

ASSESSMENT OF “NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER”

Defining the positive neighborhood characteristics of the Westside area from Polk to Fillmore Streets between W. 8th and W. 13th Aves.

- Residents
 - The character of this area is largely driven by residents with a sense of enjoyment of, and commitment to, their neighbors and the “homeyness” of typical dwellings and yards.
 - Many residents of this area have lived in the area for a long time, and many of the long-term and more recent residents have a sense of being settled in for an extended period.
 - It’s important to understand this area’s character is *not* reflective of an intensely “metro” lifestyle where residents are more transient and minimally engaged with one another.

The physical characteristics of this area, which are described next, support and reflect residents’ attitudes and way of life.

- Streets, alleys, blocks, and sidewalks:
 - Streets and alleys are laid out in a grid pattern.
 - Most streets have a parking strip with the sidewalk between the parking strip and lot.
 - There is a generally continuous sidewalk network that’s actively used by residents walking about the neighborhood and to and from nearby services (e.g., at Blair Island, Downtown, W. 18th Ave & Chambers Street).
 - Sidewalks are also actively used by “walkers” and “runners” from downtown businesses or other locations who find the area an attractive and convenient place to get fresh air and exercise.
 - Alleys are unsurfaced and are primarily used for utilitarian access to the rear of mid-block lots.
 - Block sizes are fairly small (roughly 300’x400’ or slightly larger) with 15-20 lots per block.
 - The original (and still characteristic) build-out was about 7-9 dwellings per net acre.

- Lot shapes and sizes fall predominantly into two categories:
 - Roughly square lots, from about 50’x50’ to about 60’x60’.
 - Rectangular lots, from about 50’x100’ to about 60’x160’.

ASSESSMENT OF “NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER”

- Dwellings are predominantly single-family structures, with the following characteristics:
 - One primary dwelling per lot. Some lots have a “granny cottage” secondary dwelling.
 - Placement on lot:
 - The main front plane of house is typically within about 15’ to 25’ feet of the sidewalk.
 - On rectangular lots, the width (i.e., lesser dimension) of the lot is the “front.”
 - Primary dwelling height: One or 1½ stories. Typical 1½ story houses are less than 22’ high. There are no traditional houses (other than the historical Victorian on the corner of 10th Ave. and Taylor Street) over 27’ high.
 - Architectural style:
 - Many houses have elements of (mid-scale) Craftsman, bungalow, or cottage style.
 - Roofs: Gabled roofs, frequently with dormers (especially on 1½ story houses). Many houses have small wings or porches with lower roofs than the main part of the dwelling, forming a roof “cascade”.
 - Clearly-defined entrances, commonly with front porches of various sizes
 - Most 1½ story houses and many 1 story dwellings have eaves and significant other protrusions, articulation, and trim.
 - Painted clapboard siding is common.
 - Double-hung windows are common; many older houses have divided lights in the upper sash.
 - Secondary structures (e.g., garages and cottages)
 - Height: One story or less (less than 15’).
 - Shed or gabled roofs. Shed roofs are most commonly found on small, older, one-car garages under 10’ high.
 - Narrow driveways running on the side of the lot, and small to medium sized garages with a front plane that’s behind the main front plane of the house.

ASSESSMENT OF “NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER”

- Most houses and lots reflect the following interrelationships:
 - Many houses are close beside one another, often separated only by a narrow driveway or less. House designs (e.g., facing gabled roofs) and living patterns acknowledge this compact pattern and respect the importance of adjacent neighbors’ privacy along this interface.
 - Small front yards are semi-public spaces where residents of a house may observe or interact with pedestrians or adjacent neighbors. These areas provide a graceful transition between street life and life inside the house.
 - Most rectangular lots have private backyards with lawns, gardens, or landscaping. In this area, a house’s residents have a general sense of spatial openness, relative insulation from immediate street noise, and a fair degree of privacy from other neighbors viewing backyard activities.

- Gardens, vegetation, and wildlife

Although the area doesn’t have any single, large open space, cumulatively there’s an extensive amount of natural vegetation and wildlife. Living in most parts of this area gives a sense of being in touch with Nature.

- Many of the lots have vegetable and flower gardens and/or extensive landscaping (generally fairly informal).
- There are numerous very large “heritage” trees throughout the neighborhood, as well as many medium-sized trees along the streets and sidewalks and in backyards. Collectively, the large trees on the street and in the interior create a substantial urban forest “canopy.” That is one of the most significant elements of this neighborhood’s appeal.
- There is extensive wild birdlife, including many songbirds and occasional raptors (including hawks and owls). Herons from the Amazon slough area periodically appear roosting or feeding in the upper branches of heritage trees. There are both year-round residents (such as purple finches and chickadees) and migratory birds (such as cedar waxwings and grosbeaks)
- Squirrels and raccoons are a common sight in neighbors’ yards, and bats are regular visitors in summer evenings.

The elements listed above interrelate in important, sometimes subtle, ways to create this area’s special character. The people, the spatial elements of the neighborhood, the implicit interrelationships among adjacent properties, and the natural elements are the most important determinants of this character.

ASSESSMENT OF “NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER”

Positive Characteristics of the JWN identified at the JWN OS workshop June 2008

Infrastructure / Parking / Transportation / Other
Proximity to downtown
Centrally located, close to downtown and markets
Garages on Alleys (Few on street drives)
Walkable
“Streetcar” neighborhood
Available street parking
Friendly to alternative transportation
Alleys
Alley ambiance – access, set back
Open sidewalks & levels of traffic, Walking – traffic, diverters, limits on driveway size
Quiet
Vegetation
Vegetation – Trees; green & promotes wildlife
Tree lined streets
A lot of gardens
“Friendly” – Gardening on front yards, families w/ kids
Human based landscape
Site Design
Reasonable number of dwelling units for size of site
House to street relationship, porches, landscape, frontage
Eyes on the street
A high proportion/ratio of green space to buildings
Small lots
Cultural pattern associated with smaller lot sizes
Backyard ambiance, privacy, set back, vegetation
Narrow Drives
Garages set back
Building Design
Building height & sizes are compatible
Architectural styles are compatible (Gables, Hip roofs)
Variety of housing types
Front porches, set near to sidewalk, functional
Cottage architecture, Pre WWII/Carpenter Designed
Single-Family
Diverse housing types / No homeowner Assoc. Allows individual character
Mixed uses – Small business interspersed, some home-based businesses
Some multifamily units match architecture of older homes