
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic District Case No. 15-01

Capitol Hill Historic District (Boundary Increase)

Squares 752, 753, 777 and 778

Bounded by 2nd, 4th and F Streets, NE

Meeting Date: April 23, 2015
Applicant: ANC 6C
Affected ANC: 6C
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board increase the boundaries of the Capitol Hill Historic District to include the proposed expansion area in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. Staff also recommends that the Capitol Hill Historic District amendment nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

The historic district expansion meets District of Columbia Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism), because it embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types or methods of construction, and because it is an expression of urban planning, landscape architecture, siting and design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia. The historic district expansion also meets Criterion E (Artistry) as its buildings possess high artistic and aesthetic value that contribute significantly to the heritage and appearance of the District of Columbia; and Criterion F (Creative Masters) because the buildings of the expanded area have been identified as works of craftsmen, artists, sculptors, architects, landscape architects, urban planners and builders whose works have influenced the evolution of their fields, and that are significant to the development of the District of Columbia.

In addition, the Capitol Hill Historic District boundary increase meets National Register Criterion C with Architecture and Community Planning as its Areas of Significance. The almost exclusively residential area presents collections of distinctive and continuous groupings of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century rowhouses that are architecturally consistent with those found in the present Capitol Hill Historic District boundaries. In addition, the economic and social forces that prompted the development of the Capitol Hill Historic District similarly had a profound influence on the development of the expansion area.

Boundaries and Architecture

The Capitol Hill Historic District Boundary Increase proposes to expand the existing historic district to include Squares 753 and 778 in their entirety, and Squares 752 and 777 in part. Bounded by 2nd Street NE on the west, 4th Street NE on the east, the area essentially expands the historic district from its existing northern boundary at F Street NE to the north, but stops short of H Street NE. The proposed expansion area also jogs around a collection of non-contributing buildings south of H Street between 3rd and 4th Streets NE. The extension of the boundary will add 188 buildings (170 contributing and eighteen non-contributing) to the Capitol Hill Historic

District which currently comprises approximately 8,000 contributing buildings. The buildings to be added are almost exclusively residential with the vast majority being rowhouses from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that are architecturally consistent with those found throughout the rest of Capitol Hill. In addition, the expanded boundaries include the Logan Schools (1891 and 1933 school buildings) which add to the architectural quality of the area and contribute to the social and cultural history of Capitol Hill.

Architecturally, the rowhouses in the expanded area provide an illustration of the building typology from the earliest, two-story flat-fronted examples of the 1880s whose ornamentation is limited to corbelled cornices and molded window hoods, to more exuberant Queen Anne examples from the 1890s, replete with double-height polygonal bays and towers capped by projecting gables, pediments and conical roofs, and featuring integrated brickwork, decorative panels, brick belt-coursing, rusticated sills and lintels, and other ornamental features such as finials and iron cresting. The typology continues into the twentieth century with a return to the flat-fronted prototype (with and without porches), yet in this case the facades are wider (three bays instead of two) and the roofs lower and overhanging, often with exposed rafters. The major builders and architects of the nineteenth and twentieth-century rowhouses are the same as those found elsewhere in Capitol Hill and throughout the city, including developers John H. Sherman, John Davidson, Diller B. Groff, and Herman Howenstein, and architects, T.F. Schneider, B. Stanley Simmons, George S. Cooper, Frederick G. Atkinson and others.

Interspersed in the blocks of rowhouses are five small-to-midrise twentieth-century apartment buildings, all of which reflect a restrained Classical Revival-style appearance, save for the Ramon Apartments (now the Tuscany) at 676 4th Street NE which exhibits Italian Renaissance detailing, most notably at its roofline. Although some of the rowhouses formerly had ground-floor retail, there is only one purpose-built commercial building: the Schneider-Spliedt Company offices at 316 F Street NE. Built in 1926, this sizeable and distinctive building has a wide central entry, parapet roof, and wide window openings on both the first and second stories that clearly set it apart from its residential neighbors.

Architecturally, the red-brick Logan Schools stand out as local landmarks and would, indeed, be worthy of official recognition as such. The first Logan School, located at the southeast corner of 3rd and G Streets NE and built in 1891, represents the quintessential Victorian-era neighborhood public school building with its central entry pavilion facing G Street and a conical corner tower that integrates seamlessly with the residential red brick rowhouse character of the surrounding streets. The second, Classical Revival-style Logan School, built across the street in 1935 to accommodate a growing school-age population, was expanded in 1948 and subsequently according to its extensible design, so that the building and play area provide a much-appreciated public amenity.

Historically, these blocks had alleyways filled with alley dwellings and other accessory buildings, but due to redevelopment and social reform movements, the alleys and their buildings were largely eradicated by the middle of the twentieth century. For instance, Square 777's alleyway was re-configured and, in 1979, built upon with townhouses (that have been intentionally been excluded from this nomination). Several mid-twentieth-century single-bay garages and more recent carports do stand along the surviving alleys and have been included in the expanded area.

History

The most historically significant development of the proposed expansion area occurred 1885 and 1934, during a time of substantial growth in Capitol Hill, but subsequent to Capitol Hill's initial development. Antebellum growth radiated from the Capitol building into the blocks just east of it, and south to the Navy Yard, but stopped short of the blocks north of D Street NE largely due to swampy conditions. Caused by frequent flooding of the main branch of Tiber Creek, these conditions gave rise to the name "Swampoodle" to describe the area from 1st Street NW to 2nd Street NE. First settled by laborers and immigrants, mostly Irish, Swampoodle gained a reputation as "gang-ridden and downtrodden."

Civic improvements were gradual and those areas closest to the Capitol were given priority, but the impounding of the Tiber River and other drainage projects in the 1870s opened up cheap, underdeveloped land to speculative builders. In 1871, the Columbia Railroad Company introduced streetcar service along H Street from 4th Street to 15th Street NE, driving speculation around that corridor. It was not until the 1880s when several infrastructure projects were complete that development in this the northwest portion of Capitol Hill began in earnest. From 1885 until 1899, developers purchased unimproved property, subdivided it, and filled the lots with rowhouse dwellings, reflective of the popular Victorian styles. This construction boom is typical of the larger Capitol Hill, which saw substantial and similar speculative development in this fifteen-year period by many of the same players.

As development intensified during the 1880s and 1890s, the new housing stock attracted primarily white residents of the working and middle classes. While the first residents of Swampoodle were of Irish descent, the waves of people moving into the area were generally American-born and presented a solid mix of skilled and unskilled workers. As today, many of these workers held jobs with the federal government and particularly with the Government Printing Office. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a sizeable African American presence emerged, first largely restricted to the area's alley dwellings in Gordon Avenue and 3½ Street NE. This population expanded onto the 600 blocks of 3rd and 4th Streets, spurring the construction of the first Logan School, erected in 1891 as part of the black public school system. In the early 1930s, as the area's African American population continued to increase, Logan School reached its capacity, and a new Logan School was built across the street to replace it.

Like much of the city, this area experienced a socio-economic and physical decline following World War II and after the 1968 riots, but it has seen a resurgence in recent decades and is now a densely populated neighborhood of Capitol Hill.

Evaluation

The historic district expansion meets District of Columbia Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism), Criterion E (Artistry), and Criterion F (Creative Masters). The increased boundaries include a predominantly residential building stock that illustrates the development of the rowhouse building form, that reflects the quality of building traditions and stylistic preferences of the period, and that were designed and built by the same architects and developers who were building the rowhouses within the current Capitol Hill boundaries. The original justification for terminating the Capitol Hill Historic District at F Street was based purely on topographical reasons as F Street represents the bottom of Capitol Hill. However, the buildings within the proposed boundary increase are architecturally consistent with those in the current Capitol Hill Historic District and visibly and historically are connected to it. Just as these boundaries are well

justified, future and further expansions may also be justified based upon sufficient documentation.

The Capitol Hill Historic District boundary increase meets National Register Criterion C with architecture and community planning as its areas of significance and a period of significance ranging from 1791 to 1945, i.e., consistent with the present historic district period of significance.