

“The Crabtree Era” as Lakeland Hills Evolved

Roland Crabtree

Born 25 Mar. 1917 Died Feb 3, 1984

Known as Bill

“a true Visionary”



Born to parents Roland and Rachael Crabtree, Bill spent his early life in Providence, Utah. He was the eldest of six boys who were all self reliant and interested in automobiles, becoming proficient in “tinkering” and “maintenance”

Raised with a work ethic, each one moved forward doing what was required to meet their needs or opportunities of the moment. Collectively, they were involved in home construction, auto parts, sales and restoration, commercial tilt up buildings, oil refining (built the refinery themselves) and many other ventures.

Bill married Dora Mae Poulter at the Logan, Utah Temple in 1937 – they moved to Seattle in 1941 where they remained the rest of their lives.

Their work also included social issues, scouting, and church participation at all levels including mission support and construction of two Ward churches

He owned and operated three auto repair shops including one on Denny Way for twenty years before his first real estate development & home construction.

Gordon Crabtree

Born Aug 22, 1918 Died Nov 2, 2001



Gordon became part of this project in 1966 when Bill and he orally agreed for him to move to the area and become a full participating partner in developing the Lakeland Hills property.

He was happy with Bill leading as he did the public relations work, the banker negotiations, purchasing, bartering, etc., and thought nothing of Bill’s habit of talking to these folks on site as he remained sitting on or in the piece of equipment he was operating at the time of their coming to further a negotiation. Together, they had set the project schedule for the day and, with “laser vision”, he strove with the crew to meet the goals

Land Development and Construction

His daughter Jeane shared a personal history written by Bill in 1973. In it, he refers to the 1954 purchase of a sixty acre property tract (Manhattan View, now part of Normandy Park) which he developed, built out and sold all the homes except the one in which he, Dora Mae and their family lived.

In 1961 the first 200 acres of land near the sound in Federal Way was purchased. After logging off and selling the timber, two beautiful lakes were created and named for daughters, Jeane and Lorene.

While developing Twin Lakes, prior to selling his interest to Bell and Valdez, Bill began planning his next venture by acquiring property in south Auburn.

Lakeland Hills Land Development

Using funds from the “Twin Lakes” sale he stepped up the acquisition of various parcels to build the Lakeland Hills property into a “fully self-sustaining planned community”. One of his goals for LAKE LAND HILLS was to expand the property from the Stuck River to Lake Tapps. That full goal was not reached but it did grow to more than 1,200 acres in King County plus an approximate 500 acres in Pierce County bringing it physically close. His dream was developing an area to include:

Lakes Prior to his death, several areas were targeted and initial grading done.

Commercial The early planning of the current shopping center on Lake Tapps Parkway had been done.

Neighborhoods The first lot ready neighborhoods, Div 1 (74 lots) and Div 2 (85 lots) on Millpond Loop SE were sold to Burnstead Homes in early 1984.

Schools The elementary is completed and available space is now in the name of the Auburn School District for the middle school east of the Walgreen Drugstore building.

Parks There are 3 Auburn Parks in Lakeland plus the 6 neighborhood “pocket parks” including the play equipment park between Capri and Carrara.

Church sites One church has been built at the “A” St. Entrance and several groups have used the Community Center for short periods of time.

Golf Course Did not get included in the final plat.

Bill began working the Lakeland Hills property full time in the 1965/66 time frame when Gordon joined him. The consolidated properties in King County in relation to the Mill Pond, were bounded by or near:

- North to where Oravetz road turned right to meander to Kersey. Today, you have to look hard to find where that abandoned roadway existed.
- Along the (Stuck) White River bed
- Up the hill approximately to OLD MAN JONES road (the east boundary of Eastpointe)
- The “A” Street south Lakeland Hills Way, up the hill a ways, then south to the County Line.

The acreage in Pierce County took the boundary south beyond the current Lake Tapps Parkway and shopping center, then east to approximately OLD MAN JONES Rd. The Lakeland Homeowners Assn is spread over 1,092 acres

1966-1970 Development Activity

Timber was taken down and sold. The mill that sat adjacent to the pond was shut down prior to the Crabtree acquisition of the property - the abandoned mill served as an excellent “bone yard” for various types of metal for use in construction on the property and repair of the equipment

The Mill Pond had been built as an accessory to the mill. Timber logged and removed from the hills was brought to the steep embankment at the south-east end of the pond, logs were slid down the hill and into the pond from where they were sorted, pulled into the mill and cut by two huge saws turning in opposite directions as the log was maneuvered by the sawyer riding along in his control position with the log as it went through the cutting process.

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(For some history of the mill in its latter days, and pictures of typical small mills of the era, see Exhibit 1 attached)

Bill and Gordon expanded and dredged the pond adding the overflow and drainage under the road to the river. At the time this picture was taken, the grade had been raised so the mill looks very small and short. Where the mill once stood there is now a large manhole with a welded steel grid about 8’ across where the overflow from the pond heads toward the river. (More use of steel from on site.)

A great story of “Design as you go”.

There was a very large stump in the upper end of the pond that they wanted to extract. Using winches and an excavator, they attempted to extract the stump but it would not budge. A hole was dug underneath the stump and several sticks of dynamite were used to break it up and loosen it. There was a “Whumpf” sound when the dynamite exploded but all it accomplished was to create a large cavernous hole under the stump. A second attempt was made to extract it with no more success than the first time. At that point Bill sat down, took a long look at it and said, “you know, that stump is really quite picturesque sitting in the middle of the pond”, and that was the end of trying to remove the stump.

The first years were spent clearing land, planning, surveying, roughing in the roads and streets, preparing plat areas and filling the swampy low land around the pond. This area started at the bottom of the hill at Oravetz Road and was referenced as Lakeland Hills North.

“The Last one to Leave, TURN OUT THE LIGHTS”

In 1970, when the Boeing Company cut so far back news headlines read “Turn out the Lights”, Bill bid and the Crabtree brothers put their machinery and manpower to work contracting to build and repair forest service roads.

The LIGHTS were TURNED BACK ON!

In 1977 they returned full time to the Lakeland Hills property and concentration centered on:

Dredging the river over at least a three year period getting fill material for an area (originally a swamp) that required fill depths ranging from 6 to 12 feet where Riverside high school and Roegner Park are currently located.

The area flooded each year leaving gravel bars and islands with lots of logs, brush, etc.

As the river went down, they made sure a rather narrow channel was left on the Lakeland side of the river, and then made a bridge of large Alder or Cottonwood trees laid tightly together. Atop the logs, gravel was dumped to make a bridge for hauling gravel from the island or dredging to do fill.

The next “river swelling” or flood would sometimes, but not always remove the bridge logs but

there were always plenty to rebuild and continue the work.

When confronted by the City about this practice, he was able to continue referencing the city’s action that had channeled the White River away from going down Auburn Way by joining it to the Stuck River emptying into the Puyallup River to the south.

[See Exhibit 2 attached regarding the river channels earlier location](#)



Planning Specific Property area Usage

The mining and processing (including crushing the gravel) was done on site with material from site for use on site! This took place in the late ‘70’s and very early 1980’s.

As Lakeland Hills Way was roughed in from “A” Street up the hill to the future Lake Tapps Parkway, the dirt and gravel removed doing the route cut was used for fill of the area behind the Community Center building on A St., which at that time was occupied by Puget Sound National Bank.

Infrastructure

This included all the streets, curb & gutter, sewers, and water. Though not all was done by them, they did accomplish the major sections starting with Mill Pond Drive going from Oravetz Road.

Regulations in place by the City of Auburn requirements included expansion of sewer and water lines to serve the anticipated growth of the area.

Roads and Streets

The first street to go under development was Mill Pond Way and Mill Pond Loop to a convergence with Lakeland Hills Way, the lower section of which was roughed in somewhat simultaneously. In an ongoing process Lakeland Hills Way was roughed in all the way to the current Lake Tapps Parkway and Shopping Center.

From Dora Mae’s pen, “He designed and built the first concrete curb laying machine”

A great story.

Bill used an old truck frame to create a curb extruding machine that formed, vibrated and placed the concrete. It went very well until a City inspector found a reason to force the Crabtree's to quit using it and use machinery normally seen in this area. Curbs put in with the machine can be seen on Mill Pond Loop off Mill Pond Road going up the hill on what was to become the Burnstead subdivision, now a portion of the Lakeland Hills Homeowners Association. (Not Lakeland)

The Large Concrete Sign at Oravetz and Mill Pond Drive

Bill designed this monument with all the retaining walls going up the hill. Under the entrance sign and up the steep embankment behind is a sewer pipe that required about a 20-foot deep trench for installation.

An OSHA inspector drove by and attempted to shut the project down due to safety issues regarding that very deep trench going up that very steep slope. Bill refused, telling him that he and Gordon would work the trench since they were the owners and he could not stop them. After a while the inspector gave up and left.

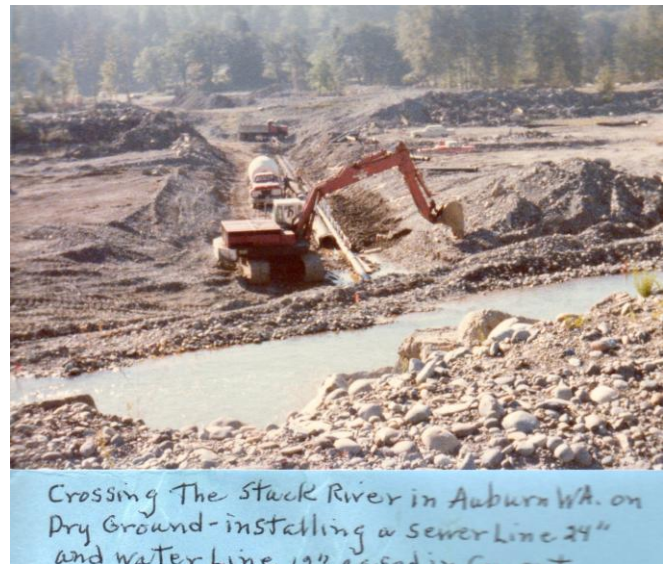
Water The water tower located west of Lakeland Hills Park was installed by the Crabtree's crew doing everything but the welding of the tank which was subbed out. It is served from a 750' deep well located several hundred yards from the tower.

The trunk lines and service for each plat were installed as the site was developed

Sewer To get permits and funding for the development required a 2.5 mile trunk line to connect into the King County Metro system in front of Boeing on 15th St SE. This meant going under the river and the installation of a pumping station on the east side of the river. Without this, the property would be of little value. With it, the area would boom.

From Dora Mae's pen "The City Engineers said they didn't think Bill had the knowledge required to build such a system. That became a challenge for Bill. They not only built several miles of sewer and water lines, they crossed under the Stuck River, moving the flow of water five times, so as to work where it was not so wet. They were watched closely by several

engineers while this was being done. When the job was finished, they said it was absolutely incredible the work had been done at all."



This \$2,500,000 project was eventually done with 20" and 12" parallel lines installed under full Engineering design and inspection.

The major challenges of this effort were the financing, the crossing under the river and under at least three sets of railroad tracks without disturbing the tracks.



They went under the railroad overpass at C Street and Ellingson on New Year's Eve. It was treacherous digging because of all of the underground utilities in that area, and, right at the corner making the turn to start north, the excavator caught the main north/south telephone trunk line on the tooth of the

bucket. It was not severed but was severely stretched causing damage or breakage to many of the very tiny lines inside that main trunk. This of course disrupted holiday phone traffic and forced the phone company employees to spend their holiday repairing the line. They were not very happy!

Though the effort was strong, Bill did not find a bank that was willing to finance offsite improvements. He eventually made a deal to borrow sewer development funds from the Latter Day Saints Church in return for a 500 acre portion of the property deeded to Brigham Young University, and with full repayment from proceeds on a pro rata basis of the sale of developed property - as it was sold.

Crews and Equipment

The basic crew was the Crabtree family. Non-family members were added as needed. In a conversation with Gordon's son Ken, interviewed for this article shared: "I joined in and was 16 years old when I began operating heavy equipment. My duties were core, supplemented with others on demands of seasonal pushes". Though Bill handled all negotiations with governmental officials and bankers, was the key contact with business and suppliers, he loved to be atop construction equipment and put in his full share of time in that position.

Most of the equipment used by the Crabtree Brothers and crew was purchased used, then upgraded and modified to serve the needs of the season. Occasionally, equipment recognized as a short time need was rented. Examples were the Rock Crusher brought in from Springfield Oregon with crew and cranes from local sources.

A number of the stories circulated at the time attributed to Roland Crabtree, were really about D. R. Crabtree - who was no relation but lived on abutting property addressed in the 5300 block of A St SE.

D.R. as he was known, did work equipment on his property a lot, including Sundays – a day set aside by Roland ("Bill") and his family who were all devout and participating Mormons.

Lot and Land Sales

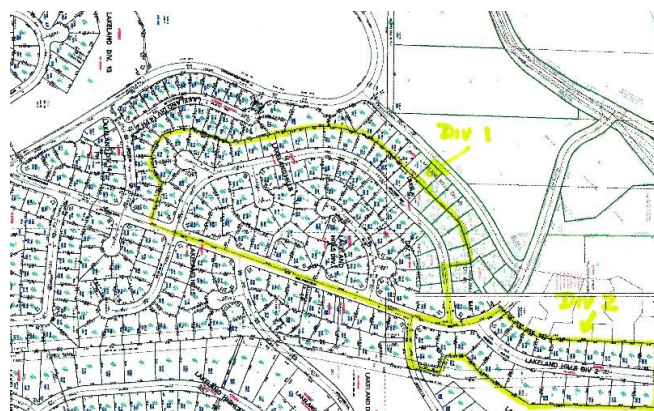
Lakeland Hills (Div 1) contained 85 lots and was sold to Burnstead Homes. The recorded plat is signed by Burnstead and Roland and Dora Mae Crabtree with

a recording date of January 11, 1984, almost simultaneous to Burnstead filing (Div 2) on Jan 5, 1984

Because it was his business and pleasure, Larry Dahl, Construction Manager for the City of Auburn, knew all the players in the property development that lay within the Auburn area.

Larry happened to be on site February 3, 1984. As he and Bill sat on large rocks down on the river bank, Bill was eating his lunch and during the conversation asked when the first building permits would be issued on the Millpond Loop lots that had been purchased by Burnstead. Larry told him they were due out the following week and Bill was very pleased sharing that he had dreamed of seeing the first homes as they were built on those lots as the "kick off" in Lakeland Hills.

That was the day of the accident so he did not get to watch the houses rise up on the site, but had been assured they were due to start the process.



This map illustrates the lot locations in Lakeland Hills Divisions 1 and 2
See Exhibit 2 for Map of the neighborhoods and years recorded

Exhibits "A"

The Brewer and LaVelle Mill located in Auburn, WA.

High school project paper researched and presented by Keith BREWER.

In 1945, Leo Brewer, my great-grandfather, sold his home in Tacoma, moved to Puyallup and with a partner Frank LaVelle, bought a small sawmill, located at what is now Mill Pond Park near Auburn. Both men had worked for many years, for the very large mills in Tacoma, both during the Depression and World War II.

Frank LaVelle moved to Auburn and built a home there. My great-grandfather, Leo Brewer later built a home in the valley north of Sumner. Leo Brewer was the sawyer and his job was to decide how much lumber could be cut from a log and to get as much good as possible from each one. Frank LaVelle was responsible for all the maintenance of all saws. My grandfather, Ron, drove a lumber truck, taking loads of the unplanned lumber to mills in Tacoma every day, per orders from those mills.

They developed a thriving business and both my grandfather, Ron Brewer and my great-uncle Doug Brewer, worked there while in high school and later as young married men.

In 1952, my grandfather, Ron Brewer, and his brother Doug, were encouraged to learn other trades as their father did not think that small sawmills could continue to compete with the larger mills, especially those in Tacoma. My great-uncle became a draftsman and my grandfather learned electronics, which led him to Boeing from which he retired.

Up Oravetz Road, Mr. Oravetz had cone shaped kilns where he made charcoal. He cleaned out the trimmings from the Brewer and LaVelle sawmill a couple of times a day for his ovens. It was a good trade. He cleaned it up for the mill and got the bark in exchange. He had a thriving business in charcoal which was used for many things.

I am sorry to say, the mill burned to the ground in 1962 or 1963. My great-grandfather was very

discouraged by this and being 65 years old, decided to retire. But Frank re-built. A few years later, in 1969, sadly, Frank LaVelle was killed at the mill by being electrocuted.

When my grandfather retired and moved to Arizona, he and my grandmother would come to visit. He often talked about where the mill used to be. Sometime later, when he was driving around, we showed him the park. Later, we moved to a condo above the park. My brother and sister graduated from Riverside and I hope to do the same.



Typical small mills of the era (added by editor)

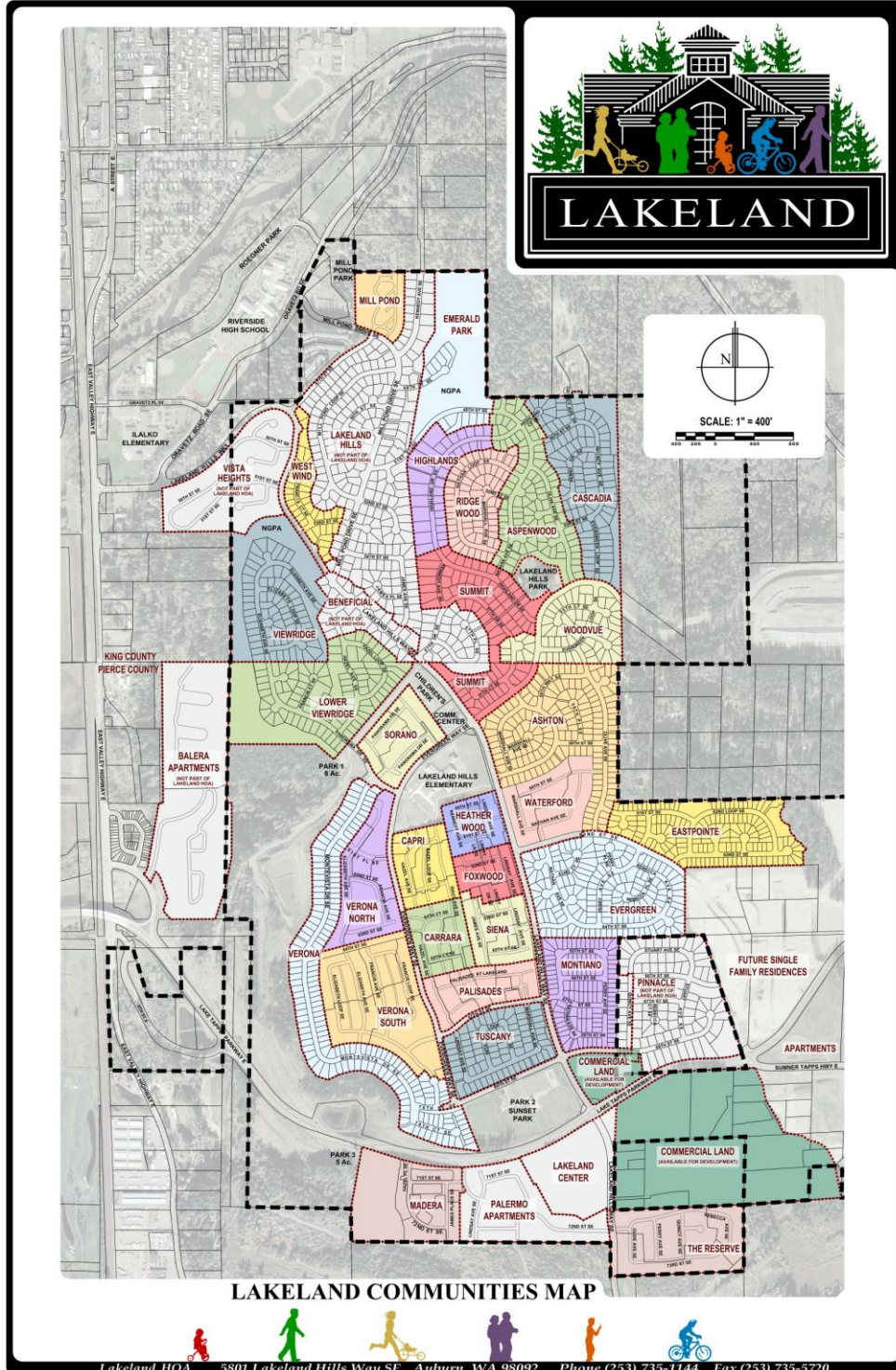


Circular saws used prior to the adoption of Band Saws – from the Diston Saw Archives (added by editor)

Exhibit B

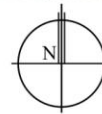
This map was prepared in 2008 to properly show the total Community consisting of:

- a) Lakeland Hills Homeowners Association,
- b) The "Beneficial" homes not in any Homeowners Association
- c) The Lakeland Homeowners Association consisting of 2,814 completed homes in 28 neighborhoods
- d) 300 apartments behind the shopping center
- e) 185 additional residential and 234 apartment construction ready sites
- f) The Common areas, Open Space, parks, Elementary school and a 51 acre site for Jr high School.



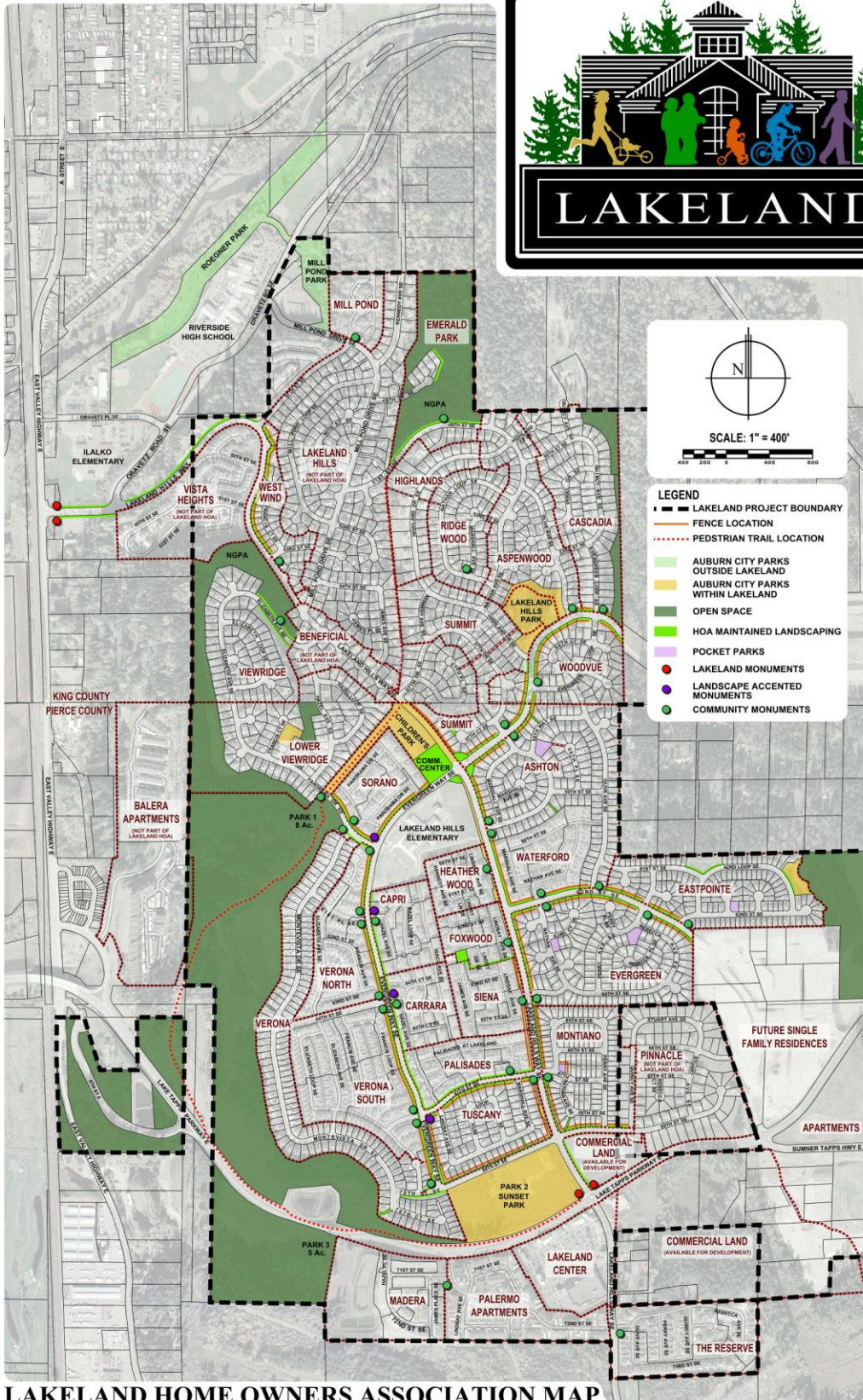


LAKELAND



SCALE: 1" = 400'

- LEGEND**
- LAKELAND PROJECT BOUNDARY
 - FENCE LOCATION
 - PEDESTRIAN TRAIL LOCATION
 - AUBURN CITY PARKS OUTSIDE LAKELAND
 - AUBURN CITY PARKS WITHIN LAKELAND
 - OPEN SPACE
 - HOA MAINTAINED LANDSCAPING
 - POCKET PARKS
 - LAKELAND MONUMENTS
 - LANDSCAPE ACCENTED MONUMENTS
 - COMMUNITY MONUMENTS



LAKELAND HOME OWNERS ASSOCIATION MAP



