

The North Slope Loses a Valued Neighbor

Valerie Sivinski, North Slope resident and former Tacoma Historic Preservation officer, died in a traffic accident on October 17, 2000, in downtown Tacoma.

Sivinski was a leading preservationist in Tacoma, both as the former City Historic Preservation Officer and as an architect in private practice. Her projects included many downtown buildings and the formation of the North Slope Historic District.

In the early 1990's, a group of North J St. residents were referred to Sivinski's office for help in discouraging the tearing down of old houses on the street to build apartments. Sivinski advised the group to survey North J Street for interest in forming an historic district while her office determined if an historic district was justified.

What emerged was an historic district with simple architectural guidelines for structural changes made to the exterior of contributing (included) buildings. Structures too modern (less than 40 years old) or in drastically marred condition were called non-contributing and were not subject to the ordinance. This excluded all the modern apartment buildings of the 1960s, 70s and 80s and included all sizes and shapes of houses and older apartments.

After North J became the North Slope Historic District in 1995, a larger neighborhood group took on the project of extending the Historic District to include North I, K, L and M Streets. This phase was completed in 1997, and the initial segment of Sheridan, Cushman, Ainsworth and Grant/Sprague Streets were initially added in the spring of 2000.

This final phase was completed after Valerie left the Historic Preservation Officer job to pursue her career as an independent architect. The new officer, Elizabeth Anderson, came highly recommended by Valerie and continues to provide professional advice and support to the North Slope.

Julie Turner, who worked with Valerie on the original J Street ordinance and the subsequent extension, feels that Valerie's guidance and professional advice were key elements in the successful formation of the Historic District. In addition says Turner, Val taught us to think of more than just no more apartments; she taught us our place in Tacoma's history.

Somewhere along the line in the years from 1993-2000, the residents of the North Slope absorbed Valerie's point of View of the value of our neighborhood as a chronicle of the lives of real people in Tacoma from the 1880s to the 1950s. The Variety and breadth of housing types and sizes as the North Slope developed in fits and starts over the years was as important as the historical value of the individual buildings. Val was fond of saying you could stroll the streets of the North Slope and see what was built and how people lived over a 50 year span.

It is difficult to absorb the loss of a friend, a neighbor, an advisor who was such an integral part of our neighborhood's recent past, says Turner. But think of Valerie as you walk along our streets and appreciate what she saw in all the old houses we are fortunate to call home.

The North Slope Coalition sent a contribution in memory of Valerie to the Tacoma Architectural Foundation.