

HISTORIC ZONING, HOW IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED

Jay Turner 5/20/15

Obtaining historic zoning for the North Slope Historic District was not easy. It took 13 years to get zoning that actually says **to protect, preserve, and maintain the historic buildings**. Let me repeat that: **Thirteen years!**

It all began at a National Night Out in our neighborhood in August, 1993, a group of about 30 North J. St. residents met for a block party and talked about homes being demolished to build apartments and how J. St. could avoid it. They decided something should be done. Ah! An awakening of the *grass roots of a neglected neighborhood!* Those roots began to stir and grow, as neighbors decided on a do-it-yourself project – save the neighborhood.

Julie Turner's task was to contact the city about changing our zoning to anything that would save our homes. Our zoning was R4-L, the cancer zoning for residential properties. The city people laughed at Julie and told her "We don't change zoning!"

Another member decided to contact Valerie Sivinski, our historic preservation officer, about forming an historic district. This process showed merit so a change was made to concentrate our efforts to forming an historic district. Valerie had just lost the way to put Old Town into a historic district so she asked us to go collect signatures. Make sure you have support so that a district could be formed.

Julie took her clipboard out and went door-to-door collecting signatures. People came to her asking for information to do their block. She had 50% in days and soon had over 70% of the neighbors who wanted to be in an historic district. Julie had no trouble getting 20 - 50 people to meetings to discuss the historic district and on to Planning Commission and City Council meetings. This passion in residents is still present today. The grass roots effort worked and the result was one of the largest residential historic districts in the State of Washington. Now, it was time to take on zoning.

But, when it comes to zoning the city was still not willing to change. We had to prove the district was historic. I put the district on the National Register of Historic Places, and that did the trick. The National Park Service, keepers of the National Register of Historic Places has strict rules about what can be included and the NSHD, being on the Register, was proof our historic district was real. If you want to read the documentation, the proof, it is over 500 pages long and can be found here:

http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/cedd/tacomaculture/historic/general/HD_NOM/NSHD_NR.pdf

This is the first time that the Planning Staff took notice of the NSHD and decided that yes, these historic properties needed to be saved. The Staff and NSHD owners came together to save this district. The City attorney and our land use attorney worked out

the legal bugs. It was well vetted. After 13 years, we were all working together to protect and preserve the North Slope Historic District and the result was a new zoning category for historic districts, HMR-SRD. I did my best to get the leading words to say - The purpose of this zoning category is to preserve and protect all properties in the North Slope Historic District. While I did not get my exact words, most of them did make it into the final zoning category. The final version does say - -“ **protect, preserve, and maintain the historic buildings.**” The most important part of our zoning was to look at all properties as historic properties and not as a single-family or multifamily.

Many, many parts of zoning were considered and too numerous to mention here. To highlights: Demolition prohibited. New duplex and higher multiples prohibited. Conditional use permits allowed under certain conditions. ADU’s allowed here and in every other zoning category.

Landmarks Commission was formed or expanded to approve changes requested in the NSHD. Design guidelines were made and approved for the District. While Historic Zoning was created only 10 years ago, it was well vetted at that time by everyone. Problems here and there, yes, but overall HMR-SRD zoning is working to preserve and protect all historic properties in the North Slope Historic District.