

Montpelier City Council Meeting on 4/26/17
Statement Supporting Design Review Control District in the Cliffside Neighborhood
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I bought my house 30 years ago. I had no idea about historic preservation at the time – and learning about it was definitely not high on my list of priorities. My house was not habitable when I purchased it. It was in poor shape on the outside as well as the inside – but it had “good bones” and the location on a dead end street was great for raising kids.

Enter Margot George. Margo George was a well-known, well-liked realtor and community activist in Montpelier. I feel very fortunate to have gotten to know Margot. She came to my house and met with me to help me understand that I just purchase a house in Montpelier’s Design Review District. She asked me if I realized what a treasure of a neighborhood I was living in?

One could be really honest with Margot because she made you feel so at ease. I said that I really had not given it much thought.

Margot was naturally energetic but when I said I not given much thought about the historic neighborhood jewel where I just bought a house – she became happily animated in telling me about Design Review. I now think she saw me as a lump of clay – ready to be molded. And that she did.

Margo was a visionary and I mean VISIONARY in caps! The 2009 Montpelier Annual Report was dedicated to Margo George and Paul Guare with their pictures and these words - ...”Both were dedicated to Montpelier’s history and preservation. The City is a better place because of their lives.”

In the same Report – there is a “Message from Mayor Mary Hooper”, “Every year we individually or as a community say good-bye to important people. This year Montpelier lost two people who were deeply ingrained in the fabric of our community – and who were important keepers of our history....Sometimes, it seems that Margot George single-handily made Montpelier embrace its built environment. A life-long love of architecture and the historic qualities of this community led Margot to her efforts to restore the historic fabric of the downtown through work on the creation of the Design Review District... I hope we honor their memories by continuing their work”.

Margot told me the City is trying to save my neighborhood because of the historic nature of its homes. She was honest – saying that living in the Design Review District will require more planning, time and nominal fees on my part – but the end result is that the Cliffside neighborhood historic treasure will continue. She said this would be good for everyone’s property values as it will preserve the historic beauty of my neighborhood.

Since having that wondrous conversation with Margot 30 years ago, I have learned much about the importance of historic preservation. I am happy to report that the Cliffside Neighborhood has held its own in maintaining its historic charm - just as Margot said it would. Before entering Design Review Control – a number of houses got artificial siding put on – this was sad to Margo. I thought about her conversation with me when I met a new homeowner who said that it was too bad the previous homeowner had put artificial siding on her house. She learned that the artificial siding had an adverse effect on the historic value and aesthetics of her home, that it was not healthy for her home, and also limited her color options.

I am not terribly interested in how Cliffside got to be in Design Review - but thankful because I can see the positive effect it has had over a 30-year stretch.

Here are reasons why I hope the Cliffside Neighborhood will remain in the Design Review Controlled District.

1. We now can actually see the benefit of Design Review maintaining the historic nature of homes in the Cliffside Neighborhood. We can see the historic preservation decline prior to Design Review implementation and then we see evidence that historic preservation decline all but stopped in this neighborhood!
2. Cliffside is a major route to Hubbard Park. Many people walk up Hillside Avenue, Cliff Street, and Course Street to experience the views and Hubbard Park. People from other parts of our country as well as foreign countries on their way to Hubbard Park sometimes becoming disoriented and ending at my house - have commented how lucky I am to live in such a historically beautiful neighborhood. The houses up on the cliff are visible from down street Montpelier for 6 months when the leaves have fallen.
3. Margot told me the folks in Design Review would help me historically preserve my house – and that they did. They made certain my octagon porch was historically correct. They helped me with keeping my garage to scale and offered me design suggestions. More recently Design Review helped me with

the design for a roof over my deck - keeping a light fixture that was there for 20 years that was originally approved by the Design Review Committee.

Without Design Review, I know the historic beauty of Cliffside pinch houses will be lost, door-by-door, window-by-window, addition-by-addition, etc. In fact, my house lost historical windows – from the previous owner – who may have had the best of intentions as he installed costly premium windows but did not understand the value of installing windows that preserved the historic nature of his home. The Design Review Committee helped me lengthen the appearance of his windows with low-cost period outside architectural décor.

4. Design Review requires homeowners to submit a plan for their project. This alone can save homeowners money. It also gives neighbors opportunity to view the project plan, attend the Design Review Meeting and bring up any concerns and/or suggestions before construction begins. This supports the underpinnings of what community is all about.

As I view the projects in the Cliffside neighborhood completed through Design Review – they are of high quality and have kept the historic nature of the houses in tact.

I am all for making the Design Review process less cumbersome, notifying new home owners who purchase a house in the Design Review Control District, holding homeowner training on the Design Review Process, streamlining the Design Review process and making adjustments to allow for updated efficiencies while retaining historic qualities. I believe the Planning Commission has suggested a yearly meeting where homeowners can give feedback on the process to make sure the Design Review Process is working for them.

I am asking the City Council to preserve our historic past by keeping the Cliffside Neighborhood in Design Review Control while we move forward into the future.

Thank you for your consideration.
Please feel free to contact me with any questions.