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Historic Context Statement, Federal Way, Washington

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Prepared by
Willamette Cultural Resources Associates, Ltd.

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Project Summary

In March 2025, on the recommendation of King County Landmarks Coordinator Sarah Steen, Willamette Cultural Resources Associates, Ltd. (WillametteCRA) proposed to prepare an historic context statement for the city of Federal Way, Washington through an application for the 4Culture Preservation Special Projects Grant. In May 2025, WillametteCRA contracted with 4Culture to prepare this historic context statement for the benefit of King County residents. WillametteCRA architectural historian Tom Heuser completed the first draft of the historic context statement in March 2026, with contributions to the ethnographic background from WillametteCRA senior ethnographer Joyce LeCompte. During the first half of 2026, WillametteCRA senior architectural historian Adam Alsobrook, Sarah Steen, and members of the Historical Society of Federal Way reviewed the draft historic context statement, and the final draft was completed in July 2026.

This historic context statement analyzes the cultural, geographical, and historical events and trends which have shaped the physical environment and land use patterns primarily within Federal Way city limits over time. Organized chronologically into seven distinct eras, the historic context statement starts with the area's original use by Puget Sound Coast Salish Peoples and ends in 1990, the year of the city's incorporation, identifying notable development patterns, building types, and other physical attributes throughout time. It also devotes a section to summarizing racial exclusion in the area and local efforts to overcome it. The intended purpose of this historic context statement is to support future landmark nominations and multiple property surveys within the City of Federal Way.

Ethnographic Background of the Federal Way Area to 1775

The area now known as Federal Way, Washington, is located on a roughly triangular promontory on the eastern shore of southern Puget Sound and northeast of present-day Tacoma and Commencement Bay. A massive sheet of ice averaging up to 4,000 feet thick covered this promontory during the Vashon Glaciation, which reached its peak approximately 15,000 years ago. As this glacier melted and retreated, it shaped the landscape with thick deposits of sand, gravel, and clay, both unsorted and in layers. What emerged was a series of low rolling hills and valleys with a scattering of small lakes, swamps, and streams fed by rivers that flow from glaciers atop Mount Rainier. These rivers are the Puyallup, Green, White, and Stuck Rivers, which all flow within three to five miles of Federal Way's southern and eastern borders.¹

The ancestors of Puget Sound Coast Salish people with ties to present-day Federal Way spoke dialects of the Southern Lushootseed (dxʷəlšucid) language, were part of extensive kin networks grounded in village exogamy (marrying outside one's own village), and lived in semi-autonomous winter settlements.² Prior to the devastating effects of the first smallpox epidemic in the late eighteenth century, the combined population of Puget Sound Coast Salish peoples is estimated to have been about 12,000 individuals.³ These ancestors lived in cedar plank houses in approximately 140 permanent winter settlements located near saltwater, along rivers, lakes, prairies, and in upland areas—from terraces at the mouths of major rivers to the foothills of the Cascade and Olympic Mountains. Winter villages and seasonal settlements were often situated at confluences of creeks and lakes, creeks and marine shorelines, or creeks and major streams. These locations provided access to abundant resources and served as transportation corridors.⁴

For the Puget Sound Coast Salish, the most salient social relationships between families and settlements were within each watershed.⁵ In addition to family and village identity, individuals identified themselves and others by the topographic position or environmental context of their winter settlements. These included saltwater people (sxʷəlčábš), river people (stúləkʷábš), inland people (łálebiuqʷ), prairie people (səbáqʷəbábš), and lakes people (xáčoʔabš).⁶ Inter-village trade and kinship ties facilitated access to the diverse resources found across these

¹ David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman, *Northwest Exposures: A Geologic Story of the Northwest* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1995), 329; Bates McKee, *Cascadia: The Geological Evolution of the Pacific Northwest*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), 296, 299.

² June Collins, *Valley of the Spirits: The Upper Skagit Indians of Western Washington* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1974); William Elmendorf, *The Structure of Twana Culture: Pre-White Tribal Lifeways on Washington's Hood Canal* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1992); Herman Haeberlin and Erna Gunther, "The Indians of Puget Sound. Vol. 4." *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1930); Marian W. Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually* (New York City, New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

³ Robert T. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," in *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol. 7, Northwest Coast, edited by William C. Sturtevant and Wayne Suttles (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990).

⁴ Haeberlin and Gunther, "The Indians of Puget Sound. Vol. 4"; Wayne Suttles and Barbara Lane, "Southern Coast Salish," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 7, Northwest Coast, edited by Wayne Suttles (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990).

⁵ Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually*, 3.

⁶ Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually*, 29.

ecological zones. Descendants of these ancestors include contemporary members of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians (puyaləpabš) and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (bəqəlšuʔ), and likely other Tribes and tribal groups, given the extensive kinship networks of the Coast Salish world.

The Puyallup Tribe derived its name from the Lushootseed words puyaləpabš, meaning “people from the bend at the bottom of the river,” and spuyaləpabš, which indicated their welcoming and generous behavior towards other Tribes.⁷ Considered both river (stúləkʷábš) and salt water (sxʷəlčábš) people, the Puyallup primarily established villages along the Puyallup River to the south, but also had a village at present-day Brown’s Point (čəyalqʷuʔ or “hidden water”), the western tip of the Federal Way promontory, which is now within the city of Tacoma.⁸ The estimated geographical reach of the Puyallup extended from the Cascade region surrounding Mount Rainier, along the Puyallup River, over Tacoma and most of the Federal Way promontory, and finally across Puget Sound to Fox Island, Gig Harbor, and the southern end of Vashon Island.⁹

The Muckleshoot Tribe derives its name from bəqəlšuʔ, the Lushootseed name for the prairie on which the present-day Muckleshoot Reservation is located, approximately 3 miles east of Federal Way.¹⁰ Considered primarily river people (stúləkʷábš), the Muckleshoot established villages along the Green (skʷúp) and White (stukʷ) Rivers to the east.¹¹ The estimated geographical reach of the Muckleshoot overlapped the northern extent of the Puyallup, extending from the Cascades to the south and east along the Green and White Rivers over the northeastern end of Federal Way and as far north as the shores of Elliott Bay, Lake Union, and Lake Washington in present-day Seattle.¹² The Muckleshoot had a trail that passed by Star Lake at the northeastern corner of Federal Way and terminated at a summer camp in the vicinity of what is now Saltwater State Park in Des Moines where McSorley Creek flows into Puget Sound.¹³ Near this trail are present-day Lake Dolloff and Steel Lake, both of which the Muckleshoot referred to as bəsqʷədis, “where there are whales.”¹⁴

The Puyallup and Muckleshoot established winter villages consisting of cedar-plank longhouses built with stone tools. Here, they stored an abundance of dried foods acquired while camping throughout the region during warmer months. These foods included fish, clams, berries, roots,

⁷ “About Our Tribe,” Puyallup Tribe of Indians, accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.puyalluptribe-nsn.gov/about-our-tribe>.

⁸ Haeblerlin and Gunther, “The Indians of Puget Sound. Vol. 4,” 9; Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually*, xi and 29–30; Thomas T. Waterman, *Puget Sound Geography* (Seattle, Washington: Lushootseed Press, 2001), 248.

⁹ “spuyaləpabš (Puyallup),” *Native Land Digital*, last modified October 16, 2023. Accessed October 2, 2025, <https://native-land.ca/listings/territories/puyallup>.

¹⁰ “Tribal Sovereignty: Muckleshoot Tribal Lands & Acknowledgement,” Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians, accessed October 2, 2025, <https://www.muckleshoot-nsn.us/tribal-lands>.

¹¹ Dawn Bates, Thom Hess, and Vi Hilbert, *Lushootseed Dictionary* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1994); Caster, *Native American Presence in the Federal Way Area*, 17–18.

¹² “bəqəlšuʔ (Muckleshoot),” *Native Land Digital*, last modified October 6, 2023. Accessed October 2, 2025, <https://native-land.ca/listings/territories/muckleshoot>.

¹³ Patricia Slettvet Noel, *Muckleshoot Indian History* (Auburn, WA: Auburn School District No.408, 1980), 29.

¹⁴ David Buerge, “Indian myths: Celebrating man’s links to nature,” *Federal Way News* (Federal Way, WA) January 18, 1989, A-1 and A-3. Waterman, *Puget Sound Geography*, 140.

and meat.¹⁵ Tribes dug Clams out of the sandy shores of Puget Sound and caught fish, including salmon, cod, and herring, using weirs, nets, and traps in the region's rivers and creeks, including Hylebos Creek, which flows into the southern end of Federal Way.¹⁶ They also hunted deer, elk, and bear both within and around the Federal Way area.¹⁷ Salmon, the region's most abundant food source, however, was the most central to the Tribes. Their ability to dry or smoke it (and other foods) for long-term storage, consumption, and trade allowed them to live beyond subsistence, with relative wealth that varied between Tribes and families.¹⁸ Evidence suggestive of seasonal camping in Federal Way includes stone tools, shell middens, charcoal, fire-broken rocks, and human bones dating to the late 18th century or earlier, found around Redondo Beach, the Lakehaven Sewer Plant, and near Hylebos Creek (ḡaḡḡ).¹⁹

Exploration, Trade, Disease, Treaties, and Treaty Wars 1775–1858

After Spanish explorers arrived in Washington in 1775, exploration and trade between Europeans and Indigenous peoples increased over the next 65 years. Indigenous peoples traded valuable furs for European goods such as blankets, guns, horses, and other tools during this period, while waves of European diseases decimated between 65 and 95% of their populations in Western Washington by 1840.²⁰ Over the next decade, explorers and traders (primarily European-American and British) encroached further on Indigenous lands by establishing settlements, cultivating crops, extracting natural resources, and forming local governments with generous land laws to incentivize the arrival of thousands more settlers in the Pacific Northwest.²¹ Dispute and conflict over land use between these new settlers and

¹⁵ Rose Mary Greene, *THE DUWAMISH, People of the River*, (Renton, Washington: Renton Historical Society, 1994), 4; Haeberlin and Gunther, "The Indians of Puget Sound. Vol. 4," 16–17.

¹⁶ Greene, *THE DUWAMISH, People of the River*, 4; Noel, *Muckleshoot Indian History*, 18–19 and 29.

¹⁷ Greene, *THE DUWAMISH, People of the River*, 3; Haeberlin and Gunther, "The Indians of Puget Sound Vol. 4," 21.

¹⁸ American Friends Service Committee, *Uncommon Controversy: Fishing Rights of the Muckleshoot, Puyallup, and Nisqually Indians* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970, Fourth Printing 1975), 3; Greene, *THE DUWAMISH, People of the River*, 4; Haeberlin and Gunther, "The Indians of Puget Sound. Vol. 4," 20; Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, "About Us: People of the Salmon," (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, 2009). Accessed February 26, 2026, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090612025821/http://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/about-us/overview.aspx>.

¹⁹ Dick Caster, *Native American Presence in the Federal Way Area* (Historical Society of Federal Way, 2010), 39–44; Waterman, *Puget Sound Geography*, 249.

²⁰ Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, "Account of Juan de Fuca's Voyage," University of Washington, Seattle, 2014. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Reading%20the%20Region/Discovering%20the%20Region/Commentary/1.html>; Greg Lange, "Smallpox epidemic ravages Native Americans on the northwest coast of North America in the 1770s," *Historylink*. January 23, 2003. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/File/5100>; Antonio Sanchez, "Spanish Exploration: Arteaga and Bodega y Quadra's 1779 Expedition," *Historylink*. April 29, 2004. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/File/5689>.

²¹ William L. Lang, "Oregon Trail" *Oregon Encyclopedia*, September 25, 2024. Accessed October 3, 2025, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_trail; Barbara Mahoney, "Provisional Government," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2023. Accessed October 3, 2025, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/provisional_govt_conference_in_champoeg_1843; Taylor C. Noakes, "Oregon Treaty," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 23, 2021. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/oregon-treaty>; Kara Rowe, "Agriculture in Washington since 1900," *Historylink*. March 15, 2018. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/file/20524>; David B. Williams, "Hudson's Bay Company builds Fort Nisqually in spring 1833" *Historylink*. March 19, 2020. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/file/20999>.

Indigenous peoples quickly followed, with armed resistance in Western Washington occurring in 1849.²²

The United States (US) government attempted to end land disputes and prevent further bloodshed by pressuring Indigenous Tribes to sign over “title” to their ancestral lands and agree to live on reservations through a series of treaties. Many Tribes opposed the treaty proceedings, while European American settlers brazenly violated their terms, leading to the Treaty Wars of 1855–1856.²³ Raids and skirmishes occurred throughout the Puget Sound region, with the closest to Federal Way and one of the most pivotal being the White River Massacre. On October 28, 1855, members of the Muckleshoot and Klickitat Tribes raided farms between present-day Auburn and Kent, killing nine European American settlers, including two children and one infant. The following year, the US Army responded in kind with similar massacres and swiftly suppressed the Indigenous resistance.²⁴

The US government organized new treaty councils and granted the Puyallup and Muckleshoot Tribes each a reservation of their own, the former between Tacoma and Federal Way, and the latter between the White and Green Rivers.²⁵ Over five decades, however, the US government reduced their size through the General Allotment Act of 1887, part of a larger government policy to “detritalize” Native people.²⁶ Under the Act, Tribal members were required to register on government Tribal rolls to receive an allotment of reservation land, typically 160 acres for each head of household. The government then ceded any unallotted “surplus” land to the public domain or offered it to European American settlers. Over time, allotments were divided among heirs, and a combination of “poverty, discrimination, and sub-standard housing” forced heirs to sell their land to maintain their livelihoods.²⁷ In the case of the Muckleshoot reservation, “101,620 acres of proposed or actual Muckleshoot Reservation land were [sic] transferred from U.S. government ownership to private ownership” between 1850 and 1980.²⁸

²² Victor J. Farrar (editor), “The Nisqually Journal” in *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (University of Washington Press, Seattle, July 1919), 212; Edmond S. Meany, “Chief Patkanim” in *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (University of Washington Press, Seattle, July 1924), 190–193.

²³ John Caldbick, “Leschi (1808–1858), Part 1 and Part 2,” *Historylink*, March 27, 2021. Accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/file/21193> and <https://www.historylink.org/file/21195>;

²⁴ Caldbick, “Leschi (1808–1858), Part 2.”

²⁵ Caldbick, “Leschi (1808–1858), Part 2.”

²⁶ Alexandra Harmon, *Reclaiming the Reservation: Histories of Indian Sovereignty Suppressed and Renewed*. Emil and Kathleen Sick Lecture-Book Series in Western History and Biography. (Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest in association with University of Washington Press, 2019).

²⁷ Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, “The Shaping of the Muckleshoot Reservation and Tribal Lands,” *Muckleshoot Indian Tribe*, 2026. Accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/tribal-lands>; Native Land Information System, “The General Allotment Act of 1887 Crippled Native Agriculture for Generations,” Native Land Information System, 2020. Accessed March 4, 2026, <https://nativeland.info/native-agriculture-land-use/general-allotment-act-of-1887/>.

²⁸ Caster, *Native American Presence in the Federal Way Area*, 120.

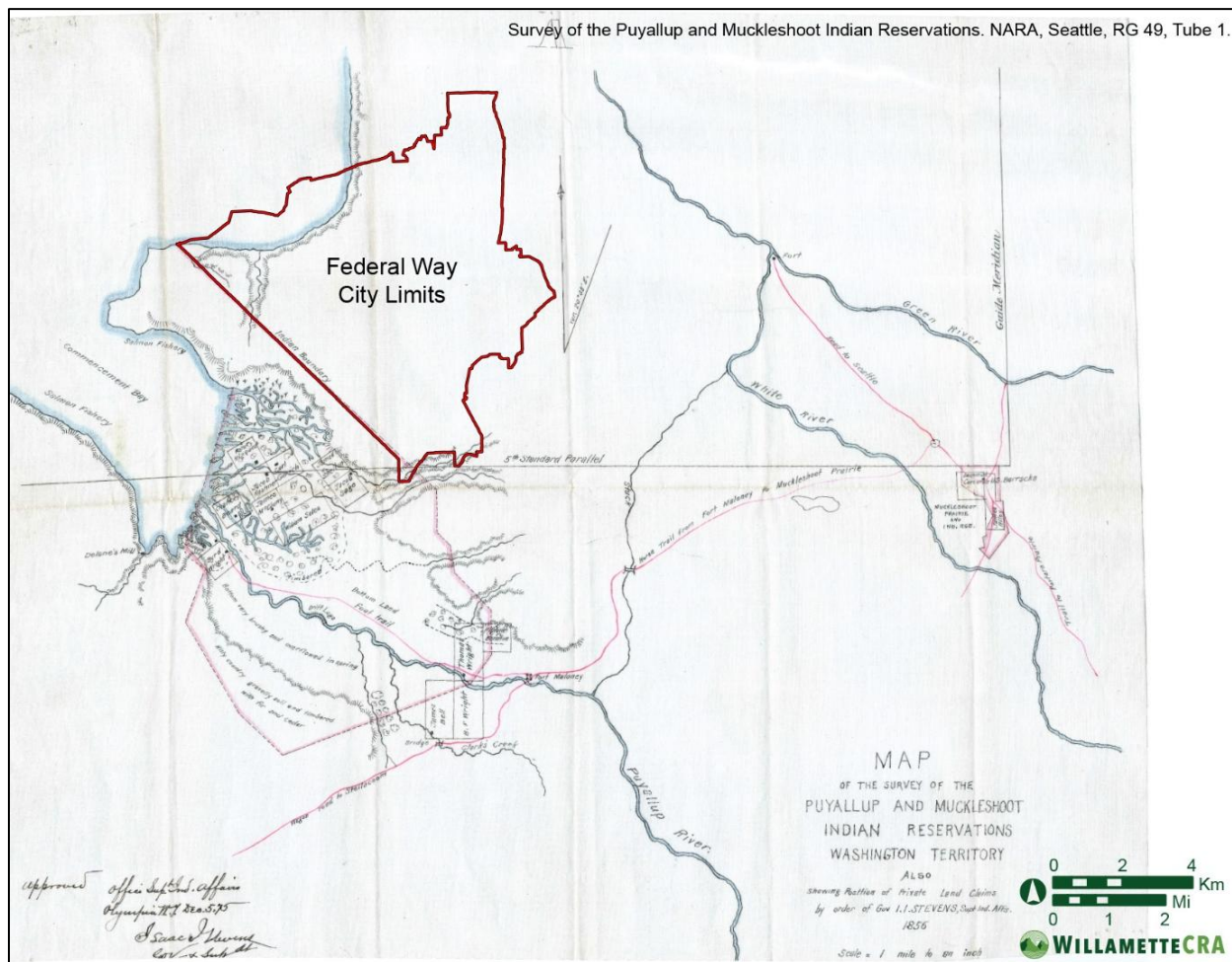


Figure 1. Survey map of Puyallup and Muckleshoot reservations (National Archives).

Early Logging and Settlement 1850s–1871

Despite the US government obtaining “legal” title to the land, dense forest and the lack of navigable rivers (and roads) continued to discourage European American settlement on the Federal Way promontory for several more years, just as it had discouraged the Puyallup and Muckleshoot Tribes from establishing villages for thousands of years before. Early road building, surveying, and particularly logging would eventually change this. Starting in 1858 from Fort Steilacoom (south of Tacoma), the US Army supervised the construction of a wood-plank military road north through the dense forests of Pierce and King Counties, reaching Seattle by 1860.²⁹ The road approximately followed the path of the present-day road that bears the same name and twice meandered for short lengths into and out of Federal Way’s current eastern border, leaving most of the Federal Way promontory inaccessible by land.

²⁹ Karen Meador, *Military Road: A Lasting Legacy*, (Historical Society of Federal Way, 2014). Accessed October 6, 2025, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/~federax3/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Military-Road-Brochure.pdf>; David B. Williams, “Military Road: The Sun Cannot Reach It,” *Street Smart Naturalist*, August 26, 2021. Accessed October 6, 2025, <https://streetsmartnaturalist.substack.com/p/military-road>.

Meanwhile, logging had become a vital industry for the emerging settler communities on Puget Sound after the California Gold Rush of 1848, which created a surge in demand for building materials in faraway port towns such as San Francisco, whose population increased rapidly from approximately 450 in 1847 to over 25,000 in 1850.³⁰ Consequently, by the mid-1850s, there were over a dozen mills sited along the shores of Puget Sound, many established by San Francisco businessmen. Additional gold and silver rushes throughout the Rocky Mountains sustained population growth and lumber demand throughout the West into the 1860s.³¹ So great was the demand that logging companies often ignored federal regulations and illegally logged timber from public lands. However, these early logging efforts depended solely on animal power and sea transport, which limited their reach to within a mile or two inland, often even less depending on the topography.³² Thus, as more desirable areas with accessible deep water bays like Tacoma and Seattle were logged off in this manner, some loggers cruised through Admiralty Inlet and landed at various points along Federal Way's northern shoreline to remove the first few hundred yards of timber throughout the 1860s.³³

At the same time, the US General Land Office conducted inland surveys of the area between 1863 and 1868, partitioning it into 640-acre sections to legally prepare it for settlement (Figure 2). These surveys identified no preexisting homesteads or structures in the vicinity, except for Military Road, suggesting that early logging along the shore was carried out illegally.³⁴ However, after completing his 1868 survey, Ezra Meeker (1830–1928) nevertheless reported on the remaining supply, saying, “we need have no fear that it will ever be exhausted... Yet, aside from this, there are many unexplored ravines and gently sloping hillsides where chutes will be constructed, and the force of gravitation made to propel the logs to the waters connected with the Sound.”³⁵

³⁰ Connie Y. Chiang and Michael Reese, “Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Placing Washington's Forests in Historical Context” in *Evergreen State: Exploring the History of Washington's Forests*, (Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, n.d.), <https://www.washington.edu/uwire/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Curriculum%20Packets/Evergreen%20State/Section%20II.html>. Accessed October 8, 2025; K. Maldetto, “Why San Francisco??? City Origins: 1835–1849,” *FoundSF: The San Francisco Digital History Archive*. Accessed October 8, 2025, https://www.foundsf.org/WHY_SAN_FRANCISCO%3F%3F%3F_CITY_ORIGINS:_1835-1849#:~:text=When%20the%20Gold%20Rush%20swelled,capital%20of%20the%20Bay%20Area.

³¹ Chiang and Reese, “Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Placing Washington's Forests in Historical Context”; Maldetto, “Why San Francisco??? City Origins: 1835–1849.”

³² Chiang and Reese, “Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Placing Washington's Forests in Historical Context.”

³³ Dick Caster, “Introduction” in *Images of America: Federal Way*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 7–9.

³⁴ Edwin Richardson, Cadastral Survey Map of Township 22 North, Range 4 East, Willamette Meridian, July 11, 1863, 1:31680 scale, in *Bureau of Land Management Land Status and Cadastral Survey Records*, by Edwin Richardson, (Department of the Interior, General Land Office, 1884). Accessed October 10, 2025, https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/landsurvey/gPlatView1_2.php?path=PWA&name=t220n040e_001.jpg&tr=022-0N004-0E; E.M. Meeker, Cadastral Survey Maps of Township 21 North, Ranges 3 and 4 East, Willamette Meridian, September 14, 1868, 1:31680 scale, in *Bureau of Land Management Land Status and Cadastral Survey Records*, by E.M. Meeker, (Department of the Interior, General Land Office, 1884). Accessed October 10, 2025, https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/landsurvey/gPlatView1_2.php?path=PWA&name=t210n030e_003.jpg&tr=021-0N003-0E and https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/landsurvey/gPlatView1_2.php?path=PWA&name=t210n040e_001.jpg&tr=021-0N004-0E.

³⁵ Ezra Meeker, *Washington Territory West of the Cascade Mountains: Containing a Description of Puget Sound, and Rivers Emptying into It, the Lower Columbia, Shoalwater Bay, Gray's Harbor; Timber, Lands, Climate, Fisheries, Ship Building, Coal Mines, Market Reports, Trade, Labor, Population, Wealth and Resources* (Olympia: Washington State Transcript Office, 1870), 18–19.

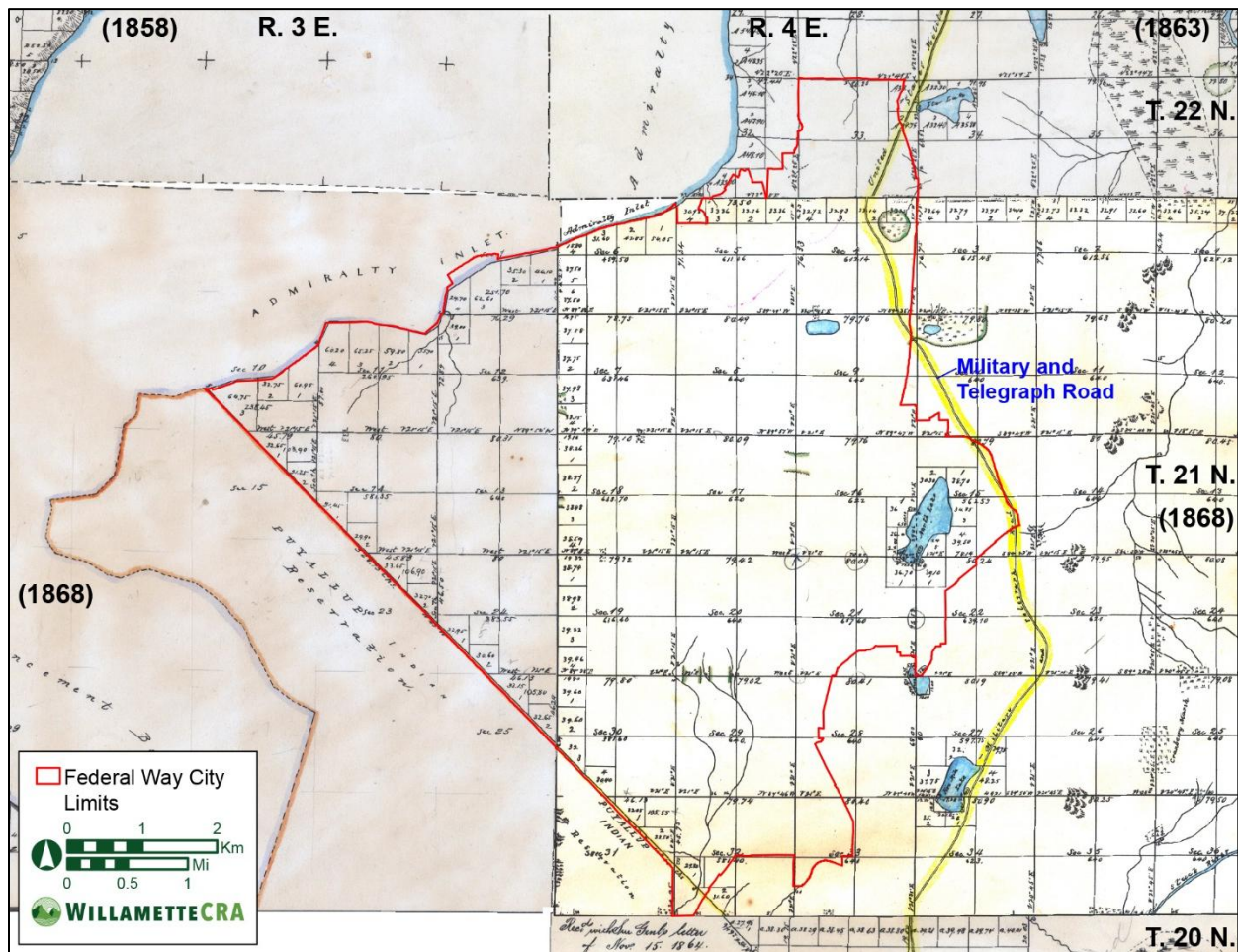


Figure 2. Cadastral Survey maps of Township 21N and 22N, Ranges 3E and 4E overlaid with present-day Federal Way city limits in red (Bureau of Land Management, 1863–1868).

Incidental to these early logging and Meeker’s promotional efforts, most of Federal Way’s earliest land claims in the 1870s occurred along the “sloping hillsides” facing Admiralty Inlet, with only one claim between Steele Lake and Military Road.³⁶ The first known settlers on the shoreline were loggers Ernst F. Lange (1819–unknown) in 1870 and Sam Stone (unknown) in 1871. They built cabins and a sawmill on the beach of Poverty Bay to continue clearing timber farther inland. Stone’s homestead later became known as Stone’s Landing (present-day Redondo).³⁷ However, until transcontinental railroads reached the region and logging technology improved, these early settlers would remain isolated along the shoreline.

³⁶ Bureau of Land Management, Online patent search results for section 6 in township 21 north range 4 east; section 32 in township 22 north, range 4 east; and sections 1, 10, 11, and 12 in township 21 north range 3 east; *General Land Office Records, 1872–1877*. Accessed October 10, 2025, <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx?>

³⁷ Dick Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, (Historical Society of Federal Way, 2015), 6. Accessed October 10, 2025, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/timeLine.pdf>; Ann Hagen, “Stone’s Landing and Redondo” in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 11.

Railroads and Later Settlement 1870–1897

Coincidentally, construction on the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad (NPR) to Puget Sound began in 1870, the year Ernst Lange arrived on Poverty Bay. The US Congress chartered the NPR in 1864. To encourage rail construction and deter timber theft on public lands, Congress granted NPR every other square mile of land within 40 miles of the track between Minnesota and Puget Sound. This was the largest federal land grant in US history.³⁸ It promised to connect the region's vast timber reserves to the middle and eastern US, where reserves were quickly dwindling, though not without difficulty.

The NPR quickly spiraled into debt, bankruptcy, and reorganization before it could complete the line, delaying its completion until 1883 with Tacoma as its terminus. Then, to maximize its land grant, the NPR hastily constructed a barely usable branch line to Seattle in 1884 and upgraded it in 1885.³⁹ Passing within approximately 5.5 miles of the geographic center of present-day Federal Way, this branch line enabled NPR to acquire a large amount of its timber lands.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the Dolbeer Donkey Engine was invented in 1881. It consisted of a steam engine, a horizontal capstan, and cables that made it easier to pull logs over hills and longer distances. It revolutionized logging in Puget Sound after its arrival circa 1885 and rapidly increased Washington's annual lumber production to more than 1 billion board feet by 1890.⁴¹ During this time, a new wave of land speculators and settlers purchased or claimed nearly the entire Federal Way promontory.⁴² While most of this activity was reportedly speculative, approximately 56 individuals or couples had acquired land patents within or overlapping the present-day boundaries of Federal Way through the US General Land Office by the early 1890s, forming loose, initially isolated clusters.⁴³ The first homes were typically single-room cabins made from logs cut on site (Figure 3). Those located inland initially had only a small amount of timber cleared around them. Larger-scale logging only occurred around Steel Lake after a lumber mill was built there in 1890 and otherwise continued closer to the Puget Sound shore, at places like Stone's Landing, where a lumber mill was built ca. 1891.⁴⁴

³⁸ Streamliner Memories: Memorabilia From the Silver Age of Passenger Trains, "NP's Land Grant in Washington," February 5, 2023. Accessed October 10, 2025, <https://streamlinermemories.info/?p=21300>.

³⁹ Chiang and Reese, "Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Placing Washington's Forests in Historical Context"; Russell Holter, "Prairie Line to Tacoma is rushed to completion on December 16, 1873," *HistoryLink*, May 8, 2024. Accessed October 13, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/File/22934>; Greg Lange, "Northern Pacific Railroad's Orphan Road," *HistoryLink*, April 23, 2000. Accessed October 13, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/File/2286>.

⁴⁰ Northern Pacific Railroad, *Map Showing Land Grant of the Northern Pacific Railroad Co. In Western Washington and Northern Oregon*, 1:380,160, 82 x 88 cm, in *Northern Pacific Country* (Buffalo, NY: Matthews, Northrup & Co., 1888). Accessed December 5, 2025, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~24571~900060:Land-grant-W--Wash--&-N--Oregon->.

⁴¹ Ann Hagen, "Logging" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 25; Chiang and Reese, "Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Placing Washington's Forests in Historical Context."

⁴² Northern Pacific Railroad, *Map Showing Land Grant of the Northern Pacific Railroad Co.*

⁴³ Bureau of Land Management, Online patent search results for Township 21 north, range 3 and 4 east, *General Land Office Records, 1872–1877*. Accessed December 5, 2025, <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx?>; Caster, "People" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 49.

⁴⁴ Dick Caster, *The Barker Cabin*, (Historical Society of Federal Way, 2012), 17. Accessed December 5, 2025, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/timeLine.pdf>; Dick Caster, "People" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 54; G.E. Hyde and R.H. McKee, *Twenty First Annual Report Part V Land Classification and*



Figure 3. The Barker Cabin, constructed of hewn logs ca. 1883, as it appeared in 1929 (Historical Society of Federal Way [HSFW]).

When enough land was cleared around their homes, homesteaders attempted farming and established school districts. The rolling terrain, ranging from high and rocky to low and wet, however, generally limited agriculture to small orchards on higher land and small gardens and hop fields in the valleys.⁴⁵ Insufficient to meet their needs, many residents would later find it necessary to work in logging or other jobs in Tacoma or Seattle.⁴⁶ School districts served each cluster of settlers and centered on single-room log or lumber-frame schoolhouses (Figure 4). Larger lumber-frame schoolhouses started replacing log schools by 1890 (Figure 5).⁴⁷ St. George's Indian School, however, initially operated in a three-story wood-frame building constructed in 1888 near present-day Gethsemane Cemetery in South Federal Way. It supplemented the much smaller government-run Cushman school located on the Puyallup Reservation and provided Catholic education (Figure 6).⁴⁸



Figure 4. North Edgewood School, built 1884, pictured in 1888 (Marie Reed).



Figure 5. Buenna School, built 1887, pictured in ca. 1914 (HSFW).



Figure 6. St. George's Indian School, undated (Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle).

Density of Standing Timber, 1897, map, 1:125000 scale, US Geological Survey TopoView. Accessed December 5, 2025, https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/ht-bin/tv_browse.pl?id=b9fa08414baddf3283c969aad60960f3.

⁴⁵ "Join Us To Pierce!" Tacoma Daily News (Tacoma, WA), March 5, 1891, 1.

⁴⁶ Caster, "Introduction" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 8.

⁴⁷ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 8–14; Caster, "First Schools" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 37–41.

⁴⁸ Caster, *Native American Presence in the Federal Way Area*, 122–125. For more information on the Cushman and St. George's Indian school, see the "Suggested Reading" section below.

After establishing small farms and schools, settlers attempted to plat townsites and built roads. The first townsites to be platted were North Lake (near the former Weyerhaeuser building) in December 1889 and Buenna (south of Stone's Landing on Poverty Bay) in June 1890.⁴⁹ Early roads were either dirt or wood plank. One of the earliest was the "Barker Road." Constructed in 1890, this road extended west and northwest from the present-day corner of South 312th Street and SR-99, connecting inland settlers to Buenna (Figure 7). Buenna was then a well-promoted townsite along the proposed route of the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) from Tacoma to Seattle.⁵⁰ However, after the Panic of 1893, the UP went bankrupt, and the railroad was never built, resulting in little to no development at Buenna or North Lake for decades.⁵¹

Despite the economic depression that followed, residents continued to build roads over the next several years. By 1897, a small network of dirt roads connected fledgling communities along Poverty Bay to others located to the south and east. This network included a north-south road that later became Pacific Highway South (SR-99) and multiple east-west crossroads that connected to Military Road and farther east to towns such as Auburn, where transcontinental rail service was available. Meanwhile, the center and western parts of Federal Way were much less developed, with only one secondary, less-maintained road and a couple of trails (Figure 7).

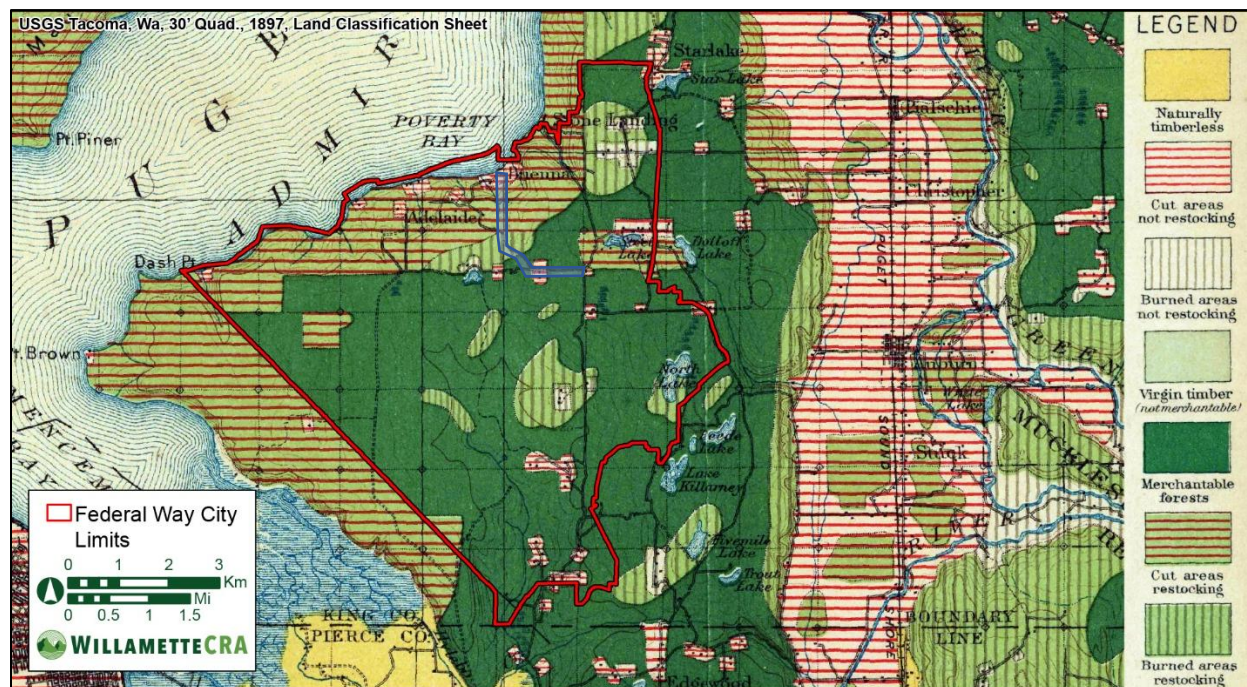


Figure 7. Cropped 1897 topographical map with land classification and density of standing timber overlaid with present-day Federal Way city limits (red) and location of the Barker Road (blue) (United States Geological Survey [USGS]).

⁴⁹ Caster *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 14.

⁵⁰ Caster, *The Barker Cabin*, 19-20.

⁵¹ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 14; Kurt Armbruster, "Seattle and the Union Pacific Railroad" *HistoryLink*, April 24, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/File/23203>.

Road Improvements, Recreation and Tourism, and Logging the interior, 1897–1928

After the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-99 revitalized the Puget Sound Region, the Federal Way area thrived as both a tourist destination and a farming community through the 1920s, as transportation methods improved, and the remainder of its interior old-growth timber was logged off.⁵² Recreational sites for tents, summer cottages, picnic facilities, and swimming stretched along and beyond the Federal Way coastline from Stone's Landing (later renamed Redondo) to Brown's Point while Seattle and Tacoma residents began purchasing 5-acre tracts around inland lakes where fishing was popular (Figures 8–9).⁵³

Until roads were sufficiently improved for automobiles, vacationers and local residents traveled between Federal Way and the greater Puget Sound region via a new electric transit system established during this time known as the Interurban Railway. It connected Tacoma to Everett via Seattle, with stations nearest Federal Way located at Milton and Auburn.⁵⁴ Starting in July 1915, drivers began reaching the area in greater numbers via the Tacoma-to-Seattle High Line Road, a gravel road completed that month. It included present-day 21st Avenue SW, South 312th Street, 16th Avenue South, and South 288th Street.⁵⁵ Lauded for its scenic views of Puget Sound, dense forests, and farmland over rolling hills, and its shorter distance between Tacoma and Seattle, it quickly became the favored route over the longer and flood-prone "West Valley Road" that went from Tacoma to Seattle via Sumner and Auburn.⁵⁶ So much so that it prompted the state to start planning for a "New High Line Road" in 1924 (Figure 10).⁵⁷

⁵² Cassandra Tate, "Gold in the Pacific Northwest," *Historylink*, December 6, 2004. Accessed December 8, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/file/7162>; Caster, "Introduction" in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 8; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 19–26; Federal Highway Administration, *Motor Vehicle Registrations, By States 1900–1995*, 1997, 13. Accessed December 10, 2025, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/summary95/mv201.pdf>; Caster, "The Barker Cabin," 17.

⁵³ "Vashon And Maury Islands Mecca For Many Pleasure Seekers," *Tacoma Daily News* (Tacoma, Washington), July 15, 1905, 14; Roy Oppie, "Trout Fishing In Western Washington," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), April 26, 1914, 3; "Lakota Beach New Suburban Resort," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), May 16, 1915, 39; "Metropolitan Bldg. Employees On Picnic," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), June 28, 1925, 32.

⁵⁴ Walt Crowley, "Interurban Rail Transit in King County and the Puget Sound Region," *Historylink*, September 19, 2000. Accessed July 30, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/File/2667>.

⁵⁵ "New Road To Tacoma Now Open To Travel," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, Washington), July 4, 1915, 37; Curt Cunningham, "History of the Highline Road," *Pacific Highway*, 2025. Accessed January 5, 2025, <https://www.pacific-hwy.net/desmoines>; The High Line Road was later realigned to follow present-day SW Dash Point Road in lieu of South 312th Street in 1920, which brought it closer to waterfront recreation sites.

⁵⁶ "Glimpse Along New Seattle-Tacoma High Line," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), February 6, 1916, 31; "Highway Program Omits Highline," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 2, 1919, 19; "Tacoma Ready To Help Build Highline Road," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), November 23, 1922, 12.

⁵⁷ "Bids Opened In March," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), February 3, 1924, Section 6, Page 1.

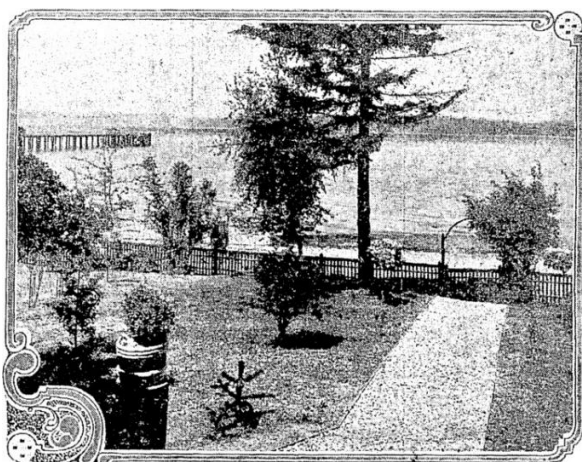


Figure 8. Lakota Beach (Seattle Times, May 7, 1916).

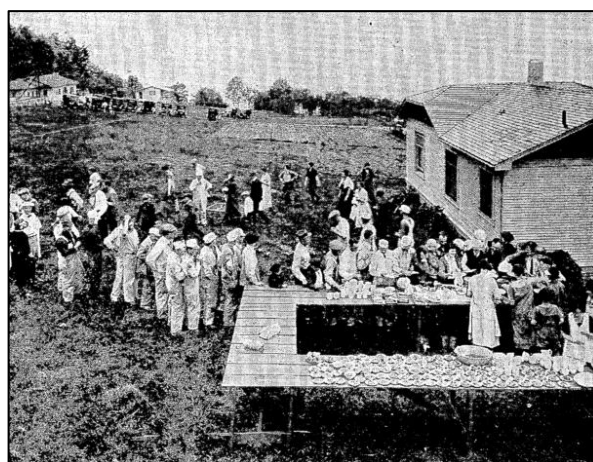


Figure 9. Camp Adelaide (Seattle Times, May 11, 1925).

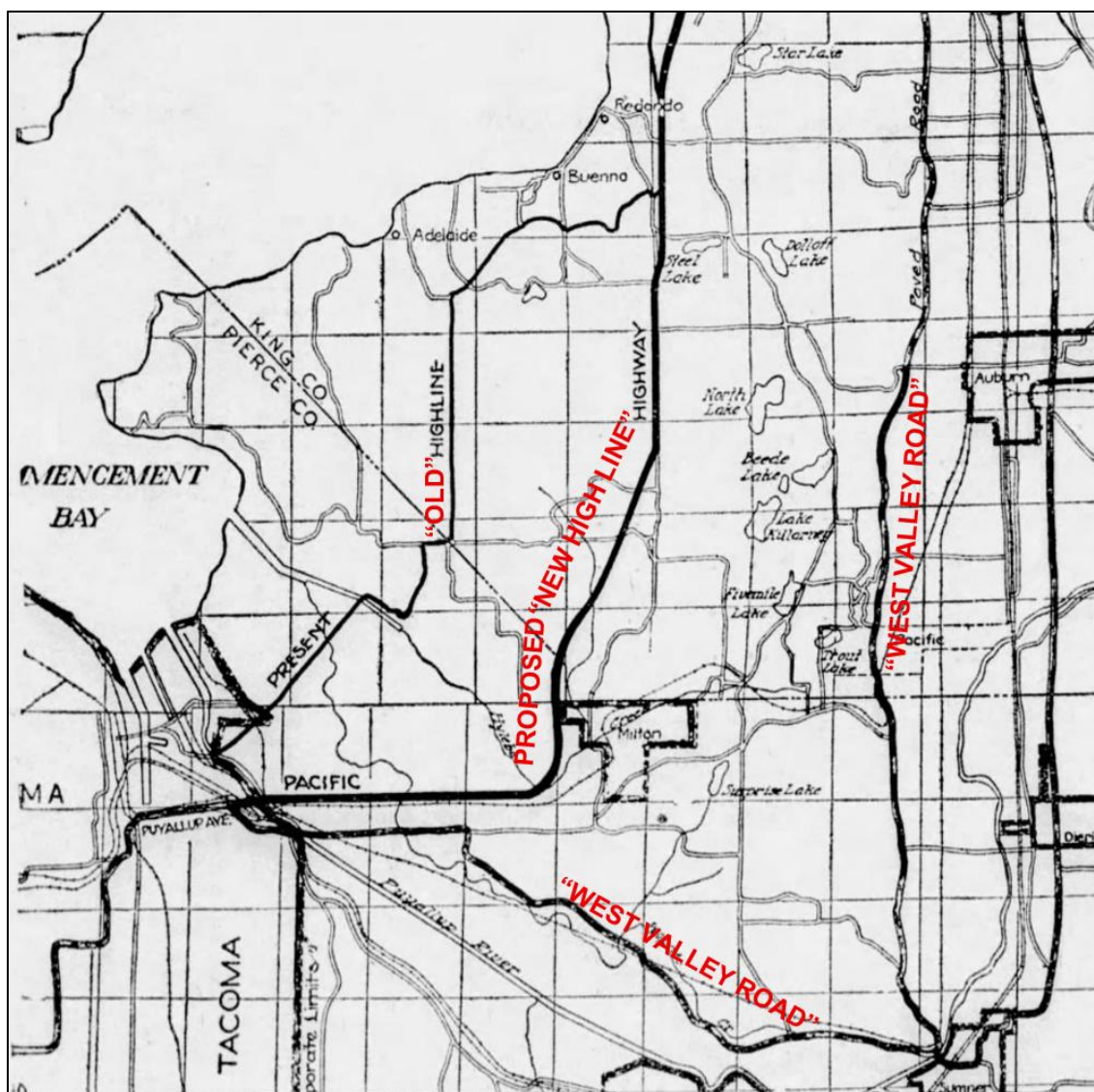


Figure 10. Annotated highway map (Tacoma Ledger, December 14, 1924).

Meanwhile, temporary logging railroads crisscrossed the Federal Way promontory along Military Road from southeast Federal Way to present-day South 320th Street and SR-99 from 1908-1909, and along present-day SW Dash Point Road and 21st Avenue South in the 1920s with a log dump at Dumas Bay (Figures 11–13).⁵⁸ Clearing timber opened more land to agriculture, allowing some farms to expand and reach commercial scale during this time, while some land was subdivided and sold.⁵⁹



Figure 11. Logging camp near the intersection of Peasley Canyon Road South and Military Road South, 1909 (White River Valley Museum).

⁵⁸ Hagen, “Logging” in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 29–33; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 31.

⁵⁹ Caster, “Introduction” in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 8; Anderson Map Company, *King County Atlas, Township 21 North Range 3 and 4 East W.M.*, 1926, Historic Map Works. Accessed January 6, 2026, <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/1610873/Plate+003+++T++21+N+++R++3+E+++Puget+Sound++Commencement+Bay++Dumas+Bay/> and <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/1610883/Plate+014+++T++21+N+++R++4+E+++Edgewood++Jovita++Pacific+City++Auburn++Puget+Sound/>.

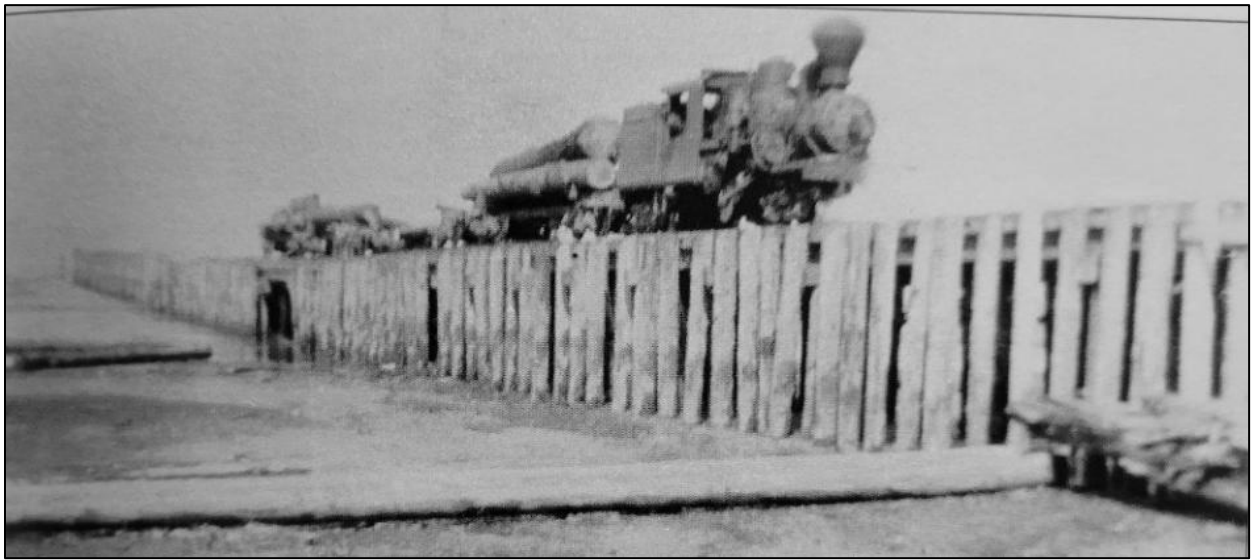


Figure 12. Logging train along SW Dash Point Road (Earl Chambers).



Figure 13. Logging train along the old High Line Road, now 21st Avenue SW (Earl Chambers).

US 99 Pacific Highway and the beginning of “Federal Way” 1928–1945

The rising popularity of the automobile and the construction of what is now Pacific Highway South (SR-99) marked a major turning point for the area. They marked the declining importance of rail, prompted the first step toward establishing a unified sense of community, and opened the way for future suburban development. After the east half of the proposed 4-lane concrete highway opened in October 1928, the Interurban Railway ceased operations two months later and five of the area’s school districts voted to consolidate under the name “Federal Way” in 1929 (Figure 14).⁶⁰ The name was chosen because the new school for the consolidated district was being constructed that year on the Pacific Highway (at present-day South 308th Street), which had been designated federal highway US 99 (Figure 15). By 1930, the western half of the Pacific Highway was paved, and the school was completed later that year.⁶¹



Figure 14. US 99 Pacific Highway looking north with east half paved and west half graded for future pavement, ca. 1929 (Washington State Digital Archives, Ref# AR-28001001-ph000201).

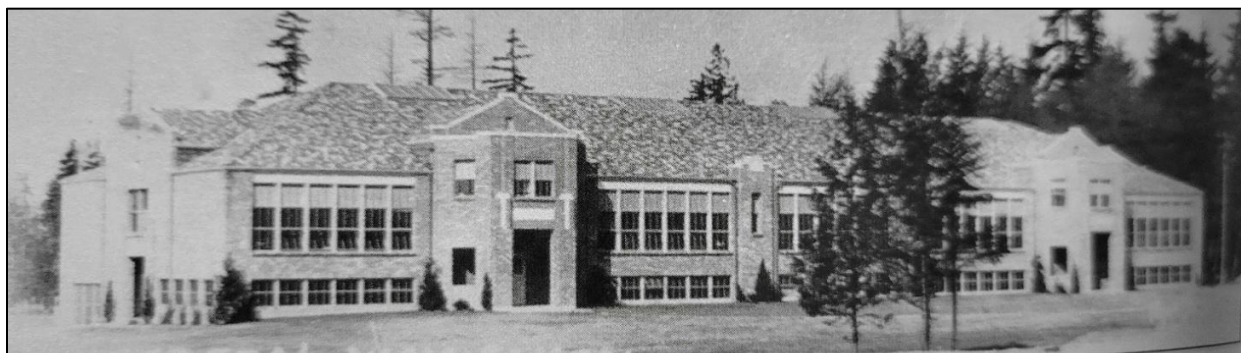


Figure 15. Federal Way School, ca. 1935 (Carol Cox).

⁶⁰ This school district includes portions of Des Moines to the north, and portions of unincorporated King County and Auburn to the east. See: <https://www.fwps.org/enrollment/school-boundary-information>; Crowley, 2000.

⁶¹ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 36–38; Caster, “Schools” in *Images of America: Federal Way*, 44; “\$45,000 School To Be Built On Tacoma Highline,” *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), January 15, 1930, 25.

The new highway also attracted new businesses, including the area's first grocery store in 1926 at 27905 Pacific Highway South and, starting in 1929, what would eventually become Brooklake Community Center, just off the highway at present-day 726 South 356th Street.⁶² An attempt was also made to establish a residential district on the highway near the Federal Way School (now a high school) by platting Solano Heights in 1927.⁶³ However, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the resulting Great Depression of the 1930s prevented its development, delayed the area's overall suburban growth, and kept it primarily used for tourism and recreation for more than a decade longer.⁶⁴ Instead, the area mostly experienced sporadic establishment of roadside businesses along the Pacific Highway, some additional road construction, and the expansion of amenities and services through WWII.

New businesses were typically automobile service and fueling stations, such as Webb Center Garage (1933), or roadhouses, where travelers could stop for a meal or room (Figures 16 and 17). In the case of Brooklake's predecessor, The Wagon Wheel Inn, travelers could also indulge in illegal prostitution, gambling, and drinking.⁶⁵



Figure 16. Webb Center Garage at the southwest corner of South 320th Street and Pacific Highway South, as it appeared in the early 1950s (Dorothy Rogers).



Figure 17. Green Parrot Inn at South 336th Street and Pacific Highway South, undated (John S. Gates).

⁶² Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 33 and 36.

⁶³ H.M. Love, *Solano Heights* (plat map), February 14, 1927, 1:1200, in *Volume 30 of Plats*, (King County, 1927), 8. Accessed January 7, 2026, on file at King County Archives and available online at <https://recordsearch.kingcounty.gov/LandmarkWeb/Document/GetDocumentByBookPage/?booktype=PLAT&booknumber=030&pagenumber=008>.

⁶⁴ Alan J. Stein, "Federal Way – Thumbnail History," *Historylink*, July 8, 2003. Accessed January 7, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/file/4215>.

⁶⁵ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 40; Dick Caster, *The Brooklake Community Center*, (Historical Society of Federal Way, Washington: 2017), 26–31 and 161. Accessed January 7, 2026, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BrooklakeBooklet.pdf>.

Road construction included a new scenic highway along the shores of Puget Sound, Marine View Drive (now SR-509), which opened in 1931.⁶⁶ The new highway facilitated access to a new residential plat known as Healy Palisades and the Boy Scouts Camp Kilworth, both established in 1930 between Dash Point and Dumas Bay.⁶⁷ New amenities and services included the opening of Federal Way High School in 1938, a dirt airstrip known as Evergreen Airport in 1941, Rainbow Park Resort at Steel Lake in 1942, Brooklake Community Center in 1943, and libraries at Brooklake and Steel Lake in 1944 (Figure 18).⁶⁸



Figure 18. Brooklake Community Center, rear side view facing east, ca. 1953 (FWHS).

Meanwhile, most of the conditions for Federal Way's rapid post-war development were set in motion during this period. First, the continued popularity of the automobile and increasing federal funding for paved highways, as a New Deal Era relief effort in the 1930s and for national defense after WWII, allowed people to live farther from their jobs.⁶⁹ Second, regulations during WWII diverted most labor and materials from private home construction to defense industries such as ship and airplane manufacturing.⁷⁰ As one of the nation's leading industrial centers for both ship and airplane manufacturing during the war, the Puget Sound region experienced a massive population increase from an influx of war workers, compounded by the return of veterans and a sharp rise in birthrates thereafter. The restrictions on housing construction, combined with the population increase, caused a major housing shortage.⁷¹ Finally, the Federal

⁶⁶ "Opening of Unit In Scenic Drive Set for Sunday," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), September 4, 1931, 10.

⁶⁷ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 38.

⁶⁸ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 42–45.

⁶⁹ Artifacts Architectural Consulting and SRI Foundation, *Washington State's Historic State Roads Historic Context for Island, Snohomish, Pierce, and Kitsap Counties* (Artifacts Architectural Consulting and SRI Foundation, 2014), 46–47.

⁷⁰ Susan Boyle, Julia Grey, and Meagan Scott, *Mid-Century King County: A Context Statement on Post-War Residential Development*, (BOLA Architecture + Planning: Seattle, WA, 2017), 8.

⁷¹ James R. Warren, "World War II Home Front on Puget Sound," *Historylink*, September 13, 1999. Accessed January 16, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/file/1664>; Richard L. Forstall, "Washington Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," (US Bureau of the Census, Population Division: Washington D.C., 1995). Accessed January 16, 2026, <https://web.archive.org/web/19990220160053/http://www.census.gov/population/>

Housing Authority, starting in the 1930s, and the Veterans Administration, starting in 1944, offered mortgage insurance to civilian and veteran home buyers and builders, making it easier to borrow than ever before.⁷² The final missing piece was a major commercial center to draw homebuilders and buyers to the area, which would soon follow as the nation lifted wartime restrictions and returned to a peacetime economy.

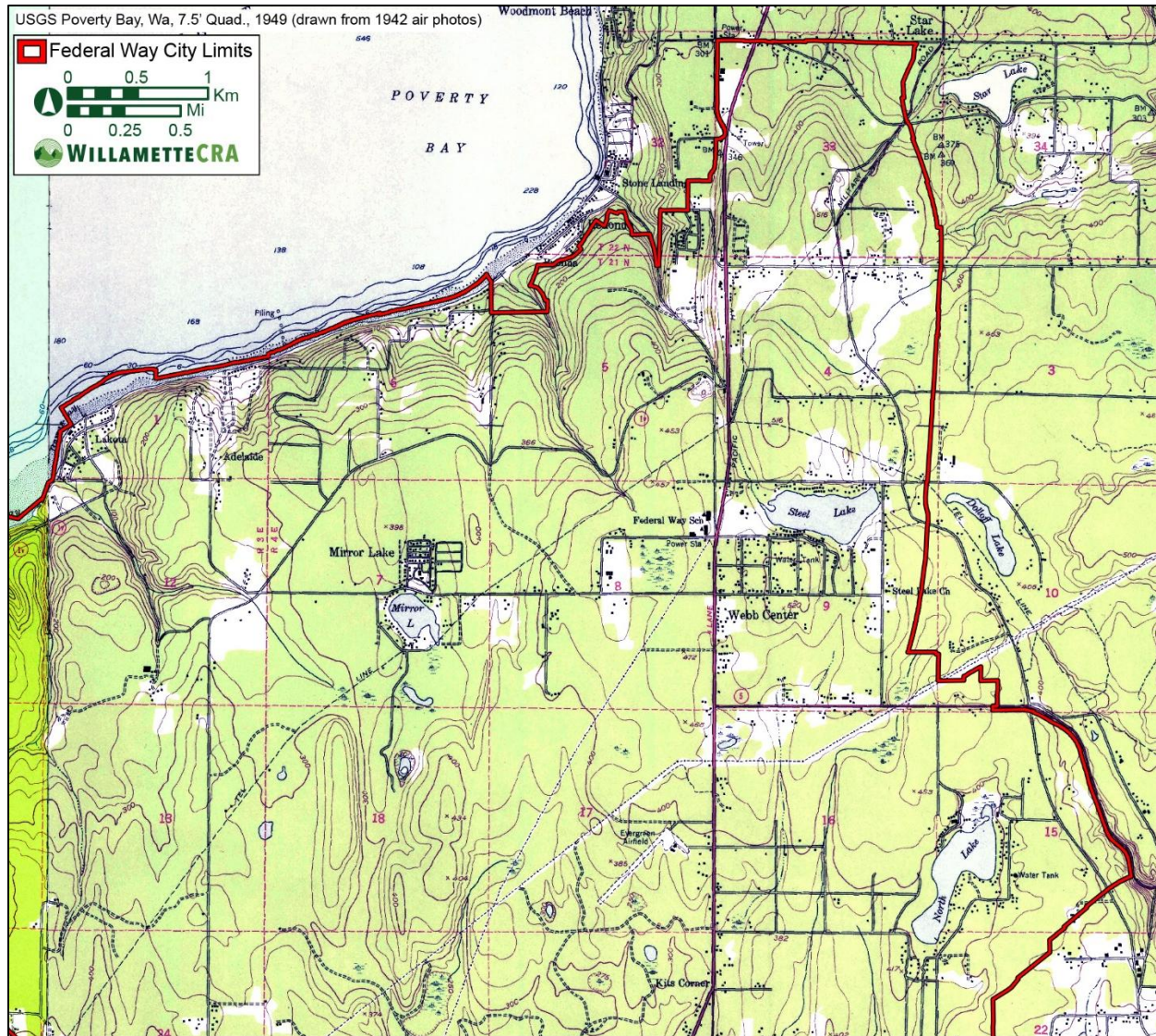


Figure 19. 1949 USGS Quad Map of Federal Way based on aerial imagery from 1942, showing development along Pacific Highway and the Puget Sound coast as well as relative dense clusters at French, Steel, and North lakes (USGS).

cencounts/wa190090.txt; Boyle, et. al, *Mid-Century King County: A Context Statement on Post-War Residential Development*, 8–9.

⁷² Boyle, et. al, *Mid-Century King County: A Context Statement on Post-War Residential Development*, 3–8.

Post-War Suburban development and “Federal Shopping Way” 1945–1970

In the 25 years following the end of WWII, the Federal Way Area experienced unprecedented growth and development, with the population of its school district increasing sharply from less than 7,000 to nearly 50,000.⁷³ In a state of controlled chaos, multiple developers carved the landscape with large residential and commercial tracts that included paved roads, ample parking, and modern utilities such as water, sewer, gas, and electricity. Other amenities, including 18 new schools (12 within present-day city limits), 13 new churches, multiple parks and libraries, and two new highways (SR-18 and Interstate 5) were also built. Development generally expanded from two focal points: the residential Adelaide-Buenna area and the main commercial area around South 312th Street and Pacific Highway South, with the area between them filled in piecemeal fashion (Figure 20). By the end of the 1960s, this development covered a roughly U-shaped area more densely developed in the north between Dash Point Park and present-day downtown Federal Way and more sporadically developed to the south along the 21st Avenue South (the old High Line Road) and Pacific Highway South (SR-99) corridors (Figure 21).⁷⁴ What was by all appearances a single modern suburb during this period, however, would remain a group of communities loosely tied by the shared name of their school district.⁷⁵

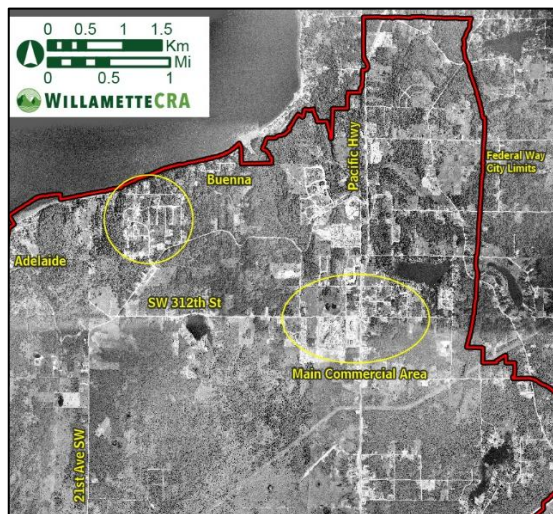


Figure 20. Combined aerial photos of the Federal Way area showing two focal points of development with northward expansion along Pacific Highway, 1957 (USGS).

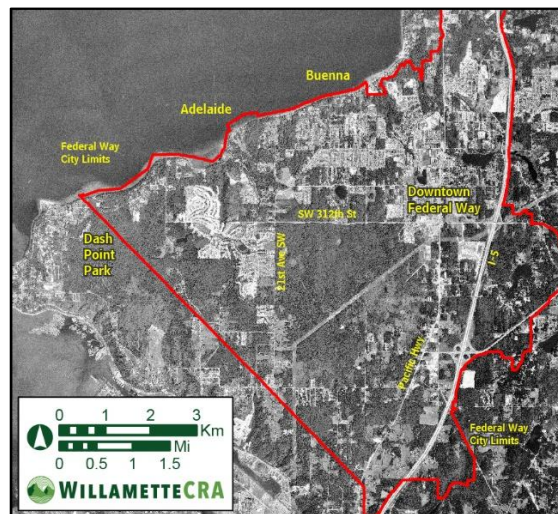


Figure 21. Aerial photo of the Federal Way area showing U-shaped development, with denser development at the base and sparser development at the ends, by 1968 (USGS).

⁷³ Walt Woodward, “Federal Way’s Present Compounds The Future,” *Seattle Times Magazine* (Seattle, WA), January 5, 1969, 6.

⁷⁴ Nationwide Environmental Title Research, LLC (NETR), Aerial Imagery of Federal Way, 1955-1969, *Historic Aerials*. Accessed January 18, 2025, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>; United States Geological Survey (USGS), Photo ID A550460010018–A550460020206, Aerial Photographs, 1:20000, *United States Geological Survey Earth Explorer*. May 28, 1957. Accessed January 23, 2026, available online at <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov>; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 46–90.

⁷⁵ Woodward, “Federal Way’s Present Compounds The Future.”

Development was initially slow and small-scale until the 1950s. As in previous decades, the first structures were small roadside businesses serving vacationers and commuters. In 1946, a motel and a variety store were built at the intersection of Pacific Highway South and South 312th Street. By then, however, there were enough businesses in the area to prompt the formation of the Federal Way Commercial Club, predecessor to the Chamber of Commerce (1953), and the next step in solidifying the concept of “Federal Way” as a single community.⁷⁶ Efforts at large-scale residential development quickly followed in 1947 with the platting of the 150-acre Marine View Estates in the Adelaide-Buenna area, but relatively few houses were built there initially.⁷⁷ The Federal Way area needed a bigger catalyst for development.

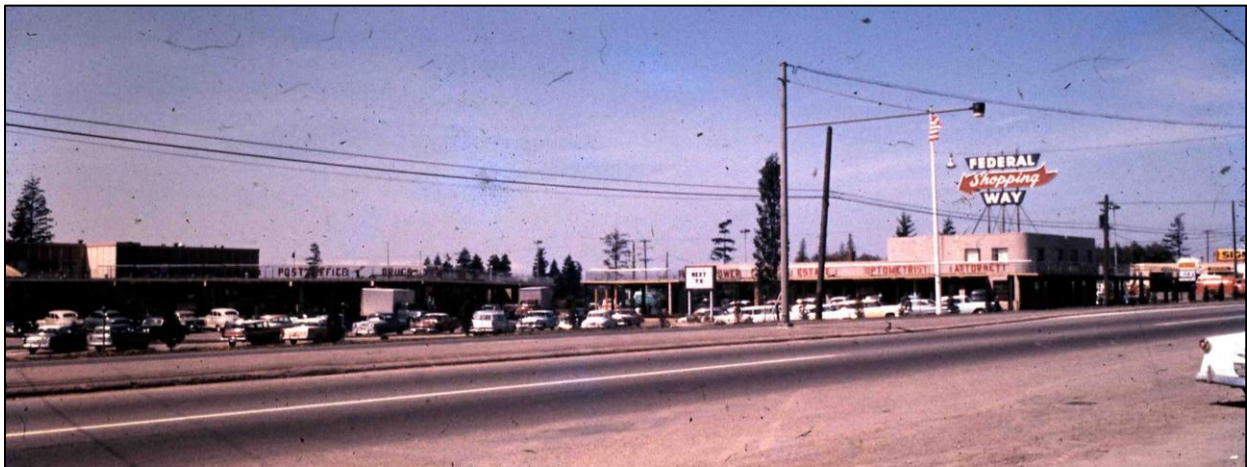


Figure 22. A section of Federal Shopping Way, view facing NW, ca. late 1950s (HSFW).

This catalyst was the future shopping mall and amusement center known as Federal Shopping Way, initially a 20-acre development at the southwest corner of South 312th Street and Pacific Highway South (Figure 22). It was a collaboration among nearby landowners and businesses, several investors, and additional promotion and support from the King County Planning Commission. Its chief developer and promoter was John R. Cissna (1908–1986), owner of the coincidentally named Federal Old Line Insurance Company of Seattle, which he relocated to the mall site in 1954.⁷⁸ Opened in 1955 and gradually expanded into the 1960s, Federal Shopping Way boasted 34 businesses in nine buildings by early 1956. These businesses included retail goods and services; medical, dental, legal, and other professional services; and amusements and recreational activities of increasing variety and exorbitance over time. Particularly noteworthy early attractions and amusements included a Ferris wheel and merry-go-round,

⁷⁶ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 46–51.

⁷⁷ Richard M. Smith, *Marine View Estates* (plat map), July 31, 1947, 1:2400, in *Volume 44 of Plats*, (King County, 1947), 59–60. Accessed January 23, 2025, on file at King County Archives, and available online at <https://recordsearch.kingcounty.gov/LandmarkWeb/Document/GetDocumentByBookPage/?booktype=PLAT&booknumber=044&pagenumber=059>; NETR, Aerial Imagery of Federal Way, 1955. Accessed January 23, 2026, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>.

⁷⁸ Dick Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, (Historical Society of Federal Way: Washington, 2003), 5–6 and 10–20. Accessed January 23, 2026, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FSshoppingW.pdf>.

“Santafair,” and the “Old Line Historic Park,” a collection of historic buildings relocated to the site, which later included the log cabin of Seattle pioneer David Denny in 1966.⁷⁹

Before and after the opening of Federal Shopping Way, large tracts of land west of the new mall and north and west of the nearby Federal Way school were platted for residential development including Soundcrest (1952-55), Aquacene (1954), Terracene (1955), Boni Terrace (1955), Marine Hills (1955), and Ninelake Park (1959). Miles of piping for sewer and water services followed and were completed by 1960.⁸⁰ These residential plats, along with others established along Southwest Dash Point Road (SR-509) from Adelaide to Pacific Highway South (SR-99) in the 1950s, were mostly developed by the early 1960s, featuring primarily Ranch-style single-family homes arranged along curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs (Figure 23).⁸¹



Figure 23. Oblique aerial view of Federal Shopping Way and nearby residence districts including Soundcrest (behind Federal Shopping Way), Ninelake Park (upper left), and Terracene (behind Soundcrest), ca. 1960 (HSFW).

By 1961, residents’ concerns about Federal Shopping Way’s outdoor amusements in their otherwise quiet new suburb had led to county-level zoning challenges, while questionable funding practices prompted the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to file charges against Federal Shopping Way Inc. for violating the anti-fraud provisions of the Securities Act.⁸²

⁷⁹ Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 21–34.

⁸⁰ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 53–69; for plat maps, see Frederick M. Drake (Soundcrest), D.H. Haines (Aquacene, Terracene, and Marine Hills), James M. McDuffee (Boni Terrace), and Howard T. Harstad (Ninelake Park) in References Cited section below.

⁸¹ NETR, Aerial Imagery of Federal Way, 1964. Accessed January 23, 2026, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>. An exception to the extent of development was Nine Lake Park. Likely ahead of its time, its developers originally planned it as a 635-acre industrial, residential, and shopping area with 1,200 homes by 1970, but aerial imagery reveals that only a small fraction of this plan was ever realized by then. See: “Ninelake Ahead of Schedule,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), December 13, 1959, 36 and NETR, Aerial Imagery of Federal Way, 1969.

⁸² Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 40 and 62–63.

Although these challenges signaled the beginning of the end for Federal Way Shopping Way and the post-war development period, Federal Shopping Way Inc. would continue to aggressively expand its mall into a de facto theme park over the next few years, and its surrounding suburb would continue to grow alongside it.

Initially unfazed by the attacks, Federal Shopping Way acquired an additional 160 acres on the east side of Pacific Highway South in 1961, primarily for its planned but never completed 4-building “Recre-plex.”⁸³ Two years later, it built a narrow-gauge railroad around the entire shopping center and a 700-seat Roman-inspired “Hippodrome.”⁸⁴ Finally, in 1964, it opened its “Old World Square.” Designed by Karl Heinz Ulbricht (1924–1985), Old World Square featured a clock tower, a fountain, and a reproduction of Shakespeare’s Study. Ulbricht later designed the Bavarian-themed transformation of Leavenworth, WA (Figures 24 and 25).⁸⁵



Figure 24. Oblique aerial view of Federal Shopping Way facing NNE in the mid to late 1960s complete with Old World Square and railroad (HSFW).

⁸³ Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 57–58.

⁸⁴ Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 50–51 and 54.

⁸⁵ Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 55–56; Death Certificate of Karl Heinz Ulbricht, Department of Health, Death Certificates, Washington State Archives, Digital Archives. Accessed January 29, 2026, <https://digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/1E884D48A1F1B542AFCA48C4CA2F3F3A>.



Figure 25. Old World Square, view facing NW, ca. 1964 (HSFW).

Meanwhile, construction on Interstate 5 (I-5) had been ongoing since 1957 and passed by the eastern edge of Federal Shopping Way's planned expansion, reaching Des Moines to the north by 1962.⁸⁶ Between 1963 and 1964, a competing but much less elaborate shopping center, Century City, was completed at the southwest corner of South 320th Street and Pacific Highway South. It also included a small residential district to the west.⁸⁷ Large-scale residential construction expanded southwest of Adelaide after Sherwood Development announced plans in March 1965 for its \$33 million "Twin" Lakes Golf and Country Club development. Ultimately spanning 621 acres, it includes lots for 1478 single-family homes, plus apartments, townhouses, a shopping center, and a medical clinic, all surrounding an 18-hole golf course and three lakes. Its developers claimed it was "the largest and most comprehensively planned community ever conceived in the Puget Sound area."⁸⁸ Initially opened in August 1965 with two blocks of model homes, primary construction continued through 1970.⁸⁹ Its main housing types are single-family Ranch, Split Level, and Split Entry, arranged on extra-long curvilinear streets with numerous cul-de-sacs, all designed almost exclusively for automobile access while simultaneously limiting that access to maximize privacy (Figures 26 and 27).

⁸⁶ Phil Dougherty, "Interstate 5 is completed in Washington on May 14, 1969," *Historylink*, April 10, 2010. Accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/File/9393>; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 76.

⁸⁷ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 80–83; Century City Corporation was the successor to Ninelake Development, Inc. and sold off much of its land holdings. See: "Proxy Vote May Hit Realty Deal," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), December 10, 1961, 103; "Federal Way Acreage Sold For \$581,520," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 27, 1964, 7; "Federal Way Residential Property Sold," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 29, 1964, 58.

⁸⁸ "Plans for \$33 Million Community Revealed Here," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), March 31, 1965, 20.

⁸⁹ "Plans for \$33 Million Community Revealed Here," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*; "Planned Development Opens Today," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), August 22, 1965, 20; "Lakes Plat Approved," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), October 13, 1965, 42.



Figure 26. Early model homes overlooking Lake Ponce (left), ca. 1965 (Kevin Houck).

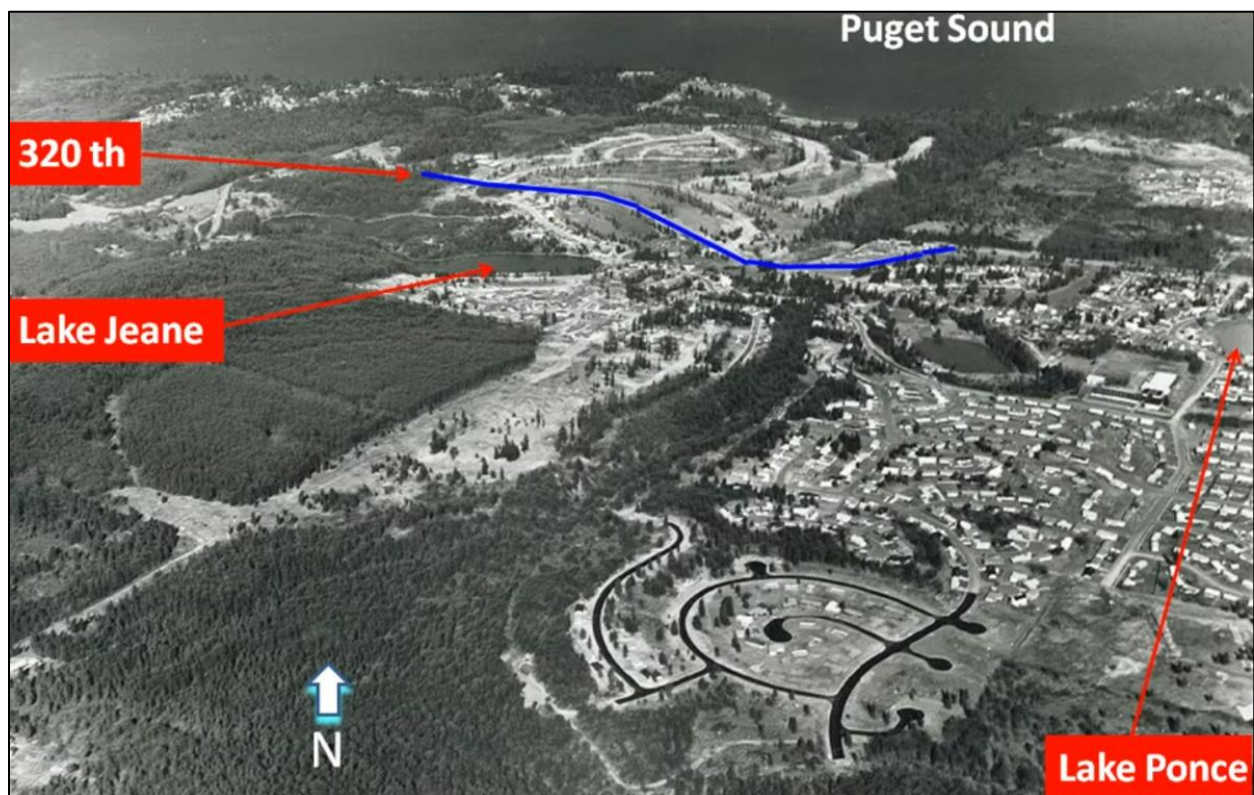


Figure 27. Oblique aerial view of Twin Lakes during development, ca. late 1960s (Kevin Houck).

Before Twin Lakes' completion, however, Federal Shopping Way could no longer minimize or avoid its mounting legal and financial troubles, forcing both Federal Shopping Way Inc. and Federal Old Line Insurance Company into bankruptcy and receivership between 1967 and 1968. Although Cissna and his executives were ultimately acquitted of fraud charges, they later faced civil charges, with litigation and counter-suits continuing well into the 1980s.⁹⁰ Its initial downfall was also an early warning of the spreading economic contagion of monetary inflation and excessive borrowing and spending that contributed to the Boeing Bust of 1969–1970 and to a nationwide recession by 1973.⁹¹

Just as Federal Shopping Way's protracted downfall was beginning, however, the Federal Way area was largely unfazed and already moving on to bigger and better things. The effort to incorporate a portion of the Federal Way area began to gain momentum.⁹² Rising costs of conventional homes in the inflationary market increased demand for more affordable housing options. One option was mobile and manufactured homes, such as Belmor Park at 2101 South 324th Street in 1966–1967 and the other was large apartment complexes like the 11-acre Evergreen Village Apartments at 32015 11th Place South, whose phased construction began in 1968 (Figures 28 and 29).⁹³ Long-envisioned plans to establish facilities for light-industrial operations also came to fruition with the opening of Evergreen Industrial Park in 1969 at the southeast corner of South 348th Street and Pacific Highway South.⁹⁴ The worsening economic conditions also accelerated the flight from urban centers to the suburbs, where land was cheaper and taxes lower.

Seeing the opportunity, Weyerhaeuser, by then the region's largest logging company, which had owned a large tract of undeveloped land in the center of Federal Way since its founding in 1900, purchased an additional 200-acre site between I-5 and North Lake in 1968 for its future corporate headquarters.⁹⁵ A year later, Weyerhaeuser purchased the recently formed, full-service development conglomerate, Quadrant Corporation, to execute and manage its development plans.⁹⁶ Finally, another local landowner was also ready to establish a more

⁹⁰ Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 60–94.

⁹¹ The "Boeing Bust" refers to a point when Boeing's workforce declined from a high of 142,000 to 38,690 due to overproduction and the cancellation of major government contracts including the Super Sonic Jet and the Apollo Space program. With 65% of Boeing's work subcontracted to other companies, the ripple effect was devastating. See: Alan J. Stein, "Boeing Bust (1969–1971)," *Historylink*, December 16, 2019. Accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/file/20923>.

⁹² "City Status For Federal Way Urged," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), March 7, 1967, 11.

⁹³ Mary E. Osman, "Mobile Homes: The Third Alternative," in *AIA Journal*, December 1971, The American Institute of Architects, Washington D.C. Accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.usmodernist.org/AJ/AJ-1971-12.pdf>; "Large Apartment Complex Opens," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), July 6, 1968, 12.

⁹⁴ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 89.

⁹⁵ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 20; Anderson Map Company, *King County Atlas, Township 21 North Range 3 and 4 East W.M.*, 1907, Historic Map Works. Accessed January 9, 2025, <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/1250031/Page+14+++Township+21+North++Range+4+East/King+County+1907/Washington/> and <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/1250014/Page+3+++Township+21+North++Range+4+East/King+County+1907/Washington/>.

⁹⁶ "Weyerhaeuser Buying Quadrant," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), November 10, 1969, 20.

sustainable successor to Federal Shopping Way to better meet the needs of the Federal Way area's next generation of suburban dwellers.⁹⁷



Figure 28. Belmor Park, view facing SE, 2023 (Northwest Multiple Listing Service).



Figure 29. An example building within the Evergreen Park Apartment complex, undated (King County Assessor).

⁹⁷ "Approval of Shopping Center Asked," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), June 6, 1971, 25.

Post Federal Shopping Way, Weyerhaeuser, Seatac Mall, Incorporation, 1971–1990

By 1971, there appeared to be a solid foundation for the Federal Way area to distance itself from the controversy surrounding Federal Shopping Way and to chart a new path toward a more mature and sustainable future. Three events that year symbolized this shift. The opening of Weyerhaeuser's new \$10 million corporate headquarters in April, the approval of what would become SeaTac Mall in June, and the first attempt to incorporate Federal Way as a city in September. The next two decades, however, would prove otherwise, marked by their own controversies. Where the 1950s and 1960s evoked a childlike innocence captured in Cissna's boundless imagination for amusements, the 1970s and 1980s would represent Federal Way's adolescent struggle for identity and to reconcile and moderate its rapid, chaotic growth.

During this period, Weyerhaeuser's Quadrant Corp filled most of the area between SW 320th Street to the north and SW 348th Street to the south with a mix of single- and multifamily homes and commercial buildings, divided by dense green belts. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Federal Way area grew denser, especially with multifamily construction in the north and commercial and light industrial development farther south along the Pacific Highway South and a widened I-5, with little attention to local transportation infrastructure, green space, and environmental impact. As a result, the population of the broader school district had increased to an estimated 85,000 people, and the suburban landscape in which they lived was crowded and chaotic, difficult for drivers and pedestrians alike to navigate, and lacked a clear center and sufficient green space to provide relief.⁹⁸

In contrast, when Weyerhaeuser's new 1,200-person headquarters opened in 1971, it was the area's most iconic and refined complex to date (Figure 30). A Brutalist masterpiece, it featured five stories and 300,000 square feet of horizontally oriented concrete, window walls, and verdant terraces, designed to seamlessly blend with the landscape while providing panoramic views of it from within. This landscape included an artificial pond and lush patches of forest and lawns, tightly nestled between I-5 to the west and North Lake to the east, on a 200-acre site then known as "East Campus."⁹⁹ A site selected for its ease of access by automobile and for its better landscaping potential.¹⁰⁰ This monumental project, however, coincided with the company's fourth consecutive year of declining net revenue amid rising labor and materials costs and a "depression in the nation's building industry in the past 18 months."¹⁰¹ Thus, it was a bold statement, communicating a clear expectation that this trend would soon reverse and that the investment in the area's growth would pay off. More specifically, it was a statement that their

⁹⁸ Joe Haberstroh, "Complexes Are Simply The Rage," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), July 6, 1988, F1–F2; Michele Matassa Flores, "Coming of Age: Federal Way Looks To Cityhood as a Solution to Growth," *Pacific Magazine* (Seattle, WA), March 12, 1989, 8–19; Google, Aerial Imagery of Federal Way, July, 1990, *Google Earth*, https://earth.google.com/web/@47.30604823,-122.37635099,109.73267469a,16904.34512527d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=ChYqEAgBEgoxOTkwLTA3LTEwGAFCaggBOgMKATBCaggASg0l_____ARAA.

⁹⁹ "New Weyerhaeuser Building Planned," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), October 23, 1968, 16; "Moving Day For Weyerhaeuser," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 3, 1971, A3.

¹⁰⁰ "Weyerhaeuser To Build Near Auburn," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 17, 1968, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Which Would You Buy?" *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 1, 1971, D8; "Fourth In Row: Weyerhaeuser Net Dips Again," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), April 5, 1971, B6.

decision not to locate their headquarters on their original Federal Way land, known then as “West Campus,” but instead to develop West Campus as a new residential district for up to 18,000 people, would prove the right one.¹⁰² Weyerhaeuser’s subsidiary, Quadrant Corporation, began construction at West Campus in 1974, starting with an information center at 32015 1st Avenue South, completed in 1975.¹⁰³



Figure 30. Oblique aerial view of Weyerhaeuser East Campus headquarters, facing NNW, undated (Ted S. Warren/The Associated Press).

At the same time, construction of the \$35 million, 80-store SeaTac Mall took place near the southeast corner of Pacific Highway South and South 320th Street. The first half of the mall opened in 1975, and the second half in 1976. Altogether, it contained four major department stores within a continuously enclosed space covering 19 acres (Figures 31 and 32).¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, a newly formed merchants association for the embattled and deteriorating Federal Shopping Way began revitalization efforts in 1973, including a renaming to “Federal Way Shopping Center” in 1977 and the closure of its amusements and attractions, such as Old World Square, which was partially destroyed in 1980 to pre-empt preservation efforts.¹⁰⁵ Otherwise,

¹⁰² Reports of its size vary between 1,400 to 1,700 acres roughly located south of SW 320th Street between 21st Avenue SW and 1st Avenue South. See: “Urban Panel Will Study Weyerhaeuser Complex,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), September 29, 1967, 10; “Timber Firm To Shift,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), April 18, 1968, 45.

¹⁰³ “West Campus Underway,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), August 18, 1974, B2; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ “Building of SeaTac Mall Starts,” *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), June 9, 1974, G3; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 94 and 110; Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 85.

the land on the east side of Pacific Highway was subdivided and sold for smaller shopping center developments, including SeaTac Village, which opened in 1976 at the northeast corner of Pacific Highway South and South 320th Street.¹⁰⁶

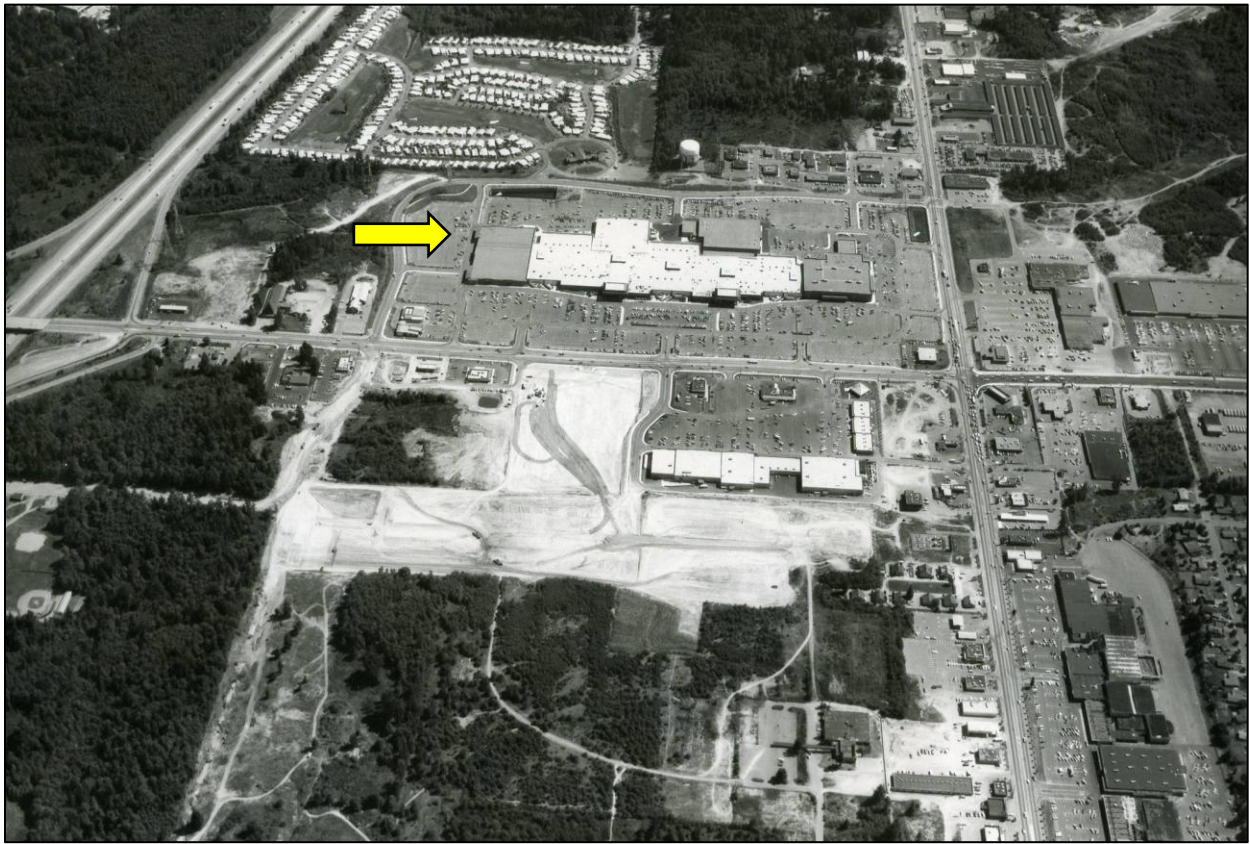


Figure 31. Oblique aerial view facing south of SeaTac Mall marked by the yellow arrow. SeaTac village is across South 320th Street to the north with the former Federal Shopping Way complex at the low right hand corner, late 1970s (HSFW).



Figure 32. North elevation of SeaTac Mall, view facing south, 1975 (HSFW).

¹⁰⁶ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 101; Caster, *Federal Shopping Way*, 79–80.

By 1982, Quadrant had completed approximately 4,000 single- and multi-family residential units and 44 commercial buildings in West Campus.¹⁰⁷ Two years later, the Planning Association of Washington gave West Campus an award of excellence for outstanding contributions to land-use planning.¹⁰⁸ Altogether, Quadrant and other developers constructed thousands of additional housing units through 1989. The pace and quantity of multi-family units accelerated after 1986, when King County tripled the amount of Federal Way land zoned for multi-family use, increasing the number of units from 5,800 in 1980 to nearly 12,000 by 1989.¹⁰⁹ Multi-family housing was typically built on sites of 10 or more acres, containing dozens of two- or three-story buildings designed in a single style with variations in massing and orientation (Figure 33). Dwelling areas are typically set back from private or semi-private roads, which are prominently lined with garages, off-street parking spaces, and carports. There are typically two access points (occasionally gated) to arterial roads to eliminate through traffic. Examples include:

1. Quail Run Condominiums at 31901 31st Place SW (1974).¹¹⁰
2. Lake Easter Estates at 1301 S 308th Street (1975).¹¹¹
3. Westfair Apartments, 31001 19th Place SW (1976–1978).¹¹²
4. Woodtrail Village Apartments at 1901 SW 320th Street (1981–82).¹¹³



Figure 33. Advertisements from Seattle Times, 1975 (left) and Seattle Post-Intelligencer 1974 (right).

¹⁰⁷ "The New Direction for the West Campus is Upward," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), March 7, 1982, D1.

¹⁰⁸ "Companies & People: Congratulations to The Quadrant Corporation's 1600-acre West Campus," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), December 17, 1984, B13.

¹⁰⁹ Joe Haberstroh, "Complexes Are Simply The Rage," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), July 6, 1988, F1; Michelle Matassa Flores, "Activists Band To Fight Builders," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), February 10, 1989, C3.

¹¹⁰ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 95.

¹¹¹ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 95.

¹¹² "Just Completed," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), August 6, 1976, D5.

¹¹³ "Brand New Apartments," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), October 22, 1981, D9.

Concerned about the environmental impact of rapid construction, 11 residents formed the Development Impact Resistance Exercise (DIRE) in 1989 to oppose or slow future development through appeals. DIRE was one of many similar environmental groups throughout the Puget Sound region opposing development in the 1980s.¹¹⁴ Their formation closely coincided with the fourth and final attempt to incorporate Federal Way, which was largely driven by residents' desire for a greater say in planning future development, with West Campus cited as an example of "development done right" for its higher standards for green space and drainage.¹¹⁵ The vote to incorporate passed on March 14, 1989, with initial city limits including everything within South 272nd Street to the north, I-5 to the east, and the King/Pierce County line to the south and west, except for Redondo, which had consistently opposed all incorporation efforts. (Figure 34). Incorporation officially took effect on February 28, 1990, establishing a firm identity for Federal Way and a solid foundation for self-determining its next phase of development.¹¹⁶

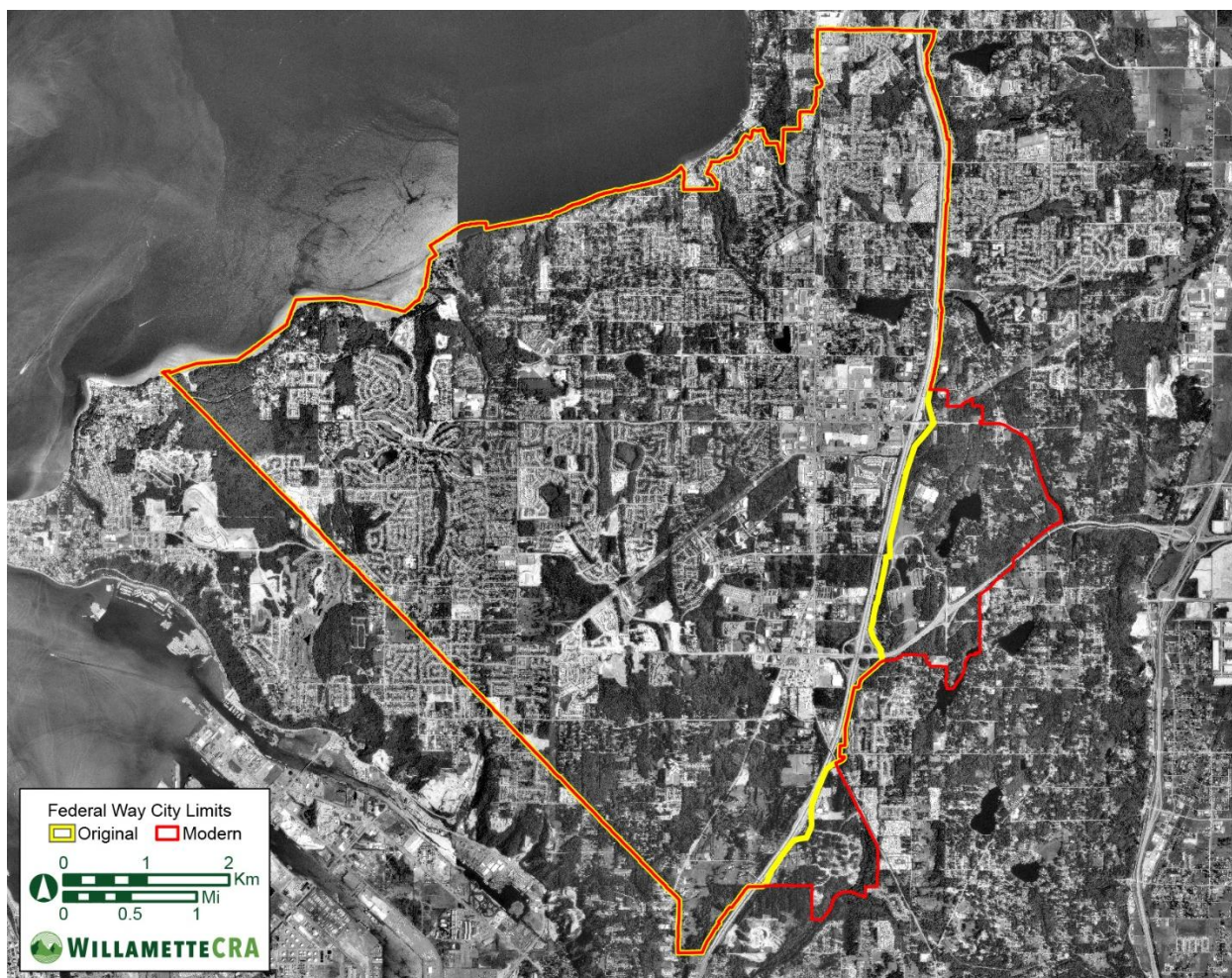


Figure 34. Aerial view of Federal Way with original and current city boundaries, 1990 (USGS).

¹¹⁴ Michele Matassa Flores, "Activists Band To Fight Builders," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), February 10, 1989, C3.

¹¹⁵ Michele Matassa Flores, "Coming of Age: Federal Way Looks To Cityhood as a Solution to Growth," *Pacific Magazine* (Seattle, WA), March 12, 1989, 8–19

¹¹⁶ Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 120 and 123.

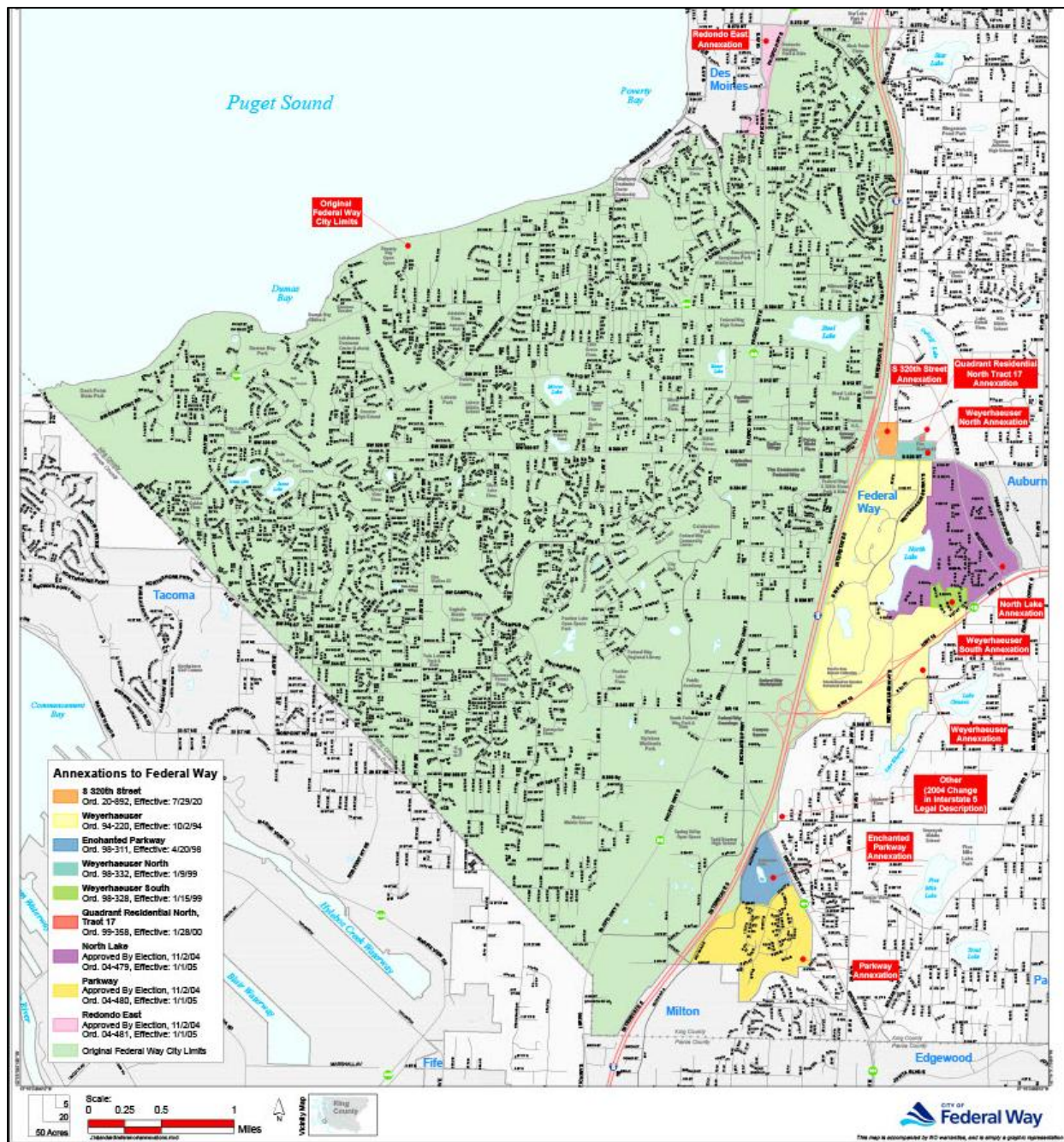


Figure 35. Annexation map with original 1990 boundaries colored in green (City of Federal Way).

Overcoming Racial Exclusion in the Federal Way Area, 1890–1990

The Federal Way area's first known non-white property owner during the settlement period was John N. Conna (1836–1921), a Civil War veteran of Irish and African descent. He came to Tacoma with his family in 1884 and filed for a land patent on the SW quarter of Section 18 in Township 21 North, Range 4 East in 1885. Conna went on to become a successful real estate agent and politician and received the patent for his Federal Way land in 1890.¹¹⁷ It is unknown exactly how long Conna owned the land. Conna himself left his family in 1900 to pursue mining and other business interests in Alaska and likely sold the property around that time.¹¹⁸ Anderson Map Company's 1907 atlas of King County shows that his land had been subdivided among four new owners by that point.¹¹⁹

Likely because of its rural character, significant efforts to control property ownership and use along racial lines do not appear until the 1920s, when the earliest known racial covenants were placed on a planned but never-built development called Woodstock on the Sound, which later became Dash Point State Park in 1962.¹²⁰ The National Housing Act of 1934 added weight to restrictive covenants by introducing "redlining," which identified areas it deemed riskier for bank mortgage investment. In practice, it effectively divided areas by racial demographics. To avoid being redlined, landowners, residents, and realtors then established additional racial covenants.¹²¹ In the Federal Way area, additional racial covenants were established in scattered locations in the 1940s and even in the 1950s, despite a 1948 US Supreme Court ruling that they were unenforceable. These include small developments at the southwest corner of SW 356th Street and 8th Avenue SW, the NE corner of SW Dash Point Rd and 50th Avenue SW, and some individual properties near or on Steel Lake. Most of the land around Lake Dolloff, just outside Federal Way city limits but within the school district, also had racial covenants established in the 1940s and 1950s.¹²² After the 1948 Supreme Court ruling, racial covenants and redlining continued to be used unofficially into the 1960s.

During the post-war period in Federal Way, some property owners, but mostly real estate agents, typically enforced racial restrictions indirectly by telling potential non-white buyers that

¹¹⁷ Bureau of Land Management, "WASAA 071599 Serial Patent, Conna, John M." Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Olympia, WA. February 24, 1890. Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=WASAA%20%20071599&docClass=SER&sid=apgjpyae.cbk>; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 11.

¹¹⁸ Douglas Q. Barnett, "Conna, John N. (1836–1921)," *Historylink*, October 28, 2004. Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/File/7111>.

¹¹⁹ Anderson Map Company, *King County Atlas, Township 21 North Range 4 East W.M., 1907*, Historic Map Works, Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://historicmapworks.com/Map/US/1250014/Page+14+++Township+21+North++Range+4+East/King+County+1907/Washington/>.

¹²⁰ Liz Peng, "Map of Restricted Properties – Seattle and King County", Racial Restrictive Covenants Project Washington State, Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, University of Washington, 2022. Accessed January 28, 2026, https://depts.washington.edu/covenants/map_cov_king.shtml; Caster, *Historical Society of Federal Way Time Line*, 68.

¹²¹ Catherine Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants History: Enforcing Neighborhood Segregation in Seattle," The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, University of Washington, 2009. Accessed January 28, 2025, https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm.

¹²² Peng, "Map of Restricted Properties – Seattle and King County"; Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants History: Enforcing Neighborhood Segregation in Seattle."

properties had already been sold when they had not, or by warning owners about the risk of reduced property values.¹²³ These practices either did not apply to or were less effective at limiting Federal Way's Korean population, which began to take hold in the 1950s after some Korean War veterans returned with Korean wives and settled in Federal Way.¹²⁴



Figure 36. Harold G. Booker house at 30240 20th Ave South, south elevation, view facing NE, ca. 2020 (Northwest Multiple Listing Service) and inset photo of Booker (Vivian O. Lee).

The first major challenge to the status quo emerged in the 1960s through the efforts of Harold Booker (1933–2018).¹²⁵ Since John Conna, Booker was the first African American known to have acquired property in Federal Way, doing so with the help of a white friend in late 1962 (Figure 36). The bold act of defiance marked the beginning of Booker's long career in civil rights activism in and around Federal Way. Booker co-founded the Federal Way Human Rights Committee in late 1963. The committee lobbied King County for supportive action and participated in the NAACP's effort to send white and black people to document differences in treatment when inquiring about homes for sale. While many white residents resisted or retaliated against Booker's and the Committee's efforts, overall support among residents was positive and constructive.¹²⁶

Similar housing activism nationwide culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (also known as the Fair Housing Act), which prohibited housing discrimination nationwide.¹²⁷ Although it did not

¹²³ Chris Green, *Harold Booker and the Struggle Against Racism in Federal Way*, (Historical Society of Federal Way, 2013), 2. Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://www.federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HaroldBookerJuly222013.pdf>

¹²⁴ Ron Redmond, "Korean Immigrants Give It Their All," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Seattle, WA), February 1, 1990, A1.

¹²⁵ University of Washington Magazine, "Harold Booker, 1933–2018," *University of Washington Magazine*, June 5, 2018. Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://magazine.washington.edu/harold-booker-1933-2018/#gsc.tab=0>.

¹²⁶ Green, *Harold Booker and the Struggle Against Racism in Federal Way*, 2–8.

¹²⁷ Clerk of the House's Office of Art and Archives and The Office of the Historian, "Historical Highlights: The Fair Housing Act of 1968," *History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives*, 2025. Accessed February 3, 2026, https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/hh_1968_04_10.

eliminate housing discrimination, Federal Way's racial diversity increased significantly after its passage. By the time the law was passed, Booker reported that there were approximately a dozen black families living in the Federal Way area. By 1990, the black population had increased to 2,709.¹²⁸

Building on the foundation that Booker established in Federal Way, Ben Song (1937–), a prominent Korean immigrant and Christian minister, settled in the area in the early 1970s to work with the growing number of Korean immigrants following the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which substantially eased restrictions on Asian immigration. After relocating to Federal Way in 1977, when there were only eight Korean families there, Song organized the Federal Way Korean Mission Church (Figure 37). By 1990, community leaders estimated there were nearly 7,000 Korean residents; however, the US Census reported that the overall Asian-Pacific Islander population had increased from 1,545 in 1980 to 4,877 in 1990. Regardless of the discrepancy, the prominence of the Korean population was evident in the 70 Korean businesses along Pacific Highway South, four Korean Christian churches, a Korean newspaper (The Korean Journal), and a Korean public television station (KOAM-TV).¹²⁹



Figure 37. Federal Way Korean Mission church at 405 South 312th Street, built 1988. North elevation view facing SE, (Korean Mission Church 2025) and inset photo of Song (John Song).

Meanwhile, Federal Way's Hispanic and Native American populations grew alongside African Americans and Asians. Hispanics, mostly from Mexico but also from other parts of Central and South America, had been seasonal migrants mainly to central Washington for farm work since the early 20th century. Migration increased during WWII, mainly for agricultural work under the Braceros program, but also for wartime jobs in cities. When urban industrial jobs declined after WWII, many urban Hispanics returned to central Washington as post-war economic growth boosted demand for agricultural products. Hispanics quickly formed permanent communities

¹²⁸ Green, *Harold Booker and the Struggle Against Racism in Federal Way*, 9.

¹²⁹ Michele Matassa Flores, "Koreans Discover America: Federal Way Now Is Home to Thousands," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), July 11, 1990, F1.

where they raised their families, with many relocating to more urban areas, including Federal Way, to pursue higher education, start businesses, or find better-paying, non-agricultural jobs. In the 1980s, civil wars and economic instability in South America, along with immigration reform, prompted even more Hispanics to move to the United States and Federal Way.¹³⁰ Thus, Federal Way's Hispanic population increased rapidly from 869 in 1980 to 2,209 in 1990.¹³¹

Many Native Americans also migrated to urban centers like Seattle and Tacoma for war-related jobs and military service during WWII. When these jobs ended after the war, many Native Americans returned to their reservations, while others joined established Native American communities in Seattle's Pioneer Square and Chinatown.¹³² In line with its long-standing policy of assimilating and dismantling Tribes, the federal government introduced a new policy of termination and relocation starting in 1953. This policy ended most government support for Tribes and provided limited funding for Native Americans to move to urban areas and later pursue vocational training. However, many did not receive the assistance promised, and others struggled to find and keep employment and housing, partly due to discrimination. Despite this, nearly 200,000 Native Americans migrated to cities between 1950 and 1968.¹³³ However, it was not until the late 1950s that many people struggling found support from Native American activist groups in Seattle, such as the American Indian Women's Service League, founded in 1958, and the Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, opened in 1977 (Figure 38).



Figure 38. Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, 5011 Bernie Whitebear Way, Seattle, Washington (Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center).

¹³⁰ Kery Murakami, "Being Black in Federal Way," *Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), May 13, 1993, F1.; Raymond W. Rast, "The Spaces Between the Buildings: Latine Claims on Space, Place, and Preservation in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 2/3 (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2023), 89-93. Revisiting Washington, "Latino Heritage," (Seattle, WA: Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, 2022). Accessed March 4, 2026, https://revisitwa.org/heritage_tour/latino-heritage.

¹³¹ Murakami, "Being Black in Federal Way."

¹³² Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle*, 2nd Ed. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2017), 156-156 and 164-165.

¹³³ National Archives, "Native American Urban Relocation," *Educator Resources*, September 24, 2025. Accessed March 5, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/indian-relocation.html>; Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid, "Indian Relocation Act Passes, Launching the Urban Relocation Process," *Investing In Native Communities*, 2026. Accessed March 5, 2026, <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/events/indian-relocation-act-passes-launching-the-urban-relocation-process>; Max Nesterak, "Uprooted: The 1950s Plan to Erase Indian Country," APM Reports, November 1, 2019. Accessed March 5, 2026, <https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2019/11/01/uprooted-the-1950s-plan-to-erase-indian-country>; Thrush, *Native Seattle*, 168-169.

These organizations pushed for additional reforms and provided services to urban Native Americans. Active members of these groups then took the skills and knowledge they gained out to other communities around Seattle and back to the reservations between the 1960s and 1980s.¹³⁴ Both the Muckleshoot and Puyallup Tribes engaged in “fish-ins” on the nearby Green and Puyallup Rivers and others to advocate for fishing rights, culminating in the Boldt Decision of 1974, which reaffirmed their original treaty rights to fishing. The Puyallup made further gains by convincing the federal government to restore trust status to its reservation lands.¹³⁵ After 1980, Federal Way’s Native American population also increased considerably, from 336 to 575 in 1990.¹³⁶

In sum, Federal Way, like many other Puget Sound settler communities, began as a logging and small-scale agricultural settlement that displaced longstanding Indigenous practices of seasonal hunting and harvesting in the area. The rugged terrain of the Federal Way promontory, along with dense forests and its distance from major transportation routes, kept early settlers isolated in small groups. The arrival of the automobile, the introduction of gravel roads, and later the paving of concrete highways in the 1920s and 1930s helped connect these isolated communities into a single school district called “Federal Way,” while also transforming the area into a popular recreational destination. The Great Depression of the 1930s and WWII largely delayed further development until the early 1950s, when rising housing demand justified expansion into urban hinterlands, leading to two major waves of suburban growth in the Federal Way area.

The first wave of suburban development, from roughly 1950 to 1970, involved building residential subdivisions around large shopping centers along key transportation corridors. The second, from approximately 1970 to 1990, featured increased density within existing developments and Weyerhaeuser’s “West Campus” residential project within Federal Way’s geographic center. Regional, national, and global events and policy shifts during this period, including Federal Way School District’s proactive effort to become racially integrated, prompted Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, and Asian populations to move to the area, transforming it into a diverse community.¹³⁷ By the late 1980s, the challenges posed by rapid growth and limited county support motivated residents to incorporate, seeking better control and funding for future development.

¹³⁴ Coll Thrush, “Native Seattle,” 166–173.

¹³⁵ Miguel Douglas, “Puyallup Land Claims Settlement 1990,” *Historylink*, October 12, 2016. Accessed March 5, 2026, <https://www.historylink.org/file/20157>; Fleming, Muckleshoot Indian History, 73–74.

¹³⁶ Murakami, “Being Black in Federal Way,”

¹³⁷ Tom Stewart, email message, May 2, 2026.

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