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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A LARGE  
RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT ON THE NATIONAL  
REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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Most people cannot deny the intrinsic value of a well preserved historic neighborhood. When you ask anyone to draw a picture of a house, they typically draw a one and a half story, gable-end vernacular house that could have been built anytime from 1850 to 1899. The sketch does not include a large attached garage you walk around to get to a front door. The sketched house will often have divided light windows, a front door right off the sidewalk, and maybe even a front porch, depending on the artist's skills. The sketch is not a typical modern, suburban house popping up infilling more established neighborhoods or replacing formerly un-developed stands of woods. The houses sketched are those much like the early examples of houses in the North Slope Historic District. These are houses that our parents and grandparents were raised in before our culture succumbed to car culture and design oriented around these gas guzzling machines. These houses are remnants of days when a street car shuttled people to work downtown, when moms greeted children with a fresh plate of homemade cookies, days when kids walked to school. These houses are sentimental reminders for everything many of us dream of having.

It's hard to put a pin dollar amount on this atmosphere. A study conducted in Alabama and released in July 2002 attempted to place a dollar amount on historic resources. The study titled "Property Value Appreciation for Historic Districts in Alabama" explored six similar studies previously conducted in other states peppered across the United State's south and east coast. The study also considered the property values in seven historic districts throughout Alabama. Registered historic districts studied all had a required design review process, similar to Tacoma's review for locally registered properties and districts. The Garden District in Montgomery, Alabama consists of approximately 750 structures built between 1850 and 1930 and found that historic properties appreciated 34% more than comparable non-registered properties in the community. A similar study is yet to be conducted in Washington State, but the figures appear to be consistent throughout

the six other studies reviewed and six other historic districts considered in the study conducted in Alabama.

The higher appreciation of property values in historic districts is likely due to our efforts to surround ourselves with tangible reminders of our past combined with the dedication of district residents to retain the historic integrity of their district. Our old houses afford many of us the opportunity to sit on our front porches and call out to neighbors out for an evening walk or chat with kids on their way to a friend's house. Often, new houses and neighborhoods are broken up with massive driveways and garages, and porches are placed in the back for privacy. Dedication for retaining historic integrity of our neighborhoods includes careful consideration of the changes we make to our homes.

Historic districts afford a level of protection for those who have the right intentions but may lack the experience necessary to do the job properly. Design review, required for any changes that will affect the exterior of the house, is one responsibility of locally registered historic homeowners in Tacoma. This ensures that the character of the neighborhood is retained for everyone to enjoy. For most people, properly maintaining these resources we have become caretakers of, is second nature.

When we look to our grandparents for guidance, we find the "waste not want not" and "if it isn't broken then don't fix it" philosophies. Both of which apply to historic preservation and caring for historic buildings. Today we often find the attitude that it's easier to rip it out and start new than to mess around with something old and try to fix it. Often, that leads to a lot of unnecessary waste. Old windows are thrown away because somewhere down the line they were painted shut. If we invest some time in reading any one of a variety of guides for restoring windows and apply a bit of elbow grease we could save ourselves thousands of dollars. Also, the wood used in historic windows is exceptional in quality. The durability of this old growth fir far surpasses new second growth lumber used for new wood windows, which is more susceptible to rot than the old wood. The other challenge with replacing historic wood with new inexpensive modern options is that the glazing fails, typically within fifteen

years. Consider investing \$20,000 every fifteen years to replace windows versus rehabilitating wood windows every 80 to 100 years. The dollar value of retaining historic windows, in the long run, is more valuable. “If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it” also comes into the window story. Just because an old window sticks, or is painted shut, doesn’t mean that you should give up on it. It may take a little (or sometimes a lot) of work, but in the long run it’s worth it both aesthetically and monetarily. If you find that there is no way you can resist the urge to rip out all your old windows, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission approves this action, then please seriously consider storing those old windows. I can guarantee you that one day; someone will live in your house and wish they could have the old windows back in place. The Tacoma Historic Preservation Officer and the Tacoma Landmarks Preservation Commission are available to assist you with making sure that the work you do on your house retains the historic integrity. We can direct you to resources appropriate for restoration and rehabilitation and we can work with you on our Special Tax Valuation program.

As residents of the North Slope Historic District, you deserve recognition of your dedication to historic preservation. That recognition comes in the form of placement on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, the Washington Heritage Register and the National Register of Historic Places. You all deserve a pat on the back for your hard work and dedication to assure that future generations will have a beautiful neighborhood to remind them of eras gone by. Congratulations, homeowners, you’ve done a fine job. Now keep up the good work!

Please check our website [www.cityoftacoma.org/historicpreservation](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/historicpreservation) or visit one of our Landmarks Preservation Commission meetings, held the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 728 St. Helens Avenue, Room 16 Tacoma Washington.