

City of Seattle

NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT STUDY



Lund Consulting, Inc.
Seattle City Council Briefing
September 29, 2014

Background in City of Seattle

AS REPORTED IN A 1999 MEMO TO THE CITY COUNCIL:

“At least 34 neighborhoods have included in their neighborhood plans at least some recommendations related to conserving or enhancing community character. As envisioned by some neighborhoods, a conservation district would provide guidelines, support and potential incentives for the conservation of important neighborhood buildings and design characteristics, but would not be as prescriptive as the landmark and special review districts that the City currently uses. ...”

What is a Neighborhood Conservation District?

- ❖ A City-designated district with a distinct character and clear geographical boundaries.
- ❖ Changes to buildings are overseen by a board that includes neighborhood representatives and design professionals.
- ❖ Other cities that have implemented districts could be described as a hybrid of the City's landmark/special review districts and the City's Design Review program.



**Learning About
Neighborhood
Conservation
Districts**

Research Conducted

- ❖ City staff and consultants conducted a literature review and analyzed the reviewed regulations and programs from over 25 cities nationwide.
- ❖ Among the cities with the richest examples and experiences with neighborhood conservation districts are:
 - Cambridge, MA
 - Chapel Hill, NC
 - Charlottesville, VA
 - Dallas, TX
 - Davis, CA
 - Denton, TX
 - Greenville, TX
 - Philadelphia, PA

Conservation District Goals

- ❖ Maintain and reinforce neighborhood character.
- ❖ Manage development in neighborhoods with a distinctive character.
- ❖ Accommodate change in a manner that is compatible with the area.
- ❖ Conserve and enhance existing architectural and cultural identity.
- ❖ Provide tailored guidelines and regulations to respond to the unique development conditions in each neighborhood district.
- ❖ Foster new construction in harmony with the scale and physical character of existing buildings.

District Governance and Administration

- ❖ **A citywide board composed of:**
 - design professionals
 - neighborhood representatives
 - other stakeholders with a demonstrated interest
- ❖ **Staffed by an administrator responsible for:**
 - neighborhood outreach
 - nomination review
 - guideline development
 - certificates of approval
 - permit review
 - administration

Typical Nomination Process

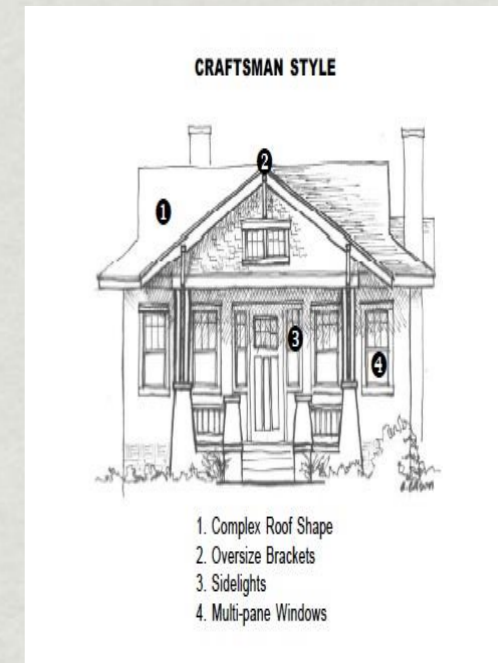
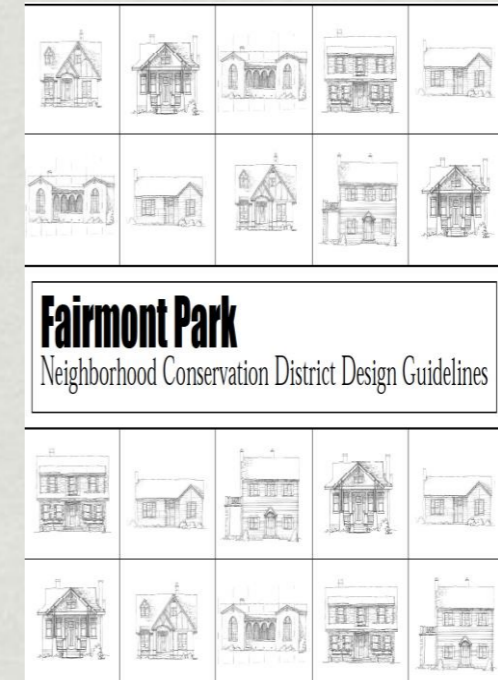
- ❖ May be nominated by neighborhood property owners, city departments or members of the public.
- ❖ Nominations identify design features significant to the district, consistent with criteria provided by the City, including:
 - Elements that contribute to the neighborhood's character.
 - District boundaries.
 - Survey of the area to determine what buildings, landscape, and streetscape features are to be included.
- ❖ The Council would need to approve designations.

Sample District Eligibility Criteria

- ❖ Could be patterned on the Seattle Landmarks Ordinance but adapted to meet neighborhood conservation objectives.
- ❖ Must contain at least four contiguous blocks.
- ❖ Must be at least 12 acres.
- ❖ May include residential and non-residential buildings.
- ❖ Must include distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or method of construction.
- ❖ A majority of the buildings and contributing landscape and streetscape features in the proposed district must be at least 60 years old.

Design Guidelines

- ❖ Clear and specific guidelines established for each district.
- ❖ Identify character-defining features of contributing structures or landscapes.
- ❖ Certificates of approval would be required.



Example of Board Review

- ❖ New construction, including infill development
- ❖ Demolition of contributing buildings
- ❖ Proposed departures from development standards
- ❖ Additions visible from the street
- ❖ Size and depth of front yards
- ❖ Accessory buildings visible from the street
- ❖ Landscaping, sidewalks, and planting strips
- ❖ Porches, fences, and retaining walls
- ❖ Doors and windows

Features Excluded from Review

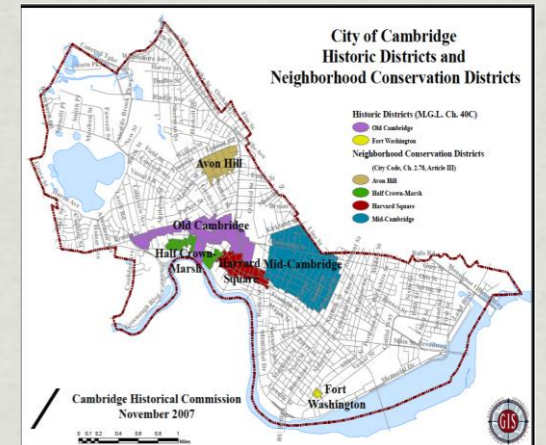
- ❖ Exemptions would be tailored to each neighborhood depending on character-defining features.
- ❖ Exemptions would be established as part of the district-formation legislation.
- ❖ Examples could include: paint colors, minor landscaping, changes in back yards not visible from streets and alleys.

Best Practices

- ❖ Provide opportunities for public to learn about the program.
- ❖ Identify key design features in each district and clear guidelines.
- ❖ Designation applications identify elements of importance to the neighborhood.
- ❖ Establish a citywide board.
- ❖ Ensure the board includes broad expertise and neighborhood representation.

What Can Neighborhood Conservation Districts Do for Seattle?

- ❖ Help residents preserve the most important characteristics of their neighborhood to support quality of life and enjoyment of where they live.
- ❖ Engage neighborhoods in deciding specifics:
 - boundaries
 - types of changes reviewed by a district board
 - changes left to individual homeowners' discretion
- ❖ Neighborhood Conservation Districts Do Not Prevent All Change.



Questions?



THANK YOU.



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Briefing Seattle Public Utilities and Neighborhoods
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