passed on to the next owner of the house. It is a challenge and the responsibility of all who are involved.

How do we approach and encourage this quality of life with in-fill homes, additions or remodels? How do we balance design and regulations that may be imposed by restrictions? How do we reach agreement on design principles? Would rigid rules restrain creativity? Will too much flexibility provide a design that is out of character for the district? Who will be the judge and do they have the expertise to judge?

There must and should be a careful balance of a regulatory approach following standards and design guidelines, yet provides for flexibility in their interpretation to create a high quality design that works for the specific historic district. Regulations are only successful when there is a balance with the regulations provided and with the homeowner or builder/developer who is aware of and is encouraged to meet a specific quality of design.

Successful design guidelines should include:

A clear background statement giving context for the guidelines.

- Define clearly what the specific criteria are.
- Provide and describe various ways in which the guidelines might be met.
- Use district-specific photographic examples from both the past and present.
- Employ simple understandable language.
- Educate through detailed explanation and accurate historical information.



An in-fill home in the Painter's Woods District. It is sited on a 50-foot-wide lot, and has an attached garage with alley access.

Finally, we must maintain principles for the development of our historic districts. We must provide clarity and consistency for developers, designers and regulators to make it easier to construct new projects. Look at the district as a resource and not just as an individual part.

Look to new construction that will complement and support the district; it should be compatible yet distinct and should reflect the district's characteristics.

Our many crowns in the city of Forest Grove are our Historic Districts. It is ours to lose or to add to its richness and distinction.

Kerry VanderZanden is a native son, Architect and current resident of Forest Grove with nearly 39 years of practice. He has designed a full range of projects from residential to professional offices to Manufacturing and Business.

Community Enhancement Grant Funds

If your house is on our local historic register, or a contributing building in one of the three historic districts, your house may be eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding. The Historic Landmarks Board may have funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work, have structural work to do such as foundation or porch repairs, even exterior painting or re-roofing, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant, up to \$1,000 (less for painting and roofing). We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to challenges you may have. Contact James Reitz at 503-992-3233 or jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov.

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In this Issue:

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