
FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE NORTH SLOPE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Bill Johnston's personal account July 12, 2013

As I can best remember the North Slope Historic District is the outgrowth of two small groups of residents who were concerned mainly about two growing trends in the neighborhood. One was the continuing establishment of "group homes" throughout the area with little thought, oversight or regulation by the city. The other was an attitude by the city bureaucrats that if a developer wanted to tear down the most historic home in the district and put up a plywood sided 8-plex that was just fine. A general feeling prevailed that the City of Tacoma was destroying one of its finest neighborhoods. Both groups independently decided the bureaucrats had to be slowed down or better yet – stopped!

On a beautiful late Summer evening I was on my front porch talking on the phone. As I had the conversion I watched as three rather disheveled looking men sat on a low brick wall at the end of the alley between North 'J' and 'K' on North 7th. As they sat there they passed a brown paper bag between them and drinking from it. They got up and were so obviously drunk they basically were holding each other up as they "walked" towards 'J' where they took a turn to the east and headed down the street. I told my caller I would call him back and started following the trio.

They eventually made it to North 4th and 'J' and to what was at that time called "My Home" an alleged re-hab center. They walked in through the front door – were not challenged by the person at the desk and disappeared. This was not something we wanted going on in the neighborhood and there appeared to be a total lack of accountability on the part of any authorities.

The first person I talked to was my neighbor – Dennis Nelson -at 701 North 'J'. Dennis was an attorney and we discussed who we should talk to and what we should do. Here I am a bit foggy as to

how things transpired over the next month or so. What I do remember is that Denny Faker became involved. He and Dennis Nelson had talked.

Denny owned The Bavarian Restaurant located at that time on the corner of North 'K' and Division. Denny opened his upstairs meeting room to citizens who were concerned and wanted to take action to preserve the North Slope Neighborhood. He put on a spaghetti dinner and turned out a rather large crowd with many people signing up to approach the city and the owner of "My Home" to reverse what we saw as a disintegrating situation.

A group of us also brought in The Safe Streets Campaign that had been fairly successful since about 1984 in dealing with the gang activity that had arrived with the drug trade from California. Safe Streets gave us some good organizational advice but our concerns were not particularly attached to gangs or street crime. We needed to expand into other areas. We started meeting on a regular basis at the Bavarian on Saturday mornings once a month. We did not have a board or any chair but decided it would be best to operate by committee (if you had an interest you joined a committee) and I was the "facilitator" who just kept the meeting agenda moving along and called on the committees to report.

The meetings were well attended (50-60 a meeting if not more) and Denny generously provided the space, coffee and donuts. The meetings were called to order at 9 am and ended at 10 am (no exceptions). The committees met after or set up additional time to meet on their particular project or task. And this is where the idea came from to form a historic district to protect ourselves from the "group home business" and the City Bureaucrats who be this time we had found out through the committees meeting with them didn't give a damn about the neighborhood quality of life or historic homes. The exception was Councilman Bob Evans who had begun to work with us, particularly on "My Home".

While the "My Home" saga is a long and convoluted story that I will not go into here, lets

just say the situation eventually improved a great deal. To this day I have not observed anyone going by my house falling down drunk headed for the group home.

The pocket park at North 'K' and 8th was also an idea born out of the our Bavarian meetings. Kelly Halligan, who at that time was the manager of the apartments at 8th and 'K', asked "Now that Tacoma Power is going to vacate the sub-station on the corner what are they going to do with the land?" The image of the city approving an 8-plex with plywood siding immediately came to mind so when Kelly suggested we approach the park department everyone approved.. A committee of group took over that task and our park was dedicated in 1999. Dr. Richard Moe, who was on the Metro Park Board at the time helped us champion the complex exchange of land between the city agencies.

The Historic District idea came up because participants at the meetings had been working in another group and decided to "throw in" with the Bavarian group to add numbers. After our experience with the city bureaucrats it seemed like the logical thing to do and we had folks who (as I recall had lived or worked in San Luis Obispo where a residential historic district had been established). Originally the historic "district" was only 'J'; 'K' and the South side of 'I' streets. Everything else was added later thanks to the hard work of Julie Turner and her crew of doorbellers.

The major accomplishments of the North Slope Historic District and the unofficial groups that proceeded it include: The establishment of the District itself; the park at North 'K' and 8th; the on-going neighborhood association continuing to this day; the city government certainly pays more attention to us than they did in 1991 and no doubt the quality of life in the neighborhood is far more protected than before.

It took between 1991-2 to 2000 to accomplish most of the above and the need for the Historic District and the association remains as much in need as it did twenty years ago.