

Pasadena and Tacoma

A Tale of Two Historic Districts

Jay Turner 3/10/2002

Pasadena, California has its Bungalow Heaven Historic District. Tacoma has its North Slope Historic District. In reading an article in *Sunset Magazine*, March 2002, I noticed a lot of similarities between the two Districts, as well as differences. I thought I would share this with you.

Both Bungalow Heaven, BH, and our North Slope Historic District, NSHD, had a real-estate developer to account for the start. NSHD was galvanized into action when an 8-unit apartment was slated to be built on North 10th and J Streets. In Pasadena, a developer demolished a 2-story Craftsman bungalow and built, quoting Bob Kneisel from BH, “. . . the tackiest apartment houses anyone had ever seen.” In our case, neighbors held the size to a “legal” 6 units of a “Gig Harbor” type apartment. It doesn’t fit the neighborhood, but there was nothing we could do about it.

People here and in Pasadena realized that more multi-units were coming, these units were legally zoned, and they would be built to the detriment of single-family homeowners. In Pasadena, BH succeeded because they were able to convince the city of the value of the historic character of the neighborhood to accomplish down-zoning. Bungalow Heaven has gone on to be a city and nationally recognized historic area. Bungalow Heaven has been featured in magazines, like *Sunset*, as well as in newspapers and books. All this is to the benefit of the neighborhood, as well as to the City of Pasadena.

Here in Tacoma, the city officials have their head in the sand and still envision our historic area as another “apartment city.” The R4-L zoning we have allows 100% apartments, and forward planning of the city shows this is the direction they want for our neighborhood. (see <www.wiredcityusa.com> for zoning and intensity maps) A group of NSHD residents have tried to change the zoning since 1994, but has been denied over and over. With this attitude from the city, it is no wonder we have had little publicity for the historic character and value of our homes, nor for the Historic District itself. And no side benefits that publicity can bring to the City of Tacoma, either. Still, our NSHD has accomplished a lot. New people want to live here and old-time residents are proud to be a part of the North Slope Historic District.

After seeing the need for a historic district, the process followed by BH and NDHD was almost identical. The Historic Preservation Office in both cities became active in helping to get the district formed. In both neighborhoods, dedicated residents worked tirelessly to educate, inform and elicit support from property owners. In October 1989, BH became the first residential district in Pasadena to reach Landmark District status. We in the NSHD became the first residential district in Tacoma on Aug. 1, 1995.

Other similarities come to mind. We both have signs on the lampposts proudly denoting the Districts. NSHD has over 950 properties in the district. BH is a close second, with over 800. In the past we have had Historic Home tours; BH still does, on an annual basis.

Both Districts sponsor neighborhood activities, both educational and social. One last item pointed out in the “*Sunset*” article -- having a Historic District gives residents a common purpose and goal, which pulls the neighbors together. This certainly fits the NSHD.

I wonder, NSHD is ready for *Sunset Magazine* is Tacoma?