HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
PRELIMINARY REPORT

Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District (Case No. 17-17)

This report provides a preliminary evaluation of the application by the D.C. Preservation League on behalf of the Bloomingdale Historic District Coalition to designate a Bloomingdale Historic District. The report provides an historical overview of the proposed historic district and analyzes its historical and architectural significance under the written criteria for designation used by the Historic Preservation Review Board. It then addresses planning considerations and public involvement in the designation process. The designation hearing on the proposed Bloomingdale Historic District is scheduled for consideration by the Historic Preservation Review Board on July 26, 2018.

SIGNIFICANCE OF BLOOMINGDALE

The Bloomingdale Historic District application establishes Bloomingdale'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, Bloomingdale'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. Bloomingdale'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, Bloomingdale 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, designed to accommodate the more "modern" lifestyle of the 20th-century resident.

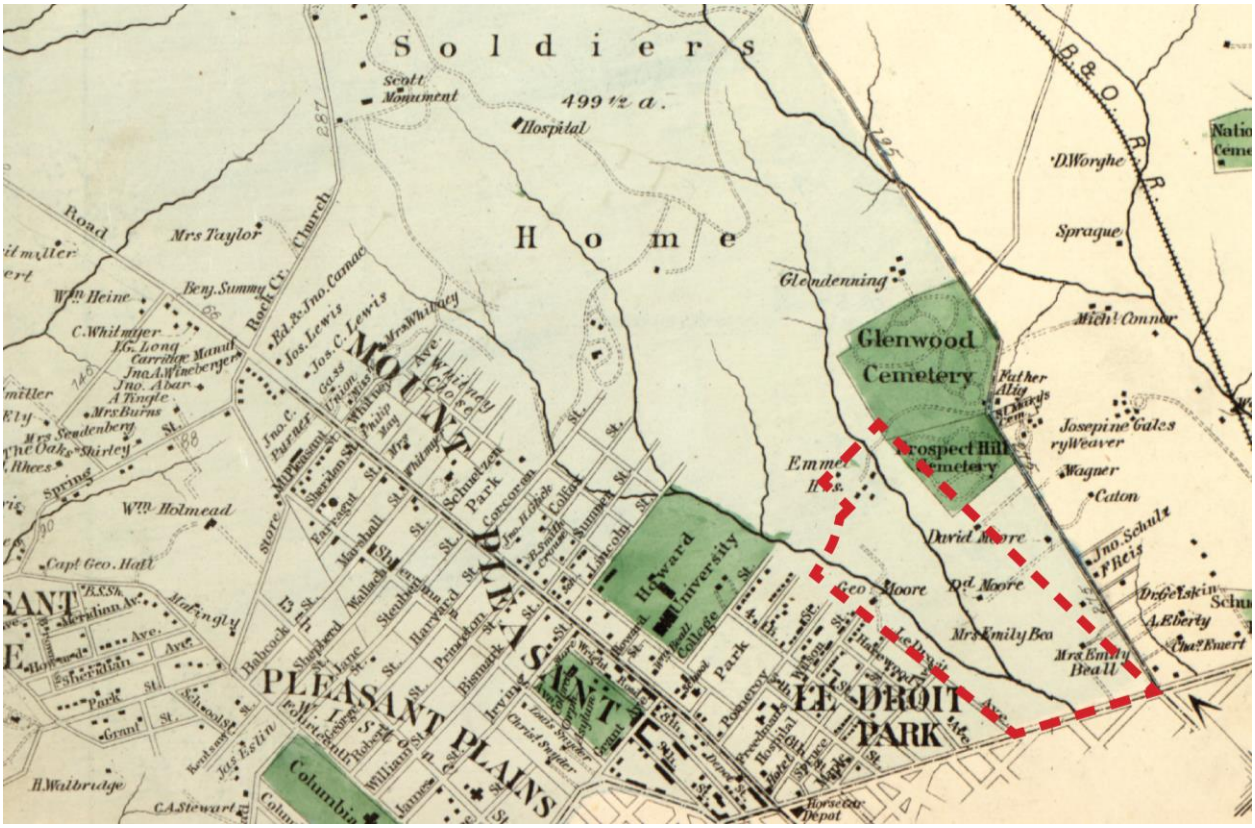
In addition to its significance as an early suburban development, Bloomingdale is historically significant for its visible role in the struggle to abolish racially restrictive housing covenants in the District and nationwide. The historically white neighborhood was the site of several important legal 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 Bloomingdale and other neighborhoods up for more widespread settlement by the city's African American residents.

Historical Summary

Early History
For much of the nineteenth century, the area that would become the residential neighborhood of Bloomingdale was farmland, the largest tracts of which were owned by two families—the Beale and Moore families—who lived on and actively cultivated the land. George and Emily Beale owned a 50-acre tract that extended from today's Florida Avenue to beyond T Street and

spanned either side of today's North Capitol Street. The Beale family homestead, consisting of a brick house that was "encompassed by a village of outbuildings" stood amongst "majestic" oak trees and a garden, just west of North Capitol Street mid-block between present-day R and Randolph Streets NW. The Beale family farm, known as "Bloomingdale" would give rise to the name of the neighborhood to come.

The Moore family land, known as the "Prospect Hill" tract, included 125 acres that extended well beyond what would become Bloomingdale. In 1839, the Moore family patriarch split his land among his five children into five parcels, two of which largely comprise the limits of today's Bloomingdale beyond the Beale family property. The George Moore tract ran from Florida Avenue on the south, abutting the Beale farm on the east and LeDroit Park and Howard University on the west, and extending well above T Street into land that would become McMillan Reservoir. The David Moore tract was west of his brother's, immediately north of the Beale family farm. Like the Beales, the Moore families lived on the tracts of land which they farmed; one house stood at 2nd and Elm Streets and the other just north of T Street along what would become North Capitol Street.



1879 Map showing the area that would become Bloomingdale

In addition to the Moore and Beale family farms, Georgetown businessman William Emmert owned a large tract of land at the north end of today's Bloomingdale, where he built a country estate for rental income. The estate, described in an 1869 rental advertisement, portrays the rural and bucolic nature of the area: "consisting of a large double brick house, commanding a fine view, two Gardens, with all the choicest Fruit Trees, Berries, Grapes & c; excellent water; healthy. Anyone wishing a pleasant home, near the city, can get it."

Residential Subdivision

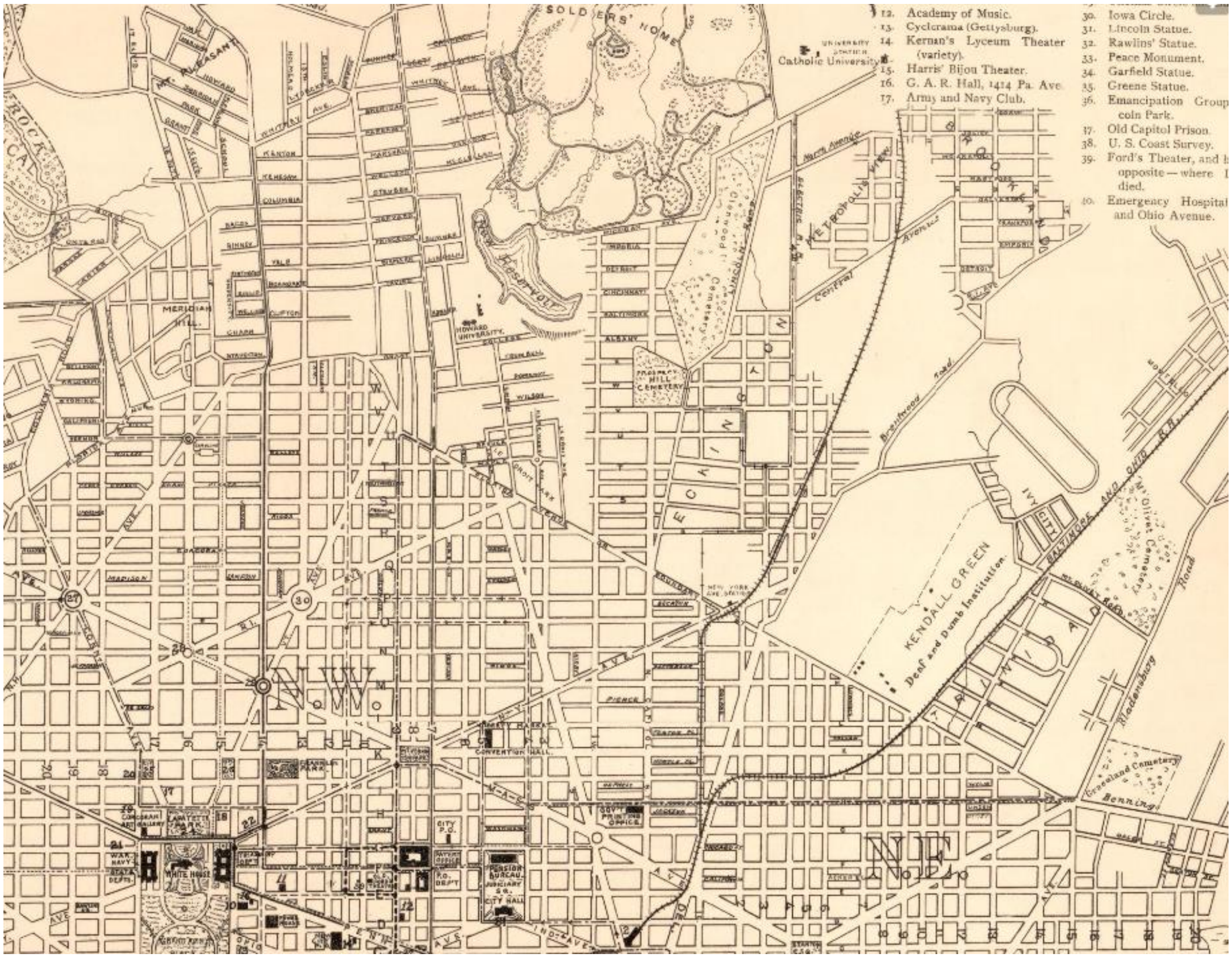
By the late 1880s, this rural land just beyond the city's limit was ripe for development. Le Droit Park, one of the city's first suburbs stood just west of Bloomingdale, while Howard University and the community of Howardtown lay immediately to the northwest. To the east, developer George Truesdell was planning the residential subdivision of Eckington and establishing the city's first electric streetcar line to get there. The Eckington and Soldiers Home Railway line opened in 1888 with service from downtown at 7th and New York Avenue, along New York Avenue to Boundary Street (Florida Avenue), then north along Eckington Place to the car barn at 4th and T Streets NE. By 1891, a branch line diverged from New York Avenue at North Capitol Street, extending up North Capitol to T Street, providing the future Bloomingdale neighborhood with transit connection to downtown.

Following the deaths of William Emmert, and the farming generation of the Beale and Moore families in the late 1880s, the process of subdividing Bloomingdale for residential development began in earnest. In a series of subdivisions between 1887 and 1892, almost the entire area comprising today's Bloomingdale would be platted with streets and lots intended for urban rowhouse building forms.

These Bloomingdale subdivisions were laid out in conformance with new regulations intended to control the suburban development of the city. During the 1870s and 1880s, as subdivisions outside of the city limits developed independent of each other and the city layout, urban planners and politicians advocated for government intervention to control the unregulated growth. In 1888, Congress approved the *Act to Regulate the Subdivision of Land within the District of Columbia*, requiring new subdivisions to conform to the L'Enfant Plan. A later act, the Permanent Highway Plan of 1893, required that a street plan for the area outside of the L'Enfant Plan be established.

As a result of these Congressional acts, the various subdivisions of Bloomingdale respected an established plan that extended the alignment of the city's streets and avenues beyond Florida Avenue across the former farmland. In the area that would become Bloomingdale, North Capitol Street and 1st Street extended due north from the city, and Rhode Island Avenue continued in its northeasterly route from where it terminated at Florida Avenue. Only Second Street NW, which pre-existed the 1888 Subdivision Act and was the eastern edge of Le Droit Park, diverged from the city's street layout. Of all the city's early suburban extensions, Bloomingdale is the most seamless, helping to give it the character of an urban neighborhood that it retains today.

Once platted for subdivision and following an initial setback due to a nationwide economic panic in 1893, the cutting and laying of streets and the development of houses in Bloomingdale progressed in a deliberate manner, but finally took off in the final years of the 19th century. Numerous developers, real estate syndicates, and members of the Moore family jumped into the Bloomingdale market. But it was mostly a few large-scale developer-architect teams who dominated the scene and created the quality and cohesive architecture that defines Bloomingdale's rows of residences today.



Detail of 1892 Map of Washington showing the Bloomingdale street plan as an extension of the Plan of the City (L'Enfant Plan)

In particular, the development team Middaugh & Shannon in partnership with notable architects B. Stanley Simmons, Thomas Haislip, and Joseph A. Bohn, Jr., built 305 houses in Bloomingdale, more than any other developer. Harry Wardman, who was well on his way to establishing himself as the city's most prolific developer, built 162 houses in Bloomingdale, primarily in partnership with architect Nicholas R. Grimm. These and other smaller-scale developers moved progressively through Bloomingdale, building long rows of dwellings on the grid streets, and focusing particular architectural attention to the neighborhood's principal residential spine of First Street NW. Laid out with a 90-foot width as required by the 1888 Subdivision Plan and with frontages on both sides, First Street offered an opportunity for the subdivision's grandest houses. In 1899, Middaugh & Shannon seized the opportunity with its first group of substantial three-story houses along the 2200 block of First Street, stealing the *Evening Star's* real estate columns and setting the stage for high-quality residential design generally reserved for the city's prominent circles and grand avenues.

2200 block First Street NW

Rise of Community

Although a 1900 newspaper article notes that Bloomingdale houses were for "opulent residents," U.S. Census records reveal that most of the early residents of Bloomingdale were instead middle-class workers and professionals. Typically, the male heads of households held white-collar government jobs, or were store clerks, physicians, attorneys, salesmen and the like. As would be expected, the area's smaller houses, such as those on Flagler Place, housed families lower down on the income bracket, whose heads of household more often held skilled blue-collar positions, while the grander houses along First Street were generally occupied by the more affluent and professionally established residents. Samuel Gompers, founding president of the American Federation of Labor, for instance, moved into the house at 2122 First Street upon its completion in 1901 with his wife and 26-year old daughter and lived there for the next fifteen years. All of the early residents of Bloomingdale were white, save for a dozen or so African American residents who worked as live-in domestics.

As people moved into Bloomingdale's new rowhouses, amenities followed and a community developed. Together the North Capitol and Eckington Citizens Association, and the Bloomingdale and Le Droit Park Citizens Association, established in the late nineteenth century, advocated for street improvements and utilities, public schools, a firehouse and other community services. In 1897-1898, in one of its first major acts, the North Capitol and Eckington Citizens Association secured the necessary funding for a firehouse to serve the larger area. Designed by Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford, the Old Engine Company 12 on North Capitol Street survives as one of the city's most ornate and intact examples of a Victorian-era firehouse, and is designated as a D.C. Historic Landmark.

Retail establishments such as dry goods and grocery stores, a pharmacy, a laundry, a shoe repair, tailor shop, fruit market, and a bakery clustered around the intersection of First Street and Rhode Island Avenue, and along North Capitol Street to serve the burgeoning community. In 1914, construction of the American Theater and its row of shops along Rhode Island Avenue introduced a commercial center to the neighborhood. At the outset and for several decades, the American Theater admitted white audiences only, in keeping with the segregated nature of the neighborhood. Similarly, the Rhode Island Pharmacy that housed a postal station, had a segregated lunch counter until the early 1950s. In 1950 as the demographics in the neighborhood changed, the American Theater (renamed the Sylvan in 1929) was opened to African Americans, and later in the decade was considered a "black theater."

Several churches established themselves in Bloomingdale in the neighborhood's early years, building architecturally notable edifices at corner sites and along the principal arterials. The first church—Memorial Church of the United Brethren in Christ, which was prominently sited along North Capitol Street was the first church of its denomination in Washington and was intended to establish a presence in the nation's capital. Initially, and with the exception of St. Martin's Catholic Church, the various churches accommodated white congregations, but as the neighborhood demographics shifted, black congregations moved into the existing edifices. St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church at 2nd and R Streets, NW provides the earliest example of this phenomenon. Built in 1905 by a Methodist organization, St. Paul's Methodist Church housed an all-white congregation for 20 years. By the mid-1920s as this southern section of Bloomingdale was becoming increasingly African American, the congregation moved its church to 13th Street NW, and the African American Tabor Presbyterian Church moved in. The church immediately became the center of the growing African American community and the meeting place for the all-black Bloomingdale Civic Association.

Racial Restrictions

As in other neighborhoods throughout DC, Bloomingdale's early developers used deed restrictions to shape their new neighborhood. Bloomingdale was next to Howard University and surrounding African American communities including Le Droit Park, which was just beginning to transition from white to black. To help ensure that Bloomingdale would develop as an exclusively white neighborhood and remain that way, developers and owners introduced restrictions and covenants into deeds, prohibiting the sale or rental of houses to African Americans. During the 1910s, individuals and citizens' groups banded together "to keep Bloomingdale and vicinity as nearly as possible a strictly white section." Committees were formed to track house sales and to secure pledges from property owners not to sell to persons of color, and to initiate and support litigation to prevent racial covenants from being violated.

The same racial geography that encouraged the use of racially restrictive covenants, however, also made Bloomingdale an epicenter of legal challenges to them. As African Americans bought and rented neighborhood houses that were not restricted, others that were restricted were similarly sold or rented to African Americans in violation of the restrictions, thereby engendering legal action. As the courts continued to uphold the constitutionality of racial restrictions and covenants, Bloomindgale became, in the 1940s, the scene of deliberate efforts to break discrimination in housing. Real estate agent Raphael Urciolo and his brother began to purchase racially restricted houses in Bloomingdale with the intention of selling them to African Americans, at the same time that NAACP attorney Charles Hamilton Houston joined the legal battle against covenants, representing several homebuyers in Bloomingdale.

In 1945, in two suits brought to the District Court by property owners Frederic and Lena Hodge on Bryant Street against Raphael Urciolo and James "Pop" Hurd, one of four African Americans who purchased houses from Urciolo on the street, the District Court upheld the covenants on the four Bloomingdale properties. In 1948, *Hurd v. Hodge* and *Urciolo v. Hodge* were taken up by the Supreme Court as companion cases to *Shelley v. Kraemer*, a St. Louis case. Following testimony by Houston and a team of NAACP attorneys that included Thurgood Marshall, Houston's former student at Howard University, the Supreme Court held that the enforcement of racial covenants violated the 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and was "contrary to the public policy of the United States." This ended the enforcement of racial restrictions and covenants in Bloomingdale and the nation.

The end of racial restrictions in housing and de-segregation of public schools in 1954 quickly led to changing demographics in the Bloomingdale neighborhood. As the African American population increased, area schools, churches and retail establishments shifted accordingly. An African American community which had already been established in the vicinity expanded into Bloomingdale and allowed important cultural institutions such as the Barnett Aden Gallery on Randolph Place to thrive. The neighborhood attracted African Americans from all socio-economic brackets, including many important individuals. A number of judges grew up or lived in the neighborhood three of whom were women: Anna Diggs Taylor, Alice Gail Clark, and Norma Halloway Johnson, along with prominent businessmen, politicians, local merchants, artists, musicians, diplomats, and physicians, including Dr. Ernest Y. Williams, founder of Howard University's Department of Psychiatry and Neurology, to name a few.

EVALUATION UNDER HPRB DESIGNATION CRITERIA

The proposed Bloomingdale 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, Bloomingdale 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, Bloomingdale 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.

Bloomingdale 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, Bloomingdale 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. Bloomingdale 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.

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 one U.S. Reservation. The proposed boundaries generally align with the boundaries of the original subdivisions that make up present-day Bloomingdale. In addition, the boundaries include architecturally distinguished and cohesive collections of residential rowhouses, neighborhood-based commercial buildings along First Street and Rhode Island Avenue, and notable religious and institutional buildings throughout that served the neighborhood.

Integrity

The buildings of Bloomingdale are remarkably intact with long, uninterrupted rows of attached rowhouses providing a highly cohesive streetscape representing the period from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the second decade of the twentieth, when the houses were constructed. The neighborhood has seen some alterations over time, including rooftop and rear additions to individual buildings, altered front yard public spaces, and replacement materials including windows and doors. Many of the rooftop and rear "pop-ups" and "pop-backs" are sizeable additions and architecturally insensitive to the historic buildings. Collectively, however, these additions do not compromise the character or integrity of the neighborhood to such an extent that they threaten Bloomingdale's eligibility for historic designation. As an entity, the neighborhood remains overwhelming intact with only a few non-contributing buildings. In addition, replacement materials and features such as windows and doors, while noticeable, do not detract from the overall high-quality of design and craftsmanship, still extant throughout the neighborhood.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The distinctive and historic character of Bloomingdale is well recognized in District of Columbia planning documents. It was first identified for its historic potential in the District's 2000 Historic Preservation Plan, and is similarly recognized in the Mid-City Area Element of the District's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2006. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the "visible threats to the historic integrity" of Bloomingdale and other Mid-City neighborhoods from "demolitions and poorly designed alterations that 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.

Comprehensive Plan Guidance

The designation of a Bloomingdale Historic District would be consistent with the District's Comprehensive Plan. The most pertinent policies in the plan's Historic Preservation Element are:

> *Defining Significance Broadly*
> Adopt an encompassing approach to historic significance. Recognize the city's social history as well as its architectural history, its neighborhoods as well as its individual buildings, its natural landscape as well as its built environment, its characteristic as well as its exceptional, and its archaeology as well as its living history. (HP-1.1.2)
>
> *Cultural Inclusiveness*
> Celebrate a diversity of histories, tracing the many roots of our city and the many cultures that have shaped its development. A multitude of citizens both famous and ordinary wrote its history. Historic preservation should bear witness to the contributions of all these people. (HP-1.1.3)
>
> *Historic District Designation*
> Use historic district designations as the means to recognize and preserve areas whose significance lies primarily in the character of the community as a whole, rather than in the separate distinction of individual structures. Ensure that the designation of historic districts involves a community process with full participation by affected Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, neighborhood organizations, property owners, businesses, and residents. (HP-1.3.4)

In addition to these city-wide historic preservation planning policies, the Comprehensive Plan's Mid-City Area Element highlights preservation priorities raised by the community during the planning process:

> The row house fabric that defines neighborhoods like Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, Pleasant Plains, Eckington and Bloomingdale should be conserved. Although Mid-City includes six historic districts (Greater U Street, LeDroit Park, Mount Pleasant, Strivers' Section, Washington Heights and Kalorama Triangle), most of the row houses in Mid-City are not protected by historic district designations.… Intact blocks of well-kept row houses should be zoned for row

houses, … and additional historic districts and/or conservation districts should be considered to protect architectural character.

The most pertinent policies and recommended actions adopted in response to this community feedback for the Mid-City planning area are:

Neighborhood Conservation
Retain and reinforce the historic character of Mid-City neighborhoods, particularly its row houses, older apartment houses, historic districts, and walkable neighborhood shopping districts. The area's rich architectural heritage and cultural history should be protected and enhanced. (MC-1.1.1)

Eckington/Bloomingdale
Protect the architectural integrity of the Eckington/Bloomingdale neighborhood, and encourage the continued restoration and improvement of the area's row houses. (MC-2.7.B)

Small Area Plan Guidance

While the Comprehensive Plan recommends consideration of Bloomingdale as a conservation district, the more recent Mid-City East Small Area Plan, approved by the D.C. Council in 2014 after substantial community involvement, recommends consideration of a historic district:

Bloomingdale's intact historic fabric makes the neighborhood a strong candidate for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. A historic district designation is a valuable tool that can provide protection from unwanted demolition and inappropriate alterations. Residents are particularly concerned about mitigating unwanted building additions or "pop-ups."

The most pertinent recommendations in the Small Area Plan are:

Develop a community-led neighborhood conservancy to lead historic preservation efforts and build consensus around preferred preservation strategies in Bloomingdale. (MCE-1.1)

Explore options for designating Bloomingdale as a Historic District. After the designation, share lessons learned with other Mid City East neighborhoods. (MCE-1.2)

Zoning

Zoning for the proposed Bloomingdale Historic District is RF-1 for the rowhouse blocks and MU-4 along Florida Avenue, on North Capitol south of R Street, and at the intersection of First Street and Rhode Island Avenue.

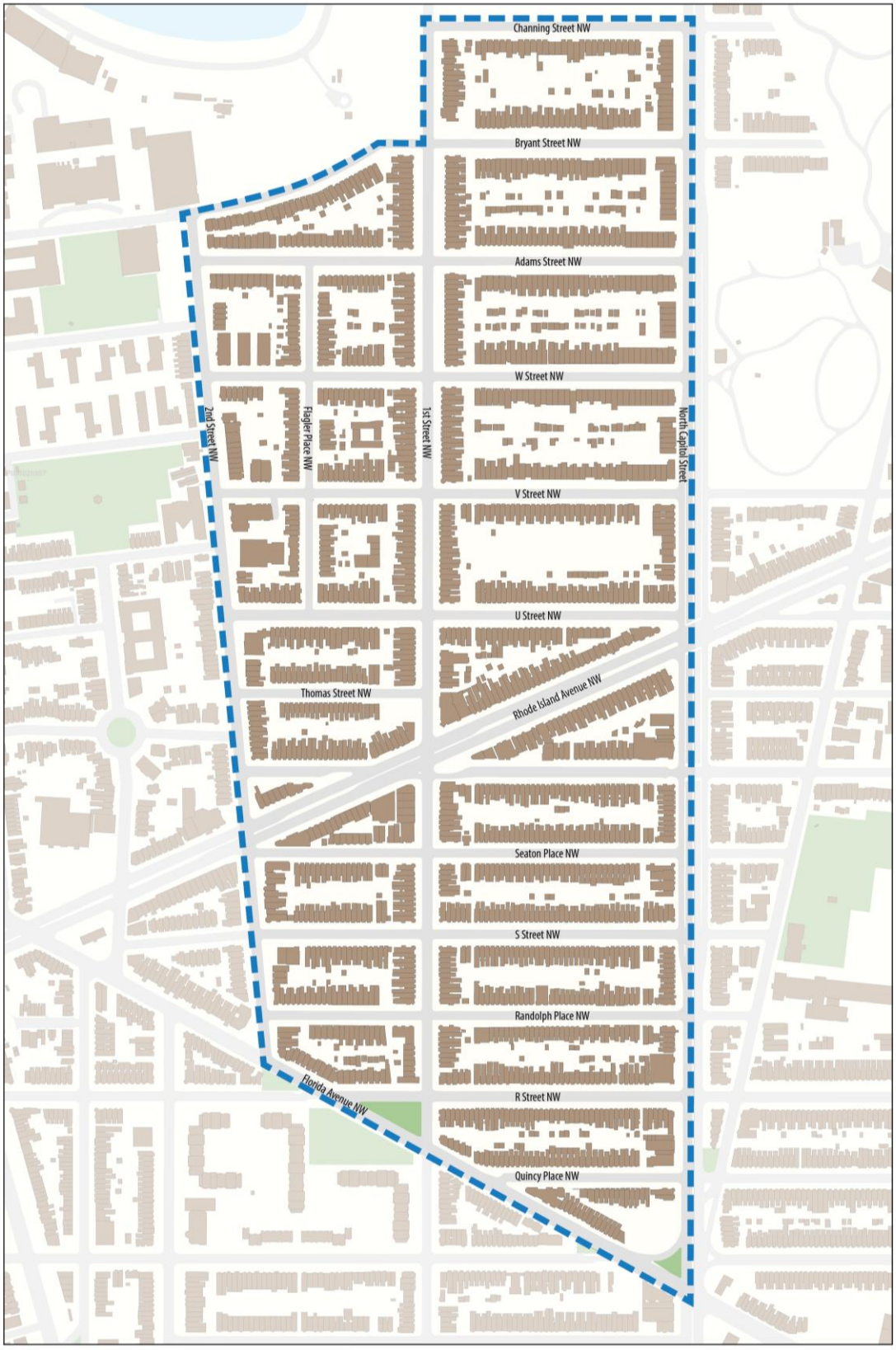
RF-1 is a zone for areas that are predominantly developed with attached row houses on small lots within which no more than 2 dwelling units are permitted. The maximum allowed height is 35 feet, with 60% lot occupancy for attached and semi-attached dwellings. MU-4 is a zone that permits commercial, institutional, and multiple dwelling unit residential mixed-use development. The maximum allowable height is 50 feet, with 60% lot occupancy (75% for projects that meet Inclusionary Zoning requirements).

Design Guidelines

In an effort to address community questions about the practical implications of designation on property owners, 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 the Historic Preservation if the historic district is designated. The guidelines were distributed to ANC 5E and posted to the Office of Planning website on June 1st.

Anyone unable to view the Guidelines on the Office of Planning website may request a copy by contacting the Historic Preservation Office at (202) 442-7600, or by email at historic.preservation@dc.gov

Boundaries of Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District



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