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Making the Invisible Visible: A Geospatial History of the Pre-World War II Japanese Community in Tacoma, Washington

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Making the Invisible Visible: A geospatial history of the pre-World War II Japanese Community in Tacoma, Washington

Meghan C. Howey

SOURCES

DeBats, D. A. (2008). A tale of two cities: Using tax records to develop GIS files for mapping and understanding nineteenth-century U.S. cities. *Historical Methods*, 41(1), 17-36.

Gregory, I. N. & Ell, P. S. (2008). From technique to knowledge: Historical GIS in practice. In *Historical GIS: Technologies, methodologies, and scholarship* (pp. 183-204). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Magden, R. E. (1998). *Furusato: Tacoma-Pierce County Japanese 1888-1988*. Tacoma, WA: Magden

METHODS



GEOREFERENCING
Four different orthophotos were found through WAGDA. Each photo was georeferenced by 'rubber sheeting' the image to geographically correct spatial data (Tacoma Streets) and referencing the image. The projection was defined as NAD_1983_HARN_StatePlane_Washington_South_FIPS_4602_Feet and then rectified. Georeferencing the image enabled the accurate digitizing of space.

METHODS



GEOREFERENCING
A map of current and future development plans was found in the UWT's Master Plan. This map was saved as a jpeg, added to ArcGIS, 'rubber sheeted' to geographically correct spatial data (Tacoma streets), and appropriately referenced using the scale, rotate, shift, link table, and control point features.

DIGITIZING
After the map was georeferenced each building was digitized. In order to digitize images feature classes were created using the 'Create Feature Class' tool. Using the 'sketch' tool these individual buildings were created. Digitizing the buildings enabled the attachment of attributes and the use of the 'Select by Location' tool.

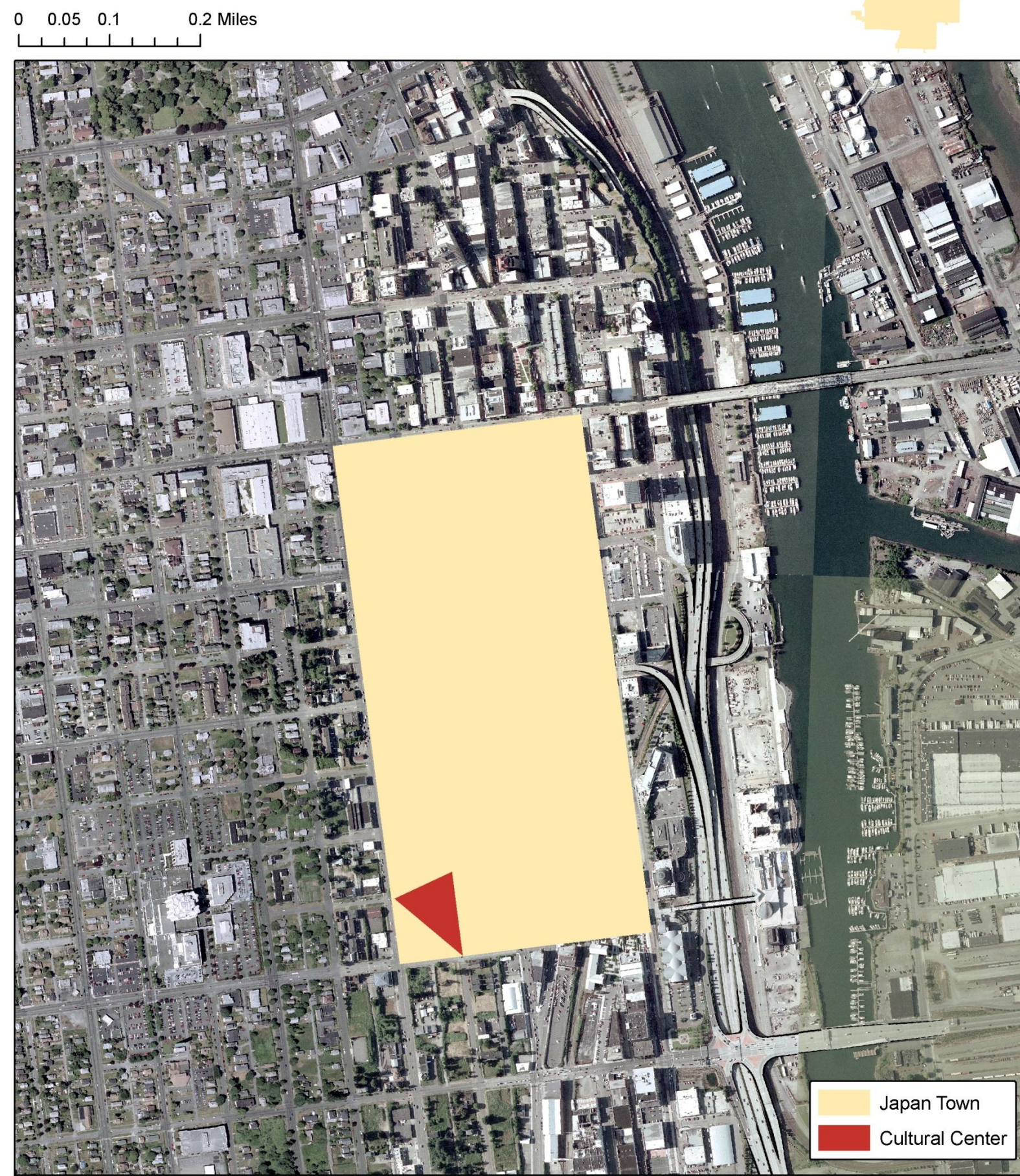
GEOCODING, and SELECT BY LOCATION
Existing Japanese structures as of 1994 were listed in Morrison's book, *Tacoma's Nihongo Gakko*. This list was ground truthed to reflect existing structures, as of 2010. A list of points and their attributes was built in excel and transferred to ArcGIS where it was then geocoded, enabling the use of the 'Select by Location' tool. Existing Japanese structures were then intersected with the UWT buildings, thereby enabling a choropleth symbolization of hazardous development.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this project is to discover the ways in which the Pre-World War II (Pre-WWII) Japanese community's spatial perspective of Tacoma and current spatial perspectives of Tacoma intersect and converge. Identifying and recognizing these spatial patterns and creating this knowledge is intended to further historic preservation efforts in regard to Tacoma's Pre-WWII Japanese community.

RESULTS

Cultural Centers:
Tacoma's Pre-WWII Japanese community



Through interviews with Ron Magden, the Tacoma Historical Society, and newspaper articles, the general area of Japan Town, or Nihonmachi, was defined. The cultural center was determined in a similar fashion. It is drawn with three points in mind - the Buddhist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Japanese Language School. Once the orthophoto was added spatial differences became clear. Much of Japan Town no longer exists, although the cultural center is still partly alive due to the Buddhist Temple.

School Routes:
Japanese children's education

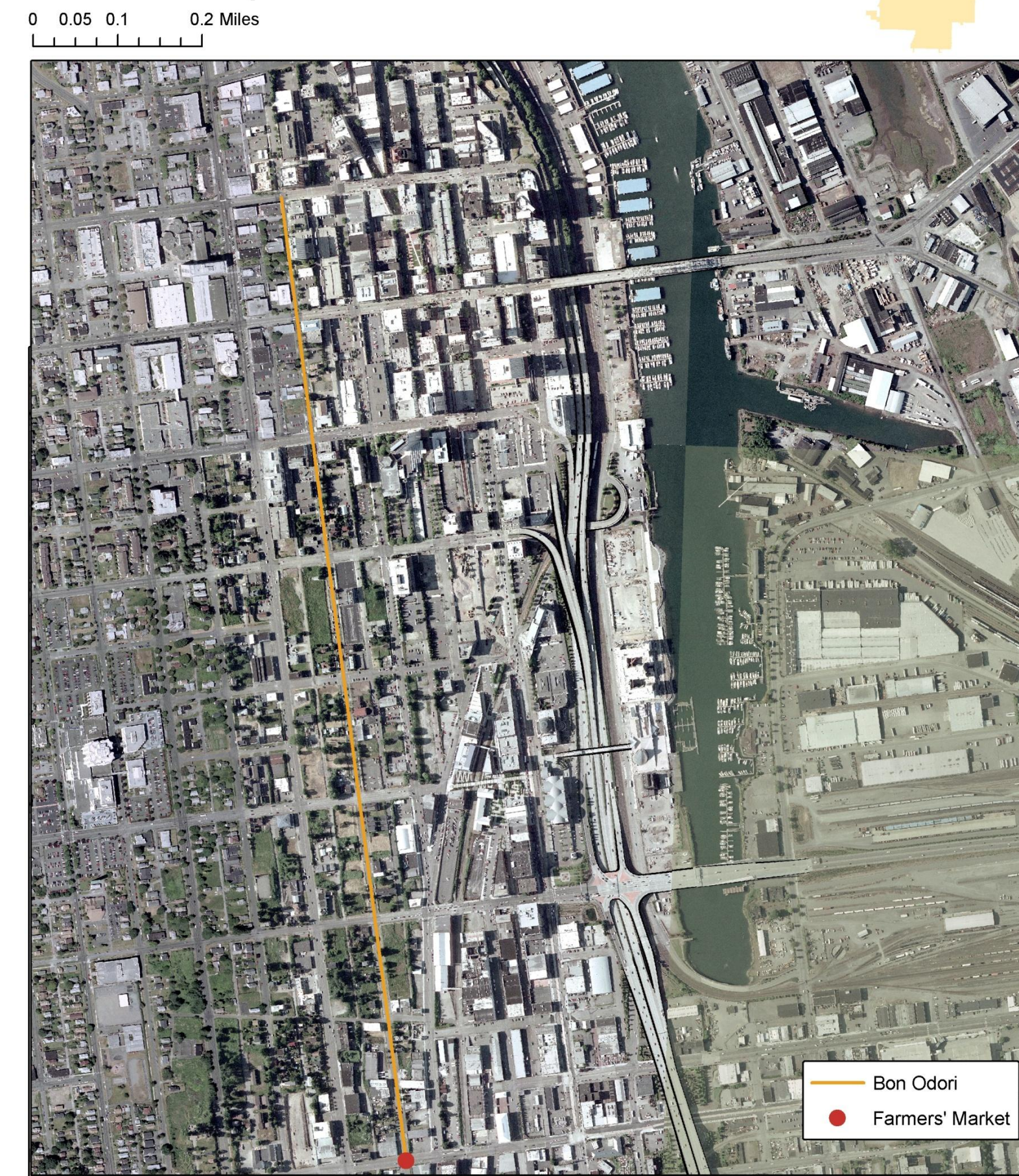


Through interviews with Ron Magden and the Tacoma Historical Society it was discovered that an important and well-worn path was traveled. Japanese children would leave Central and McCarver after a long day of school work for the Nihongo Gakko, the Japanese Language School. Although both McCarver and Central still exist the Japanese Language School does not, as it was demolished by the UWT. However, two important trees gifted by Japan still exist on this plot, which is traveled every year in remembrance.

PURPOSE

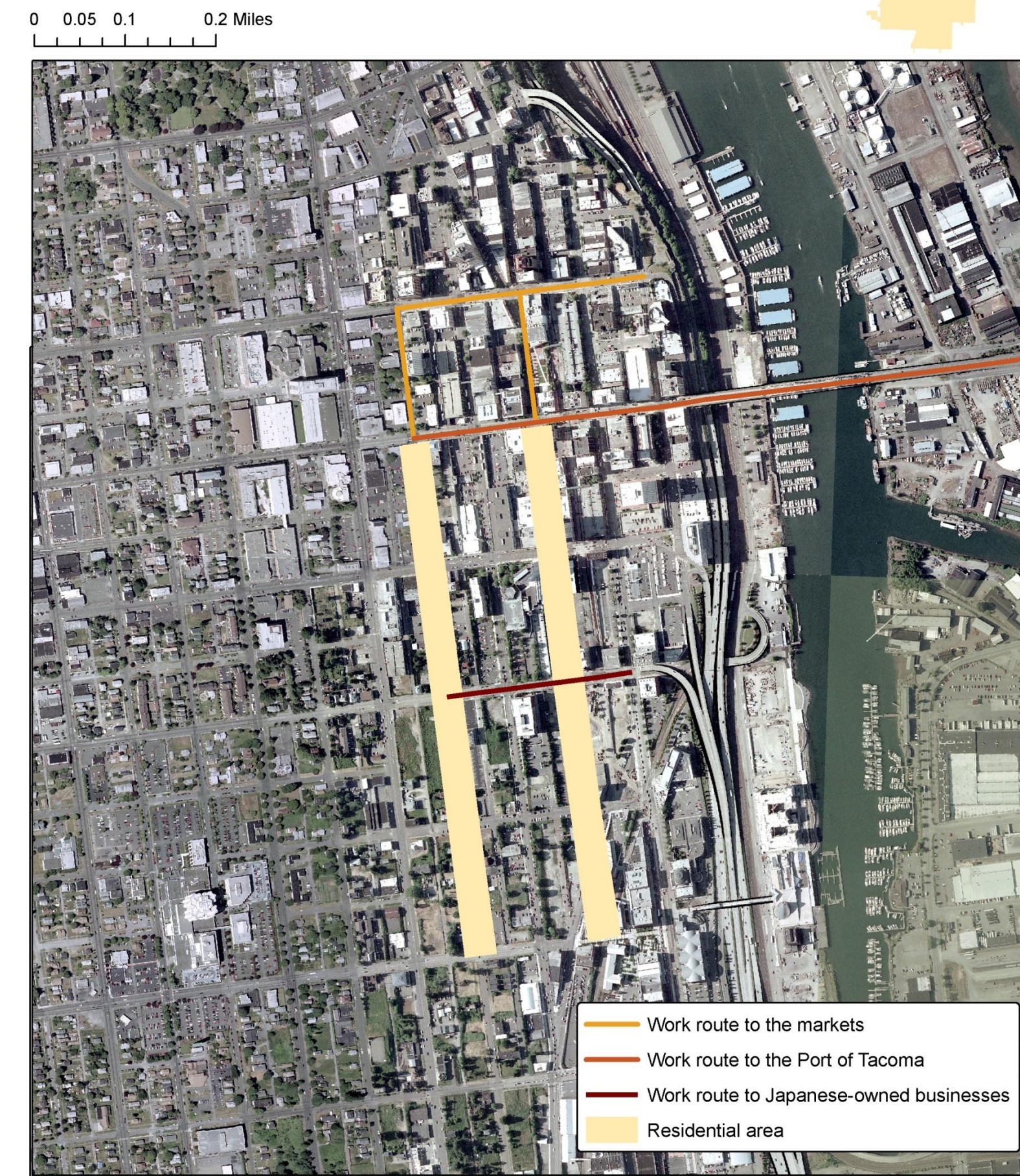
The purpose of this project is to assist Dr. Lisa Hoffman and Dr. Mary Hanneman at the University of Washington, Tacoma with current preservation work. Prior to World War II, the downtown area of Tacoma, Washington was the hub of a vibrant Japanese American community, which is now in need of recognition and preservation. The purpose of our project is to discover spatial perspectives and create knowledge that will enhance historic preservation.

Significant Gatherings:
Prominent Japanese festival and market place



Bon Odori is a very important spiritual celebration held annually by the Japanese community. This festival dates back to the late 1800s and takes place on the third Sunday of August. At the end of the festival's route was the first farmer's market in Washington State. It was frequented during the celebration. The festival is one of the last remnants of this once thriving community. An annual walking tour during this time of year and the revival of a farmer's market in this location would be a good way to commemorate the Japanese community.

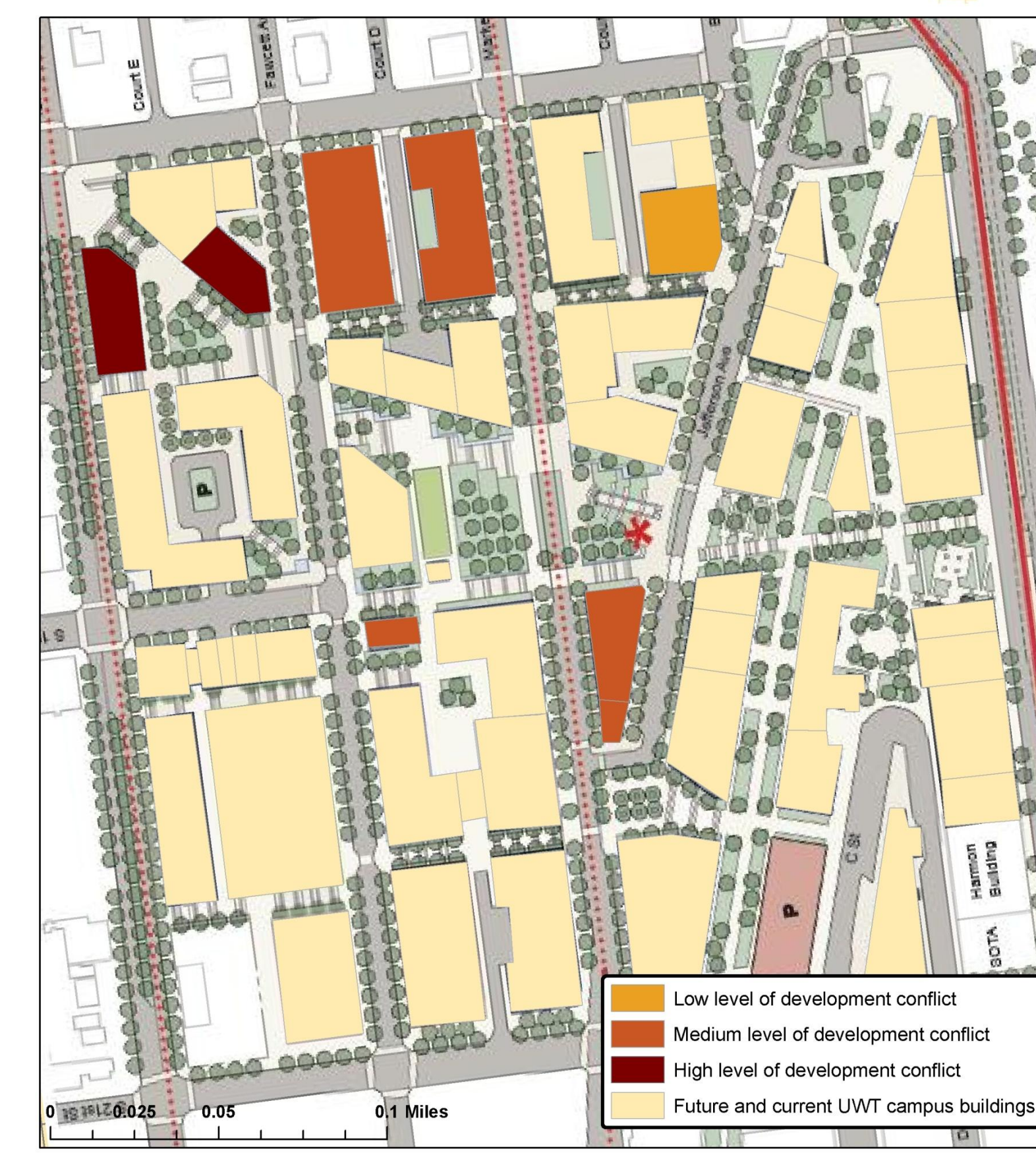
Work Routes:
Japanese workers in Tacoma



Three prominent work routes visualized here were distinguished by Ron Magden and the Tacoma Historical Society. The residential area is important to visually recognize as it was a large factor in the determination of these routes. Wealthier Japanese families lived on Fawcett Avenue, whereas the poor, overwhelming number of Japanese bachelors lived on Broadway. Concentrations of Japanese business on Pacific, work on the Port, and markets on 9th created these walking routes from home to work.

RESULTS

Development Conflicts:
The University of Washington, Tacoma's Master Plan and the historic preservation of Tacoma's pre-WWII Japanese community



The map of the UWT's development plans, as visualized in their master plan, is an excellent indicator of how and why Japanese space has changed. Urban renewal and development has largely erased this once vibrant community - the remnants of which exist in the way of university development.

Although the UWT has a past of historic preservation the Japanese Language School was recently destroyed. Now future development plans further jeopardize historic Japanese buildings. One, which used to be the Massasoit hotel was preserved and is now the Pinkerton (shown in yellow). However, four buildings are currently at a medium level of conflict (depicted in orange) with future UWT development. The Buddhist Temple, the Methodist Church, the Swiss (an old Japanese newspaper company), and the Longshoreman's Hall are shown as retaining their spatial form. This is the only indicator of hazard as the university's information concerning future development is limited. Other Japanese areas are depicted in red, indicating high conflict development - the Japanese doctor's house and the two trees gifted by Japan to the Japanese Language School are in danger of being destroyed.

Now preservation efforts are even more important because there is so little left to preserve.