

Grass-roots Effort Started NSHD

At National Night Out, 24 Years Ago

In the early summer of 1993, a young man who lived in the 900 block of North J St. distributed a flyer titled, “**We Should Care About This!**” He was referring to the recent demolition of a small “homesteader” house in his block to build a multi-plex. He was outraged and said we should all do something about demolition of these old houses before we lost them all!



So, at the first National Night Out in our neighborhood, in August, a group of about 30 North J. St. residents

met for a block party and decided on two tactics: ask for a zoning change, and inquire about how to make an historic district.

Ah! An awakening of the grass roots of a neglected neighborhood! The roots began to stir and grow, as neighbors decided to on a do-it-yourself project.

Roger Johnson met with the Historic Preservation Officer of Tacoma, and Julie Turner talked with Tacoma’s Planning Department. Roger got encouragement and Julie got turned down about a zoning change.

Consequently, a group of 15 North J. St. homeowners met in November at the Turner home, and Historic Preservation Officer Valerie Sivinski said: “Bring me the names of at least **50% of property owners** who say they are interested in establishing an historic district. If you can do that, the City will write an ordinance to establish a District on your street.”

Over the next two years, neighbors learned how to talk to each other about saving our houses from demolition to get that 50%, we learned what the Landmarks Commission required of property owners in Districts, and how to go to hearings and tell of our commitment. And, finally, we sat in the City Council chambers in August of 1995 to hear the ordinance pass unanimously to establish the “North Slope Historic Special Review District.” It went from North Steele to North 3rd St. along North J.

We had become “community activists” who took the future of our neighborhood into our own hands, made the decision to accept oversight by the Landmarks Commission, and proceeded over the next 5 years to establish one of the largest residential Historic Districts in the United States. Step by step, chunk by chunk.



It was a **grass-roots effort**. And, it still is, to keep what we have and make our neighborhood better each month and every year. Keep those grass roots watered and growing!