

**Business Signage Control in Seattle's Chinatown International District,
Pursuing Healthy Balance of Preservation and Commercial Vitalization
in a Historic Commercial Districts**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Urban Planning

University of Washington

2016

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Urban Design and Planning

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Abstract

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Abstract:

Chinatown International District (Chinatown-ID) is a historic commercial neighborhood in the City of Seattle (the City). The neighborhood is characterized with historic mixed-use buildings from the early 20th century, and appearances of small Asian ethnic businesses. International Special Review District (ISRD) is established as one of the City's historic districts with purposes to preserve historic buildings and community character in Chinatown-ID. This thesis studies business signage control in Chinatown-ID under ISRD's administration. Through the study, it is questioned if the ISRD's signage control is functioning properly in order to enhance the community character by benefiting both preservation of historic buildings and vitalization of small business activities.

The first half of this thesis assesses ISRD's design review program on business signs, as the program is the currently adopted implementation of signage control. The assessment reveals problems around the ISRD's design review program. Problems are caused by absence of objective rules, as well as by separation of ISRD administration away from the city's planning departments. The thesis argues for legislation of objective rules that clearly state size and frequency standards, and for structural improvements of ISRD's administration so that its design review procedures are able to receive supports and evaluations by multiple planning and design professionals.

The latter half studies history and the current context of Chinatown-ID's commercial community. Through the history study, it is clarified that the image of diverse business signs is a part of Chinatown-ID's historical characteristics. An intention of design reviews that pursues compatibility of signage design does not align with enhancement of Chinatown-ID's historic character. The neighborhood context study argues that ISRD embraces both Chinatown-ID's historic core where historic buildings are concentrated, and the area outside where historic buildings are sporadic and low density automobile-oriented uses are more prevailing. While design reviews may be necessary in the historic core purposed to prevent signs from damaging historic buildings, that rational of design reviews is not adaptable in the area outside of the historic core.

Finally, the thesis argues for the potential of business signs that may be strategically used in order to enhance the Chinatown-ID's community character. Diverse expressions of signage designs by individual businesses should be encouraged under objective rules, instead of being restrained by the design review program.

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Terms

SMC

The City of Seattle Municipal Codes

Historic Districts

General term for districts that are designated by municipalities or other public entities with purpose of preserving remained historical structures clustering in the area.

Historic Commercial Districts

Historic Districts that embrace small and local businesses clustering in their historical urban structures.

Design Review

Design Review in this thesis means one of the municipal permit processes. Design reviews are conducted by appointed or elected citizen review boards with intent making aesthetic controls on development projects. Design Reviews involve public hearing processes. Design guidelines are published as criteria for review decisions.

Administrative Review

Administrative Review is another form of the municipal permit processes. Administrative reviews are conducted by authorized municipal workers with intents assuring that development projects follow land use codes. Land use codes generally set objective standards, in contrast to design guidelines that describe aesthetic standards for design reviews.

Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines are a set of document explaining what the ideal architectural and general design features are for projects that are subject to Design Reviews.

Business Sign

An on-premises sign directing attention to a business, profession, commodity, service or entertainment conducted, sold or offered on the lot where the sign is located. This definition shall not include signs located within a structure except those signs oriented so as to be visible through a window. (SMC 23.84.A)

Introduction

This study advocates for a healthy balance of design control on business signage in a historic commercial community. Historic neighborhoods in inner downtowns are often characterized as communities with small local businesses. For these neighborhoods, both distinctive historic character and vibrant commercial activities are significant values. While municipalities in North American cities often set extended signage controls in historic areas, these controls need to be implemented in a way that balances both values.

Chinatown International District (Chinatown-ID) is a valuable historic commercial neighborhoods in the City of Seattle. This area is established as an International Special Review District (ISRD) under the City's preservation ordinance with the intention of conserving historic architectural structures and community character. At the same time, layers of revitalization efforts are made in order to maintain the thriving small business community in the neighborhood.

This study was inspired by an awareness of frustration toward ISRD's signage control among Chinatown-ID's nonprofit workers who are engaged in economic revitalization efforts. Some of these nonprofit workers express their opinions that the control is extreme and performed in an arbitrary way. Responding to the awareness, the first half of this study analyzes ISRD's current signage control in the context of the City's general historic district management. This analysis answers the question if ISRD's structural conditions and existing signage rules have any fault causing the frustration. The latter half of the study details historical and commercial elements of ISRD. This study aims to understand how business signage can both enhance historic community character and benefit commercial activities in ISRD. The last chapter argues for strategic use of signage rules in ISRD, while articulating recommendations for the ISRD's signage control administration.

This thesis draws heavily on municipal codes, design guidelines and other municipal documents in the City of Seattle. Classic texts in urban planning and urban history were also reviewed. Historic photograph collection of Wing Luck Asia Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience was studied in order to find how business signs were used in Chinatown-ID through its history. Additionally, in-person interviews were conducted with public workers who are involved in the Chinatown-ID community.

A limitation of this study is the lack of research finding opinions among business owners in Chinatown-ID. The thesis assume that voices from nonprofit workers who are involved in commercial revitalization efforts represent Chinatown-ID's commercial community. Further studies on opinions of the community's business owners, ISRD's previous review cases and its decisions would have been good additions to this thesis study. This study primarily focuses on the commercial aspect of Chinatown-ID. Residential aspect of the neighborhood is less focused.

Chapter 1

Preservation and Revitalization of Historic Commercial Districts

1.1 Significance of Preservation in Historic Commercial Districts

Historic districts in this thesis are defined as areas that are designated by municipalities with the purpose of preserving remained historical structures and characteristics. According to National Trust for Historic Preservation, over 2,300 municipalities and local communities in the U.S. have preservation ordinances that designate historic districts¹. Their ordinances typically prohibit or limit changes to existing architectural features and establish design review processes in order to control design within districts. In the City of Seattle (the City), as of February 2016, there exists nine (9) historic districts. The City's municipal code describes the legitimacy of historic districts by stating that "the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of sites, improvements and objects of historical, cultural, architectural, engineering or geographic significance, located within the City, are required in the interest of the prosperity, civic pride and general welfare of the people (SMC 25.12.020)." History is the economic, social and cultural assets that have been accumulated through the past. Historic preservation stands on the acknowledgment that preservation of those assets contributes to the current and future prosperity of societies.

While historic districts may include groups of old residential or monumental structures, this thesis's attention goes to historic districts that have commercial land uses. These districts embrace small retail businesses clustering in individually owned historic buildings. Typically they are located in central downtowns. These neighborhoods can be rephrased as downtown "main streets," in contrast with shopping malls, shopping centers or suburban big box retailers. In City of Seattle, out of the nine (9) historic districts, six (6) districts contain commercial communities.

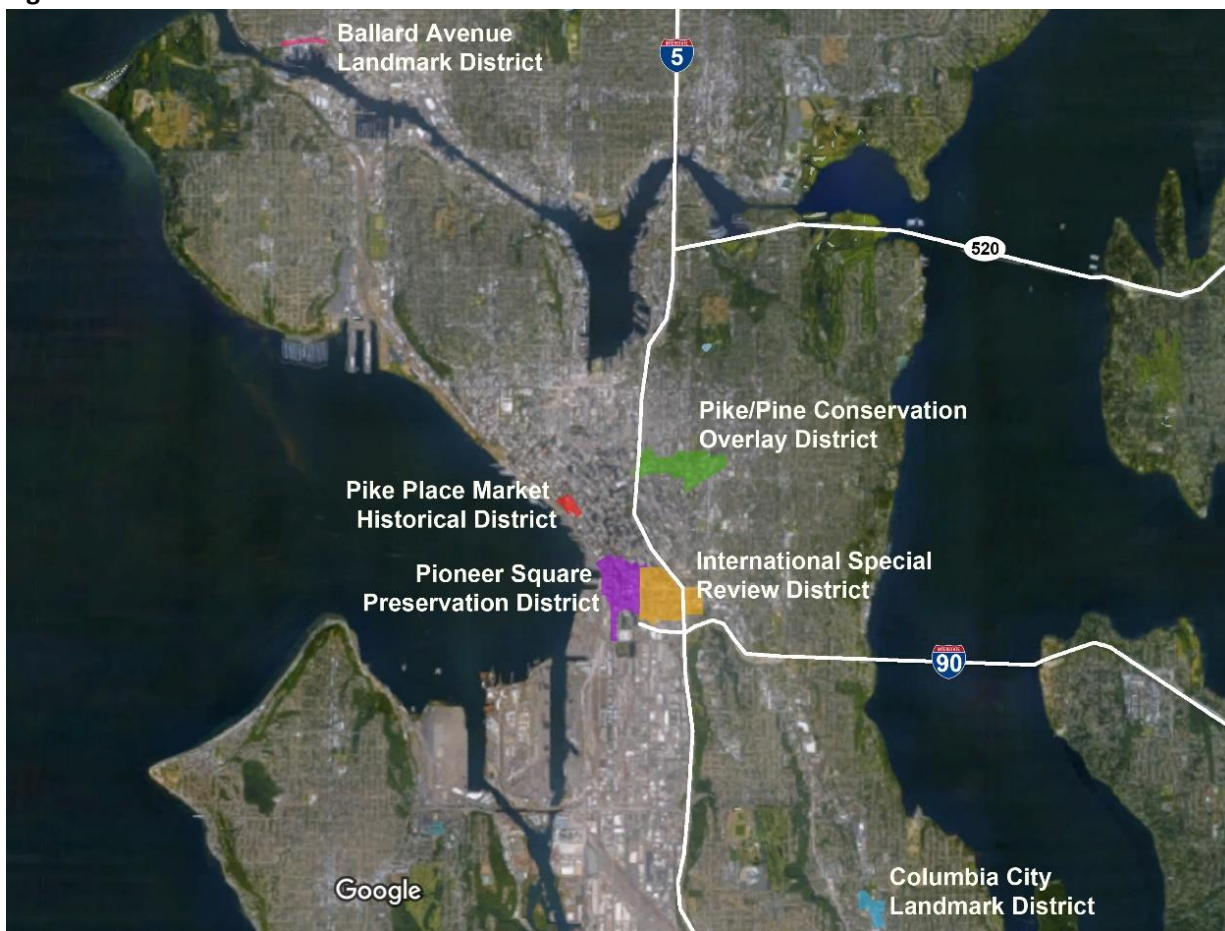
The value of historic commercial districts has been widely recognized by urban designers and planners, since Jane Jacobs articulated the value with her 1961 book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities." The book claimed how American cities were losing "exuberant diversity" as results of urban renewals after World War II (WWII). Those superblock developments replaced richly textured streets of smaller old buildings with larger new structures. Jacobs advocated the significance of mixed-use, short-blocks, buildings that vary in age and density, as they create "diversity surroundings [that] has the practical power of inducing a natural, continuing flow of life and use (Jacobs, 1961)." The Jacobs idea has been a philosophical rationale for the significance preserving historic commercial districts.

Jacobs's voice fostered movements of historic preservation in 1960's. In 1966, the U.S. federal government instituted the Historic Preservation Act and started to designate the National Register of Historic Places. Municipal governments also began designating Historic Districts under preservation ordinances. While federal designations provide benefits for restoration of historic structures with tax incentives and grants, municipal ordinances set legal protections for historic buildings and architectural elements from being demolished.

¹ What Is a Historic District?. Retrieved May 12, 2016, from http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/saving-a-place/historic-districts/what-is-a-historic-district.html#.Vsayx_krJD8, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBuAlaNg> on June 10, 2016

City of Seattle designated Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD) in 1970 as the first historic district in the City. According to the City’s Department of Neighborhood website, “By the 1960s a City plan called for the construction of a ring road around the downtown that would have required razing many of the district’s historic buildings².” A local group of architects and historians “documented a collection of architecturally significant structures from the Richardsonian Romanesque period³.” Their efforts convinced City officials to “recognize the historic significance and commercial potential of the district⁴.” Pike Place market was secondarily designated as Pike Place Market Historical District in 1972. The designation successfully canceled a demolition plan of the market. The Chinatown-ID was designated as the International Special Review District (ISRD) in 1973. The designation was achieved by the protest against the Kingdome construction in early 1970’s. The protection was also linked with the Asian American civil rights movement. Ballard Avenue Landmark District and Columbia City Landmark District were established in later 1970’s.

Figure 1.1 Location of Historic Commercial Districts in Seattle ⁵



² Historic Preservation. Retrieved May, 2016, from <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation>, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBuY0Qmn> on June 10th

³ Historic Preservation. Retrieved May, 2016, from <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation>, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBuY0Qmn> on June 10th

⁴ Historic Preservation. Retrieved May, 2016, from <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation>, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBuY0Qmn> on June 10th

⁵ Source: Google Earth / City of Seattle GIS Shapefile Datasets

Table 1.1 Historic Commercial Districts in Seattle, Year of establishment⁶

District Name	Year of Establishment
Pioneer Square Preservation District	1970
Pike Place Market Historical District	1971
International Special Review District	1973
Ballard Avenue Landmark District	1976
Columbia City Landmark District	1978
Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District	2009

1.2 Gentrification and Historic Districts

Currently, the Historic District legislations protect older smaller structures from the gentrification boom. Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD) is a recent case of historic district designation, responding to gentrification. The neighborhood was originally designated as Urban Center Village Overlay in 1995. The overlay was purposed to encourage denser mixed-use residential developments in the neighborhood adjacent to the central business district. The designation was packaged with up-zoning as part of the City’s compact city philosophy. With the market push after 2000, this policy successfully stimulated infill developments in the neighborhood. However, at the same time, considerable numbers of historical buildings were demolished and replaced with new larger buildings. This physical replacement also triggered a change of the community character. The new buildings had “considerably higher rents than before,” which forced existing residents and small businesses leave the neighborhood. “Larger and more upscale” businesses took the new space (Chalana, 2014). Responding to the community’s frustration, the City designated PPCOD in 2009 by adding conservation aspects to the overlay. PPCOD today controls demolition of historic structures and provide incentive programs for remaining façade and small retail spaces of original buildings.

Chinatown-ID was not part of the recent gentrification and real estate boom of Downtown Seattle. In the decade between 2005 and 2015, new buildings constructed within the approximately 130 acres of ISRD boundary were two market rate apartments, one subsidized apartment and one fire station. During the same period, in contrast, twenty eight (28) new buildings were built in the about 110 acres of PPCOD boundary⁷. In fact, ISRD and PPCOD has similar mixture or pre-WWII buildings and post-WWII buildings as well as existence of vacant or surface parking parcels, comparing to other districts filled with historic buildings (Chapter 5 will further clarify this point). Despite of the similar potentials for infill developments, Chinatown-ID had not experienced as much gentrification as PPCOD.

However, the condition is changing. Beginning with the groundbreaking of the Publix Hotel (504 5th Ave S) renovation in early 2015, there are a few redevelopment projects in the pipeline within the ISRD boundary. Projects include the renovation of Louisa Hotel (665 S. King St.) and the massive 12th & Jackson development that is planned to have 240 residential units, a 500 seat theater, 100,000 square feet commercial space and 600 parking lots⁸. This pace of redevelopment is something the community has not previously experienced.

⁶ Source: Seattle Department of Neighborhood website

⁷ Information Source: King County Department of Assessments, Assessments Data 2016

⁸ Information Source: Early Design Guidance SDCI PROJECT #3022675 by Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections

There are reasons for the change. In 2011, many blocks within ISRD were up-zoned as part of the City's "Livable South Downtown" rezoning program. Except the area within the National Register of Historic Place, most blocks that used to have from 65 to 85 feet maximum height became allowing developments with up to 150 feet in height⁹. The improving transit connectivity must be another background. International District Station is becoming a regional hub of the expanding Sound Transit's Link Light Rail network. The First Hill Streetcar that opened in early 2016 brought further transit convenience to the district.

ISRD coordinator at Seattle Department of Neighborhood describes her recently increasing tasks. "In the past seven years, I had only processed a few new development projects. At this point, I have five ongoing projects (including reviewing adjacent projects outside of the district)," she says. "The change is going to occur at the volume unexpected. ISRD's role is to make sure that the growth happens without the expense of the historic fabric. We want to have the benefit of the growth shared among the existing community, instead of pushing them away," she emphasized.

1.3 Commercial Revitalization Efforts in Historic Districts

Besides preservation, economic revitalization is another side of efforts pursued in historic commercial districts. As Jacobs called for "continuing flow of life and use (Jacobs, 1961)," vigorous commercial activities of small businesses are as essential as architectural elements in historic commercial districts.

National Main Street Center of the National Trust of Historic Preservation widely spread revitalization programs in 1980's. The decade was when suburban bed town cities turned to have their own commercial centers and thus inner city main streets lost vitality behind the competition between suburban malls. The program set core strategy associating small businesses within main streets. These business associations were supported to hire professionals who would perform marketing for the entire commercial community, as well as maintenance of streets and building stocks¹⁰. These associations were usually formed as organizations called Business Improvement Area (BIA).

In Seattle, there exists three (3) BIA organizations overlaying historic districts; Chinatown-International District BIA, Pioneer Square BIA and Columbia Cities BIA. Chinatown-ID BIA operates neighborhood marketing programs, retail recruitment activities, cleaning and public safety programs. BIA represents the commercial community and play roles to invite customers to the district. "Chinatown-ID offers unique experiences that cannot be found in any other places in the town. As Seattle people becoming more active looking for new things to do in the city, Chinatown-ID should receive more attentions now," says one of Chinatown-ID BIA worker. BIA's promotion team continuously makes efforts to keep the neighborhood welcoming.

Economic revitalization efforts in historic districts require strategic approach. "On top of big box retails, online commerce is huge today," says a retail recruiter of Chinatown-ID. She also talks about the complexity of commercial leases in historic buildings. "Although Chinatown-ID offers affordable rents, capital improvement cost can be high. Many spaces in old buildings here are not in good shape," she says. Retail recruiters deliver necessary operational supports for businesses and property owners in historic districts. The supports include

⁹ Information Source: Ordinance No. 123589

¹⁰ Information Source: *National Main Street Center* of the National Trust of Historic Preservation Website

matchmaking services between vacant spaces and start-up entrepreneurs. The matchmaking is conducted with considerations on existing portfolio of district businesses. “My strategy is to bring in more shops and entertainment businesses here that would supplement the current pool of restaurant businesses,” she explains.

These layers of revitalization efforts are taking place in addition to the preservation efforts in historic districts. In Chinatown-ID, Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda) and Inter*Im Community Development Association (Inter*Im) are also significant contributors to the district economic development. Both organizations have their roots in 1970’s Kingdome protest and pan-Asian American civil rights movement. They are largely associated with Chinatown-ID BIA’s revitalization efforts, while they also provide affordable housing and senior care services in the community.

Preservation and revitalization efforts are expected to be supportive of each other. The National Main Street Center explicates in its website that “a place’s distinctive characteristics and older and historic buildings are its greatest assets, and that fostering a strong local-business environment creates enormous rewards.¹¹” Preserved old structures and distinct community character are understood as assets to differentiate historic districts from generic shopping malls. Old buildings also provide affordable rents for small local businesses. Reversely, business prosperity and financial affluence are necessary for preservation efforts as they bring money for necessary restoration projects.

However, at the same time, conflicts between preservation and economic revitalization can be predictable. The dilemma of gentrification is an apparent case. “It is always a hard line to walk,” one of the Chinatown-ID BIA worker says. She describes the complexed standing of Chinatown-ID at this moment. “Chinatown-ID is very close to the City’s center business district where all the economic development is happening right now. We want to keep the pace and have economic development happening in this neighborhood, rather than being left alone. However, we do have historic elements that we want to preserve as a community. The distinctive character is what brings people here. We do not want to have current residents and businesses being pushed away either. It is complicated. However we certainly need to figure out a healthy balance.” Her comments explain both complexity and necessity of balancing preservation and economic vitalization.

¹¹ The Movement - Main Street America. Retrieved May, 2016, from http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/main-street-america/the-movement.html#.VsAeK_krJD8, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBv4qze3> on June 10, 2016

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Debates

2.1 Roles of Business Signage in Urban Streetscape

Business signage is another key word of this thesis, in addition to historic districts. This thesis defines business signage according to the land use codes of the City of Seattle. The codes define that business signage “means an on-premises sign directing attention to a business, profession, commodity, service or entertainment conducted, sold or offered on the lot where the sign is located” (SMC 23.84A.036). Discussions of this study focuses on business signs as defined by the City’s definition. Public signs, community kiosk signs or parking signs are not part of this study. Off-premise billboard signs, that advertise third party products, are also out of the study’s focus. Off-premise signs are widely prohibited in historic districts in North America. Awning, marquee and canopy are included in discussions because these structures are often integrated with signage installations. Appendix D defines signage typology discussed in this thesis.

Business signs are media for street businesses communicating products and services to potential customers who are visiting their neighborhoods. For restaurants and shops with limited budgets for general advertisements, business signs are significant promotional tools. It is unquestioned that business signs are essential for individual business activities. Business signs also have important roles for urban streetscapes. Diverse image of business signage is an emblem of thriving commercial activities. Gray Hack, in his writing “Urban flux (2011),” named temporal and changeable urban forms such as signs, canopies and wall paintings flux. He pointed out important functions of flux that keep urban landscape attractive. He claimed that the current mindset of urban design has been shaped by an architectural vision that seeks a stability of environment. However “many of the most interesting places in cities are just the opposite: disordered, unpredictable, changing at a rapid pace, and open to individual initiatives that constantly reshape them” (Hack 2011). Hack called for attentions to the possibilities of flux.

The attention on business signage is linked with “Everyday Urbanism,” which theoretical and practical basis was established by the book “Everyday Urbanism (2008)” by John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski. The book enlightened an urban design approach that pays attention to “a common-sense level of ordinary urban residents in their banal routines (Crawford 2008).” For ordinary people, businesses along streets are destinations and attractions to walk around cities, rather than architectural details. People remember certain areas in cities with their memories of what business signs they see. Business signage play significant roles forming “imaginability (Lynch 1960)” of urban streetscape for everyday people.

2.2 Extended Signage Control in Historic Commercial Districts and its legitimacy

Most municipalities in North America today control business signage in order to prevent proliferating signs from harming neighborhood environment. Signage control is usually implemented as sign permit system. Municipalities mandate new installations of signs to receive permits after administrative reviews. Administrative reviews are generally performed by municipal workers. Reviewers assure that new signs follow rules that are legislated with sign codes. The City of Seattle institutes sign codes (SMC 23.55) that regulate size,

frequency and installation methods of business signs depending on zoning. Regulations generally allow larger and more diverse type of signs in downtown and other commercial oriented neighborhoods, while they set lesser freedom on signage expressions in residential neighborhoods.

In historic districts, even if they are commercial oriented zones, municipalities tend to set stricter signage rules. Size and frequency are limited to be lesser than non-historic commercial areas. Design is controlled to be compatible to historic structures and existing community character. In the City of Seattle, installation of new business signs in historic districts are mandated to go through design review processes prior to the sign permit application. Design review is significantly different from administrative review. Administrative reviews are performed by municipal workers, and they assure that signage installation methods, size and frequency are complying with objective and often numeric standards formulated by land use codes. Design reviews are performed by citizen board members at their periodical meetings, and they make aesthetic recommendations to designs by referring to design guidelines and/or form-based land use codes.

Rationale for this design review requirement in historic districts in the City have two aspects. One is to protect architectural elements of historic buildings. Another is to maintain business signs compatible to historic character. For example, review criteria articulated within ISRD's sign codes have two major provisions. One is about protection of architectural structures. The provision says that "signs shall be affixed to structures so that they do not conceal, damage, or disfigure desirable architectural features or details of the structure" (SMC 23.66.338). Another provision details about compatibility by stating that "the overall design of a sign including size, shape, texture, method of attachment, graphics, color and lighting, shall be compatible with -- the building upon which it is to be installed, and with the District" (SMC 23.66.338). The City of Seattle's preservation ordinances mandate design review for business signs in historic districts in order to protect architectural structures and to standardize signage designs in order to maintain historic character.

2.3 Debates for Signage Control in Chinatown-ID

While the extended signage control is understood as a part of preservation efforts in historic districts, healthy balance needs to be pursued. As discussed in Chapter 1, the value of historic commercial districts rely on both architectural historic structures and thriving small business activities. Signage control should be managed in a way that enhances distinctive image of districts and benefits commercial communities as the result.

This study initially noticed frustrations among non-profit workers who are dedicated to community development and economic revitalization in Chinatown-ID toward the ISRD's signage design reviews. These non-profit employees work closely with small business owners in the community through their daily responsibilities. From their obligations to maintain the community's vibrancy and historic fabrics, they are concerned about the current status of ISRD's design review program.

"The design review processes are burdensome for small business owners," says community designer at SCIDpda. One of her responsibilities is to support small businesses to implement federal granted façade beatification projects. She works through ISRD's design reviews for façade improvement and signage installation projects for the sake of busy small business owners. "Many of business owners here use English as second language. It is not easy for them... reading through the codes, preparing the lengthy list of documents, visiting

the city hall and attending meetings,” she says. Her story extends to her observation of staff intervention and arbitrary judgements. “I sometimes help business owners to find historic pictures that would prove that the same kind of signs were once installed on the historic building. District coordinator asks for the proof prior to ISRD meetings, but I am not sure if that is necessary. It is recommended that new signs need to be respectfully scaled comparing to existing historic signs. But these criteria are unclear.” She thinks that the lack of objective standards is confusing business owners in the district. “What I expect is simplified processes, objective standards, and fair rules of enforcement. There needs to be considerations for small businesses owners,” she emphasizes.

A retail recruiter of Chinatown-ID is concerned about sporadic enforcement of the design review rule. She explains that many existing businesses just ignore design review rules, while all new businesses moving into the neighborhood after her matchmaking services go through design review procedures.

One Chinatown-BIA worker describes her opinions about the modest business signs in Chinatown-ID. “Attractive signs are certainly things that draw people to the area. Recognizable signs allow visiting customers to remember where they are,” she says. She expresses her concerns about the less outstanding and illegible signs in the district. “The tough thing walking through this community as a customer is knowing where you are. It is hard to find signs in this district. There is no blade signs facing out. Signs do not pop up as much as rest of the downtown commercial areas. Asian language signs are nice to see, but at the same time hard to remember. As BIA, our goal is to invite more people here. The challenge is that once people are here, they do not know where exactly they are”. She argues that it should be beneficial for the community to facilitate business signs so that they can communicate what the district offers. “We do not need extremely large or flashing signs here, however we need a little more,” she says.

Voices of business owners vary. The thesis performed short interviews with four (4) business owners who recently experienced ISRD’s signage reviews. They were asked what they think about ISRD and if they are happy with their current business signs. One business owner expressed his concern about the sporadic enforcement. “We complied with ISRD’s design rules. But many of the businesses here do not,” he says. He also explained that the current modestly displayed window signs are not visible enough. “Many of our customers have hard time finding our business,” he says. He thinks having a projecting sign would be helpful to communicate that his business is existing at the location. One business owner made preferable comments about ISRD. She said that “I like the way how the Chinatown-ID community is today. I don’t want to have this place become like South Lake Union. It is nice that ISRD is working to maintain the feel of this neighborhood.” Two other business owners did not have much opinions toward ISRD. “I went to the city hall once and to the ISRD meeting once. It took about two months for the entire procedure,” one business owner explained. He simply followed the rule as he was supposed to do so. One business owner explained that he can only place window signs and small white texts on the edge of a canopy. Although he did not expressed many opinions, he commented that “it will be nice if we can brand our name using larger signs.”

Further research listening to opinions of business owners is required in order to determine that the opinions among nonprofit workers really represent Chinatown-ID’s commercial community. However, this thesis assumes that voices of nonprofit workers do represent benefits of small business owners, and intend to find what are causing their frustrations. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 will assess ISRD’s design review administration and signage regulations, questioning if there are any spaces for improvements.

Chapter 3: Seattle's Historic Districts and Business Signage Design Review Program

This chapter details legislative and administrative background of ISRD's signage control, in the context of the City of Seattle's overall historic district management. Findings from this chapter is summarized at the end of this chapter.

3.1 Three Types of Historic District Designation and Different Signage Controls

There are nine (9) historic districts in the City of Seattle. All districts are established under the City's municipal codes with the purpose of preserving historical structures and characteristics. In spite of the shared purpose of preservation, there exists three different layers of designations. The different designations bring different rules and administrative structures in districts.

The first type of designation is "Landmark Districts," which are designated with Landmark Preservation Ordinance¹² as instituted in SMC Title 25 - Environmental Protection and Historic Preservation. There are seven (7) Landmark District establishments. Four (4) of them include commercial land use; Pioneer Square Historical District, Pike Place Market Historical District, Ballard Avenue Landmark District and Columbia City Landmark District. Three (3) of them do not include commercial land use; Fort Lawton Landmark District, Harvard-Belmont Landmark District, and Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District. All Landmark Districts are spatially linked with National Register of Historic Places. Landmark District establishments are meant to preserve physical elements of historically and architecturally significant landmark buildings.

The second type of designation is "Special Review Districts," which are designated with land use codes (SMC Chapter 23.66 – Special review Districts). International Special Review District (ISRD) and Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD) fall into this group. Special Review Districts are designated as part of Overlay Districts¹³. Overlay Districts are applied to areas with special planning considerations and subject to additional land use requirements on top of general zoning ordinance. Although purposes of Overlay Districts are various and not necessarily for historic preservation, the two Special Review Districts are established with preservation purposes. While Landmark districts focuses on protection of physical forms, Special Review Districts include emphasis on conservation of social character. Background of the two Special Review Districts establishment was each community's protests toward Kingdome Construction in early 1970's. Responding to the community's protest, the City's planning department created the system that allows community members to set their own land use rules and to review incoming development projects. Pioneer Square is designated both as Landmark Districts and Special Review Districts. However administration of PSPD today follows rules as Special Review District rather than Landmark district. Both Special Review Districts are also spatially linked with the National Register of Historic Places.

¹² Ord. 106348 § 1.01, 1977

¹³ SMC 23.59.010 - Overlay district generally

The third type is “Conservation Overlay District.” Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD) is the only one. This district is also one of the Overlay Districts, but excluded from Special Review Districts. As explained in Chapter 1.2, this historic designation is relatively new. Pike/Pine Urban Center Village Overlay was reestablished as PPCOD in 2009, in order to conserve historic buildings and social characteristics from the rapid gentrification today (See Chapter 1.2). The purposes of this overlay today consists with two elements; “to preserve and enhance the balance of residential and commercial uses” and “to promote the conservation of Pike/Pine's existing historic character” (SMC 23.73.002). Unlike other nine districts, PPCOD does not include National Register of Historic Places.

These different types of historic designations bring different signage controls in historic districts. There are two major differences. Firstly, the design review requirement for signage only applies to Landmark Districts and Special Review Districts. Business signs in Pike Pine Conservation Overlay District only need to go through administrative review for sign permits. Secondly, Special Review Districts do not follow city-wide sign codes, while signs in Landmark Districts are subject to city-wide sign codes.

This chapter details the design review requirement for business signs in Landmark Districts in Special Review Districts. The fact of the extraterritoriality of Special Review Districts from city-wide sign codes is further addressed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Certificate of Approval and Design Review Requirement for Business Signs

The design review requirement for business signage in Landmark District and Special Review Districts is legislated as requirement of “Certificate of Approval.” For Special Review Districts, SMC 23.66.030.A states that;

“No person shall alter, demolish, construct, reconstruct, restore, remodel, make any visible change to the exterior appearance of any structure, or to the public rights-of-way or other public spaces in a special review district, and no one shall remove or substantially alter any existing sign or erect or place any new sign or change the principal use of any building, or any portion of a building, structure or lot in a special review district, and no permit for such activity shall be issued unless a certificate of approval has been issued by the Department of Neighborhoods Director” (SMC 23.66.030.A).

For Landmark Districts, each of their district codes include a provision of “certificate of approval.” For example, BALD’s codes include “25.16.070 - Building alterations—Certificate of approval required,” that articulate that;

“No person shall make any change (including but not limited to alteration, demolition, construction, reconstruction, restoration, remodeling, painting, or signing) to the external appearance of any building or structure in the district, or to the external appearance of any other property in the district which is visible from a public street, alley or way, nor construct a new building or structure in the district, nor shall any permit for such be issued, except pursuant to a certificate of approval issued by the Director (of the Seattle Department)” (SMC 25.16.070).

As seen in the codes, certificate of approval is to be issued by Seattle Department of Neighborhood (SDN). SDN’s Historic Preservation team coordinate “District Boards” for each of historic districts, which review applications for certificate of approval. In Special Review District, district boards are advisory boards who make recommendations to Director of SDN. Final approval is to be made by Director of SDN. In Landmark Districts, district boards hold authority to make final approvals.

Figure 3.2 is a list describing what needs to be reviewed and approved by the District Board in ISRD. This list is almost the same in PDPD and the three Landmark Districts. Table 3.2 is a list of recent certificate of approval review agendas at ISRD’s semi-monthly district board meetings. These agendas include many signage reviews as well as trivial changes to storefront façade including a window treatment and an installation of a gas regulator.

Figure 3.2 List of changes that require “Certificate of Approval” in ISRD¹⁴

Making Changes to a building in the International Special Review District
What must be reviewed and approved by the Board?
 The following changes require a Certificate of Approval to be issued by the Board and the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods before the City will issue any permits:

- Any change to the outside of any building or structure.
- Installation of any new sign or change to any existing sign.
- Installation of a new awning or canopy.
- Any change to an interior that affects the exterior.
- New addition, construction, and/or remodel.
- A proposed new business or service (change of use).
- Any change in a public right-of-way or other public spaces, including parks and sidewalks.
- Demolition of any building or structure.
- Exterior painting

¹⁴ Historic Preservation, Making Changes in the District. Retrieved May, 2016, from <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation>, archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBvDDvmV> on June 10, 2016

Table 3.2 List of Agenda for Certificate of Approval Application Review by ISRD in January 2016¹⁵

Date	Building /Business Name	Project
January 12, 2016	Fruit Bliss Café	Sign: Replacement of the sign face for an existing wall sign
	Publix	Sign: Building Signage and tenant sign plan
		Design: Outdoor furnishings and exterior building amenities
	Unknown	Use: Retroactive approval to establish use as “Parking, Accessory use”
		Sign: Signage to be installed in three locations
Sunny Massage & Spa	Use: Retroactive approval for the change from “retail” to “service” for a massage spa Sign: Sign and window treatment (curtains)	
January 26, 2016	A Plus Hong Kong Kitchen	Sign: Installation of two wall signs
		Exterior alterations: installation of a gas regulator
	Summit School	Sign: Installation of building signage
		Design: 2-story classroom addition (approx. 3,000 sq. ft.) at the southwest corner of the site and installation of a vertical utility support structure on the south façade.

3.3 Separation of the Historic Districts Design Review from the City-Wide Design Review Program

The legislation of Certificate of Approval results in two separate design review programs within the City of Seattle; one administered by Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)’s Design Review Office and another administered by Seattle Department of Neighborhood (SDN)’s Historic Preservation Office.

SDCI’s design review program has been operated since 1994 as a part of the city’s current planning programs¹⁶. This program only reviews developments of new buildings, not business signs nor other trivial façade changes of existing buildings. SDCI’s design review program applies everywhere in the City, except Special Review Districts and Landmark Districts. The City’s land used codes clarify the exclusion of these historic districts. The chapter for design review (SMC 23) articulates that “the following structures are exempt from design review: 1. New structures located in special review districts regulated by Chapter 23.66 and 2. New structures in Landmark districts regulated by Title 25.”

The review program for the Certificate of Approval in Special Review Districts and Landmark Districts began over two decades prior to the SDCI’s design review program. These districts were founded in 1970’s after preservation movements responding to 1960’s urban renewal projects that was led by the city’s planning office. Historic district designations enabled each community to have their own preservation ordinances and to review physical changes happening in districts. The independence of historic districts’ review program from the city’s planning department was reasonable in 1970’s.

¹⁵ Historic Preservation, ISRD 2016 Agendas and Minutes. Retrieved May, 2016, from <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation> archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6iBvDDvmV> on June 10, 2016

¹⁶ Information Source; Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections, Design Review Program Improvements Background Report (April 2015)

However, in the today’s context, this separation is not benefiting historic districts. The City’s planning department has evolved over the past forty years. Planners today further emphasize conservation of older and smaller structures, as well as public involvements within their urban planning executions. The city-wide design review program did not exist in the 1970’s. However, since its inception in 1994, the program has received continuous consideration from many planners, urban designers and outreach specialists employed in planning departments. The separation from the planning departments is limiting ISRD and other historic districts from gaining from these planners’ consideration.

Design review management is difficult. When design review programs were becoming common in the 1990’s in North American cities, Brenda Case Scheer voiced her skeptical opinions about design review. In her book “Invitation to Debate In: Design Review” (1994), Scheer pointed out that “design review is a difficult and controversial process that needs thoroughgoing, professional criticism before it is introduced on a wide scale.” She cautioned endemic problems of design review explaining that “solving one of them tends to cause problems in another; for example, making design less arbitrary and more objective tends to reduce the flexibility to make discretionary discussion that are a necessary element of aesthetic judgement” (Scheer 1994). Scheer’s list of potential flaws of design review includes design review being time consuming and expensive, arbitrary and grounded in personal interest, limiting individual expressions and rewards ordinal performance, lacking due processes and dealing with aesthetic value which is hard to decide right or wrong. Certainly design review programs demand continuous efforts by professionals in order to maintain its healthy management.

When the Scheer’s opinions are considered, SDCI’s Design Review program has advantages. In addition to larger numbers of planners employed within SDCI, SDCI’s design review program is also assisted by planners in the city’s long range planning department, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD). Programs within SDCI and OPCD are strongly integrated with each other because they previously existed under one umbrella of Seattle Department of Planning and Development (SDPD). In contrast, it seems like the communication between SDN and SDCI/OPCD is limited, in regards to ISRD’s administration. Both SDCI’s design review program manager and ISRD coordinator said that they have not been involved in each other’s projects. SDCI’s design review program manager mentions that for the first time, her team has the opportunity to work together with ISRD. She explains that the new development of 12th & Jackson is straddling the boundary of ISRD and the boundary of SDCI’s East Design Review District. The development is going through both ISRD board and SDCI’s East Design Review board. “This is the first time I am aware that ISRD and our design review board are familiar with each other’s work. It will be interesting,” she says.

Table 3.3 Different Design Review Programs for Historic Districts in Seattle¹⁷

Type	Design Review Authority	City Department	Design Review Requirement
Landmark Districts	Landmark Preservation Board and/or District Boards	Department of Neighborhoods (SDN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any change to the outside of any existing building • New Development
Special Review Districts	District Boards		
Conservation District	Design Review Boards	Department of Construction and Inspection (SDCI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Development
Any other Non-Historic Area	Design Review Boards		

¹⁷ Source: SMC 23.66, SMC 23.73, SMC 25.16, SMC 25.20, SMC 25.24, SMC 25.28

3.4 Design Review Management of Tow City Departments

While the isolation of SDN's design review program is limiting city planners' attentions on ISRD, the staffing system within the Historic Preservation Office of SDN is also limiting opportunities for peer evaluations within the department. While multiple staff shuffle around different districts under SDCI's design review program, design review of each historic district is administrated by only one staff in the Historic Preservation Office.

SDCI's design review program divides the entire city into seven (7) geographical districts. A Design Review Board is established for each of the seven district. As of May 2016, SDCI's Design Review Office consists of seventeen (17) design review planners, one (1) program manager and one (1) administrative staff¹⁸. According to the program manager, one or a few design review planners are assigned by each development project. Each project is reviewed by a district board of an area where the project is taking place. That way, design review planners shuffle around to different districts. The program manager works as a supervisor overseeing the entire program, making sure it is working appropriately. "It is nice that everybody knows what is going on all over the city. That will balance out," explains the design review program manager.

SDN's Historic Preservation office operates one (1) Landmark Preservation Board and eight (8) District Boards. Landmark Preservation Board's responsibility is to review projects on Landmark buildings in the entire City. Eight District Boards review projects within each of eight districts. As of May 2016, SDN's Historic Preservation Program team consists of five (5) District Board coordinators, one (1) Landmark Preservation Board coordinator, one (1) Historic Preservation Officer and one (1) administrative staff¹⁹. Unlike the SDCI's design review team, District Board coordinators do not move around different districts. They are allocated by district rather than by project. Each coordinator is assigned two or more districts and manage all projects happening within their districts. This staffing system of SDN is legislated under preservation ordinances. SDN is required to assign one staff as district board coordinator for each district. Each district board coordinator must provide clerical support for the review of certificate of approval by District Boards. ISRD Codes formulate that;

"The Coordinator shall be the custodian of the Board's records, handle official correspondence, and organize and supervise the clerical and technical work of the Board. The Coordinator shall also recommend such actions, policies, rules and regulations for adoption by the board as may be necessary to accomplish the objectives of this chapter" (SMC 23.66.314 - Staff support for the Special Review Board).

ISRD coordinator details her roles. "I review incoming applications to make sure they are complete containing all the information required by the law. I will require more information if there are any missing pieces before applications are scheduled for a board review. Before the time applications go to board review, any issues I follow are addressed. But some issues go directly to the board authority," she says. She works closely with business owners, architects and signage installation contractors for each applications. "If a proposal includes something that goes counter to codes, I will advise them prior to the board review. I do a lot of coaching," she added.

Comparing staffing systems adapted by SDCI and SDN, SDCI's staffing system is preferable in terms of its structural ability to have each district receive oversight by multiple professionals. On top of the separation from

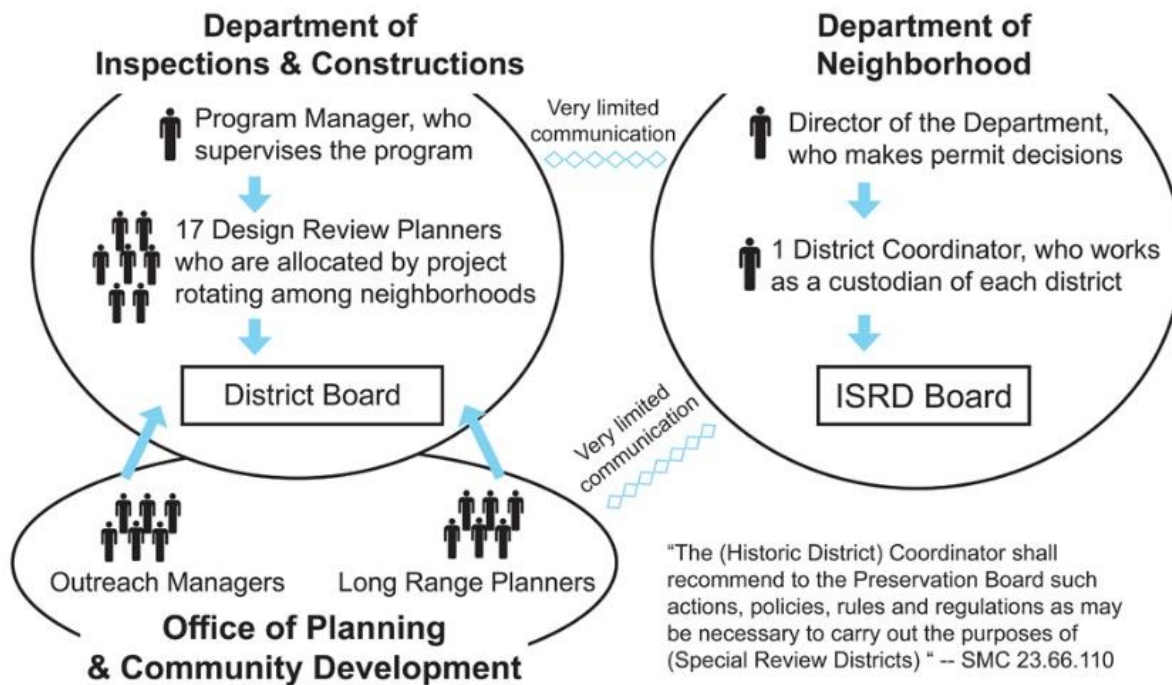
¹⁸ Information Source; Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) Design Review Program website

¹⁹ Information Source: Seattle Department of Neighborhood Historic Preservation program website

the city’s planning department, SDN’s staffing system is limiting design review administration of ISRD from peer evaluation opportunities.

The program manager of SDCI’s Design Review Office emphasizes the significance of having multiple professionals involved in order to maintain a healthy balance of design review processes. “We have a group of design review professionals. Our design review planners gather weekly and talk about their projects each other,” she says. “Involving public voice also largely helps,” she adds. SDCI’s design review program is largely integrated with public outreach programs by the city’s long range planning department. The SDCI’s design review program manager further explains her and her team’s efforts keeping the program working right. “I make sure the review process is very objective, although subject aspects cannot be completely removed from design topics. We also make sure that the role of design review board is to respond to a design, not to make a design,” she says. It is suspected that all these efforts that are required for proper design review procedures are missing within ISRD’s design review program under the current conditions without opportunities for peer evaluations.

Figure 3.4 Image of different administrative structures in two city departments



3.5 Design Guidelines of Tow City Departments

The difference of design review administration between SDCI and SDN appears in their design guidelines. While design guidelines of SDCI have unified forms, design guidelines of SDN vary. SDCI’s design guidelines are periodically updated. In contrast, updates of SDN’s design guidelines are sporadic.

SDCI’s Design Review team publishes one (1) set of city-wide design guidelines and twenty one (21) sets of neighborhood specific design guidelines. The current versions were all updated and republished in 2013. All

design guidelines consist of three (3) chapters; 1. Context and Site, 2. Public Life and 3. Design Concept. “Design guidelines updates are made via collaboration with our design review team, Design Review Board members and the long range planning team in the Office of Planning & Community Development. We also sometime hire third party consultants,” explains the design review manager at SDCI.

SDN’s Historic Preservation team publishes design guidelines for each of the eight (8) districts. SDN’s eight design guidelines largely differ each other. This difference may be related to the different natures of each district. However, it looks obvious that coordination among districts is not likely happening, compared to SDCI. Interestingly, there is a difference between Special Review Districts and Landmark Districts. Design guidelines for CCLD, PPMHD and BALD and were renewed and republished as new versions in 2006, 2013 and 2015 accordingly. In contrast, updates for design guidelines in the two Special review Districts have been made gradually as additions and revisions. For example, design guidelines for PSPD has traces of revisions and additions made in 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999 and 2003. ISRD’s design guidelines, that were originally adapted in 1988, has traces of additions made in 1990 and 1993.

Among five historic commercial districts, ISRD’s design guidelines are mostly aged. They have not been updated since 1993. ISRD design guidelines only articulate business signs and temporal storefront designs such as awning, canopy and façade treatment. They do not include massing or bulk components, failing in deliberate articulation of how contemporary buildings should be constructed in a way that fits into the existing historical context. As a matter of fact, ISRD is currently working on the comprehensive renewal of ISRD design guidelines. However, it is taking for years. “I and the district board members are working on drafting the new guidelines. This needs to be done between ongoing project reviews. It is moving slowly,” says ISRD district coordinator. “Some districts hire third party team to draft design guidelines. But for ISRD, I work on it,” she says.

This delay of design guidelines update is problematic when the recent gentrification pressure in Chinatown-ID is considered. The City of Seattle should have managed to have ISRD renew its design guidelines when the up-zone was adopted in 2011. Although this thesis does not address this issue further, the City officials should pay much more attention to ISRD so that the district can quickly and appropriately create new design guidelines to have the district ready for gentrification pressures.

Table 3.5 Most Recent Updating Years of Design Guidelines for the Five Historic Commercial Districts²⁰

Designation Type	District Name	Year of the most recent update
Special Review District	International Special Review District (ISRD)	1993
	Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD)	2003 *Additional Document for New Construction on the North Lot was published in 2007
Landmark District	Pike Place Market Historical District (PMHD)	2013
	Ballard Avenue Landmark District (BALD)	2015
	Columbia City Landmark District (CCLD)	2006

²⁰ Source: ISRD Design Guidelines, PSPD Design Guidelines, PMHD Design Guidelines, BALD Design Guidelines, CCLD Design Guidelines

Summary of Chapter 3 Findings:

- In Special Review Districts and Landmark Districts, business signs subject to Design Review Program managed by Department of Neighborhood
- The Design Review Program by Department of Neighborhood is separated from the city-wide design review program managed by the city's current planning department.
- The Design Review Program of each historic districts is administrated by one district coordinator. This staffing system is contrasting to the city-wide design review program where design review planners move around different districts.
- ISRD's design review program is closed from evaluation of multiple planning professionals, because of the separation from the city's planning departments and the SDN's staffing system that allocate one district board coordinator for each of historic districts.

Chapter 4: ISR D's Signage Rules

Chapter 3 detailed the legislative and structural background of the signage control in International Special Review District (ISR D). Chapter 4 analyzes actual contents of signage rules in ISR D, in comparison with signage rules in Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD) and Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD). PSPD is chosen to be compared because the district is another Special Review District where city-wide sign codes do not apply. PPSIC is selected because the district's signage rules reflect city-wide sign codes.

4.1 Extraterritoriality of Special Review District from the City-Wide Sign Codes

As mentioned in Chapter 3.1, International Special Review District (ISR D) and Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD) are excluded from the city-wide sign codes. The scope of the city-wide sign codes clearly state that "The provisions of this chapter shall apply to signs in all zones, except those zones regulated by Chapter 23.66, Special Review Districts" (SMC 23.55.002). Business signs in Special Review Districts still need to receive sign permit and follow the city-wide right-of-way clearance and the electric power standards. However, as far as design standards including size, frequency and installation type, city-wide sign codes do not apply in ISR D or PSPD.

This extraterritoriality from sign codes is another layer of exclusiveness of ISR D (and PSPD) away from city-wide planning administration, in addition to the separated design review program as discussed in Chapter 3. While the city-wide sign codes are administrated by sign permit team of Seattle Department of Construction & Inspection (SDCI), district specific sign codes are administrated by ISR D and PSPD coordinators and district boards.

For this study, rules for business signage in ISR D, PSPD and Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay (PPCOD) are closely studied. ISR D's signage rules are legislated in ISR D sign codes (SMC 23.66.33) and ISR D design guidelines. PSPD's signage rules are legislated in PSPD sign codes (SMC 23.66.160) and PSPD design guidelines. PPCOD signage rules are instituted within the Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3) section of the city-wide sign codes (SMC 23.55.030).

The table of Appendix A, B and C clarify details signage regulations in ISR D, PSPD and PPCOD. Appendix D can be referred in order to understand signage terms and definitions.

4.2 Missing Numeric Standards in ISR D

The analysis reveals that there are very limited numeric standards in ISR D's sign codes, comparing to codes of other two districts. Both sign codes and design guidelines of ISR D only include a few numeric standards for trivial rules. ISR D sign codes clarify approved and prohibited installation types clearly. However, size and frequency standards are not formulated at all. Only subjective descriptions are articulated and requires compatibility of new signs to existing building, signs and the community character. The provision of Criteria for Approval for signs describes that;

“the overall design of a sign including size, shape, texture, method of attachment, graphics, color and lighting, shall be compatible with the use to which the sign refers, with the colors, architectural and design motifs of the building upon which it is to be installed, and with the District.” (SMC 23.66.160)

As for size and frequency standards for projecting blade signs as an example, they are required to “be sited in a manner that minimizes view blockage of abutting business signs” and to “be installed or erected so that there are no visible angle iron sign supports above the roof, building face or wall” (SMC 23.66.160). Requirements are formed as subjective descriptions and do not include any numeric standards. Again, business signs in ISRD do not follow city wide sign codes. Thus, this absence of numeric standards means that design review decisions for business signs in ISRD are made without following any objective standards.

As seen in Appendix B, the city sign codes for PPCOD clearly formulate size and frequency standards. The codes classify signs into Type A and Type B, and then set numeric standards for each type. Type A signs including projecting blade signs and roof signs. These signs are allowed to have size of seventy two (72) square feet maximum in every 36 feet distance. Additional 2 square feet is allowed to be added, per 2 feet over thirty six (36) feet interval next to another signs, up to 300 square feet. Type B signs, including awning signs and marquee signs, do not have size limitation, although only one sign is allowed per street frontage of each business.

PSPD’s regulations are not as objective as the PPCOD’s city sign codes. They consist of lengthy descriptions of subjective criteria. However, PSPD design guidelines set numeric standards for generally recommended projecting blade signs. According to the design guidelines, projecting blade signs need to be typically eight (8) square feet without neon and six (6) square feet with neon. Neon is limited to one (1) for each ten (10) linear feet of street frontage. Any projecting signs including blade sign and awning sign are limited to one (1) per address.

In ISRD, neither sign codes nor design guidelines have sufficient numeric standards. There are only two trivial rules using numeric standards within ISRD’s sign codes. One is a provision regulating that awning “shall overhang the sidewalk a minimum of 5 feet.” Another is a rule about exemption from the design review requirement. Window signs and wall signs smaller than four (4) square feet are exempt from design review of ISRD if they follow certain rules. Except there trivial rules, ISRD does not set any numeric standards for size or frequency of business signage.

4.3 Eliminated Numeric Standards and Necessity for Objective Rules

In fact, the ISRD codes used to have numeric standards regulating sign size and frequency, until 2011. The City’s ordinance No.123589 proves the elimination of numeric standards. Appendix E is part of ISRD’s former sign codes that were removed in 2011. The codes clearly determine numeric standards of business signs in ISRD. Interestingly, these former codes used to allow business signs in ISRD to have as large size and frequency as PPCOD’s codes. For example, a business with thirty five (35) feet street frontage was able to have up to eighty five (83) square feet area of signage with condition that signs include more than 40% of Asian characters or designs. Signs without Asian characters had a size limit of 70% of the maximum limit of Asian character signs. The area limit was able to be divided into an unlimited numbers of signs, although a single sign was supposed to

have an area less than seventy-five (75) square feet for a single-faced sign and one hundred and fifty (150) square feet for a double-faced sign²¹. Maximum size used to be set very large.

Why were these numeric standards that used to allow larger signs in ISRD removed? The ISRD coordinator explains that the removal of the numeric standards was an “intentional effort” after discussions by the district board. According to her, “the codes used to look more at scale and proportion of signs. But the formula was not user friendly. It was not easy to read.” She further explains that the board considered that there should be specific formulas for every business and location, instead of standardized formulas that is applied to the entire district. The board also concerned that the inflexible standards would limit diverse design by each business. The district board coordinator explains that “a part of this neighborhood’s character is chaos. The chaos of signage makes this neighborhood distinct. That is an element of Chinatown in this country which you do not see in other parts of the city. If there is too much order such as standardized size, it will limit the chaos. But, at the same time, we need to regulate it. So we set subjective aspects.” It is a universal challenge for design review administrations to balance between objectivity and flexibility. As Scheer pointed out, “making design less arbitrary and more objective tends to reduce the flexibility to make discretionary discussion that are a necessary element of aesthetic judgement” (Scheer 1994). The ISRD district board removed the objective standards so that they can flexibly alter their judgements according to contexts of each signage installation.

However, the absence of objective standards is confusing for applicants. Business owners in Chinatown-ID have no clue in what manner their new business signs are allowed to be installed until they go listen to the district coordinator’s advice. This step must be preventing creativity of each business rather than encouraging diverse design. Furthermore, this step may trigger inappropriate intervention by a single district board coordinator. For general design review programs, which is mostly for building constructions, buildings codes and land use codes define maximum heights, setbacks and other numeric standards even though design guidelines articulate materials and façade design in subjective manners. ISRD’s sign codes, unlike any other neighborhoods in Seattle, do not include any objective rules.

The thesis advocates for the necessity of objective rules that clearly formulate size and frequency standards of business signs. Objective rules will prevent inappropriate interventions during the process of reviews. Diverse expressions of each business should be encouraged under the condition that applicants understand clear rules of size and frequency limitations. Within these rules, each business is allowed to express their own designs, rather than being forced to go through processes finding what can be “compatible” by asking advice of a district coordinator and district board members.

²¹ City of Seattle Ordinance No. 123589

Summary of Chapter 4 Findings:

- The city-wide sign codes do not apply in ISRD. Thus, the district sign codes and design guidelines are the only legislations that set signage design rules in ISRD.
- ISRD's district sign codes nor design guidelines do not include any numeric standards for size and frequency. There only exist subjective criteria that calls for compatibility of new signs to existing signs, buildings and the community character.
- ISRD used to have numeric standards that clarifies size and frequency standards. The standards used to allow relatively larger signs in ISRD. The standards were eliminated by the district board's recommendation in 2011.
- The absence of objective rules may trigger arbitrary interventions during the process of design review. Objective rules need to be re-established so that business owners can express their signage design within clear size and frequency standards.

Chapter 5: History of Chinatown-ID and Business Signs

This Chapter studies history of Chinatown-ID as a commercial community. A major purpose of this study is to understand how business signs have been historically used in Chinatown-ID. Historical photographs of storefronts and business signs taken during the years between 1907 and 1936 are observed. These years are identified as a period of significance in the nomination form for National Register of Historic Places. This history study also aims to understand the historical context of Chinatown-ID's commercial community and background of ISRD establishment.

This chapter heavily draws on readings of two books; Doug Chin's "Seattle's International District – The Making of a Pan-Asian American Community (Second Edition) (2009)" and Quintard Taylor's "The Forging of a Black Community Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era (1994)." Wing Luck Museum's photo collections are a major resource of historical photographs. The nomination form for National Register of Historic Place (the National Register form) is also closely studied.

5.1 Foundation of Chinatown and SRO hotels as historic mixed-use buildings

Physical development of the Chinatown-ID neighborhood goes back to the early twentieth century, when two modern railway stations, King Street Station (Built between 1904 and 1906) and Union Station (Built in 1911) were constructed. Jackson Street regrade was completed in 1909 and the current street grids were formed. Soon Chinese businesses started to settle along S. King Street and created a Chinatown in the neighborhood.

Prior to this modern station area development, Chinese businesses were clustering in the vicinity of 2nd Avenue and Washington Street in Pioneer Square. Thousands of Chinese immigrants, who started to arrive in mid-19th century, were already working as seasonal laborers at mining and railroad constructions in the western territory of Pacific Northwest. Some Chinese merchants were making their fortunes as labor contractors. These merchants owned or leased buildings, and used upper floors as single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels that provided affordable rooms for laborers. Ground floors were used as their merchandising offices and businesses that served food and services for single male laborers. Canton building was one of these buildings located at the former Chinatown location. The building was built by Chin Gee Hee, who was one of the most successful Chinese merchants in the region. He initially worked for Wa Chong Company, a trading and merchandising company, and later started his own labor contracting business named Quong Tuck Company. Built in 1889, Canton building was the first brick building built after Great Seattle Fire. The increasing numbers of Chinese laborers caused racial hostility among white laborers in Seattle. The tension caused a violent anti-Chinese riot in 1886, which forced many Chinese laborers to sail back to home or to San Francisco bay area. During the riot, merchant leaders worked as spokesmen for Chinese. They communicated with Chinese Council in San Francisco, white business partners and the city government, and asked for protections of Chinese laborers from the violence. Immigration from China significantly slowed down after the riot and the Chinese Exclusion Act in

Seattle, compared to other west coast cities. Nevertheless, successful merchants remained in the city and shaped a Chinatown in the current location.

Figure 5.1.A Canton Building and Wa Chong office building in late 19th century²²



This photograph captures Canton Building (left) and Wa Chong office building (right) located at the corner of 2nd Avenue and Washington Street in late 19th century. The ground floor are filled with businesses. There are identifiable business names including Lexington Hotel, Phoenix Hotel and M. Hei Wo Chinese Medicine Co. Upper floors of buildings are ornamented with wall painted and wall mounted signs. Wa Chong office building seems like having a roof sign on top of the building. The ground floor storefronts are ornamented with awnings, projecting signs, window signs and multiple posters.

The first Chinese buildings constructed in S. King Street were Hip Sing Tong building and two Kong Yick buildings along King Street. They were constructed in 1910 by Kong Yick Investment Company headed by Goon Dip. Goon Dip was another successful merchant who made his fortune by contracting labors for cannery factories. He also worked as Honorary Chinese Consul for the Pacific Northwest region. Kong Yick Investment Company collected money from Chinese throughout the region to finance the construction of these buildings. “The Wa Chong and Quong Tuck Companies immediately moved to the Kong Yick buildings. Also setting up shop was the Yuen Long Company and Yick Fung Company, an importer/exporter and agent for the Blur Funnel steamship line. One of the Kong Yick buildings later housed the Gee How Oak Tin Family Association, the largest

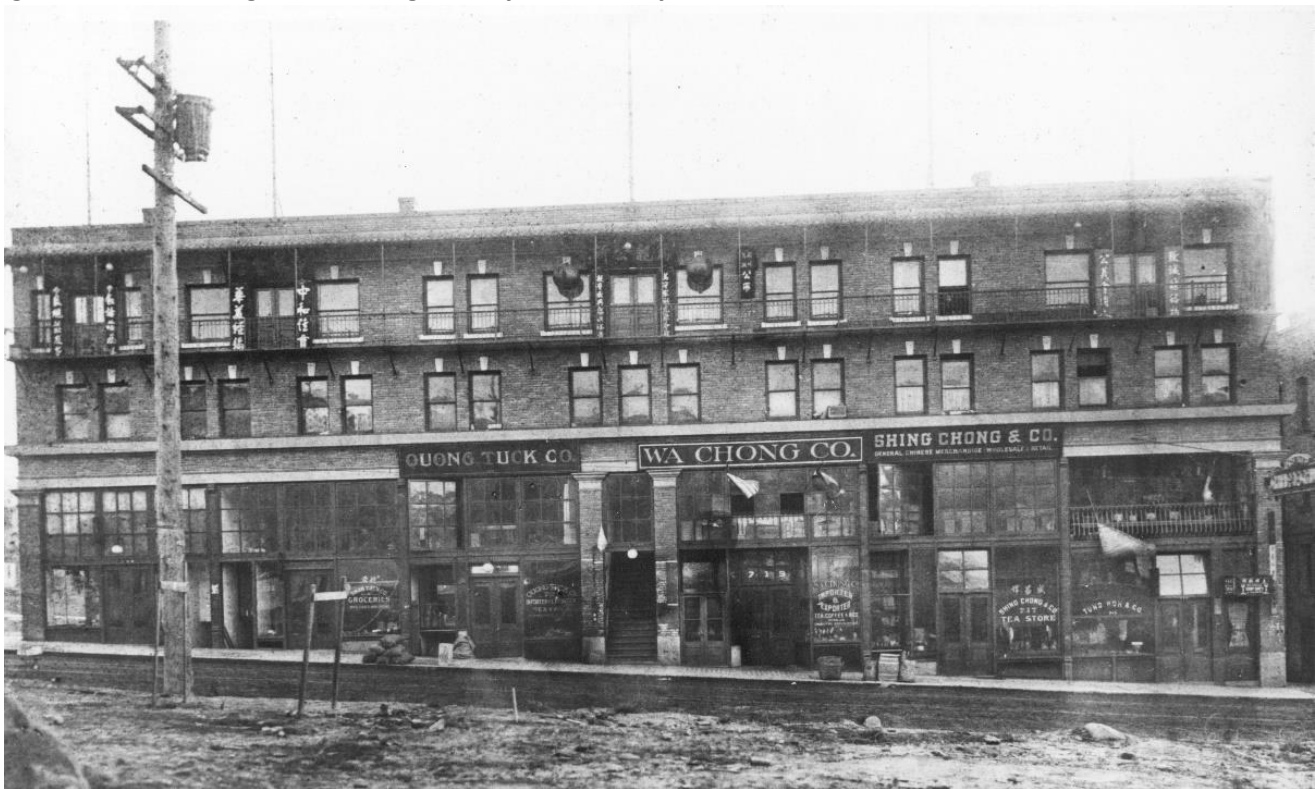
²² Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Chinese family association in the state (Chin 2009).” Chinese family association was an extended family association where Chinese immigrants with same surnames gathered and supported each other.

In 1911, Goon Dip built Milwaukee Hotel between Maynard and 7th Avenue along King Street as the first Chinese SRO hotel in S. King Street. Eastern Hotel was soon built in the same year for Wa Chong Company. Atlas Hotel was built across King Street from Kong Yick buildings in 1916. During the 1910’s, many Chinese merchants either built or purchased buildings along King Street. Upper floors were used as SRO hotels or family association residences. Ground level commercial spaces were filled with Chinese businesses such as restaurants, barber shops and tailors that served bachelor male labors who resided in upper floors.

The National Register form identifies SRO hotel as “the most characteristic building type in the district”. According to the form, “in general, the buildings cover 100 percent of their lots, resulting in a strong, unbroken street wall throughout the commercial core, especially along King Street.” The form also mentions business signs that ornament SRO hotel buildings, describing that “the relatively plain façade of the hotels serve admirably as backdrops for the many signs, balconies, and applied ornamentation which have historically characterized the district.”

Figure 5.1.B East Kong Yick Building in early 20th century²³



This building is one of the Kong Yick Buildings, which is home of Wing Luck Museum today. This photograph is estimated to be taken in 1910’s or 1920’s. Wall mounted fascia signs of Quong Tuck Co, Wa Chont Co, and Shing Chong & Co. are captured. Upper floors, that was a home of Gee How Oak Tin Family Association, is ornamented with vertical signs with Chinese language and Chinese lanterns.

²³ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Figure 5.1.C Milwaukee Hotel and its storefronts in early 20th century²⁴



This photograph shows ground floor storefronts of Milwaukee Hotel. The photograph is probably taken around 1920's according to the automobile style. Wing Luck Museum's description says that "shops in the building can be identified, Milwaukee Dye Works, Bow Wah Co., Chong Hing & Co. Mr. Mizuki Cab Company cars."²⁵ Business signs include a projecting blade sign, a large wall mounted fascia sign, multiple window signs and foldable awning signs. Two vertical wall signs in Chinese characters are also captured.

5.2 Pre-WWII Prosperity as a Multi-Ethnic Commercial Neighborhood

In early 20th century, as immigrants from Japan and Philippines, as well as African American migrants from southern cities arrive in Seattle, they settled and opened businesses around Chinatown. Chinatown became a multi-ethnic commercial center by 1920 and enjoyed its prosperity until the great depression in early 1930's.

Japanese settlements in Seattle began in 1880's and rapidly increased when Japanese passenger lines opened regular voyages between Yokohama and Seattle. Japanese immigrants were initially single male labors. However they soon brought "picture brides" from Japan and created families in Seattle. Japanese became the largest minority group in Seattle. They formed a *Nihonmachi* (Japantown) in the south of Chinatown, along Washington Street, Main Street and Jackson Street. According to a 1908 article in Washington Magazine by a Japanese government representative, Japanese businesses included "45 restaurants, 20 barber shops, bathhouses, laundries, 30 hotels and lodging houses, four groceries, bakeries, meat and fish markets, five

²⁴ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

²⁵ Document Details- Wing Luke Museum Photo Collections. Retrieved May 31, 2016, from captions for the photograph identified as number 1991.100.512.

Japanese general merchandise stores, five tailors, two dentists, tree physicians, four interpreters and some cigar stands and candy stores” (Chin 2009).

Many Japanese families leased or purchased buildings around Union Station and operated SRO hotel businesses. The ground floors of Japanese SRO hotel buildings were filled with Japanese businesses. They thrived on patrons including the expanding Japanese residents, as well as white residents. It was typical that building owners and operators rented their ground floor commercial spaces to businesses within their same ethnic groups. Chinese and Japanese, and later arriving Filipinos and African Americans were competing with each other for white customers that would bring money to their businesses.

Table 5.2 Seattle’ Minority Population²⁶

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Native American	22	24	106	172	222	666	1,792	NA	6,158	NA
Chinese	438	929	1,351	1,347	1,781	2,650	4,076	NA	9,591	NA
Japanese	2,990	6,127	7,874	8,448	6,975	5,778	9,351	NA	10,427	NA
Filipino	-	-	458	1,614	1,392	2,357	3,755	NA	9,591	NA
Black	406	2,296	2,894	3,303	3,789	15,666	26,901	37,868	46,755	51,948
Total	80,671	237,194	315,312	365,583	368,382	467,591	557,087	530,831	493,820	516,259

Figure 5.2.A Paris Hotel in early 20th century²⁷



Paris Hotel was located at the corner of King Street and 6th Avenue. This building has been also demolished and the lot is used as surface public parking under Uwajimaya’s ownership today. The ground floor stores include an ice cream parlor, a second hand store and a Japanese public bath house. All stores have awnings. There are three large posters, which seem like advertisements for theater events. Three projecting signs are also captured.

²⁶ Quintard Taylor. (1994). *The Forging of a Black Community – Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era*. University of Washington Press. P.245 Appendix 4

²⁷ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Figure 5.2.B Welcome Annex Hotel and Bush Hotel in early 20th Century²⁸



Welcome Annex Hotel consisted of two buildings located at the corner of 6th Avenue and Jackson Street. These buildings were demolished after WWII and replaced with new bank buildings. Welcome Annex Hotel was owned by Ishikawa family. Two pictures capture businesses on the ground floor including drug stores, general stores and barber shops. Storefronts are ornamented with awnings, projecting signs, window signs, wall mounted signs and posters. Projecting signs are installed both on ground floors and the 2nd floors. Roof signs are installed on top of the both buildings and facing to Union Station area. The roof signs are indirectly illuminated.

²⁸ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Filipino population in Seattle rapidly increased in 1920's. When the Act of 1924 completely banned immigration from China and Japan, Filipino male immigrants started to fill vacant labor positions at railroad construction and cannery factories. Filipinos arrived as U.S. citizens after the Philippine–American War. These laborers started to crowd SOR hotels along King Street. Eastern Hotel was one of the hotels that was popular among Filipinos. There also existed two Filipino hotels, the LMV Hotel and New Manila Hotel. Filipino restaurants and dance halls including Rizal Dance Hall, Manila Corporation Restaurant, Philippine Café and New Manila Café were all located along King Street near 6th Avenue and Maynard Avenue.

As much as Chinese and Japanese laborers, Filipino laborers faced racial discriminations in the city. Although demands for cheap labor for the region's expanding railroads and cannery businesses brought immigrants from Asia, white Seattleites expressed racial hostilities each time different Asian ethnic groups expanded in the city. These minority immigrants were discriminated by labor unions in different industries. Labor unions in that era were dominated by white laborers. Discriminated from mainstream workplaces, Asian immigrants either took menial jobs or tried to make their fortune through entrepreneurship operating businesses in Chinatown-ID.

Chinatown-ID in early 20th century was a commercial core of racially discriminated yet thriving multiple Asian ethnic groups. According to Chin's book, 1920's was the peak of its prosperity. The book describes that "as the Filipino presence in the area emerged, so did the presence of African Americans. At the same time, the Japanese and Chinese sectors continued their growth as well, creating a lively and robust district. In many ways, it was a multiracial area in its heyday, experiencing the good times of the Roaring 20th (Chin 2009)"

Figure 5.2.C Philippine Café in early 20th century²⁹



Three men and one female are standing in front of Philippine Café. Windows are decollated with neon signs. The storefront appears to have an awning or projecting signs, with the steel wires installed into the walls.

²⁹ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

5.3 Decline of the Neighborhood, Kingdome Protest and ISRD establishment

The great depression in 1930's and the war time in early 1940's was the turn of Chinatown-ID. Because of the loss of jobs and businesses, many Asian immigrants went back to home countries or moved to California. Chinatown-ID started to lose its population and businesses. After Japan's Pearl Harbor attack, Japanese businesses and residents were immediately evacuated from the neighborhood. Most of them did not return to the neighborhood when they were released from internment camps after the war. Chinese population in Seattle increased after the removal of The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943. However, many of Chinese families gradually moved out of Chinatown-ID as they received citizenship and improved their financial and social standings. At the same time, SRO hotels and other buildings in the Chinatown-ID's commercial core began to be deteriorated under limited maintenances by absent landlords who moved out of the neighborhood. After the WWII, Chinatown-ID was turning to be a slum.

The City's planning policies furthered the decline of Chinatown-ID. During the war, the City's first public housing Yesler Terrace was constructed around upper Main and Washington Streets by removing existing housing structures. The Interstate 5 freeway (I-5) construction in early 1960's also demolished many historic buildings including tens of SRO hotels. The neighborhood was shrunken and divided into the western half and the eastern half by the freeway viaduct. The eastern half later became Little Saigon with appearance of many Vietnamese businesses in 1980's. Although residents in Chinatown-ID organized protests against the I-5 construction, their voices did not change the plan.

Figure 5.3.A Jackson Building after the evacuation of Japanese in 1940's³⁰



The photograph captures a sidewalk in front of Jackson building after the evacuation of Japanese. Jackson building was owned by Murakami family and anchored by Higo Variety Store. Murakami family maintained the ownership. The buildings today is home to three Japanese businesses including Kobo at Higo craft shop. This photograph captures layers of projecting signs in front of Far East Building next to Jackson building.

The construction of the Kingdome aroused much larger protests when the project was passed by King County voters in 1986. The protest widely received attentions from Asian Americans in the region who had already left Chinatown-ID. The majority of protesting activists were second generation Chinese, Japanese and

³⁰ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Filipino Americans who were involved in Asian America civil-rights moments rising in the era. These young activists were afraid that Chinatown-ID may be replaced with stadium parking spaces. They linked the stadium construction with the Ozark Ordinance adopted in 1970 that had closed many of SRO hotel rooms which did not follow its fire codes. They suspected that the closures of SRO hotel rooms were part of the City's plan clearing Chinatown-ID in order to replace the neighborhood with parking. Two cross-ethnicity organizations, the International District Youth Council (Inter*Im) and the International District Economic Association (IDEA) were organized during this period and representatively negotiated with city planners for mitigation of stadium impacts on Chinatown-ID. Inter*Im represented young pan-Asian activists and expressed concerns over issues such as poor housing, deteriorated buildings, lack of social services, and a predominantly non-English-Speaking elderly population living on limited incomes. IDEA represented Chinatown-ID businesses, and negotiated for legal and financial support to protect small pedestrian oriented businesses in Chinatown-ID from suffering by stadium traffics.

International Special Review District (ISRD) was established in 1973, after discussions between the city planners and the two pan-Asian organizations. "Initially conceived to mitigate the stadium's impact, the (ISRD) Review Board's purpose expanded to preserve the District's unique Asian character and to encourage the rehabilitation of areas for housing and new pedestrian-oriented businesses (Chin 2009)." In addition to the ISRD establishment preservation ordinances established within the District, community revitalization programs took places in later 1770's. The City financially supported Inter*Im and Seattle Chinatown/International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda) to acquire and rehabilitate deteriorated SRO hotels. Seattle Housing Authority constructed three elderly residential towers. Hing Hap Park, Denny Woo community garden, Kobe Terrace and International District Children's Park were created with public and community findings. In 1986, Chinatown-ID's historic core around South Jackson Street and South King Street was designated as National Register of Historic Place.

Figure 5.3.C King Street Sidewalk during Seafair in 1982³¹



This photograph was attached to the National Register Form. Storefronts are ornamented with Chinese-English bilingual sigs. Many projecting signs are observed. A large internally illuminated wall mounted sign of Wa San Groceries is captured.

³¹ Photograph Source: National Register of Historic Place Nomination Form for Seattle Chinatown Historic District (1986)

5.4 Asian Entrepreneurship and Business Signage as Chinatown-ID's Historic Character

History of Chinatown-ID clearly reveals that the neighborhood has been a commercial core of multiple Asian American immigrants and African American migrants groups. While these minority groups had been discriminated from professional or skilled employment opportunities, many of them aimed to make their fortunes and successes with their entrepreneurship. Chinatown-ID had provided opportunities for them. Newer immigrants who just arrived to the region found their comforts in Chinatown-ID, during their hardworking days as seasonal labors. SRO hotels provided them with affordable housings. Restaurants and social clubs along streets served entertainment, food and music that were familiar to them. Streets in front of ethnic businesses were places where they mingled with their friends who share the same languages and cultures.

The Chinatown-ID community was created adjacent to a transit hub. Union Station and King Street Station were an entrance to Seattle in early 20th centuries. Chinatown-ID business took advantages of the congested traffics around the stations. The photograph of Figure 5.6.A captures SRO hotel's roof signs and other large wall signs facing toward Union Station. Jackson Street looks crowded with cars, streetcars and pedestrians within the early 20th century photograph. Figure 5.6.B is a photograph of storefronts and sidewalk in front of Hotel Annex Welcome and Bush Hotel along Jackson Street. Signs are diverse and layered with large projecting signs, medium sized wall signs and finely designed window ornaments. Stores along Jackson Street were probably trying to get attentions from the station traffics and to catch eyes both from car traffic driving up the street and pedestrian traffics walking from the station area.

Figure 5.6.A Union Station and Jackson Street in early 20th Century³²



³² Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Figure 5.6.B Diverse Storefront Signs along Jackson Street in early 20th Century³³



This is a picture of storefronts of Hotel Annex Welcome and Bush Hotel along Jackson Street. Signs with different shapes and sizes were projecting to the sidewalk. Sing includes Yamatoya, Chop Suey Noodles and the adjusting Bush Hotel.

Historic photographs certainly prove that diverse business signs had been distinctive character of Chinatown-ID. This character was specifically prominent during the period of significance, when Asian businesses were thriving under Seattle's booming economy. Although businesses despaired and colorful signs became deteriorated or removed during the declining age, many remained and gradually recovered after the community's revitalization efforts.

It is observed that large projecting blade signs have been widely used in Chinatown-ID. Within photographs, many of these projecting signs are horizontally shaped and projected to sidewalks with hard metal wires. While shapes are various, business names are printed with large and crisp fonts. Wall mounted signs are also commonly seen in historic photographs. Each storefront often has both a projecting sign and a wall sign in these photographs. Wall signs are typically horizontally placed along wall lines between ground floors and the second floors. Vertical wall signs with Chinese characters can be also seen. These Asian language signs, as well as Asian lantern ornaments are certainly creating feelings of Asian community. Awnings are also commonly seen in historic pictures. However most of them look like they are being used as weather protection rather than as business signs. Most awnings do not have any text or symbols printed in historical photographs.

Chinatown-ID has been a commercial core for different minority ethnic groups and diverse business signs have been characterizing their thriving business activities. ISRD today should pay further attention to this fact. Encouragement of diverse business signs do comply with ISRD's intention to enhance historic character of the community. Although the current ISRD's review criteria focuses on compatibility and standardization of signage designs, encouragement of diverse business signs should be rather emphasized for its signage policies.

³³ Photograph Source: Wing Luck Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience

Summary of Chapter 5 Findings:

- Chinatown-ID has been a commercial core of Asian and other minority groups. While they were discriminated from professional and skilled jobs, Chinatown-ID had provided them with opportunities for entrepreneurships.
- Diverse business signs are part of Chinatown-ID's Historic Character
- The separation of ISRD from the city's planning department is originated to its establishment in 1970's, which enabled the community to have rights to formulate their own preservation ordinances and to review new developments so that the impact from the Kingdome stadium construction can be mitigated.

Chapter 6

Chinatown-ID's Commercial Community Today

Chapter 6 studies neighborhood contexts of Chinatown-ID today. The study aims to understand how business signage control of ISRD should be laid out within the current context.

6.1 Political Boundaries

Seattle's Chinatown International District is located at the south of Downtown Seattle, adjacent to the City's Central Business District. The City of Seattle identifies the neighborhood boundary as Chinatown-International District Urban Center Village. Part of the neighborhood is designated as International Special Review District (ISRD). ISRD is legislated under Special Review District ordinance (SMC 23.66) with the purpose "to promote, preserve and perpetuate the cultural, economic, historical, and otherwise beneficial qualities of the area, particularly the features derived from its Asian heritage (SMC 23.66.302)." As discussed in Chapter 5.4, ISRD was established in 1973 responding to the community's protest against the Kingdome development. The original purpose was to mitigate stadium impact and to protect the neighborhood from automobile oriented developments such as motel, fast food stores and parking. ISRD's ordinances today maintain emphasis on pedestrian orientation.

Goals of ISRD today are as listed in Table 5.1. One of provision encourages "the use of street-level spaces for pedestrian-oriented retail specialty shops with colorful and interesting displays." The goal complies with the district purpose of preserving and enhancing historical qualities of the area. As studied in Chapter 5, colorful and interesting displays ornamenting street storefronts are Chinatown-ID's historic character.

Table 6.1 International Special Review District (ISRD) Goals (SMC 23.66.302)

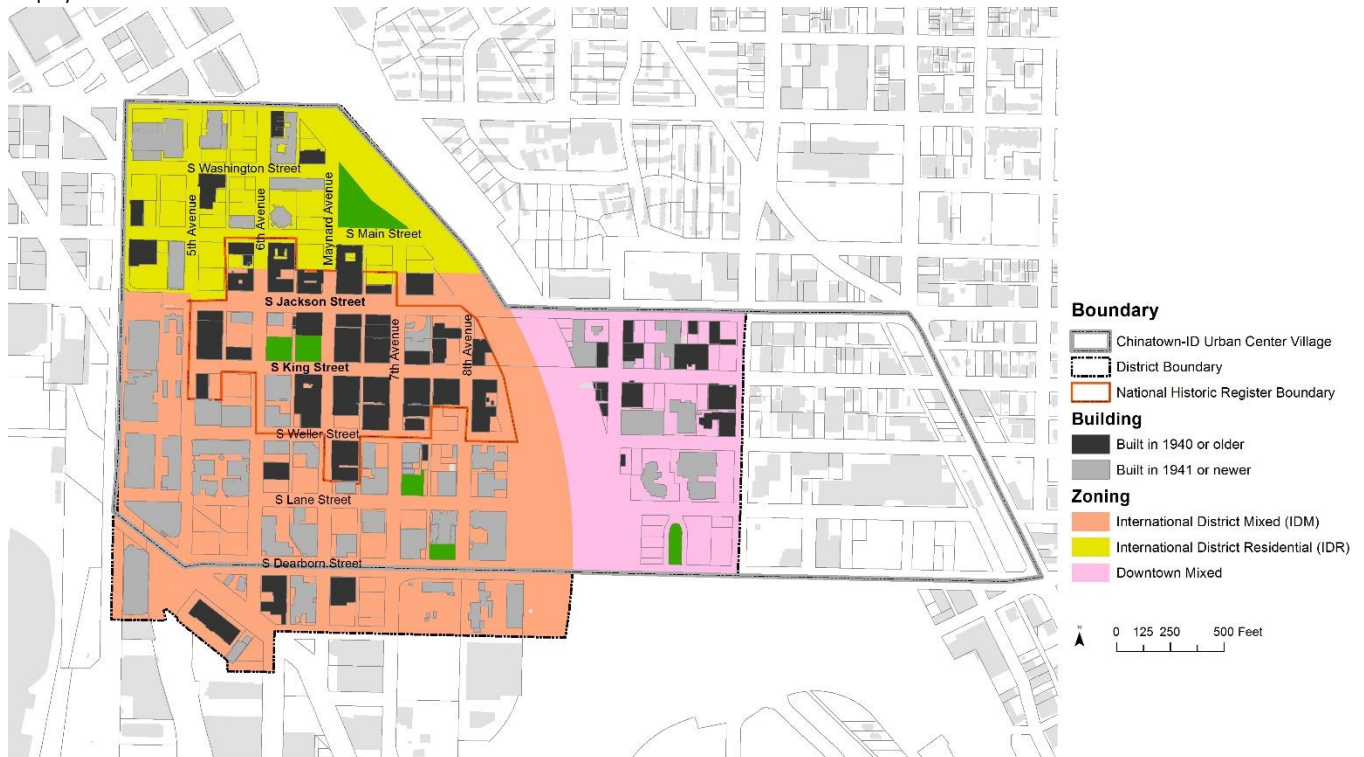
- Reestablishing the District as a stable residential neighborhood with a mixture of housing types;
- Encouraging the use of street-level spaces for pedestrian-oriented retail specialty shops with colorful and interesting displays;
- Protecting the area and its periphery from the proliferation of parking lots and other automobile-oriented uses;
- Encouraging the rehabilitation of existing structures;
- Improving the visual and urban design relationships between existing and future buildings, parking garages, open spaces and public improvements within the International District;
- Exercising a reasonable degree of control over site development and the location of off-street parking and other automobile-oriented uses; and
- Discouraging traffic and parking resulting from athletic stadium events and commuters working outside the District.

Zonings in ISRD include International District Mixed (IDM), International District Residential (IDR) and Downtown Mix (DM). IDM and IDR are special zoning established for ISRD separately from the City's general

zonings. These special zonings are allowing ISRD to control the area with its own ordinances and design review program. The boundary of National Register of Historic Place (National Register boundary) is around S. Jackson Street and S. King Streets, in the area west to the freeway viaduct. The National Register boundary is much smaller than the ISRD boundary.

Figure 6.1.A Map of International Special review District – Boundary, Zoning and Historic Building³⁴

Map by Misa Cartier



Chinatown-ID BIA has been identifying and promoting three ethnic towns since the late 2000's; Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon. Each location is as displayed in Figure 6.1.B. Chinatown's heart is King Street between 5th Avenue and 8th Avenue. These four (4) blocks along S. King Street are filled with history of early Chinese community development. The historic Kong Yick Building is home of Wing Luck Museum of Asian Pacific American Experience today. Milwaukee Hotel, Rex Hotel, Alps Hotel and many other historically significant buildings exists along S. King Street in these blocks. The Chinatown Gate at the entrance of 5th Avenue and Hing Hay Park between 6th Avenue and Maynard Avenue are prominent additions to this historic street. In 2016, this area is busy with constructions. Hing Hay Park expansion is taking place at the former U.S. post office location. Publix hotel and Louisiana Hotel are under rehabilitations.

Japantown's heart is a block surrounded by S. Jackson Street, S. Main Street, 6th Avenue and Maynard Avenue. The S. Jackson Street side has three Japanese businesses; Kobo craft shop at Higo, Momo apparel store and Kaname restaurant. They opened their businesses in late 2000's after Jackson Building's remodel. Maneki

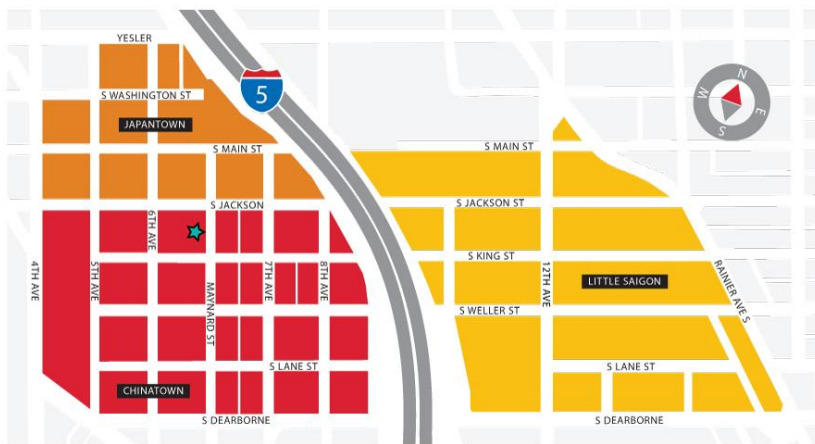
³⁴ GIS Data Source: City of Seattle, King County Department of Assessments

Restaurant along 6th Avenue has been serving traditional Japanese cuisine since 1904. Panama Hotel at S. Main Street is the place Japanese Americans left their belongings behind their ways to internments camps.

Little Saigon is the area located east of I-90. Its core is the cluster of mid-20th century style shopping centers along S. Jackson Street. These shopping centers are filled with Vietnamese restaurants, grocers, salons and other Vietnamese businesses. The Vietnamese population in Seattle increased in 1980's after the Fall of Saigon. Refugees from Vietnam were largely Chinese Vietnamese. They created Little Saigon in the 1980's and added new character to the Chinatown-ID neighborhood. In 2015, the 12th & Jackson development is under early design review processes. This giant residential and shopping center development will become a new destination in Little Saigon.

Figure 6.1.B Map by Chinatown-BIA promoting Chinatown, Japantown and Little Saigon

Map by Chinatown International District Business Improvement Area



6.2 Diverse Characteristics in Chinatown-ID

ISR D encompasses areas much wider than the National Register boundary. Neighborhood characteristics significantly differ between the area inside and outside of the National Register boundary, as well as among different blocks outside of the National Registry boundary.

The area inside of the National Registrar boundary is Chinatown-ID's historic core. Historically significant buildings mostly concentrate in this area. Many of these buildings are SRO hotels that cover 100 percent of their lots, maintaining a strong unbroken street wall. Pedestrian oriented small Asian businesses clusters in this historic core, adding distinctive character to this neighborhood. S. Jackson Street and S. King Street are two main arterials. S. Jackson Street is a boulevard equipped with four car lanes, wide sidewalks, sidewalk trees and parallel street parking spaces. Higher automobile traffic is observed along S. Jackson Street including metro bus route and the First Hill Streetcar. S. King Street is the main pedestrian corridor. The walkway along the street from the Chinatown Gate to Wing Luck Museum viewing Hing Hay Park and small businesses residing in historic SRO hotels is probably the most imaginable streetscape in Chinatown-ID. There exist some non-historic buildings in this historic core, including two bank buildings, two garages from 1940's and

two mid-20th century style restaurant buildings. Street wall is broken and surface parking dominates in their parcels. Despite these exceptions, the historic core is characterized with concentration of historic buildings and pedestrian oriented small businesses. This neighborhood is filled with Chinatown-ID's distinctive character.

The area outside of the National Register boundary is much larger than the historic core. Historic buildings do not exist much in this area. Character differs among different blocks. The blocks south of the historic core between S. Weller and S. Dearborn Streets have the closest characteristics to the historic core, in terms of appearances of pedestrian oriented small Asian businesses. Uwajimaya Village is located in the west edge and International District Village Square Buildings are located in the east edge of these blocks. International District Village Square Buildings is home of International District library and community center. Pedestrian oriented character remains around the Uwajimaya Village building and Village Square Buildings. However automobile-oriented land use increases as it gets closer to South Dearborn Street. The southern half of Uwajimaya Village is a large surface parking. The blocks between 6th Avenue and 7th Avenue are dominated by surface parking lots and automobile-oriented uses.

Another major area outside of the National Boundary is Little Saigon blocks. Businesses along South Jackson Street resides inside of mid-20th century style shopping center buildings that contain surface parking spaces between sidewalk and storefronts. The Pacific Rim Center next to the freeway viaduct was built in 2000 and its commercial spaces include Chinese restaurants and other small businesses. Along S. King Street, there exist a few Asian grocers. Half of the buildings in blocks north of S. Weller Street are built prior to WWII. However these old buildings are mostly one or two stories garage buildings and currently used as warehouses. Exceptions are Chinese Baptist church at South King Street built in 1924 and Nichirin Buddhist Church at South Weller Street built in 1928, which remain architecturally and historically interesting structures. S. Weller Street and S. Lane Street are disconnected from the historic core by the freeway viaduct. Blocks south of S. Weller Street have the least connections with Chinatown-ID's character. There exists subsidized apartments and Indian Clinic Center buildings both built in 1980's.

The Union Station area is a regional transit hub. The tall office complex buildings were built in 1990's as part of the City's Union Station reform project. Vulcan Inc., one of the largest real estate developer in Seattle, was behind the reform project and is currently located inside of these buildings. Union Station has been linked with Chinatown-ID's foundation and commercial prosperity prior to the WWII. As public transportation is regaining popularity in the Seattle region, this station area is again becoming an entrance of Chinatown-ID.

The Area around Denny Woo Park and Kobe Terrace is Chinatown-ID's residential core. Commercial activities are limited in this area. The Northwest corner of ISRD boundary, the blocks north to S. Jackson Street between 4th Avenue and 6th Avenue are the transition area from Chinatown-ID to Pioneer Square. Although some pedestrian oriented businesses exist along 5th Avenue, they are not related to Asian characters. Surface public parking lots are prevailing in this area.

It is obvious that ISRD embraces areas with different character within its boundary. Concentrations of historic buildings are significantly different between the historic core and other areas. Because of the different land uses, potential for future growth and development also varies. Most of the area outside of the historic core

was drastically up-zoned in 2011, except the Union Station area and the residential core area. New developments are highly predictable in the up-zoned areas, which will replace surface parking and automobile-oriented mid-20th style buildings with contemporary mixed-use buildings. ISRD's preservation policies including signage control should reflect these diversity within ISRD. Differentiation between the historic core and the area with potential growth is necessary.

Figure 6.2.A Context Map of Chinatown-ID as a Commercial Destination

Map by Misa Cartier

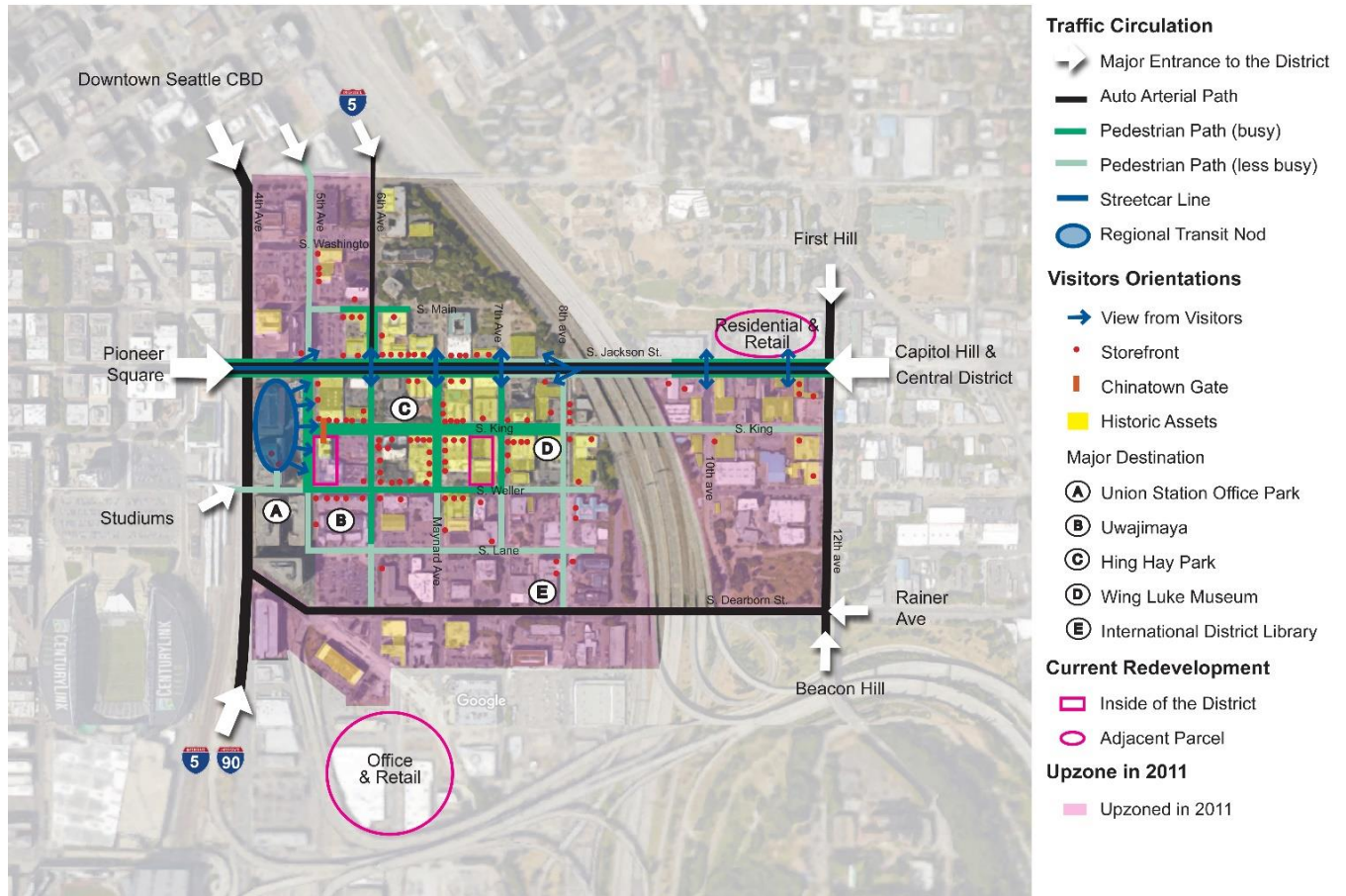
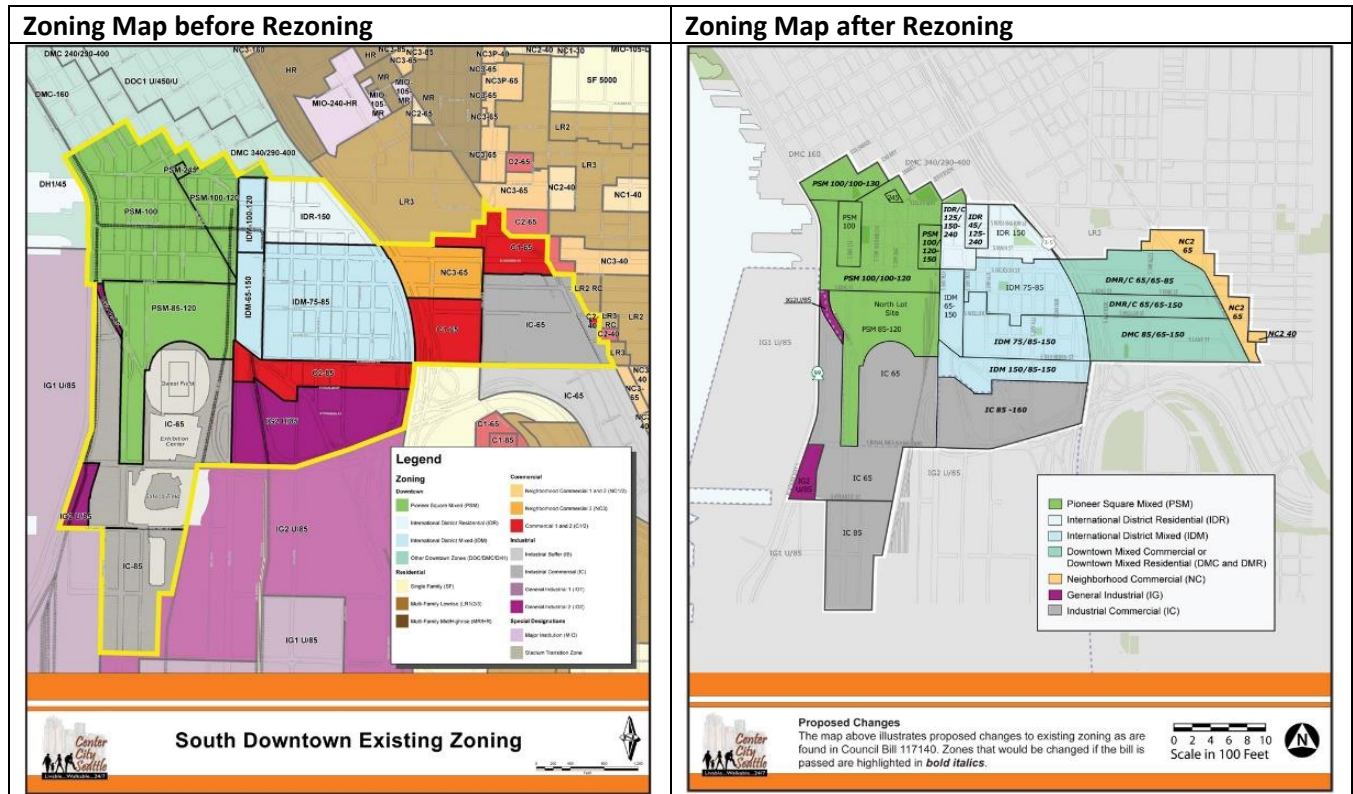


Figure 6.2.B South Downtown Rezoning Map in 2011 by the City of Seattle³⁵

Map by City of Seattle



6.3 Questioning Standardized Signage Control in Chinatown-ID

The diversity inside of ISRD is unique compared to other historic districts in Seattle. Figure 5.3 and Table 5.3 compares size and concentration of historic buildings among ISRD and other historic commercial districts in Seattle. ISRD’s boundary encompasses a wider area outside of the National Register boundary than other districts. Pioneer Square and the three Land Mark Districts have similar boundaries to their National Register boundaries. Historic Buildings dominate overall of districts within Pioneer Square, Pike Place Market and Ballard. Columbia City has relatively less historic buildings, however its commercial area along Rainier Avenue is filled with historic buildings. Interestingly, the concentration pattern of historic buildings of ISRD is similar to PPCOD. In PPCOD, similarly to ISRD, historic buildings only concentrate in its conservation core and sporadically exist outside of the conservation core. It should be pointed out that business signs are not required for design reviews in PPCOD.

Neighborhood characteristics are further diverse in ISRD, comparing to other historic districts. ISRD embraces not only its historic core, but also areas with auto-oriented uses, shopping centers, a regional transit hub, contemporary office complex buildings, a quiet residential hub, warehouse areas and more. Chinatown-ID’s multi-ethnic background adds further complexity to this neighborhood. This diverse character is significantly

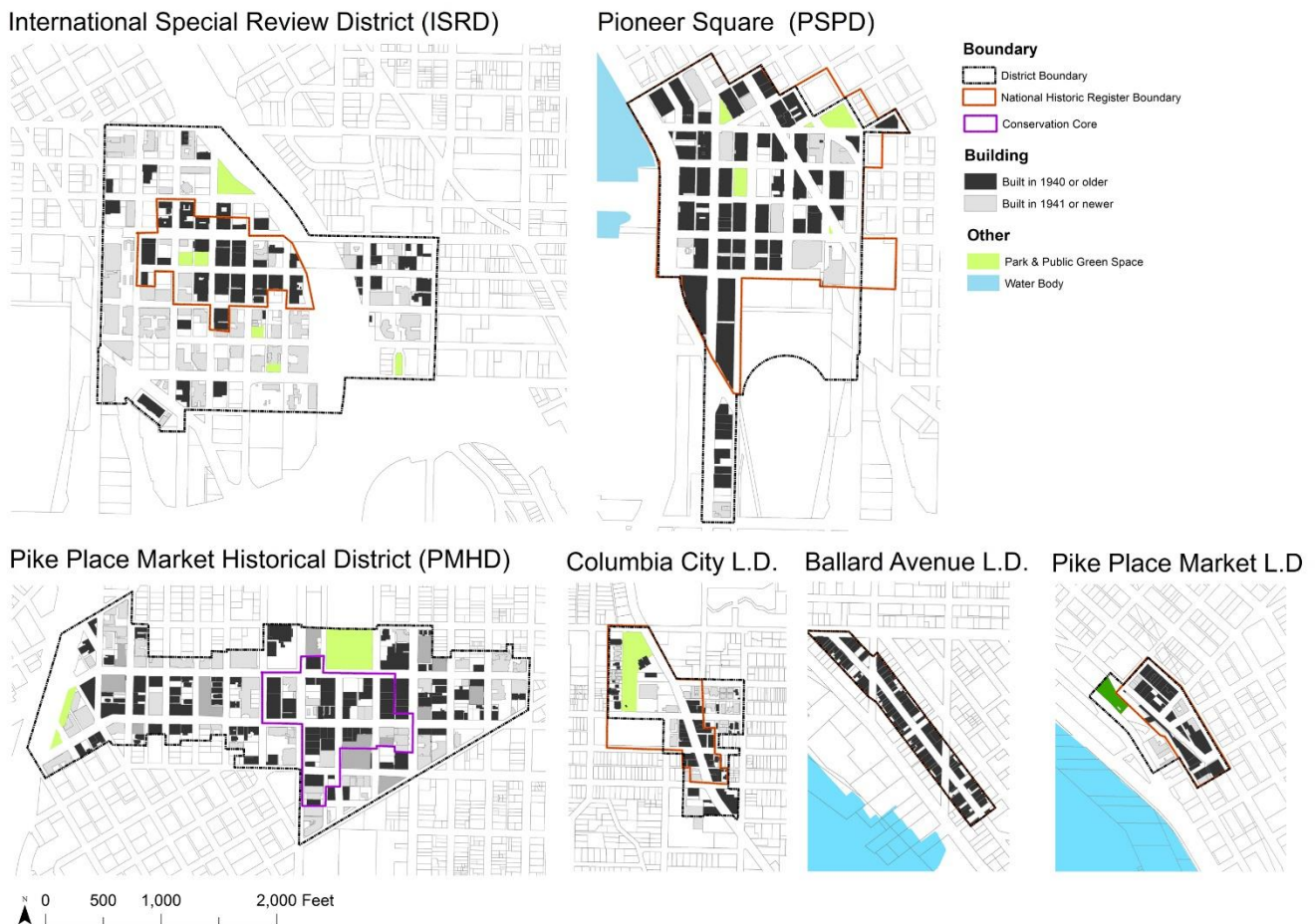
³⁵ Maps are retrieved from South Downtown Rezoning Map published by Seattle Office of Community Development (Former Seattle Department of Planning and Development) in 2010.

different from the character of three Landmark District. Both BALD and CCDL have a history as a main street of small village of a mono-ethnic group. Pike Place Market includes businesses with diverse backgrounds. However its nature as a public market remains the district more or less unified as one commercial center. The neighborhood of PSPD is similar to ISRD in terms of the large size of the district. However the concentration of Victorian Era buildings maintains PSPD architecturally identical. Furthermore, the neighborhood is characterized as a pioneer town of Seattle’s Caucasian immigrants, thus multi-ethnicity character does not exist in PSPD.

When understanding the uniqueness of ISRD, it is questioned if the rule of Certificate of Approval that is standardized for all of Landmark Districts and Special Review Districts is appropriate within the ISRD’s diverse context. Chinatown-ID’s neighborhoods that ISRD encompasses are too complex to follow the standardized design review requirement on business signs. The thesis argues that ISRD needs to have layers of business signage policies and design review requirements that reflect different concentrations of historic buildings and potential for new development within the District, instead of merely following the standardized rule.

Figure 6.3 Maps of Six Historic Commercial Districts in Seattle, Boundaries and Pre-WWII buildings³⁶

Map by Misa Cartier



³⁶ GIS Data Source: City of Seattle, King County Department of Assessments

Table 6.3 Area of Historic Commercial Districts in Seattle

* Area calculated by GIS geometric calculation

Designation Type	District Name	District Area (Acre)
Special Review District	International Special Review District (ISRD)	127
	Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD)	105
Landmark District	Pike Place Market Historical District (PMHD)	14
	Ballard Avenue Landmark District (BALD)	13
	Columbia City Landmark District (CCLD)	24
Conservation Overlay District	Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD)	107

Summary of Chapter 6 Findings:

- Within ISRD, the area inside and outside of the National Register of Historic Place boundary are significantly different in terms of concentration of historic buildings, appearance of vacant or surface parking lots and potentials for future growth
- Standardized signage control rules and design review requirement with other historic districts are not appropriate in ISRD
- ISRD needs original signage control rules with considerations for the difference between historic core and the area with potential for growth.

Chapter 7

Recommendations for ISRD's Signage Control

Responding to all findings from earlier chapters, this last chapter makes recommendations to policy makers about ISRD's administration and signage rules in Chinatown-ID. These proposals intend to achieve sustainable community development in Chinatown-ID, while balancing both preservation of historic character and vitalization of the small business community.

7.1 Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Table 7.1 summarizes findings from each chapters and recommendations according to each of findings.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 clarified significance of preservation of architectural structures and vitalization of small commercial communities in historic districts. It was emphasized that ISRD's signage control needs to be performed in a way that enhances the community character by benefiting both preservation of historic buildings and vitalization of small business activities.

Chapter 3 found limitations of ISRD's current design review administration. The isolation of ISRD from the city-wide planning departments has left ISRD behind the City's continuous planning efforts and design review program improvements. Furthermore, there is a structural limitation around the staffing system of the City's Historic Preservation Office where only one city employee oversees all projects within each of districts. This staffing system is in contrast to the system adapted by the city-wide Design Review Office where multiple employees shuffles around different districts. ISRD's administration is closed to one district coordinator, without being open to peer evaluations. This staffing system is not preferable for healthy operation of design reviews that requires sets of eyes. The ISRD administration should be improved so that its design review procedures are able to receive support and evaluation from multiple professionals. The isolation of ISRD from the city-wide design review program must be fixed.

Chapter 4 studied ISRD sign codes and design guidelines. This study revealed that ISRD's signage control do not have any objective rules. ISRD's design review decisions are made based upon entirely subjective criteria without following any size or frequency standards. This absence of numeric standards is an issue only in ISRD, not in other historic commercial districts. Combining this absence of objective rules with the ISRD's closed administration, it is predictable that inappropriate arbitrary intervention can be made throughout the design review process. Objective rules that clarify size and frequency standards must be formulated within ISRD's sign codes.

Chapter 5 detailed history of Chinatown-ID. It was clarified that the image of diverse and colorful signage is a part of Chinatown-ID's historic character. Encouragement of diverse signs aligns enhancement of historic character in Chinatown-ID. Diverse design of business signs should be encouraged under objective size and frequency standards, rather than being restricted by design reviews that seek design standardization.

Chapter 6 studied neighborhood character of Chinatown-ID. The study elucidated diversity within Chinatown-ID. The difference between the area inside and outside of the National Register boundary is

significant. While the area inside of the National Register boundary has high concentration of historic buildings, the area outside of the boundary is filled with surface parking and auto-centric land uses that may be replaced by new developments. Signage rules and design review requirements need to reflect different character within Chinatown-ID.

The following sections explain more details of recommendations for ISRD’s administration and signage rules for both areas of the historic core and the area with potential growth.

Table 7.1 Summary Table of Findings and Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Presupposition	
<p>Chapter 1 The value of historic districts consists of both architectural structures and vibrancy of small commercial communities. Policies in historic districts need to balance both aspects.</p>	<p>Signage control needs to balance both preservation of architectural structures and vitalization of small businesses in the community.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Business signs have the potential to enhance community character in historic commercial districts. However, business signs tend to be strictly controlled in historic districts. In Seattle, business signs are required to go through design reviews on top of city-wide sign permit processes. Design reviews intend to protect architectural structures of historic buildings and to maintain compatibility of new signs to the existing neighborhood context.</p>	<p>Signage control should be managed in a way that enhances distinctive image of districts by protecting architectural structures, and that benefit commercial communities at the same time.</p>
ISRD’s administration	
<p>Chapter 3 Involvement of multiple professionals is necessary for healthy operation of design reviews. However ISRD’s design review program is lacking in peer evaluation opportunities. The ISRD’s design review is administrated by one city staff, while multiple staff and third party professionals are involved in each of districts under the city-wide design review program operated by the current planning department. The isolation of ISRD from the city’s planning departments is leaving ISRD behind the city-wide planning momentum.</p>	<p>Reform ISRD administration structure so that evaluation of multiple professionals and public voices can be effectively reached by management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix the isolation of ISRD from the city-wide planning departments. • Improve Public Outreach efforts by cooperating with outreach planners in the city’s long range planning department. • Encourage involvement of non-profit workers who are engaged in community development efforts.
<p>Chapter 4 ISRD is lacking in objective standards for size and frequency of business signs, which may cause arbitrary intervention by a city staff and ISRD review board.</p>	<p>Set objective rules that clarify standards for size, frequency and installation methods. Based on these standards, establish administrative review program that can substitute design review for areas design review is not necessary.</p>
Signage Rules	
<p>Chapter 5</p>	

<p>The image of diverse business signage is a historic character of Chinatown-ID. ISRD’s signage control should focus on enhancement of this character, rather than design standardization.</p>	<p>In the historic core, keep district board review with a purpose protecting historic buildings. Remove an intention to seek for design compatibility and standardization.</p>
<p>Chapter 6 The area inside and outside of National Register of Historic Place boundary is significantly different, in terms of concentration of historic buildings and potential for future growth. ISRD’s signage control need to reflect these differences.</p>	<p>In the area outside of the historic core, remove ISRD’s review requirement for business signs. Design Review focus should be shifted from business signs and other trivial façade changes to new developments. Ensure new development happens as growth of Chinatown-ID’s existing character. New buildings may be forced to have pedestrian oriented small commercial spaces.</p> <p>In both areas, size and frequency standards should be objectively formulated according to characters and architectural context. Administrative review should function in order to enforce these standards. Overall, colorful and diverse business signs, as well as outstanding projecting signs should be encouraged.</p>
<p>-</p>	<p>Strategically use business signs as a tool enhancing the community character. Consider transit and pedestrian flow within ISRD and invite eyes and interests of passengers into the district’s commercial core.</p>

7.2 ISRD’s Administration

First of all, ISRD’s administration needs to be transformed so that its design review procedures are open to evaluations and supports by multiple professionals and community members. The separation of ISRD from the city’s planning departments must be fixed. This thesis cannot define if the Historic Preservation office needs to become part of the current planning department or not. However, it is clear that communication between Historic Preservation office and the two planning departments need to become sufficient. A system needs to be established, where design review planners and public outreach planners in planning departments are involved and give input on design review programs for historic districts including ISRD.

The separation of the historic district administration from the general planning offices is peculiar to the City of Seattle. Most North American cities have historic preservation offices managed under planning departments. The separation was reasonable at the time when Seattle’s historic districts were formed after community’s protests toward urban renewals that were led the City’s planning department. However, the planning departments have been drastically changed as of late. Planners today understand the significance of historic structures and pay further attention to public involvement. The city-wide design review program has been established since 1994, although it did not exist in 1970’s.

In Vancouver B.C., preservation practices for the historic Chinatown are managed under the city’s planning department. The planning office integrates preservation and economic vitalization elements within policies for the Chinatown. The Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee is formed as a citizen committee in Vancouver

B.C. Chinatown. The committee’s responsibilities are not limited to design review of incoming developments. The committee is involved in comprehensive planning issues and makes recommendations for plans related to economic vitalization, rehabilitation and all other preservation issues in the neighborhood. Design review is required only for new developments, and business signs are only subject to city-wide sign permit procedures. Chinatown BIA is programed under the umbrella of the city’s planning department. These unifications of both preservation and revitalization efforts is appearing in their well-balanced design guidelines. The case of Vancouver B.C. teach us that sufficient communication between preservation and economic vitalization efforts can be beneficial for administration of a historic district. In Chinatown-ID, community’s non-profit organizations such as SCIDpda and Inter*Im embraces many community development professionals. ISRD’s historic preservation administration may be further integrated between these community organizations.

Secondary, public involvement has to be further emphasized. For healthy operation of design reviews, public involvement is another significant element in addition to involvement of multiple professionals. Currently, the ISRD’s semi-monthly board meeting has limited public participants. Although meeting schedules and agendas are available at the Seattle Department of Neighborhood website, further proactive outreach needs to be made in order to encourage public participations. The sufficient communication between outreach professionals in the long range planning department must be effective in order to strengthen public involvement.

The outreach efforts should be also made in order to educate small business owners about signage rules. It may be one way to distribute brochures that summarize signage rules to business owners. Land use codes and design guidelines are often written in a complicated way with jargon. Brochures that summarize rules using simple words and illustrations will help business owners to understand and comply with these rules. A good example of this kind of brochure is “Façade Guide to Storefront Design,” which is published by New York City planning department. The brochure uses many visual instructions and simplified terms. Proactive outreach efforts will improve compliance to rules among small business owners in the District.

Figure 7.2 Façade Guide to Storefront Design published by New York City Small Business Services



7.3 Objective Rules and Administrative Reviews

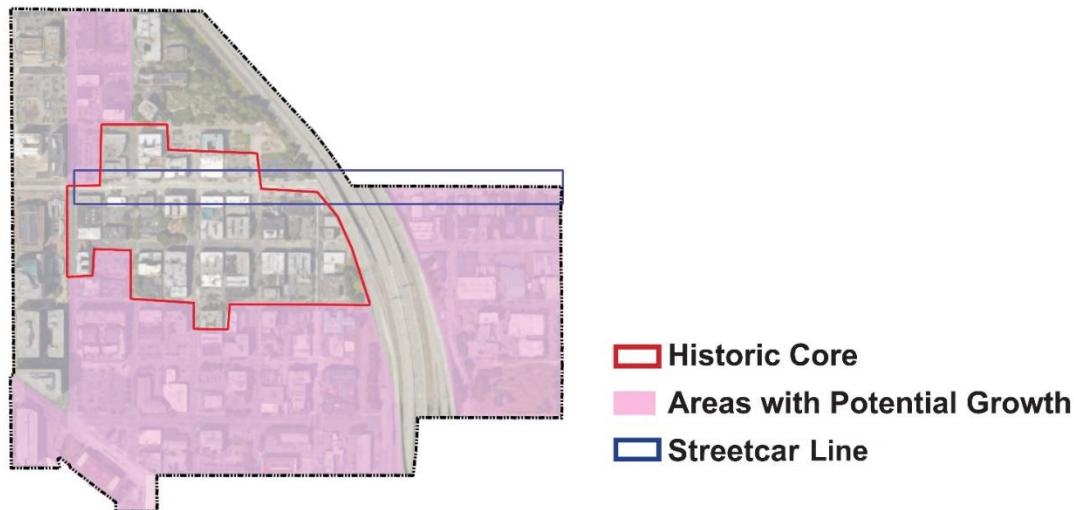
Objective rules need to be formulated that sets size, frequency and installation methods of business signs in ISRD. By knowing clear rules of size and frequency limitations, business owners are allowed to make their own design expressions within these rules. Diverse signs are not encouraged under current conditions, where business owners have no clue about size and frequency standards until they listen to district coordinator's guidance.

Once objective rules are established, administrative reviews can be performed for areas where design review is not necessary. This administrative review can be performed by sign permit office within the current planning department. Business signs in the Pike Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD), simply goes through administrative review of the sign permit office without any of design review procedures. In ISRD, business signs in the area out of the National Register boundary can be reviewed in the same way as in PPCOD. The shift from design review to administrative review for business signs will save time and resources of the Chinatown-ID's community. The saved community resources can be used for more important issues such as design guidelines updates in order to prepare for new developments.

7.4 Recommendations for the Area of Historic Core

Chapter 6 already identified the area inside of the boundary as historic core, and outside of the boundary as the area with potential growth. This chapter proposes policies that are tailored for each of the two areas.

Figure 7.4 Historic Core, Area with Potential Growth and Streetcar Line



In the historic core, architectural structures of historic buildings need to be preserved. The current design review by the ISRD district board should remain in this area with focuses on protection of historic buildings. Numeric standards for size, frequency and installation methods should be tailored according to the architectural character of historic buildings. While administrative reviews should be performed in order to

enforce numeric standards, ISRD board's design review should overlay in order to make sure new signage installations are not damaging historic structures. While the intention of design review protecting historic buildings is emphasized, another currently existing intention pursuing compatibility of signage design to the existing character should be eliminated. Instead of pursuing compatibility, diverse design expressions by each business should be encouraged within clear standards for size, frequency and installation methods.

Projecting blade sign is a kind of signage that should be recommended in the Historic Core. The layers of blade signs that horizontally project toward sidewalks has been characterizing Chinatown-ID's commercial streets throughout its history. Projecting signs effectively invite eyes into historic cores from the transit hub along the 5th avenue and the Streetcar line along the S. Jackson Street. Effective use of projecting blade signs will support businesses within the Historic Core to communicate what they offer to transit passengers, invite more people to the neighborhood and enhance historic character of Chinatown-ID.

Many deteriorated business signs are seen in the historic core today. Some are damaged and unrepaired because of vacancy. Some are not well taken care of by long term tenants. Both retail recruiting and façade beautification support by non-profit workers of community organizations should be further encouraged as effective ways to rehabilitate deteriorated business signs. While ISRD performs design reviews from the view point of preserving historic buildings, significance of storefront rehabilitation needs to be understood by district board members and the district coordinator.

7.5 Recommendations for the Areas with Potential Growth

In the area outside of the National Boundary, design review by ISRD board is not necessary. Concentration of historic structures is not high enough to justify the design review requirements for business signs and other trivial façade changes. Design review should only focus on new developments and building demolitions, in the same way as the design review requirements in Pike Pine Conservation Overlay District (PPCOD). Numeric size, frequency and installation method standards should be formulated according to new development standards. Administrative review by the city's sign permit office must be sufficient in order to enforce these standards.

While redevelopments are highly anticipated in this area, ISRD's attentions need to shift toward preparation for gentrification pressures. In order to achieve new developments as new growth of the Chinatown-ID's community rather than as replacement, ISRD's land use codes and design guidelines must be updated with profound considerations. Land use codes may enforce new developments to have ground floor commercial spaces that are compatible with the existing character of the historic core. Setting limitations for size and street frontage of each business may be one way to maintain spaces for small businesses. PPCOD's land use codes currently set these kind of storefront size limitations. PPCOD codes require new buildings to have certain numbers of commercial space that is smaller than two thousand (2000) square feet according to size of buildings. The codes also limit street frontage of commercial spaces to 50 feet along Pike and Pine Streets³⁷. In addition to the limitation of size and street frontage of commercial spaces, the use of Asian language and symbols may be also enforced so that the new developments maintain Chinatown-ID's pan-Asian character.

³⁷ Source: SMC 23.73.008

7.6 Strategically use Business Signs to Enhance the Community Character

Finally, this thesis advocates for strategic use of business signage in order to enhance community character of Chinatown-ID. The community of Chinatown-ID often faces conflicts defining “Asian Character” among multiple ethnic groups. Architectural values differ among Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Vietnamese. However, the image of diverse signs is something common among many Asian cities. Encouragement of diverse business signs can be an effective tool to embody pan-Asian character of Chinatown-ID.

As the Seattle region’s public transportation expands, more and more transit users are passing through Chinatown-ID. The view from Chinatown International District Station and First Hill Streetcar line along S. Jackson Street is significant in terms of promoting the Chinatown-ID’s commercial community to these transit passengers. Specifically the view along Jackson Street should be considered as a showcase of Chinatown-ID. Characteristic Asian signs and storefront displays will provide streetcar riders with feelings of Chinatown-ID. Encouragement of temporal signs such as banners, posters, lanterns and flags that include Asian languages and design may quickly enhance Chinatown-ID’s pan-Asian character. Projecting blade signs facing out along avenues and allays will invite eyes and interests into historic cores. Businesses along the Streetcar line should be allowed to have larger scaled transit orientating signs.

In San Francisco Chinatown, business signs are further filling its streetscapes. Business signs only adhere to administrative reviews under the city’s sign permit program. Sign codes clearly formulate size and frequency standards for each type of business signage. These standards are differentiated among different zonings in the Chinatown. For examples, maximum size of projecting blade signage is set at twenty four (24) square feet in Visitor Retail District zone that is a pedestrian oriented historic core of the neighborhood, while the number is set at thirty two (32) square feet in Community Business District zone that is around the city’s major arterial roads. Grant Avenue is part of Visitor Retail District zone in San Francisco Chinatown. As seen in the Figure 7.6.A, the avenue is filled with colorful awnings, blade signs, wall mounted signs, flags, banners and Chinese lanterns. As soon as cable car riders moving along California Street get to the avenue, this distinctive view tells passengers that they are at Chinatown. The image of diverse signage is certainly enhancing the Chinatown’s character and inviting visitor’s eyes.

Figure 7.6.A Street View of Grant Avenue from California Street in San Francisco Chinatown

Photograph retrieved from Google Maps



In Seattle’s Chinatown-ID, business signs are further modest, compared to San Francisco Chinatown. ISRD’s signage policies should encourage and support diverse signage expressions of small businesses, rather than restraining them. Although control is necessary in order to prevent excessive proliferation and to protect historic structures from inappropriate installations, administrative reviews based on objective rules must be sufficient to achieve these purposes. The design review program that pursues design standardization is not necessary. Figure 7.6.B is a sample image of S. Jackson Street between 6th and Maynard Avenue with more outstanding business signs and temporal ornamentations. This image demonstrates the potential of business signs that may be strategically used in order to enhance the community character of Chinatown-ID in Seattle.

Figure 7.6.B Image of Jackson Street Ornamented with Diverse Business Signage

Image created by Misa Cartier



Conclusions

This thesis studied business signage control in Chinatown-ID. The neighborhood is characterized with historic mixed-use buildings from the early 20th century, and appearances of small Asian ethnic businesses. The diverse and colorful business signs have been one of the distinctive characteristics in Chinatown-ID. This thesis concludes that diverse design of business signs should be further encouraged in the neighborhood than today. Although excessive proliferations and inappropriate installations that damage historic structures must be prevented, objective standards and administrative review program must be sufficient in order to prevent them. Individual business owner's diverse design expressions should be allowed and encouraged under objective rules. The currently performed design review program is not appropriate in Chinatown-ID. The district board review may be kept inside of the historic core, but its intention should be limited to protection of historic buildings, not standardization of designs.

Through the processes studying signage control in Chinatown-ID, the thesis found the isolation and closed administration of ISRD. Land use codes, design guidelines and all other land use policies including signage control policies in ISRD have been administrated by limited numbers of city staffs in the City's Historic Preservation Office. The current administration is structurally limiting opportunities to have ISRD receive supports and evaluations from multiple planning and urban design professionals. The thesis argues for sufficient communication between ISRD and the city's planning departments. With the up-zoning in 2011 and the increasing transit convenience of the neighborhood, rapid gentrification is predictable in Chinatown-ID. The neighborhood needs to receive further attention from the City's planning departments than today.

Appendix A. Summary Table of Sign Codes and Guidelines in ISRD ³⁸

*Rules in codes are written in black font and Rules in design guidelines are written in blue font

*This table include rules include size, frequency and installation type. Rules in regards to right-of-way clearance as well as façade transparency requirements for windows are not included.

Objectives of Rules	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage signs that by their design, location and number are consistent with the goals and objectives of the International Special Review District, and the Union Station Corridor where applicable, and in particular the Asian character of the area; To promote effective communication of sign messages by avoiding undue proliferation; To enhance views and sightlines into and down streets; and To reduce driver distraction and visual blight. 	
Criteria for Approval	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When reviewing proposed signs, the Board and the Director of Neighborhoods shall consider the sign codes objectives, the function of the sign, the character, color and scale of buildings in the immediate vicinity, the character, color and scale of the building for which the sign is proposed, the proposed location of the sign on the building's exterior, and the total number and size of signs proposed or existing on the building. The overall design of a sign including size, shape, texture, method of attachment, graphics, color and lighting, shall be compatible with the use to which the sign refers, with the colors, architectural and design motifs of the building upon which it is to be installed, and with the District. Signs that incorporate recognizable Asian designs or Asian language symbols in at least 40 percent of their message area, or are multilingual, are preferred. Signs shall be affixed to structures so that they do not conceal, damage, or disfigure desirable architectural features or details of the structure. 	
Prohibited Sign Types	
Roof signs, off-premises signs, video display, flashing signs, advertisement sign, changing-image signs, motion sign, free standing sign and portable signs	
Rules for each of allowed Sign Type	
Awning Sign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shall be functional, serving as weather protection for pedestrians at street level. Shall overhang the sidewalk a minimum of 5 feet. Shall be of a design compatible with the architecture of the area. shall be of a solid through color, i.e., the underside of the awning is the same color as the exposed face shall be a color compatible with the building façade The scale of the awning, i.e., height, length, depth and overall bulk shall be compatible with the building storefront Shall be reviewed for color, scale, and overall design compatibility. Shall not be made of shiny, high-gloss, and translucent materials Shall not cover distinctive architectural features of the building face, nor shall installation of the awning damage the structure. Curved shaped awnings are not permitted. A curved shape may be considered only when the curved component is only a minor element of overall design. Large letter sizes and message areas shall not be permitted Asian symbols or designs are encouraged elements
Canopy / Marquee Sign Under Canopy Sign	Not Specified
Projecting Blade Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shall be sited in a manner that minimizes view blockage of abutting business signs. Shall be installed or erected so that there are no visible angle iron sign supports above the roof, building face or wall. Prohibited above the sill line of the second floor unless identifying the building or a single primary tenant, unless signs are identifying the building or a single primary tenant
Wall Sign : Mounted	Allowed

³⁸ Reference: SMC 23.66.160 Signs in International Special Review District, International Special Review District Design Guidelines

Wall Sign : Painted	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt from "Permit" if non-illuminated, consisting Asian language symbols, and smaller than 4 sq. ft.
Window Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exempt from "Permit" if hand painted, gold leafed or decaled onto window, and smaller than 4 sq. ft.
Banner Sign	Allowed, subject to periodic review
Flag Sign	Allowed, subject to periodic review
Rules for Lighting Method	
Directly illumination	
Neon-lit signs	Allowed and Encouraged <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illumination shall be designed and sited in a manner to minimize glare on floors above grade in nearby residences.
Internally Illuminated Cabinet Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The background color of an interior lighted cabinet shall be compatible and integrated with the building face upon which it is attached. Prohibited above the sill line of the second floor unless identifying the building or a single primary tenant, unless signs are identifying the building or a single primary tenant
Indirect illumination	
Backlit awning sign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shall be permitted if the lighting system is encased or screened from view underneath. Warm color lighting systems and neon are encouraged.
Lighting toward sign	Allowed
Size and Frequency limitation	
Not Specified	

Appendix B. Summary Table of Sign Codes and Guidelines in PSPD ³⁹

*Rules in codes are written in black font and Rules in design guidelines are written in blue font

*This table include rules include size, frequency and installation type. Rules in regards to right-of-way clearance as well as façade transparency requirements for windows are not included.

Objectives of Rules	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that signs relate physically and visually to their location To ensure that signs not hide, damage or obscure the architectural elements of the building To ensure that signs be oriented toward and promote a pedestrian environment To ensure that the products or services offered be the focus, rather than signs 	
Criteria for Approval	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship of the shape of the proposed sign to the architecture of the building and with the shape of other approved signs located on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign; The relationship of the texture of the proposed sign to the building for which it is proposed, and with other approved signs located on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign; The possibility of physical damage to the structure and the degree to which the method of attachment would conceal or disfigure desirable architectural features or details of the structure (the method of attachment shall be approved by the Director); The relationship of the proposed colors and graphics with the colors of the building and with other approved signs on the building or in proximity to the proposed sign; The relationship of the proposed sign with existing lights and lighting standards, and with the architectural and design motifs of the building; Whether the proposed sign lighting will detract from the character of the building; and The compatibility of the colors and graphics of the proposed sign with the character of the District. 	
Prohibited Sign Types	
Roof signs, off-premises signs, video display, flashing signs, advertisement sign, changing-image signs, motion sign	
Rules for each of allowed Sign Type	
Awning Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awnings shall be functional, serving as weather protection for pedestrians at street level Awnings shall overhang the sidewalk a minimum of 5 feet. Awnings may be permitted on upper floors for the purpose of climate control.

³⁹ Reference: SMC 23.66.160 Signs in Pioneer Square Preservation District (PSPD) and PSPD Design Guidelines

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All awnings shall be of a design compatible with the architecture of buildings in the area. Letter size shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches
Sign on Canopy / Marquee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter size shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches
Projecting Blade Sign	Allowed and Recommended <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shall not hide, damage, or obscure the architectural elements of the building. Shall be below the intermediate cornice or second floor of the building Size Limit: Typically 8 sq. ft. for non-illuminated sign Neon-lit Sign is generally prohibited but may be approved if less than 6 sq. ft. in size Letter size shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches Must be compatible for surrounding
Wall Sign : Mounted	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter size shall not exceed a maximum height of 10 inches
Wall Sign : Painted	Allowed and Recommended <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the way painted on a wood or metal backing and attached in such a manner that the building surface is not damaged
Window Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aluminum, painted metal, wood and other materials may be used for signs on windows
Banner Sign	Allowed, subject to periodic review
Flag Sign	Allowed, subject to periodic review
Rules for Lighting Method	
Directly illumination	
Neon-lit signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neon signs are generally discouraged. The number of allowable neon signs is limited to 1 for each 10 linear feet of business frontage. No more than three colors, including neon tubes and any backing materials, shall be used on any neon sign.
Internally Illuminated Cabinet Sign	Prohibited
Indirect illumination	
Backlit awning sign	Prohibited
Lighting toward sign	Allowed
Size and Frequency limitation	
A limit of one any projecting element (e.g. a blade sign, banner, or awning) per address.	

Appendix C. Summary Table of Signe Codes in PPCOD and other NC3 zone ⁴⁰

*Rules in codes are written in black font and Rules in design guidelines are written in blue font

*This table include rules include size, frequency and installation type. Rules in regards to right-of-way clearance as well as façade transparency requirements for windows are not included.

Rules for each of allowed Sign Type	
Awning Sign Canopy / Marquee Sign Under Canopy/Marquee Sign Wall Mounted Sign Wall Painting Sign	Allowed as Type B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One sign allowed street frontage of each business (Or every 30 feet if a business have longer street frontage) No size limit
Projecting Blade Sign Ground Sign Roof Sign	Allowed as Type A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One sign allowed per 300 feet of business street frontage Maximum 72 sq. ft. in area within 36 feet next to another type A sign Additional 2 sq. ft. allowed per 2 feet over 36 feet interval next to another sign. Up to 300 sq. ft.
Banner Sign	Allowed for outdoor business as temporary sign

⁴⁰ Reference: SMC 23.55.030 - Signs in NC3, C1, C2 and SM zones, Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District Design Guidelines

Flag Sign	Allowed for outdoor business as temporary sign
Window Sign	Not Specified
Rules for Lighting Method	
Directly illumination	
Neon-lit signs	Allowed
Internally Illuminated Cabinet Sign	Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size Max: 3 sq. ft. (Specific condition in PPCOD)
Indirect illumination	
Backlit awning sign	Prohibited (specifically in PPCOD)
Lighting toward sign	Allowed
Size and Frequency limitation	
For each business, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Type A sign per 300 feet along sidewalks except alley • 1 Type B sign per 30 feet along sidewalks except alley • One additional under-marquee sign that does not exceed 10 square feet in area 	

Appendix D: Sign Typology and the City of Seattle Definitions

Awning Sign; means graphics on a fixed awning used or intended to be used to attract attention to the subject matter for advertising, identification, or informative purposes. An awning sign shall not be considered a fabric sign.



Canopy Sign; "Sign, canopy" means graphics on a canopy used or intended to be used to attract attention to the subject matter for advertising, identification, or information purposes. A canopy sign shall not be considered a fabric sign.

Marquee Sign; means a sign placed on, constructed in or attached to a marquee.
Under Marquee Sign; means a lighted or unlighted sign attached to the underside of a marquee.



Projecting Sign; means a sign other than a wall sign, that projects from and is supported by a wall of a structure.



Wall Sign: means any sign attached to and supported by a wall of a structure, or projected on or onto a wall of a building or structure, or suspended from the roof of a building or structure, with the exposed face of the sign on a plane approximately parallel to the plane of the wall, or any sign painted directly on a building facade.

Wall Sign - Mounted



Wall Sign - Painted



Appendix E: Eliminated Numeric Standards that used to regulate signage size in ISRD until 2011

D. Permitted Sign Area

D1. Asian Character Signs. Asian character signs are Asian bilingual or multilingual business identification signs at street level in which at least forty (40) percent of the message area is in a non-English medium, or signs that have recognizable Asian symbols or designs that have been reviewed by the Board and approved by the Department of Neighborhoods Director. The total message area of all such signs for an individual use shall not exceed the area indicated on Table 338 D. For street frontages not listed on Table 338 D, the Maximum Sign Area column shall be interpolated proportionally.

D2. Non-Asian Character Signs. The total message area of non-Asian character signs for each street-level use shall not exceed seventy (70) percent of the area authorized in subsection D1 and indicated on Table 338 D.

TABLE 338D SIGN AREA PERMITTED

Street Frontage (SQ.FT.)	Maximum Sign Area (SQ.FT.)	Street Frontage (SQ.FT.)	Maximum Sign Area (SQ.FT.)	Street Frontage (SQ.FT.)	Maximum Sign Area (SQ.FT.)	Street Frontage (SQ.FT.)	Maximum Sign Area (SQ.FT.)
15	59	30	78	110	131	320	201

16	61	35	83	120	136	340	206
17	62	40	87	130	140	360	211
18	64	45	92	140	144	380	215
19	65	50	96	150	148	400	220
20	66	55	99	160	152	420	224
21	68	60	103	170	156	440	228
22	69	65	106	180	160	460	232
23	70	70	109	190	163	480	236
24	71	75	112	200	167	500	240
25	72	80	115	220	173		
26	74	85	118	240	179		
27	75	90	121	260	185		
28	76	95	124	280	190		
29	77	100	126	300	196		

D3. The total number of signs permitted per use is not limited; provided, that the total area of all signs for an individual use shall not exceed the area authorized in subsections D1 and D2. The maximum size for any single sign face for Asian and non-Asian character signs at street level shall be seventy-five (75) square feet for a single-faced sign and one hundred and fifty (150) square feet for a double-faced sign, unless the Department of Neighborhoods Director, after review and recommendation by the Board, approves a greater sign area because of hardships resulting from location, topography or similar conditions.

D4. Businesses located on or above the second floor may have business identification signs with a total sign area that does not exceed one-half (1/2) of the area authorized in subsection D1 and indicated on Table 338 D. The maximum size for any single sign face above the second floor shall be forty (40) square feet for a single-faced sign and eighty (80) square feet for a double-faced sign unless the Department of Neighborhoods Director, after review and recommendation by the Board, approves a greater sign area because of hardships resulting from location, topography or similar conditions.

D5. The total illuminated area of theater marquees shall not exceed eighty (80) square feet in addition to the sign area authorized in subsections D1 and D2.

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