



THE CITY OF TUKWILA SAVES THE UPPER DUWAMISH VALLEY FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION

In the postwar years Tukwila was destined to become involved in the major issues of King County and Seattle. Unquestionably, one of the most significant accomplishments of the City of Tukwila in the past half century is its halting the Port of Seattle's plan to turn the Duwamish Valley and possibly the Green River Valley as far as Auburn into a heavily industrialized area. This accomplishment has been a benefit not only to valley residents but to the entire region including Seattle. If the Port's plan had gone through in the 1950s—30 years before public recognition of environmental damage issues and controlling legislation—the damage to air, water, and natural flora and fauna would have been enormous and, in many cases, irreversible. The story is a fascinating one and shows how small does not mean without power or the ability to influence history. In winning its battle with the Port of Seattle, Tukwila shaped the history of King County and the region as few municipalities have in their history.

THE PORT OF SEATTLE

Since the early years of the twentieth century Seattle-area boosters had worked to make the city a large, heavily industrialized port city of national recognition. The Port Authority of Seattle was created to carry out much of this task and was highly successful in realizing its goals. By 1938 it had made plans to replace the quiet Duwamish Valley communities from Duwamish-Allentown south to the Tukwila crossroads with heavy industrial development.

MABEL J. HARRIS, CITY TREASURER AND CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

Mabel "Mae" J. Harris served 28 years as elected official for the City of Tukwila. Born and raised in Winthrop, Minnesota, Harris came to Tukwila in 1947. In September 1962 Mayor John Strander appointed Mae Harris Tukwila City Treasurer. In 1963 she was elected to the office and held it continuously until 1978, when the city adopted the Optional Municipal Code form of government, which abolished the elected treasurer position. Mae recalls that in those days, the greater part of the city budget was spent on streets and roads. There was a terrible cash flow problem. The greatest source of revenue was the real estate property tax. All bills of the City were paid by interest-bearing warrants held by Seattle First National Bank.

Between 1978 and 1989 Harris served three terms as a member of the Tukwila City Council. Looking back on her nearly three decades in the Tukwila city government, Harris says, "I feel my greatest contribution as a council member of the City was in the field of transportation."

support of business, the City of Seattle, King County and the Washington State Legislature. By developing sites for heavy industry, the Port had created more customers for shipping which in turn, benefited the Port through shipping fees and allocations of a portion of the property taxes collected by the county. The Port was looking for opportunities to grow.

The Port had powerful allies with whom it had faced and overcome opposition on many of its past projects. Seattle and King County had benefitted from the Port's successes through increased sales and property taxes resulting from an expanded working population. The county assisted the Port with favorable zoning and Seattle helped in other ways. For example, while the Port was preparing to straighten the lower Duwamish, opposition from Georgetown and

by the Seattle business community and, knowing that there were no alternative plans to develop the valley, the Port knew it could count on continued business support. With the King County behind it, the Port received unanimous support from the State Legislature to levy a property tax paying for the project. With these allies, plus the federal Bonneville Power Authority, which stood to benefit from increased utility sales to heavy industry, that development would bring, the Port's plan was usually unstoppable.

LAN

The Port's plan for the Duwamish Valley was to purchase large sections of land in the upper valley and then dig a new, straightened river channel. The seven miles of winding river would become a three-mile straight and widened waterway. The abandoned riverbed and lowlands would be filled and sites for heavy industry. Under the most conservative option in the plan, the project would develop up the Green River to Auburn, developing 3,500 acres of industrial tracts. As stated in the 1946 Master Plan, the Port intended to initially create 920 acres of industrial sites on undeveloped valley land, with an additional possibility of 200 acres, if an industrialization of the area makes rural communities on the river bottom suitable for residential purposes." Early on, the desires and interests of the residents of the small Duwamish Valley communities—North Riverton, Duwamish-Allentown, Riverton, Renton Junction and others—were of no concern to Seattle. Their homes, churches, schools and communities were not an issue. They were merely obstacles. Just like the tiny community of North Riverton which was erased from the map in 1914 when the lower Duwamish was straightened, the rural communities in the upper valley were to vanish.

HISTORY OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION PLAN

The straightening of the lower part of the river between 1912 and 1917 had created four and one-half miles of excellent waterway serving a sizable industrial area, and this success stirred interest in the rest of the river. In 1943 the Bonneville Power Administration's "Western Washington Industrial Survey" discussed potential sites for industry near Seattle and said:

When needed, it is expected that the Duwamish Valley for about three miles between the present head of the waterway...and Renton Junction will be developed for industrial purposes. At the present time the valley is cut up by the winding river, but plans are in an advanced stage for straightening the channel and dredging a waterway that will be navigable at least for barges and small vessels....

This was followed by a report in 1946 to the Seattle Planning Commission that also emphasized the "essential need" to straighten the river.

By the early 1950s the Howard Hanson Dam on the Green River was approved and construction began. With flood protection thus assured for the upper Duwamish Valley, the Port prepared to take over the entire valley. In 1954 the Port of Seattle, the Seattle City Council and the King County Commission jointly hired the New York engineering firm of Knappen, Tibbetts, Abbett, McCarthy and Stratton to produce a feasibility study for straightening the upper Duwamish River and the territory which should be included in a new Duwamish Industrial District. This study completed, the firm was contracted in 1956 "to prepare drawings that will show the recommended locations of streets, railroad lines, utilities and sewers the Port will construct in that 4½ mile-long area." All was going according to plan and the Port was confident that the first 600 acres of industrial land would be ready for occupancy by 1959.

FORMING A COALITION

Mayor Baker knew that the Port's support needed to be eliminated if Tukwila was to have a chance to win. It is an appealing alternative to the Seattle business community causing division. Tukwila now sought support from other mental agencies.

With Tukwila's encouragement, others began to question the Port's plan. The Puget Sound Fisheries Department, having finished forcing the relocation of the Hanson Dam to protect the fish spawn-lands, again found the fish run threatened. The Washington Highway Commission, working to construct the federally financed highway, found that the Port's plans were a financial and planning nightmare by requiring higher, longer bridges and major road relocations. Mayor Baker's friendship with the head of the Highway Commission, Bill H. H. enabled Tukwila to coordinate smoothly with the State. Baker's leadership in organizing the Puget Sound Industrial Planning Council added the opposition of nearby communities Kent, and Auburn to the fight.

In July of 1956 the Port had its first official meeting with the Tukwila City Council and received a lecture from the council about the lack of consideration. The Tukwila City Council made it clear that part of the Port would be within the city limits of Tukwila and that the Port would have to comply with Tukwila zoning and Tukwila-issued building permits.

The Tukwila Council moved quickly to oppose the Port's plans. It created the City Zoning Commission and the Annexation Review Committee in September. Someone was assigned to keep an eye on the group studying the Port's plan. A portion of the proposed annexation was rapidly moving along and on September 19, 1957, the City of Tukwila expanded. After July's unsuccessful meeting, the Port

held an October meeting with the Tukwila Council. The Council listened with narrowing eyes as he explained that the "improvements" to the Duwamish would reach up to Renton Junction within three years. Within six weeks, on November 25, 1957, Tukwila annexed another large parcel of land which the Port had planned to develop, once again removing land from the jurisdiction of the King County Planning Commission. The following day the Tukwila City Council formally voted to oppose the Port plan and on December 16, 1957, the Council adopted a zoning plan directly opposing the Port by limiting development to commercial and light industrial business.

Shortly after Andover, Inc. had acquired a total of 550 acres and expressed interest in acquiring another 250 acres, the Port of Seattle complained to the newspapers that the Duwamish industrial development plan would not be economically feasible with only the remaining 500 acres. The Port threatened to force Andover to sell the newly acquired property by using the Port's powers of condemnation. Then came the most serious blow to the Port's plans.

THE STATE SUPREME COURT CASE

The Port had sought and received authorization in 1957 from the state legislature to levy a two-mill property tax to finance the Duwamish industrialization program. But as the King County Assessor prepared to implement the tax, a lawsuit was filed in Superior Court on October 22, 1957. Seventeen valley residents had joined together as the plaintiffs in the suit: Helen Nelsen, Archie and Anna H. Codiga, Joe and Hazel Aliment, John and Louise Strander, Shannon and Lucille Houge, Paul and Beatrice Wieser, Harlan and Ruby Bull, the Harmses and the Listons. The plaintiffs stated "on behalf of all other taxpayers similarly situated" that they chose to oppose the increase in property taxes because the levy

THE OPPOSITION UNITES

With the publication of the consultant's report to the Port in September 1954, the reality of the plan began to hit home in the Duwamish Valley. Many of the property owners were not interested in being bought out by the Port and looked for alternatives. It was a disparate group with a variety of motives. Some were property owners who wanted to limit their taxes; some were land developers and speculators who wanted to get the jump on the Port and make money. Some living in the heights feared that their pastoral views would be converted into stark, noisy, dirty industrial landscapes. Some were 1950s-style environmentalists who foresaw the pollutants pouring into the Duwamish's waters and noxious smokestacks creating smog to smother the entire Seattle region on stagnant winter days. Some wanted to make Tukwila stronger and others just wanted to be left alone.

The weapons they could muster were of four basic types: lawsuits, organized public support, obtaining representation through a governmental body, and time. Time to find allies. Time to stall the Port and disrupt its timetable. Time to think of a plan. The property owners realized that to wield power they needed to be represented by a governmental body, and they approached King County. Already aligned with the Port, the county declined.

TUKWILA BEGINS TO ANNEX

In desperation they turned to the nearby community of Tukwila, a gesture many must have thought futile. But Tukwila had come of age. As mayor of Tukwila, Charles O. Baker played a key role and demonstrated great skill in using strategy and timing, mixed with good fortune, to protect Tukwila and its sister communities from the destruction planned by the Port.

Mayor Baker and key community members began to quietly meet with area property owners and a few interested businesspeople. Baker began doing what good politicians do best—he created a coalition out of a diverse group with conflicting motives, guiding the self-interested actions of individuals in a direction and sequence that would further the larger goal. Many things began to happen quickly and simultaneously as the opposition to the Port's plan to own a life of its own. Mayor Charles Baker and future mayor John Strander, chairman of the Tukwila Planning Commission, were at times leading, and at other times merely responding to, the accelerating pace of events as they gathered forces to the opposition.

Annexation would be the key. The property owners would have a stronger position if they were part of an incorporated city and if the property were zoned for a different use than the Port's proposed heavy industry. In exchange for protection and its assistance, the City would gain an expanded tax base. In the summer of 1948 Tukwila annexed, its first new area: Herman C. Anderson's Golden Arrow Dairy. This was the beginning of 40 years of annexations during which time Tukwila would find annexation to be a powerful tool.

SOUTHCENTER AND ANDOVER

INDUSTRIAL PARK—THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE PORT'S HEAVY INDUSTRY

In July of 1956 Mayor Baker appeared before the City Council to report that he had been contacted by a business interest which had just purchased 250 acres of land south of Tukwila, and that they desired to be annexed to Tukwila. The Council indicated they were favorable to such a proposal. Allied Stores, through its subsidiary corporation, Andover, Inc., had proposed the much-needed alternative to the Port's plan, and the unanimous support of the business community began to waver.

BUILDING A COALITION

Mayor Baker knew that the Port's support needed to be eliminated if Tukwila was to have a chance to win. With this appealing alternative to the Seattle area business community causing division therein, Tukwila now sought support from other governmental agencies.

With Tukwila's encouragement, other agencies began to question the Port's plan. The Washington Fisheries Department, having barely finished forcing the relocation of the Howard Hanson Dam to protect the fish spawning grounds, again found the fish run threatened. The Washington Highway Commission, hard at work to construct the federally financed freeways, found that the Port's plans were creating a financial and planning nightmare by requiring higher, longer bridges and major roadway relocations. Mayor Baker's friendship with the head of the Highway Commission, Bill Bugge, enabled Tukwila to coordinate smoothly with the State. Baker's leadership in organizing the Valley Industrial Planning Council added the opposition of nearby communities Kent, Renton and Auburn to the fight.

In July of 1956 the Port had its first official meeting with the Tukwila City Council and received a lecture from the council about the Port's lack of consideration. The Tukwila City Council made it clear that part of the Port District would be within the city limits of Tukwila and that the Port would have to comply with Tukwila zoning and Tukwila-issued building permits.

The Tukwila Council moved quickly to block the Port's plans. It created the City Planning Commission and the Annexation Committee in September. Someone was assigned to keep an eye on the group studying the Metro Plan. A portion of the proposed annexation was rapidly moving along and on September 30, 1957, the City of Tukwila expanded.

After July's unsuccessful meeting, the Port sent its chief engineer, Mr. Treadwell, to the

October meeting with the Tukwila Council. The Council listened with narrowing eyes as he explained that the "improvements" to the Duwamish would reach up to Renton Junction within three years. Within six weeks, on November 25, 1957, Tukwila annexed another large parcel of land which the Port had planned to develop, once again removing land from the jurisdiction of the King County Planning Commission. The following day the Tukwila City Council formally voted to oppose the Port plan and on December 16, 1957, the Council adopted a zoning plan directly opposing the Port by limiting development to commercial and light industrial business.

Shortly after Andover, Inc. had acquired a total of 550 acres and expressed interest in acquiring another 250 acres, the Port of Seattle complained to the newspapers that the Duwamish industrial development plan would not be economically feasible with only the remaining 500 acres. The Port threatened to force Andover to sell the newly acquired property by using the Port's powers of condemnation. Then came the most serious blow to the Port's plans.

THE STATE SUPREME COURT CASE

The Port had sought and received authorization in 1957 from the state legislature to levy a two-mill property tax to finance the Duwamish industrialization program. But as the King County Assessor prepared to implement the tax, a lawsuit was filed in Superior Court on October 22, 1957. Seventeen valley residents had joined together as the plaintiffs in the suit: Helen Nelsen, Archie and Anna H. Codiga, Joe and Hazel Aliment, John and Louise Strander, Shannon and Lucille Houge, Paul and Beatrice Wieser, Harlan and Ruby Bull, the Harmses and the Listons. The plaintiffs stated "on behalf of all other taxpayers similarly situated" that they chose to oppose the increase in property taxes because the levy "provides funds to condemn property for private



purposes, in violation of the State Constitution.” At issue was the Port’s right to use the governmental power of eminent domain to take land from the present owners and then sell it to other private individuals and corporations, after preparing the land for industrial use.

The case went before the Washington State Supreme Court in 1959 and the Court concluded that, whatever the merits of the Port’s plan, the Port did not have the legal authority to condemn and purchase land under its existing authority. The tax was thrown out.

The Port now found that its support at the state level was divided, as was the business community. The county’s jurisdiction had been eliminated by Tukwila’s annexations, and three other cities had joined the fight. Now both the Port’s funding and its power to condemn had been blocked. The Port’s support was too weak to get new legislation from the State. The Port was never able to regain the initiative.

TUKWILA WINS

The independent, feisty Duwamish Valley communities had fought to preserve themselves from the Port’s plans and had won. While all the communities entered into battle, being unincorporated units they lacked political legislative power. Only the municipality of Tukwila possessed the tools to save the upper valley and its sister communities. But there was a bitter irony in victory: One of the communities’ allies, the Federal Highway Commission, would soon build I-5 through their valley. Saved from annihilation by the waterway, the communities would lose homes,



Mess family farm, Southcenter area, ca. 1920. The valley had been thoroughly cleared and secondary growth was becoming established on the hills. A sawmill still operated on the western hillside at this time. Courtesy King County Public Works Dept.

churches, businesses and a portion of their identities to the broad freeway and its roaring river of cars. In the coming decades, Andover Park and the Southcenter retail center would provide Tukwila with a tax base that would have been inconceivable 10 years earlier, but there would be a historic price to pay—hundreds of acres of farms and the quiet rural life would be gone forever.

THE CITY OF TUKWILA FROM 1957 TO 1990

Unquestionably, the prolonged battle with the Port of Seattle consumed the majority of the time and energy of Mayor Charles Baker and the Tukwila City Council, but somehow they managed to bring about major changes at home. In the first years of his tenure as mayor, Baker and his fellow public officials worked diligently with an annual budget of \$12,000 to build Tukwila into a city. The streets were improved, the water system was upgraded, building codes were enacted and



financial stability grew. With this growth came Tukwila's attraction to investment and development.

In order to be assured of a prosperous future, the City expanded to encompass several square miles and, with more land, a plan was developed that proved to be both unique and economically sound. A planning commission of 12 was formed with John Strander as chairman. The John Graham Co. was hired as consultant to draw up the master plan. Among the many community innovations was the placing of all utilities, old and new, underground by 1972. It was agreed that land use was to be restricted in order to preserve the clean, uncluttered beauty of the city. In addition, plans were made for architectural design, landscaping and signage controls. A balanced zoning plan was developed, with the area divided 70 percent commercial and 30 percent residential.

THE CROSSROADS OF COMMERCE

Undoubtedly the most significant change facing the City was in the area of transportation. Anticipating the

development of two freeways—Interstates 5 and 405—that would put Tukwila squarely at the crossroads of commerce, the Tukwila Planning Commission included transportation access as part of its plan. With other improvements being considered and the assessed value of the City increasing, Tukwila came to the attention of a very imaginative and innovative developer, Rex Allison, Director of West Coast operations for Allied Stores Corp.

As the originator of the concept of regional shopping centers, Allison and Allied Stores had already successfully built the Northgate Mall, the Tacoma Mall and numerous others around the United States. Tukwila offered an opportunity for another mall with its ideal location at the interchange of two major freeways. After several years of extensive negotiations by Mayor Baker and Marvin Boys, representing Allied Stores, mutually agreeable terms were reached. Three years in construction, on July 31, 1968, the Southcenter retail center opened with 116 stores enclosed within a 30-acre covered area. Over 7,200 parking spaces surround the mall. Sharing the site are a variety of services including a full-service bank, a large Cinerama theater, an automotive center, service stations, restau-

rants and several hotels and motels. In 1961 the Andover Industrial Park was developed by Puget Western, Inc., and in the next 20 years this and other industrial parks provided space for over 1,000 business firms employing 20,000 people.

Changes in Tukwila's Arterial Circulation Plan were necessary to maximize the benefits of improved freeway design developed through municipal and state cooperation and to fit freeway revisions that developed as the State Highway Department details became more definite. An example of the

Tukwila leaders and policy makers who helped guide the city through the critical 1960s and early '70s gathered in September 1968. All of these men served their community as councilmen, and three led the city as mayor. L. to r.: Rudy Regel, Bill Crosttick, John Strander (mayor), Dwight Gardner, Richard Bowen, Tom Forsythe, Arlie Radford, Charles Baker (mayor), Stan Minkler (mayor), Gene Ives. Courtesy Darlene Crosttick.





improved Highway Department design is the bridging of the I-405 east-west freeway by the 57 Ave. S. extension and Christensen Road to preserve the existing arterials and connect the residential areas to the major industrial and commercial development. The grade separation of the I-5 Tacoma-Seattle freeway near S. 160 St. makes possible more direct access between the industrial-commercial complex of Tukwila and the area served by the westerly extension of I-405.

As each City administration under Mayors Strander, Minkler, Todd, Bauch and Van Dusen passed through the portals of the Tukwila City government, the improvements to the City continued. The assessed value continued to increase, and the guidance of Tukwila's future never faltered. Firms from almost every commercial sector are now represented in the ever-growing legacy that is Tukwila.

TUKWILA IN 1990

By 1990, three decades after Mayor Baker led Tukwila into its present dynamic phase, the population had grown to 14,631; there were over 1,000 apartment units sprinkled throughout the city; over 8 million square feet of commercial and industrial buildings covered the valley; two of the busiest freeways in the state bisected the town; and the assessed value of the city reached more than \$300 million (100 percent valuation).

In addition to this change in outward appearance, Tukwila's attitude had changed also. Denser living patterns, loss of natural beauty, noise and other problems which com-



The City of Tukwila proudly marks its 75th anniversary. Mayor Gary VanDusen, City employees, and citizens ceremoniously erect a special commemorative sign placed on roads leading into the crossroads community in 1983. L. to r.: Ralph Trepanier, Mabel Schults, Michael Back, Kathyrn Ruhlman, Doris Cox, Mark Badten, unknown, Hubert Crowley, Maggie Schwindt, Mabel Gylden, Pat Lowrey, Doris Phelps, George Hill, Mayor Gary VanDusen, Byron Sneva, Don Williams (kneeling). Courtesy City of Tukwila.

monly accompany development sharpened the public's sensitivity to amenities, urban design and public services. In 1990 the City of Tukwila struggled with the typical problems of a rapidly growing West Coast city, and the days of small-town life recorded in this book fade into memory. From an idea in the mind of Joel Shomaker to the Northwest crossroads of commerce, Tukwila has emerged as a leading city in the Puget Sound area.