

## LETTERED STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

### I. NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

#### History

The title "Lettered Streets" has been used for years to designate the area bounded by Holly Street, Broadway, North Street, Cornwall, and Whatcom Creek. The neighborhood is readily visible on a map because the streets are on a diagonal to most of the streets surrounding the area. There are approximately 110 blocks in the Lettered Streets, extending along the old northeast shoreline of Bellingham Bay.

The Whatcom Creek waterfall provided energy for the sawmills, which attracted the first settlers to this area beginning in the 1850's. The main street of the early town was Division Street, now an alley behind the old sewage treatment plant. A blockhouse, a sawmill, and several residences were built by 1856. The brick building located in the 1300 block of "E" Street and the Pickett House, at 910 Bancroft, survives from this early period. Other city founders left their names on sites throughout the area, including the Peabody Estate, the Eldridge cabin site, and the Roeder/Peabody mill site.

More important than individual histories, however, is the collective historical character of the neighborhood. Constructed for the most part in the late 1890's and early 1900's, the neighborhood was established as a middle-class community adjacent to the city's downtown district. The homes were of varied sizes and styles, and for the most part reflect the building trends of the early 1900's. This legacy of original buildings records the types of homes constructed by Bellingham's middle-class and working families of 75 to 95 years ago. In 1980 a survey of the housing stock in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood was conducted by the Whatcom County Park and Recreation Department. This survey titled "The Vintage Bellingham Neighborhood Survey" categorized structures with regard to their historical significance and architectural integrity. Most of the single-family structures in the neighborhood fell into some category of historic significance.

Nonresidential structures built during the same era of the early 1900's also contribute to the historic character of the neighborhood. The Great Northern Depot (1927), Aftermath Clubhouse (1914), Roth Block (1890), and First Christian Church site at Girard and A Streets are on the National Historic Register. The Roeder School (1908), Unity Church (1884), the buildings along W. Holly, and Aker's Taxidermist (1895) at "I" and Astor - originally the Baptist School of Industries - all have local historic significance.

Modern landmarks on the periphery of the neighborhood include the Senior Activity Center, the Washington Square high-rise, Calvary Temple, the Police Facility on Girard Street, and new office buildings on Dupont and Broadway. Generally, the quality of newer buildings throughout the area has been high and the structures have been in scale with the surroundings, allowing a harmonious mix of new and old as transition occurs.

## **Land Use**

When zoning was first adopted in 1947, the entire strip on both sides of Dupont was zoned for the commercial uses, which originated when Dupont was part of U.S. Highway 99. The remainder of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood was zoned Residential with apartments allowed. In 1956, there were about 75 multiple unit buildings in the Lettered Streets area. Businesses were located primarily along Holly and Dupont, with a few along Girard and Cornwall, and only seven were scattered in the rest of the residential area.

With the adoption of the 1967 Comprehensive Plan, the Lettered Streets area southwest of Ellsworth Street was designated General Commercial (Semi-Industrial) and the remainder was placed in high and medium density residential use. Only 68 multiple unit structures were counted at that time: 38 duplexes and 30 apartment buildings containing 212 units. Dupont Street was devoted to auto-oriented businesses, with used car lots as the major tenants. The property owners at that time felt that residential uses between Holly and Ellsworth had a limited life and that the city's commercial area would expand in that direction.

A 1972 study of the General Commercial zone showed a decrease in businesses requiring that zoning, but an addition of four new office buildings which were allowed under high density residential zoning. The effect of the heavy commercial zoning on the residential uses was readily apparent, according to that study. Most apartment buildings were seriously rundown, homes were not being maintained, and there was no new residential construction. Since the expected commercial development had not occurred, the area was rezoned to Residential - High Density in 1973. The Comprehensive Plan was brought into conformance by a City Council ordinance passed in 1976.

The history of the zoning is reflected in the character of the neighborhood. Large, older, well-maintained homes predominate in the northern part of the area, with some newer homes and small apartment buildings scattered throughout the residential sections. A vacant land inventory conducted in 1995 identified the potential for 80 additional residential units in the neighborhood. The majority of these potential units are located in Areas 8 and 14, the area previously zoned General Commercial. Several new offices and apartment buildings have been constructed recently and numerous homes have been remodeled, indicating a stabilization of the uses intended by the Comprehensive Plan.

## **II. OPEN SPACE**

The Lettered Streets Neighborhood, although highly developed, has a variety of open space opportunities. The Maritime Heritage Center (MHC), located on Whatcom Creek, which defines the southern boundary of the neighborhood, is a popular multi-use park, hatchery, and educational facility. A picnic shelter and spacious lawn areas provide the public with a chance to enjoy the 2.4-acre park. A picnic shelter was recently constructed but the park is still in need of a public restroom. Safety concerns in the

park can be addressed through improved lighting and even by encouraging regular use of the park by residents of the neighborhood, through a designated neighborhood activity day, for example.

The public can also learn about the life cycle of the salmon and view the large numbers of fish returning each year to the hatchery. The MHC is an attractive fishing area most of the year but particularly in October and November when the Coho and Chum salmon return. Improvements are needed along the vegetated shoreline so that on the busy days, more places to fish are available. Because of the dependency on water from Whatcom Creek for hatchery production, it is critical to protect and improve water quality upstream.

The 1995 Whatcom Creek Trail Master Plan has proposed a multi-use trail along the creek, eventually connecting Whatcom Falls Park near the headwaters to the mouth of the creek near Citizens Dock. Currently, access to the creek from the north side is available, but a new park entrance from C Street is planned. A paved path follows the creek on the south side where a local salmon enhancement group has been successful at re-vegetating the creek bank, replanting it with over 40 different native plant species. Trail improvements to the park will create better connections to the waterfront, civic center, and the nearby Whatcom Museum of History and Art.

The nine block long Old Village Trail was developed as a useful neighborhood connection. Some improvements are needed, including landscaping. Both the trail and the Pickett Bridge Overlook were designed as entries to the MHC. The falls on Whatcom Creek leading to the MHC are dramatic and invite passersby to take a look.

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A PUBLIC RESTROOM SHOULD BE BUILT AT THE MARITIME HERITAGE CENTER. A NEW ENTRANCE TO THE PARK FROM C STREET AND IMPROVEMENTS TO THE OLD VILLAGE TRAIL SHOULD BE COMPLETED. PARK USE BY RESIDENTS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED. CREEK ACCESS FOR FISHING SHOULD BE IMPROVED WHILE CONTINUING TO ENHANCE STREAMSIDE VEGETATION.

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Battersby Field (3.8 acres) and the adjacent paved playground (1.2 acres) by Whatcom Middle School are both owned by the Bellingham School District. Primary use of these recreational facilities consists of school related activities. However, the City of Bellingham Parks Department maintains the field and coordinates community use when not in conflict with the school activities.

Fout's Park, located one block northeast of Battersby Field is a 1.4-acre neighborhood park with grassy areas, playground equipment, and picnic tables. Three nearby parks that are outside the Lettered Streets Neighborhood are also easily accessible to residents of the Lettered Streets: Elizabeth Park, Broadway Park, and the open space south of Whatcom Creek across from the Maritime Heritage Center.

Because of the diagonal layout of the Lettered Streets in relation to Cornwall Avenue, several open triangle areas abut Cornwall. One of these was converted to the Cornwall Triangle Park and equipped with a playground. The triangle located at Cornwall and F Street will become a landscaped entrance to the Lettered Streets.

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A LANDSCAPED ENTRY FEATURE TO THE LETTERED STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD AT CORNWALL AND F STREETS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED.

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### **III. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES**

The sanitary sewer and water mains located in the Lettered Streets are some of the oldest within the City Limits. These mains have constantly undergone replacement and rehabilitation throughout the past decade with several locations still in need of attention. No additional local improvements are necessary for the continuation of current levels of service in both the water and sewer system.

There are a few locations in the middle of long blocks where additional street lighting is needed. The neighborhood has identified the need for crosswalks on Cornwall Avenue by Bellingham High School and Assumption School. In addition, a stop sign at D Street and a crosswalk at Logan Street and D Street are desired.

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ADDITIONAL STREET LIGHTING, STOP SIGNS TO REPLACE YIELD SIGNS, AND CROSSWALKS SHOULD BE PLACED IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE DEEMED APPROPRIATE BY THE RESIDENTS AND THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.

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Because the Lettered Streets Neighborhood is located so close to downtown and the Civic Center, additional public facilities within the neighborhood have not been identified as a need.

Elementary school children attend Parkview School and most of them are bused. Parkview School was built in 1957 with additions in 1961 and 1972. It includes a total of 34,000 square feet on a 4.1-acre site with one portable classroom. 1994 enrollment figures show the school is operating at capacity (325 students). The Bellingham School District's 1993 Capital Facilities Plan identified needed improvements including a larger administration area, nurse area, teachers' workroom, and conference room and storage space. The site is small for an elementary school (10 acres is recommended) making continued use of adjacent city parkland particularly important.

Whatcom Middle School has an original building constructed in phases in 1903 and 1916, and two other buildings constructed in 1935 and 1971. The buildings contain over 103,000 square feet on an 8-acre site. Student capacity is 700 with one portable classroom. Identified improvements include spaces for student support services, additional storage and administration areas, a multi-purpose shop and eventually additional classrooms. 1994 figures show enrollment at less than capacity, primarily

due to the recent construction of Kulshan Middle School. The site is small for a middle school (20 acres is recommended) and additional land area is needed for the long-term viability of this site according to the School District.

## MAP, LETTERED STREETS ARTERIAL ROUTES

#### IV. CIRCULATION

Arterials surround and dissect the Lettered Streets. Roeder Avenue, Broadway, and Cornwall Avenue form boundaries, while Girard Street, Dupont, and Holly Street connect to the Civic Center and north Bellingham neighborhoods. "F" Street runs in a northeast/southwest direction from Roeder Avenue and the waterfront industrial area to Alabama Street. Much of the traffic from the northern and eastern parts of town flows through the Lettered Streets.

There are no proposals for additional arterials, but future traffic loads may require use of the full four lanes for which "F" Street was designed. The 1995 traffic counts show the average daily number of cars along Holly as 15,000, and along Cornwall as 11,250. On the interior arterials, Girard and "F" Streets have had an increase in traffic to 11,100 on Girard and 8,500 on "F" Street.

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BECAUSE RESIDENTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES ALONG GIRARD AND "F" STREETS ARE DEPENDENT ON THE STREET FOR PARKING, ALTERNATIVES TO REMOVING PARKING SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.

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The concrete residential streets were originally 20 feet wide, and several remain at that width.

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NEW STREET CONSTRUCTION SHOULD CONFORM TO A STANDARD OF 28 FEET WITH CURBS AND GUTTERS. SIDEWALKS SHOULD BE PLACED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STREETS ON WHICH THE HOUSING FACES. SIDEWALKS ON ONE SIDE ONLY ARE ADEQUATE ON THE CONNECTING CROSS STREETS WHICH BORDER SIDE YARDS.

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A bicycle route improvement, recommended for implementation in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood should be considered to facilitate bicycles crossing Pickett Bridge, where Dupont turns into Prospect Street. Bicycle lanes should be added on F and Girard Streets.

**MAP, LETTERED STREETS, LAND USE**

## V. SUBAREA DESCRIPTIONS AND LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

A look at actual uses in the neighborhood shows commercial buildings concentrated along Holly, Cornwall and Dupont Streets with a cluster at the Girard and Broadway intersection. A new police facility and medical offices occupy the area between "D" Street and Whatcom Creek from Dupont to Girard. The majority of the offices in the neighborhood are located in the interior and are primarily in converted houses or buildings resembling homes.

Though the majority of the neighborhood is zoned Residential Multiple, residential use is predominantly single family. However, several multiple unit structures are scattered throughout the neighborhood and are generally of a scale compatible with the single-family homes in the area. Most are built where two or three lots have been assembled by demolishing the existing homes.

Areas of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood, which are appropriate for more intensive residential or office development were identified in the 1976 MAKERS Plan. Further study confirms that most of the residential area has a strong pattern of mixed single family homes and small apartment buildings. People are investing in the rehabilitation of these older properties, both single family and multiple units. High-density redevelopment is therefore unlikely to occur except along the arterials, where ready access is of value for offices and traffic is a deterrent for family living.

Another recommendation from the MAKERS Plan was that conversions of existing homes to duplexes should be allowed on lots of record. Most of the lots in the Lettered Streets are 5,000 square feet. Allowing conversion of an existing structure to a duplex has, in many cases, promoted conservation of the very large older homes. Maintaining these properties as investments is preferable to the continued demolition of two or three adjoining homes for apartment construction.

Historic preservation is a concern in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood. The area between Roeder Avenue and Girard Street contains historic sites and structures, with a concentration of significant historic properties between Holly and Dupont. The Great Northern Depot (1927), Aftermath Clubhouse (1914), Roth Block (1890), the First Christian Church site at Girard and A Streets are on the National Historic Register. The Roeder School (1908), Unity Church (1884), Aker's Taxidermist (1895), and buildings along West Holly Street all have local historic significance. A local historic district could be formed to protect these structures. Until there is a means for local consideration of historic properties, demolition permits in the area southwest of Girard should be reviewed for impacts on historic structures.

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**THERE SHOULD BE A REVIEW OF DEMOLITION PERMITS FOR STRUCTURES WITHIN THE HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT AREA FROM GIRARD STREET TO ROEDER AVENUE.**

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Residents for the Lettered Streets Neighborhood have expressed a desire to protect the historic character of their neighborhood through design criteria that requires pitched roofs, crossbar windows, and gables if possible. These criteria should be adopted for commercial and multi-family construction of two units or more and should also be encouraged for single family construction.

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DESIGN CRITERIA SHALL BE ADOPTED FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION OF COMMERCIAL AND MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS OF TWO UNITS OR MORE.

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The land use designations within this plan are intended to encourage a healthy mix of urban uses in the neighborhood, while reducing some of the negative impacts and giving direction for future developments in each area. The plan does not intend to exclude existing uses. One small office or store may be desirable in a residential area, but several such uses along the street would not be. A special zone cannot be created for each nonconforming use. Because this area has been in transition for some time, and the mix of uses is generally accepted and favored, the existing uses should be allowed to rebuild in case of fire, or even to expand if no conforming uses are destroyed to do so.

### **Area 1**

This area contains predominantly single family housing. Most of the housing is older, including many houses of historic significance. The overall condition of this housing is good. The continued preservation of these older homes should be encouraged through flexibility in the Land Use and Development Code for repair or replacement of historic features. Special setback requirements shall apply to homes with historic features.

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**AREA 1 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY**

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### **Area 2**

This neighborhood business area adjoining the Fountain District should not be expanded into the residential sections of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood.

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**AREA 2 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL**

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### **Area 3**

This area was rezoned in 2008 in recognition of the historic and predominate single family character. The area comprises the majority of the residential uses in the neighborhood and consists of a mix of single family and small multiple unit structures. This area has a number of structures of historic significance. The preservation of these

structures should be encouraged through flexibility in the Land Use and Development Code for repair and replacement of historic features on single family and duplexes. The special setbacks in the Area 3 Lettered Streets zoning section of the Land Use Code shall apply to structures with historic features.

Residents have expressed a desire to adopt design guidelines that would ensure new development, remodels and rebuilding of nonconforming buildings / uses are designed consistent with the areas historic architecture. They have also expressed their intent to explore the creation of zoning regulations that would allow townhouses, detached accessory dwelling units and cottage and carriage housing within the area.

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**AREA 3 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY**

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**Area 3A**

This Area was created during the 2008 Neighborhood Plan Amendment and rezone to Area 3 and includes four properties. The Area is bound by F Street, Morris Street, and Cornwall Avenue. Three of the properties are currently developed with single family residences and total approximately 27,340 square feet. The fourth property includes Gossage Plaza. The residential properties are generally surrounded by commercial and multifamily uses with Gossage Plaza located to the north and across F Street. .

F Street, Alabama Street, and Cornwall Avenue are all designated arterials and generally bound the subject properties. These streets provide major transportation routes linking northeast Bellingham to the city center as well as the waterfront.

The subject properties are also located on WTA bus routes, including the high frequency line.

The special condition in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood zoning (Area 3A) section of the Land Use and Development Code is intended to allow for conversion of existing housing stock to duplexes on each lot of record.

This area has a number of structures of historic significance. The preservation of these structures should be encouraged through flexibility in the Land Use and Development Code for repair and replacement of historic features on single family and duplexes. The special setbacks in the Area 3A Lettered Streets zoning section of the Land Use Code shall apply to structures with historic features.

Due to the existing surrounding development and proximity to arterial streets, a Multi Family zoning designation is appropriate for these properties. Multi Family structures of two or more shall be subject to design review as stated in the Land Use and Development Code.

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**AREA 3A LAND USE DESIGNATION:   MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY**

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**Area 4**

Washington Square is a publicly owned special use within a lower density residential area. Its use is not expected to change in the foreseeable future.

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**AREA 4 LAND USE DESIGNATION:   PUBLIC**

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**Area 5**

This area contains Roeder School (the Bellingham School District administrative offices), Fire Station No. 1 and the Bellingham Fire Department administrative offices.

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**AREA 5 LAND USE DESIGNATION:   PUBLIC**

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**Area 6**

This is the site of Fouts Park, a valuable neighborhood recreational resource.

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**AREA 6 LAND USE DESIGNATION:   PUBLIC**

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**Area 7**

The School District owns this large parcel in the center of the neighborhood. It contains Whatcom Middle School and play fields. Battersby Field is used by the City recreation program as well as the middle school for track and field sports.

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**AREA 7 LAND USE DESIGNATION:   PUBLIC**

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**Area 8**

A high density residential and office uses designation is appropriate for this southern portion of the neighborhood and along Dupont Street. The portion of the area abutting the Civic Center has seen a number of changes, including the construction of the new police facility, improvements to the satellite City Hall parking facility, and construction and conversion of new offices.

A density of 1,500 square feet per dwelling unit is the maximum allowed for residential development. Buildings combining offices with residential uses are encouraged. There are some steep bluffs along "D" Street that should be of concern as development occurs. View impacts should be considered for those properties facing or southwest of Holly Street. Design criteria as specified in the Land Use and Development Code shall apply to office and multi-family construction of two units or more.

In order to protect the adjacent properties, special consideration should be given to screening for any new parking facility on the property abutting Halleck Street between A and B Streets.

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**AREA 8 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY**

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**Area 9**

This area was rezoned in 2008 in recognition of the historic and predominate single family character. The zone line was also modified in order to more accurately reflect the existing development pattern of the area. In this area there are a number of historic and architecturally significant buildings, which should be preserved. The preservation of these structures should be encouraged through flexibility in the Land Use and Development Code for repair and replacement of historic features on single family homes. The special setbacks in the Area 9 Lettered Streets zoning section of the Land Use Code shall apply to structures with historic features.

A high-density "redevelopment" designation is not compatible with existing and predominate single family development in Area 9, so a medium density land use is appropriate. Residents have expressed a desire to adopt design guidelines that would ensure new development, remodels and rebuilding of nonconforming buildings / uses are designed consistent with the areas historic architecture. They have also expressed their intent to explore the creation of zoning regulations that would allow townhouses, detached accessory dwelling units and cottage and carriage housing within the area.

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**AREA 9 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY**

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**Area 10**

The Old Town Subarea Plan includes land within the Lettered Streets and the CBD Neighborhoods on either side of Whatcom Creek, with Area 10 comprising the portion of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood within the Subarea Plan boundary. The Subarea Plan is intended as a policy document for an overlay zone that will guide future development within the subarea. See Appendix A – Old Town Subarea Plan for details.

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**AREA 10 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL**

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**Area 12**

This is the site of the Whatcom County Senior Activity Center and parking facility.

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**AREA 12 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC**

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**Area 13**

The commercial property along Cornwall extends north from downtown. Since most customers come to the area in cars, off-street parking should be required.

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**AREA 13 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL**

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**Area 14**

This area is a combination of properties formerly contained in Areas 8 and 9 of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood. These areas had similar residential densities allowed. However, office development was permitted along Dupont and "F" Streets (arterials) as well as "D" and "E" Streets. Since several office conversions were successfully made in older homes, to the betterment of the entire neighborhood, there was no reason to remove the mixed-use qualifier from the properties formerly contained in Area 8. There are three significant historic properties in the area: Pickett House, Bellingham Theatre Guild (formerly First Congregational Church,) and Ahlfords Grocery (Bonnie Rest Mattress.) It is unlikely that any of these structures will be converted to residential uses. Other areas of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood, particularly Area 3, contain a greater proportion of primary historic resources - vintage buildings contributing dramatically to historic character and over 75 years of age.

Sensitive residential development in this area should result in a vital, desirable residential neighborhood. Generally, the quality of newer buildings within the area has been high and the structures have been in scale with the surroundings, allowing a harmonious mix of new and old as transition occurs. Area 14 is viewed as the residential element for the Central Waterfront development area. Offices and multi-family structures of two units or more shall be subject to design criteria as specified in the Land Use and Development Code.

To encourage residential development at higher densities, a payment option in lieu of usable space should be permitted.

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**AREAS 14 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, NO DENSITY SPECIFIED**

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**Area 15**

This area presently contains the County Health Department offices and associated parking.

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**AREA 15 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC**

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As adopted by Ordinance N. 8868 and amended by Ordinance Nos. 8946, 9079, 9329, 9642, 9643, 9915, 9947, 10280, 10754, 2004-12-087, 2008-03-022, 2008-12-111.