



Frequently Asked Questions PROPOSED BLOOMINGDALE HISTORIC DISTRICT

What is the purpose of historic districts?

Historic districts call public attention to the distinctive character and importance of District neighborhoods. They honor and encourage community pride, and by protecting and preserving the physical evidence of a community's history, help to educate residents about past achievements.

Historic districts are an important planning tool that promotes care and upkeep of neighborhood buildings. They support the District's policy to ensure that new development respects and enhances the character and scale of existing neighborhoods. They help to maintain and improve the quality of life that residents value. For the entire city, historic districts protect a public interest in the economic value of attractive and thriving neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods support local businesses, attract visitors and new residents, and help sustain a healthy economy in the District of Columbia.

Preservation Planning

How are potential historic districts identified?

The planning and historic preservation professionals in the Office of Planning (OP) work to implement the policies in the District of Columbia's Comprehensive Plan. These policies include conserving neighborhood character, encouraging new development to be consistent with that existing character, and identifying areas that should be protected by historic designation.

OP's Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is responsible for surveying the city for historic resources, and identifying sites and areas that appear to meet the standards for designation as historic landmarks and districts. Community organizations can also sponsor historic district nominations on their own initiative.

How was Bloomingdale identified as a possible historic district?

Bloomingdale was first identified for its historic potential in the District's 2000 Historic Preservation Plan. The Mid-City Area Element of the District's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2006, identifies Bloomingdale as one of the city's first-generation suburbs, where visible threats to its historic integrity from demolitions and poorly designed alterations are diminishing an important part of Washington's architectural heritage. Citing community concern, the plan includes a policy to protect the architectural integrity of Bloomingdale and encourage continued restoration and improvement of its row houses.

While the Comprehensive Plan recommends consideration of Bloomingdale as a conservation district, OP's Mid-City East Small Area Plan, approved by the DC Council in 2014 after substantial community involvement, identifies Bloomingdale as a strong candidate for historic district designation. It recommends that a community-led neighborhood conservancy lead exploration of that option.

Creating Historic Districts

How are historic districts nominated?

Historic districts are nominated by filing a detailed application that documents the history and physical character of the neighborhood. The application must describe why the neighborhood meets the test of significance under the District's criteria for designation. To become a historic district, the neighborhood must be determined significant to the history, culture, or heritage of the District, or to its physical development and appearance.

Who can nominate historic districts?

Under the District's historic preservation law, a qualified community organization or government entity may file an application to designate a historic district. The application requires substantial research and documentation, and applicants typically spend up to a year or more working with the community before submitting a nomination. The Bloomingdale Historic Designation Coalition undertook the effort for Bloomingdale, working with the Bloomingdale Civic Association and community residents. The Coalition partnered with the DC Preservation League to submit its application in July 2017.

Who designates historic districts?

Historic district designations are made by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), a nine-member body appointed by the Mayor and approved by the DC Council. By law, the Board includes professional experts and public members reflecting the District's diverse population, with a majority of professionals qualified in the fields of architecture, architectural history, history, or archaeology.

How does the designation process work? How can I participate?

Historic designations are made through a public process open to anyone who wishes to participate. Interested persons are encouraged to read the application posted on the HPO website, to engage through community organizations, and to attend community meetings on the proposal. Anyone may express their views on the nomination in a letter or email to HPO, or in person at the public hearing HPRB will hold on the nomination.

Before the public hearing, HPO will evaluate the nomination and give its recommendation on whether the proposed historic district meets the District's written designation criteria. At the public hearing, HPRB will consider the nomination, HPO report, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) comments, and public testimony before making a final decision on whether the district meets the criteria. In its deliberation, the Board gives "great weight" to the affected ANC's comments.

How many historic districts does the District have?

The District has 34 neighborhood historic districts, including LeDroit Park, U Street, Shaw, Mount Vernon Square, Union Market, and Capitol Hill among those closest to Bloomingdale.

Living in a Historic District

How would a historic district affect me as a property owner?

Historic district designation means that there is a review process to monitor construction that you or your neighbors propose to do on the outside of your property. The process protects historic districts from uncontrolled change. Its goals are to retain and enhance buildings that contribute to the character of the historic district, to encourage their adaptation for current use, and to ensure that construction is compatible with the district's historic character.

When does the preservation review process apply?

The preservation review process applies to construction projects that require a property subdivision or a DC building permit for exterior work. The review applies only in these circumstances. Interior alterations are not subject to preservation review. Ordinary exterior maintenance and repair, such as painting, replacing broken glass, reattaching or tightening loose materials, repairing wooden trim, and the like, does not require a DC building permit and is not subject to historic preservation review.

Who does the review? How long does it take?

About 95% of permit applications in the preservation review process involve minor renovation or site work and are reviewed by the HPO staff. These are routinely approved “over the counter” on the same day, or in a matter of days after submittal of the permit application. Garages and small building additions, such as a new room at the back of the house, can also be reviewed by the HPO staff.

Large building additions and new construction require a submission to the Historic Preservation Review Board, usually when there is a design concept. Public notice is required by posting a placard on the property. HPO notifies immediate neighbors and makes the project plans available for public inspection. HPRB reviews these cases at its monthly meetings, and may require revisions if necessary to ensure the design is compatible with the historic district. After HPRB approves a project concept, HPO completes the final plans review.

Demolition of historic buildings is exceedingly rare and requires a public hearing by the Mayor’s Agent and a specific finding of why the demolition is necessary in the public interest.

What are the review standards?

Design guidelines for each new historic district serve as a way for property owners to understand the standards for compatible work in a specific historic district. HPO will issue draft guidelines for the proposed Bloomingdale Historic District by June 13, and will post these on the OP website.

What about existing conditions?

Preservation review applies only to new work that requires a DC building permit. Existing conditions are “grandfathered” at the time of designation, and there is no requirement to change them. Property owners in historic districts must maintain their property in good repair under the same rules that apply to all DC property owners.

Next Steps

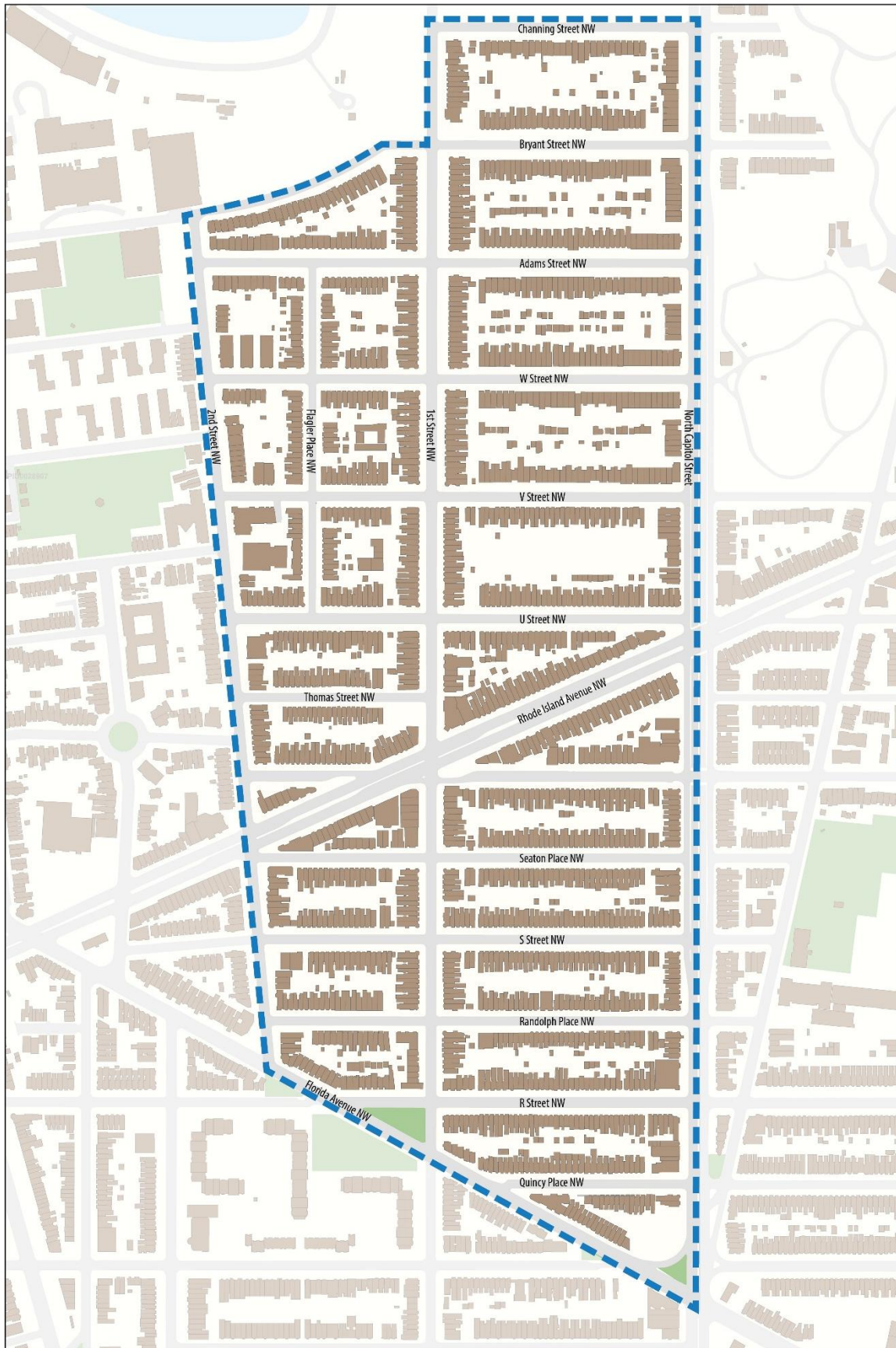
Where can I get more information?

The Historic Preservation Office website has further information on the preservation law, regulations, review process, and design guidelines. See Historic Preservation at <https://planning.dc.gov>.

How can I ask a specific question?

If you have a question that hasn’t been answered by this handout or the Historic Preservation Office website, send an email to historic.preservation@dc.gov

Boundaries of Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District



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