



**Architects and  
Modern Preservationists**

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Date: January 13, 2021

Sarah Sodt & the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board  
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods  
600 Fourth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104  
[Sarah.Sodt@seattle.gov](mailto:Sarah.Sodt@seattle.gov)

Dear Ms. Sodt and Members of the Landmarks Preservation Board:

On December 2, 2020, the Landmarks Preservation Board met to consider the nomination of the Hahn Building, the former Hotel Elliot, located at First Avenue and Pike Street.

This letter addresses one question raised by the Board during the hearing regarding the boundaries of the Market through time. The building owners requested that I do some research to answer this question for the Board.

## **BACKGROUND**

As background, the Pike Place Market Historic Preservation Initiative sprang from ongoing efforts for the urban renewal project known as Pike Plaza, which began as early as 1963.

The basic issue was the tension between federal money available for urban renewal and the preservation initiative that would block the access to federal funds. Why was federal money being sought for urban renewal?

A 1969 report on file in the Municipal Archives discusses the demographic needs of the “Skid Road” area of Seattle, which was defined as everything between Jackson and Denny streets to the north and south and Western and Fifth avenues to the east and west. This meant that half of downtown and all of the waterfront was described as a distressed “Skid Road” area. The report talks about the living conditions of the estimated 5,000-6,000 residents and how badly the federal funds were needed for housing, as homelessness was rampant in 1969. The biggest reported problems were alienation, loneliness, poverty, and “impairment” or mental and physical disabilities. (“Skid Road Study Committee of the Council Of Planning Affiliates, Preliminary Report, March 1969” Matthew Hudson, Chairman, Alan Riley, Staff, Exhibit #26)

The recommendation by the COPA was to request that the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) and the Secretary of HUD, George Romney, revise their housing requirements to allow federal funds to go towards emergency shelters and housing for individuals, rather than exclusively towards family housing. They

specifically talked about locating some of this housing in the area between Pioneer Square and Pike Street, and Second Avenue and Harbor. The Hahn Building is on the edge of this location.

The report paints a bleak picture of the lived reality of residents of Skid Road: not a romanticized “gritty Seattle,” but a Seattle of loneliness, disconnection, and the struggle to connect people to services.

## PIKE PLACE MARKET HISTORIC DISTRICT EMERGED FROM “PIKE PLAZA”

The initial urban renewal proposal was called “Pike Plaza.”

The boundaries for the proposed Pike Plaza are the same as those of the Pike Place Market Historic District, established in 1971. The COPA/urban renewal proposal was to rehabilitate the Market Building and the Corner Market Building, while demolishing all other buildings within the district in order to create high-density subsidized housing and a controversial 35-story hotel building. This is where we find the differential between an oft-cited 1.6-acre and 7-acre boundary, as the urban renewal scheme initially only proposed to preserve those buildings at the very heart of the Market, about 1.6 acres; ultimately 7 acres were included in the Historic District delineated in 1971. (See Pike Plaza flyer.)



## POLITICAL RESPONSE: INITIATIVE 1

The successful designation of the Pioneer Square Historic District in 1970 paved the way for an initiative, called Initiative 1 on the November 1971 ballot, to designate the Pike Place Market a historic district.

Initiative 1 effectively prevented the urban renewal scheme proposed by the City architects, urban planners, and Paul Kirk.

Initiative 1 defined the boundaries of the historic district along First Avenue to the east (including the buildings on the western side of the street, excluding those on the eastern side of the street), Virginia Street to the north, Western Avenue to the west, and cutting mid-block between Pike and Union to the south. These were the same boundaries proposed by the Pike Plaza urban renewal proposal, although there was also a larger 22-acre area affected by both proposals. The initiative was to place the district on the National Register and also set up local district control of the area. The initiative proposed:

“an ordinance to preserve, improve and restore the Pike Place Markets, creating the Pike Place Market Historical District, prohibiting alteration, demolition, construction, restoration, remodeling or modification of structures without a certificate of approval establishing an Historical Preservation Commission and providing for administration and enforcement.”

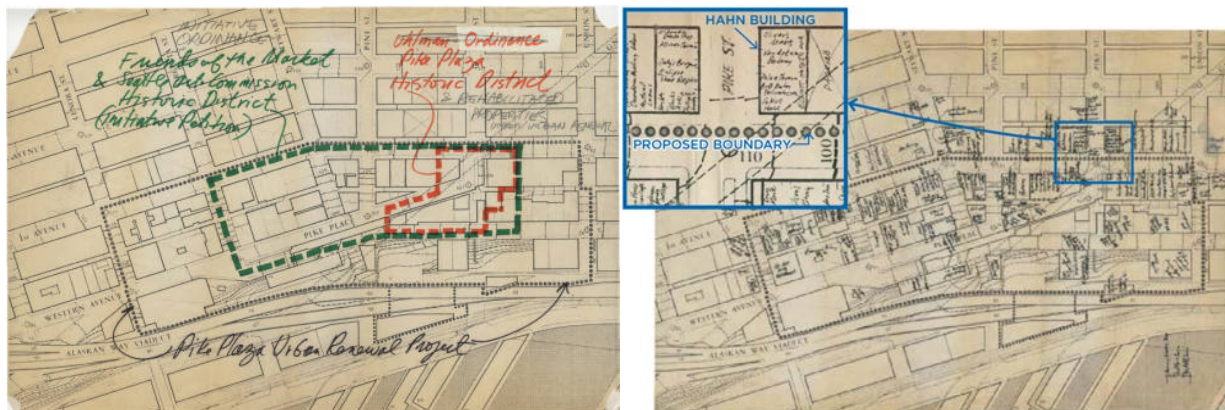
## PROponents & Opponents

Newspapers at the time depicted the Friends of the Market and Victor Steinbrueck supporting the historic district, in opposition to the Central Downtown Association and the members of Save the Market, who supported the urban renewal plan. A KOMO radio program aired in October 1971 before the Initiative 1 vote. In this program Victor Steinbrueck joined Ibsen Nelsen and Fred Bassetti to defend the designation of the Market Historic District, while Paul Kirk joined the city architect to defend the COPA/urban renewal scheme. Some market vendors, in interviews conducted before the Initiative 1 vote, indicated confusion as to how the initiative would affect them. However, the push to preserve the Market and designate the Historic District was clearly a grassroots effort with tactics including protests, petitions, and homemade flyers.

## Contemporary Discussions of Boundaries

When Victor Steinbrueck proposed the Market boundaries, he clearly delineated First Avenue as the border, with the western side of First Avenue included in the District and the eastern side excluded. In the 1971 KOMO radio program Steinbrueck and Kirk discussed the First Avenue boundary. Kirk stated that there were not any buildings on First Avenue architecturally worthy of being preserved, with the exception of one owned by Ralph Anderson (the Smith/Butterworth/Alaska Trade building, at First and Stewart on the western side). During the program, Steinbrueck agreed with Kirk about the First Avenue buildings and went on to discuss the importance of the Market usage inside the boundary. The Hahn Building, along with many other buildings bordering the Market, does appear on Steinbrueck's use map, but outside the Market boundary. None of Steinbrueck's maps propose to include buildings on the eastern side of First Avenue.

**There is no proposal in which the eastern side of First Avenue is included in the Pike Place Market Historical District.** (See attached for Steinbrueck's early sketches and the proposed Market delineation in the preservation plan.)



## Outcome

From the Municipal Archive timeline we see that HUD approved \$10 million in federal funds for the Pike Plaza project in May 1971, and voters approved the Pike Place Market Historical District designation in November 1971. 73,369 people voted in favor of Initiative 1, thus to preserve the Market, and 53,264

opposed the initiative measure. This led to the establishment of the Pike Place Market Historical District and its city administration. After a lawsuit and appeal, the State of Washington approved a seven-acre historical site in 1972. In the end, a special condition for the designation of the Pike Place Market Historical District was incorporated into the HUD loan and grant package of \$14.6 million. (Pike Market Timeline on File at Seattle Municipal Archives)

Since Initiative 1, the Market boundaries have changed twice: once in 1986 and once in 1989, with a failed boundary expansion effort in 2017.

Efforts to expand the Market in the 1980s focused on the back side of the Market. This resulted in the inclusion of the Victor Steinbrueck Park expansion in 1986 and the inclusion of the lower Market area in 1989. When the Market boundary was expanded in 2017 to include the Showbox, the Hahn Building was not included in the expansion, nor were any other buildings east of First Avenue. This expansion of the Market boundary was later ruled illegal. **The 2017 attempted Market boundary expansion is the only time the Market boundary has been proposed to cross First Avenue.** (See attached Market boundaries Map)

## UNDERSTANDING “BLIGHT” & URBAN RENEWAL

In order to understand why architects at the time did not include in proposed preservation models any First Avenue buildings—such as the Broderick Building, the Colonnade Hotel, the Atwood, and others, and in some instances explicitly said they were not worth preserving—it may be useful to understand the historical concept of “blight.” Having seen images of the Hahn building during the 1970s, it is easy to understand why architects at the time would not have considered the building’s architecture as worthy of preservation.

“Blight” was an ill-defined term for any poverty-stricken property that threatened the property value of its neighbor. “Blight” was not always defined by the economic status of the tenants or the exterior condition of the building. Rather, depending on the situation and the desirability and political expediency of the acquisition by condemnation, “blight” was at times defined solely by the skin color of the inhabitants of the building. There is evidence of this on redline maps and in Seattle City Council Hearings on the YANIP (Yesler-Atlantic Neighborhood Improvement Project). The photographic record for the Pike Plaza urban renewal project shows buildings that were thought to be “blighted,” including wood-framed mixed-use SROs and the later designated buildings on the back side of the Market. Understanding the urban social context of First Avenue at the time, it would be understandable that the architects may have considered these buildings “blighted,” or beyond repair. It is unknown what the perception of race may have had on the concept of “blight” in the Market in the 1960s. It would be worth investigating why urban renewal was more active in areas such as the ISRD and the Central District, while being soundly defeated in Pike Place Market. (See attached for images from the studies for urban renewal for Pike Plaza)

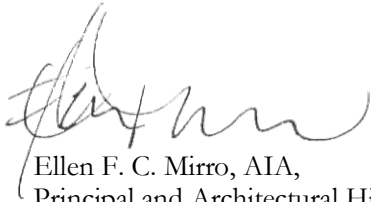
Urban renewal can be a difficult historical topic. Today we tend to judge the results harshly and blame city planners and architects for the disenfranchisement and loss of wealth of thousands of people living in inner cities and of people of color whose wealth was tied to the properties lost through urban renewal efforts.

Federal funds were being sought to solve sociological problems in downtown Seattle before 1969. The earliest urban renewal project took place in Seattle in 1940, the Yesler Terrace project. Urban renewal activities then took place in the YANIP and Pioneer Square throughout the 1960s. The ordinance to preserve the Pike Place Market was passed in 1971 and another passed in 1972. The City of Seattle Landmarks Ordinance did not pass until 1977.

## CONCLUSION

The Hahn Building, along with the whole eastern side of First Avenue, has never been discussed as part of the Historic District. Neither has the Hahn Building, nor any other building on the eastern side of First Avenue with the exception of the Showbox, been proposed to be included in the Historic District in any boundary revision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen F. C. Mirro".

Ellen F. C. Mirro, AIA,  
Principal and Architectural Historian



# PIKE PLAZA

## Urban Renewal Project

The Pike Plaza Project is planned as the first step in a major rebuilding of Seattle's central business district.

First noted in 1930 by the general manager of the Pike Place Public Market, the area's need for renewal was pinpointed by the 1963 Seattle Central Business District Plan. Redevelopment would serve a number of uptown needs, including off-street parking for 2000-3000 cars, a new terminal facility for Seattle Transit, a water view park three blocks in size, including a restored or rebuilt public market and various apartments and office building.

Today, application for \$400,000 in Survey and Planning funds has been made, and an announcement of this appropriation is pending. With it, a full study of the 20.4-acre project area will be possible.

At present, 88.7 per cent of the 53 buildings in the area are deficient, used for a mixture of commercial, industrial and residential hotel uses. Sanitation is haphazard, topography of the area not conducive to repair, even if it were possible, many small ownerships of property limit private development.

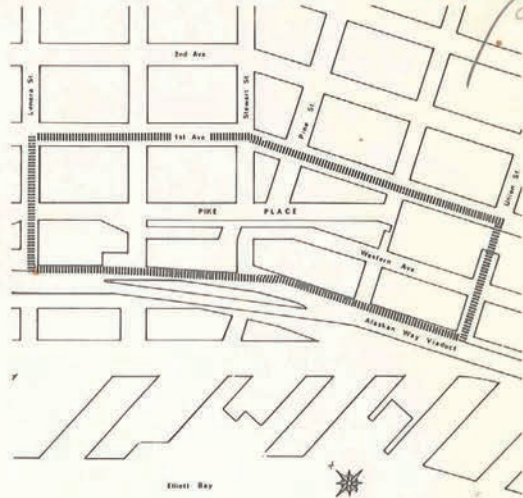
The pending Survey and Planning Application will finance a detailed building survey, property appraisal, social and

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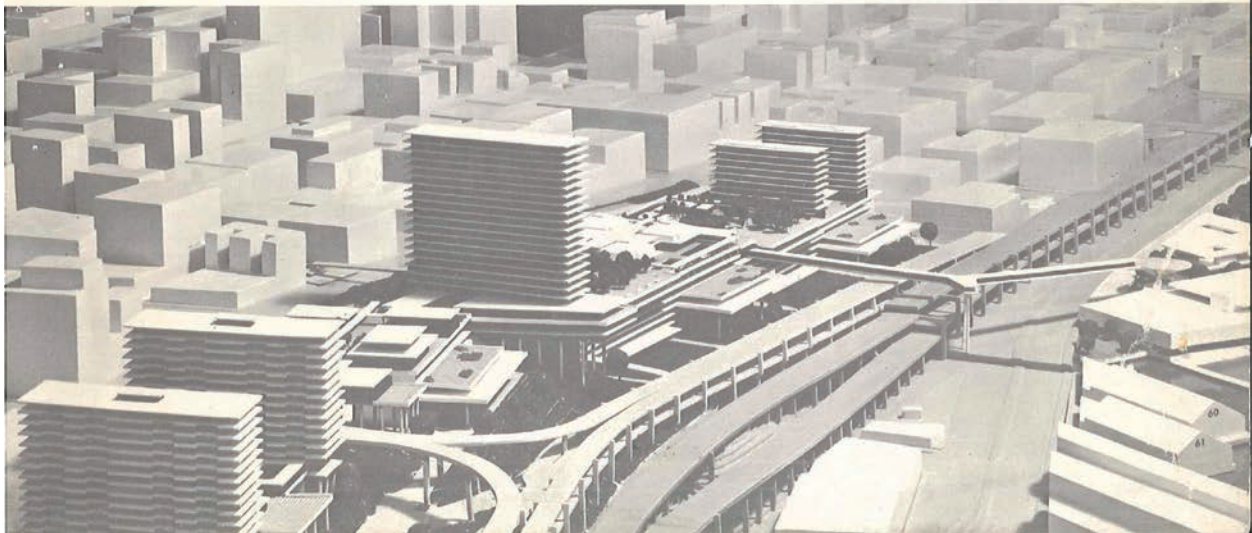
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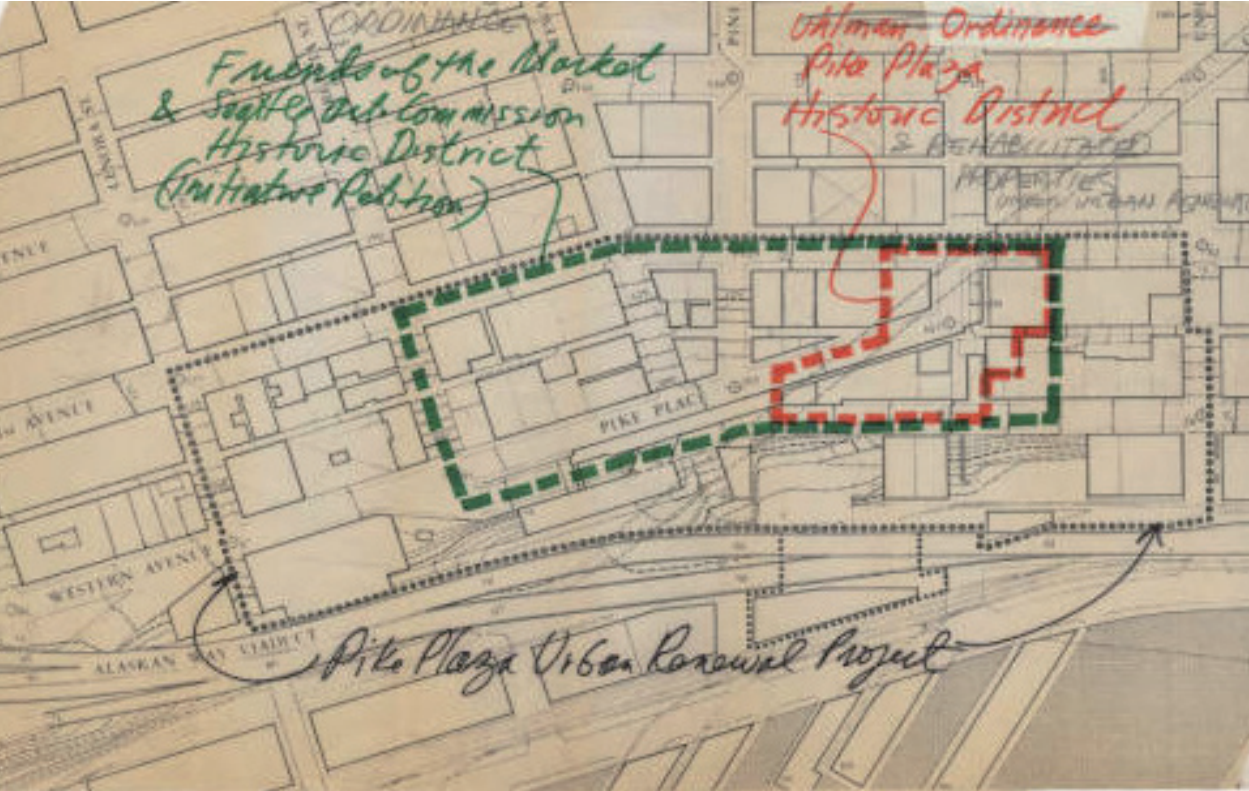
economic study of the approximately 450 transients in the area and business relocation report.

Estimated cost of project improvements to the area is \$10 million. It is further estimated there would be a return of \$6 million in sale of land to be made available through the project, leaving a \$4 million balance to be financed through federal funds and local sources.

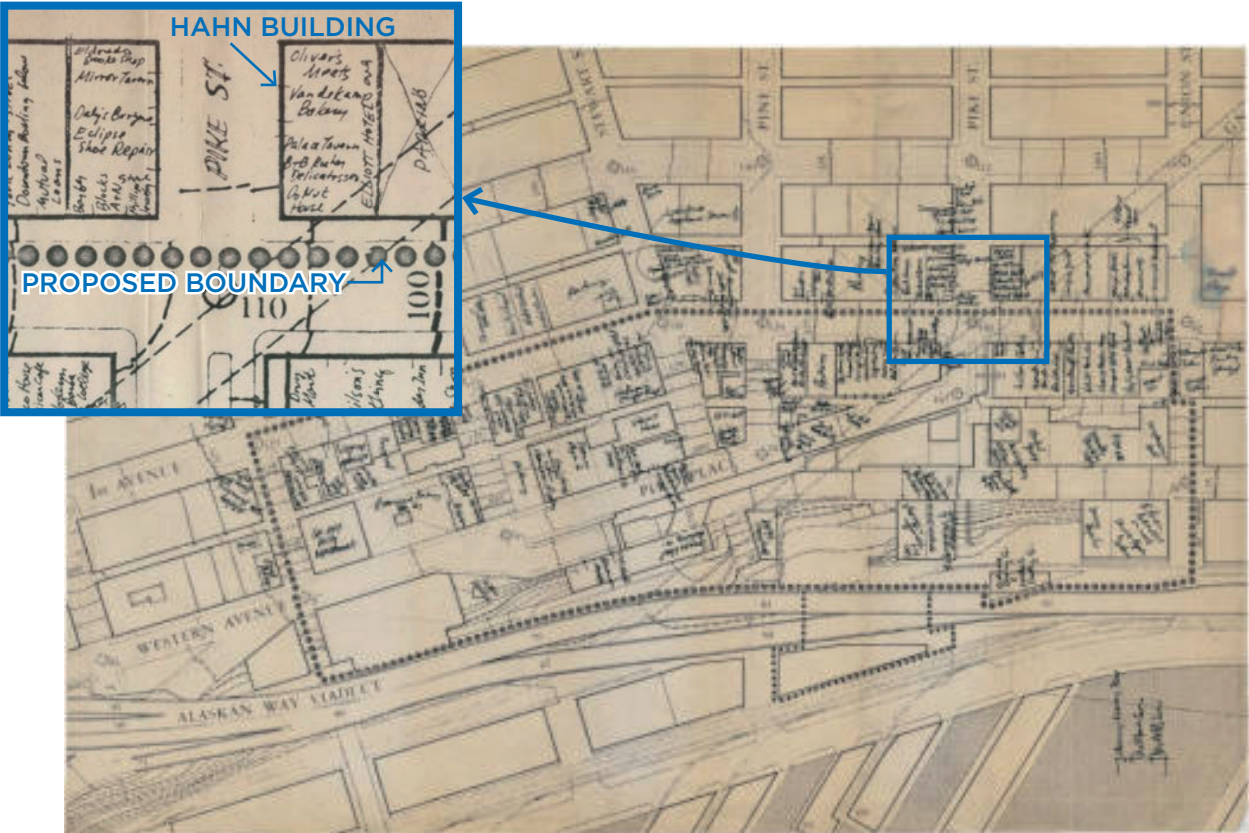
A preliminary feasibility study by the Central Association and Seattle Urban Renewal Enterprise in August of 1964 projects \$58 million in private development.



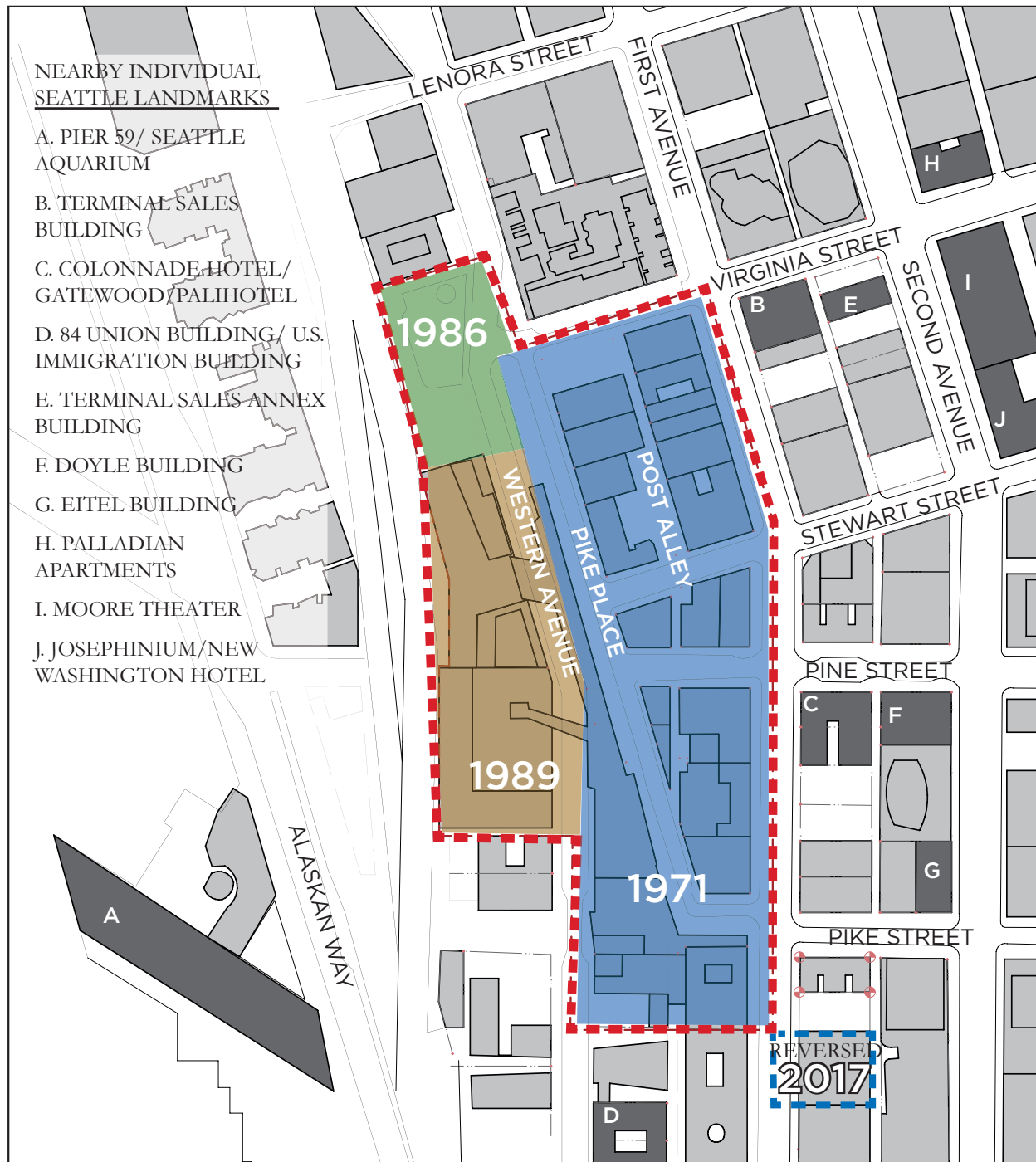




Steinbrueck's sketches of market boundaries (Seattle Public Libraries Special Collections Online sps\_ps\_018)



Steinbrueck's sketches of market boundaries and building use (Seattle Public Libraries Special Collections Online sps\_ps\_018) Notice the boundary encompasses all of the Pike Plaza dotted area of the map above.



Boundary revisions, Pike Market





Seattle Municipal Archives acial view 1969 (courtesy pauldorpat.com)



HAHN BUILDING

Seattle Municipal Archives acial view 1970 (courtesy pauldorpat.com)





Seattle Municipal Archives: view of Market (courtesy pauldorpat.com)



Seattle Municipal Archives 31538: 2015-2037 First Avenue, ca. 1970