

**To:** Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee  
**From:** Kara Hahn, Principal Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)  
**Date:** November 1, 2018  
**RE:** Landmark Designation for the Henderson House, 2600 Milwaukee Street

**Staff Recommendation:**

Based on ordinance designation criteria and on the findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a structure, staff recommends approval of the application.

**Request to Designate a Structure:**

**Application:** #2018L-009  
**Address:** 2600 Milwaukee  
**Zoning:** E-SU-D1X  
**Council:** District #9, Albus Brooks  
**Blueprint Denver:** Area of Stability  
**Owner:** Lynn Henderson  
**Applicant(s):** Albus Brooks

**Case Summary:**

Councilman Albus Brooks submitted a Landmark Designation application for the Henderson House, at 2600 Milwaukee, to CPD. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for October 16, 2018.

At the Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing, the LPC voted (7-0) to recommend approval and forward to City Council for the landmark designation, based on History Criterion 1a, and Architecture Criteria 2a and 2b, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and the staff report.

**Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:**

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30-4, Denver Revised Municipal Code, a structure must meet the following criteria:

1. Meet one designation criteria in two or more of the following categories:
  - History
  - Architecture
  - Geography
2. Maintain its physical and historical integrity
3. LPC consider how it relates to context or theme

**Criteria Evaluation:**

Landmark staff found that the structure application meets History Criterion 1a, and Architecture Criteria 2a and 2b.

**1. Historical Significance**

**To have historical significance, the structure or district shall be thirty (30) or more years old or have extraordinary importance to the historical development of Denver, and shall:**

*a) Have direct association with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;*

John R. Henderson, Jr.'s licensure and subsequent work as an architect in Denver and Colorado, represent a key moment in local history. In 1959 John Henderson became the first African-American licensed architect in the state of Colorado. He was followed shortly thereafter by Bertram A. Bruton another African-American Denver architect. Throughout Henderson's architectural career in Denver, which spanned from 1959 through the 1990s, he admired and followed the careers of other African-American architects around the country. While a practicing architect, he designed federal buildings, institutional buildings such as schools and healthcare facilities, renovation projects, and private residences for prominent architectural firms. Among these diverse projects, Mr. Henderson was most proud of the design he created for his family home at 2600 N. Milwaukee St. in Denver, started in 1962 and completed in 1971.



John Henderson, interior of 2600 Milwaukee. Image by Paul Brokering, 2016.

The location of the house is also associated with the discriminatory practice known as redlining, which shaped Denver's inner neighborhoods. The Federal Housing Authority created maps that influenced who could or could not get a home mortgage, thus formally entrenching segregated neighborhoods. The

Henderson House sits in the Skyland neighborhood north of 26th Avenue, which historically marked the boundary between white neighborhoods to the south and black neighborhoods to the north.

With the end of World War II, a rush of workers sought urban locations for jobs and economic prosperity. In the decade from 1950-60, the African-American population in Denver nearly doubled from 15,200 to 30,000. The Henderson family, as part of the increase in population, found themselves searching for a home in the early 1960s, but the options for a young African-American family in Denver were limited. Unable to purchase a house, they found one of the last empty lots along 26th Avenue across from the City Park Golf course. The Hendersons purchased the property from Charlie Cousins, a prominent African-American businessman. John Henderson designed the house as Mid-Century Modern residence, the style he most appreciated. Mr. Henderson lived in and cared for this home for 55 years, and was proud of the home as it represented his achievements as the first licensed African-American architect in Colorado.

## 2. Architectural Significance

**To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:**

*a) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type;*

The residence at 2600 N. Milwaukee St. was designed by architect and owner John R. Henderson in a Mid-Century Modern architectural style, with noticeable International Style elements. He was inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe throughout his education and career. Beginning in 1962, he designed the home in sections, starting with the southern portion that parallels 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue facing the northern edge of City Park Golf Course. This one-story portion of the home contains a wall of glass on the southern façade looking out to the golf course and City Park, prompting the neighbors to nickname it the “Glass House.” After paying off the first phase in 1971, Mr. Henderson designed an almost identical northern addition and a new entry that connected the north and south side. At that time, he also added a sloped roof and a detached garage. Each of these elements gracefully connect to the original structure and reflect the modern style with a one-story configuration, simple lines, and large plate glass windows throughout.

The character-defining features of Mid-Century Modern style, with some International Style elements, can be seen in the horizontal elements, recessed entrance, minimal orientation, and the use of large plate glass windows. The large-scale windows on the southern façade, on the northern wing, the corners of each wing, and on the western entry porch are interspersed with smaller panels of dark red brick to reinforce the structure. With the 1971 additions, more of these brick panels were added between the plate glass panes on the southern façade, due to golf balls from the City Park Golf Course hitting and breaking the large expanse of windows. Despite this alteration, the large floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows still dominate the façade, providing extensive light to the inside and ample exterior views. They connect the inside to the outside neighborhood – one of the driving concepts of mid-century modern home design. The horizontality is also seen through the open interior spaces where rooms continuously flow into each other. The interior of each wing includes large wood structural beams spanning the ceiling to create open rooms and simplified spaces. Each room flows into the next, with no doors to shut off one space from the other. Wall divisions and openings on either one or both sides of the dividing wall separate the rooms, yet allow for movement between spaces.





2600 Milwaukee, south elevation. Image by Shannon Stage, 2018.



2600 Milwaukee, recessed entrance. Image by Shannon Stage, 2018.

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*b) Be a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;*

Mr. Henderson's formal career was spent as a draftsman, and working on larger institutional projects, and ultimately for the federal government. He worked for several notable Denver Firms, including Fisher & Davis, James Sudler Associates, and Hornbein and White. His projects included the National Register-listed Byron Rogers Federal Office Building, renovations for the Denver United Bank, and housing for the Colorado School of Mines. However, the home at 2600 N. Milwaukee St. is the design most associated with him. John Henderson's achievements, both as the first licensed African-American architect in Denver, and the construction of his mid-century modern home, are particularly noteworthy because African-American architects in the early and mid-20th century were regularly overlooked, marginalized, and discriminated against.

#### **Integrity:**

Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain is historic and physical integrity, defined as "the ability of a structure or district convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver's history." The seven qualities that define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The period of significance for the house begins with its original design in 1962, and extends to 1971 when Mr. Henderson completed the additions and his final design for the mid-century modern home. The house is highly intact and retains integrity, still exhibiting Henderson's original vision and desire to honor the stylings of Mies van der Rohe. The materials and workmanship, including the brick exterior with extensive windows, remain and continue to emphasize the home's relationship to its location on 26th Avenue, and its setting adjacent to City Park Golf Course. The horizontal emphasis of the house design is still evident in the long expanse of plate glass windows. The addition of the low-pitched roof and garage, which were added during the period of significance, are still present. John Henderson and his family have continued to own, live in, and care for the home since its construction. Its historical associations are strong, and with significant stability in the homes surrounding the Henderson House in the Skyland neighborhood, the home and neighborhood have much the same feeling as they did during the period of significance.

#### **Relate to a Historic Context/Theme and Period of Significance:**

While the property is related to discriminatory housing practices through redlining and the segregation of Denver's neighborhoods, it also associated with a small, but growing number of African-Americans architects. Shortly after John Henderson became licensed in Colorado, Bertram A. Bruton received his license in the state. Both men were trailblazers in Colorado, but, as illustrated in the application, had contemporaries throughout the country.

#### **Boundary:**

The designation application proposes to designate the legal description below:  
Lot 13, Block 23, Ashley's Addition to the City of Denver, AND Lot 1, Block 7, State Addition (Blocks 1 to 15 inclusive), City and County of Denver, State of Colorado.



### **Public Review Process:**

Community Planning & Development has met all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

### **Notifications:**

- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
  - The Points Historical Redevelopment Corp
  - Denver Arts and Culture Initiative
  - City Park Friends and Neighbors (CPFAN)
  - Opportunity Corridor Coalition of United Residents
  - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
  - Historic Denver, Inc
  - Colorado Preservation, Inc
  - National Trust for Historic Preservation
  - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

### **Public Comments:**

As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received letters of support from Councilman Brooks and Lynn Henderson.

### **Attachments Provided by CPD:**

- Designation Application
- Map of proposed structure
- LPC draft meeting record
- Public comments received by 12:00pm, November 1, 2018