

Near West Side Conservation District

The Near West Side Conservation District qualifies for local designation under the following highlighted criteria found in Ordinance 95-20 of the Municipal Code (1): a, c (2): e , f and g.

(1) Historic:

- a. **Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation; or is associated with a person who played a significant role in local, state, or national history; or**
- b. Is the site of an historic event; or
- c. **Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the community.**

(2) Architecturally worthy:

- a. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or engineering type; or
- b. Is the work of a designer whose individual work has significantly influenced the development of the community; or
- c. Is the work of a designer of such prominence that such work gains its value from the designer's reputation; or
- d. Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or
- e. **Contains any architectural style, detail, or other element in danger of being lost; or**
- f. **Owing to its unique location or physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood or the city; or**
- g. **Exemplifies the built environment in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style.**

Case Background

The properties in the proposed Near West Side Conservation District make up the majority of the properties in the West Side National Register District—which has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1997. A Committee of neighborhood residents began working towards submitting an application for historic designation in 2018, however, based on feedback provided by property owners in the neighborhood during initial public meetings the Committee decided to hold additional public meetings and agreed to only submit an application if a referendum indicated that a majority of property owners supported historic designation. After a total of six public meetings, where information, questions, and opinions were exchanged between groups, a ballot was mailed to each property owner in the proposed district. This process was facilitated by the Committee and the City’s Historic Preservation Program Manager. The results of the referendum were overwhelmingly in favor of submitting an application for historic designation (72-48). A majority of returned ballots also indicated that a Conservation District was preferable to a Historic District.

Historic surveys and rating historic properties:

The City of Bloomington uses historic surveys that identify properties that may be worthy of historic designation. The survey rates properties as being “Non-Contributing”, “Contributing”, “Notable”, or “Outstanding”. A “Non-Contributing” rating may be given if the structure is less than fifty years old, has been heavily altered, or has been demolished leaving a vacant lot. The “Contributing” rating may be given if the property is at least 40 to 50 years old, is not heavily altered, or does not meet the criteria for an "Outstanding" or "Notable" rating. Such resources may be important to the density or continuity of the area's historic fabric, and the removal or alteration of contributing structures can have a detrimental impact on the area’s historic integrity. Contributing structures can be listed on the National Register only as part of an historic district. A “Notable” property means that the property does not merit the outstanding rating, but it is still above average in its importance. A “Notable” structure may be eligible for the National Register.

The following ratings were drawn from the resurvey of historic properties conducted by Bloomington Restorations Inc. in 2018. This is the most current and accurate data available on the inventory of historic structures within the city limits of Bloomington, IN.

There are 325 properties located within the proposed Near West Side Conservation District boundaries.

Properties listed as Outstanding on the historic survey (3):

- West Kirkwood Ave: 608.
- West 7th Street 930.
- West 8th Street 715.

Properties listed as Notable on the historic survey (14):

- West 6th Street: 502, 615, 621, 727, 917, 935, 1101, 1115, 1119, 1131, 1201.
- West 7th Street: 904.
- West Kirkwood Ave: 706.
- North Rogers Street: 221.

Properties listed as Contributing on the historic survey (219):

- West 6th Street: 502, 508, 514, 515, 520, 521, 600, 601, 609, 622, 626, 702, 703, 708, 709, 713, 722, 726, 800, 807, 808, 811, 814, 817,818, 822, 823, 831, 836, 837, 900, 903, 906, 911, 912, 916, 920,923, 924, 927, 930, 931, 934, 1001, 1002, 1004, 1005, 1009, 1012, 1013, 1016, 1021, 1025, 1026, 1029, 1030, 1035, 1036, 1100, 1102, 1105, 1107, 1110, 1114, 1115, 1119, 1122, 1124, 1125, 1127, 1128, 1130, 1131, 1201, 1206, 1211, 1217, 1218, 1220, 1221, 1224.

West 7th Street: 513, 523, 703, 707, 713, 720, 801, 802, 804, 809, 810, 813, 814, 817, 822, 823, 826, 827, 828, 830, 831, 835, 901, 902, 907, 914, 915, 922, 925, 1000, 1001, 1004, 1005, 1011, 1017, 1019, 1020, 1021, 1023, 1025, 1026, 1101, 1119, 1123, 1125, 1201, 1203, 1205, 1207, 1223.

West 8th Street: 520, 602, 608, 614, 710, 712, 714, 722, 723, 802, 807, 812, 823, 824, 915, 1101, 1007, 1022, 1109, 1120, 1131, 1201, 1205.

West 9th Street: 615, 709, 711, 723, 801, 809, 815, 821, 909, 1009, 1017.

West Kirkwood Ave: 504, 508, 520, 702, 714, 718-722, 726, 804, 812, 816, 820, 822826, 830, 834, 900, 916, 920, 924, 1004, 1008, 1012, 1020, 1022, 1026, 1030, 1100, 1112, 1114, 1116, 1124, 1200, 1208, 1212, 1218.

North Rogers Street: 215.

North Jackson Street: 116, 118, 419, 421.

North Fairview Street: 117, 309.

North Maple Street: 110, 112, 206, 209, 210, 212, 319, 321, 418.

North Waldron Street: 112.

North Elm Street: 111, 210.

North Pine Street: 215, 217.

North Adams Street: 220.

Properties listed as Non-Contributing on the historic survey (89):

West 6th Street: 712, 718, 721, 803, 826, 827, 830, 905, 1017, 1020, 1031, 1200, 1203, 1225.

West 7th Street: 500, 910, 914 ½, 922 ½, 931, 1231, 1010, 1014, 1022-1024, 1105, 1127, 1208, 1230, 1231.

West 8th Street: 320, 624, 811, 817, 900, 907, 908, 914, 919, 922, 825, 901, 1000, 1001, 1008, 1014, 1105, 1108, 1113, 1114, 1119, 1208, 1210.

West 9th Street: 609, 919, 703, 901, 915, 921, 1003, 1021.

West Kirkwood Ave: 600, 612, 620, 808, 914, 928, 930, 934, 1000, 1016, 1028, 1120, 1130, 1208 ½, 1222, 1226-1230.

North Rogers Street: 111, 207.

North Jackson Street: 117.

North Fairview Street: 404, 412, 434.

North Maple Street: 109.

North Waldron Street: 215.

North Elm Street: 206, 217.

North Oak Street: 405, 415, 420.

Historic Background: Criteria (1) A, C

A: This neighborhood plays a significant role in the economic development of the city of Bloomington because it developed adjacent to and concurrent with the industrial and commercial resources in the area, sparked by the mid-19th century arrival of the railroad and reaching its height with the national success of the Showers Brothers furniture company by the 1920s.

The growth of industry on the west side is directly linked to the growth of the Near West Side neighborhood, from a quiet rural area of grand estates (1850–1890) to a densely settled, bustling working class neighborhood (1890–1920). Bloomington’s economy was thriving at the turn of the century and the Near West Side, because it was adjacent to the railroad, went through a period of rapid growth. Some of the industrial and commercial development included: Dolan Tierman Stave Factory, Field Glove, Bloomington Basket Company, Nurre Mirror Company, Central Oolitic Stone Saw Mill, and Hoadley Stone Company. A number of buildings from businesses of this period are still standing, including the Johnson’s Creamery (400 W. 7th Street, 1913), Bloomington Wholesale Foods Warehouse (300 W. 7th Street, 1920), Bloomington Frosted Foods (211 S. Rogers Street, 1927), and several auto-related businesses reflecting the beginning of the automobile’s popularity in the 1920s. These establishments both served the community and attracted more workers to the neighborhood, thereby expanding this diverse working class neighborhood and helping the city to grow.

Although many business were located in the area, the Showers Brothers Company would become the biggest driver of Bloomington’s development on its west side. In 1884, following a fire at its earlier site on the city’s east side, Showers relocated to Morton Street beside the railroad. The history of the Showers Company is an important part of the heritage of Bloomington, a fact reflected in the location of our City Hall offices in restored Showers factory buildings. With the factory’s relocation on Morton Street, Showers employees formerly living near the earlier east side site began a gradual migration across town, where they became the homebuilders and residents of the new Near West Side neighborhood.

C: The development of the Near West Side is part of the social history of the community because it was a racially diverse, working class neighborhood since it was platted in the late nineteenth century. The Showers company corporate culture was unusual for its time and employed women and African Americans as well as white men when other industries did not. The company afforded its employees good jobs with excellent benefits including worker’s compensation, cultural events, and—most significantly for the development of housing on the Near West Side—home financing. Showers even established a bank “solely for the benefit of its employees.” This is reflected in the greatest period of the neighborhoods growth, from 1890 to 1925, which shows direct relationship between the relocation of the Showers Factory in 1884 and the consequent migration of blacks to the west side from other areas of ethnic settlement in Bloomington. Additionally, the establishment of other religious and civic buildings in the neighborhood such as the Banneker School and Bethel A.M.E. Church, utilized primarily by the black community, are indicative of this migration and serve as important markers for understanding black history in Bloomington.

Architectural Significance Criteria (2) E, F, G

E: The Near West Side presents a range of once common architectural styles that are now in serious danger of being lost through demolition or neglect. As Bloomington's largest collection of historic vernacular house types, the Near West Side includes multiple recognizable examples of shotgun, double pen, saddlebag, central passage, hall and parlor, and other traditional house forms that are becoming increasingly rare in Bloomington. For example, 523 W. 7th, one of the only known Central Passage house forms extant in the city, was slated for demolition but was saved by the Historic Preservation Commission. Because the Near West Side is the only core neighborhood in Bloomington that is not locally designated, this architecturally significant group of structures could easily succumb to development pressure in the future and be lost to history.

F: The platted subdivisions of the west side are characterized by relatively narrow city streets, densely sited houses, and a network of alleys running both east and west, and north and south. Limestone retaining walls, brick sidewalks and the mature trees which line the streets add much to the West Side's sense of place. The main thoroughfare, Kirkwood, retains its residential character with an increasing number of businesses in converted houses. The smaller homes that constitute the majority of housing stock in the Near West Side neighborhood represent historic forms and styles that provide a visual link back to the early twentieth century.

G: Most of the houses in the Near West Side were built in the years shortly before and after the turn of the 20th century as working class housing. Before the advent of the railroad, the west side was sparsely settled, with gentleman farms and their associated grand houses, mostly of the I-house architectural type. Examples include the Cochran–Helton–Lindley House (504 N. Rogers Street, 1850), the Elias Abel House (317 N. Fairview, c. 1850), and the Hendrix House (726 W. 6 th Street, c. 1875). Closer to the turn of the century, as the downtown area developed, several prosperous merchants built large Victorian homes in the Near West Side area, many with Queen Anne detailing. Examples include the Griffin House (621 W. 7 th Street, c. 1890, and the Flanigan House (714 W. 7th Street, c. 1895), both located in the Fairview Historic District, which our proposed district surrounds.

With the coming of the railroad and the subsequent industrialization of the area, the west side's open spaces were subdivided and platted into small lots to house the new working class residents drawn to the neighborhood by the many suddenly available employment opportunities. Small single-story wood-frame houses soon became the majority in the neighborhood, and continue to characterize the neighborhood as it exists today. Built by and for the common working people of Bloomington, most of these houses are modest. These residences were built by local carpenters, and many homeowners assisted in the construction of their own homes.

The most distinctive architectural style of these workers' homes is the gabled ell, although pyramidal roof, foursquare, bungalow, and Victorian house forms are also common. Many of these homes have had few modifications over the years so original details abound such as decorative rafter tails and attic vents, limestone foundations and retaining walls, and late 19th century windows, doors, and porches. The neighborhood has remained relatively intact for the past century and still conveys the distinct architectural character from their period of construction.

Sample Styles of Houses Found in the District

- Double Pen – common in 19th century.
- Gabled-ell – common between 1890 and 1910.
- California Bungalow – common between 1910s and 1939.
- Shotgun – common between the mid-1800's and 1930.
- Pyramid Roof Cottage – common between 1900 and 1930
- Queen Anne – common between the mid to late 19th century

Sample Photographs of Historic Resources within the Proposed District



Graves-Morrison House — 608 W. Kirkwood Avenue — Outstanding
Architectural Style: Queen Anne, c. 1895



715 W. Eighth Street — Outstanding
Architectural Style: Gabled ell with Queen Anne detailing, c. 1895



621 W. 6th Street — Notable
Architectural Style: Pyramidal roof with bay, c. 1895



904 W. 7th Street — Notable
Architectural Style: Shotgun house



Old Boarding House — 221 N. Rogers Street — Notable
Architectural Style: I-house, c. 1850



923 W. 6th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: Double Pen, c. 1880



521 W. 6th St — Contributing
Architectural Style: Central Passage, c. 1890



513 W. 7th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: Double Pen, c. 1900



722 W. 6th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: California Bungalow, c. 1925



831 W. 7th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: Saddlebag, c. 1900



210 N. Elm Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: American Foursquare, c. 1920



722 W. 8th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: T-plan Cottage, c. 1905; restored c. 2000



Porter–Butler House, Historic Parsonage of the Second Baptist Church
615 W. 9th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: Craftsman Bungalow, c. 1920; relocated and restored in early 2000s



Historic home of T. C. Johnson, first principal of Banneker School
901 W. 7th St — Contributing
Architectural Style: Gabled Ell, c. 1900



Eagleson–Bridgwaters family home
915 W. 7th Street — Contributing
Architectural Style: Pyramidal Roof, c. 1900

Staff Recommendation: Meets Criteria for Designation. Forward to Common Council.

Staff recommends that the Near West Side Conservation District be designated as a local conservation district. After careful consideration of the application and review of the Historic District Criteria as found in Ordinance 95-20 of the Municipal Code, staff finds that the property not only meets, but exceeds the minimum criteria listed in the code.

The district meets Criteria 1(a) because of its significant value as part of development of the city of Bloomington because it served as worker housing for people employed in the commercial and industrial businesses on the west side of town.

The district meets Criteria 1(c) because it is linked to the progressive hiring policy of the Showers Furniture Factory which gave working class members of the community the opportunity to earn a living wage and establish homes in the Near West Side neighborhood. The district also protects many civic, religious, and residential structures that are important markers for understanding and celebrating black history in Bloomington.

The property meets Criteria 2(e) because protects a range of historic architectural forms and styles that are now in serious danger of being lost through demolition or neglect. As Bloomington's largest collection of historic vernacular house types, the Near West Side includes multiple recognizable examples of shotgun, double pen, saddlebag, central passage, hall and parlor, and other traditional house forms that are becoming increasingly rare in the city.

The property meets Criteria 2(f) because the narrow city streets, densely sited houses, historic architectural forms and styles, network of alleys, limestone retaining walls, brick sidewalks and mature trees all coalesce to form a familiar visual pattern that communicates the district's early twentieth century origins.

The property meets Criteria 2(g) because the built environment of the district, which includes the streetscape and buildings, maintains high integrity and still conveys the distinct architectural character from their period of construction.