

# NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY AND CHARACTER ELEMENT



Historic photograph of the ca. 1850 Gothic Revival style brick house at the  
East Shoreline Historic District.

# NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY AND CHARACTER ELEMENT

## Introduction

The first residents of the Whiteaker neighborhood were the Kalapuya Indians who inhabited this section of the Willamette Valley for an undetermined amount of time before the arrival of white settlers. These natives utilized the Willamette River for transportation, recreation and food gathering. The river is still a significant natural resource forming the northernmost boundary of Whiteaker.

The Whiteaker neighborhood was named for Oregon's first governor. John Whiteaker was born in Indiana, arrived in Oregon in 1852 and died in Eugene in 1902. The section of Eugene that is known as Whiteaker is in large part the site of Eugene Skinner's 640 acre Donation Land Claim (DLC) of 1846. West of Skinner's homestead lay the land claim of Prior Blair, for whom Blair Boulevard is named. Blair Boulevard was part of the Willamette Valley's first north/south highway and was a principal entrance into the city. For decades travelers arrived by foot, horse, oxen, mule or wagon, later utilized the Model T, and eventually every form of motor vehicle that came into existence following World War I. Blacksmith shops gave way to gas stations, which sprang up at the intersections of Blair at 5th, 6th and 7th Avenues.

Whiteaker is Eugene's oldest neighborhood. Settlement began in the area now known as the East Skinner Butte Historic District and expanded south to create Eugene's downtown. The Mill Race was a determining factor in this development as agricultural and industrial enterprises located close to this hydroelectric landscape feature. The Mill Race originally flowed north along Mill Street where it branched east at 4th Avenue to rejoin the Willamette River. Development in Whiteaker became more intensive after the arrival of the railroad in 1871. Along with the railroad came prosperity and the downtown core grew while residential development expanded west along 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Avenues. Whiteaker began as a residential neighborhood and evolved into a mix of land uses. Stately Victorian houses, for example, were situated on large lots along 5th, 6th and 7th Avenues prior to the commercial development that we know today. Single family houses were the norm throughout the neighborhood, with some concentration of apartments and boarding houses close to downtown. Along with numerous outbuildings, the family hen house was a common occurrence in Whiteaker prior to World War II.

At the northwest corner of Madison Street and 4th Avenue, the Geary School provided elementary education for Whiteaker students until 1938, when it was converted to the Eugene Vocational School. In 1926, the Whiteaker School was constructed, which expanded high quality elementary education for many residents in the neighborhood. Churches were primarily located in the downtown area so Whiteaker only had two small churches to serve the faithful. Prior to comprehensive zoning of the entire city in 1948, Whiteaker followed the typical random pattern of commercial and industrial development. Commercial enterprises like dry cleaners, service stations, contractors, and plumbers were located along the major

traffic intersections. The Eugene Planing Mill and other lumber yards, grocery wholesalers, grain and feed storage operations, warehouses and gas and oil wholesalers located close to the railroad tracks. Along the south bank of the Willamette River and at the end of Washington Street the Eugene Nursery and L.A. Raup Florist operated sizable greenhouse concerns. As the automobile came to dominate the American landscape a few motor lodges and roadside restaurants developed on South River Road and 6th Avenue.

Whiteaker continues to contribute to the cultural history of the Eugene metropolitan area with industrial, commercial and residential activities in structures that date from all periods of local development. Whiteaker has functioned as a "small town within the city" throughout Oregon's statehood. Blair Boulevard has been the working class hub of the west side of the neighborhood. As trends and opportunities have changed so has Whiteaker. During the 1960s and 1970s historic structures were replaced with multi-family housing, commercial enterprises and eventually the Washington/Jefferson Overpass.

The first phase of a historic inventory of Whiteaker was completed in August of 1993. The Neighborhood History and Character Element establishes policy to help preserve and promote the history of Whiteaker and a variety of features that create the neighborhood's special identity. This element contains City policies and implementation strategies to guide historic preservation goals for the neighborhood, which hopefully will result in the retention of significant character defining features.

## **Overview of Key Issues**

### **Historic Inventory and Protection**

The Whiteaker neighborhood contains some of the oldest properties in the city, and for this reason requires a comprehensive survey and inventory of historic resources, including landscape features. Approximately 600 structures in Whiteaker meet the 50 year age criterion for historic identification. (Refer to the map titled, "Historic Resources" on page 18.) For the purposes of this plan "historic" is defined as those aspects of our culture, including events, people, sites, architecture, objects, or landscape features that inform us about what has gone before, helping us to understand the significant aspects of Native American or American culture.

The Whiteaker Community Council has strongly supported conducting a historic survey for the neighborhood. First phase survey and inventory work began during the winter of 1993 through the cooperation of the City of Eugene, the University of Oregon and the State Historic Preservation Office. In 1993, about 410 historic properties were identified during a reconnaissance survey of a portion of the neighborhood. In 1994, additional properties were identified as the reconnaissance survey work was completed for the entire neighborhood. Intensive level survey work continued to help determine the significance of each historic resource. Following completion of the survey and inventory, protection strategies will be

implemented so that significant landscape features, architecture, and other character defining elements can be maintained and preserved for future generations to enjoy.

A percentage of historic structures may be subject to demolition due to deteriorated building conditions, pressures for redevelopment, and property owner neglect. The zoning of many of the structures currently encourages more intensive development. With the exception of the properties in the East Skinner Butte Historic District and the Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area only three structures in the Whiteaker neighborhood are included on the City historic landmark list and offered protection through National Register listing.

### **East Skinner Butte Historic District**

The East Skinner Butte Historic District was the first historic district for the City of Eugene, with National Register designation occurring in 1982. The district is residential in character, illustrating a spectrum of architecture that was popular between 1875 and the 1920s. The district boundaries are irregular. Twenty nine tax lots are included in the designation. Since 1982 many property owners have upgraded and improved their properties to reflect the historic period of construction of a variety of architectural styles. East Skinner Butte Historic District has been inventoried, evaluated and protected. Skinner Butte itself is a character defining landscape feature northwest of the district. City owned Shelton-McMurphey/Johnson House, an important local landmark, is located on the south side of the Butte and is not within the boundaries of the historic district.

Protection strategies for the above resources are firmly established through local and federal designation, as well as design guidelines. Residents are concerned that proposed changes to the Ferry Street Bridge may have a negative impact on the character of the district. Increased off-street parking by EWEB and downtown employees impacts the look and character of the district. Residents have been involved in the development of alternatives for the Ferry Street Bridge corridor to try to ensure that any future improvements will include provisions to enhance the historic district by minimizing the impact of through traffic in the area. Increased on-street parking by downtown employees has led to the recent development of a residential preferential parking program in the East Skinner Butte area, aimed at preserving adequate off-street parking for customers, residents and visitors while lessening the impact of commuter traffic.

Zoning for the area is primarily R-2/20 which allows multiple family residential developments up to 20 units per acre. A few tax lots in the district are zoned R-3, mixed use, and I-2 light medium industrial. In general, existing zoning does not encourage the preservation of historic resources. There is no mechanism in place for design review of surrounding land uses, which can result in incompatible development.

*Note: All references to "existing" zoning reflect zoning prior to adoption of the August 1994 Whiteaker Plan. Based on the Plan, the City Council adopted a significant number of zone changes including the application of Site Review Subdistrict zoning.*

## **Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area**

The Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area is an enclave of commercial, industrial and residential buildings that were important to the early development of the Eugene community. The district contains architectural resources that span four major periods of development, ranging in construction dates from 1875 to 1945. Twenty six tax lots make up the district within an irregular boundary along Blair Boulevard and Van Buren Street.

Because this designation was instigated by property owners in the Blair Boulevard Commercial Area there is a strong indication that Whiteaker neighbors have a distinct respect for local history. Designation as a historic district encourages property owners to improve and maintain their properties within clearly defined design criteria. Improvements to structures located within the district might create a positive economic climate that would be conducive to new business enterprises and increased home ownership in the residential neighborhoods to the east and west.

Current zoning does not encourage the preservation of historic structures nor address distinct characteristics of the area. The inventory of surrounding historic residential architecture could create the basis for the creation of additional historic districts to the east and west of the commercial district.

### **Design Standards**

The current look of Whiteaker is the product of many years of development of varied land uses in the neighborhood. Natural features, like Skinner Butte and the Willamette River, co-exist with man-made features like the railroad tracks, Washington/Jefferson overpass, and the Chambers Connector. Over time major traffic arterials have fragmented the different portions of the neighborhood, while mixed zoning has contributed to the look of commercial and industrial buildings juxtaposed with residential architecture. Some of the multi-family residential development of the late 1970s and 1980s in the Whiteaker neighborhood was not compatible with the ambient design or the historic qualities of the neighborhood. Designs for multi-family housing were sometimes unsympathetic to existing landscape resources and neighboring buildings, both historic and contemporary.

One distinctive feature in Whiteaker is the mix of allowable land uses. Because of the varied pattern of land uses and zoning, poorly designed new construction can have a significant impact on surrounding property values, traffic circulation, vegetation, historic structures and overall livability. Existing zoning throughout most of Whiteaker encourages greater intensity of development. There are no clear design standards to ensure compatible reuse or redevelopment of a site.

*Note: All references to "existing" zoning reflect zoning prior to adoption of the August 1994 Whiteaker Plan. Based on the Plan, the City Council adopted a significant number of zone changes including the application of Site Review Subdistrict zoning.*

## Transportation and Development

Whiteaker is bounded on three sides by heavily used automobile routes, and is bisected into east and west areas by the Washington/Jefferson Overpass, while the Southern Pacific railroad divides the neighborhood into north and south. Heavy motor vehicle usage contributes to diminished air quality and noise along the major transportation corridors and residential areas of the neighborhood. As traffic increases these intrusions may diminish the environmental quality of the area, which will directly affect neighborhood character. Truck traffic due to the mix of land use is incompatible with the residential land uses. Future expansions and alterations to transportation routes may affect historic and character defining features of the neighborhood. Particular attention will need to be given to street improvements, curb cuts, lighting, and signs in the two historic districts.

The railroad arrived in Eugene in 1871 and has had a significant effect on land use in Whiteaker. As the neighborhood and the railroad have grown, conflicts have developed. Changes are needed to soften the railroad's impact on the neighborhood and support long-range growth and efficiency of rail operations in Eugene. The railroad has nostalgic and historic appeal to many community members.



*"Whiteaker home and yard," drawn by student at Whiteaker School.*

## Neighborhood Identity

Whiteaker is a diverse urban neighborhood that is located near many of the amenities that make Eugene a desirable place to live. The neighborhood is adjacent to magnificent park land that is located along the south bank of the Willamette River. Whiteaker's mix of business and industrial enterprises close to residential areas is a positive feature that creates an opportunity for nearby employment of neighborhood residents. It also represents a type of "incubator" environment for small businesses that require inexpensive facilities, often developed in conjunction with residential uses. Whiteaker is home to a diverse population base that includes citizens of various ethnic origins, educational backgrounds and socio-economic groupings. A variety of social service agencies are located in Whiteaker, some maintaining offices in historic structures. Over the years businesses have begun, prospered, and continued to establish themselves in Whiteaker.

The Whiteaker neighborhood is generally bounded by the Willamette River to the north, the Ferry Street bridge to the east, Seventh Street to the south and the Chambers Connector to the west. The Washington/Jefferson Overpass divides the neighborhood into two distinct east and west sections. The Southern Pacific railroad separates the neighborhood into north and south sections. Whiteaker illustrates how transportation has evolved over the decades from the days of the riverboat, through the railroad era, and into the dominance of the motor age. During most of the last century, Whiteaker has been significantly affected by transportation changes such as the construction of highways, one-way arterials, and major bridge projects.

Skinner Butte is a familiar landscape feature that physically and visually separates the eastern half of the neighborhood into West and East Butte neighborhoods. A significant quantity of park land, including Owen Rose Garden, is located in Whiteaker, providing convenient access for residents. The basalt columns on the west side of the butte are a landscape feature used by climbing enthusiasts. Whiteaker contains numerous mature street trees and a pleasant mix of ornamental vegetation. All of these landscape features are part of the identity of the Whiteaker neighborhood.

The residential area south of the railroad tracks and east and west of Blair Boulevard is surrounded by commercial and industrial development. The Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area is the hub of this part of the neighborhood. Van Buren Street provides a connection between First Avenue and the neighborhood to the south. North of the tracks the Sladden Subdivision, an early planned community, remains primarily residential in character with some non-residential land use along the north side of First Avenue. First Avenue is an important link between the east and west sections of Whiteaker. It provides convenient access to routes either north along the bank of the Willamette River or south along the flank of the butte onward into the East Skinner Butte historic district.

Most properties in Whiteaker are rental units, with some structures in need of repair and maintenance. Whiteaker residents would like to better the neighborhood by increasing options/opportunities for purchase or home ownership to interested low-income renters. In

general, an increased level of owner occupancy could improve the stability and livability of the neighborhood. Many residents believe Whiteaker is a positive place to live, particularly with its convenient access to downtown amenities and the Valley River Center, which is located along the north bank of the Willamette River. The unique mix of commercial, industrial, and residential architecture, in association with transportation corridors, is generally thought to be a positive aspect of Whiteaker's history and character.



PHOTOGRAPHER: JOHN BAUGLISS



*The Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area is working class district characterized by a mix of building types that are located along a diagonal boulevard with a quantity of large shade tree.*

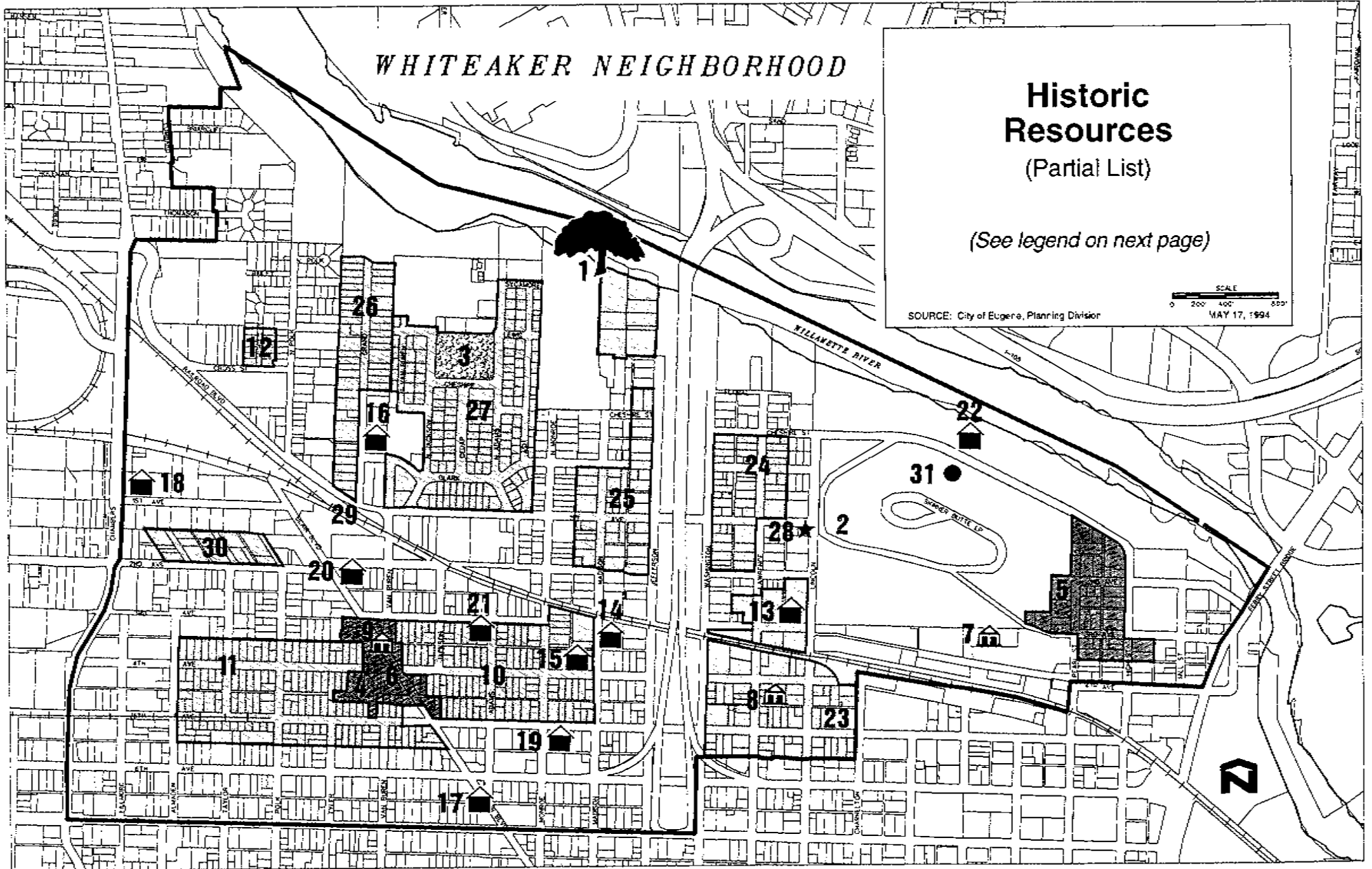
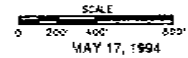


# WHITEAKER NEIGHBORHOOD

## Historic Resources (Partial List)

(See legend on next page)

SOURCE: City of Eugene, Planning Division



## Historic Resources Legend\*

### HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

1. "Republican" Cherry at Owen Rose Garden, over 130 years old
2. The "Columns", site of early basalt quarry for Eugene
3. Sladden Park, established 1926
4. Scobert Park, illustrating agricultural landscape

### HISTORIC DISTRICT

5. East Skinner Butte Historic District
6. Blair Blvd. Historic Commercial Area



### NATIONAL REGISTER

7. Shelton-McMurphey/Johnson House (1888 Queen Anne Style) – 303 Willamette Street
8. Eakins/Snodgrass House (1892 Queen Anne Style) – Lawrence Street
9. Hayse Blacksmith, 1914, at 357 Van Buren Street

### POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT *(Boundaries will require further research)*

10. Primary residential development, 1884 – 1910
11. Residential development, 1910 – 1928
12. Cross Place housing built for Anderson-Middleton Lumber Mill, 1925



### POTENTIAL HISTORIC SITE

13. Eugene Planing Mill, operating 1902 – 1989
14. Jefferson Elevator, 1946
15. Eugene Vocational School site, 1938, former site of Geary School, 1890
16. Whiteaker School, 1926
17. Circa 1915 barn on alley between W. 5th and W. 6th Avenues
18. Willamette National Forest Warehouse, built by Civilian Conservation Corps., 1935
19. Classic Revival Residence, 1910, at 529 Monroe Street
20. R.H. Pierce Manufacturing Co., 1926
21. Stone bungalow at 304 Adams Street
22. Lamb Cottage, originally part of the "Public Tourist Park". Established in Skinner Butte Park in 1921.

### RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

23. Dating from 1871 to 1920's
24. Dating from 1886 to 1940's
25. After 1889 to 1930's
26. After 1911 to 1943
27. Sladden subdivision, 1926



### HISTORIC SITE

28. Plaque for original site of Eugene Skinner's Cabin, erected in 1846
29. **SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD**, arrived in Eugene in 1871
30. **INDUSTRIAL AREA** related to timber manufacturing, kilns and industrial buildings still extant
- 31. Reproduction of **SKINNER'S CABIN**

\* The Historic Resources map does not illustrate potential expansion of the East Skinner Butte Historic District to include the Shelton-McMurphey/Johnson House nor individual sites or buildings that might be eligible for historic landmark designation.

## Neighborhood Goal

The Whiteaker neighborhood will be a showcase example of the connection between historic preservation and a livable community. Positive features of the neighborhood will be retained and give Whiteaker a feeling of community and a rich sense of place.

## City Policies/Implementation Strategies

Policies are in **bold**. Indented below each policy are the associated Implementation Strategies.

### Historic Inventory and Protection

- 1. Continue to implement a program of historic preservation in the Whiteaker community to further identify historic resources and educate community members on their importance.**
  - 1.1 Prepare a neighborhood walking tour guide illustrating historic resources.
  - 1.2 Complete a cultural resource (historic) survey in the Whiteaker neighborhood.
  - 1.3 Prepare a historic report summarizing the number, type, and general location of historic properties in Whiteaker and the relative significance of listing properties as City or National Register landmarks.
  - 1.4 Develop interpretive displays and signs in the neighborhood that explain significant historic events or sites. Examples of sites should include: the Willamette shipyard, lumber mill, gravel quarry, original Ferry Street bridge site, and the observatory on Skinner Butte.
- 2. Continue to dedicate funds to loan programs for rehabilitation of historic properties and encourage the restoration of structures, landscapes and other landmarks of historic significance.**
  - 2.1 Encourage the use of both private and public funds for the rehabilitation of historic properties in Whiteaker.
- 3. Preserve existing trees on public land and right-of-way.**
  - 3.1 Encourage protection of significant large canopy street trees and other important landscape features of the neighborhood by educating residents and property owners on the value of existing landscape materials.

**4. Continue, enhance, and promote the street tree planting program.**

- 4.1 Establish a map and inventory of significant existing traditional tree species for Whiteaker.
- 4.2 When planting new trees use a mix that includes appropriate traditional and native species.

**5. Inventory and promote protection of significant trees on private property.**

- 5.1 Instigate a permit process, with review guidelines, for major pruning, removal, paving, or construction within the drip line of the tree.
- 5.2 Create incentives for property owners to care for and protect significant identified trees, such as: a) creation of a trained volunteer group and/or City staff to assist owners with tree maintenance and protection, and b) reduction in off-street parking requirements in return for protection of trees on the site.

**Blair Boulevard Commercial Area Historic District and East Skinner Butte Historic District**

**6. Periodically evaluate different ways to preserve areas that contain a high concentration of significant historic properties. (Refer to pages 39 and 51.)**

- 6.1 Complete research on historic architecture in the neighborhood, particularly east and west of the proposed Blair Boulevard Commercial Area Historic District. If deemed acceptable, create additional historic districts to include the east and west Blair residential areas.
- 6.2 Investigate the feasibility and merit of including the Shelton-McMurphey/Johnson House, Skinner Butte and Skinner Butte Park as part of the East Skinner Butte Historic District.
- 6.3 Install ornamental lighting, where needed, that is compatible to the character of each historic district.
- 6.4 Implement the proposed action in the "Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan" to work with the Historic Review Board in evaluating ways to preserve the historic sites in the Skinner Butte area and increase the public's awareness of their role in Eugene's early development. (Refer to page 35 of the Parks Plan.)
- 6.5 Develop a list of compatible tree species for the historic districts.

## **Design Standards**

- 7. Review existing City Code regulations on height, setback, area, and lot coverage to strengthen compatibility between existing residential development and new commercial, industrial, medium and high-density residential developments, and the positive impact of new development on the public streetscape.**
  - 7.1 Examine a variety of tools and approaches for effectively regulating new development so that it is compatible with historic and character defining aspects of the neighborhood, including landscape requirements for parking lots and planting strips.
  - 7.2 Develop, implement and enforce design or development standards that conserve Whiteaker as a traditional small community and foster the development of buildings and spaces that have a positive relationship to the human scale and enhance the neighborhood's livability.
  - 7.3 Develop West 5th Avenue as a landscaped boulevard that would connect Blair Boulevard Historic Commercial Area with the Fifth Street Public Market.
  - 7.4 Implement design standards for new and non-historic structures to ensure compatible development in the neighborhood.
- 8. Amend the Eugene Code to require vegetative screening of barbed wire fences abutting sidewalks and streets and precluding use of barbed wire around vacant lots.**

## **Transportation and Development**

- 9. In evaluating proposed changes to the transportation systems that affect Whiteaker, consider the impacts on historic and character defining features of the neighborhood and design systems that not only move traffic but link and reinforce elements of neighborhood character. (Refer to the Transportation Element beginning on page 53.)**

## **Neighborhood Identity**

- 10. Protect and enhance the natural characteristics of Skinner Butte and the Willamette River.**
  - 10.1 Examine the effectiveness of site review for properties next to the butte that are not controlled by the Willamette River Greenway regulations. If needed, consider alternative land use regulations or incentives to ensure protection.

10.2 Identify portions of the Willamette Riverbank to preserve in as natural a state as possible. This would include encouraging the use of native plant species that help to support wildlife and NOT planting green lawns. (Refer to Strategy 9.3 on page 77.)

**11. Protect and enhance positive features of the neighborhood that help create a strong sense of neighborhood identity.**

11.1 Minimize any impact on the view of Skinner Butte by continuing to restrict height and development in front of the slopes.

<i>Whiteaker Neighborhood is a special place.</i>
<i>Big parks where I live</i>
<i>and they're right across</i>
<i>the street. Basketball hoops</i>
<i>under the freeway. So many trees.</i>
<i>Lots of education.</i>
<i>A.J. Jordan Years old 9 <del>10</del> # 1</i>

*"Whiteaker Neighborhood is special," written by a student at Whiteaker School.*



*"Future housing in Whiteaker," drawn by a student at Whiteaker School.*