

INTRODUCTION

Establishment of the Historic District

The Historic District is an officially designated area of Snohomish, including commercial main streets as well as residential neighborhoods that have been identified by the community as being culturally, historically and architecturally significant.

The establishment of Snohomish's Historic District began through the efforts of a few individuals, who in 1969 formed the Snohomish Historical Society. The goal was to ensure the historic structures in town remained intact by listing an area of the city on the National Historic Register. In 1973, the City of Snohomish recognized that its unique and historic architectural character was worthy of preservation. The Historic District and Historic Preservation Board were established by the City Council under Ordinance 1185. A year later, the City Council passed Resolution 378, designating 40 buildings as historic structures within the Historic District. This list of structures was then filed with the National Park Service to support a nomination of the Snohomish Historic District for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. On October 22, 1974, the nomination was certified. Today, the City Council has recognized 56 buildings as historic structures within the Historic District.

The reviewing entity for development within the Historic District—the Design Review Board (DRB)—was created in 1979 under Ordinance 1436. The first guidelines regulating development within the Historic District were published in 2000, and revised in 2003. The standards were used for over a decade to aid the City and the DRB in reviewing and evaluating proposals to construct, alter, and demolish structures within the boundaries of the Historic District. During that time, opportunities for refinements and improvements were identified, and new language was developed. The standards contained within this document are the result of that process.

Purpose & Intent

The purpose of these design standards is to promote the continued preservation of the character of Snohomish's Historic District and historically significant buildings, and to encourage the design of compatible new development that is creative, high-quality, and expressive of its own time. New development that respects and relates to the scale of existing buildings and reflects the Historic District's character will protect the investment of businesses and property owners and attract visitors to the community into the future.

This document also serves as a tool for increasing awareness of historic preservation and good design, educating property owners and their design professionals when planning projects. The design standards contained in this document are intended to provide specific criteria for alterations, additions, new construction, and demolition in Snohomish's designated Historic District.

Why Preserve?

Preservation of Snohomish’s historic buildings and neighborhoods is a priority of the City Council for many reasons. Historic preservation brings cultural, aesthetic, environmental, and economic value to the community.

Preservation protects the character of the community and its connections with our history. Maintaining the aesthetic appeal and historic character fosters community pride and increases the sense of place, thus making Snohomish a desirable place to live, work, and visit. Preservation supports the local economy by promoting reinvestment in historic buildings to help stabilize property values, and promotes the local tourism industry. Preserving the built environment also provides a sense of belonging, pride in our past, and contributes to the overall quality of life for our residents. It has also been shown that preserving historic structures can be more sustainable than new construction, as the energy required to demolish and replace an original building and its components is greater than the energy required to maintain it.

The Character of Snohomish

Historic resources are a key factor of Snohomish’s character and identity. The old buildings of the Historic District—both commercial and residential—are assets that attract visitors, businesses, and residents, contributing to an aesthetically pleasing streetscape and creating a tangible link with Snohomish’s past. The Historic District is the City’s image in the region and beyond.

History

Founded in 1859, Snohomish was the first incorporated city in the county. The town was originally called Cadyville, until 1871 when the plat of Snohomish City Western Part joined the western and eastern claims of the Fergusons and the Sinclairs at Union Avenue. In 1861, Snohomish County split from Island County, and the town was voted county seat. In 1897, a controversial countywide vote resulted in Snohomish losing the county seat to the nearby growing town of Everett by a margin of seven votes.

The town was initially developed to support the surrounding agricultural community of the Snohomish River valley, and boasted a booming logging industry. The first Snohomish sawmill was constructed in 1876. Rail was also an important element of Snohomish’s economy; the first railroad connection was made in 1888, with the arrival of the Seattle, Lake Shore & Eastern Railway. The Great Northern Railway from St. Paul was completed in 1893. Although trains no longer run through town—the right of way within city limits has been converted to the Centennial Trail—the railroad remains a significant component of Snohomish’s identity.

In 1884, a Seattle newspaper reported Snohomish’s early population was 700 people. That number increased to 6,400 by the year 1995. In 2015, the population was just over 9,300. Growth has steadily increased but Snohomish has remained a compact town with historic neighborhoods and a vibrant commercial and cultural core. The city now serves as a

suburb of the larger metropolitan areas of Everett and Seattle, though it contains a job base of commercial and industrial uses as well.

Setting

The natural setting is an important part of the town's identity. Snohomish is located at the confluence of the Snohomish and Pilchuck Rivers, which border the town on the east and south. The agricultural floodplain to the south and southeast provides a wide expanse of visual and physical open space next to the town's urban environment. The landscape to the northwest was formerly forested and few distant views exist. The floodplain is visible to the southwest, and is limited by views of the hill where Everett begins, approximately six miles away. There are distant views of the Cascade Mountains to the east, and occasional views of Mount Rainier to the south from a few strategic places.

The Historic District is located on the north bank of the Snohomish River, on a gentle slope. Historically, large trees, especially evergreens, were a visually significant element of the town's character. Today, deciduous trees line the streets in both residential and commercial areas of the Historic District, while local parks preserve stands of large trees that are visually significant in forming the horizon of many local views.

Land Use

The Historic District is about 99 acres in size and currently contains seven zoning designations: Single Family, Medium Density Residential and High Density Residential at maximum densities of 18 and 24 dwelling units per acre respectively, Commercial, Public Park, Urban Horticulture, and Historic Business. The Single Family and Historic Business designations comprise the bulk of the District, accounting for approximately 85 percent of designated land. Rights of Way, including streets, sidewalks, and alleys comprise just under a third of the total land area.

The Historic District represents the earliest-developed land in town, and the strongest connection to the early days of Snohomish. Development typically began along the river and moved north as population increased. Commercial development was originally concentrated along the river bank, with homes constructed nearby.

The single family areas are located at the northern extent of the Historic District, on a gentle, south-facing slope. While the land use is primarily detached single family dwellings, several multifamily and non-residential uses are located within this area. Churches, private schools, and small businesses can be found, some operating out of large converted homes. The predominant era of construction is pre-1920, which is reflected in building scale, design, and orientation.

In the Historic Business District, development on First Street is generally characterized by one- and two-story buildings with night-oriented activities (taverns, restaurants) on the south side overlooking the river. On the north side of First Street, taller two- to three-story buildings with primarily retail uses are more common. Storefronts and retail uses at the first floor level are frequently combined with lodging, office and residential uses on upper

floors. The lower height of buildings on the south side of the street permits excellent winter solar access to First Street, improving the microclimate and supporting year-round economic viability of the outdoor shopping environment.

Architecture

Snohomish is a town with working roots. The eclectic, utilitarian buildings with quirky elegance and character are reminders of those industrial beginnings. Buildings in town are representative of their time and place, with wood detailing and functional articulation. Pedestrian orientation is apparent in both residential and commercial areas, with covered porches and garages located behind homes, and commercial buildings located at the front property line with substantial sidewalks and storefront windows.

Commercial

The defining era of commercial buildings in the Historic District is 1880-1930. Commercial buildings range in height from one to three stories. Exterior materials include brick, masonry, wood, and stucco. The general character varies throughout the Historic District; First Street construction differs from Second Street and the north-south oriented Avenues, which were typically developed later.

Buildings on First Street are generally located at the front property line, with wide sidewalks. Flat and hipped roofs are common with well-defined cornices, or sloped roofs with a western front façade. First floors typically have large storefront windows, glass store doors and taller ceilings than upper floors. Upper floor windows are vertically-oriented, and repeated across the façade. Awnings, canopies, and recessed entries are common. Due to the age of development, off-street parking is rare. Landscaping is commonly limited to flower pots and corner street trees.

Second Street remains a major thoroughfare for pass-through traffic in Snohomish. The buildings on Second Street generally exhibit a more modern appearance, however front façades remain largely pedestrian-oriented. Several characteristic examples of early Snohomish development may be found on Second Street, interspersed with the more contemporary, post 1930s buildings. Off-street parking is common.

The avenues extending north-south between First and Second Streets are more eclectic in character. Several buildings were originally constructed for single family use. Greater structural setbacks are more common, with parking lots or front yards, and lawn planter strips between the street and sidewalk.

Residential

Homes in the Historic District date primarily from the 1860s to the present, with many constructed prior to 1920. Residential buildings display a range of turn-of-the-century styles, including Craftsman Bungalow, Queen Anne Victorian, Shingle, Beaux Arts, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Cottage, Colonial Revival and Stick/Eastlake.

Wood lap siding is the predominant material, but brick, stone and stucco are also common. Historic home roofs were either cedar shingle or composition. Roof pitches were steep, often 10:12 or 12:12, with substantial eaves. This steep pitch allowed an otherwise one story home to have a usable upstairs for bedrooms. Covered porches were common. Windows were vertically-oriented and often grouped in twos and threes. Wide wood trim was used on all windows, doors and building corners, generally with wider trim and/or cornices at the top. Skylights were not used.

Houses were set back from the street a uniform distance, with garages and outbuildings located behind the main structure, with access from an alley. Yards were generous in relation to building footprint, with lawns common, and substantial space between structures. Houses varied in size, but generally were approximately the same size within a neighborhood. Picket fences were widely used.

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