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The Landscape: Forest Grove

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Forest Grove

by Elizabeth Mylott

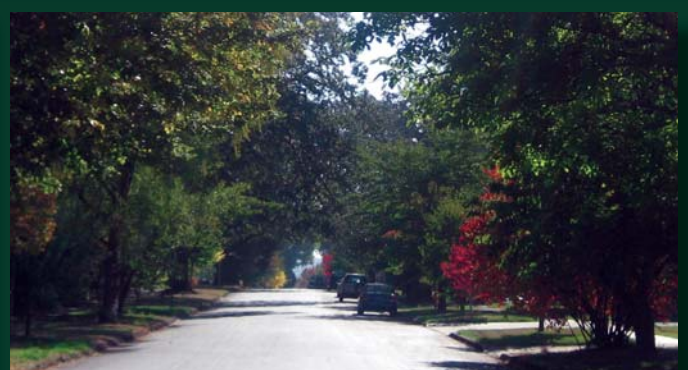
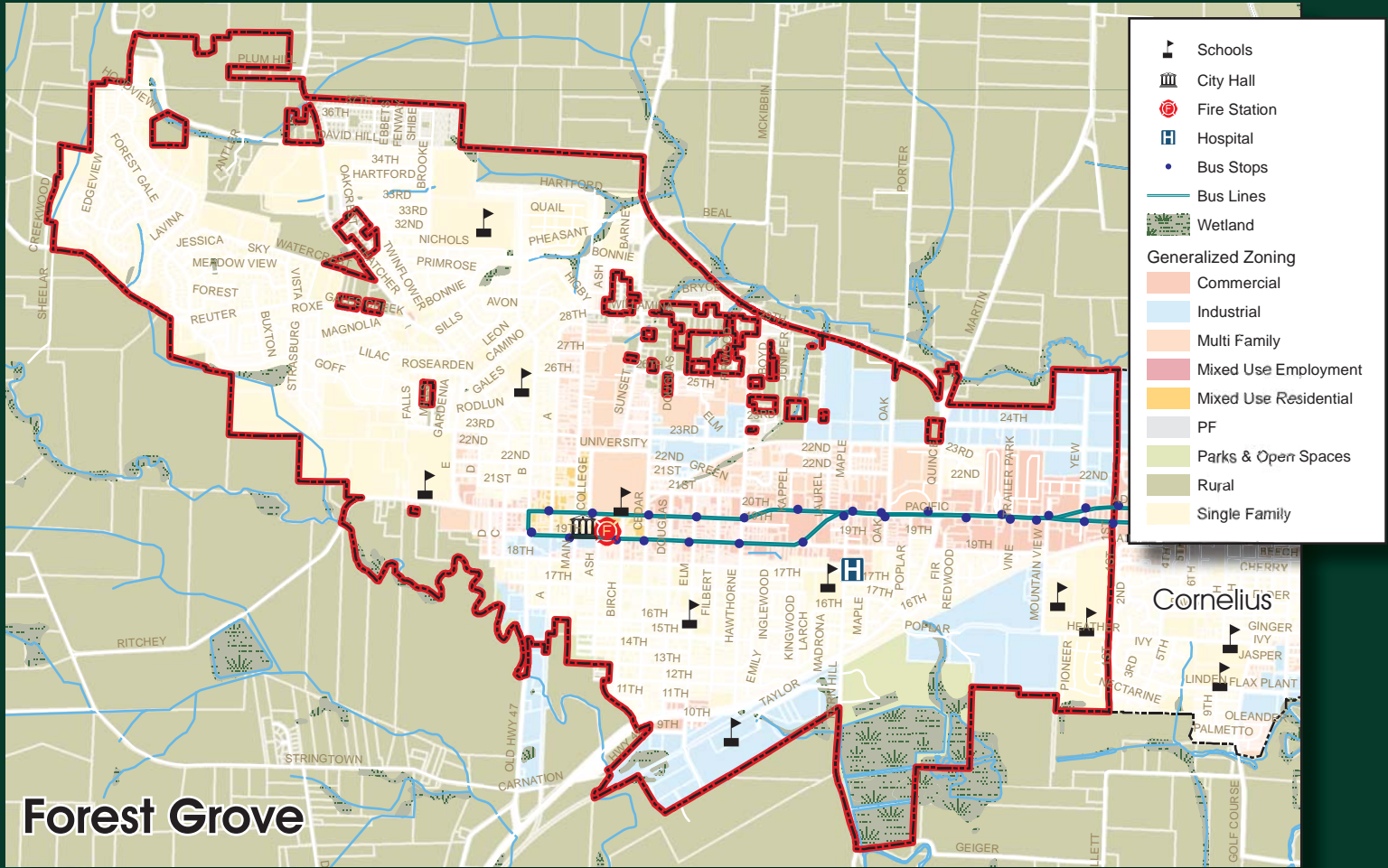
Founded in 1872, Forest Grove has a history closely tied to education. The first school in the area, the Tualatin Academy, was opened in 1849, 23 years prior to incorporation. The academy was originally opened as a school for “orphans left by the many deaths among the emigrants on their trip across the plains” (Edwards). The need for a school to serve orphans was perhaps overestimated, however, and soon the school was remained Tualatin Academy and opened to all local students. The Academy added college classes in 1854 and spun off Pacific University. The Forest Grove Indian and Industrial School, one of several such schools in the country, was opened in Forest Grove in 1880. Located on four acres of land rented from Pacific University, the school was authorized by the U.S. government. The first class consisted of 14 boys and four girls, all from Washington State, who were taught blacksmithing, shoemaking, carpentering, wagon making, and homemaking. Local resistance to the school, the need for additional land, and a fire that destroyed the girls’ dormitory caused the school to move to Salem in 1885. It continues to operate today as Chemawa Indian School, a boarding school for American Indian and Native American youth.

The 1890s and early 1900s were boom years for Forest Grove. The first phone lines were installed by the Home Telephone Company in 1894, and by the end of the decade the town was served by electricity and water facilities. This allowed for the development of much of the brick downtown surrounding Pacific University, which continues to serve as the heart of the community. At the beginning of the century Forest Grove, with a population of 1,300, was home to 40 businesses, four churches, four fraternal organizations, and 15 miles of boardwalk. Over the next 15 years, the town’s population increased to 2,500. The arrival

of electric interurban commuter rail service in 1908 allowed residents to move easily throughout the area, and in 1912 the Southern Pacific Railway began to electrify the line from Portland to Forest Grove, turning the little town into a commuter suburb.

The town’s fortunes turned south in 1919 when a fire destroyed the east side of Main Street north of 21st Avenue. The First Congregational Church and Post Office were among the many buildings destroyed. In the 1920s an agricultural depression compounded the town’s problems. The depression continued throughout the 1930s and many farmers turned to the lumber industry. By 1930 paved roads connecting Forest Grove to Portland, McMinnville, and the Oregon Coast allowed the lumber industry to flourish. This success would be short lived, however. In 1933 the first of the Tillamook Burns removed large swaths of forest from potential timber land. Local mills were able to do salvage business, but the destruction caused by this and subsequent Tillamook fires limited the industry’s economic potential. World War II and the Portland shipyards briefly increased the need for lumber, and during the 1940s the town’s population increased from 2,500 to 4,500.

Forest Grove has continued to grow during the past 60 years. Today the town of more than 20,000 retains much of its charm. Many of the brick buildings built downtown during the 1890s are still standing. Historic residential neighborhoods shaded by large trees ring downtown. Although Forest Grove will surely continue to grow as newcomers are attracted to the small-town feel of a community within commuting distance of Portland, the existence of the original infrastructure will ensure that it continues to be an attractive and livable community.



Downtown Forest Grove and the Clark Historic District.