

Survey Summary and
Proposed National Historic District
for the
Lettered Streets Neighborhood
Bellingham, Washington

*Prepared for the
City of Bellingham
and the
Lettered Streets Neighborhood
by Historic Preservation Northwest*

May 28th, 2009



Disclosure

This project is federally-funded by *Preserve America* requiring a 50% match. *Preserve America* is a White House initiative developed in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; the U.S. Departments of Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Education; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities; and the President's Council on Environmental Quality.

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Front Cover Photograph: View looking north in 1912 toward Battersby Park on the left and North Side High School (today's Whatcom Middle School) in the background on the right. (Photo courtesy of the Whatcom Museum Photo Archives)

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Introduction

This report presents a summary of information gathered for the Lettered Streets Neighborhood located in Bellingham, Washington as part of the 2007-09 *Preserve America* Historic Resource Survey and Inventory project. As part of the *Preserve America* project, this report also provides recommendations for a National Register Historic District in the Lettered Streets.

The *Preserve America* federal grant program provides funds on a matching basis to assist *Preserve America* Communities with marketing, planning and educational efforts associated with protection and utilization of community heritage assets. The City of Bellingham received one of 43 grants awarded in 2007.

Partners in the Survey and Inventory project included volunteers and staff from the City of Bellingham's Planning and Community Development Department, Whatcom Museum Photo Archives, and Bellingham Public Library, as well as contributions from the Washington State Regional Archives and Western Washington University's Center for Pacific Northwest Studies. Additional volunteers were provided by student interns from Western Washington University.

The project goals were to survey and inventory the historic resources within the three neighborhoods, to enter information into the Statewide Database, and to analyze the survey and historical research information and develop a National Historic District nomination for each neighborhood. This report describes what has been found during the survey and inventory work and provides recommendations for the Lettered Streets Historic District nomination.

Methodology

The City hired *Historic Preservation Northwest* to perform the survey and inventory and to write the district nominations. A public "kick-off" meeting was held in February 2008 to introduce the public to the project, and the survey was initiated with a "windshield survey" of the initial 2772 tax lots within the three neighborhoods. This involved recording approximate construction date, and if built earlier than 1960, taking one or more digital photographs and recording the integrity of plan, siding and windows, along with the type of siding, windows and foundation. By the end of March 2008, the windshield survey was complete.

With this initial information gathered, survey forms were produced for a "reconnaissance survey" on the 2167 resources built before 1960. Reconnaissance survey involves writing a physical description of the property and how it evolved over time. A two-day training session was held in March 2008 to train 25 volunteers in the architectural survey process. Volunteers were tasked with surveying and writing physical descriptions for assigned buildings. Other volunteers completed city directory research, some photographed outbuildings, several completed tax assessment research, and some researched Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.

Two additional volunteer survey training sessions were held in April 2008, with several volunteers researching and writing the history of their own homes. In June 2008, a group of interns from WWU were recruited and trained in field survey. Meanwhile, three core project volunteers continued with the reconnaissance survey, completing the field work in October 2008. In January 2009 four historic preservation students from the University of Oregon assisted in writing physical descriptions, which was completed in April 2009.

During the reconnaissance survey volunteers researched the history of the neighborhoods and individual resources. All the resources with sufficient integrity to be contributing to a potential historic district within a neighborhood had a history written for it. That totaled 1302 resources recorded at the "intensive level" with an additional approximate 100 resources that were non-contributing but had an interesting history.

In October 2008, an informational public meeting was held to inform the neighborhoods how the project was progressing and what intriguing history the survey had uncovered. Since that time all of the data has been gathered into a proprietary Access database which will be given to the City. The subset of that data will then be entered into the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation's Statewide Database. Information from this database will be available online in the future but will not include information of current ownership.

The next step in the project is to present preliminary district boundaries to each of the three neighborhoods in early June, and to work with City staff and the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), who will review the survey data and the three district nominations.

Once SHPO has completed its final review, the nominations will be submitted to the Washington State Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). The ACHP will review the nomination, which will be presented at a public ACHP meeting on October 22-23, 2009 in Spokane, Washington. (The ACHP holds their meetings every four months in different regions of the State.) If the ACHP has no changes or additions, the nominations will be sent to the National Park Service (NPS) for review before listing in the National Register of Historic Places. If the NPS has no changes or additions, they will forward the district nomination to the Keeper of the National Register for listing.

Neighborhood Boundaries

The Lettered Streets Neighborhood, so named for its series of streets "A" through "J" (and north of Holly Street alphabetically with Astor Street through Morris Street), grew from the site of the Bellingham's origins at the mouth of Whatcom Creek on the northeastern shore of Bellingham Bay. The Lettered Streets Neighborhood is thus one of the City's oldest and most historically significant areas. The neighborhood is distinctive for its grid platted parallel to the bay, in contrast to the cardinal layout of the surrounding neighborhoods, reflecting the neighborhood's origins as one of the original settlement of Bellingham Bay. (See the *Maps Appendix* for a neighborhood boundary map.)

Previous Surveys

In 1979-1980 the Historic Preservation Office of the Whatcom County Park and Recreation Board surveyed the Sehome, South Hill, York, and Lettered Streets Neighborhoods. In 2007 an historic resource survey was completed for properties along the Old Village Trail in the Old Town section of the Lettered Streets.

Properties Currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places

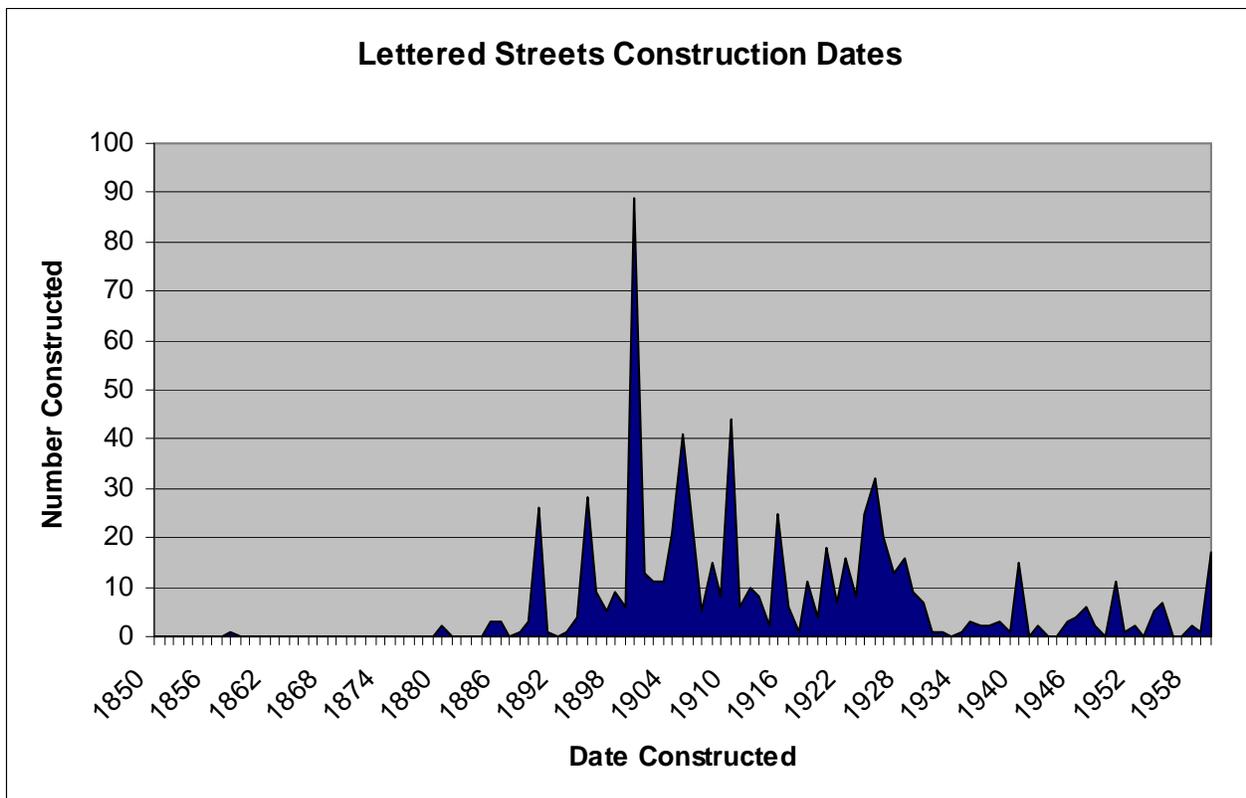
Reflective of the historic origins of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood, six buildings are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These include the Lottie Roth Block (built in 1890)*; the Aftermath Club (built in 1904); the Great Northern Railroad Passenger Station (built in 1927); the Immanuel School of Industries (built in 1904)*; the Capitan George Pickett House (built in 1856) and the T.G. Richards Building (built in 1858)*. (*Signifies that the property is also listed in the City of Bellingham Historic Register.)

Findings

The Lettered Streets Neighborhood has been home to Bellingham’s working and middle class for over 150 years, and the neighborhood’s homes, structures and commercial buildings reflect the different building trends that occurred throughout this time span.

Within the boundaries of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood there are 944 tax lots, on which exist 887 principal structures. Of the 887 principal structures, 717 were built before 1960, according to discovery through the Whatcom County assessment records, research and field survey.

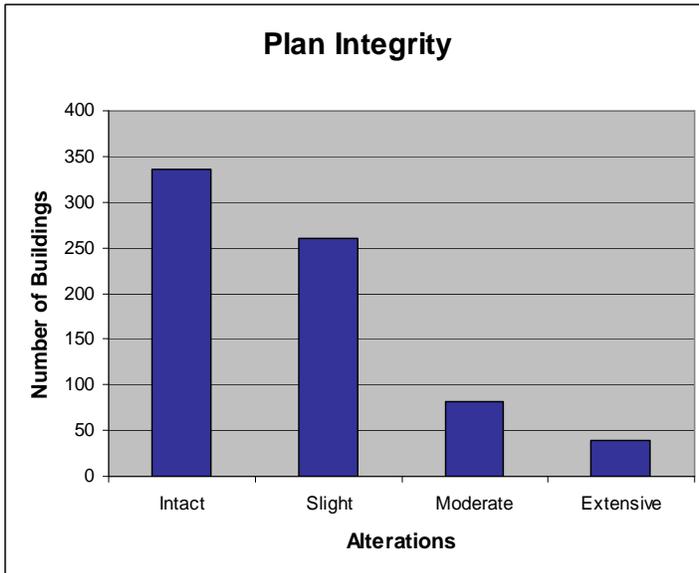
Construction dates were found to peak around 1900, with 324 (45%) of the resources built between 1890 and 1909. That period was a boom time for Bellingham, with only a slight depression occurring in 1893. The Lettered Streets Neighborhood did not experience the growth in the 1920s and 1950s that other Bellingham neighborhoods did as it had already been developed and only offered redevelopment possibilities rather than vacant buildable lots.



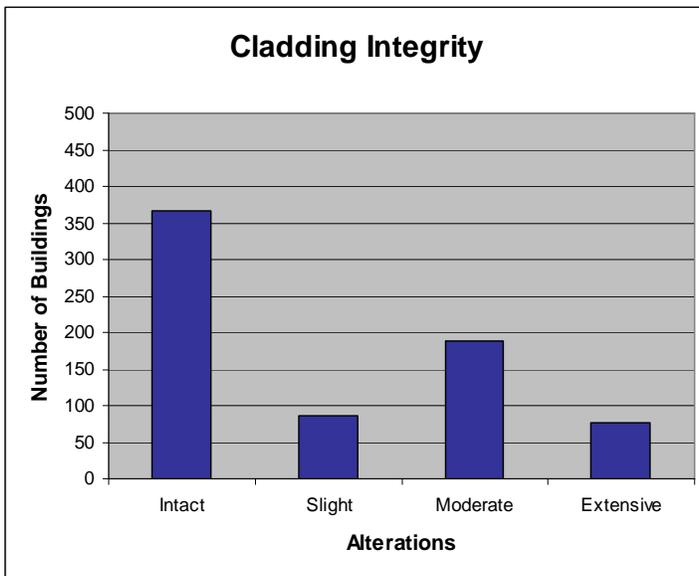
Integrity evaluation was one of the most important aspects of the survey analysis. Resources were evaluated in three categories representing the key character-defining features of a building: **plan, cladding, and windows**. The three elements of each building were evaluated as being intact, slightly altered, moderately altered, or extensively altered. The overall historic integrity, or level of alteration to the original building, was evaluated according to the following table:

Table 1. Evaluation of Historic Integrity

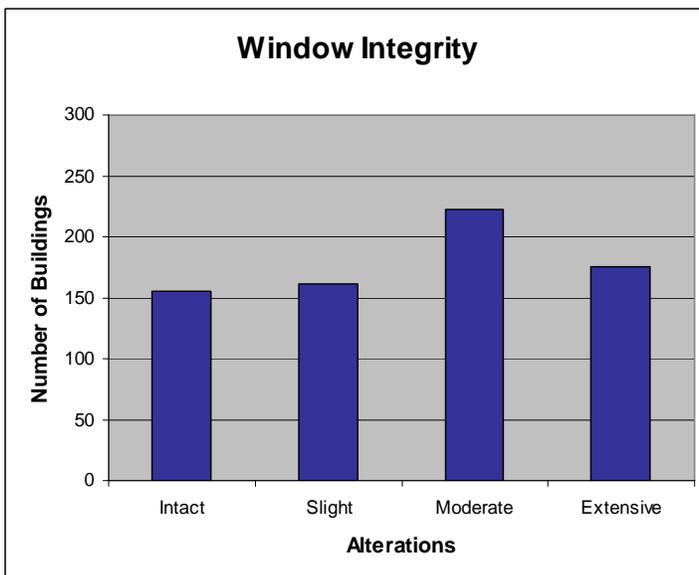
Alterations		Plan	Cladding	Windows
	Intact	There are no apparent additions.	All siding is historic. Partial replacement with compatible material is acceptable, e.g. new wood lap at the foundation. Full replacement with a new compatible material may be categorized as "slight."	All windows are historic. Exact replication of several windows is acceptable. One non-compatible window on an elevation that is not readily seen is acceptable.
	Slight	There are additions (especially historic) to the rear of the building or small, compatible newer additions, e.g. a new dormer with compatible massing and styling.	Siding replaced with compatible material, especially early in the building's history (e.g. drop to lap siding). Minor incompatible replacements, e.g. T-1-11 foundation skirting.	Several non-historic windows on non-visible elevations is acceptable. One non-historic window on a visible elevation is allowed. Near exact replication of most windows is acceptable.
	Moderate	There are additions to the sides of the building that are visible from the front and change the overall building mass.	Partial siding replacement with non-compatible material, e.g. vinyl on 1 st floor, wood on 2 nd .	All windows have been replaced while keeping the same openings and same window configuration. Full vinyl window replacement leaving window openings intact and matching sash configuration would be here.
	Extensive	There are major additions on the front and sides or to the building's height and roof structure. The building is barely recognizable as a historic structure.	All siding replaced/ covered with metal or vinyl veneer. Historic siding replacement with material that is substantially different visually from original, e.g. Queen Anne building with combed wood shingle or asbestos shingle.	All windows have been replaced without regard to window configuration or openings.



As part of the survey, buildings were compared to the 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company made maps of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood beginning in 1885, and provided updates up until 1963. These maps provide information about the original footprints of buildings as well as information about construction material, uses, and any outbuildings on the site. By comparing the Sanborn maps to current aerials and examining the buildings from streets and alleys, it was found that only 39 out of 717 (or 5%) buildings had been extensively altered in plan. There were alterations, but many of the plans were either intact or slightly altered (596, or 83%).



Similarly, the historic integrity of building cladding (i.e., siding) in Lettered Streets to be quite high. Out of 717 resources 452 properties (63%) were found to have intact or slightly altered siding. Only 77 resources had extensive alterations, though 188 had moderate alterations, mainly affected by the addition over the decades of asbestos, metal, vinyl and cementitious sidings.



Many of the original windows in the Lettered Streets have been altered, and of 717 resources, 397 (55%) were found to have been moderately to extensively altered. This is mainly due to vinyl window replacements, as well as replacement of original windows with bronzed aluminum sliders. Only 155 (22%) of the buildings had original windows.

Evaluation

Based on survey information, buildings were evaluated as to whether they retained sufficient "historic integrity" to contribute toward a district. Historic integrity is the authenticity of a resource's historic identity, and refers to the intactness of historic form and original construction materials. As such, historic integrity is essential to the resource's ability to convey its significance. Alterations, either historic or contemporary, were examined for compatibility. The "condition" of an historic resource is generally defined as "state of repair," should not be confused with historic integrity. In other words, a building can be in poor condition but retain a high degree of historic integrity.

To be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places an historic resource must have identifiable evidence in all or some of the following aspects of integrity. Some aspects are more important than others in conveying significance, and these are determined on an individual basis. The seven aspects of integrity, as developed by the National Park Service, include:

- Location:** Is the resource in its original location or has it been moved?
- Design:** Is the original design intact?
- Setting:** Has the character of the setting stayed the same or changed over time?
- Materials:** What portion of the original materials is retained?
- Workmanship:** Does the resource show craftsmanship of the period?
- Feeling:** Does the resource evoke an aesthetic or historic sense of the past?
- Association:** Is this the site of an historic event or activity, or is the site associated with an important person historically?

A historic district is a group of buildings, properties and / or sites that have been designated as historically and/or architecturally significant. Buildings, structures, objects and sites within an historic district are divided into two categories: contributing and non-contributing. Districts greatly vary in size, some having hundreds of structures while others have just a few.

To make a preliminary decision of contributing and non-contributing to a historic district, we used an objective procedure based on **Table 1. Evaluation of Historic Integrity:**

1. If the building was built after 1945, it would be considered "non-contributing" to a district in Lettered Streets. This seemingly arbitrary date defines a strong change in house styles, construction methods, and land use in the post-WWII era.
2. If a building had "extensive" alterations in any of the three categories of integrity, then the structure would be considered non-contributing to a district.
3. If the building had "moderate" alterations in two or more categories, for example moderate alterations to windows and cladding, it would be considered non-contributing to a district.

4. However, a non-contributing building could be “elevated” to contributing if evidence of association of the building with a significant individual or event were discovered through future research, or if a building were restored to its original historic materials, form, and style.

District Boundaries

Coupled with contribution are the four district boundary descriptors: historical, physical, temporal and integrity. We try to find **historical** boundaries for a district, a place traditionally defined by history, such as a commercial business district. We try to find **physical** boundaries for a district, such as a river, highway or topographical boundary. Broadway and Cornwall Avenues would be considered physical boundaries for the Lettered Streets. **Temporal** boundaries outline areas that show development occurring at the same time, such as a subdivision. In the residential areas of the Lettered Streets, the construction spike around 1900 is a good sign of a temporal boundary; however, this building episode is weakened by the number of homes constructed before and after the 1900 decade. And **historic integrity** can be used to separate an area of low integrity from one of high integrity, although this boundary definer is the weakest of the four.

Looking at the four boundary determiners, not one or a combination of all four could be used to create the boundaries of a large historic district in Lettered Streets. Examining the maps and overlaying construction dates against contribution to a district, there is not a strong indication of “historic district” in the neighborhood.

Recommendations

Based on the survey information combined with historical research and remaining historic integrity, it is recommended that a small National Register Historic District be formed in a portion of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood. We recommend an area that is defined by historical and temporal boundaries contained within an area developed by Charles Cissna in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood (see *Map Appendix*). The block bounded by H, Halleck, G, and Girard Streets (Block 189 in the Supplemental Map of Whatcom Addition), plus lots 7 and 8 in block 182 across Girard Street on H Street. The period of significance would be defined as **1888 to 1904**. This date range takes in nine of the ten houses within the boundary, leaving as non-historic, non-contributing a Habitat for Humanity house built in 1999.

There are four criteria to listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Listing can occur if the proposed district meets one or more of the following criteria:

- A: EVENT** The historic property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the nation's history; or
- B: PERSON** The historic property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C: DESIGN / CONSTRUCTION** The historic property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D: INFORMATION POTENTIAL** The property has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

The Cissna National Historic District is eligible for the National Register under **Criterion B: Person** as an intact, tangible representation of Charles Cissna's impact on the history of Bellingham. This is the only single-family residential block that he developed and the houses are historically known as the "Cissna Cottages." He also lived in two of the houses. Other prominent people included would be Billy Utter, owner of the lots before Cissna, and Marion Latta, Bellingham's first prominent architect and a city mayor.

The district is also eligible under **Criterion C: Design / Construction** as an area that represents the work of master craftsmen and possesses the highest artistic values of residential development in Bellingham.

The **eight contributing** resources to the Cissna Historic District within the proposed boundaries at this preliminary stage would be:

2001 G STREET
2007 G STREET
2015 G STREET
1910 H STREET
2000 H STREET
2006 H STREET
2010 H STREET
2012 H STREET

The **two non-contributing** resources to the Cissna National Historic District within the proposed boundaries:

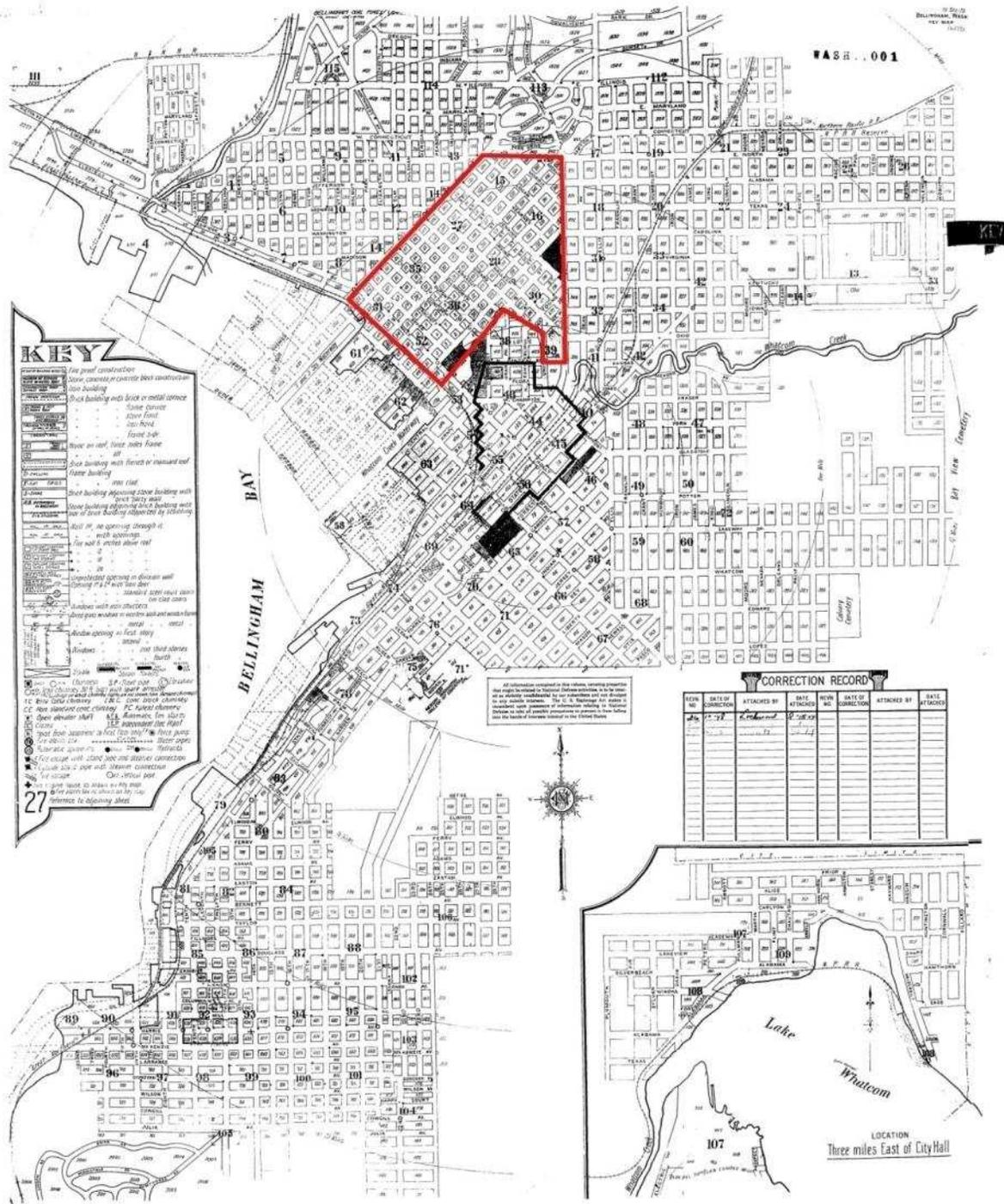
1914 H STREET (historic non-contributing)
2004 H STREET (non-historic, non-contributing)

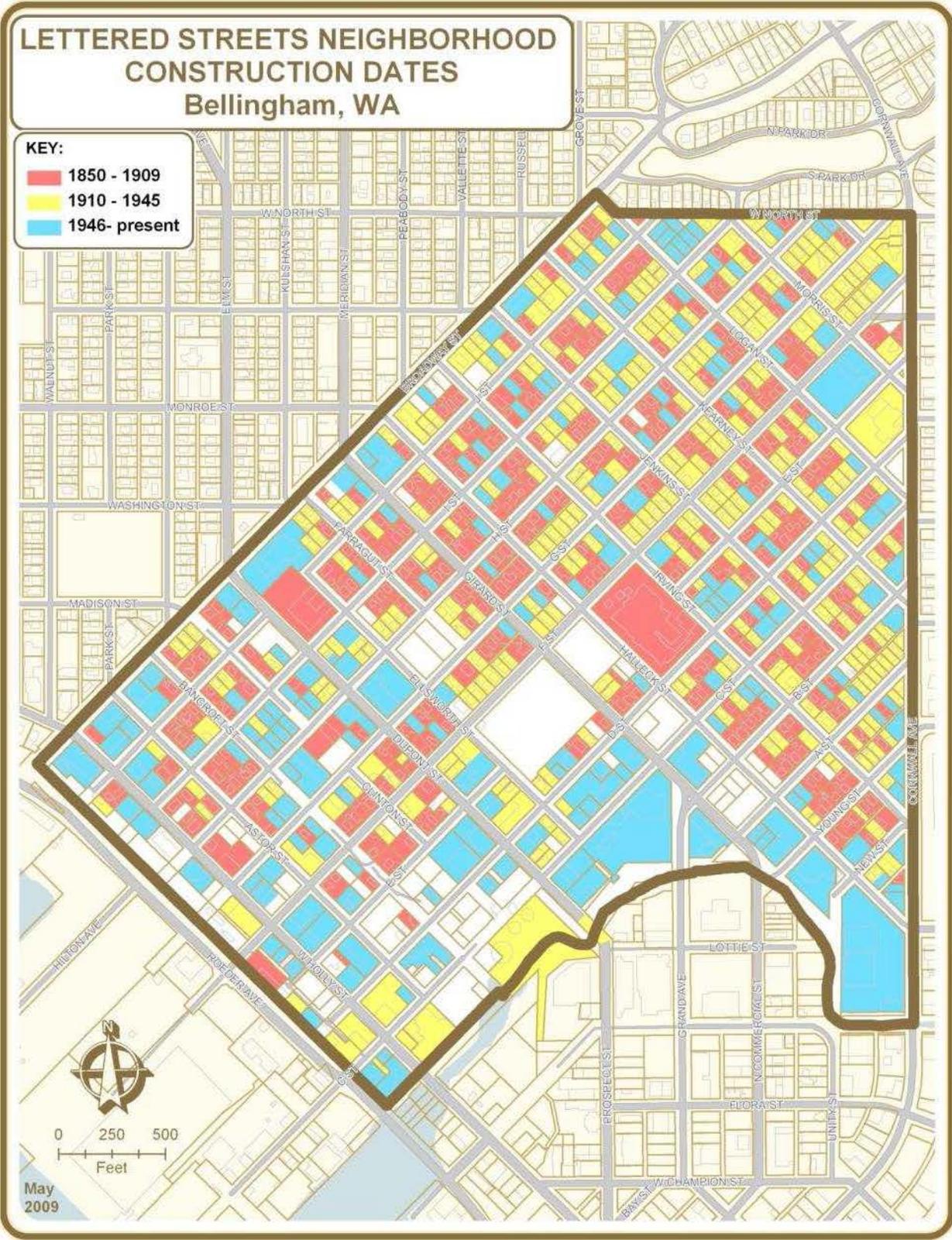
Outcomes of National Register Historic District Designation

The federal government designates historic districts through the U.S. Department of Interior, under the auspices of the National Park Service. Federally designated historic districts are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which is primarily an honorary designation.

The National Register is the official recognition by the U.S. government of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register does not restrict a private property owner from altering or demolishing a contributing or non-contributing resource. Designation through the National Register offers protection to a district or property **only** in cases where the threatening action involves a "federal undertaking." If the federal government is not involved, then the listing on the National Register provides the property or district with no protections or oversight.

Maps Appendix



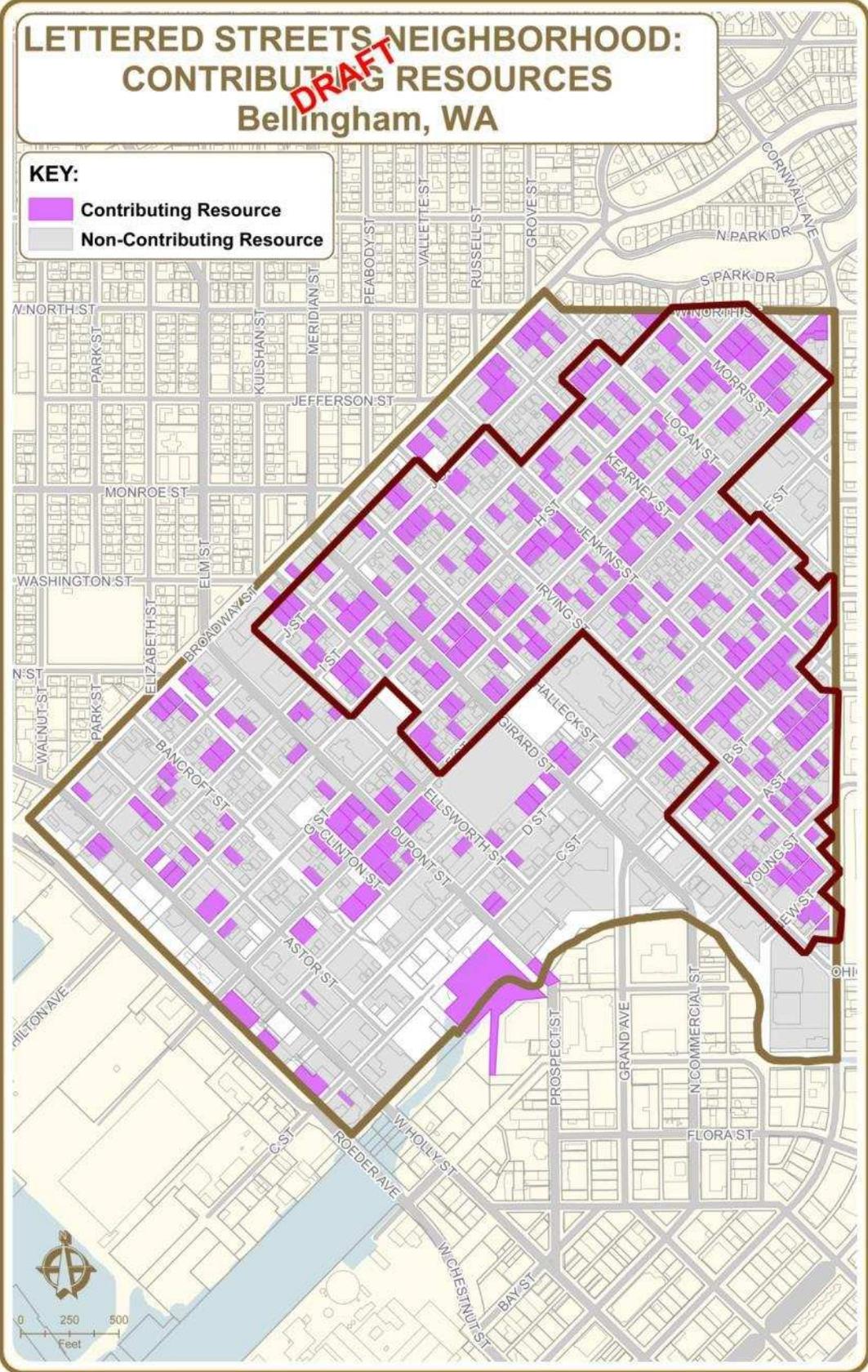


LETTERED STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD: CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

DRAFT

Bellingham, WA

KEY:
■ **Contributing Resource**
■ **Non-Contributing Resource**



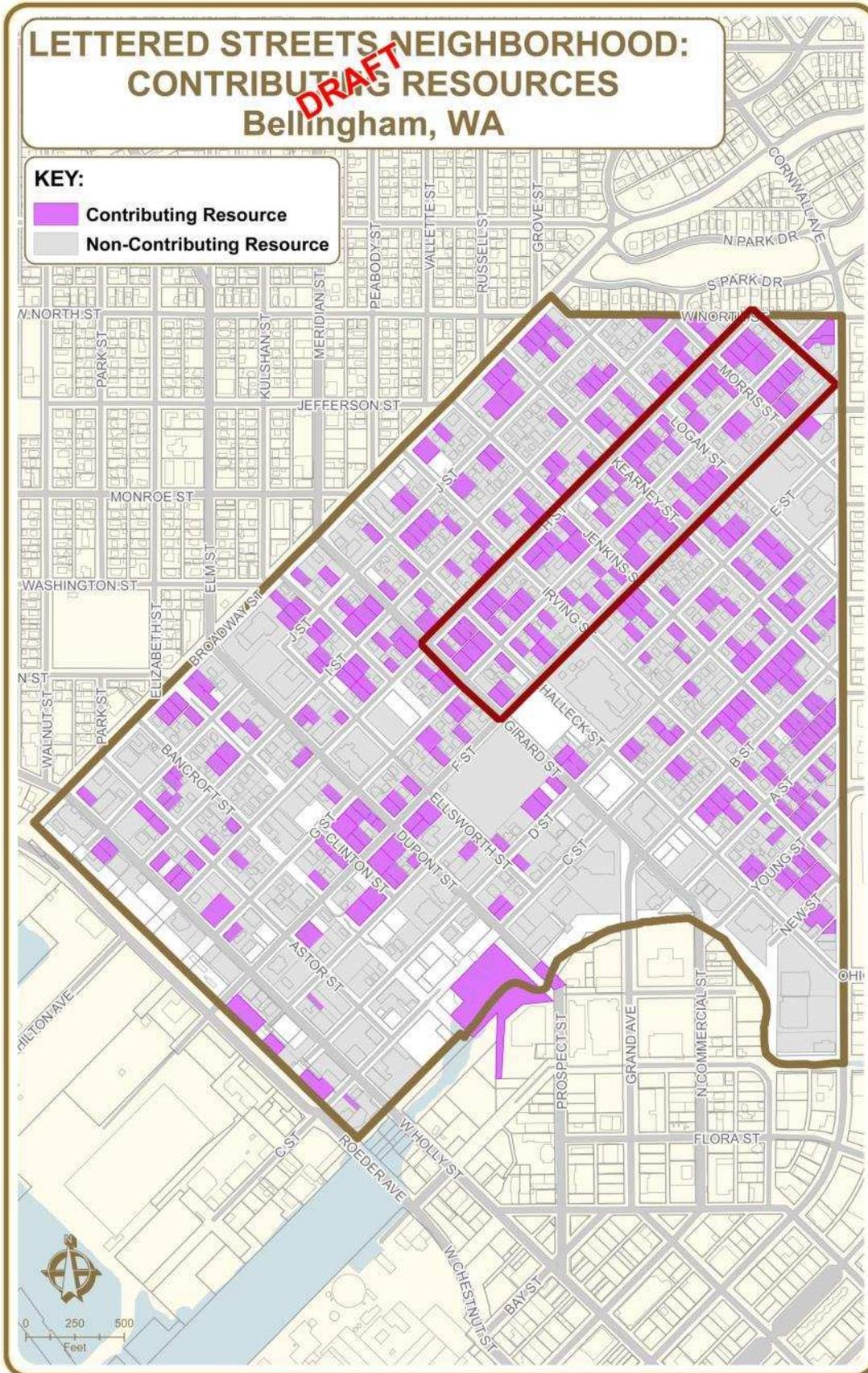
LETTERED STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD: CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Bellingham, WA

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KEY:

-  **Contributing Resource**
-  **Non-Contributing Resource**

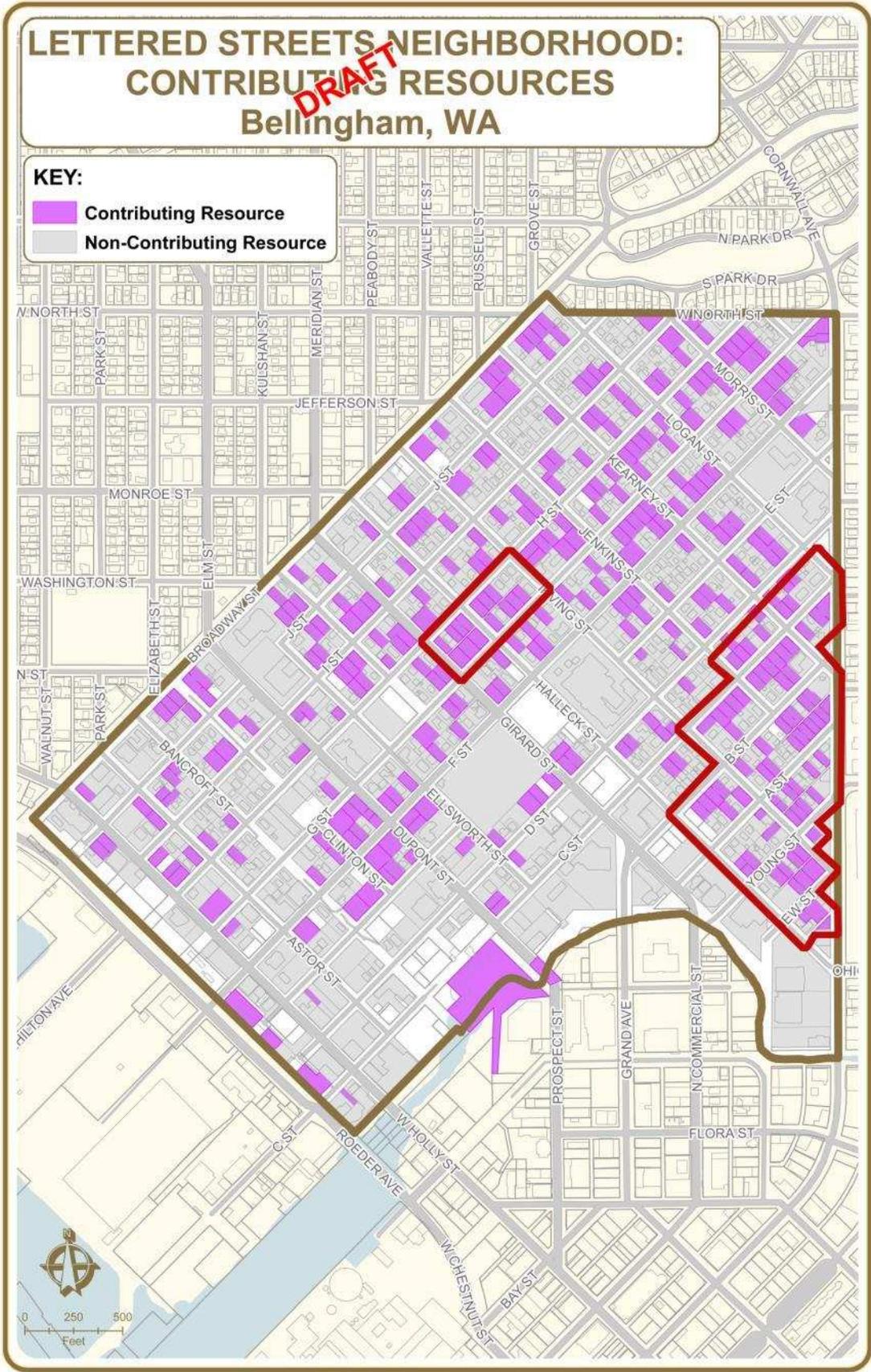


LETTERED STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD: CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

DRAFT

Bellingham, WA

KEY:
■ Contributing Resource
■ Non-Contributing Resource



Proposed National Historic District Boundaries

