A Short History of Wilkeson  
Donna Hogerhuis – 2011

Wilkeson lies in a narrow valley in the Cascade foothills of northern Pierce County along the meandering Gale Creek. Wilkeson was once divided into two sections: “uptown” which no longer exists was a company town where housing, businesses and land was owned by the mining company; and “downtown” originally named Hope was independent, where business and homes were owned by families.

Few people know the significance of Wilkeson to the existence of early Tacoma and Northern Pacific Railway. When Wilkeson coal was brought into Tacoma by wagon in 1874, the Northern Pacific Railway (NP) was already eyeing the area. Coal was needed to fuel the shipping industry, foundries and homes along the west coast. NP was running out of funds to pay its workers and investors. It was one of two companies commissioned by congress to build a transcontinental line. In exchange congress gave the railroad every other section of land along the route to pay for their efforts in their charter. The officials of NP had declared Tacoma as the future main terminus but paying investors would be a challenge. The discovery of Wilkeson coal deposits meant that Tacoma, with its natural deep harbors, had the potential as the leading coal loading port of Puget Sound. In 1876, the then NP Vice President, George Stark, stated: “The building of the Puyallup Branch for the development of our coal resources, seems to be the one wheel, which if started, will put the whole train in motion, and I trust that ways and means will be devised to accomplish it at an early date.” The Puyallup branch, built by both European and Chinese laborers opened in 1877 from Tacoma to the “Wilkeson” depot. NP investors bought up the mines and the first coal shipments were transported the next year.

The Wilkeson mines and sandstone quarry provided jobs for thousands of European immigrants (Welsh, Italians, Yugoslavians, Russians, Swedes, Germans, Austrians, and more) at the turn of the century. A few Chinese laborers also stayed until they were forcibly removed in 1885. It was here were the Wilkeson’s 160 coke ovens roared for days, and lit the skies at night, smelting the raw coal for impurities. The finished product, Coke, was taken by rail to Tacoma for foundries or to be loaded on waiting ships for San Francisco. Here too, at the turn of the century, sandstone was quarried and transported for use in building churches, businesses and roads especially in Tacoma. Wilkeson’s sandstone is the building material used for Washington’s State Capital.

As the coal industry declined, many of the mining towns that once dotted the Carbon Valley have since disappeared, only Wilkeson and Carbonado have survived. Today,
Wilkeson’s Centennial Monument Park near Town Hall honors over 340 men who lost their lives in the mines. It tells of the history of the area, and the people who made it possible.

Today Wilkeson has over five sites on the National Register the Wilkeson, Arch, the Coke Ovens, the Wilkeson Quarry, the Trinity Orthodox Church and the Pete Home. The town hall is currently being proposed by the Wilkeson Historical Society for listing. Many more sites are eligible. Fifty five sites were listed on the state register in the 1908s more than any other town at that time.
TOWN OF WILKESON
Historic Preservation Ordinance

ORDINANCE NO. 99-11
PIERCE COUNTY, WASHINGTON

1. **Purpose.** The Mayor and Town Council recognize the historic value and distinct architectural style of buildings of the Town of Wilkeson by creating an ordinance to ensure renovation or rehabilitation of existing buildings, as well as new development, is consistent and harmonious with the existing architectural style and national historic significance of Wilkeson, is consistent with the provisions of its Comprehensive Plan, and meets the requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act. It is the intent and purpose of this ordinance to preserve and enhance the heritage of Wilkeson through regulatory controls.

2. **Definitions.** The following words and terms when used in this Ordinance shall mean as follows, unless a different meaning clearly appears from the context:

   A. "Building" means a structure constructed by human beings. This includes both residential and nonresidential buildings, main and accessory buildings.

   B. "Certificate of appropriateness" means the Town Planner has reviewed the proposed changes to a property within a historic district and certified the changes as not adversely affecting the historic characteristics of the property which contributes to its historic value and character.

   C. "Historic District" means a geographically defined area in the Town of Wilkeson that is zoned commercial and mapped accordingly in the Zoning Chapter of the Unified Development Ordinance of the Town of Wilkeson.

   D. "Town Planner" means a person appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Town Council who will carry out all planning functions of the Town, including the administration of this ordinance.

3. **Design Review Guidelines.** The Wilkeson design review guidelines shall be utilized as a policy document to determine the suitability of development within the historic district. The design review guidelines will take into consideration the historic character of buildings constructed between the years 1880 and 1910. The Wilkeson design review guidelines shall be adopted by the Town Council in a form a resolution and will accompany this Ordinance.

4. **Administration.** The Town Planner is the administrator of this ordinance. The Town planner will receive and review all applications for renovation, reconstruction and
new construction of all buildings and alterations of property requiring a building permit. The Town Planner, in keeping with the design review guidelines, will make a determination whether an application meets the requirements of this Ordinance. If the Town Planner determines that the application is in compliance with this ordinance, a certificate of appropriateness is issued. If the Town Planner determines that the application does not meet the requirements of this ordinance, the application will be denied. The applicant has the right, within 20 days to appeal the decision of the Town Planner to the Town Council.

5. **Review Considerations.** The Town Planner, in considering the appropriateness of any development activity, shall base all decisions on this Ordinance and the design review guidelines. It shall consider the historical and architectural value and significance, architectural style, general design, arrangement, texture, material, and color of the structure in question or its appurtenant fixtures including signs, the relationship of such features of other buildings within the Town of Wilkeson historic district, and the position of such buildings.

6. **Indemnity.** The Town of Wilkeson shall defend and indemnify the Town Planner and the Town Council against law suits brought against the Town Planner and/or the Town Council for decisions made by the Town Planner and/or the Town Council while acting within the scope of their official capacity.

7. **Development Requiring Issuance of Certificate of Appropriateness.** Only the alteration, renovation, reconstruction or construction of facades or fronts to the buildings in the historic district require a certificate of appropriateness.

8. **Review, Certificates of Appropriateness.** If, after considering the foregoing review criteria in Section 5 and the design review guidelines, the Town Planner determines that the proposed development is consistent with this Ordinance and the design review guidelines, it shall issue a certificate of appropriateness, and may specify changes, modifications and deletions.

9. **Review, Denial.** In the event the Town Planner denies a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate letter shall be mailed within 10 days the last known address of the applicant including notification of denial giving reasons for denial and possible options for bringing the proposed plans into compliance with this Ordinance. The applicant shall have 60 days from the date of denial for consideration of alterations to the proposed plan, which may bring them into compliance with this Ordinance and design review guidelines. At the conclusion of this review period, the Town Planner shall either issue a certificate of appropriateness for the proposed development specifying changes, modifications, and deletions or deny a certificate of appropriateness.

10. **Review, Modification of Plans.** Changes, modifications, and amendments to all approved building and site plans shall require additional review by the Town Planner.
11. **Appeals.** If, at the end of the review period described in Section 9, an acceptable solution has not been achieved, the certificate of appropriateness shall finally be denied and the applicant shall be so notified by certified letter within 10 days. The applicant may appeal in writing to the Town Council within 20 days of the date the request was denied. Any aggrieved party who owns property within the historic review district may appeal in writing to the Town Council within 20 days of the date of the Town Planner made a final decision. Upon receipt of an appeal, the Town Council shall, at their next public meeting, set a date for the public meeting where they may affirm reverse or modify the decision of the Town Planner. If after considering the matter at a public meeting, the Town Council decide to reverse or modify the decision of the Town Planner, said reversal or modification shall not be made until the Town Council has conducted a public meeting and thereupon adopted their own recommendations which reverses or modifies the decision of the Town Planner. Any modification or reversal by the Town Council shall be based on findings of fact and shall be in agreement with the design review guidelines and the intent of this Ordinance.

12. **Proposal Content.** Each submission or proposal for the issuance of certificate of appropriateness shall be submitted in accordance with guidelines specified in the design review guidelines.

13. **Enforcement.** Provisions of this Ordinance shall be enforced by the Town of Wilkeson.

14. **Violation, Penalties.** Anyone violating or failing to comply with the provisions of this Ordinance shall be denied a certificate of appropriateness and be subject to the civil law violation penalties and procedures of the Town of Wilkeson.

15. **Adoption and Effective Date.** Passed and adopted by the Wilkeson Town Council on the 28th day of July, 1999 and signed in authentication of its passage this 28th day of July, 1999.

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

Town Attorney

**Mayor**

Ordinance No.: 99.11
INTRODUCED: 7-28-99
PASSED: 7-28-99
APPROVED: 7-28-99
PUBLISHED: 8-4-99

**Attest:**

Marilyn Campbell 7/28/99
WIILKESON HISTORIC BUSINESS DISTRICT
USE, CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION STANDARDS

No building, or any architectural detail or feature of any building shall be removed without prior review by the Town Planner who shall be responsible for the administration of these guidelines as provided by and subject to the provisions of Ordinance 1999.11 of the Town of Wilkeson and in supplement to Wilkeson’s building codes and the requirements of the town’s Building Inspector. Any new construction should be stylistically compatible with adjacent structures.

1. Exterior Materials:
Exterior Materials shall be generally consistent over the entire block face and shall be limited to materials that were originally used to construct residences and businesses in the neighborhood. Such materials may be integral with the buildings structure, a surface or enclosure, or an ornament on the building. The dominant facade material over the entire area is red brick. There are a few wood frame structures such as the Washington Hotel, smaller business buildings and a few residences with the historic business district. The town hall is the only downtown feature to date made of sandstone. New or remodeled buildings made of Wilkeson Sandstone are also acceptable providing the technique is historic. The use of wood frame, wood siding or wood shingles on any exterior elevation as a dominant material is prohibited, unless such material can be shown to have been the original dominant material on at least three-quarters of all elevations of a building.

For utility buildings and garages, appropriate materials are brick, brick veneer, brick-scored concrete block (painted brick red) and split-faced concrete block.

New construction shall be of exterior materials similar to those already in use on the street, such as red brick, wood trim, and glass. Any additions or alterations to primary facades or to prominently-visible secondary facades shall conform to the historic character of the building. The use of imitation, artificial or simulated exterior materials is prohibited, except when such materials serve to replicate original architectural elements which have been lost or destroyed.

Below are lists of exterior materials which are approved and those that are prohibited. By no means are these lists complete, but indicate the most common materials, and will serve as a guide in selecting others, particularly for primary facade treatment:

APPROVED:
Brick
Glass
Aluminum or steel gutters (color-clad and complementary to the building)
Stone
Wood (for unenclosed rear porches, decorative trim surrounding windows and
doors, and replacement of original wood treatment) (Painted or stained with opaque stain)
Painted or color anodized metal
Copper or zinc (for roof, gutters, downspouts)
Terra cotta (trim)
Cast or wrought iron
Slate (for roof, dormers, siding)
Vinyl siding (as replacement for original clapboards)

PROHIBITED
Permastone
Stucco
Aluminum or T-111 Siding
Expanded metal screens
Raw aluminum or galvanized steel
Porcelanized metal panels
Corrugated fiberglass, cement asbestos board or asbestos shingles (for wall treatment)
Unpainted or untreated wood
Raw concrete block
Ceramic tile (in vertical applications)
Tar paper or roll roofing
Any material not specifically intended for exterior use

2. Color:
There shall be no painting of unpainted masonry buildings. Previously painted buildings, if changed, must be either chemically cleaned or repainted a brick red color.

The range of colors used on facades should unify the area while emphasizing the distinct qualities of each building. The dominant color applied to the building shall be a background somewhat neutral in color, and shall approach the value and intensity of natural materials, such as brick and stone. Brighter complementary colors shall be limited to the trim.

3. Height and Location:
a. Height:
On blocks where buildings are generally the same height, new or renovated residential structures are to be within 15% of the average height of existing buildings on the block. Commercial structures may be one-story in height. On blocks with varying heights, new or renovated residential buildings shall fit within the overall pattern of the block.
b. Location, spacing, width and setback:
Location and spacing of new residential buildings shall be consistent with existing patterns on the block and the width of such buildings shall be consistent with existing building widths. If there is an existing uniform setback for residences on the block, new buildings shall maintain that setback.
4. Details:

a. Original details, such as cornices, roof brackets, etc., shall be maintained, repaired or replaced as close to the original features as possible. Architectural details on new structures shall be compatible with details on existing buildings in terms of design, materials and scale.

b. Primary (front) doors made of wood are recommended, raw or uncolored aluminum is prohibited. If modern storm doors are used, they must be of color clad material and full-light. Flush doors are not recommended and subject to review.

c. On each elevation, window patterns shall reflect the original configuration. Windows, as well as doors and other openings on both new and renovated structures shall be in the same horizontal and vertical size and style as in the original buildings in the area. Both new and replacement windows shall be limited to wood or color-finished metal. Raw or uncolored aluminum is prohibited for storm windows or prime replacement windows. If used, storm windows and window screens must be mounted to or fit between the blind stops of the existing window.

   New windows installed shall fill the original opening without the use of fixed panels. This may be modified only in the case of segmental arched windows, and then the eyebrow of the window is to be decorative in design. If an existing window must be filled in, the color and type of exterior materials used on the original building shall be used. The window opening shall still be expressed so as not to change the basic proportions of the facade. For major renovation projects, if a window has previously been filled in, in a manner inconsistent with this policy, a reinstatement of the original facade proportions is required through the use of materials already in existence on the facade. Window air conditioner units shall not be placed on the front of the building. Heat pumps and compressors for central air conditioning units shall not be placed in front of the building line, and shall be screened from the street.

d. Fixed metal or fiberglass awnings on any exterior elevation are prohibited. Awnings, if installed must be of canvas or canvas-like material. Signage on awnings shall be limited to building number and/or business name. Awnings shall be in solid colors or subtle stripes. Colors should be similar to those used on the facade trim of the building. Samples of awning material must be submitted with application for permit.

e. Roofs:

   Any change to roof materials require a building permit. On blocks where a roof line and shape is dominant, new or renovated structures shall have the same roof shape and lines. On blocks where there are different roof shapes and designs, new or renovated structures shall have roof shapes and lines compatible with adjacent buildings. Materials for new or renovated roofs shall be compatible with the original materials in the neighborhood. It is always desirable to repair and retain
slate or tile roofs where possible. Aluminum or plastic siding, corrugated sheet metal, tar paper, and brightly-colored asphalt shingles on Mansard or pitched roofs are not acceptable where visible from the street. A consistent material shall be used on any given roof. Dark earth tones, shades or grey or a color which duplicates the original color of the roof, shall be selected for roof colors.

Unpainted galvanized steel or aluminum is not a suitable material for guttering.

Existing dormers be retained, repaired or replaced on the primary facade of a building according to the original design, whenever possible.

5. Site Improvements:
   a. Walls and Fences:
      The placement of fences are subject to the Town of Wilkeson’s Unified Development Code. The placement of fences that face commercial streets shall be brick, wrought iron, or wood. These materials are also preferred for other fencing, particularly along side streets, though painted or coated chain link is acceptable in these areas. Barbed wire is not acceptable.

   b. Accessibility:
      All commercial buildings shall be as accessible to disabled individuals as possible, given the constraints of working within an existing structure. The specific guidelines for accessibility should be American National Standards Institute, Inc. ANSI A117.1-1980, a copy of which is available at the Heritage and Urban Design Commission Office.

   c. Signs:
      The placement of signs are subject to the Town of Wilkeson’s Unified Development Code page. The placement of signs the location and size of sign should not conceal architectural details and should be stylistically compatible with adjacent structures.