



To: Denver City Council – Jolon Clark, President
From: Jenny Buddenborg, Senior City Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: October 22, 2018
RE: Landmark Designation for Vassar School Bungalows Historic District, #2018L-005

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 district, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a District:

Application:	#2018L-005
Address:	105, 115, 119, 127, 135, 141 East Vassar Avenue
Zoning:	U-SU-B1
Council:	District 6
Blueprint Denver:	Area of Stability
Applicant(s):	Councilman Paul Kashmann

Case Summary:

Councilman Paul Kashmann and co-applicants/property owners Jennifer Kremer, Patrick Dichter and Scott Nelson submitted a Landmark Designation application for the Vassar School Bungalows Historic District to CPD on June 21, 2018. 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 (LPC) for August 21, 2018.

At the Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing, LPC recommended landmark designation of a district for the Vassar School Bungalows Historic District, application #2018L-005, based on History Criterion 1a, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criterion 3b, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and the August 14, 2018 staff report. Vote 7-0.

At the Denver Planning Board meeting on September 19, 2018, the board voted 7-0 to recommend to City Council the approval of the proposed district with respect to conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, effect upon the surrounding neighborhood, and other planning considerations.

On October 2, 2018, the Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure Committee forwarded the case to the full City Council. At first reading, Denver City Council ordered the bill published and the public hearing is set for October 22, 2018.

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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 property must meet the following:

1. Meet one designation criterion in two or more of the following categories:
 - History
 - Architecture
 - Geography
2. Maintain physical or historical integrity
3. Be considered by LPC for its relation to a historic context or theme

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff find that the historic district application meets History Criterion 1a, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criterion 3b.

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;*

Situated one block east of South Broadway in the Rosedale neighborhood, the Vassar School Bungalows Historic District is directly associated with the growth of south Denver in the pre-Great Depression era. The development of the Vassar School bungalows between 1925 and 1926 was influenced by the overall growth trends occurring along the historic transportation route of South Broadway. Several businesses and major companies operated along the route at the time the bungalows were constructed, making nearby residential developments attractive to workers/residents.

For example, the Gates rubber factory got its start at nearby 1025 South Broadway in 1911 and provided stable employment throughout major world events of the first part of the 20th century. Smaller businesses that dotted South Broadway provided additional employment opportunities. The owners and residents of the Vassar School bungalows reflect the working-class demographic of the Rosedale neighborhood and South Broadway corridor. Residents were employed as electrical engineers, clerks, salesmen, bank tellers, cashiers, and department managers and supervisors, and included a city detective, lather, and barber.

Uniquely, the bungalows are directly tied to the former Vassar School that occupied the six parcels upon which the houses are now located. When the school was built in 1892, it and the surrounding neighborhood were part of the Town of South Denver, an area annexed by the city of Denver two years later in 1894. Vassar School served children from the Rosedale and Overland neighborhoods from kindergarten through eighth grade. In 1924, the larger, more modern Rosedale School was built nearby to accommodate the increased population in the neighborhood and the growing enrollment at Vassar School and its sister Milton School, and

absorbed Vassar School students. The school district determined that Vassar School was no longer needed, and in December 1924, the property was purchased by Albert L. Franz.

Franz was an Ohio native whose occupation at the time was building contractor. It is not known if Franz was involved in the development or construction of additional properties in Denver. He applied for a permit to demolish the school on February 16, 1925, and ten days later filed six identical building permits for one-story brick bungalows with full basements and garages. Franz worked with the existing topography, facing the houses south like the former Vassar School, and re-used materials from the school in the construction of the Spanish Revival houses and their lots.

Franz's development illustrates the growth trends of south Denver along the South Broadway corridor during the pre-Great Depression era.



105 and 115 East Vassar Avenue

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;

Vassar School Bungalows Historic District exhibits a high level of physical integrity that successfully conveys the distinguishing characteristics of the Spanish Revival architectural style. The six primary structures are contributing to the district and were constructed during the period of significance from 1925 to 1926.

There are minor differences between the houses, but the Spanish Revival elements are easily recognizable. The properties present a uniform, cohesive appearance. Such features include stucco-over-brick construction, parapets with brick coping, small shed roofs over windows and entryways, red clay barrel tiles, arches beneath porch roofs, and decorative downspouts. Each of the houses and original garages have flat roofs, a feature found in only around 10 percent of this style in the country overall. Additionally, there is evidence of vigas on some of the houses.

The buildings were not designed by a master architect, but a significant degree of thought and resourcefulness was implemented into the design of the district. In an innovative move, materials from the former Vassar School were incorporated into the properties. Landscape features, such as the sandstone wall and flagstone sidewalk that run along the west, south, and east property lines were left intact and tie in with the design of the lots, giving the district a cohesive appearance. Additionally, sandstone from the school building and other masonry materials are present in the building foundations.

3. Geographic Significance

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

b) Promote understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;

The Vassar School Bungalows Historic District promotes the understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of its distinctive physical characteristics and rarity due to its unique, uniform grouping of Spanish Revival Style architecture and direct association with the design and layout of the former Vassar School.

Although small, the historic district is a distinctive grouping of Spanish Revival style architecture unlike surrounding properties. The occasional house built before 1920 can be found in the neighborhood, and two closer examples are a two-story brick Cottage and a two-story brick Foursquare. Most nearby residential properties are Craftsman-style bungalows built during the 1920s, modest Minimal Traditional houses built after World War II, or newly constructed houses that are noticeably larger in scale and do not exhibit any specific style.

Like the Vassar School, the six houses present a uniform, symmetrical appearance. Rather than divide the property into west- and east-facing parcels like the rest of the surrounding blocks, the developer embraced the unique challenge presented by the remnants of the school and its setting and maintained the south-facing placement of the school with the bungalows. The three westernmost properties are a mirror image of the three easternmost properties in plot size, location of house on each plot, and spacing between them. When facing the two central properties, one can detect the entrance to the school in the space between.

The re-use of materials from the former school that were incorporated into the construction of the houses lends an additional degree of distinctiveness and rarity. A low sandstone wall with a simple metal railing attached at the top with a series of Roman numerals etched into the horizontal sections surrounds the west, south, and east sides of the district, likely denoting the school property boundary. The sunken backyard of the property at 141 East Vassar Avenue was reportedly the location of the playground. Additionally, the original flagstone sidewalk remains around most of the properties.

The Vassar School Bungalows are a physically distinctive and rare piece of Denver's urban environment.



141 East Vassar Avenue

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Integrity:

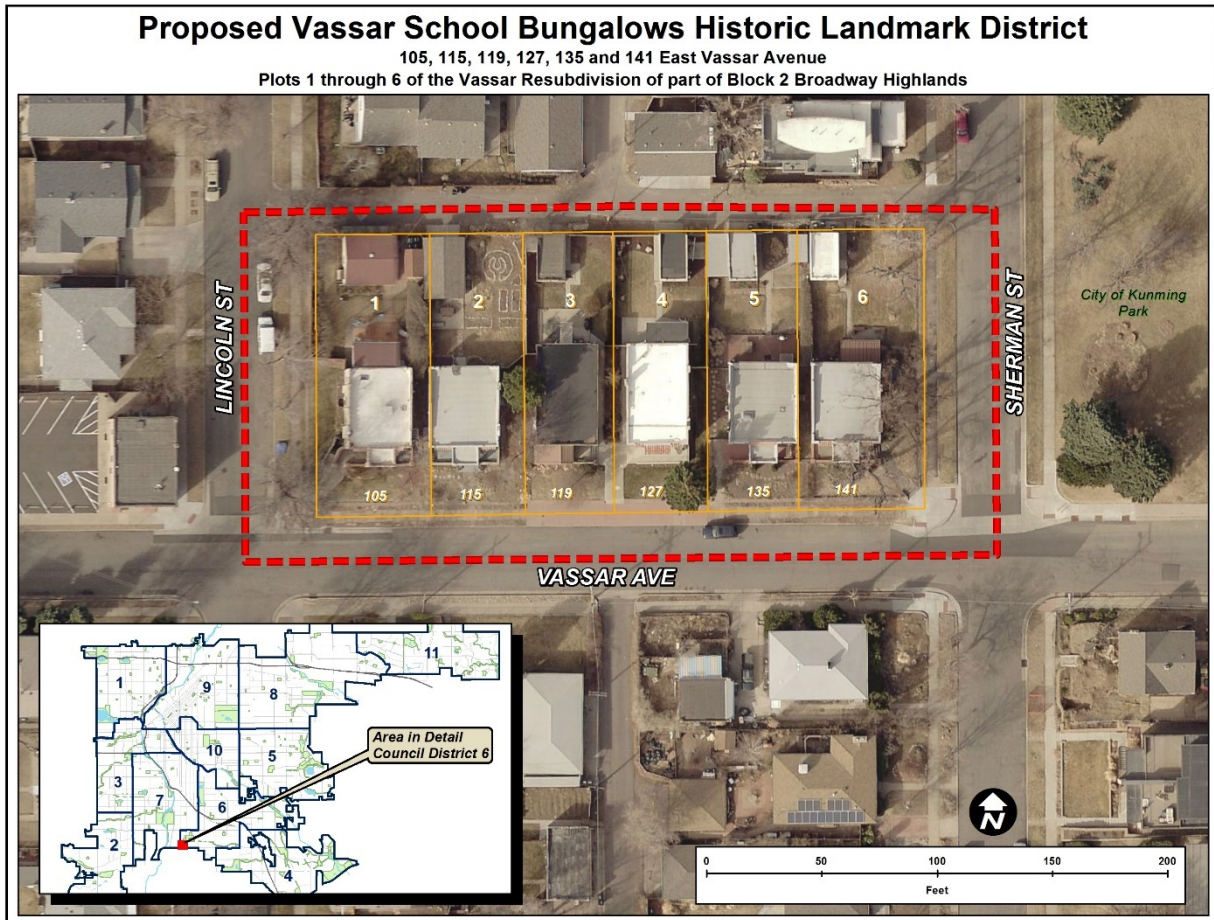
Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain its historic or physical integrity, defined as “the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven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

The six primary structures contributing to the Vassar School Bungalows Historic District retain a high degree of physical and historical integrity related to the district’s period of significance (1925-1926). They are recognizable as belonging to a specific time and place in Denver’s history and easily convey a sense of history and place with their cohesive appearance. Overall, the properties retain integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Each of the properties retains its original residential dwelling in the location where it was constructed, and all six continue to serve in a residential capacity. The setting remains much as it was in 1925 to 1926 with the surrounding area comprised of primarily residential properties, commercial properties along South Broadway, and the open space of Rosedale and Harvard Gulch Park just to the northeast. Many of the surrounding residential properties were either built in the 1920s, in the decade after the end of World War II, or within the past ten years. The form, plan, space, structure and style of each property is largely unchanged. Minor alterations include window replacement, small rear additions, garage replacement and front porch enclosure/replacement. When combined with original key exterior materials, such as the parapets with brick coping, stucco, and flat roofs, the district conveys the direct association with its period of significance.

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

The district relates to the pre-Great Depression development of properties in neighborhoods along South Broadway and the evolution of the Vassar School property from educational facility to unique residential development. The closure of Vassar School in 1924 and construction of a larger replacement school due to an increase in the student population within the school district illustrates the growth and development of working class housing along South Broadway. The period of significance reflects the district’s association with that development and the construction of the buildings from 1925 to 1926.



Criteria for Planning Board Review

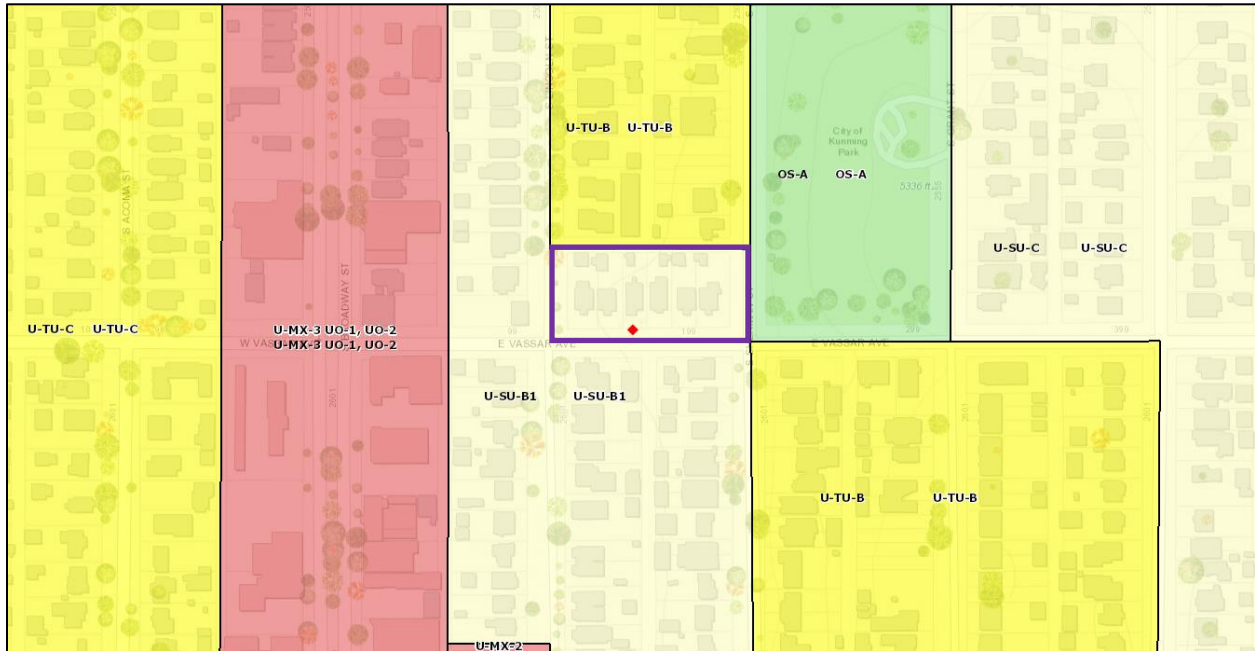
Planning Board Considerations, per Chapter 30-4.6, DRMC:

The Landmark Ordinance provides the opportunity for the Planning Board to make a recommendation to City Council regarding designation of districts. The ordinance specifically directs the Planning Board to consider a proposed designation with respect to:

1. Its relationship to the Denver Comprehensive Plan;
2. The effect of the designation upon the surrounding neighborhood; and
3. Such other planning considerations as may be relevant to the proposed designation or amendments.

Zoning Context:

The District is zoned U-SU-B1.



Zoning (Proposed District boundary noted in purple)

Relationship to the Denver Comprehensive Plan (2000) and Blueprint Denver (2002):

The proposed district is consistent with applicable plans including the Denver Comprehensive Plan (2000) and Blueprint Denver (2002). The comprehensive plan envisioned Denver in 2020 as vibrant, with well-preserved and appropriately used structures representing every era of the city’s history. The proposed district meets several Comprehensive Plan visions, objectives and strategies under the goals of Land Use, Legacies, and Neighborhoods. Among these is the strategy to “respect the intrinsic character and assets of individual neighborhoods” (p. 149). The proposed Vassar School Bungalows Historic District reinforces the intrinsic historic and cultural character of the city and Rosedale neighborhood, preserves the city’s historic properties and neighborhoods, enhances design excellence, and contributes to a strong sense of community identity.

According to the 2002 Plan Map adopted in Blueprint Denver, the district’s concept land use is single family residential and is in an Area of Stability. The plan document states: “Neighborhoods of single family houses represent the majority of Denver’s residential areas ...[and] Single-family homes are the predominant residential type” (p. 42). It also recognizes a collection of historic homes as an amenity that “should be accentuated to help neighborhoods develop a niche within the city” (p. 41). The primary character of the proposed Vassar School Bungalows Historic District is single family residential and the proposed district designation will help preserve that unique character.



Guiding principles for Areas of Stability include keeping valued community characteristics in older and stable neighborhoods and identifying and maintaining the character of an area while accommodating some new development and redevelopment. Historic designations identify and help retain the character defining features of a district thereby providing greater certainty for any future change. Designations also allow for new infill construction that is compatible with the character of the district. The proposed Vassar School Bungalows Historic District would help reinforce the stability of the area.

The designation application is consistent with the Blueprint Denver concept land use and Area of Stability recommendations. Additionally, within Blueprint Denver, historic designation is noted as one of the most successful and common tools to preserve a neighborhood's special qualities (p. 120).

Effect on Surrounding Neighborhoods:

The Vassar School Bungalows Historic District designation ordinance will help preserve the character defining features of the district and will have little impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. LPC only has purview for the area located within the designation boundary. The intent of the designation is to recognize this unique district, the buildings that define it, and their contribution to the historic fabric of the city. This will allow for the area to meet the goals as an Area of Stability within Blueprint Denver as well as the goals found in the Comprehensive Plan.

Boundary:

The designation application proposes to designate the following legal description: Plots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Vassar Resubdivision of part of Block 2 Broadway Highlands, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado. Together with the adjoining public rights-of-way but only to the centerline thereof.

Public Review Process:

Community Planning & Development has met or exceeded 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, Planning Board meeting, and City Council meetings
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
 - Rosedale Harvard Gulch Neighborhood Organization
 - 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

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Public Comments:

As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received one signature support card from five individuals regarding the Vassar School Bungalows Historic District application.

- RNO comment
 - None
- Public Comments submitted to CPD from individuals
 - 5 in support
 - 0 in opposition
- At the LPC public hearing one member of the public commented
 - 1 in support
 - 0 in opposition
- At the Planning Board meeting two members of the public commented
 - 2 in support
 - 0 in opposition

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Map of proposed district
- LPC Public Hearing meeting record
- Planning Board meeting record
- Public comments received by 12:00 p.m., October 18, 2018