
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 17-15

Homestead Apartments

812 Jefferson Street NW
Square 2999, Lot 54

Meeting Date: November 16, 2017
Applicant: Hampstead Jefferson Partners LP (owner)
Affected ANC: 4D

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Homestead Apartments, 812 Jefferson Street NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and requests that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1939, the building's construction date.

The Homestead Apartments merits designation under National Register Criterion C and District of Columbia Criterion D ("Architecture and Urbanism") for embodying the distinguishing characteristics of a particular building type and a design significant to the District of Columbia, specifically, a "conventional low-rise apartment building," as classified in the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*.

Secondarily, the apartments meets National Register Criterion A and D.C. Criterion B ("History") for being associated with the development of the Brightwood Park neighborhood (bounded by Georgia, New Hampshire and Missouri Avenues and Emerson Street NW).

HPO does not agree that the property merits designation under D.C. Criterion F ("Creative Masters"), as it is not a notable work of an architect whose works have influenced the evolution of his field, or that are significant to the development of the District of Columbia or nation beyond the extent of significance described above. The building is too eclectic and schematic in its application of stylistic elements to be particularly influential or considered a master work in itself. Yet, it is a good illustration of cost-conscious provision of rental housing for the masses in Brightwood Park during the Great Depression.

The Homestead Apartments were constructed in 1939, one of many multi-unit buildings erected to house working-class and middle-class residents of Washington during the interwar period. Much of this development followed the streetcar lines radiating from downtown, seeking lower land costs to accommodate a burgeoning labor force upon which the Depression-era federal government depended. This building was designed by the Quebec-born architect Louis de LaDurantaye for builder W. Charles Heitmuller. LaDurantaye designed dozens of buildings in the District but is not well known.

Fairly conventional in its H-shape plan and four-story height, the Homestead Apartments has quirky, Gothic/Romanesque/Moorish decoration in the form of corbeling, round arches, basket-weave brick panels, and peaks on the roofline. There are elements that could be interpreted as Deco and Moderne as well, such as a stepped parapet at the central bar and projecting brick ‘streamlining’ at corners and suggested pavilions, but the streamlining is presumably intended as a modern take on quoining, which picks up the classicism of the most notable exterior element of the building, the Renaissance-style hemi-octagonal entrance bay. One of the most interesting functional elements is the basement-level garage reached via openings off the rear alley. The building’s landscape is notable for the intimate courtyard enclosed by the low stone walls punctuated by piers, the taller of which support a wrought-iron arch. These are echoed by stone piers and gates controlling admittance to the side yards. Stone steps—that need repair—stand at the entrance and at the sidewalk, and one of Washington’s typical rustic granite retaining wall supports the central portion of the front yard as the land slopes away to the west.

The Homestead Apartments are nominated under the context provided by the Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) Form *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*, adopted by the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board and the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. The document traces the physical development of the apartment building type and classifies subtypes according to their design and characteristics and how they represent the development of the city. The Homestead falls within the “Conventional Low-Rise Apartment Building” subtype, purpose-built multi-unit buildings of at least three units on two to four floors, having a single main entrance and no elevator.

The MPD is written to allow the designation of a broad class of buildings, to protect both the most interesting and most characteristic examples. Like other building types, apartments should be evaluated not only against examples of their building types and other building types citywide, but also within their neighborhood context, representing how that area evolved. Brightwood Park began to develop with rowhouses in the 1890s. Apartments did not follow until the mid 1920s (and through the 1960s) and were consequently relatively small and mostly located in the northern half of the neighborhood. The Homestead Apartments are not in the highest tier of Brightwood Park apartments in terms of the qualities of its architecture—there are probably four apartment buildings that are superior—but neither is it in the much larger lowest tier. Being of better than average quality in localized terms, it is interesting as one of the earlier examples and one illustrating the incorporation of automobile storage.

The MPD proposes that apartment buildings may be listed under National Register Criteria A, B and/or C, but that they must meet one or more specific sub-criteria. In the present case, the Homestead Apartments meet the following registration criteria:

- A-3: Buildings that are part of clusters, corridors, or districts that illustrate the patterns of development of the city [for being part of extensive apartment construction in Brightwood and Brightwood Park following the extension of streetcar lines and the popularization of automobiles];
- A-4: Buildings that reflect economic forces, both external and internal, that altered the development of the city [for being constructed largely to house government workers during the Great Depression]; and
- C-3: Buildings that reflect changes in aesthetic philosophies [for being a cost-conscious response to a housing shortage that nonetheless mixed traditional and modern styles].