



Legislation Text

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City Council Meeting Date: October 10, 2017

To: Mayor and City Council
City Administrator

From: Scott Tempel, City Planner

Presentation on expanding the Northfield Historic District

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council hears a presentation on the Northfield Historic District.

Summary Report:

The City Council held a public hearing on June 6, 2017, to hear testimony on the ordinance amending the historic district. Council members raised some questions about the process which will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

Why do the assessment now?

The district has not been comprehensively reevaluated or updated since its creation in 1978-79 and comprehensive final inventory forms do not exist for all of the properties in the district. Standards for historical evaluation have changed since the initial survey and there are new standardized inventory forms. The determination of contributing and non-contributing status was not explained in much detail in the 1979 nomination, and many changes have taken place during the past decades. Additionally, more properties are now more than 50 years old and are potentially eligible for inclusion in the district. By properly inventorying the area, the historic district boundary can be more clearly defined.

What are the benefits of a Historic District?

There are many benefits of having a historic district. Some in-depth analysis is provided in the attachments. In general, benefits of the district include:

- Preservation and recognition of community heritage
- Increased property values and sales
- Increased tourism opportunities
- Environmental and economic benefits from conservation and preservation
- Community identity and local pride
- Tax credits available for building rehabilitation

Northfield has benefitted greatly from the past efforts of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). While it is private investment that has rehabilitated and restored our downtown, the HPC has provided the guidance to help create the uniform feel of the district. The historic integrity of downtown Northfield had eroded prior to establishing the Northfield Historic District, and the HPC has provided ongoing leadership to maintain and

improve the District.



What are the impacts to district property owners?

In-district owners need to get a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the HPC for any exterior changes to buildings. Improvements must follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These standards are actually quite flexible. The Land Development Code (LDC) C1 zone district standards still apply to properties within the district, but building appearance is dictated by the Standards for Rehabilitation, not the prescriptive zoning standards applied to the rest of the C1 zone. Sign permits for properties within the district are also reviewed by the HPC.

What is the role of the HPC?

The HPC's duties as defined in the LDC are to designate historic properties, advise on rehabilitation of district properties, maintain historic records, and educate the public on preservation and community heritage. The HPC has the flexibility to operate by sub-committee, so sign permits can be issued in a matter of days. HPC review can add review time to rehabilitation projects if the applicant is not following national standards.

Armory property

The Minnesota Army National Guard Armory study in 2004 did not recommend National Register eligibility related to statewide military significance. The building itself qualifies for local designation based on architectural context. Local historical significance would need to be further studied. The garage addition that now houses Imminent Brewing is already eligible for historic status based on age and relationship to the Armory building.

Representatives from the Armory property testified at the public hearing with concerns about how the property might be impacted by Local Historic District designation. Specific concerns included handicap accessibility and solar installations. Handicapped accessibility changes are dictated by the Building Code, not the HPC. Solar panels are regulated by the LDC and would not be prohibited nor blocked by the HPC. Solar installations on historic buildings do, however, require a conditional use permit from the City Council. The Imminent Brewing project was already reviewed by the HPC without any recommended changes.

Background:

In February of 2015, the HPC applied for grant funds from the State Historic Society to update the survey of

the Northfield Historic District. The grant request was to update survey information for all buildings in the Historic District and to evaluate the buildings in the adjacent commercial area to see if others could be included in the district or if an additional district could be created.

The State Historic Society awarded a \$12,000 Certified Local Government (CLG) grant to the City of Northfield in 2015. The total estimated project cost was \$20,000, so the HPC applied for an additional \$8,000 from the Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage Legacy Grant program. The HPC was not successful with this application, so the HPC requested additional funds from the General Fund. At the December 8, 2015 City Council meeting, the City Council approved the use of \$8,000 from the Community Development Department's Planning Division budget for 2016 in order to move the project forward.

A request for proposals (RFP) for consultant services was issued on January 6, 2016 and five proposals were received. The proposals were reviewed by a subcommittee of the HPC and the contract was awarded to Landscape Research in February of 2016. Landscape Research began the survey work in March of 2016. The survey work continued throughout the summer of 2016 and the consultant provided several updates to the HPC. The consultants completed the survey at the end of 2016 and provided a final report at the March 2017 HPC meeting.

The HPC reviewed the survey forms and the final report. They agreed to the recommended additions and boundary changes, except they decided the Northfield Library should remain within the district. While the consultants made their recommendation based on the most recent standards, the HPC recognized that both additions went through review by the HPC and were approved based on adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's standards and their interpretation at the time. The HPC felt it would be disingenuous to remove the library from the district and recommends keeping it in the district as a non-contributing structure. The HPC received no public comment during the review process.

The Planning Commission (PC) reviewed the HPC proposal at its May 2017 meeting and recommended approval to the City Council. The PC agreed the library should remain in the Historic District, as it both benefits and adds value to the district. The PC also recommended a change in the proposed district boundary to include more of the park property adjacent to Bridge Square. The PC received no public comment during their review process.

This project followed guidelines established by the Secretary of the Interior for preservation planning and the Guidelines for History/Architecture Projects in Minnesota provided by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Survey work by the consultant consisted of researching the history of each building, photography, evaluation of historic significance, and completion of a new inventory form. The survey was completed in July, 2016 and submitted to SHPO. SHPO accepted the report and its recommendations.

The report provides the following information on the Northfield Historic context:

The Northfield Commercial Historic District's original 65 properties include some of the earliest portions of the Ames Mill (1856), the Northfield Lyceum (1857), the YMCA (1885), the Northfield Public Library (1910), and the Post Office (1936). Masonry commercial structures dating from 1868-1910 comprise the primary building types.

The densely-built streetscape is comprised of buildings designed to house retail and office as well as artisan and manufacturing use. There are seven remaining "anchor" buildings on key Division Street corners, each distinguished by its bulk, architectural treatment, and prominent roofline. The corner turret

of the Central Block (1893) commands a view of the entire district including the Cannon River and mill dam. The Central Block was exemplary of the mixed-use commercial building, with retail shops, banks and offices at the ground level, offices and apartments or manufacturing space at the second level, and a meeting hall used by fraternal and other groups at the top level.

Three periods of Northfield's growth are represented in the historic district. The earliest, from 1856 to 1880, resulted in a compact downtown focused on Bridge Square on both sides of the river and along Division Street between 2nd and 5th Streets. Many frame and a few stone and brick Italianate commercial structures were based on the diagram of retail and service shops on the first floor with offices, apartments and sometimes shops and manufacturing space above. Significant survivors are the Bjoraker Building (1870), which retains its façade of massive limestone piers, the limestone Scriver Building (1868) at the corner of Bridge Square, and the limestone and brick Scofield Building (1878), an important early corner anchor for Division Street. A total of 19 buildings survive from this period.

Downtown Northfield took on much of its current configuration from 1880-1900. A total of 29 buildings remain from this period, including the Nutting (First National Bank), Central, Holland, and McClaughry blocks, reflecting Victorian Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Neo-Classical influenced styles. The infill along each block is typically a retail storefront with upper-level offices or apartments. Wood and metal cornices with elaborate window framing, cast-iron storefronts, and a lively array of overhanging signs enriched the uniform setback and continuous street wall. Canvas awnings obscured much of the storefront detail, which typically relied on a recessed entry between glazed storefronts and transoms.

Analysis:

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), is the official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. A property can be significant at the local, state, or national level. The criteria are:

- Criterion A-association with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- Criterion B-association with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- Criterion C-embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; representation of the work of a master; possession of high artistic values; or representation of a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- Criterion D-potential to yield information important to prehistory or history.

The survey of the 38 properties located outside the Northfield Commercial Historic District (NHRP) suggests only the Northfield Armory may be potentially eligible for individual listing on the NHRP and evaluation will require research demonstrating the building's significance to the local community within the institutional context. Only three other properties possess enough significance or integrity to recommend their addition to the district. Two of the three are the two retail buildings immediately north of the Armory. On the west side of the river, the small stone-faced building (1940) at 107 W. 3rd Street, behind Plummer Corner at 300 Water Street, is also recommended for inclusion within the historic district.

The consultant found the Northfield Library has been modified to the extent where the original building lacks historic integrity and believes it is no longer contributing to the district, according to current standards. However, after discussion at its last meeting, the HPC is recommending the library remain in the district. The

HPC believes it would be disingenuous to remove the library from the district considering both additions to the library received HPC approval and were confirmed to have followed the Secretary of Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation. The Library Director was consulted and also feels the facility should remain in the district as it adds value to the brand and connects the library to the historic downtown. The PC agreed with the HPC's review to keep the Library included in the district as well.

The analysis language from the inventory forms is provided below:

515 Division St. S. (Kinship Collective) - Significance and Evaluation

This building was not included in the Northfield Commercial Historic District (1979). It was evaluated using National Register of Historic Places criteria (National Register Bulletin 15). Under Criterion A, building construction falls within the Northfield "Commerce, 1856-1945" historic context timeframe during a decade when there was only a small amount of new commercial construction in the city. The building is a well-conserved example of a stone-clad retail or office structure, which employed regionally-sourced masonry, and the exterior retains good historic integrity. Under Criterion C, it does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values. Based on its inclusion within the district's period of significance and its exterior integrity, the building is recommended as contributing to the Northfield Commercial Historic District.

517 Division St. S. (Willie's Shoes) - Significance and Evaluation

This building was not included in the Northfield Commercial Historic District (1979). It was evaluated using National Register of Historic Places criteria (National Register Bulletin 15). Under Criterion A, related to the building's contribution to early twentieth-century downtown development, construction falls within the Northfield "Commerce, 1856-1945" historic context timeframe during a decade when there was only a small amount of new commercial construction in the city. 517 Division Street is typical of simple brick-veneer retail or office structures added to the Northfield downtown area. Like their predecessors, these buildings supplied retail or office space at the first floor and living quarters at the second. The upper story retains good historic integrity, but primarily because of the alteration of stucco cladding the ground level integrity is fair. The historic cast-iron corner column remains, and the angled treatment of the entry is intact. Under Criterion C, it does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values. The building is recommended as contributing to the Northfield Commercial Historic District.

519 Division St. S., Northfield Armory - Significance and Evaluation

The Northfield Armory was not included in the Northfield Commercial Historic District (1979). In 2004 the property was evaluated as part of a Minnesota Army National Guard Armory study that did not recommend NRHP eligibility related to statewide military significance; it was evaluated with the context "Early Period Armories in Minnesota, 1911-1917," which did note its excellent integrity (Blythe 2004). The evaluation, however, did not fully address potential local significance. In 2016 it had preliminary evaluation for local significance using National Register of Historic Places criteria (National Register Bulletin 15). Under Criterion A, building construction falls within the Northfield "Public Institutions, 1857-1945" historic context and timeframe. The current evaluation recommends a period of significance for local significance as 1915 through the National Register 50-year cut-off date of 1966. The building retains excellent historic integrity and is recommended as potentially contributing to the Northfield Commercial Historic District. Further study and local context development is recommended.

107 3rd St. E. (Quinnell Insurance)- Significance and Evaluation

This building was not included in the Northfield Commercial Historic District (1979). It was evaluated using

National Register of Historic Places criteria (National Register Bulletin 15). Under Criterion A, building construction falls within the Northfield “Commerce, 1856-1945” historic context timeframe during a decade when there was only a small amount of new construction in the city but when post-war growth was anticipated. This building is a well conserved example of a stone-clad retail or office structure which employed regionally-sourced masonry with a modern appearance and the exterior retains good historic integrity. Under Criterion C, it does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values. The building is recommended as contributing to the Northfield Commercial Historic District.

210 Washington St. S., Northfield Library

This building is primarily associated with the second period of Northfield’s community development, from ca. 1900 to 1945, when the city’s downtown achieved much of its present form. The building is associated with the Northfield historic context, “Public Institutions and Improvements, 1857-1945 (Northfield Preservation Plan, 1992).

This property was listed on the NRHP in 1979 as contributing to the Northfield Commercial Historic District. Subsequent remodeling has had a significant impact on the historic building and the Washington Street elevation retains poor integrity, although conservation of the E. 3rd Street elevation results in fair to good integrity when seen from Division Street and the surrounding historic district. Overall, however, the building does not retain enough integrity to remain contributing to the district.

This action is for local historic district designation only. Local designation provides stronger protection for historic properties than National Register listing. If the City desires to update the National Register District, it will require a separate process involving approval by the National Park Service. Staff is suggesting all parcels in the district receive official designation as a local Heritage Preservation Site.

Boundary change:

In addition to adding and deleting properties, it is recommended the district boundary be amended to improve accuracy. The changes recommended on the attached map reflect boundary edits to match the district with parcel lines. The official action for the boundary change will come in the form of an ordinance amending the DH-O Downtown Historic District overlay zone.

Next Steps:

Pursuant to Section 8.5.7 of City Code, heritage preservation site designation is subject to the Type 4 review procedure of Section 8.4.7 as modified by Section 8.5.7. The City Council shall adopt findings in support of any decision to designate a heritage preservation site. The decision of the city council shall be made in the form of an Ordinance.

The Downtown Historic District is designated as an Overlay District in the LDC. Pursuant to Section 8.5.14 of City Code, amendments to text of this LDC or official zoning map shall be subject to the Type 4 review procedure as established in Section 8.4.7 Type 4 Review Procedure. The decision of the city council shall be made in the form of an Ordinance.

Timeline:

Based on the feedback and direction received at the City Council work session on October 10th, an ordinance to designate the district as a heritage preservation site can be brought back to the City Council for approval in November. Once the local district is approved, the National Register Boundary can be updated and the zoning overlay map can be amended.