

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District



Landmarks Preservation Commission Briefing

May 28, 2014

BACKGROUND

The West Slope Neighborhood Coalition is proposing to establish a conservation district overlay in the West End area of Tacoma. This is a briefing to introduce the proposal to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, as well as to receive early feedback from the Commission. Following this briefing, staff will ask the Commission for authorization to formally begin the review process.

About the Neighborhood

- The West Slope Neighborhood consists of four plats and was initially established in 1941. The proposed conservation district includes approximately 279 homes and 286 lots, constructed predominantly during the 1940s through the 1960s. Most houses are simple 2 story homes (the lower floor being a daylight basement) located on their lots to maximize views of the Tacoma Narrows.
- In order to preserve the neighborhood's views and character, the original developer established covenants placing restrictions on the design and construction of homes within the plats.
- The neighborhood association has faced difficulty enforcing or amending the covenant restrictions, resulting in teardowns, out of scale development, and view disputes. Consequently, they are seeking a land-use based approach to resolve these issues

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

History of the Proposal

- In 2007, at the request of the West Slope Neighborhood Coalition, former Mayor Bill Baarsma and the City Council provided funding to the Historic Preservation Program to conduct a study of the feasibility of creating a new midcentury historic district in the West Slope Neighborhood.
- In 2009, the consultant retained by the City released a report that recommended not designating a historic district in the neighborhood, due to lack of historic integrity and lack of neighborhood consensus. The report recommended revising the City's "conservation district overlay" to allow for standalone conservation districts.
- In 2011, with the support of the neighborhood, the City modified both the comprehensive plan and regulatory code to allow the conservation district overlay to be used as a standalone district (previously it was only used as a buffer zone around historic districts).
- The neighborhood retained a consultant to develop an application to become a conservation district and formally submitted a proposal and application for Area-Wide Rezone in December, 2013.

About Conservation Districts

General Information

A conservation district is an overlay zone that is designed to protect historic neighborhood character, when a neighborhood either lacks the integrity to qualify as a historic district or doesn't desire the requirements that come with a historic district.

The objective of a conservation district is to protect a neighborhood from unnecessary demolition, inappropriate new construction, and inappropriate additions. Unlike in a historic district, design review is not required for most exterior alterations to buildings.

Criteria for Conservation District Designation

Conservation districts must meet the criteria for suitability and historic significance within the municipal code (TMC 13.07.040). The prevailing age of the structures within the proposed district must be 50 years or greater, and the area must be geographically distinct and possess a "clearly established existing character related to historical development patterns or the overall appearance of building types in a defined period of time."

The following are the criteria for determining the suitability of a conservation district for a neighborhood:

- a. Appropriate documentation of eligibility is readily available. Survey documentation is already prepared or could be easily prepared by an outside party in a timely manner; and
- b. For proposed conservation districts, preliminary analysis indicates that the area appears to have a distinctive character that is desirable to maintain; and

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

- c. A demonstrated substantial number of property owners appear to support such a designation, as evidenced by letters, petitions or feedback from public workshops; and
- d. Creation of the district is compatible with and supports community and neighborhood plans; or
- e. The area abuts another area already listed as a historic district or conservation district; or
- f. The objectives of the community cannot be adequately achieved using other land use tools.

The following are the criteria for determining the historic eligibility/significance of a potential conservation district:

- a. The area is part of, adjacent to, or related to an existing or proposed historic district or other distinctive area which should be redeveloped or preserved according to a plan based on a historic, cultural, or architectural motif; or
- b. It possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.
- c. Although it shall possess historic character based upon an intact development pattern and a prevailing historic architectural character expressed through its assemblage of buildings, a Conservation District is not required to meet the criteria for landmark designation as outlined above.

Boundaries for a Conservation District

The municipal code states that the boundaries should be based on a definable geographic area based upon age, building types, density, and historical development patterns to the extent feasible.

Effects of Designation

In general, a conservation district has less of an effect on property owners within the district than the effect of a historic district. Per TMC 13.05.047, design review within a conservation district is required only for 1) construction of a new building, or 2) an addition to an existing building. Approval from the Landmarks Preservation Commission is also required for demolition of an existing building. Lastly, properties within a conservation district do not qualify outright for the Special Tax Valuation incentive – to qualify for the program, a property within a conservation district must be designated by City Council individually.

When a conservation district is established, the Landmarks Preservation Commission must adopt design guidelines to review the appropriateness of projects that are subject to review. The guidelines must address, where applicable, height, scale, massing, exterior cladding and materials, building form and shape, roof shape, fenestration patterns and window materials, architectural details, additions, parking, main entrances, rhythm of openings, accessory structures, streetscape and sustainable design.

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The items below are proposed for regulation under the proposed conservation district. Some of these areas likely cannot be regulated by the City under the conservation district code, and some others will require additional clarification of language to be effective. These items will be topics of discussion later Commission meetings.

Building Height

Buildings in the Narrowmoor Additions shall be restricted to no taller in height than the existing ridgelines and or rooflines for reconstruction, remodels, and additions. New construction shall be no higher than the average roof line of the primary structures on adjacent properties so long as those structures are representative of original Narrowmoor construction. If an adjacent home has been structurally altered in a manner than increased its roof height or it consists of 3 levels includes of a daylight basement, the nearest residence representative of original construction shall be used for the measurement.

The application suggests that exceptions to this guideline should require a variance.

Roofs

1. Low pitched gable and hipped roofs shall be the norm, and may vary in degrees of pitch depending on various factors, including where a structure is sited on the sloping topography of the lot, its roofline height and orientation, comparative height of adjacent homes, etc. Roof pitch shall not exceed 5:12.
2. No cupolas, railings, decorative railings, or accessory items such as roof-mounted solar panels, wind-energy devices, or the like shall extend the allowable roof height, nor shall such items be allowed if they are reflective of the sun and disruptive to the view. Normal and necessary items, such as vent stacks, chimneys, and safety railings on decks are exempted so long as they are designed to be of minimal impact on the view, consistent with their essential functions.

Building Form

1. New and remodeled homes shall be consistent and compatible with existing structures in style and features. A-frames, flat-roofed, unmodulated “commercial looking” structures, and similar unsympathetic construction should be considered inappropriate for the area (see appendices for examples of “incompatible construction”).
2. Residential structures shall not exceed a single, main level and a daylight basement.

Lot Layout

1. The cumulative footprint of the residence, garage, and outbuildings shall not exceed 25% of the square footage of the residential lot.
2. No residential parcels or lot shall be less than 12,500 square feet, to include individual existing lots, Assessor segregations, short plats or re-plats.

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

3. Where an original lot extends street-to-street, so shall any lots subdivided from the original.

Trees

Trees or tall growing vegetation shall not obstruct views and shall not exceed the rooftop height of the residential structure on the property.

Garages and Accessory Buildings

1. Minimal, detached accessory buildings may be allowed to include garages so long as their cumulative footprint does not exceed 1,000 square feet and do not exceed 15 feet in height or otherwise impair views.
2. Detached buildings should be of similar materials and colors to the residence (with the exception of greenhouses).

Other Regulations

There are no requirements proposed for parking configurations, windows or window patterning, or other building elements.

KEY ISSUES/NEXT STEPS

To evaluate this proposal, the Commission will need to focus on several key areas:

1. Eligibility. Does the West Slope Neighborhood, based on the criteria in the municipal code and the overall character of the area, appear to meet the requirements for the establishment of a conservation district? This includes both the appropriateness of the conservation district overlay as a tool to address neighborhood concerns as well as the criteria for determining historic significance.
2. Are the proposed regulations suitable or adequate for a conservation district based on the municipal code definition?
3. Completeness of application. Are there additional types of information that the Commission needs to review this proposal and to make a determination as to whether the aforementioned criteria are met?

Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

Review Process and Schedule

The initial step is review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider the merits of the proposal in terms of designation criteria, followed by Planning Commission review and finally, review by City Council.

Tentative Schedule

May – Sept 2014	Landmarks Commission Review <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neighborhood wide announcement of proposal• Two public Q&A sessions TBA• Landmarks Commission site visit/tour TBA
Nov – Dec 2014	Landmarks Commission Public Hearing
Jan – Apr 2015	Planning Commission Review
May 2015	Planning Commission Public Hearing
July 2015	City Council