

BELLTOWN HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT AND SURVEY REPORT

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Historically, the name “Belltown” referred only to the area west of Second Avenue, between approximately Lenora Street and Denny Way, the western portion of the claim originally settled by pioneer William Bell and his family. However, by the 1990s the name had crept as far east as Fifth Avenue, incorporating much of the neighborhood formerly known as the Denny Regrade; the names are now often used interchangeably. This history covers a slightly larger area, east to Westlake Avenue between Lenora Street and Denny Way. Of course, no neighborhood’s history can be looked at in isolation, and that of Belltown is directly connected with the development of downtown Seattle to the south, and to a lesser extent to Queen Anne on the north and the Denny Triangle and South Lake Union farther east.

Although Belltown was settled at the same time as Pioneer Square, its development has followed a distinctly different pattern. It may have seen more dramatic changes than any other Seattle neighborhood, since most of its first incarnation was washed away in the early twentieth century. Its nineteenth century economy was based on the processing and shipping of fish and the timber that covered its slopes. For most of the twentieth century it was a service district for downtown Seattle, with a variety of light manufacturing and business support services. It has always had a significant residential component, with accompanying cafes, taverns and stores. For decades, relatively low rents attracted senior citizens, artists and musicians, many living in the former workers’ housing and cheap hotels. In recent years it has evolved once again from a relatively small-scale neighborhood with an eclectic mix of art galleries, studios, nightclubs and affordable housing to one with an increasing number of high-rise condominiums, office buildings and upscale restaurants and shops.

NATIVE AMERICAN AND PIONEER SETTLEMENT: to 1888

Euro-American settlers arriving in Elliott Bay in 1851 entered a land occupied by several Native American groups, each with its own communities and resource-gathering places. As Puget Sound was extremely rich in resources, the groups traveled to fishing camps and plant-gathering spots during the milder months, and settled in larger, more permanent villages during the winter. One such village, located approximately at the foot of Bell Street, was known as babáqWab (“little prairie” or “large prairie”). Pioneer Sophie Frye Bass described a fine and sandy beach at the foot of Bell Street, with springs of good water, where Indians camped while they hunted and fished. They called it Muck-muck-wum.¹ Accounts by both Natives and white settlers note the

large longhouses here, measuring 48 by 96 feet. Inland from the village was a Native cemetery, whose bodies were disturbed over the following decades as development occurred. Natives fished in Lake Union and traversed the forested area between Elliott Bay and the lake for hunting and gathering berries and other plants. A trail ran from the settlement at babáqWab to the south end of the lake, through today's Belltown.²

The area now known as Belltown lies on the donation claim of William and Sarah Bell, which extended from Elliott Bay east to today's Yale Avenue, from Pine Street north to Denny Way. William N. Bell (1817-1887), his wife Sarah Ann Bell, and their four children arrived with the Denny party at Alki Beach on November 13, 1851. The couple had traveled from Illinois to find a new life in the West, and joined the others in Portland for the trip north. Early in 1852 the group moved east to today's Pioneer Square. The Bells continued farther north and established a donation claim lying between that of Arthur Denny to the south and David Denny on the north. Their property was steep and heavily forested; at the narrow beach a steep cliff ascended to a flat strip, beyond which a large hill covered most of the claim. In the spring of 1852 they built a cabin, where their son, Austin Americus Bell, was born in 1854. The cabin burned on January 26, 1856 in the brief skirmish with Native Americans known as the "Battle of Seattle." Bell was convinced that future attacks would occur and, rather than rebuilding, the family left for California.

Growth was slow during Seattle's first two decades, but intensified by the 1870s. Westward migration increased at the end of the Civil War in 1865, and a robust economy, budding industries, and expanded transportation options all supported growth in the region. The Northern Pacific Railroad extended its transcontinental line from Tacoma to Seattle in 1884, bringing commerce as well as new arrivals. The city's population grew from just 400 residents in 1867 to 3,533 by 1880. Thereafter it increased dramatically each year, and reached 42,830 by 1890.

William Bell returned from California briefly in the 1860s to plat his land, establishing most of today's street grid and putting the Bell family's mark on the city. Virginia and Olive streets are named for two of Bell's daughters, and Stewart Street is named for Olive's husband, Joseph H. Stewart. Because of the curving shoreline Belltown is set between two changes in the street grid. Denny Way, the border between the Bell and David Denny claims, lies at an angle to Belltown, producing triangular blocks along the northern edge. The grid changes again at the southern edge, with Stewart and Pine streets at an angle, transitioning into the main grid of downtown streets. The names of some of the major early streets were changed in later years: Front Street became First Avenue and West Street became Western Avenue. Depot Street, which was to lead to a railroad station envisioned by David Denny, was later renamed in his honor.

In 1870 Bell and his son Austin returned to Seattle permanently and began to actively encourage commerce to spread northward. However, the steep topography and poor roads isolated their land from the main settlement at Pioneer Square. Historian J. Willis Sayre described the ordeal of getting to Belltown: "From 2nd and Pike a stiff grade up to Pine and then a far worse one to Stewart Street. Once that summit was attained, there was a deep dip down to Virginia Street then another real climb up to Lenora Street, a level half block and then a perilous descent to Belltown."³

By the mid-1870s, businesses were spreading up First Avenue north of Yesler Way, so the street was regraded to Pike Street and then on to Belltown. The plank sidewalks extended the entire length from Yesler Way to Bell Street. They afforded relative protection from the ever-present mud or dust, making this a popular location for fashionable promenading. Horse-drawn jitneys served those who preferred not to walk the distance. The condition of Belltown's early roads is clear from Sophie Bass' description of its main thoroughfare, Front Street (now First Avenue), which "meandered up the hill to Stewart Street, took a turn and meandered on, then went off at a tangent, and, no doubt, would have landed at Mukilteo if it had not been stopped at Old Depot Street, now Denny Way."⁴

Nevertheless, by 1880 Belltown had more than fifty houses and a grocery store. It also had at least two churches, the Battery Methodist Church on Third Avenue and the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Blanchard Street, established by Trinity Episcopal Church downtown.⁵ The two-room Bell Town School, the first school north of Pine Street, was built at Third Avenue and Vine Street in 1876. Only a few years later, in 1884, it was replaced with a larger two-story building, designed by Stephen Meany, on Battery Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues.⁶

William Bell built his own home and a substantial mansard-roofed hotel (1884) on First Avenue at Battery Street. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for 1884 show the hotel, a row of stores across the street and scattered large dwellings between Blanchard and Bell streets. An 1888 photo from the roof of the Bellevue (or Bell's) Hotel, looking toward Denny Way (then Depot Street) shows a rough terrain with one street (First Avenue) edged by its plank sidewalks and meandering pathways connected the simple houses, mostly two stories, with clapboard or plank siding and wood shingled gabled roofs. Scattered among the houses were small barns and outbuildings, orchards and, near the hotel, a rough baseball diamond.⁷ An historian, Frederick Grant, described the neighborhood at about this time as having residences of "medium character for the most part, interspersed with flats and lodging houses; rarely in any case a building reaching a level of squalor, and not in many cases rising to magnificence. For the most part solid comfort, home-like cosiness (sic) and good taste prevail here."⁸

The greatest activity was along the waterfront and on the steep slope west of First Avenue, which was a pioneer industrial center focused on lumber and fish processing. Wall Street was most accessible to the uplands, as there was a steep bluff and ravine at Battery and Bell streets. The first major plants were the Seattle Barrel Manufacturing Company, which opened in 1880 on an expansive site between Bell and Wall streets, and the Muttulath Barrel Factory near Denny Way. The 1888 Sanborn map also shows, near Wall Street, the Manning Wharf and sawmill, the Hall Wharf and shipyard, the Hall & Paulson Furniture Company and the Stetson & Post Mill. Housing was interspersed throughout, with workers' cottages, duplexes and flats. The waterfront street was what is now Elliott Avenue, then known as Water Street. Railroad Avenue (now Alaskan Way), was created by ordinance in 1887, but was not actually a street, as it consisted only of railroad tracks running atop pilings and rip rap.

LAYING A FOUNDATION: 1889-1910

The decades between 1889 and 1910 shaped Seattle as a modern city with a significant role in national and international trade and economics. During this period the city's role as a trade and manufacturing center solidified and both downtown and neighborhood business districts boomed with new offices, stores, services and public institutions. The population of 42,830 in 1890 nearly doubled to 80,671 in 1900. By 1910 the population had soared to 237,194. The city grew in area as well as population by annexing eight neighboring towns (Ballard, Columbia, Ravenna, South Seattle, Southeast Seattle, South Park, West Seattle, and Georgetown) in 1905-10.

The two decades from 1889 to 1910 were flanked by two major fires that helped shape Belltown. On June 6, 1889 a cabinetmaker's glue pot ignited at First and Madison Streets, setting off a fire that destroyed 30 blocks in the heart of the Pioneer Square commercial district. Rebuilding occurred almost overnight, with a vision of a much larger and grander city. By 1891 the roughhewn town of brick and wood-clad buildings was transformed into a commercial center of "fireproof" brick and stone buildings in the latest architectural fashion, with regraded streets and modernized water and sewer utilities. The rebuilding activity and the booming economy pushed development outside of Pioneer Square, closer to Belltown.

Before the fire occurred, Austin Bell (his father had died in 1887) had hired an architect newly arrived from Victoria, Elmer Fisher. Fisher, who was to design many of the post-fire buildings, designed a large residential building next to the Bellevue Hotel at First Avenue and Battery Street. Before the building was completed, Austin Bell took his own life; his wife completed its construction and gave it her husband's name. Soon afterwards, Fisher designed an Odd Fellows Hall (now the Barnes Building) next door and a retail/hotel/office building across First Avenue for Alonzo Hull, an Eastern investor who had recently moved to Seattle. These substantial brick buildings, some distance from Pioneer Square, combined with the area's isolation to give Belltown a distinctive identity separate from that of downtown Seattle.

Continuing transportation improvements connected Seattle neighborhoods during this growth period. By 1891 thirteen streetcar lines spread throughout the city, allowing people to travel more easily. In 1889 the first electric streetcar service arrived in Belltown, extending from James Street to Denny Way along Second Avenue. The Front Street Cable Railway erected an elaborate powerhouse and car barn near Denny Way and Second Avenue in 1893. Within a few years, lines would run along Western and Elliott avenues to Ballard and on First, Second and Fifth avenues to lower Queen Anne, with connections at Pike Street to Eastlake, Westlake and points north and east.

In 1893 the Great Northern Railroad brought Seattle its first direct transcontinental rail link. However, the national financial panic of that year had a profound effect, as most of the capital for growth in the Pacific Northwest came from the East Coast and development virtually halted. The arrival in June 1897 of the steamer *Portland* carrying "more than a ton of gold" pulled Seattle out of the economic doldrums. Seattle quickly became "The Gateway to Alaska," the commercial center and supply point for the Klondike gold rush. Adventurers from throughout

the world sought their fortunes, stopping in Seattle to buy the required supplies. Although few succeeded in the mine fields, the city's merchants, hoteliers, theaters, restaurants, and shipping companies thrived. First Avenue was given over to small hotels, stores, cafes, and saloons serving miners, sailors and other travelers.

The decade following the discovery of gold was one of transformation for Seattle. By 1910 the city had steel-frame skyscrapers, its own electric utility, a grand railroad station, an active trade with the Orient, an efficient transportation system and an optimistic outlook. In 1909 Seattle invited the world to celebrate its physical development and economic success at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, sited at the new university campus. Its effects spread through the city, with new hotels, apartment buildings and other amenities. More than 3,700,000 visitors attended the fair, enhancing the city's national and international status and setting the stage for further growth.

The Problem of Denny Hill

By the turn of the century Belltown was a well-developed but low-density residential area. Sanborn maps (1893 corrected to 1902) show a mix of single-family homes, duplexes, row houses, flats and tenements extending as far east as Eighth Avenue. An 1891 photo by Frank La Roche looks down the eastern slope of Denny Hill, showing a neighborhood with graded streets, wood-frame houses of one to two stories and the Norwegian Danish Baptist Church, a substantial Carpenter Gothic building at Sixth Avenue and Virginia Street.⁹

The well-known 1891 bird's-eye view by Augustus Koch shows a street grid similar to that today.¹⁰ Depot Street (Denny Way) runs all the way to Broadway; the waterfront is lined with wharfs and mills, with stores, houses, flats and rowhouses elsewhere. At the south edge, looming over the vicinity, was the grandest building in the area, the incomplete Denny Hotel on Stewart Street and Third Avenue. Arthur Denny had begun the project in 1888, but his bankruptcy in the Panic of 1893 prevented its completion. It remained a vacant turreted castle for nearly a decade, until developer James A. Moore took over the project. Renamed the Washington Hotel, it had a special three-block trolley line to carry guests up the steep grade. The first guest was President Theodore Roosevelt, on May 23, 1903.

However, this was all to change very soon. The original "Belltown" was a narrow strip along First and Western avenues, with little room to expand. Denny Hill rose steeply north of Pine Street between Second and Fifth avenues, descending gradually to the north, with a steep bluff dropping from Second Avenue to Elliott Bay. The hill was too steep for horses to climb, isolating the settlement from the main town to the south. City Engineer Reginald H. Thomson saw the hill as a barrier to northward growth and economic progress, and he envisioned washing it away with hydraulic jets, using with water from the Elliott Bay to sluice earth into Elliott Bay. He succeeded, although it took three separate regrade projects over more than thirty years to accomplish his goal.

Although the "Denny Regrade" is the largest and best known of Thomson's efforts to re-shape Seattle, regrading and filling occurred throughout the greater downtown area between 1876 and

1930 in order to provide land for industry and to move people and goods more efficiently. The first Denny Hill regrade, in 1898-99, was a relatively modest effort that lowered First Avenue between Pike Street and Denny Way by as much as 17 feet; the dirt was used to fill Western and Railroad avenues. The second phase of the regrade occurred between 1903 and 1911, when 27 blocks between Second and Fifth avenues, from Pine to Cedar streets, were sluiced away. The greatest excavation was along Blanchard Street, which was lowered by 107 feet at Fourth Avenue. This was the largest such operation in the world up to that time, moving six million cubic yards of dirt. The regrade opened up access to Belltown, Queen Anne and Lake Union, greatly enhancing property values.¹¹

In considering the regrade, one often thinks only of the newly flattened land that became available for new buildings. However, the reality was much more complicated. The city was responsible only for regrading the streets and relocating the utilities. Owners of individual lots were required to hire their own contractors to either move or rebuild their homes and to level their property to match the street grade. Business owners could benefit from the increased value of the more accessible property. Not everyone was eager, or financially able, to do this. The best-known holdout was James Moore, who resisted relocating his grand hotel; however, he abandoned it in 1906, only three years after its opening, and built the New Washington Hotel (now the Josephinum) at Second Avenue and Stewart Street. Many pinnacles of land, with houses or apartments atop them, remained even into the 1920s. The embankment along Fifth Avenue remained for more than twenty years, until the third regrading phase.¹²

Belltown during the Regrade Period

During the regrading period (1898-1911), Belltown developed in fits and starts, as dwellings, stores and institutions were built, demolished and moved. One example was Engine House No. 4 at Fourth Avenue and Battery Street, built in 1890 by the Seattle Fire Department to serve all of “North Seattle:” Belltown, Queen Anne and South Lake Union. The tall wood-clad Victorian building was sited on a hill, with a full daylight basement, living quarters and a tall bell tower. It had three horse-drawn trucks, including the city’s first hook-and-ladder. However, the station was demolished in 1909, when the corner was lowered by 31 feet.¹³ The Bell Town School, which had expanded to 20 classrooms in 1891, was partially demolished in 1906.¹⁴

Other institutions grew outside of the regraded areas. In 1904 Dr. L.C. Neville built the Pacific Hospital, a 25-bed hospital and school for nurses at 2600 First Avenue. In 1919 the hospital relocated to First Hill and the building was converted to the New Pacific Apartments, which remain today. The area’s largest church complex was Sacred Heart Catholic Church, established in 1889 at Sixth Avenue and Bell Street, east of the early regrades. By 1891 the parish, run by the Redemptorist order, had a church, school, convent and rectory. The church burned down in 1899, and was rebuilt on the same location

Redevelopment following the 1889 Pioneer Square fire, combined with population growth, caused land uses to become more separated. People of all income levels moved out of downtown to take advantage of a variety of living options, depending on their income, social level and family structure. At that time all of these options were available in Belltown. A family

who could not afford its own home might rent a duplex or triplex. Those who were in transition often moved into apartment hotels, which catered to the middle and upper classes by providing rooms and suites with bath facilities and meals served in central dining rooms. Single people who could not afford this might live in a boarding house, with meals provided, or a rooming house, where residents relied on restaurant meals. A step up from the rooming house was the workers' hotel, which catered largely to single men (and some couples and families) with rooms without private bath or cooking facilities.

By 1910, Belltown was a thriving community of wood frame dwellings, hotels and small commercial buildings. The opening of the Pike Place Market in 1907 encouraged development north along First Avenue, with many stores, taverns and cafes. The street was soon lined with workers' hotels, serving laborers from nearby industries and transient workers from lumber camps, fishing boats, canneries and ships, all of whom spent time in the city. Away from First Avenue, substantial apartment buildings were being built, such as the Rivoli on Second Avenue and the Cedar (now the Watermarke) and the William Daniels (now the Centerview) near Denny Way. Small commercial buildings, some with apartments above, were also built; only a small number from this era remain today. Photos show houses and flats that were larger and more elaborate than in earlier views, often with Queen Anne or Italianate detailing; most of these were demolished over the next twenty years.

Industrial Growth and Calamity

The area west of First Avenue was not regraded and its steep slope remained a dense combination of industrial facilities and cottages, boarding houses and flats for workers. Sanborn maps of 1893-1910 show several significant industrial facilities, including several saw mills, the Chlopeck Fish Company and the Puget Sound Sheet Metal Company. Several facilities, such as the George W. Hall Wharf and Manning's Wharf, had expanded following the 1889 fire, which destroyed the downtown wharves.

City Engineer R. H. Thomson persuaded James J. Hill, who then controlled both the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific railroads, to construct a tunnel beneath downtown to connect trains with the two new stations at the south end (King Street Station, 1906 and Union Station, 1911). The tunnel was completed in 1905, reducing congestion on Railroad Avenue. However, the northern tunnel entrance was at Virginia Street, so that trains continued to run through Belltown's industrial area.

On the night of June 10, 1910, sparks ignited hay at the Galbraith Bacon stable at Railroad Avenue and Battery Street. A strong wind drove the fire rapidly through the industrial buildings and dwellings until nine square blocks were destroyed, from the waterfront to Second and Vine. The destruction included the Galbraith Bacon warehouse and stables, a four-story brick hotel on Western Avenue, several smaller workers' hotels, a dozen houses and numerous businesses. Although only one life was lost, hundreds were left without homes or jobs. The fire department exhibited little organization in fighting the flames, and the city was saved by a rainfall and a wind shift. They did manage to save the Galbraith Bacon Dock, the Chlopeck Fish Company,

and the Pacific Hospital on Fourth Avenue.¹⁵ The fire was a minor setback, as the burned area was soon rebuilt with larger industries and new dwellings and apartments for workers.

CONTROLLED GROWTH (1911-31)

The years from the 1910 fire through the construction boom of the 1920s formed the Belltown we see today. After the Klondike gold rush, Seattle's population soared, from 42,830 in 1890 to 237,194 in 1910 and to 315,685 in 1920. It slowed considerably during the 1920s, growing slightly to 365,583 by 1930. Seattle's economy accelerated with the build-up to World War I, with expanded employment in the city's shipyards and sawmills. Although the United States did not formally join the war until April 1917, preparedness activities to build up national military strength stimulated the economy. In the Northwest, shipyards and the lumber industry profited, hiring large numbers of new employees. In the years following the war, however, the nation, and Seattle, experienced economic uncertainty, unemployment and labor unrest as the international economy struggled to adjust to systemic changes.

Because development had slowed while the population continued to increase, Seattle, in the early 1920s, was faced with a tremendous pent-up demand for housing and commercial and office space. The influx of people had created a housing shortage that was felt in every Seattle neighborhood. Low real estate prices, together with a shortage of rentals, fostered sustained building activity through the 1920s, as Seattle caught up with the population growth of previous decades. Single-family home construction nearly tripled from 1920 to 1925, and apartment house construction flourished again in the late 1920s.¹⁶

Everyone waited expectantly for the city to expand into the newly-cleared Regrade, but it remained filled with small commercial buildings and apartments. Perhaps the best known development in Belltown during this period was one that did not occur.

Visions of the Future

The population boom had brought overcrowding and congestion, transforming Seattle within a few years from a small city to a metropolis with some of the urban problems found in older East Coast cities. Civic leaders sought to both address these problems and solidify the city's position as a sophisticated metropolis, worthy of business investment. They looked to the "City Beautiful Movement," a belief that by refining the physical appearance of cities through rational planning and beautiful buildings and parks, one could change the way the city functioned and ameliorate urban problems. Designers sought to re-make cities in the image of Paris or Washington D.C., with boulevards and axial vistas terminating in grand buildings and monuments.

For Seattle, the first step was the hiring, in 1903, of the Olmsted Brothers, a Massachusetts landscape architecture firm, to design a citywide system of parks and boulevards. Although the City quickly began implementation, the plans had little impact on Belltown. The existing Denny Park, just north of Belltown, was regraded in the 1920s and the recommended waterfront park was not acted upon until decades later.

Several property owners proposed their own City Beautiful-inspired civic center plans, tying together major features of the downtown core with boulevards and imposing buildings. In 1910 voters approved establishment of the Municipal Plans Commission to develop an official plan. The commission hired a nationally-known civil engineer and former railway surveyor, Virgil G. Bogue, to develop a comprehensive plan for the city. Bogue looked, not surprisingly, toward the newly accessible and relatively inexpensive land north of downtown. His *Plan of Seattle* released in 1911, was regional and comprehensive, proposing new road construction, harbor improvements (including a seawall), rapid transit (with a tunnel beneath Lake Washington), improved train and ferry service, and a regional park system (including the purchase of Mercer Island for park land). However, the idea that aroused the ire of downtown business leaders and property owners was a new civic center plaza and building complex at Fourth Avenue and Blanchard Street, with large new buildings and broad tree-lined boulevards radiating outwards. A new train depot and ferry terminal on Lake Union would connect to a re-designed street system, essentially moving downtown Seattle to the Denny Regrade.¹⁷

However, neither Bogue nor the city provided either justification for the drastic changes or a plan for financing them. The possibility of this massive rebuilding of the city's basic infrastructure caused considerable consternation among property downtown property owners, who fought against the relocation that would cause their property values to plummet and force them to move. To their relief, voters rejected the ambitious plan resoundingly, consolidating the city center downtown and forestalling any significant movement into Belltown for the next sixty years.

Residential and Commercial Development

With the failure of the Bogue Plan, city officials looked to other methods to address urban problems. One tool was the adoption of one of the nation's first zoning ordinances, in 1923. Prior to this, land uses had been determined largely based on economics and the desires of property owners. This resulted in an unorganized mix of uses, which could be seen clearly in parts of Belltown, where single family homes, apartments, stores, churches, stables and industrial sites were in close proximity to one another. Seattle's building regulations had been focused on public health (adequate light and air) and fire safety, including height limits for various types of construction. However, it had not regulated the location of uses.

The new ordinance regulated land use, building area and height. It divided the city into six districts: First Residence (single family), Second Residence (single family and multifamily), Business, Commercial, Manufacturing and Industrial. Mapping of the zones was based primarily on the predominant uses at the time, so that single family areas remained so, and commercial nodes remained. The regulations were inclusive, so that lower-intensity uses (such as single family) would be allowed in higher intensity districts (such as business).

The Belltown/Denny Regrade area was designated as "Commercial," as was most of downtown. The western slope (west of Western Avenue), which had had significant industrial uses since the 1870s, was designated as Manufacturing. The downtown office core (between Seneca Street and Yesler Way) was designated as "Business," with a maximum height that encouraged the construction of skyscrapers. The zoning code succeeded in encouraging concentrated

commercial office buildings in the downtown core, while Belltown remained a low-density commercial district.

The zoning ordinance confirmed Belltown's future as an apartment district, as those areas that already had apartment development were zoned for future apartments, while new apartments were prohibited in single family zones. Although apartments were allowed in the downtown commercial and business districts, office buildings were more profitable and relatively little apartment construction occurred downtown.

Slow development during and after World War I led to pent-up demand for housing and very intensive development in the mid-to-late 1920s. By this time apartments were well established as a viable and acceptable housing option for the middle class, typically for single people or for those saving to buy a single-family home. Social conditions also encouraged apartments, particularly the increasing role of women in the work force. Single women working in shops, offices and factories needed respectable and affordable housing, something that could not be obtained at the workers' hotels. Multifamily development continued strongly from 1925 until 1930. The majority of the city's pre-World War II apartments were built during this period, with apartment blocks and mixed use buildings appearing along arterials in nearly every neighborhood.

General commercial development also occurred throughout Belltown in the 1920s, just as in all neighborhoods. Two types of development were particularly notable: the film industry and the automobile industry. Belltown was the center of the film industry in the Pacific Northwest, with dozens of studios having distribution centers where theater from throughout the region came to preview films and purchase supplies. Belltown's location, close to downtown but with less expensive land and less congestion, also encouraged auto-oriented businesses such as service and parking garages. The neighborhood also attracted light-industrial uses such as printers and small-scale suppliers and assemblers serving downtown businesses.

Neighborhood Amenities

Belltown gained some special amenities during this period. In 1912 it acquired one of its few open spaces, when a fountain and a statue of Chief Seattle by sculptor James A. Wehn were installed at the eastern edge of Denny Hill, at the triangle formed by Denny Way, Cedar Street and Fifth Avenue. The site was called Tillicum (or Tilikum) Place, a Chinook word meaning "tribe, people, relations and friend." The statue may have been part of the preparations for the city's first Potlatch celebration in 1913, a combination of civic boosterism and a tribute to Native culture that was led by a group of civic leaders banded together as the "Tilikums of Elttaes."¹⁸

Belltown has two unique amenities. One was the Crystal Natatorium (demolished), designed in 1916 by B. Marcus Priteca. Located at Second Avenue and Lenora Street, the swimming pool was filled with filtered and heated salt water from Elliott Bay. It was one of the city's outstanding examples of ornamental terra cotta with colored dolphins and mermaids. The other, the Trianon Ballroom, built in 1926 at Third Avenue and Wall Street, was the largest ballroom in the Northwest, with a springy dance floor that accommodated more than 5,000 dancers. Newspapers called it "a gala glittering dreamland," with walls decorated with tropical scenes and

a silver clamshell hood sheltering the bandstand.¹⁹ These attractions drew people from throughout Seattle to Belltown.

Existing neighborhood institutions changed with the times. In 1920 the fire station built in 1890 was replaced by a modern concrete building designed by city architect Daniel Huntington across the street at Fourth Avenue and Battery Street. In 1928, the third regrading phase reached both Belltown School and Sacred Heart Catholic Church and school. Sacred Heart relocated to lower Queen Anne, but the public school was not replaced in the neighborhood.

The End of Denny Hill

Construction during the 1920s meant that the remaining portion of Denny Hill, located east of Fifth Avenue, was increasingly becoming a barrier to both development and circulation. East-west travel and connections between downtown and Lake Union were limited. The third and final regrading phase began in 1928 and was completed in December 1930. This phase extended from Fifth Avenue to Westlake Avenue, between Virginia and Harrison streets. In volume it was about two-thirds the size of the second phase, removing 4,233,000 cubic yards of dirt on a half-mile lone conveyor belt to barges on the waterfront. Most of the dirt was then dumped into Elliott Bay. Westlake Avenue, which had been graded and filled near Lake Union in 1907, was connected to downtown and opened for development.²⁰ This massive effort was undertaken to allow business expansion, but by the time of its completion the Great Depression had slowed commercial activity, and the expected development did not occur. For decades the area contained primarily car dealerships, parking lots, motels and other low-density uses.

Waterfront and Industrial Development

Significant change occurred along the Belltown waterfront in the World War I era and the 1920s. Fill dirt from the first regrade had been used to create more shoreline north of Virginia Street. The deep water allowed construction of large docks parallel to the shoreline, yielding a different development pattern than that seen to the south. Galbraith Bacon, a wholesaler in food, grains and building materials, built a dock (later Pier 67), warehouse and stables in 1910; the warehouse and stables were lost in the 1910 fire, but the dock was saved. The Booth Fisheries (formerly Chlopeck) pier (later Pier 68) served the company's smokery and packing house (1911) on the uplands to the east. The American Can Company had the largest facility, a plant to manufacture cans for salmon packing; the northern part was built in 1916, and expanded in 1925. Other major industrial activities were the U. S. Radiator Company (later used by Skyway Luggage) and the Lockwood Lumber Company, with a large yard at Broad Street and Western Avenue. In 1914 the Empire Laundry was built at Bell Street. Construction of housing for workers continued in the industrial area.

The major factor in waterfront development was the creation of the Port of Seattle by King County voters in 1911. The new port authority had the power to build, own and operate harbor improvements (including but not limited to piers and wharves) and to levy property taxes. Since much of the waterfront was already privately owned, the new agency had to purchase land for its activities. Accordingly, it acquired less developed (and less expensive) land north of Pike Street. Among the Port's first actions were the construction, in 1914, of the Bell Street Terminal (later

Pier 66), with a roof-top park, and, just to the north, a four-story warehouse for port offices, storage sheds and cold storage for fruit.²¹

DEPRESSION AND WAR (1931 -1945)

Seattle experienced the crush of the Great Depression as severely as any city in the country. Modest population growth through the 1920s slowed to a net gain of only 3,000 people in the decade that followed. Wages plummeted as manufacturing stalled, and the lumber industry saw particular declines.

A limited amount of construction continued in Belltown. In 1931, American Can Company built one of the central waterfront's last piers (later Pier 69), to store rolls of aluminum for the manufacture of cans at their factory across the street. That same year, the Currin-Greene Shoe Manufacturing Company, which manufactured logging boots, built a new plant on Western Avenue. Several printers constructed new facilities, and some industrial warehouses were added. Many of the small industrial facilities and warehouses on Western Avenue became more consumer-oriented, with businesses such as a candy factory, wholesale bakeries and a tobacco warehouse. The film industry did relatively well nationally in the 1930s, and both MGM and Paramount Studios built new local film exchanges.

Public infrastructure investments also continued. The Aurora Avenue Speedway, with the George Washington Memorial Bridge (Aurora Bridge) and an elevated section through Woodland Park, opened in May 1933, efficiently bringing traffic from North Seattle to the northeast corner of Belltown at Denny Way. Along the waterfront, in 1936 the seawall was completed from Madison Street to Bay Street. The space between the new wall and Railroad Avenue was filled, creating, for the first time, an actual street along the north waterfront rather than a collection of pilings.

No significant residential development occurred in Belltown between 1931 and 1949, and much of the existing housing stock deteriorated. This was reflected in the 1940 census, which contained the most comprehensive housing statistics collected to that time. University of Washington sociologist Calvin F. Schmid's analysis counted the section of Belltown west of Third Avenue as part of "hobohemia," or Skid Road, along with Pioneer Square. The dwelling units, mostly workers' cottages or cheap hotels, were among the oldest and most crowded in the city, with a most having no private toilet or bath facilities. The area had a high percentage of older males, many of them foreign born (especially from Scandinavia); many were unskilled laborers and, not surprisingly, were unemployed. In contrast, the section of Belltown east of Third Avenue, had predominantly clerical and sales workers and a much larger percentage of women, as one would expect from the apartment buildings there.²²

The economic depression came to an end only when the nation began preparing for World War II, which began in Europe in September 1939. This preparation began early in Seattle, and transformed the city perhaps more than any other large city. Its North Pacific location made it a strategic military location for shipping both troops and goods to the war against Japan. Its airplane factories, shipyards and steel mills made it a crucial part of the war effort. Boeing alone

increased employment from 4,000 to 50,000 between 1939 and 1945. War activities began well before the declaration of war in December 1941, as Boeing and local shipyards received contracts to support the Allies. Civil defense measures and fund drives began locally in 1940. Internment of Seattle's Japanese population began early in 1942, with a dramatic negative impact on the nearby Pike Place Market.

Like much of Seattle, Belltown prospered during the war, as it was ideally located to provide housing, food, drink and entertainment to both servicemen and defense workers. Its apartments, workers' hotels and taverns boomed. The Seattle Housing Authority opened the Blanchard Street Reception Center, one of several in the city that provided temporary housing for workers coming from all over the country seeking defense jobs.²³ During the 1930-40s the Trianon Ballroom hosted big bands such as Duke Ellington, Guy Lombardo and Lionel Hampton. Thousands lined up in the street and dances went until 5 AM for swing-shift workers.²⁴ Belltown's proximity to downtown and waterfront industry also made it a center for union activity, with the Seattle Labor Temple relocating to First Avenue in 1942. This trend continued through the 1950s, with numerous other union halls being constructed.

INTO THE MODERN AGE: 1946-1966

The national and regional economies took some time to recover from World War II and the Korean War, and little significant development occurred in Seattle until the late 1950s. However, significant social and economic changes were underway. Just before the war started, in 1940, the first bridge across Lake Washington connected Mercer Island and the East Side directly to Seattle. After the war, the real estate industry hurried to take advantage of the newly-accessible land. Builders had learned to build quickly and efficiently to meet defense housing needs, and they put new skills and materials to good use by building large communities of houses virtually overnight. The G. I. Bill and new home financing regulations allowed many to buy a new home in the suburbs.

One of the first efforts to shape Seattle to the post-war world was a new zoning ordinance adopted in 1957. Rather than relying on existing uses to determine the zoning designation, the ordinance focused on separating uses that were considered incompatible and on promoting specific uses in specific areas. Concentrated office and retail development was encouraged downtown in order to develop a high-density regional business center. Most of Belltown was designated as General Commercial, which allowed small stores, offices and services similar to those that had been there for many years. However, the zoning discouraged one of the district's primary land uses--housing. The area west of First Avenue continued to be a Manufacturing zone; a number of small warehouse and distribution centers were built, and older warehouses were modernized.

Accommodating the Automobile

Planning in downtown and Belltown in the 1950s-60s primarily involved efforts to accommodate the automobile. The emphasis was on getting large numbers of people, in autos rather than streetcars, downtown to work and shop. People were eager for new cars, as they had been

unavailable during the war and transportation options had decreased. Those who moved to the suburbs needed a car to commute to work or to shop. The streetcar system, which had come into municipal ownership in 1919 when it was on the brink of bankruptcy, had been replaced by buses in 1941. The interurban that had served the older suburbs north and south of Seattle, ended its runs in 1939.

Belltown's primary new infrastructure of the post-war period was the construction of the Battery Street Tunnel and the Alaskan Way Viaduct. For two decades, the Pacific Highway (Aurora Avenue) had ended rather abruptly at Denny Way. The new roadway extended the highway through downtown Seattle. Near Denny Way, it entered a new tunnel beneath Battery Street, exiting just west of First Avenue and continuing on a double-level structure just east of Alaskan Way. It dramatically altered the character of the waterfront and the western edge of Belltown. At its western portal, it tunneled into the steep bluff across from the Austin Bell Building, in the heart of historic Belltown.

Planning for the viaduct had begun in 1934, shortly after completion of the Aurora Bridge. Construction of the Belltown segment (Battery to Pike Streets) took place from 1949 to 1951, and involved the demolition of several buildings in the industrial area. The segment to S. King Street was completed by the summer of 1952. Only when that was built did construction of the Battery Street Tunnel begin. The tunnel was completed in June 1954, after considerable disruption and some building damage; care was taken, however, to avoid building demolition for the tunnel.²⁵ As the viaduct was being completed, in 1953, the Washington legislature approved the route for a new freeway, I-5, which was completed on the east side of downtown in 1967.

At about the same time as the new zoning legislation, a group of downtown business leaders organized as the Central Association of Seattle spearheaded the development of a new comprehensive plan for downtown Seattle. They developed broad visions for each section, focusing on transportation and circulation as well as land uses. The Denny Regrade was seen largely as a service area to support downtown, with commercial, light manufacturing, communications, motel and parking uses, with some potential for new apartment buildings and apartment hotels.²⁶ This vision generally reflected the existing uses and what was to be built in following decades.

The goals of the Central Association of Seattle were translated into a technical report entitled *Comprehensive Plan for Central Business District, Seattle*, prepared by a New York planning consultant, Donald Monson. The Monson Plan, adopted by the City Council in 1963, proposed re-shaping downtown Seattle to accommodate higher-density buildings, vehicle circulation and parking. The overall goal was to prevent decentralization--that is, to prevent people from taking their business to the new suburban shopping malls with their easy access and parking. Thus, the downtown plan proposed to provide easy automobile access and parking with a ring road system with plazas, pedestrian malls and parking structures on the periphery of the commercial core.²⁷

Under the Monson Plan, Belltown would have been cut off from downtown by limited access ring roads on Lenora and Virginia streets, connecting along Seventh and Eighth avenues to the south ring roads on Washington and Main streets in Pioneer Square. The replacement of the

Pike Place Market with a massive parking garage topped by tourist and office facilities, first proposed in 1950, would have significantly altered First Avenue and the southwestern part of Belltown.²⁸ The Bay Freeway south of Lake Union would have further isolated Belltown. (A 1959 concept proposed demolishing the entire center of Belltown, between Bell and Battery streets from First to Seventh avenues, for distributor roads for the ring road around downtown.)²⁹

Public response to the drastic changes proposed by the Monson Plan was strong, with momentum growing over the following decade. Through citizen activism Pioneer Square became a local and National Register historic district in 1970, one of the first in the nation. The proposal to demolish the Pike Place Market was halted by a 1971 public initiative, and it was also designated both a National Register and a local historic district. The Bay Freeway, approved by the city council in 1970, was defeated by voters in 1972. In 1973 the City established its own historic preservation program, designating numerous individual buildings as landmarks in the 1970s and 1980s.

Post-War Development

Seattle began the 1960s with a second world's fair, the 1962 Century 21 Exposition. This involved remodeling the 1920s Civic Center, just across Denny Way at the northern edge of Belltown, and clearing a large area for new construction. The fair revitalized lower Queen Anne with new commercial and apartment buildings, and some of this effect spilled over into Belltown. However, the fair's major lasting feature in Belltown was the monorail, which ran on an elevated track along Fifth Avenue from the fairgrounds to downtown Seattle. Although the monorail does not stop in Belltown, it remains a significant presence on Fifth Avenue. It provides a strong demarcation between the older more established part of Belltown and the area to the east, cleared in the last regrade, which has only recently begun to develop.

Two major projects were constructed near Fifth Avenue in the years after World War II. In 1948, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* built a large office and press building at Sixth Avenue and Wall Street. Across the street was one of downtown's first high-rise apartments, the Grosvenor House (1949, 500 Wall Street), a complex of 18-story towers,. This was the only residential project in Belltown between 1930 and the 1970s. Otherwise construction in the 1950s-60s consisted primarily of small modernist office buildings and motels and auto dealerships east of Fifth Avenue. A notable addition was the unique Cinerama Theater, built on Fourth Avenue in 1963.

POSTSCRIPT: BEYOND 1967

Belltown changed relatively slowly for most of the latter half of the twentieth century. The growth anticipated after the regrades had never occurred, so it remained primarily a district of one- to three-story buildings providing housing and services for downtown. The ambitious plans of the 1950s-60s that would have transformed much of it into roadways and parking garages had failed.

In the 1970s a new round of planning studies and zoning changes began, which eventually had considerably more impact than had previous efforts. Many of Belltown's early apartment buildings had deteriorated and were in danger of demolition. A 1970 fire in the Ozark Hotel, which took 21 lives, led to stronger fire safety requirements, leading some building owners to simply close off their upper stories rather than upgrading. The City's Denny Regrade Development Plan of 1974 directly addressed the problem of providing new housing and preserving existing buildings. It recommended changing zoning from General Commercial, which discouraged housing, to a designated residential zone extending from Western Avenue east to Fifth Avenue and from Lenora Street north to Broad and Clay streets. This priority on housing was re-emphasized in the 1985 Downtown Plan, which also promoted an improved pedestrian environment, linkages with the waterfront, more open space and preservation of the district's historic buildings. Non-profit housing agencies, using federal and local housing funds and private donations, acquired and restored more than twenty buildings, maintaining them for low and moderate income renters. Several new low-income buildings were also constructed, and facilities for several social service agencies were established. Low-income housing and social service agencies remain an important part of the Belltown community.

In the early 1970s the high-rise construction that had become common downtown finally came to Belltown. The city's first high-rise condominium, the Royal Crest, opened in 1972, followed by two Seattle Housing Authority high-rise buildings for low-income elderly and disabled residents. In the early 1980s several high-rise commercial buildings were built, including the Fourth and Battery (1977) and Fourth and Battery (1979) buildings. Another significant project was KIRO Broadcast House (1968), not far from the 1950s Fisher Broadcasting (KOMO) building across Denny Way (replaced in 2000).

An important factor in the residential rebirth of this area was a change in city codes to allow downtown buildings to have up to five stories of wood-frame construction on a concrete base, which is much less expensive than the steel-and-concrete construction previously required for this height. The first result of this change was the demolition of the Film Exchange Building on Second Avenue, replaced in 1992 by Belltown Court. In later years, however, values increased sufficiently that concrete and steel construction became the rule, with condominiums exceeding twenty stories.

In the 1994 Seattle Comprehensive Plan, the Belltown/Denny Regrade district was designated an Urban Center, an area designated for growth in residents and jobs. An additional 4,500 jobs and 6,500 households were estimated by 2014, for a density of 46.3 households per acre, by far the highest in Seattle. In 1999 the city adopted the Denny Regrade/Belltown Neighborhood Plan, for the area bounded by Elliott Bay, Fifth Avenue, Stewart Street and Denny Way. This community-driven plan supported the priorities of the earlier plans and emphasized the need to maintain Belltown's diverse population, services, housing types and artistic character.

During this period Belltown was once again transformed. The low rents had attracted many artists, musicians and funky businesses, who were able to take advantage of Belltown's convenient location and historic character. Soon, galleries, art studios and nightclubs joined the more traditional taverns, cafes, and services, and Belltown acquired a reputation as a desirable

and uniquely urban neighborhood. By 2000, however, the increasing number of high-rise condominiums and office buildings had changed its character once again.

The End of Belltown Industry

By the late 1960s, economic and technological developments led to the decline of Belltown's industries and subsequent changes in land use. The American Can Company plant closed in 1970. The last major industrial presence was Skyway Luggage, which expanded into the adjacent Booth Fisheries building in 1965; it maintained its properties into the 1990s, but with minimal manufacturing activity. The Currin-Greene Shoe Manufacturing Company (a manufacturer of logging and hiking boots) moved to Ballard and the building was demolished in 1996. The numerous small warehouses and light industrial buildings on Western and Elliott avenues were either replaced or modernized, housing support services such as printers or dealers in industrial or commercial equipment. However, by the mid-1990s many of these were themselves being replaced by high-rise condominiums.

During the 1960s-70s most of the housing stock built in the industrial district for workers was either left to deteriorate or was demolished. The last three remaining workers' cottages, near the foot of Vine Street, were designated as Seattle historic landmarks and incorporated into a park. Several duplexes and apartment buildings along Western Avenue have been replaced with condominiums in recent years; the last remaining one (highly altered) is the Bayview Apartments (formerly the Call Apartments).

Streetscape and Parks

Over most of its history little attention was paid to the streetscapes or open spaces of Belltown. Despite its considerable residential population, it was seen as a commercial/light industrial district, with few amenities of its own. Residents were able to enjoy two nearby amenities: Denny Park, near Denny Way and Aurora Avenue, and the 1920s civic center complex, which was later expanded into Seattle Center.

As part of the effort to make Belltown an attractive residential neighborhood, both community members and the City have focused on open space and streetscapes in the past two decades. In 1975 Tilikum Place, the small triangle at Denny Way and Cedar Street with a statue of Chief Seattle, was re-designed as a park. The following year Belltown got its first real park, called Regrade Park, at Third Avenue and Bell Street. The largest effort was the First Avenue Linear Park and Urban Arboretum (1986), which added a variety of street trees and art pieces such as bus stop benches of sandstone construction remnants. In 1996 a similar design was completed on Second Avenue, with wider sidewalks, curb bulbs, custom-designed light standards and benches and a variety of street trees. Concrete planks in the sidewalk are reminders of the original wooden sidewalks.

In 1995 the Belltown P-Patch at the foot of Vine Street opened as a community garden featuring extensive local artwork. In 1998, the last three examples of workers' cottages were incorporated

into the adjacent park. Now designated as City of Seattle historic landmarks, they have been restored and are once again being lived in. Vine Street also features “Growing Vine Street,” a community-driven experiment in creating a “green street” that returns nature to the city with an artwork, street trees and a unique drainage system that captures and re-uses storm water.

Major Property Types and Architectural Trends

Residential Buildings

From the first half of the twentieth century, Belltown had what was probably the city’s broadest variety of affordable housing types, with single family dwellings, duplexes, row houses, flats, workers’ hotels and apartment buildings. Today the smaller types are largely gone, replaced by high-density, more expensive condominiums and apartments. However, the district still has numerous examples of three historic housing types: the workers’ hotel, the mixed-use apartment building and the apartment block.

Four groups of residential buildings most strongly convey Belltown’s history.

- The three brick buildings (the Austin Bell, Hull and Barnes) built in 1889 at First Avenue and Battery Street each originally had a residential component; the Barnes building now has restored apartments, and the Bell Building contains condominiums.
- The Wayne Apartments (2222 Second Avenue), with three steep gables, is a unique “regrade hybrid” and an example of the typical housing stock that once covered the slopes of Denny Hill. It was originally built above Second Avenue about 1890; in 1911, after the street was regraded, the owners built a new storefront, raising the old building to make room for the new.
- Across the street at 2231-2235 Second Avenue (c. 1900-1907) are two of the oldest buildings on Second Avenue, and one of the very few remaining wood-clad structures downtown; both originally had apartments upstairs.
- The Vine Court (1911), now offices, is unique in that it has three entrances, a form that resembles the rowhouses that were common in the area before regrading.
- Finally, the three cottages at the Belltown P-Patch Park at Elliott Avenue and Vine Street, were built in 1906-16, and are the last remaining examples of the dozens of small workers’ cottages that covered the western slope when local industry was thriving.

Workers’ Hotels

First Avenue was the initial street to be regraded and was most convenient to waterfront industries, so it was lined with workers’ hotels by the first decade of the twentieth century.

Many of these buildings remain and have been restored as affordable housing, composing a very important part of the historic character of western Belltown.

A step up from rooming houses, workers' hotels catered largely to single men who rented by the week or month. The individual rooms did not include a kitchen or a bathroom and residents shared a toilet room and bathtub on each floor, and ate in nearby restaurants. These hotels were typically small brick-clad wood-frame or masonry buildings of two-to-four stories, with commercial uses (often a cafe or tavern) on the ground floor. Many of these facilities were closed in the 1970s because owners did not want to upgrade them to conform to stricter fire codes. After sitting vacant for many years, most that survive have been converted to studio apartments for low-income residents, often with individual bathing and cooking facilities.

The oldest workers' hotels in Belltown are the Oregon (1902), the Guiry (1903), the Douglas (1904) and the Alexandria (Donald) (1904). The largest number were built in 1907-11, perhaps as part of the economic optimism of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition: the Strand (Kasota), the Utah (Apex), the Schillestad, the Scargo and the Lewiston. The New Latona Hotel/Glaser Building (1909) is now a boutique hotel with a restaurant on the first floor.

The William Tell Hotel is unique in Belltown as it appears to have originally served largely as a transient hotel rather than as a residential hotel. It is located in the Film Row district, an area with many visitors, rather than on the waterfront-oriented First Avenue. While tourist hotels were common in the downtown area, they were rare north of Lenora Street. It is now permanent housing, although many of the rooms still have shared baths.

No workers' hotels remain that were built after 1911, the year that the second regrade was completed. It appears that developers quickly turned their efforts to building larger, more upscale buildings with efficiency apartments rather than simple rooms. The hotels had a limited market, appealing primarily to single men. The number of middle-class women in the work force increased following World War I, and they desired respectable and affordable housing, something that could not be obtained at the workers' hotels with no kitchens and shared baths.

Mixed-use Apartment Buildings

Mixed-use apartment buildings are found along the main streets of most of Seattle's older neighborhoods, with one or more floors of apartments above commercial storefronts. In Belltown, however, most residential buildings are either the more modest workers' hotels or single-purpose apartment blocks with no commercial uses. This category is somewhat elastic, as uses change. Many now have offices rather than apartments upstairs, or the rooms that originally did not have private kitchen and bath facilities have been remodeled to modern standards. In other cases, apartments have replaced offices. One characteristic of the mixed use building is that it typically has an understated residential entry, between or beside the storefronts, and a minimal lobby.

One of the most notable examples of mixed-use apartment buildings in Belltown is the Rivoli Apartments (1910), a large building designed by prominent architect A. H. Albertson of Howells

and Stokes. It emphasizes the apartment entry with an elaborate terra cotta surround. Next door is the El Rey Apartments, built the same year but much simpler in style. The New Pacific building on First Avenue was built in 1904 as a hospital and nursing school, but was converted to apartments in 1919. The former Rodeo Café building (now Zeek's Pizza) on Denny Way is one of the oldest buildings in the vicinity, built in 1902; its original apartments have been converted to offices. Nearby is the Hermosa Apartments (1913, now 2700 Fourth Avenue), with five floors of apartments above the storefronts. In the industrial area, the building at 2700 Elliott Avenue (now Northwest Protective Services), built in 1910, probably originally had lodgings above a restaurant.

A ground-breaking example of mixed-used development was the Grosvenor House (now known as Wall Street Tower), built at 500 Wall Street in 1949. The designer was Earle W. Morrison, one of the city's most prominent apartment designers. At the time of its construction, development was just recovering from World War II, but apartment growth (mostly with federal assistance) boomed both within and outside of the city to meet the critical need for housing. This was one of the first large Seattle apartment complexes of the post-war period. It was also one of the first to adopt this distinctive form, with an 18-story tower set on a full-block base with a garage and stores. Even with intense downtown development in recent years, this remains a distinctive feature of the neighborhood.

Apartment Blocks

Belltown has some of the city's best examples of single-purpose apartment buildings with little or no commercial use. A review of Baist maps and survey data shows that between the completion of the second Denny Regrade in 1911 and the Depression in 1930 at least 20 apartment buildings were constructed in the area. The buildings are scattered along Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth avenues; none are located east of Fifth Avenue.

Three buildings remain from before 1911. Two of these are near Denny Way at the northern end of the regrade: the Cedar (Watermarke) built in 1908 and the William Daniels (Centerview) from 1910. The Call Apartments (Bayview, 1910) on Western Avenue is one of few remaining example of original multifamily housing in this former industrial area; it has been significantly modernized. The Vine Court (1911) at Third Avenue and Vine Street is unique because it has three porches and entries for its original eight units; it is now used as offices. Four more apartment buildings were constructed in the World War I decade: the Adams (1915), the Fleming (1916), the Castle (1918) and the Franklin (1918).

The post-World War I recession slowed construction, but it was followed by a decade of intensive development. Between 1922 and 1925 ten major apartment buildings were constructed in Belltown: the Fifth Avenue Court, the Charlesgate, the Stonecliff, the Humphrey, the Lexington-Concord, the Windermere, the Bremer, the Devonshire, the Davenport and the Cornelius. At least two additional buildings from this period have been demolished, both on Fourth Avenue: The Lynwood, a sister building to the Charlesgate, and the Tramontane. The last of the 1920s buildings was the Le Sourd (Edwards) Apartments on Fifth Avenue, in 1929.

No significant apartment construction occurred in Belltown from that time until the Grosvenor House mixed-use development in 1949.

Most of these buildings are generally similar on both exterior and interior, with some variations. They are typically three to four stories in height, of brick masonry or wood frame construction faced with brick; a small number are of reinforced concrete. All have terra cotta ornamentation with Tudor, Mediterranean, Classical or Gothic motifs. They generally have a block form, extending from lot line to lot line, but with light wells or narrow courtyards on the side or rear. Some Belltown apartments depart from this formula, however. The Cornelius (nine stories) was the largest building in its neighborhood, and the Humphrey and Hermosa (2700 Fourth) were six stories. The Humphrey has a large central courtyard that is now used by a restaurant in the summer months. The Davenport and the Devonshire have front courtyards above a garage, with the garage door in the front façade. Apartment garages were common in the neighborhoods, but rare in Belltown. The Charlesgate (like the demolished Lynwood) has a more complex footprint with several courtyards.

Apartment amenities and sizes were targeted to the potential tenants that developers expected in a particular location. Because of Belltown's proximity to downtown and relative distance from schools and playgrounds, its apartments were designed for downtown workers, either singles or couples without children. Thus, there were a large number of inexpensive efficiency units, or studios. Some buildings also had a variety of one-bedroom units, which would accommodate a couple, and even a few two-bedroom units, which could potentially accommodate a roommate or a child. However, Belltown does not appear to have had significant examples of the higher-end or luxury apartments built on First Hill and Capitol Hill during this period (some owner-occupied units may have been more luxurious). These buildings (such as those developed by Frederick Anhalt) sought to provide the amenities of an elegant home, including spacious rooms and landscaped surroundings, and Belltown was probably not considered sufficiently desirable as a neighborhood for this purpose.

The building interiors have many similarities. They typically have small lobbies, often clad with marble or other luxurious materials, with a central staircase and mailboxes. More elegant buildings feature such details as a fireplace, large mirrors, paired staircases or a sitting area. Buildings up to three stories are unlikely to have elevators; larger buildings have a small elevator as well as one or more staircases. Apartments are usually arranged along double-loaded corridors with windows opening onto either the street or an inner courtyard or light well. Shared facilities such as laundry rooms and storage areas were originally in the basement; in many cases, storage areas have been converted to additional units. The basement also contained a trash/incinerator room and a boiler room. Most buildings originally had steam heat, but some have been converted to electric baseboard or wall heaters.

Belltown apartment blocks range in size from the Cornelius, with 137 units, to the Adams, with 22 units; most are approximately 40 to 60 units. They all have predominantly studio apartments, which were known as "efficiency apartments" at the time they were built. The typical efficiency apartment is between 400 and 550 square feet in size and consists of a living room, a full bath, and a kitchen with appliances and cabinets. Often an extra-large closet or dressing room (usually

large enough to contain a bed) opens off the living room. Original building plans show that wall beds, built-in cabinets and dinettes enhanced the usefulness of the small space; it is not known how many of these features remain. In many cases, leaded glass, oak floors and tile bathrooms added elegance. A one-bedroom unit would have most of the same characteristics, but with a separate bedroom rather than just the dressing room.

Commercial Buildings

The majority of pre-World War II commercial buildings in Belltown are simple one- or two-story retail buildings of brick masonry or wood-frame construction faced with brick or stucco. Most of them originally had four to six storefronts, although most now have fewer. The primary defining features are large display windows and, typically, recessed entries. Originally, these spaces accommodated a wide variety of stores and services including cafes, taverns, grocery stores, meat markets, bakeries, radio repair, barbers and hair salons. Some of these uses remain, but there is less variety, with fewer stores selling basic needs and services and more restaurants and night clubs, typically occupying larger spaces.

Many of these vernacular buildings have been so significantly modernized with new windows and cladding that they are no longer recognizable as early buildings. Two of the oldest and most intact are 2235 Second Avenue (1907), which retains its wood cladding, and the adjoining building which is a few years older. Among the most intact examples of 1920s retail buildings are: Two Bells (1923, 2315 Fourth Avenue); 401-409 Cedar (1926); 425 Cedar Street (1922, 5 Point Cafe); Spitfire (1924, 2213 Fourth Avenue); and Downtown Dog Lounge (1925, 2230 Third Avenue).

Some buildings from this period are distinctly more stylish. Although it has been altered, the Crocodile (1924, 2200 Second Avenue), once a grocery store, had notable terra cotta ornament. Otis Elevator (1923, 2200 Fourth Avenue) built an elegant Georgian building with tall arches. The Seville Building (1929, 2226 Third Avenue) has Spanish Revival detailing and the White & Hitchcock building (1930, 2234 First Avenue) has simple Art Deco detailing. Most notable of all was the Trianon Ballroom at Third Avenue and Wall Street, which was a Spanish-style fantasy with arched parapets, arcades and a tower. The ballroom closed in 1956 and was converted to retail use; in 1985 it was significantly altered for office use with small storefronts.

New construction in the 1940s-50s was noticeably different from previous years. The new businesses were primarily for financial/real estate and business services and equipment firms. These buildings were Modernistic in style, with one or two stories, often with associated parking. They made extensive use of glass and concrete with large windows or window walls. These lists illustrate the primary new businesses of the period.

Financial/real estate firms: Rex Land Company (1946); Northwest Acceptance Corporation (1948); Fidelity Savings (1951, now Wells Fargo); White & Bollard Real Estate (1951, now an architect's office); Farmers Insurance (1951, now Antioch

University); Pacific Mutual Life (1957, now Car-Toys); National Bank of Commerce (1954, now US Bank)

Business services/equipment: Universal Index Tab (1948, now Lighting Supply); Hoover vacuums (1949); Elliott Addressing Machines (1950, now Wasabi Bistro); Hunley Engineering (1950, now Top Pot Doughnuts); Royal Typewriter (1953); Burroughs Corporation (1954, now American Lung Association); Keuffel & Esser (1955)

Film Exchanges

Belltown has several remaining examples of a building type unique to the neighborhood, the film exchange. During the 1920s Belltown became the center for the film industry in the Pacific Northwest, a role it played through the 1960s. The nature of the industry encouraged the clustering of buildings, which allowed company representatives and theater managers from throughout the region to socialize and take care of their business at one time.

In the heyday of movies, films were shipped by rail to major cities throughout the country for distribution to smaller communities. Each of these cities had a “film row,” where theater owners could come to see what was available. Seattle served the largest area, with more than 500 theaters from Alaska to Montana. In the early years, film companies operated out of downtown office blocks, but in the teens they began consolidating in a “Film Row” near Third Avenue and Lenora Street; the oldest extant film exchange is the Pathé Exchange (1922) at 2025 Third Avenue. Film exchanges were unique buildings, not only because of their function, but because of the nature of early nitrate film. The highly flammable film had to be handled with great care and stored in explosion-proof vaults. An exchange building would have several storage vaults as well as rooms for inspecting the film, shipping and office use; larger ones also had space to store and handle advertising materials and movie posters, which were loaned with the films.

The industry moved north the Belltown in 1928, with the construction of two large film exchange buildings on the west side of Second Avenue between Battery and Wall streets. This complex housed representatives of Universal Studios, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox and others, as well as support services such as poster companies. It was demolished in 1991. Also in 1928 the RKO building (now Roq la Rue Gallery, 2312 Second Avenue) was built by developer E. N. Canedy, designed by a well-known local architect, Earl Morrison. It retains its distinctive Batchelder tile façade and cast stone pilasters with Art Deco motifs. The MGM/Loew's exchange (2331 Second Avenue) was one of the last to be built, in 1936. Its dramatic Art Deco façade is particularly suitable for the film industry and similar to MGM buildings elsewhere. MGM was here until the 1960s. The Paramount Pictures building (now the Catholic Seamen's Club) was built in 1937 in the Streamline Moderne style. Buena Vista (2332 Second Avenue) and National Screen Service (2420 Second Avenue) also had exchanges nearby and other buildings in the area may have also been exchanges; it is not known if any film vaults remain.

One of the most important of the local film industry buildings was the B. F. Shearer Company (1925, 2320 Second Avenue). Shearer supplied theatrical furnishings such as seats and curtains

to theaters and schools throughout the Northwest. He also owned and managed several theaters, and had a screening room to preview films for theater owners. Although the exterior has been altered, the screening room, known as the Jewel Box Theater, is intact and still used for performances. The Rendezvous Lounge has been in the building for many years.

Not all film-related buildings had specific characteristics. Many buildings in the area had poster companies, concessions and other suppliers to the trade. Virtually every building in the 2300-2400 blocks of Second Avenue was part of the film industry at one point.

Repair Garages and Other Auto-Related Buildings

After the first automobile was sold in Seattle in 1905, the Pike/Pine corridor east of downtown quickly became “Auto Row,” with most of the auto dealers and repair garages. However, both parking and repair garages also located in Belltown, where they were close to work places. They were typically one-story fireproof structures of brick or concrete masonry with heavy timber interiors, because heavy fireproof construction was an important safety feature. They have large open areas for parking or working on cars, and often have one or more storefronts as well as the large garage door on the main façade. Because of the large doors, they are often easy to identify today.

By 1920 there were six garages nearby including the large Cedar Garage at Fourth Avenue and Vine Street. Belltown, so convenient to downtown, was also the center for the Seattle taxicab business. One, at 2302 Second Avenue (later Speakeasy, demolished), was constructed in 1925 as the headquarters and two-story garage for the Seattle Taxicab Company; it later accommodated Yellow Cab, Red Top, Royal Blue, Checker and Dollar (probably with the same ownership) as well. It also served as headquarters for a group of touring companies--Olympic Limousine, Circle Tours, and Gray Line. Brown & White and Black & White cabs had a garage at 2118 Second Avenue (1926), a building later known as Henry’s Garage and now used as a restaurant.

The garage’s predecessor was the stable, and the western part of Belltown had many stables in the early years. Those that remain are on Western Avenue close to the Pike Place Market, at 2114 Western (1902), 2200 Western (1908) and 2315 Western (1908). The Master Garage building (2324 Second Avenue), built in 1907, may have originally been a stable.

Belltown has one remaining service station (1926), now a barbershop at Third Avenue and Lenora Street; the small office building and service area are quite intact. At least three garages remain in their original use, notably the Bell Street Garage near Second Avenue, which is largely intact. Others are Dean’s Transmission (1929, 2116 Fourth Avenue) and a garage at 2218 Fourth Avenue (1924). However, most of the original auto repair garages have been completely altered for office or retail uses. The oldest and largest examples are the Sam Inch Gotham Garage (1914, 2126 Third Avenue) and the Golden West Garage (1919, 2106 Second Avenue), both of which are unrecognizable as garages.

Because the area east of Fifth Avenue remained undeveloped for several decades, numerous car lots and dealerships located there. By the 1960s it rivaled the Pike/Pine corridor as Seattle’s

Auto Row. Andersen Buick was the farthest west, near the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and Lenora Street. Nearby on Seventh Avenue was British Motor Car Distributors, a distinctive International Style building now altered for an architectural office. Metro Volkswagen (1962) was on Eighth Avenue.

Auto-Oriented Suburban-Style Buildings

In the 1950s-60s, other types of auto-oriented businesses also developed in the eastern part of the regrade. Motels were a fairly new concept developed to serve automobile travelers. In the 1920s-30s auto courts had allowed travelers to park right outside their rooms. The new urban motels, however, had two-to-four stories with parking underneath. Several clustered near Denny Way around Seventh Avenue, close to Aurora Avenue (SR 99). Early ones (1957-60) included Towne Center/Kings Inn on Fifth Avenue and the Towne/Days Inn, the Travelodge/8th Avenue Inn and the Century House/La Quinta farther east. They were not only convenient to the highway, but to downtown and the 1962 Exposition 21 as well. Nearby, at the end of Aurora, was the Elephant Car Wash (1956), with a sign designed to attract motorists.

Movie theaters are not necessarily auto-related. However, in the late 1960s three large theaters in eastern Belltown were built, surrounded by parking lots in an effort to compete with the newly-emerging suburban theaters. The most notable of these is the innovative Cinerama (1963) at Fourth Avenue and Lenora Street, which was recently restored. Two other theaters were built in that vicinity in the late 1960s; one has already been demolished and the other is now a church.

Union Halls

Seattle had long been known internationally as a center for labor union activity. The local labor newspaper, the *Seattle Union Record*, reported on March 3, 1900 that forty labor unions met regularly in the city.³⁰ Union membership surged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, partially due to politically-aware immigrant workers from Northern Europe. Unions also gained support by joining with agricultural granges and others in fighting for Progressive era reforms such as women's suffrage, initiative and referendum rights and public ownership of utilities. In the World War I period the Pacific Northwest was a center for the militant Industrial Workers of the World, who were involved in highly-publicized violence in Everett (1916) and Centralia (1919). Seattle's 1919 General Strike secured the city's place in labor history, but slowed the movement until the Depression. Added legal protections for labor during the New Deal and the critical need for workers during World War II led to resurgence in the labor movement.

With this strong basis, the industrial growth and large numbers of new workers during World War II strengthened the local labor movement, despite controls on strikes during wartime. High-profile coast-wide maritime strikes in 1934 and 1946 and a Boeing strike in 1948 helped to raise the visibility of the labor movement. In the late 1940s the city had more than 300 labor

organizations. Many located in downtown offices or near their place of work (such as the Ballard shingle mills) but they increasingly concentrated in Belltown or near the Teamsters' headquarters on Denny Way near Fifth Avenue. In 1942 the Seattle Labor Temple relocated from Sixth Avenue and University Street to First Avenue and Broad Street. The spacious new building had offices for dozens of individual unions as well as for the labor council, an auditorium for large events and a restaurant for socializing.

This move apparently encouraged other unions to build facilities in the area. Other large halls in the vicinity were the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 46) at 2700 First Avenue (1948); Carpenters Center (1957, demolished); and the Sailors Union of the Pacific (1954, 2505 First Avenue). Smaller buildings were the Marine Firemen's Union (1948, 2333 Western Avenue), the Seattle Musicians' Association (1959, 2620 Third Avenue), the Masters, Mates & Pilots (2333 Third Avenue) and the Cooks & Assistants Union (2407 First Avenue).

The larger of these buildings are a distinct building type, with a hiring hall, offices, meeting rooms and often additional facilities such as coffee shops or locker rooms. The most complete was the Sailors Union (now El Gaucho); because it served people away from home, it had a large hiring hall, sleeping rooms, a gymnasium and a barber shop for members. Most are Modernistic or Moderne in style, with clean lines and modern materials such as metal window sash, Roman brick and ceramic or terra cotta tile cladding.

Industrial Buildings

Relatively few of Belltown's industrial buildings remain today. Most of them were on the western slope, an area with outstanding water and mountain views, and have been demolished for high-rise condominiums. Many of the lumber and fish processing businesses closed by the 1930s and by the late 1960s, economic and technological developments led to the decline of all of Belltown's industries and subsequent changes in land use.

The massive 1924 American Can Company plant closed in 1970, reopening in 1980 as the Seattle Trade Center; it is now the headquarters of Real Networks. The company's storage pier (Pier 69) was renovated into the Port of Seattle's headquarters. The last significant industry in the area was Skyway Luggage Company, which remained in its main 1914 building (the former U. S. Radiator Company) until the 1990s. After sitting vacant for a number of years, it was recently altered for use as a religious school. In 1965 Skyway expanded into the 1911 Booth Fisheries (formerly Chlopeck Fish Company) building next door. This has now been converted to storage units. The company still owns the former Northwestern Paper Box Company (1910, 2501 Western Avenue) and the former Marine Café (1911, 2500 Elliott Avenue), but they are not used for manufacturing. The former Compton Lumber Company building at 2315 Western Avenue (originally a stable) is a rare reminder of Belltown's lumber industry; it is now used as studios and a book bindery.

Smaller industries also changed. One little-known example was the Butterfield Trunk Company, which operated in a brick masonry building at 87 Wall Street from 1912 until the 1970s; the building is now used for offices. Nearby at 113 Bell Street was the Ice Delivery Company, which now houses an architectural firm. The Northwest Industrial Buildings at the foot of Denny Way, which housed a variety of small wholesalers and light industries over the years, was converted to art and graphics studios. The anonymous buildings on Western and Elliott avenues that once housed wholesale bakeries and warehouses have been greatly altered for parking or office use. The former Milani's bakery at 2934 Western still has an industrial use, Bavarian Meats. The Empire Laundry at 66 Bell Street has been converted to condominiums.

Printing Plants

The major single category of industrial buildings in Belltown has been printing plants of all sizes. Until the 1930s most printing was done in Pioneer Square or downtown, especially at the foot of Columbia Street. In 1915 there were three printers in Belltown, all on Western Avenue. By the 1940s there were more than a dozen plants, scattered from Western to Fifth avenues. Their distinguishing characteristic are a large well-lit open space for a press room and sturdy construction (heavy timber in older buildings, concrete in more recent ones) to bear the weight of the presses.

Probably the oldest extant plant is the Metropolitan Printing Press Company (1923, 2107 Third Avenue), a very decorative building distinguished by its two-story arches; it has been converted to a restaurant. Metropolitan was so successful that it built a larger new plant at 2603 Third Avenue in 1931. This building, now a large drugstore, is a particularly good example of Art Deco design that retains all of its decorative features, with a zigzag cornice and pilasters and a stained glass window with a chevron pattern. Two other good examples of Art Deco design have been demolished in recent years: California Ink/Security Press at Western Avenue and Cedar Street and Far West Lithography. The latter was a Moderne building with a tower that went well with that of the Trianon Ballroom across the street.

The former Western Printing Company building (1926, 2100 Fifth Avenue) was for many years a florist, and is now a catering facility. Frayn Printing and Publishing Company (81 Vine Street) was located in a 1914 brick-and-timber building obtained from an older industrial use; it has now been converted to office and condominium use. Seattle Home News built a one-story newspaper printing plant in 1946 at 2314 Third Avenue. In 1964 it expanded into the adjoining 1924 print shop, becoming the News Publishing Company and later Pacific Publishing, which published most of Seattle's weekly community papers for many years. The combined building was recently demolished.

The most significant printing/publishing plant was the home of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the city's oldest newspaper, at Fifth Avenue and Wall Street at the eastern edge of the neighborhood.

This distinctive office building and printing plant, designed in 1947, clearly reflects the Moderne aesthetic that was popular at the time. Because the newspaper was owned by the New York-based Hearst Corporation, the building was designed by the prominent New York industrial engineering firm of Lockwood Greene, with Henry Bittman as the local associate architect. The newspaper moved out in 1987, taking with it the building's most distinctive feature, a massive globe encircled with the words "Read the P-I," which was installed on the new building near the Belltown waterfront. The building was converted for office use and the expansive first-floor press room and the loading docks, key characteristics of a newspaper plant, were removed.

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