

# Proposed West Slope Neighborhood Conservation District

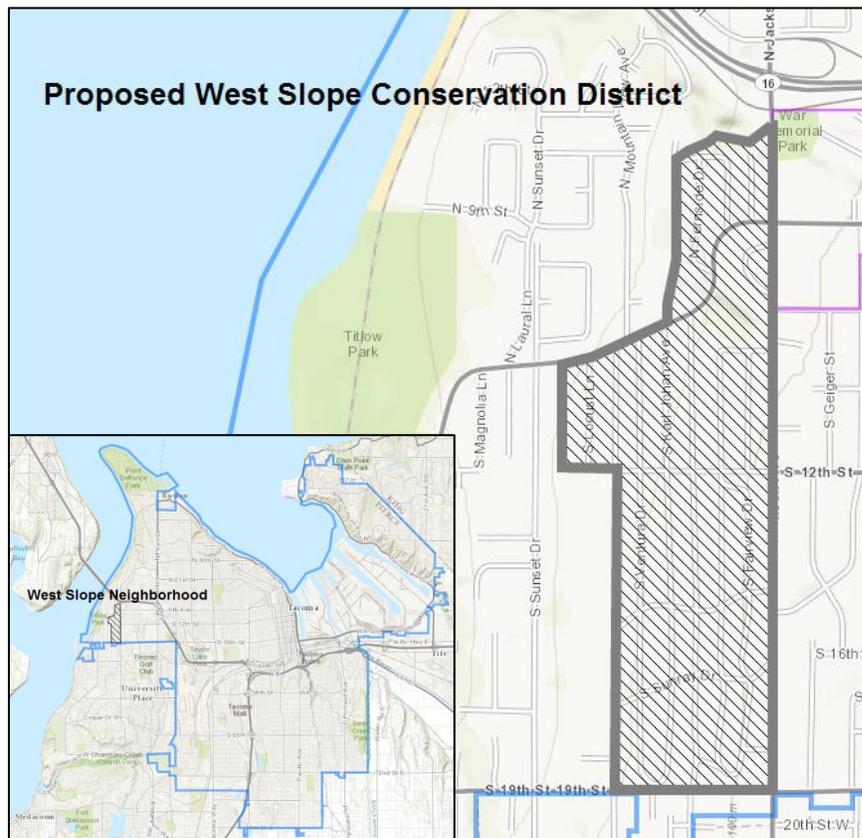
The West Slope Neighborhood Coalition is proposing that the City establish a conservation district overlay in the West End area of Tacoma. This document is a summary designed to provide background information for property owners and interested parties about the proposal, about conservation districts, and about the process for creating a conservation district.

## Why is a Conservation District being proposed?

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.

According to the proposal, the neighborhood has faced difficulty enforcing or amending the covenant restrictions, resulting in teardowns, out of scale development, and view disputes. Consequently, the West Slope Neighborhood Coalition is seeking a land-use based approach to resolve these issues.



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## History of the Proposal

- In 2007, at the request of the West Slope Neighborhood Coalition, 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. The report recommended revising the City’s “conservation district overlay zone” to allow for the creation of conservation districts in neighborhoods.
- In 2011, with the support of the neighborhood, the City Council 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 November, 2013.



## What is a “Conservation District?”

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.

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## What are the criteria for establishing a Conservation District?

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
- 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.

## How are the boundaries for a Conservation District determined?

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.

## How Does a Conservation District affect property owners?

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

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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.

## What is the process and how will the proposal be evaluated?

To evaluate this proposal, the Landmarks Preservation Commission will 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?

### 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.

### Previous Briefings

<b>Date</b>		<b>Subject</b>
May 28, 2014	Landmarks Preservation Commission	Introduction to proposal, preliminary feedback and direction
June 2, 2014	Neighborhoods and Housing Committee of City Council	Informational briefing
Sept. 24, 2014	Landmarks Preservation Commission	Identification of key issues; preliminary assessment of eligibility

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## Overall Schedule

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

## For more information, contact:



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