

# FREMONT

## AN INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS AND URBAN DESIGN RESOURCES

COMMENCED IN 1975



HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Since the information included is preliminary, corrections and additional information is solicited to provide refinement of the documents. Please send information to Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, 714 Smith Tower, Seattle 98104.

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### HISTORY

An early description of the Fremont hillside in the 1880s describes it as a small clearing in the forest at the mill site, with one frame building housing the mill's construction workers. In 1888, the Denny-Hoyt Addition, comprising most of lower Fremont, was platted by E. Blewett, and subsequent plats of the rest of the area were recorded from 1889 through 1890, with smaller areas added until the 1910s. The area was annexed by Seattle in 1891, by which time it had grown to 5,000 people.

The town was named after the hometown in Nebraska of two of Fremont's three founders: L. H. Griffith and E. Blewett. Dr. E. C. Kilbourne, who was also involved in the original platting of the area, named Aurora Avenue after his hometown in Illinois. Griffith operated a real estate office selling Fremont property for many years following their arrival. Blewett Street later became N. 35th Street; Kilbourne Street was renamed N. 36th Street.

Early transport to and from Seattle was crucial to Fremont's development. In 1887, the Seattle, Lake Shore & Eastern Railroad built a line from Smith Cove to Fremont and north along Lake Union, offering twice daily transportation to Seattle. In 1889, the steamer Maude Foster ran across the lake from a wharf at the foot of Stone Way Avenue to Westlake and Roy, where the horse-drawn streetcar line to downtown Seattle ended. By 1891, however Denny's Seattle Electric Railway & Power Company extended their Second Avenue line around Queen Anne Hill to Fremont and Green Lake. Although the Company subsequently went into receivership in 1893, it continued its operations through modernization to busses some fifty years later.

A primary impetus for Fremont's growth was its strategic location at the northwest corner of Lake Union, placing it at a crossroads of north-south land traffic and, later, east-west water traffic through the Ship Canal.

In 1888, the Lake Washington Improvement Company hired Wa Chong & Company to dig a ditch for small boat use from Lake Union to Salmon Bay. By 1891, this was crossed by a road built between the iron works (constructed in 1889) and the sawmill, carrying commuter traffic from Fremont to Seattle. By 1892, a wooden trestle bridge with sidewalks and double tracks for electric cars had been constructed. Work on the Lake Washington Ship Canal from 1911 on changed the configuration of waterside industries. Meanwhile, the expansion of the railroads along the canal route and across it added further congestion. In 1914, the Northern Pacific Railway constructed a trestle across to Fremont. When the

dam used in construction between Lake Union and the canal broke in 1914, all bridges over the canal were destroyed except the streetcar trestles. After the opening of the Ship Canal in February, 1916, the present Fremont drawbridge was constructed and opened the same year. The George Washington Bridge (Aurora Avenue) was built in 1932.

The most important early industry was the sawmill. By the early 1880s the Fremont hill had been logged off by oxen. The Bryant Lumber and Shingle Mill was organized in 1880, and in 1886, after one year's lease it purchased the Fremont Milling Company's sawmill, established by Isaac Burlingame. The mill began to manufacture shingles only, but soon expanded to more operations, and an eventual capacity of 50,000 board feet of lumber per day by 1905. A disastrous fire in 1902 caused substantial rebuilding, followed by further fires in 1912 and 1914, but the mill continued operations until 1932, when it burned to the ground and subsequently closed. Similar sawmill operations were located farther east at 1st Avenue N. E. & Northlake, and at Sunnyside & Northlake. Fuel, feed, and firewood suppliers also served the area on a smaller scale.

Besides the Pacific Iron Works, established in 1889 by A. J. Goddard, and a tannery and machine works also on N. 34th (Ewing) or the lakeshore, many small businesses clustered in 1900s buildings around the intersection of Fremont Avenue and the lower hill streets, where streetcar, road and train services all stopped. These businesses, including meat markets, groceries, drug stores, hardware, a photographer, harness shop, bicycle repair shop, realtors' offices, barber shop, and a hotel, served the daily needs of Fremont residents. A local bank, the Remsburg & Dixon Bank, was established in 1904 and renamed the Fremont State Bank in 1908.

Public facilities also clustered at this location. The Odd Fellows Hall, organized in 1892, was built in 1927. In 1902, the first fire station north of Lake Union was built near Linden and N. 39th, although it was replaced in 1932. After serving in several different locations, the Fremont Public Library, was built in 1921 in its present location. The Fremont Baptist Church has occupied its present prominent site since 1924.

The B. F. Day Elementary School, the only school in the area, was in operation from 1889-1890 in donated facilities. After Fremont's annexation by the City, 20 lots were

donated to the Seattle Board of Education by pioneer settler B. F. Day. Building was begun in September, 1891; the brick and stone structure with California redwood trim was finished in 1892. Another nine rooms were added in 1901 and north and south wings in 1916. According to Seattle Public Schools records, B. F. Day is the oldest Seattle classroom building still in use.

With the construction of the Aurora Avenue Bridge in 1932, carrying commuter traffic north and past Fremont's business district, and the development of other areas into more diversified shopping centers for Fremont residents, most of the original businesses have closed or relocated to more profitable locations. A recent concentration of arts and crafts stores in Fremont's original business district promises a partial revitalization of this area, despite the tendency of its waterfront properties to develop industrial land uses and of the traffic pattern of the area to discourage pedestrian activity.

Fremont has long had a reputation as a close-knit, active community. Discussing Fremont's early days, Sophie Frye Bass wrote: "Even though Seattle embraced Fremont in June 1891, the little town still retains its 'mayor' who calls a town meeting once a year. The stories told at this meeting never grow old and the jokes never become dull. Fremont is a clannish town, and once a Fremonter always a

Fremonter." For many local residents this feeling of community identity is still a large part of Fremont's character.

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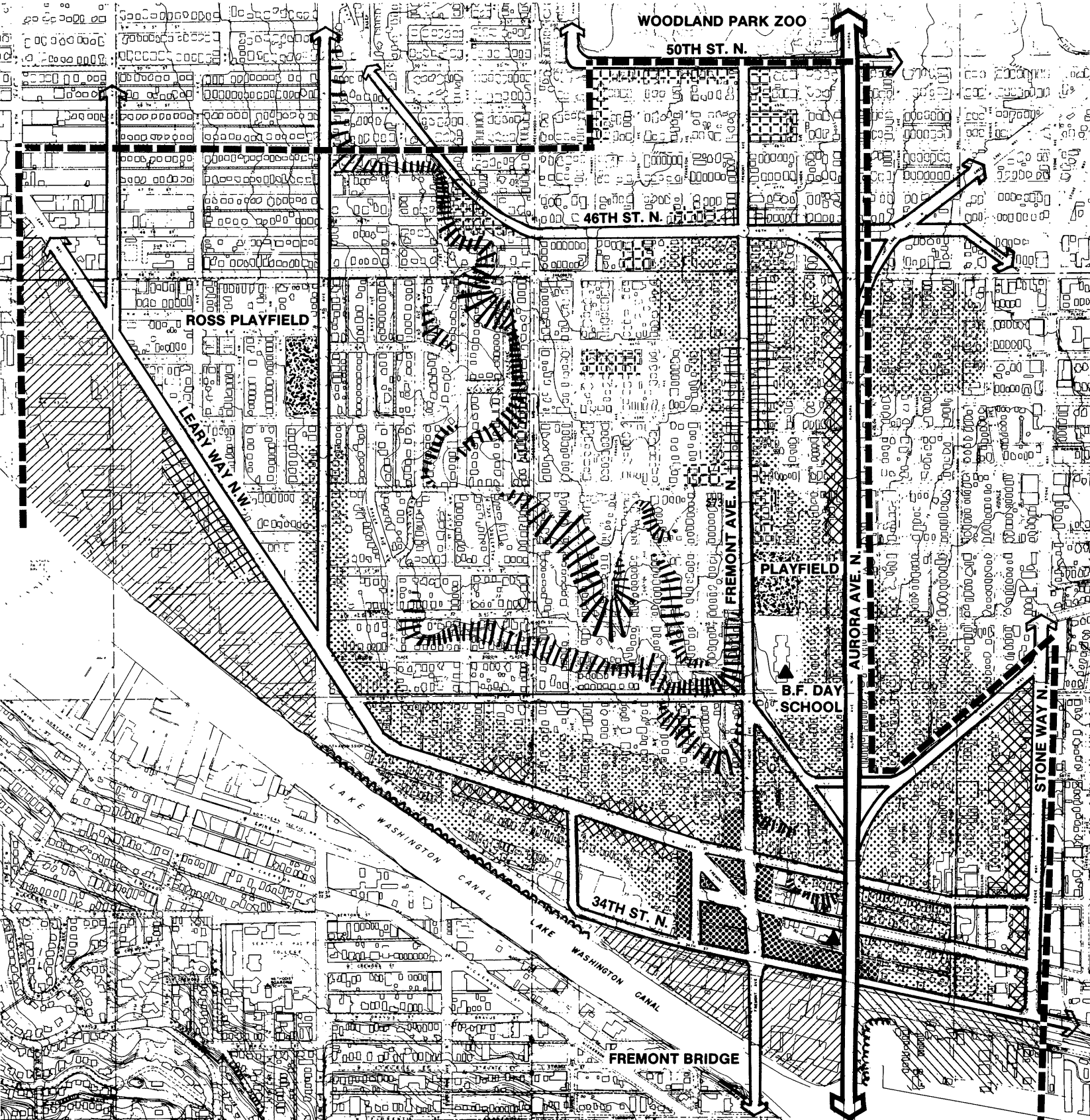
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### SUMMARY MAP SHOWING VISUAL STRUCTURE

LEGEND	
	COMMERCIAL CORE
	NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS
	COMMERCIAL STRIP
	INDUSTRY
	INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT
	RESIDENTIAL AREAS DEVELOPED ABOUT 1890
	GROUPS OF APARTMENTS
	ACCESSIBLE WATERFRONT
	COMMUNITY LANDMARK
	STEEP SLOPES



### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Fremont, a thriving, prosperous residential community in the 1890s and early 20th Century still retains some of its original qualities; particularly along Fremont Avenue North and North 36th Street. Although its early dependence on fishing, logging and community businesses has changed over the past sixty years to a residential area for commuters to Seattle's central business district or the University of Washington, the neighborhood yet contains a diversity of land use and activity illustrative of its early history as a small town as well as its present role in Seattle's urban context. The area includes a central business core, an industrial waterfront, a metropolitan commercial strip and residential areas of varying age and character.

The old business center at the foot of the Fremont bridge retains much of its earlier appearance with many of the turn-of-the-century stone, brick and terra cotta commercial buildings still standing around the intersection of Fremont Avenue North, Fremont Place North and North 36th Street. The handsome public library and the Fremont Baptist Church overlooking this location also add to the area's sense of permanence. Newer office buildings have thus far been located and designed so as not to excessively conflict with the older structures. The most important change to the Fremont's business core has been in its use rather than its physical character. In recent years the neighborhood oriented businesses and services generally have been replaced by taverns, crafts and antique shops serving customers from outside the community. A small neighborhood convenience shopping area is maintained on upper Fremont Avenue.

The fringe of heavy industrial warehouses, mills, and railroad sidings along the Lake Washington Ship Canal also echoes earlier developments in their utilitarian anonymity. Fortunately, the industrial buildings' uniform low profile blocks little of the south and southwest views, and their generally dark color minimizes their size. Physical access to the waterfront is curtailed by the railroad line and industrial fringe, although the Canal remains visible. City planning efforts to develop public use of the Canal bank and waterway approaches are now in progress.

Heavy traffic carried by an elevated and expanded Aurora Avenue North, once a residential street, has divided the neighborhood. Miscellaneous automobile-oriented commercial buildings have replaced many of Aurora's original residences. More wholesale, large retail, and service businesses have developed, again in lieu of local

stores, along lower Stone Way North, North 34th, North 36th, and Leary Way Northwest. Processing and distribution facilities are also common. In summation, much of lower Fremont has been developed industrially for commercial use, thereby leaving only the hillside with a specifically residential character.

The residential areas west of Aurora Avenue North are oriented along north-south avenues which often provide views to the south. Principal cross streets are limited to North 36th, North 38th, North 46th, and North 50th, as many smaller streets and avenues terminate in precipitous pedestrian stairs or dead ends because of the hilly topography. Panoramic views to the west, south, and east are found on almost every corner and enhanced by the largely low-level residential development, which rarely exceeds 35' in height. Excellent vistas west to the Olympic Mountains and south to Queen Anne Hill, downtown Seattle and the Space Needle are common. Ross Playfield, the B.F. Day Elementary School playground, the Woodland Park at Fremont's northern boundary provide open space, trees, and facilities for public use.

There are many late 19th and early 20th Century houses located along the lower slopes. In some areas, Victorian styled homes are grouped together giving a picture of a typical turn of century Seattle streetscape. Properly maintained and enhanced, such groupings could become important city-wide resources. However, because many of them are currently zoned for multifamily and commercial uses, these groupings are being fragmented and destroyed by intrusive new development.

In the northern areas Craftsman styled homes, bungalows, colonial houses and more modern ranch houses are common. Multi-story brick apartment blocks dating from the 1910s and newer duplex or triplex apartments frequently occur, the latter clustering near developed arterial streets or bus lines.

In the northern part of the district, large brick apartment complexes—the Lutheran Home North 45th, Hawthorn Court on North 48th and 49th, and Linden Court North on Linden Avenue North—add Tudor elegance to these streets. East of Aurora Avenue North and south of Bridge Way North, the area's original low-rise residential character is now only evidenced in two or three blocks. Other blocks are being filled with modern apartments and commercial structures.

Fremont's population has tended to polarize in recent years, with low-income elderly people concentrated in the north central area and under-thirty adults in south Fremont. In addition, many businessmen operating stores and retail outlets in the neighborhood live elsewhere and have little share in evening or weekend activities there.

Heavy traffic on arterial streets coupled with incongruous, scattered mixtures of residential zoning have encouraged a breakdown of neighborhood identity in Fremont, but growing local interest in the area's history, landmarks, street improvements, and its annual

street fair indicate a substantial and growing feeling of unity recalling, in many respects, the spirit of the newly annexed City of Fremont 80 or more years ago.

Perhaps Fremont's greatest urban resource is its diversity of physical setting, topography, and building elements. Few communities can boast such a wide spectrum of land uses including a central business area, waterfront industry, and residential areas with views and proximity to a major park. In addition, the area's older housing stock also has a high potential for restoration and establishment of an historical district character.

