

Clark County, Washington  
 Historic Preservation Commission



# Clark County Heritage Register Nomination Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/>. Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. **This form is similar but not exact to the National Register of Historic Places nomination form. Some sections of the National Register form were not applicable to the local register therefore were not included. When using the National Register Bulletin 16A to fill out the form, look for the section names for information on completing the specific section.** If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Ridgefield State Bank  
 Other names/site number Ridgefield City Hall

## 2. Location

street & number 230 Pioneer St. (State Route 501) \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication  
 city or Ridgefield \_\_\_\_\_ N/A vicinity  
 town \_\_\_\_\_  
 State Washington code WA county Clark code 11 zip code 98642

## 3. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

### Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the Clark County Heritage Register

N/A

## 4. Owner Consent for Nomination, Designation and Listing

I (we) consent  do not consent  to the nomination, and designation of the above property on the Clark County Heritage Register. I (we) also certify that I am/we are the legal owner(s) of the above property.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Owner signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Owner signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

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**5. Functions or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE *financial institution*

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**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT *city hall*

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**6. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century  
 Revivals - Classical Revival (Vernacular)

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**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

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walls brick

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roof asphalt

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other \_\_\_\_\_

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

Ridgefield is in southwest Washington state, in the northwestern portion of Clark County, a little under 15 miles north of county seat Vancouver. The small town is situated on the east bank of Lake River, which flows north from Vancouver Lake into the Columbia River, which runs north-south at this point on its route to the Pacific. The L-shaped building, originally the Ridgefield State Bank and now Ridgefield City Hall, is located at the northwest corner of Pioneer Street (State Route 501) and 3rd Avenue with its primary (south) elevation facing onto Pioneer. In the context of Ridgefield's low-scale commercial core, a participant in Washington's Main Street program, the brick bank is an imposing building whose single extra-tall story rises above nearby edifices and is notable for its vernacular classical temple front, a unique detail in downtown.

Nine banks built around the state in a similar time frame of 1919 to 1921 shared similar characteristics, such as a corner location in a town or developed urban neighborhood and attachment to other storefronts. All were of substantial construction with traditional and familiar ornamentation, though with logical differences as to the level of architectural detail based on prominence of the institution. Two of the larger institutions in large cities, the elaborate Beaux Arts University State Bank in Seattle, and the Classical Revival National Bank of Tacoma, remain in an essentially unaltered state and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the more modest examples, and therefore more comparable to Ridgefield, include ones in Chehalis, Walla Walla, Tacoma, and Yakima. They all have been significantly remodeled over time, therefore leaving the Ridgefield State Bank as one of relatively few remaining smaller banks of the era which has a high level of integrity (WISAARD).

*Exterior*

The bank's tall concrete foundation, which is scored to look like stone, is slightly taller on the west side because of the slight rise in grade from west to east. The brick of the south (primary), east, and

west facades is set in running bond, while the north façade is set in common bond. The symmetrical primary façade has a tall central recessed entrance flanked by large, concrete Doric columns supporting a tall wooden fascia ornamented with a slightly projecting, narrow central band, and a prominent molded cornice above which wraps around to the east facade. The parapeted roofline above the cornice has a very slight peak on the south façade above the entrance, and is capped by a plain narrow band which wraps around the entire building. The peaked portion is outlined with a slightly projecting brick detail formed of headers.

The main entrance is outlined to west and east by brick pilasters which are ornamented with a full-height vertical central rectangular recessed detail outlined with exaggerated mortar and finished with projecting brick décor at the top and bottom. Iron light fixtures with two globe shades each are located about two-thirds of the way up the pilasters. The west pilaster has an enclosed metal public message center readable from the sidewalk. The tall wooden paired doors of the entrance are inset with large glass panels and are surmounted by a large "City Hall" sign in capital letters. The doors and sign are surrounded and separated by plain wood molding. The brick entryway (originally concrete) is accessed by a single brick step. The brick is continued in a non-original section of sidewalk the same width as the entrance. Large, slightly-recessed metal-frame commercial windows flank the entrance. The windows have sloping sills and are composed of two large central lights bordered by two tall, narrow vertical lights.

The east façade is formed of two volumes, the tall portion of the original bank to the south, and a subordinate, much shorter non-original addition which appears to be constructed of large-scale concrete bricks. On the original section of the façade, a central commercial window like the ones on the main façade is flanked to the south by a metal entry door topped by a window and a tall, narrow one-over-one metal-framed window and to the north by two of the same windows. The door has a glass panel in the top portion. A chimney is located at the northeast corner. The addition has a flush, plain metal door at the northeast corner, and two windows to the south of it, of which the central one is a metal slider and the southern one a single light. Both windows are very slightly inset and have projecting brick sills.

The north façade of the original portion has three large, basically symmetrical bays separated by plain brick pilasters. Most of the lower one-third of the western two bays has been covered by concrete. A small single fixed light window covered with vertical iron security bars is located at the western side of the western bay. It corresponds with a restroom on the interior. The wood-framed window is topped by a soldier row of bricks and has a projecting sill formed of headers. The north façade of the addition has two one-over-one windows. The west façade of the addition has a plain, central flush door.

The west façade is largely obscured by a shorter one-story building which also faces south onto Pioneer. A small chimney is located near the southwest corner.

### *Interior*

An enclosed wooden vestibule connected to the main entrance provides the primary access via double wooden doors with large glass panels. The interior is largely composed of one large, tall

rectangular open space which was originally the banking floor and is now subdivided with office areas delineated simply by desks or by low walls. Much of the original woodwork with classical details is still extant, and some examples of the original hardware. Two large original glass-and-wood walled offices on the south (front) side flank the central front door. Currently, the western one is used by the city manager, and the eastern one by the assistant city manager. A wood and marble service counter near the front entrance was originally set farther to the north and served to separate banking staff from customers but was moved forward in 2013. The wood panel walls and marble base are original; the marble top is not (Knottnerus). The original hexagonal tile flooring with square tile border detail is still visible between the vestibule and the service counter.

The west wall has newer restrooms and a kitchen area set behind a ¾ height wall. The north side has an original restroom with an original wooden panel door in the northwest corner, with a bank vault, now used for storage, next to it to the east. An original wooden staircase in the northeast corner leads to a storage area with an original wooden panel door. The eastern wall has a non-original glass and wood walled office installed in 2013 in place of a raised area demarcated with a partial-height wall with swinging doors which city staff believes was occupied by a loan officer during the use of the building as a bank (Knottnerus). An open office space occupies the northeast corner. A doorway at the northeast corner provides access to the addition, which is attached via a short hyphen and has a meeting room and a storage closet.

The ceiling is demarcated with box beams. A central square box beam detail is not original. It represents the location of a large, ornate leaded glass skylight was removed from the ceiling of the primary banking space c. 1954 to be placed in the new Ridgefield branch building of First Independent Bank. The window featured a central image of George Washington surrounded by fruits and vegetables and the words "Ridgefield State Bank," and also included a classical egg and dart border and a heraldic shield with United States flag motif.

**7. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable Clark County Heritage Register Criteria**

<u>X</u>	<b>1</b>	It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of national, state, or local history.	<b>6</b>	It has yielded or may be likely to yield important Archaeological information related to history or prehistory.
<u>X</u>	<b>2</b>	It embodies the distinctive architectural characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of design or construction, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.	<b>7</b>	It is an historic building or cultural resource removed from its original location but which is significant for architectural value, or association with an historic person or event, or prehistory.
<u>    </u>	<b>3</b>	It is an outstanding work of a designer, builder, or Architect who has made a substantial contribution to their field.	<b>8</b>	It is a birthplace of grave of a prehistoric or historical Figure of outstanding importance and is the only surviving structure or site associated with that person.
<u>    </u>	<b>4</b>	It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the county's history.	<b>9</b>	It is a cemetery or burial site which derives its primary significance from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events, or cultural patterns.
<u>X</u>	<b>5</b>	It is associated with the lives of persons significant in	<b>10</b>	It is a reconstructed building that has been executed

in a historically accurate manner on the original site.

- 11 It is a creative and unique example of folk architecture and design created by persons not formally trained in the architectural or design professions, and which does not fit into formal architectural or historical categories.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

**Period of Significance**

1920 - 1968

**Significant Dates**

1920–construction of building

c. 1936–Firstenburg family connection begins

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion 5 is marked above)

Edward Firstenburg

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Builder: Charles H. Greely

Contractor: Peter Johnson

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property.)

**Statement of Significance:** As the site of many different kinds of financial transactions for a broad segment of the local population, from holding bank accounts and safe deposit boxes to selling mortgages and insurance, the Ridgefield State Bank was thoroughly integrated into the social history of the town as a locus for economic activities for many decades. The vernacular Classical Revival building, built in 1920, reflects the maturation of the business to the point of requiring a larger building for the sole formal financial institution in town at the time, and was a springboard for the banking career of prominent banker and later philanthropist Edward Firstenburg.

*Historical Overview of Ridgefield*

Lower Columbia Chinookan peoples had inhabited the area that is now Ridgefield for thousands of years prior to the arrival of American explorers Lewis and Clark in 1805. The very large village of the Cathlapotle people now part of the Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge was noted in the journals of the Corps

of Discovery, and today is known to have been historically one of the largest Native American communities on the entire Columbia River. Inhabitants sustained themselves with hunting and fishing, along with harvest of native plants such as wapato. Lewis and Clark traded there on their return trip from the Pacific in March, 1806. By the 1830s, Sahaptin- and Salish-speaking peoples had moved from the Northwest interior to also live here but disease and Euroamerican in-migration greatly impacted the original populations and the village was abandoned by the mid-1850s (U.S. Fish).

A continuous Euroamerican presence was established in c. 1840, when Irish immigrant and former Hudson's Bay Company employee James Carty built a cabin on Lake River. Other residents who arrived in the 1840s included W. Pickens, Preston Laws, Arthur Quigley, S.A. Whipple, David Fales, James H. Campbell, W.H. Tappan, and M.R. and J.S. Hathaway. In 1849, the area contributed the Carty's Donation Land Claim formed the northern portion of today's Ridgefield, generally speaking, while the DLC of Frederick and Catherine Shobert, natives of Illinois, formed the general southern portion. The Shobert cabin, built in 1853 on the east bank of Lake River, formed the nucleus of Shobert's Landing, which developed into a center of trade and the name by which the community was known until September of 1865 when the name Union Ridge was adopted by locals for their post office moniker due to the Civil War northern sympathies and service of many residents. The change to Ridgefield in 1890 by petition culminating in a public acclamation retained the topographical reference but depoliticized the name (Fitzsimons).

Early residents persisted in their settlement efforts despite major flooding at times, and sent their timber and agricultural products to Portland and Vancouver via steamboat at first and later by train. Continuing growth led Ridgefield residents to discuss incorporation as a city at least by late August of 1907. By the time of incorporation in 1909 by a vote of 67 to 15, the community had telephone lines, contractors, at least two fraternal organizations and three general merchandise stores, along with a shoe and boot maker, hotel, well driller, weaver, a creamery, barbershop, meat market, church, school, grist and flour mill, train depot, livery business, boat builder, and blacksmith ("County and City;" "Ridgefield;" Wilson). One of the first civic acts planned for after the incorporation was sidewalk improvements ("Ridgefield New Town"). Railroad construction, and most particularly the completion of the rail bridge across the Columbia in 1908, opened the community to expanding markets. The 1910 construction of a railcar loading facility by the Lewis River Logging Company and 1911 construction of Austin Beaver's shingle mill, followed by similar efforts of the Bratlie Brothers Mill Company and others, made Ridgefield a major producer and shipper of shingles (Standal; Wilson). Ridgefield represented a microcosm of Washington state's major economic activities of the time – timber production, milling (the state's most important manufacturing enterprise), agriculture (the potatoes for which Ridgefield became well known were among the state's major crops), and shipping (the port made all the other activities economically viable).

#### *The Establishment of Ridgefield State Bank*

A financial institution was a logical addition to such a burgeoning community which also had every single house in town owned or rented the same month the bank opened, and a population in town of 297 and more in the surrounding countryside. (The county as a whole had a population of 23,000.)

The *Ridgefield Reflector* reported in December of 1909 that the new bank was slated to open the following February. Credit was given to local businessman, sometime state representative, first city treasurer and British immigrant Edward Allworth Blackmore (1872 – 1939) for convincing Portland investors and financiers, John Leib Hartman (c. 1857 – 1925) and Edward Lewis Thompson (1863-1927), a native of Albany, Oregon, to start the bank. In addition to banking, Hartman and Thompson also had business interests in insurance, loans, real estate, and housing construction. Furthermore, Thompson engaged in agricultural pursuits, some of which were in Washington, so he was specifically knowledgeable about the area. He raised cattle and operated a dairy on the Columbia River north of Clark County, sold farm implements, and was active with the Portland Fair and Livestock Association. Thompson's broad business interests included a stint as an organizer of the Portland Woolen Mills (Caldbrick; *Reflector*; Gaston). In addition to the founders' wide variety of economic enterprises, the bank's early history was marked by the presence of many local people who also engaged in a variety of other business activities as well.

Thompson, Hartman, and Blackmore filed Articles of Incorporation with the state of Washington on January 12, 1910 and opened the physical bank slightly later than planned on Saturday, March 5, 1910 with an initial capital stock of \$10,000, divided into 100 shares. They served as president, vice president, and cashier respectively; Fred C. Allen was assistant cashier. The original modest bank offices of Ridgefield's first formal financial institution were located in rooms within the premises of Thompson's Ridgefield Mercantile Company but with a separate entrance from that of the store. The mercantile was situated at the southwest corner of what is now Pioneer and Main, but was then County Road and Lindsley (named after the Presbyterian pastor who founded the church just to the south), the primary intersection in the small town. In addition to a prominent location, the space presumably was logical from an economic standpoint because it was already owned by one of the bank's founders. Bank staff declared that the new institution was "doing a fine business," and this was corroborated by the Ridgefield correspondent to the *Columbian*. This apparent bank booster also urged readers to "dig up that money you have tucked away in that old shoe and bring it right in and deposit. It's perfectly safe and you would just as well be drawing some interest as have it laying around idle" (Ancestry; Caldbeck; Washington Secretary; *Polk's Portland Directory* 1900, 1905, and 1923; "Ridgefield" Jan. 27, March 10 and 24; Sanborn 1912).

The bank announced its presence in a *Reflector* advertisement run multiple times stating that the new institution "Transacts a General Banking Business." An advertisement later that year adjured local residents to "Establish Business Standing" by affiliating with the bank, further described in the advertisement as "a commercial banking business, conservative management, and comprehensive service." Paying accounts with checks was touted as an example of proper business methods which would show payees that the account holders were modern and had good credit ("Ridgefield Bank;" "Establish"). The bank continued to advertise weekly in the *Reflector* at least until the early 1920s. Messaging included advice regarding security ("Give the Burglar the 'Ha Ha' – a check doesn't work for a thief") and the value of saving ("A Dollar Banked is a Dollar Saved Until You Need It"). In addition to print advertising, the bank offered promotions such as free books to induce customers to come in ("Bank Gives").

Ridgefield entered the Washington banking milieu as the fifth state bank in Clark County, and one of 223 state banks in Washington. Not surprisingly, King County had the largest number at 30. The second largest number, however, was in sparsely-populated Whitman County in southeastern Washington, with 28. Spokane County followed in third place at 18. Clark's county neighbor to the north Cowlitz had four banks, while eastern neighbor Skamania had one (Washington Statistics). Other financial institutions in the state included national banks (chartered by the Federal Comptroller of the Currency) and trust companies.

Progress was measurable within two years and the bank continued to grow and innovate. The *Oregonian* noted in 1911 that the bank was in good shape, and had ended its business year with a surplus, though not enough of one to declare a dividend, and that the current officers had been re-elected. By 1912, \$41,080 in deposits and \$35,396 in loans was reported. In 1915, Ridgefield Light and Power hired the Ne-Page McKenny Company to install electric wires for the town. Ridgefield State Bank was one of the earliest to adopt the new technology, and had a telephone by the end of 1918 ("Many;" "Ridgefield State Bank in Good Shape;" "Ridgefield State Bank" advertisement 20 December 1918). At the bank's annual meeting in March 1916, most of the same officers were re-elected -- Thompson, president; Hartman, vice president; Blackmore, cashier. James E. Keith had replaced Allen as assistant cashier. Their success was modest, however, and they did not declare a dividend ("Ridgefield State Bank Elects").

The 1917 state bank examiner's report noted continuing gradual growth, with surplus profits of \$2,084, \$90,909 in deposits, and \$40,988 in loans (Washington State Banking). During 1918, the bank again switched cashiers, with P.H. Bell taking over from Keith, and recorded a small decline in deposits to \$80,000 but an increase in profits to almost \$6,500 (Moore). Given the World War I milieu, the bank was actively selling Liberty Bonds. Other services gradually added to further accommodate the needs of hometown customers included accepting checks and deposits by mail, assistance with tax forms and tax payments, selling travelers checks and telegraph transactions, offering a Christmas savings plan, safe deposit boxes, and being open extended hours on days when local mill workers and others were typically paid ("Ridgefield State Bank" advertisements, multiple dates; "1 Cent;" "The Street"). The bank was off to a significant start, having also survived multiple downtown fires, and burglary attempts in 1916 and 1917, the second of which was severe enough to require a couple days of closure because the thieves, though unsuccessful at breaking into the vault, had damaged it to the extent that employees had to call in an expert to open it because the combination dial was knocked off (Wilson; "Washington State News;" "Ridgefield When Plans").

Bank officer and employee activities in various civic, social, religious, and fraternal organizations firmly incorporated the bank into town life, and the institution radiated a friendly, reassuring tone in its advertising. James Keith spoke on "The Rural Credit Movement" at a meeting of the Ridgefield Commercial Club in 1915, and was elected to the City Council in December 1916, on which he served as chair of the Light and Water Committee, and also on the Building Committee. The bank contributed to a fundraising campaign led by the Civic Improvement Club for the purchase of a public water fountain installed in 1920 on the same corner as the building. Clifford K. Rice, the assistant cashier in 1922, was re-elected that year as district secretary of the Knights of Pythias, and

helped prepare for the 1923 convention of the group in Ridgefield ("The Civic;" "Ridgefield Club;" Ridgefield City Council; "Pythians to Meet"). Herman J. Potter, a bank vice president in addition to his lumber business work, served on a local Boy Scout committee in 1922 ("New Scout Leader"). The bank proclaimed itself "Always a Friend – Your money in this bank has no moods. It is at your service, when the sun shines, when it rains or when misfortune is at your door" ("Ridgefield State Bank" 10/25/1918).

### *Bank Growth*

In 1919, the institution advanced to become one of 19 that year to be designated a Washington Bank Depositors' Guaranty Fund Bank. The 1917 state legislature had passed a state guarantee of deposits act designed to ensure safety of the accounts of the general public in the same way that deposits of government entities were already protected. Banks progressed through a demanding certification process consisting of not only passage of their usual annual banking exam but also an additional rigorous application and assessment overseen by a board led by the governor. Acceptance into the program meant that the bank not only had a proper percentage of deposits but also had demonstrated a strong record of ethical and efficient leadership and prospects for continued excellent management and increased deposits. Five of the 104 banks and five branches in the state program at the time were in Clark County -- Ridgefield, State Bank of Battle Ground, La Center State Bank, and Vancouver's American Security and Washington Exchange banks. Presumably, the bank's huge increase in deposits in 1919 to \$204,701 was a major factor in meeting the state criteria for the Guaranty program, in addition to the demonstration of leadership stability by having only its second president, Charles Henry Greely Jr. (1884-1955), a local leader in agriculture, business, and civic life (Thirteenth; Moore; "The Deposits").

### *Charles Henry Greely Jr.*

A Clark County native who was born in the Pioneer area east of Ridgefield, Greely listed himself in each census during adulthood as a farmer, which was accurate but not complete, though he did become known as the "Potato King of Clark County" ("Charles H. Greely"). His father (also Charles) and mother Virginia, a Vassar graduate, moved to the Pioneer area in 1883 from Washington, DC, where Charles Sr. had been superintendent of the U.S. Reform School. Charles Sr. was postmaster in the Pioneer area by 1889 and until at least 1897. Charles Jr. grew up to become widely engaged in many civic, political, and business pursuits in addition to his work with the Ridgefield bank, including selling farm implements for the R.M. Wade Brand, building and operating a sawmill in 1924, and more ("Washington Mills;" Chamberlain). Greely, a charter member of the Ridgefield Masons and an active Republican, was married in 1908 to Lettie McDonald (1885-?), who had moved from her birthplace of Missouri to Clark County by covered wagon, and they had two children, Dorothy and Charles III (Ancestry).

Nineteen-twenty was a year of explosive activity for Greely Jr. (hereinafter referred to as Greely), including real estate investment projects such as the development of an addition to Ridgefield. Work in the automotive arena, still quite a young field at the time, included construction that year and operation of the Greely Ford Showroom and Garage at 304 Pioneer Street, which replaced a livery stable previously at that location. That same year he also built the Clarke County Auto Company at

11<sup>th</sup> and Washington in downtown Vancouver (operating it to c. 1930), and was one of the incorporators of the Bratlie Brothers Mill Company, along with J.L. Bratlie, and H.J. Bratlie ("New Incorporations;" Chamberlain).

### *Construction of a New Bank*

Nineteen-twenty was also an important year in the history of the Ridgefield State Bank as the board, comprised of President Greely, Vice President Herman Potter, and P.H. Bell, cashier, decided early in the year to construct a new building, and were purchasing building materials by March. The *Reflector* applauded the officers as "all progressive business men, and the best evidence we can produce to sustain this assertion is to point to the present prosperous condition of the bank." Greely played an important role in the process as bank president at that time, was credited as the builder of the bank, and presumably promoted or orchestrated the construction at the same time of his garage business across the street to the east made from the same materials and built by the same contractor, Peter Johnson (1886 - ?). Johnson had immigrated from Sweden in 1905, by way of a stop in North Dakota c. 1910 where he was listed in the census as a farmer, and was settled in Clark County and married to Carrie by 1920, when the census indicated his occupation as carpenter/contractor (Ancestry; "Work"). Both construction enterprises would have benefited from possible joint ordering of materials in bulk and from having the same work crew handy to work on whichever structure had the next task queued up.

Garage construction was begun by May, and the bank by at least June, when the 11' x 14' vault, touted as having 18" thick walls reinforced with 1" steel bars placed 6" apart, was under construction. The bank's framework was done in June, and the walls enclosed and roof underway by the end of July ("Work;" "Making;" "A Few;" "Buildings"). The garage was completed in the fall, and the bank officially opened at the end of December, using electricity carried on wires installed from the garage across the street. The bank began the new year with a public open house which attracted about 400 people and an advertised promise of continuing "security, courtesy, (and) service." *The Reflector* was predictably fulsome in praise, noting of the bank building: "There are few if any more complete in all its appointments. It is a structure of which Ridgefield may well be proud." *The Columbian* noted that "the new structure compares favorably with any in the county" ("State;" "More Business;" "Bank Elects;" 1920;" City Council; "Ridgefield Bank;" "Ridgefield Bank Will Open;" "Over 400").

Reasons for construction of the new bank building presumably included general growth of the institution and physical need for more space, along with a desire to present a more formal face to the town than the previous small wooden office rented from an attached store. The region was experiencing increased prosperity and the town's population had grown to around 900, approximately triple the number of residents when the bank opened 10 years earlier. The *Reflector* and county auditor reported a substantial business increase in 1920, with county real estate transfers and mortgages having jumped from \$17,213 in 1919 to \$26,686. Contractor Johnson alone had a banner year in 1920, constructing not only the \$25,000 bank, but also the \$500,000 Bratlie Mill Company sawmill, the \$20,000 Greely garage, a hotel, and 13 new residences, along with starting a real estate business ("Ridgefield on the Progressive;" "It's Name;" "Yet;" "County Auditor;" "A

Record Season;" "P. Johnson"). A stronger brick structure with a heavily-reinforced vault was also a wise decision in light of past burglary attempts, the new location represented the downtown's growth and eastward expansion, and the corner setting and more impressive architecture increased its visibility. In January 1921, the stockholders followed up their bold construction move with a vote to increase the capital stock to \$25,000 – more than double the initial investment. Representatives signing for the application to the state were Greely, H. J. Potter, P.H. Bell, and J.W. Blackburn (Washington Secretary; "Notice").

#### *Continuing Bank Operations and the Arrival of Edward Firstenburg*

Despite the economic severity challenges inherent to the Great Depression of the 1930s and a local population which declined to about 700 by 1935, the bank stayed in business (Wilson). Part of its longevity can certainly be attributed to the continuing habit of bank employees to also be engaged in other business pursuits, but a significant portion to the hard work and vision for long-range growth and success of Edward Firstenburg.

Born in Seattle in 1913 to a homemaker mother and carpenter father who had fought in the Spanish American War and sought gold in Alaska, Firstenburg spent his formative years there in the local schools, and then stayed on through graduation with a Master's degree in business and a minor in Education from the University of Washington in c. 1934. Unable initially to obtain a position in business in the midst of the Great Depression, he responded affirmatively to an unsolicited offer from the Ridgefield School District to serve as the head of its Commercial Department. Upon arrival in town, with which he was completely unfamiliar, he found out that he was in fact the sole teacher in the department (Firstenburg; Jollota).

Firstenburg taught bookkeeping, typing, and shorthand until December, when he asked for and was granted a year-long leave of absence to accept an offer from the current bank manager to learn the business. The manager knew that he had a business degree, and he and his wife, who also worked in the bank, wanted to relocate. Firstenburg took over the wife's job on the 2nd of January, 1935 and became steeped in the day-to-day operations of a small-town bank. Six months later, the management couple moved to Seattle, and what was to have been a year-long experiment turned into a lifetime of banking for Firstenburg, who shortly thereafter in 1937 married his wife Mary, a union which lasted for 72 years (Firstenburg).

In addition to his intelligence, academic and on-the-job business training, energy, and commitment to customer service, Firstenburg learned that the banking field in Ridgefield also required vision and entrepreneurship. He took the risk of leaving a \$100 per month salary in teaching for a \$50 per month banking salary because he felt the latter offered more long-term economic potential. He also had more than one job in the early years. During World War II, he drove the local school bus prior to opening the bank, and then worked in a cannery until midnight after the bank closed for income but also to help a local home front short of workers. He conducted auction sales which helped bank business grow. Local farmers were selling their property to go into defense work and because the value of their land for development purposes was increasing due to a growing population. He opened accounts both for people selling their property, and made loans to people who were

purchasing that same property or livestock or farm equipment. During an oral history interview, Firstenburg recalled that when he first got into the business, all the banking transactions were recorded in ledgers with pen and ink, and that the switch to electric adding machines had been a technological revolution which was later dwarfed by the advent of computers. However, over the course of his long career, he felt that the biggest change in the banking business was the plethora of mergers brought on by a growing regulatory atmosphere which made it more difficult for small banks to compete effectively for business (Firstenburg; Jollota).

### *Bank Expansion*

Though it was difficult to find workers during the World War II years, then-bank president John Louis Bratlie and cashier Edward Firstenburg opted for growth. In 1943, they expanded into Oregon by purchasing Citizens Bank in Sherwood. Bratlie, also a long-time lumberman in addition to his banking responsibilities, continued as president in Ridgefield but also took the title of vice president for the Sherwood operation. Firstenburg became president of Citizens, and worked there two days a week ("Sherwood Bank"). They also purchased a bank in Carlton, Oregon, and became partners in a bank in Yamhill, Oregon, though managing travel south was challenging because of wartime gas rationing (Firstenburg).

In 1949, the corporate officers included John Bratlie, president; Frank E.G. Royle, vice president, and E.W. Firstenburg, secretary and cashier. The fourth officer, Marjorie Bratlie Reed, assistant cashier and daughter of John and Winnifred Bratlie, was a 1939 graduate of the University of Washington with a BA in Economics and Business, and possibly only the second woman to work for the bank in a time when banking was not a common occupation for women. The board of directors was comprised of the same people, with the addition of J.W. Davis (Washington Secretary; "Seniors;" Firstenburg). Bratlie, however, wanted to retire so he sold his interest in the bank to Firstenburg, thus setting the stage for the latter's lasting influence on the evolution of financial institutions in southwest Washington. Firstenburg proceeded to sell the Oregon banks because he had decided to concentrate operations in his home state. Furthermore, the sales helped him pay for his new acquisition, along with a loan from his mother, which was paid back within 10 years (Firstenburg; Jollota; Hewitt).

### *First Independent Bank Formed*

Firstenburg strategically lead growth in the bank by increasing the capital stock in 1953 from \$25,000 to \$200,000 (*Biennial Report*). To solidify the growth, he purchased the State Bank of Battle Ground, and banks in Skamania and Klickitat counties. Under continuing leadership by Firstenburg, the institution was reorganized in July 1954, and changed its name to First Independent Bank with headquarters in Hazel Dell, and the Ridgefield State Bank and State Bank of Battle Ground became branches. The Ridgefield State Bank entered the reorganization phase with total assets of around \$1,552,354, and Battle Ground \$2,325,700. Starting in 1956, new branches were opened every couple years for a period of time, including in Vancouver Heights in 1958. Downtown Vancouver holdings included a building at 15<sup>th</sup> and Main, and the former 1<sup>st</sup> Federal Savings and Loan Building. In May of 1970 bank officials built a new headquarters at 1313 Main Street in Vancouver. Officers at the time were Ed Firstenburg, president; E.J. Sullivan, vice president; V.S. Danielson, secretary; and F.L. Durdle, cashier. Additional directors were: C.E. DeLong, Mary M. Firstenburg, Mel Shevach, E.W.

Jackson, D. Elwood Caples, and A.F. Lechtenburg (Washington Secretary; Firstenburg; "Banks to Get").

The bank continued to grow, and other family members stepped up to continue the tradition. Not only did the children work in various branches during their formative years, but William, son of Ed and Mary, became president by 1986, and son Bruce vice president. By 2001, the bank had 25 different offices and bank and family were widely known for their community philanthropy in such projects as the Firstenburg Tower at Southwest Medical Center, Firstenburg Student Commons at Washington State University Vancouver, and the Firstenburg Community Center. After retirement, Ed remained a banker through and through. He noted a need for a branch bank at the Waterford retirement facility in Vancouver at which he lived, and opened a small branch of First Independent in the lobby. Mary Firstenburg died in 2009, followed by Ed in August, 2010. In 2011, the Firstenburg family sold the bank, one of the few in the nation at the time to still be in family ownership, to Sterling Savings Bank of Spokane. The bank had 14 branches in Clark and Skamania counties, 240 employees, \$691 million in core deposits, and \$455 million of assets in associated businesses at the time of the sale ("2001 Annual Report;" "Vancouver's First;" Hewitt; Vogt).

#### *Bank Adaptively Re-Used as City Hall*

In August of 1974, the city officially expressed interest in obtaining Ridgefield's First Independent Bank for use as city hall in a letter from Frances Quiroga, chair of the Finance Committee, to Bill Firstenburg. The city asked that the building be donated for civic usage and stated their intent to "restore and maintain it as a historical landmark." A central location on Pioneer and traditional civic appearance made the structure a logical choice for the purpose. The bank agreed to the donation, with the caveat that the building not be used for commercial purposes. On March 13, 1975, the Ridgefield City Council voted to accept the offer of First Independent to use the former bank building as city hall. The vote of council members in attendance, Mel Anderson, Wayne Ball, Barbara Faeh, and Ed Pearson, and R. Quiroga, was unanimous. Mayor Alexander officially thanked First Independent Bank and the Firstenburg family for the generous gift which would replace greatly outgrown civic quarters on Main Street. Bank representative Bruce Firstenburg presented the deed to the city (City of Ridgefield). Today, the former Ridgefield State Bank building continues to serve as city hall for the burgeoning city of Ridgefield, which has seen 26 new housing developments in the most recent decade, experienced a population increase of 13 per cent between 2016 and 2017, and rose from being the fifth fastest growing city in the state between 2011-2012 to the fastest-growing city in the state in 2018 ("Ridgefield in Growth Spurt;" "Ridgefield's Growth").

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Primary location of additional data: None known

Previous documentation on file (CCHR): N/A

- \_\_\_ Preliminary determination of individual listing has been requested
\_\_\_ Previously listed in the Clark County Heritage Register
\_\_\_ Previously determined eligible by the Clark County Heritage Register
\_\_\_ Recorded by Clark County Cultural Resources Inventory Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office
\_\_\_ Other State agency
\_\_\_ Federal agency
\_\_\_ Local government
\_\_\_ University
\_\_\_ Other

Name of repository:

9. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre.

UTM References

(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

UTM reference grid with 4 rows and 3 columns (Zone, Easting, Northing).

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

#20 of Arthur Quigley DLC .11A

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the legal description of the site.

10. Form Prepared By

Form fields for name/title (Holly K. Chamberlain), organization (n/a), date (11/13/2018), street & number (2223 G St.), telephone (360-921-5992), city or town (Vancouver), state (WA), zip code (98663).

Additional Documentation

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. N/A

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

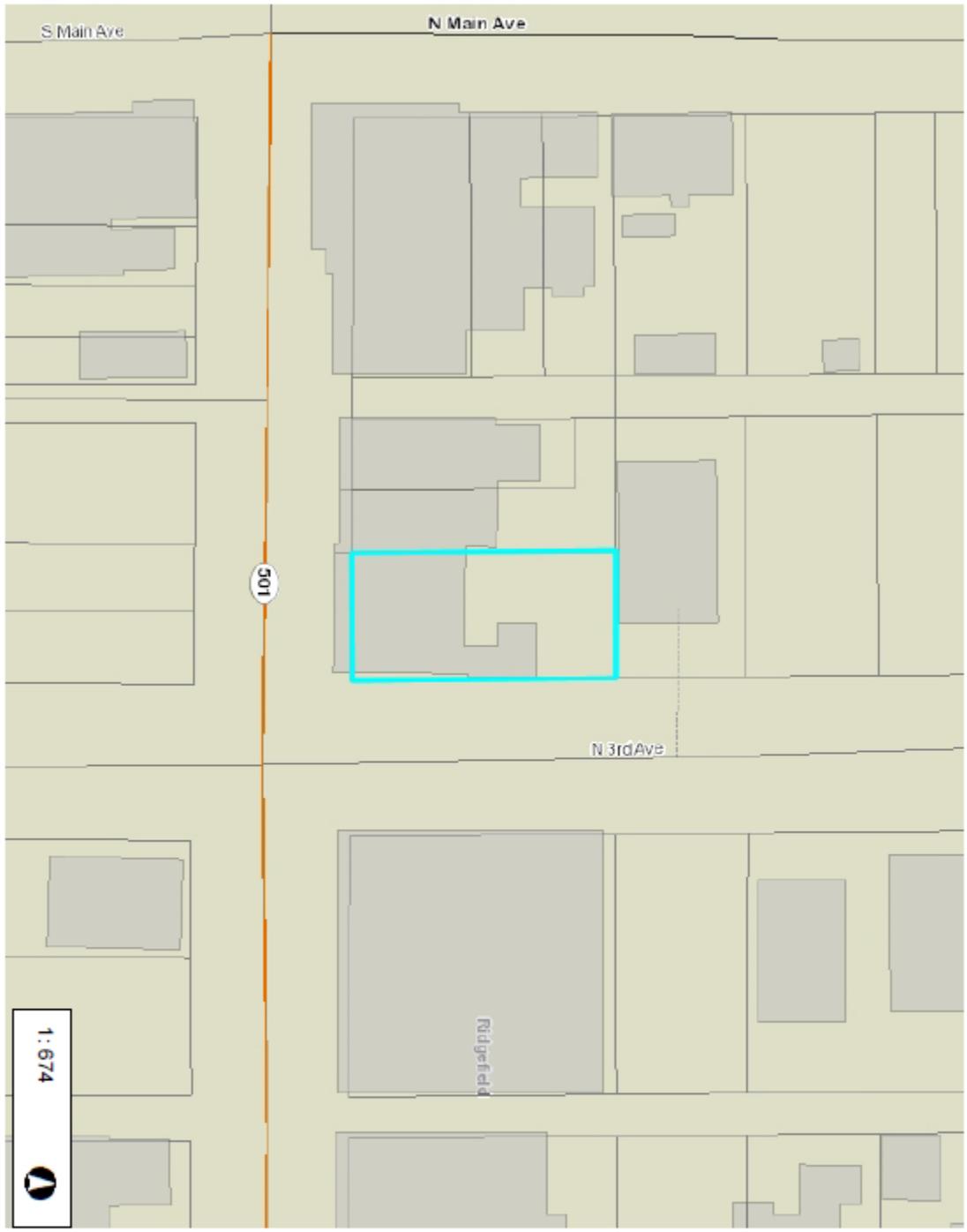
**Additional items**

(Check with the CCHPC Staff)

Location map



# Ridgefield State Bank CCHR Nomination



112.4  
0  
56.20  
112.4 feet

WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere  
Clark County, WA GIS - <http://gis.clark.wa.gov>

This map was generated by Clark County's "MapOnline" website. Clark County does not warrant the accuracy, reliability or timeliness of any information on this map, and shall not be held liable for losses caused by using this information.

1 : 674



- Legend**
- Building Footprints
  - Taxlots
  - Cities Boundaries
  - Urban Growth Boundaries

**Notes:**  
230 Pioneer St.

**Property Owner**

name City of Ridgefield  
 street & number 230 Pioneer St telephone 360-857-5001  
 city or town Ridgefield state WA zip code 98642

4b. **CLARK COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

In my opinion, the property  meets /  does not meet the Clark County Heritage Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of commenting staff

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

4c. **CLARK COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION / DECISION**

IN THE OPINION OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION, THE PROPERTY MEETS  / DOES NOT MEET  THE CLARK COUNTY HERITAGE REGISTER CRITERIA. ( See continuation sheet.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 CHAIRPERSON,  
 Clark County Historic Preservation Commission

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date





CITY  
HALL

230

15  
MINUTE  
PARKING  
8AM-6PM  
MON-FRI

CITY OF RIDGEFIELD



CLARK COUNTY HERITAGE SITE  
RIDGEFIELD  
1880s  
1900s  
1950s  
1980s  
2000s

Office Hours  
Monday - Friday  
9:00am - 5:00pm

RIDGEFIELD  
1880s  
1900s  
1950s  
1980s  
2000s

RD AVE  
NEER

STOP

RECYCLING



CITY HALL  
EMPLOYEE  
PARKING  
ONLY

CITY  
MANAGER  
PARKING  
ONLY

CITY  
MANAGER  
PARKING  
ONLY

CITY  
MANAGER  
PARKING  
ONLY



CITY  
MANAGER  
PARKING  
ONLY

EMPLOYEE  
PARKING  
ONLY

CITY HALL  
EMPLOYEE  
PARKING  
ONLY



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dishes  
catering  
*whose country reflects  
with delicious food*  
Chef Regan Wlugh  
**360-903-3835**  
www.deliciousdishes.biz



# CITY HALL

230

15  
MINUTE  
PARKING  
11-6PM  
MON-FRI

CITY OF RIDGEFIELD

Hours  
Friday  
8:00am - 5:00pm











N 3RD AVE  
PIONEER ST

CLARK COUNTY HERITAGE SITE  
RIDGEFIELD

Open Hours - Friday  
10am - 5:00pm

RIDGEFIELD

05













EA



OFFICE





NO ENTRY









NO SMOKING

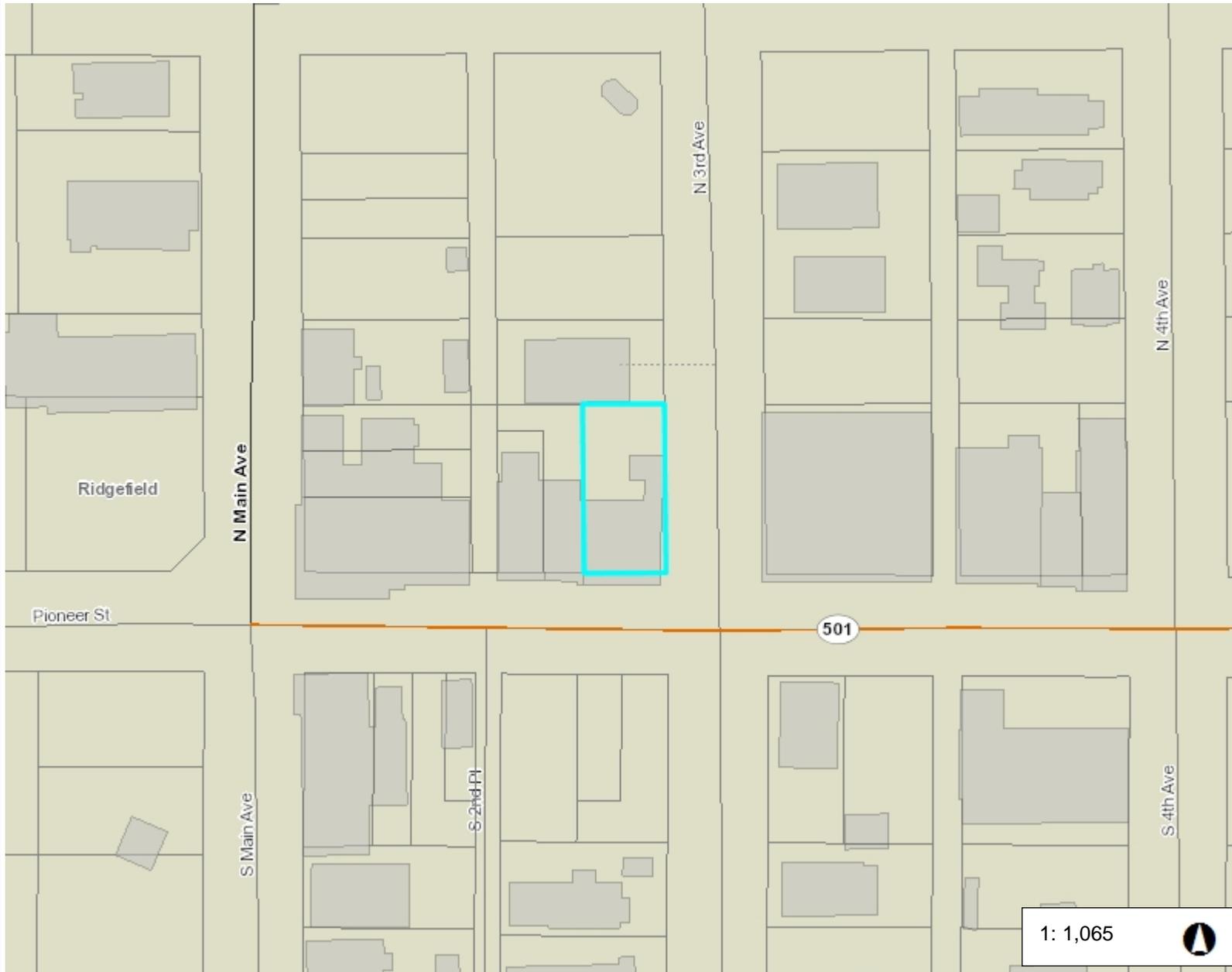
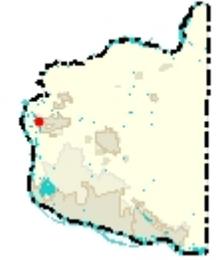
Cal...

QUARTER





# Ridgefield City Hall: Nomination to Clark County Heritage Register



### Legend

- Building Footprints
- Taxlots
- Cities Boundaries
- Urban Growth Boundaries

### Notes:

1: 1,065



WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere  
Clark County, WA. GIS - <http://gis.clark.wa.gov>

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