
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Historic District Case No. 17-17

Bloomingdale Historic District

All properties within a boundary formed by Florida Avenue, North Capitol Street, 2nd Street and Channing Street, NW, including all lots and condominiums in Squares 3099-3125 and 3127; and Reservation 276A and Reservation 277A

Meeting Date: July 26, 2018
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League on behalf of the Bloomingdale Historic District Coalition
Affected ANC: ANC 5E

After close review of the application and supporting materials, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Bloomingdale Historic District to be entered into the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Place at the local level of significance with a Period of Significance of 1892-1948.

Background

In July 2017, the Historic Preservation Office received an application for a Bloomingdale Historic District, filed by the D.C. Preservation League on behalf of the Bloomingdale Historic District Coalition. This application was filed after several years of concerted efforts by the coalition to undertake research, prepare the documentation for the application, and to conduct extensive public outreach and education on the designation process and its implications. The application provides a well-researched architectural and social history of Bloomingdale that presents solid justification for historic district designation according to the D.C. and National Register Designation Criteria.

This designation effort was undertaken by the Coalition with the knowledge and support of the D.C. Historic Preservation Office/Office of Planning. The Office of Planning has recognized the distinctive architectural and historic character of Bloomingdale in official planning documents for years, and has encouraged preservation efforts to protect that character. Bloomingdale was first identified for its historic potential in the District's 2000 Historic Preservation Plan. In 2006, the neighborhood was similarly recognized in the Mid-City Area Element of the District's Comprehensive Plan for its architectural character and cultural heritage. Finally, the Mid-City East Small Area Plan, approved by the D.C. Council in 2014 after substantial community involvement, recommended consideration of a historic district in Bloomingdale. The plan also recommended that a community-led neighborhood conservancy be developed to lead the historic preservation effort.

Consistent with these planning recommendations, the Bloomingdale Historic District Coalition was formed to undertake the research, documentation and public outreach effort towards a

Bloomington Historic District. The Historic Preservation Office has contributed to this effort through survey work and architectural analysis and participation in public meetings

Evaluation

On June 7, 2018, HPO issued a preliminary report on the Bloomington Historic District, summarizing the neighborhood's history and architecture, and evaluating it according to the DC and NR designation criteria. The evaluation of the historic district is repeated here:

The Bloomington Historic District application establishes Bloomington's significance as one of the city's most extensive and cohesive rowhouse neighborhoods, whose buildings are not only remarkably intact, but offer high-quality design and craftsmanship. Located immediately beyond the city's original boundary at Florida Avenue, Bloomington's residential development out of cultivated farmland was spurred by the arrival of the nearby streetcar line in 1888 and its proximity to existing neighborhoods. Bloomington's development was largely undertaken by a small group of speculative developers and builders whose large stock of substantial rowhouses were intended to attract middle-class residents during a major building boom in the city's development history. Architecturally, Bloomington offers a primer on the stylistic transition of the city's rowhouses from the grand and fanciful late Victorian building forms of the early 1890s to the statelier Edwardian ones after 1900 and the more modest rowhouse forms of the 1910s.

In addition to its significance as an early suburban development, Bloomington is historically significant for its visible role in the struggle to abolish racially restrictive housing covenants in the District and nationwide. The historically white neighborhood was the site of several important legal cases that contributed to the 1948 Supreme Court decision to declare racially restrictive covenants unenforceable under the law, thus ending the legal segregation in the city's housing, and opening Bloomington and other neighborhoods up for more widespread settlement by African American residents.

The proposed Bloomington Historic District meets **DC Designation Criterion A** as the "site of events that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia or nation." In particular, Bloomington played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement, as it was the site of a number of legal challenges to racially restrictive covenants that developers and residents used to keep neighborhoods segregated. Most significantly, Bloomington is associated with the two D.C. cases that advanced to the Supreme Court and were part of the landmark 1948 decision that ruled racially restrictive covenants unenforceable.

Bloomington meets **DC Designation Criterion B** for its "associations with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions, achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia." In particular, Bloomington represents the transformation of Washington County from rural to suburban as the city began implementation of a street plan outside of the original city limit. Bloomington was one of the first residential subdivisions to be laid out in accordance with the 1887 Subdivision Act that required all new streets platted and laid beyond the L'Enfant Plan to be aligned and configured to it.

The proposed Bloomingdale Historic District meets **DC Designation Criteria D, E and F** as the neighborhood “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, or methods of construction, or are expressions of landscape architecture, engineering, or urban planning, siting, or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia, or nation,” and it “possesses high artistic value that contributes significantly to the heritage and appearance of the District,” and it is identified as “notable works of craftsmen, architects, builders and developers whose works have influenced the evolution of their fields.”

The rowhouses of Bloomingdale are not only remarkably cohesive and intact, but are substantial in size and materials (primarily brick with some stone) and exhibit high-quality design and craftsmanship. Built almost entirely within the defined timeframe between 1892 and 1916, the rowhouses are most commonly the product of teams of developers, builders and architects, and are executed in a variety of late-Victorian, Edwardian and early twentieth century styles. The rhythm of repeating and alternating projecting bays, turrets, and rooftop ornaments of the late nineteenth century examples, and the front porches and dormer windows of the early twentieth century ones, give the urban neighborhood its human scale and its exceptionally rich visual quality.

The collection of rowhouses also offers a visual lesson in the transition of the rowhouse form in the city from the Victorian era to the twentieth century. Bloomingdale’s evolution provides excellent examples of the work of some of the city’s most notable developer-builder-architect teams, including developers Harry Wardman and Middaugh & Shannon, and architects Francis Blundon, Thomas Haislip, Joseph Bohn, Albert Beers, William Allard, Nicholas Grimm and George Santmyers. Designer-builder Francis Blundon, who would later be called a “pioneer builder of Bloomingdale,” built his own corner house at 100 W Street as part of a long row, just as designer-builder Thomas Haislip built his house at 55 Quincy Street in the middle of his own speculative venture.

For the same reasons cited above, the Bloomingdale Historic District meets National Register Criteria A and C.

Period of Significance

The Period of Significance for the Bloomingdale Historic District extends from 1892, when the first rowhouses were constructed in the neighborhood, to 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled racial covenants unenforceable under the Constitution. This end-date is an important watershed moment that set Bloomingdale up for a major shift in its racial composition, and contributed to the rich social history of the neighborhood that still exists today. An African American community which had already been establishing itself in Bloomingdale and the surrounding vicinity expanded dramatically after 1948. Once the restrictive covenants were banned, the neighborhood attracted African Americans from all socio-economic brackets, including many important people and institutions. A number of judges grew up or lived in the neighborhood (three of whom were women), along with prominent businessmen, politicians, local merchants, artists, musicians, diplomats, and physicians. To name a few, Dr. Ernest Y. Williams, founder of Howard University’s Department of Psychiatry and Neurology, and public health advocate Dorothy Ferebee lived in Bloomingdale. Business woman Flaxie Pinkett who grew up in Bloomingdale became a much-honored member of the city’s business establishment after taking over her father’s real estate company in 1958. Diplomat and scholar Will Mercer Cook, son of

famed composer Will Marion Cook and singer Abbie Mitchell Cook, lived in Bloomingdale while teaching at Howard University until 1961 when President Kennedy appointed him ambassador to Niger. Actor and dancer Chita Rivera grew up here, and Jackie “Moms Mabley” lived here, just one block from her friend Odessa Madre, a colorful local nightclub operator.

The Barnett-Aden Gallery, the first privately owned black gallery in the U.S. was operated by James Vernon Herring and Alonzo Aden, who showcased the work of a number of nationally important black artists including Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White.

By 1960, just twelve years after the end of racial restrictions in housing, more than 99% of Bloomingdale residents were African American.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the proposed Bloomingdale Historic District extend from Florida Avenue on the south to Channing Street on the north, and from 2nd Street on the west to North Capitol Street on the east. The area includes twenty-eight city squares, and two federal reservations (triangle parks) on Florida Avenue. The proposed boundaries generally align with the boundaries of the residential subdivisions that make up present-day Bloomingdale, one of which follows the property lines of the 19th-century Bloomingdale farm that gave the neighborhood its name. The boundaries include architecturally distinguished and cohesive collections of residential rowhouses, neighborhood-based commercial buildings along First Street, Rhode Island Avenue and North Capitol Street, and notable religious and institutional buildings throughout the neighborhood.

Contributing Status and Integrity

The Bloomingdale Historic District boundaries include a total of 1,696 primary buildings and 183 secondary buildings (a secondary building occupies the rear of a lot). Of the 1,696 primary buildings, 1,688 are considered “contributing” and eight are considered “non-contributing.” This represents an extremely low percentage (less than one-half of one percent) of non-contributing buildings, compared to other historic districts in the city.

As the contributing count indicates, the buildings of Bloomingdale are remarkably intact. Long, uninterrupted rows of attached rowhouses provide highly cohesive streetscapes representing the period 1892-1916 when the majority of the houses in the historic district were constructed. The buildings of Bloomingdale share uniform building setbacks and heights, high-quality building materials and craftsmanship, and stylistic variety, yet coherent forms and features.

In addition to some new construction (seven of the eight “non-contributing” buildings were constructed outside the Period of Significance), the neighborhood has experienced a certain amount of alterations over time, including additions, altered front yard public spaces, and replacement materials including windows and doors. Until recent years, these alterations were generally modest in number and scale, and had no noticeable impact on the historic character of the neighborhood. In recent years, the number and scale of alterations in the neighborhood has increased, some resulting in large rooftop and/or rear additions (pop-ups and pop-backs) that have compromised the visual integrity of individual buildings or rows.

To assist the Board in evaluating the impact of roof and rear additions on the integrity of the proposed district, HPO conducted a survey over the past month to document them quantitatively

and qualitatively in terms of their impact on neighborhood character. While some of the pop-back rear additions could be seen from public street view through alleys, these types of additions do not impact the character of the integrity of the neighborhood's primary street-fronting elevations and streetscapes. A total of 78 roof-top additions were documented as having some extent of visibility from street view within the boundaries of the district, representing approximately 4.6% of the contributing buildings. Thirty-five of these additions (2%) fundamentally change the height and character of the building by rising significantly above the building roofline, without attempting towards compatible design or materials, and often resulting in the removal of original roof features (such as turrets). Twenty-seven roof-top additions (1.6%) are visible, but are more sympathetically designed and do not fundamentally change the character of the building or streetscape. Sixteen roof-top additions (slightly less than 1%) fall into a third category of minimally visible roof additions that also do not compromise the character of the building or street. A map and examples of each type of roof addition are attached.

Based on this analysis, in which only 2% of the building stock has been compromised by roof-additions that negatively impact the integrity of certain buildings or streetscapes, the neighborhood, as an entity, remains overwhelmingly intact and retains a high degree of integrity. Again, this compares favorably with the integrity of other historic districts in the city.

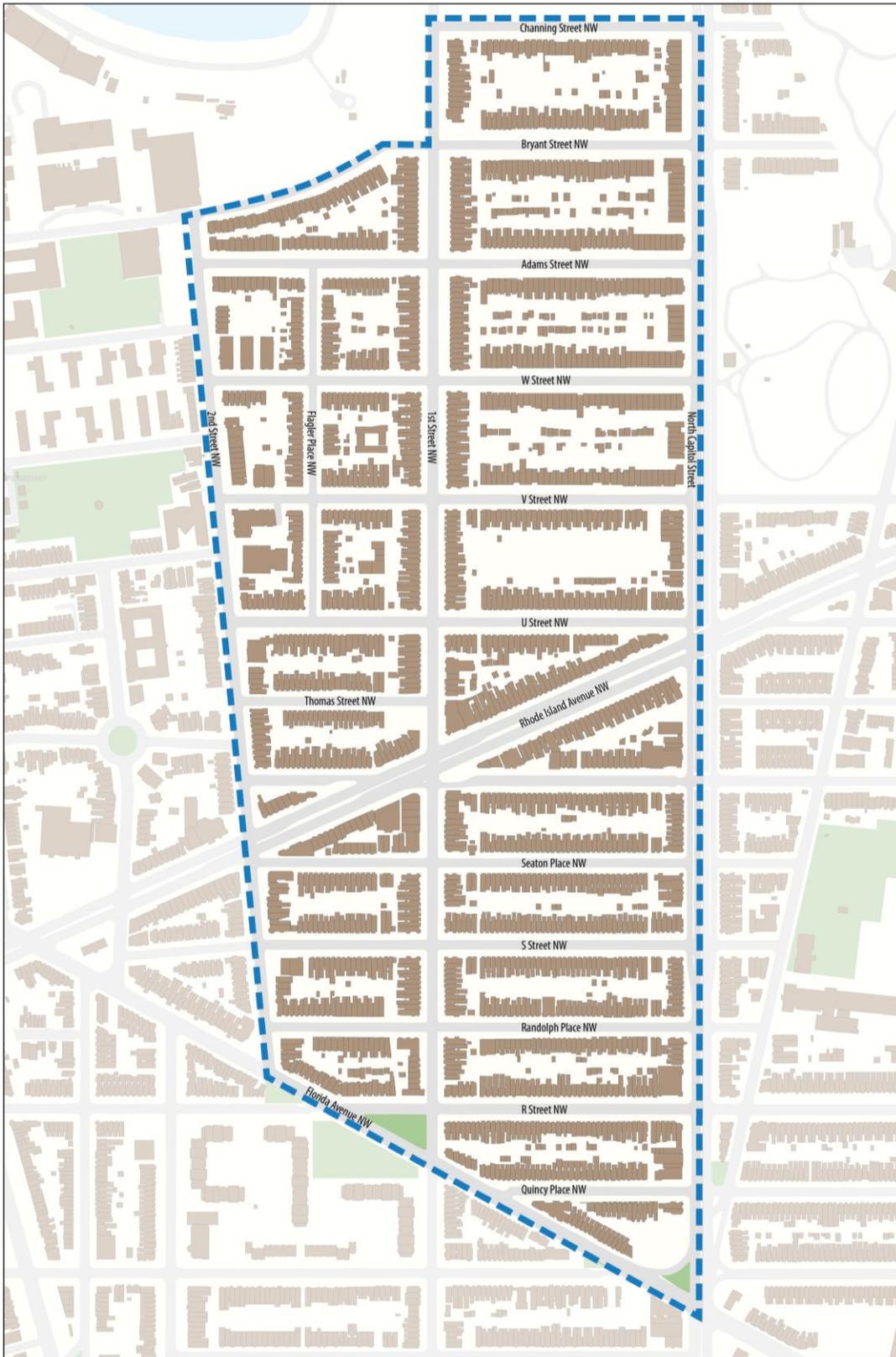
Design Guidelines

The Historic Preservation Office has prepared draft design guidelines for the proposed Bloomingdale Historic District for review and comment by the community. The guidelines suggest preservation and design principles for building alterations and additions that could be applied by the Historic Preservation Review Board and HPO if the historic district is designated. The guidelines were distributed to ANC 5E and posted to the Office of Planning website on June 1st, and presented by HPO at a meeting of ANC 5E on June 5.

Recommendations

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Bloomingdale as a historic district to be entered into the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, according to the above designation criteria and period of significance, and that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing. In addition to meeting the stated designation criteria, Bloomingdale possesses sufficient integrity to convey, represent, or contain the values for which it has been judged significant, and sufficient time has passed to permit professional evaluation of the district in its historical context.

Boundaries of Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District



May 2018