

# John P. Willison Records, 1959-1971

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Seattle (Wash.). Dept. of Community Development
<b>Title</b>	John P. Willison Records
<b>Dates</b>	1959-1971 (inclusive) 1959 1971
<b>Quantity</b>	2.25 cubic feet, (3 boxes)
<b>Collection Number</b>	1642-01
<b>Summary</b>	Records of John P. (Jack) Willison, Director of Seattle's Urban Renewal Program, include project and administrative files for urban renewal projects.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Seattle Municipal Archives</a> Seattle Municipal Archives Office of the City Clerk City of Seattle PO Box 94728 98124-4728 Seattle, WA Telephone: 206-233-7807 Fax: 206-386-9025 <a href="mailto:archives@seattle.gov">archives@seattle.gov</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	Records are open to the public.
<b>Languages</b>	English

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## Historical Note

In 1957, the Washington State Legislature adopted the "Urban Renewal Act" enabling Washington cities to take action to prevent, arrest, and eliminate blight. After the federal Housing Act of 1959 authorized the Housing and Home Finance Administration (a division of the Department of Housing and Urban Development) to make grants to localities for the preparation of Community Renewal Programs, Seattle formed a Community Renewal Program Committee. The federal Community Renewal Programs were designed to assist cities in the development of long-range comprehensive plans for city-wide renewal; inventorying existing "blight" both residential and non-residential; assessment of public facilities, streets, schools, parks and playgrounds, and libraries; and to determine the urban renewal treatment needed to "recapture, or create anew the good environment."

The Seattle Urban Renewal Program was authorized by ordinance in 1957, and the first federal funds allocated for neighborhood studies were received in 1959. The program was designed to eradicate urban "blighted areas" in the City. It was initially administered by the Executive Department, and then transferred to the Department of Community Development in 1969. Conventional urban renewal funding was designated for four neighborhoods: Yesler-Atlantic, University-Northlake, South Seattle, and Pike Place Market. In addition, Neighborhood Development Program funds targeted Leschi, South Park, and North Greenwood. Despite the early identification of neighborhoods and the adoption of urban renewal plans, most projects did not get underway until the mid- to late 1960s.

John P. Willison (known as Jack) was director of the Urban Renewal Division from 1963 to 1969. Before coming to Seattle, Willison was director of the urban renewal program in Columbus, Ohio. After the transfer of the Urban Renewal Division to the Department of Community Development, Willison's title changed to Development Operations Director. He was preceded by Talbot Wegg, Urban Renewal Coordinator. Wegg left in 1963 to join a private engineering consulting firm. The Urban Renewal Division was responsible for the development and administration of designated areas for various types of redevelopment, as well as the relocation of area residents who were required to move to make way for improvements.

## Content Description

The records of Jack Willison are primarily focused on urban renewal projects. The major projects included are the Central Business District, Northlake, Pioneer Square, South Seattle, and Pike Place Plaza. Administrative files are included as well. The bulk of the records date from 1963 to 1969 during Willison's tenure as Director of the Urban Renewal Division. Contents of the records are described more fully below.

## Use of the Collection

### Preferred Citation

[Item and date], Department of Community Development, John P. Willison Records, Record Series 1642-01. Box [number], Folder [number]. Seattle Municipal Archives.

## Administrative Information

### Arrangement

Materials have been arranged into two series, Project Files and Administrative Files.

### Related Materials

Researchers should also consult the Documents Database, as many reports authored by the Urban Renewal Division on specific neighborhood projects are cataloged here. Related record series include other Urban Renewal record series in the Department of Community Development.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

### Project Files

The Project Files include correspondence at the federal and local level, minutes of meetings, and financial information. Significant projects include the Central Business District, Northlake, Pioneer Square, South Seattle, Pike Place Plaza, and open space. Federal project numbers are included in folder titles when known.

The Northlake Urban Renewal Project, also known as the University Addition-Northlake Urban Renewal Project, was located within one-fourth of a mile of the University of Washington campus. Primary land uses for the project included development of housing, dining and parking facilities for the UW, public and private utilities, and off-street parking. Relocation of Northeast Pacific Street was part of the project. Work was initiated in 1960 but did not begin until 1964, in part because of legal action taken by property owners regarding the constitutionality of the urban renewal law. Legal action arose again in 1966 when the City was asked by the State Supreme Court to justify conditions that would support "blight" within the project area. Correspondence between the UW and property owners with the City is included. Files include legal correspondence and property surveys as well.

The controversial nature of redevelopment plans for the Pike Place Market is reflected in Willison's records. Correspondence from Victor Steinbrueck, Friends of the Market, Allied Arts of Seattle, and citizens describe the disagreements. Additional correspondence from business groups, the Health Department, and others voice opinions about plans for the Market. Housing, retail, and parking were some of the issues discussed. Information on public hearings is also included.

The Pioneer Square Redevelopment Project records include studies of the potential and economic feasibility for an urban redevelopment project in this area. The survey and planning application for proposed development was not submitted initially because of the area's non-residential character. Eventually, application was made for a non-assisted project which permitted the use of rehabilitation loans for property improvement. Willison' records contain correspondence discussing this decision. As part of the planning, there is also discussion of a ring road in downtown Seattle. The ring road is also discussed in the records on the Central Business District. Some reports of the Pioneer Square Advisory Committee are also included here as well.

The South Seattle Redevelopment project focused on utility improvements and development of land for private industrial purposes. The federal grant for \$3,850,000 included land acquisition, relocation of people and businesses, demolition, new construction, and utility improvements such as sanitary sewers, storm drains, paving and underground telephone and power lines.

The Yesler Atlantic project was designed to encourage rehabilitation of existing structures in order to contribute to the improvement of the entire area. The records document property acquisition and development plans. Included is correspondence with the Yesler Atlantic Citizens Conference, made up of property owners and tenants in the neighborhood who protested urban renewal plans, and other residents, who were in favor of the efforts. Legal information, background for hearings, and correspondence with neighborhood organizations and consultants is included as well. The properties in question were known as the Yesler-Atlantic "T". Work on another urban renewal project area, known as the Yesler-Atlantic "U" was deferred because of the uncertainty of the R.H. Thomson Expressway scheduled for construction south of East Yesler Way after 1968.

Container(s)	Description	Dates
<b>Central Business District</b>		
<b>Box/Folder</b>		
1/1	Distributor System / Ring Road	1964
½	Government Center Project / Federal Building	1964-1965

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/3	Circulation Study / Steering Committee	1967
1/4	Pike Plaza	1964
1/5	Staff Committee Meeting Minutes	1963-1966
1/6	Planning and Implementation	1964-1965
1/7	Waterfront Development	1964-1965
1/8	UW Demonstration Grant	1964-1967
1/9	Cherry Hill Urban Renewal	1960
1/10	Haller Lake Community	1965
1/11	Model City Program	1967-1969
	Northlake Urban Renewal (Wash R-8)	
<b>Box/Folder</b>		
1/12	General	1966-1967
1/13	UW Coordinating Committee	1967-1968
1/14	Blight Survey (includes First Hill)	1961-1963
1/15	Law Suit	1963-1967
1/16	Land Purchase / Redevelopment Agreements	1963
1/17	Execution Information	1964
1/18	Public Hearing	1962-1963
1/19	Selected Buildings	1963
1/20	Background	1964
	Open Space Programs	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box/Folder		
1/21	General	1965-1966
1/22	Correspondence	1964-1970
1/23	OS-6	1963-1964
1/24	Magnolia Tidelands	1966
1/25	Sicks' Stadium	1965-1967
1/26	Sicks' Stadium / Empire Athletic Center	1966
1/27	Urban Beautification	1965-1969
	Pike Plaza	
Box/Folder		
1/28	Economics	1968
1/29	Review	1968
1/30	Public Hearings	1968-1969
1/31	Financing	1968-1969
1/41	Forward Thrust : Community Renewal Program (CRP) Study Committee	1967
	Pioneer Square	
Box/Folder		
1/32	Community Organizations	1964-1968
1/33	Consultants	1966-1969
1/34	Planning Studies	1965
1/35	Survey and Planning Application	1966

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1/36	Property Demolition	1971
1/37	Renovation / Rehabilitation	1968-1970
1/38	Reports and Proposals	1966-1968
1/39	Non-Assisted Project	1968
1/40	Property Acquisition	1964-1968
2/1	Relocation	1967-1970
2/2	General Neighborhood Renewal Plan	1970
2/3	General Planning	1965-1970
2/4	Maps	1966-1968
2/5	Poverty Program : Neighborhood Youth Corps	1964-1965
2/6	South Park	1966
	South Seattle Redevelopment Project (R-13)	
	Box/Folder	
2/7	Correspondence and Notes	1964-1966
2/8	Correspondence and Notes	1967-1968
2/9	Financial	1964-1968
2/10	Planning	1964
2/11	Loan and Grant Contract	1965-1968
2/12	Seattle Area Industrial Council	1965-1966
2/13	Progress Reports	1964-1966
2/14	Work Flow	1964

Container(s)	Description	Dates
2/16	Site Improvement Contracts	1968
2/16	Workable Program for Community Improvement	1965-1966
	Yesler Atlantic Project	
<b>Box/Folder</b>		
2/17	Citizen Conference / Citizen Groups	1964-1967
2/18	Comprehensive Plan	1965
2/19	Newsletter	1966-1967
2/20	Planning	1966
2/21	Planning	1967-1968
2/22	Public Hearing / Background (Wash R-5)	1966-1967
2/23	Public Hearing	1967
2/24	Land Acquisition Map	1967
2/25	Legal Information (Wash R -5)	1967-1968
2/26	Rehabilitation - Non-residential Properties	1964
2/27	Shopping Center Proposals	1971
2/28	Reports and Plans (includes sociological survey)	1963-1967
2/29	Staffing	1965
2/30	Miscellaneous	1964-1965

## Administrative Files

The Administrative Files include planning, real estate, community services and fiscal management, as well as personnel and legal information. The legal issues include broader challenges to the concept of urban development. Information on community organizations is also included in this subseries, such

as newsletters from the Central Association for Seattle, as well as correspondence and minutes from Seattle Urban Renewal Enterprise (SURE) and the Official Urban Renewal Advisory Board (OURAB).

Container(s)	Description	Dates
<b>Box/Folder</b>		
2/31	Audit Reports	1966-1967
2/32	Code Enforcement Program	1965-1966
2/33	Historic Preservation	1964-1972
2/34	Housing Act Amendment - 1964	1964
2/35	Land Disposition	1965
3/1	Land Disposition	1963-1969
3/2	Edwards v. City of Seattle	1968
3/3	Urban Renewal Background - Legal	1963-1966
3/4	Low Income Housing	1968
3/5	Office Urban Renewal Advisory Board (OURAP)	1963-1966
3/6	Relocation	1963-1969
3/7	Rehabilitation	1965
3/8	Central Association of Seattle - Newsletters	1964-1966
3/9	Seattle Urban Renewal Enterprise (SURE)	1964-1966
3/10	National Association of Real Estate Boards Visit	1964
3/11	Small Business Administration	1967
3/12	Slide Show Narrative	1965
3/13	Urban Renewal Programs - Other Cities	1962
3/14	Affirmative Action / Equal Employment Opportunity	1968



Container(s)	Description	Dates
3/15	Personnel - Job Specifications	1959-1960
3/16	Personnel - Staff Planning	1959-1963

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

City planning--Washington (State)--Seattle

Community development--Washington (State)--Seattle

Urban renewal--Washington (State)--Seattle

### Personal Names :

Willison, John P.

### Corporate Names :

Pike Place Market (Seattle, Wash.)

Seattle (Wash.). Dept. of Community Development

### Geographical Names :

Seattle (Wash.)

Finding aid prepared by Anne Frantilla  
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