

# Meet a DC Historic District: Bloomingdale

Scott Roberts, Bloomingdale Historic District

# The Bloomingdale Historic District + more

- Why would a community want to become a historic district?
- Zoning vs. historic districts?
- What is the process of becoming a DC historic district?
- What steps did Bloomingdale take to become a DC historic district?
- Bloomingdale Historic District
- DC Historic Districts Coalition (HDC)
- Links
- Q & A

# Why would a community want to become a historic district?

- A historic district that is aesthetically cohesive and well promoted can be a community's most important attraction. A historic district ensures that major renovations are compatible with established design guidelines.
- Major changes to the exterior of a property undergo a design review by the assigned HPO staff reviewer, or if deemed, by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB).
- There is perhaps a bit of confusion over DC historic districts. Let's try to address some basic questions:
  1. Can a given property owner opt out of being in a designated historic district? No.
  2. Does the historic district designation ever expire? No.
  3. Is DC Council legislation or DC mayoral support required for the creation of a historic district designation? No.
  4. Are there any other options besides historic district designation available in DC? No.
  5. Are historic districts considered by some a "heavy hammer?" Yes.

# Zoning vs. historic district: what's the difference?

**Zoning:** property use

**Historic district:** property design

- Zoning regulations govern property use. Historic district designation does not.
- Zoning regulations do not govern design. Historic district designation does.
- Can't zoning address ugly additions with incompatible materials, etc.? No.
- Aggressive zoning regulations are not a substitute for historic district designation.
- DC Council Chair Phil Mendelson has commented in the past that the only tool left in the toolbox that can “protect neighborhood aesthetics” is neighborhood historic district designation. *It is admittedly a heavy hammer.*

# What is the process of becoming a DC historic district?



- Sponsorship of a historic district nomination by a recognized organization is required to submit the historic district nomination to the DC Office of Planning.
- The organization either performs its own research and community outreach *or* hires an external person or firm to perform the historic district research and optionally, perform the community outreach
- The organization or external person/firm performs community outreach, including public meetings and ANC meetings
- Support is solicited from the ANC and other neighborhood groups
- A nomination is filed with the DC Historic Preservation Office
- The case is placed on the HPRB agenda
- A HPO staff report is produced prior to HPRB hearing
- The HPRB hearing is held, where testimony in support & opposition is shared and HPRB members deliberate
- The HPRB members vote at the end of the hearing
- HPRB upvote decision appears in the DC Register

# Process that Bloomingdale followed

NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018  
 United States Department of the Interior  
 National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**  
 Historic name: Bloomingdale Historic District  
 Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_  
 N/A  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**  
 Street & number: Bounded by Florida Avenue on the south, Channing and Bryant streets on the north, North Capitol Street on the east, and 2nd Street on the west  
 City or town: Washington State: DC County: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
 As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
 I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
 In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  
   national    statewide X local  
 Applicable National Register Criteria:  
X A X B X C    D

Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property <u>  </u> meets <u>  </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title:	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

- A group of neighbors got together in 2017 and formed a coalition called the “Bloomingdale Historic Designation Coalition” for the purpose of establishing the Bloomingdale Historic District
- The Coalition interviewed local historic preservation firms and hired Prologue DC to perform the required research, to produce a report and perform community engagement.
- Three public community presentations were provided by Prologue DC to educate Bloomingdale about neighborhood districts and neighborhood historic designation.
- The DC Office of Planning Historic Preservation Office (HPO) came out to present to the community.
- DC Preservation League nominated the historic district on behalf of the Bloomingdale Historic Designation Coalition.
- The Bloomingdale Civic Association voted in support, while the ANC did not.
- The HPO produced its staff report in support of the historic district.
- The HPRB designated the historic district in July 2018 for meeting criteria for events, history, architecture & urbanism, artistry and work of a master.
- The designation subsequently appeared in the DC Register in August 2018, which announced that the Bloomingdale Historic District would be effective in September 2018.

# HPRB Action on the Bloomingdale Historic District nomination in 2018 > *unanimous vote*

## Proposed Bloomingdale Historic District, Case 17-17.

After close review of the application and supporting materials, the Historic Preservation Review Board voted to designate the Bloomingdale Historic District to be entered into the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and to forward the nomination, with technical revisions, to the National Register of Historic Places. The Board addressed the concerns voiced by the ANC in its vote to oppose the designation. In particular, the Board recognized that the historic district designation process needs improvement, but that in this case, the public outreach was implemented effectively, efficiently and in conformance with current procedures. The Board also found that historic district designation versus landmark designations more fully tells the story of the neighborhood's history and more appropriately recognizes the quality architecture. Finally, the Board found that despite the recent alterations to buildings in Bloomingdale, the historic district is overwhelmingly intact and retains its integrity. Vote: 8-0.

# Bloomingdale Historic District

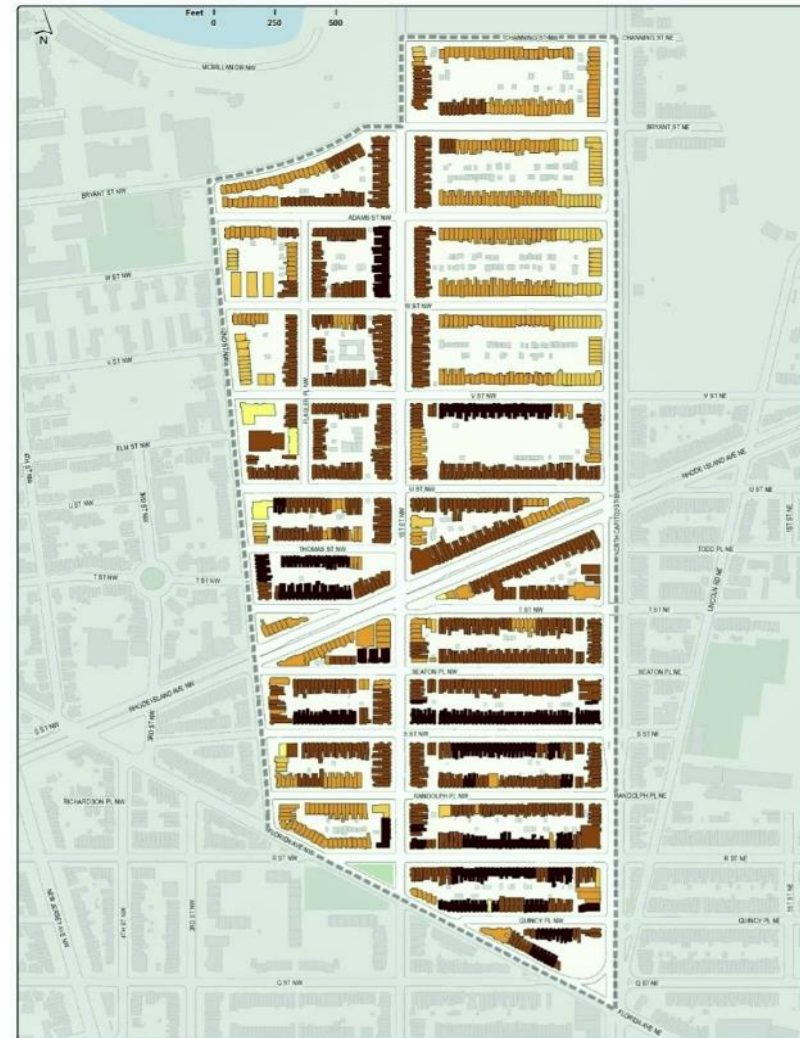


# Bloomington Historic District map

Bounded by Channing Street NW to the north; North Capital Street to the east; Florida Avenue NW to the south; and 2nd Street NW to the west.

Bordering the LeDroit Park Historic District.

Bloomington Historic District Boundary Map



Year of Construction	
1890 - 1899	Dark Brown
1900 - 1906	Medium Brown
1907 - 1916	Light Brown
1917 - 1954	Yellow
1955 - 2010	Light Green

Bloomington



This project has been funded in part by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Historic Preservation Fund grant funds, administered by the District of Columbia's Historic Preservation Office.

# Bloomingdale history - 1

Cohesive rowhouse neighborhood

Conformance with the Permanent Highway Plan of 1893

Key role in the struggle to abolish racially restrictive housing covenants in DC and the nation



- The Bloomingdale Historic District is a group of 1,692 contributing resources bounded by Channing Street to the north; North Capital Street to the east; Florida Avenue to the south; and 2nd Street to the west.
- Bloomingdale is significant for its status as one of DC's largest cohesive row house neighborhoods. It boasts a large stock of row houses of high-quality design and materials, houses intended to attract stable middle-class residents. The size and quality of the architecture illustrate that the success of speculative development for DC's rising middle class was all but assured during the years in which the neighborhood was built.
- Bloomingdale also demonstrates the architectural transition of DC's row houses away from fanciful three-story Victorian buildings of the early 1890s to the more regular, two-story, front-porch row houses of the 1910s. Bloomingdale is also one of the first large developments in DC laid out in conformance with the Permanent Highway Plan of 1893, which standardized the layout of new subdivisions beyond the city's original boundaries.
- These factors, along with Bloomingdale's prominent role in the struggle to abolish racially restrictive housing covenants in the District and nation from 1907-1948, make the neighborhood significant. The Bloomingdale Historic District's period of significance is 1892-1948.

# Bloomingdale history - 2

Hurd v Hodge, 1948



- Bloomingdale is associated with events related to racially restrictive covenants, specifically, the large number of legal challenges to the racially restrictive covenants that were the primary means by which developers and residents attempted to keep the neighborhood segregated. Bloomingdale is associated with the two DC cases that advanced to the Supreme Court and were part of the landmark 1948 decision that ruled racially restrictive covenants unenforceable.

- Bloomingdale played a major role in the civil rights history of DC and the United States. A number of Bloomingdale's developers used racially restrictive covenants. These prohibited sale or rental to African Americans in deeds for lots and houses.

- Bloomingdale was blanketed with racial covenants, but from the start of development was home to African American residents.

- By 1907, white residents organized to enforce racial covenants in deeds.

- By 1913, the local citizens association passed a resolution opposing real estate sales to African Americans.

# Bloomingdale history - 3

Charles Hamilton Houston



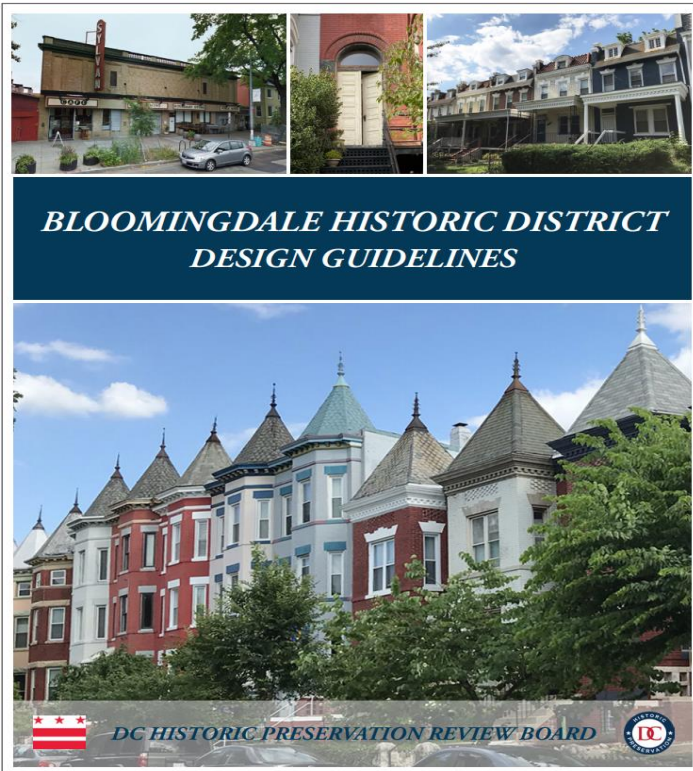
- Bloomingdale's racial covenants by agreement, combined with those placed by developers, restricted nearly all housing between First and North Capitol streets from R Street to Channing Street.
- Of the 43 legal challenges to racially restrictive covenants in DC documented to date, almost half were associated with Bloomingdale.
- Much more!

# Bloomingtondale history – famous residents



- Bloomingtondale was home to a number of famous leaders, including several who worked to break down racial barriers in the neighborhood. In 1941, NAACP attorney Charles Hamilton Houston partnered with real estate broker and lawyer Raphael Urciolo in an attempt to void racial covenants on Adams Street and to sell houses to African Americans. After the courts upheld the covenants, Houston and Urciolo shifted their focus to Bryant Street, where two important legal cases arose. In suits brought against an African American couple, the Hurds, and Urciolo by Frederic and Lena Hodge of 136 Bryant Street, the District Court upheld the covenants on all four properties.
- When a consolidated appeal of Hurd v. Hodge and Urciolo v. Hodge was struck down, appellate court Judge Henry White Edgerton dissented, calling racial covenants unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed Edgerton's dissent. Following testimony by Houston and NAACP attorneys, the Supreme Court held that enforcing racial covenants violated the 14th amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866.
- American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers in 1902-1917
- Senator Edward Brooke, the first African American elected to Congress in the 20th century.

# Bloomingdale Historic District design guidelines



## What is the purpose of historic district design guidelines?

- In an historic district, work requiring a DC building permit, such as exterior alterations, new construction, demolition, and subdivisions, is subject to a design review process under the DC historic preservation law. The purpose of the law is to ensure that such work preserves important character-defining features of historic properties and is compatible with the character of the historic district.
- These guidelines supplement the policies established by the city's preservation law, regulations and standards. In instances where policies within these district guidelines may differ from city-wide policies, the historic district guidelines shall take precedence.
- These guidelines seek to provide flexibility in the application of design principles in a manner appropriate to the neighborhood and its history. Their focus is on maintaining the physical features that are most fundamental to the community's character while allowing substantial freedom in the treatment of less-significant features.

# Historic District design guidelines - - process



- Note that DC historic district design guidelines are voted on separately by the HPRB, usually on the HPRB consent calendar.
- The HPO staff reviewers refer to the historic district design guidelines when evaluating proposed work.
- “These guidelines *supplement* the policies established by the city’s preservation law, regulations and standards”

# DC Historic Districts Coalition (HDC)

**HISTORIC  
DISTRICTS  
COALITION**

- The Historic Districts Coalition is an informal alliance of organizations and individuals representing DC's historic districts -- those that have been designated under the provisions of the Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978 (D.C. Public Law 2-144) -- as well as others interested in historic preservation, including residents of undesignated neighborhoods and representatives of neighborhood organizations, historic preservation organizations, and preservation-related businesses.
- The HDC serves as a grassroots movement to support historic preservation as a priority.
- The HDC primarily engages in advocacy and the fostering of community among DC historic districts.
- The HDC is the process of being reconstituted. Look forward to hearing more about the HDC in the future!



# Links

- DC Office of Planning Historic Preservation Office: <https://planning.dc.gov/page/historic-preservation-office>
- Historic Preservation Office historic homeowner grant program (for DC historic districts that are eligible to participate): <https://planning.dc.gov/service/historic-homeowner-grant-program>
- List of DC historic districts eligible to participate in the HPO historic homeowner grant program: <https://planning.dc.gov/node/1467171>
- Building permits for historic property: <https://planning.dc.gov/node/1180405>
- “Is my property historic?”: <https://propertyquest.dc.gov/>
- “Criteria for Designating Historic Properties in the District of Columbia”
  - [https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/page\\_content/attachments/Criteria%20for%20Designating%20Historic%20Properties%20in%20the%20District%20of%20Columbia.pdf](https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/page_content/attachments/Criteria%20for%20Designating%20Historic%20Properties%20in%20the%20District%20of%20Columbia.pdf)
- DC historic districts
  - <https://planning.dc.gov/node/623272>
- List of pending historic district nominations
  - <https://planning.dc.gov/node/917472>
- Bloomingdale Historic District nomination
  - <https://planning.dc.gov/node/1346706>
- DC Preservation League: Bloomingdale Historic District
  - [https://www.dcpreservation.org/current\\_issues/bloomingdale-historic-district/](https://www.dcpreservation.org/current_issues/bloomingdale-historic-district/)
- DC Historic Districts Coalition
  - <https://www.dcpreservation.org/historic-districts-coalition/>

# Q & A

