



Connections for yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

September 30, 2017

Dear Planning Commissioners,

The Eastside Heritage Center (EHC) would like to support the broad outlines and outcomes of the Arts and Culture framework for the Grand Connection Plan. EHC sees tremendous potential in telling the story of Bellevue's history and heritage through the creation of the Grand Connection Cultural Corridor outlined in the framework. EHC encourages the Planning Commission to explicitly state that one of the goals of the Cultural Corridor plan is to embrace the use of the history and heritage of Bellevue to guide and influence the design of historically and culturally appropriate sections of the corridor. EHC further encourages inclusion of new and existing spaces for heritage events, programs, and exhibition as part of the Grand Connections final design. A city's culture is defined by more than just its public art installations and arts programming.

We whole heartedly support the design's strategy to, "Build and reinforce distinct neighborhood identities along the route." EHC feels that the outcome of "enhancing and celebrating the existing character and localized history through events and installations" should be a main driver of the design for the corresponding sections of the Grand Connection. Bellevue is a city comprised of many diverse neighborhoods, villages, and former towns, each with their own stories and histories. This diversity of neighborhoods and character allows for a wide pallet of design ideas and themes as well as captivating stories that can serve to highlight the diverse populace of the city's diverse historical neighborhoods. Here are a few examples...

One of Bellevue's first major industries employed a colorful crew of whalers, who would ship up to Alaska for the spring whaling season. The American Pacific Whaling Company wintered their ships in Meydenbauer Bay. The large ocean going ships were able to navigate to the fresh waters of Meydenbauer Bay, thanks to the opening of the Lake Washington Ship Canal in 1916.

The land that now makes up the Downtown Park was once home to three of Bellevue's early schools: Bellevue Grade School, Union S High School and Overlake Elementary. The buildings were demolished as a part of the park project, in part because of the small number of school age children in the Downtown Bellevue area at the time. The land that the offices and shopping centers in the downtown business core are built on was once fertile farm land. Berries, lettuce, carrots and other crops were grown by land owning farmers, or by Japanese families who leased

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the land. After World War II, the farms were developed into suburban shopping districts and planned residential communities.

Wilburton was once a thriving mill town, with a railroad providing service to Seattle, and spurs that ran into the forests of the eastside, connecting to other remote logging and mining sites. Prior to the lowering of Lake Washington in 1916, the Mercer Slough was deeper and extended further inland. The town of Wilburton's ferry dock (located approximately where the Lexus dealership on 116th is today) offered regular ferry service to workers and residents. At its height, the town of Wilburton once had a larger population than Bellevue.

One of Bellevue's earliest settlers, Clark Sturdevant, chose the area of Midlakes for his homestead. Arriving in the remote area in 1873, Sturdevant hunted, fished and foraged. In 1904 the railroad arrived in Midlakes, and the area quickly became a commercial hub. The Bellevue Growers Association, an organization formed by the local Japanese farming community to facilitate shipping their produce via rail to markets beyond Seattle opened in 1933. Over 60 families belong to the BGA, most of who were incarcerated during World War II

As the premier heritage organization in Bellevue, the Eastside Heritage Center is in a unique position to help the city bolster its Arts and Culture planning for the Grand Connection. We hope to continue to support this project as it moves forward with an increased focus on Bellevue's fascinating history and heritage. Bellevue has been quick to tear down it's past to build the future. Let this project be the start of the City embracing and honoring its history and heritage in an innovative and defining way.

Sincerely,

Josh Gannis
Executive Director