
DESIGNATION
Of the District of Columbia

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
In 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

The Historic Preservation Review Board having held a public hearing on July 26, 2018 on an application for historic district designation of Bloomingdale, designated the district as the Bloomingdale Historic District, to be entered into the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and recommended that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance with a period of significance of 1891 through 1948.

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 display high-quality design and craftsmanship. Located immediately beyond the city's original boundary at Florida Avenue, its residential development on farmland was spurred by the arrival of a nearby streetcar line in 1888 and its proximity to existing neighborhoods. Bloomingdale's development was undertaken by a small group of speculative developers and builders whose large stock of substantial rowhouses attracted middle-class residents during a major building boom in the city's development history. Architecturally, Bloomingdale is a primer on the stylistic transition of the city's rowhouses from the fanciful, late-Victorian buildings of the early 1890s to statelier Edwardian ones after 1900, and the more modest rowhouse forms of the 1910s.

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

The 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." Bloomingdale played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement, as the site of a number of legal challenges to racially restrictive covenants imposed by developers and homeowners. It 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.” It represents the transformation of Washington County from rural to suburban as the District implemented a new street plan beyond 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 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 between 1891 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 elements—projecting bays, turrets and rooftop ornaments at the Victorian houses, and the front porches and dormer windows at the post-Victorian ones—give the urban neighborhood its human scale and exceptionally rich visual quality.

This collection of rowhouses also offers a visual lesson in the transition of the rowhouse form from the Victorian era to World War I. Bloomingdale’s evolution provides excellent examples of some of the work 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, “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 erected his own home 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 Board designated the Bloomingdale Historic District with a period of significance from 1891, when the first rowhouses were constructed in the neighborhood, to 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled racial covenants Constitutionally unenforceable. The end date is a watershed moment that set Bloomingdale up for a major shift in its racial composition, contributing to the rich social history of the neighborhood. An African American community that had established itself in Bloomingdale and the 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. Just twelve years later, 99 percent of Bloomingdale residents were African American.

Boundaries

The Bloomingdale Historic District extends 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 28 city squares, plus two federal reservations (triangle parks) on Florida Avenue. The boundaries generally align with those of the residential subdivisions that made up Bloomingdale, one of which follows the property lines of the nineteenth-century Bloomingdale farm that gave the neighborhood its name. The Board recommended that the two squares between Florida and Rhode Island avenues and 2nd and 3rd Streets be considered for future inclusion in either the LeDroit Park or Bloomingdale historic districts.

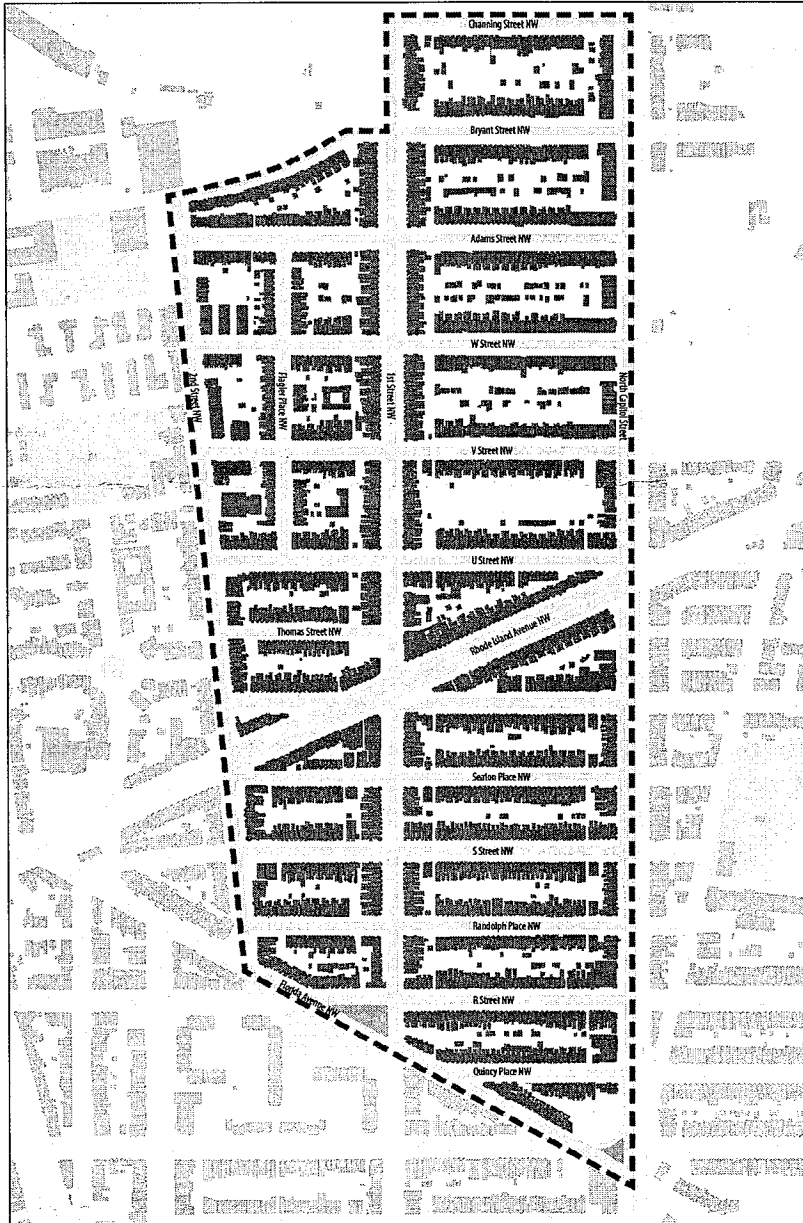
Contributing Status and Integrity

The boundaries encompass 1,696 primary buildings and 183 secondary buildings (accessory buildings at the rear of lots). Of the 1,696 primary buildings, 1,688 are considered to contribute to the character of the historic district, and eight are considered “non-contributing.” As this contributing count indicates, Bloomingdale is remarkably intact. Long, uninterrupted rows of attached rowhouses provide highly cohesive streetscapes representing the period 1891 to 1916, when the majority of the houses were constructed. The buildings share uniform building setbacks and heights, high-quality building materials and craftsmanship, and coherent forms and features, yet display stylistic variety.

In addition to some new construction (seven of the eight “non-contributing” buildings postdate the period of significance), the neighborhood has experienced some alteration over time, with additions, altered front-yard spaces, and replacements such as windows and doors. Until recently, these alterations were generally modest in number and scale, and had little impact on the historic character of the neighborhood. But the number and scale of alterations in the neighborhood has increased, with a number of large, rooftop and rear additions (“pop-ups” and “pop-backs”) that have compromised the visual integrity of individual buildings or rows. A total of 78 rooftop additions were documented by the Historic Preservation Office. Thirty-five of these are sizeable additions that rise above the building roofline without an attempt toward compatible design or materials. Still, this represents just two percent of Bloomingdale’s building stock. As an entity, the historic district remains overwhelmingly intact, with a high degree of physical and historic integrity.

In a resolution opposing designation, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5E averred that the neighborhood lacks sufficient historic integrity because of the extent of alteration. The Board indicated that, despite these mostly recent, the historic district remains overwhelmingly intact. In addition to meeting the stated criteria of significance, the Board expressly determined that the Bloomingdale Historic District possesses sufficient integrity to convey, represent, or contain the values for which it has been judged significant, and that sufficient time has passed to permit professional evaluation of the district in its historical context. The Board acknowledged and supported the Commission’s point that the historic district designation process can be improved upon, with the participation of all parties. The Board also recognized that, in this case, there was considerable and effective public outreach. To the ANC’s point that designation could instead be limited to a few of the neighborhood’s most important buildings, the Board responded that historic district designation more fully tells the story of the neighborhood’s particular history and more appropriately recognizes the quality and cohesiveness of its buildings as a collection.

Boundaries of Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District



May 2018

Marnique Heath
Chairman, D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board