To: Denver City Council
From: Becca Dierschow, Senior City Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)
Date: June 22, 2023
RE: Landmark Designation Application for La Raza Park Historic Cultural District

Staff Recommendation:

Based on the ordinance designation criteria, on the findings of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) that the application meets the criteria for designation of a district, and on the findings of the Denver Planning Board that the designation is consistent with applicable plans and will have minimal impact or effect on the surrounding neighborhoods, staff recommends approval of the application.

Request to Designate a District:

Application:	#2023L-003
Address:	1501 W 38th Avenue
Zoning:	OS-A (Open Space)
Council:	#1, Amanda Sandoval
Owner:	City and County of Denver
Applicant(s):	Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval

Case Summary:

In 2022, Landmark Preservation/Community Planning and Development published a historic context study of Denver's Latino, Chicano and Mexican-American communities. Entitled *Nuestras Historias*, this historic context study compiled a number of sites identified by these communities as being historically and culturally significant. La Raza Park was one site identified as having particular historical and cultural significance. In 2022, Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval approached Denver Parks and Recreation, who manage La Raza Park, and Denver Landmark Preservation about designating it as a local landmark. Through conversations with DPR and Landmark staff, Councilwoman Sandoval requested Landmark Preservation staff research and write the designation application. Generally, staff do not write historic designation applications, but did so for this city-owned property, as it was identified as significant in the historic context, and supported by City Council, Denver Parks and Recreation and the community. Staff supplemented primary source research (newspaper articles, city publications, television reports) with interviews from members of the Latino/Chicano community who had connections to the park. The council office also hosted two community meetings about the park – one in December 2022 invited members of the community to share their memories of the park. A second meeting in March 2023 discussed the draft designation application, identified significance criteria and implications of historic designation on the park.

On April 7, 2023, with a complete application, Landmark staff set the public hearing at the Landmark Preservation Commission for May 2, 2023. The LPC voted unanimously (5-0-0) to forward the designation application to Denver City Council. On May 3, 2023, Denver Planning Board reviewed the designation application for consistency with approved plans and for the district's effect on surrounding neighborhoods. Denver Planning Board unanimously recommended approval (9-0-0) and forwarded the designation to City Council. On May 9, 2023, 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 June 26, 2023.

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

To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code, the application must be complete, and the district must meet the following criteria:

1. The district maintains its integrity
2. The district is more than 30 years old, or is of exceptional importance
3. The district meets at least three of ten criteria
4. The LPC considers the district's historic context

Criteria Evaluation:

Landmark staff found that the district meets the following criteria:

A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;

La Raza Park has a direct association with historical events and the historical development of Denver's Northside, from its earliest days as a playground for Denver's thriving Italian community, to its time as the heart of the growing Chicano movement in Denver, to its current role as a place of celebration and ceremony for a diverse Latino/Chicano community that lives in Denver and the surrounding area.

The Pavilion and "Gym" at the North Side Playgrounds, Thirty-eighth and Osage

Figure 1 Picture of the Pavilion and Gym from Municipal Facts

In 1906 the city acquired the land and turned the site into a playground. The acquisition of dedicated parks and parkland in urban environments was a cornerstone of the urban planning philosophy known as the "City Beautiful Movement". The Northside playground was intentionally designed to teach immigrant children American values and social mores, as part of the wider Progressive Movement which influenced the design of cities across America. In 1931, the name of the park was changed to Columbus Park to honor the Italian residents who called the Northside home.

Figure 2 Artist Robert Lucero (right). Artist Emanuel Martinez, background, is giving Lucero help. Credit: Denver Post

La Raza Park continued to serve as a focal point for the Northside community, even as the demographics of the surrounding area changed, with the Latino population steadily growing between 1945 and 1990. In Denver, La Raza Park served as an important location for the nascent Chicano Movement (El Movimiento), to advocate for civil rights causes such as equal access to public amenities (including pools and recreation centers), employment, and education. It was also where El Movimiento promoted a distinctly Chicano culture by enjoying public space, practicing the arts, religion, and the traditions of la raza (an Amerindian or mixed heritage ancestry). The community solidified control of La Raza Park in 1970.

In 1981, police harassment of the Northside Latino community reached a boiling point. On June 28, 1981, the Northside community gathered in La Raza Park to 'open' the park for the summer. An estimated 400 - 800 people, including families with small children, gathered in the park that day for festivities. Around 2 pm, the Denver Police shut down the event. As families slowly dispersed from the park, police moved in, armed with batons and tear gas. In 1984, three years after the police attack at the park, the City of Denver closed La Raza Pool, and filled it in.

In the late 1980s, Denver Parks and Recreation engaged residents to design a new community space for the park. The Kiosko and Plaza de la Raza were dedicated on May 5, 1990. La Raza Park became a different kind of gathering place for the Latino community, hosting more large-scale, organized events rather than being an area for informal events and gathering. Ceremonial danza, Dia de los Muertos memorials and La Raza Park Day illustrate the contemporary events that connect the community to their culture.

The evolution of La Raza Park, from the Northside playground to the Kiosko and Plaza illustrates the historic development of the Northside neighborhood, its residents and a century of cultural development in Denver.

F. It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;

The park, occupying a full city block between Osage and Navajo Street, and West 38th and 39th Avenue, is an established and familiar feature of the Sunnyside and Highland neighborhoods. It is the second largest park in the Sunnyside neighborhood. The prominent Kiosko is visible from 38th Avenue – a major thoroughfare of North Denver. This is the only Kiosko in the City of Denver and its unique physical characteristics and cultural importance make it an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood and the contemporary city.

Figure 3 'La Raza Unida' - sculpture by Emanuel Martinez, in front of the Kiosko. Photo: Landmark Staff

I. It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;

La Raza Park is a physical attribute of the Northside neighborhood and Denver's Latino/Chicano community that serves as a source of pride and cultural understanding. The Park was often the site of Chicano Movement actions – including the 1969/1970 take over or liberation of the park. By hiring local community members and activists to staff the pool, the community created a safe space for children, young adults and elders. This era in La Raza's history was marked by a decrease in gang violence. The role La Raza played as a 'liberated' area, under community control is a source of pride for the community today, as it was in the 1970s.

La Raza's continued role as a space for cultural events, such as the yearly summer solstice festival, La Raza Park Day and Dia de Los Muertos, allows the Chicano/Latino community to connect to their culture, and invites the wider Denver community to understand Chicano/Latino cultural practices.

The renaming of the park in 2020 serves as a point of pride for the Chicano/Latino community, as it had been colloquially known as La Raza Park for 50+ years before its official renaming. Removing the name of Columbus – a man associated with the colonization and genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas – from the park, represents a reclaiming of the land by indigenous voices. The Kiosko, murals and sculpture in the park all celebrate indigenous arts and culture, a source of pride for the community.

J. It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

La Raza Park is associated with El Movimiento, a civil rights movement from the 1960s that contributed significantly to the culture of Denver's Northside, in addition to Colorado and the nation as a whole. The

Chicano movement encouraged the embrace of a distinctly Chicano identity, in opposition to the ideal of assimilation into wider American culture. While the Chicano Movement had distinct historic events (see above, Criterion A), it had a tremendous influence on the culture of Denver's Northside. La Raza Park served as a site of direct action through marches and protests, but it also served as an incubator for Chicano and Latino culture (culture, as defined by the Landmark ordinance as being the traditions, beliefs, customs, and practices of a particular community).

Figure 4 Detail of mural by David Ocelotl Garcia. Photo: Landmark Staff

La Raza Park was also home to early murals by local Chicano artists that represented Chicano culture as a unique artistic practice, a visual retelling of important cultural beliefs and traditions, and a visual claiming of the park. This practice was continued by muralist David Ocelotl Garcia, who designed and painted El Viaje within the Kiosko in 2016. The park also serves as the center of many contemporary cultural activities, such as the ceremonial danza, Dia de Los Muertos event, and La Raza Park Day. This culminated with the renaming to La Raza Park and the 2021 rededication of the park with installation of Emanuel Martinez's La Raza Unida sculpture.

Integrity:

Chapter 30 requires that a landmark designated property maintain its integrity, defined as "the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic, geographic, architectural, or cultural significance … recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver's history."

The proposed district retains a high degree of integrity. Although the site has seen changes throughout its life, it still maintains its integrity. It maintains integrity of location and setting, as it is an urban park in a primarily residential neighborhood. It maintains integrity of materials, design, and workmanship, as it

uses landscaping and concrete to delineate space, encourage recreation, and allow for easy maintenance and updating. The park retains integrity of feeling and association as it remains a gathering space for the surrounding neighborhood, who utilize the space for recreation. It also remains a central gathering space for the wider Latino/Chicano community who lived in the area, and who return to celebrate cultural events in the Kiosko and plaza. While the pool has been infilled, the Kiosko serves as a contemporary gathering place. Additionally, the changes occurred within the period of significance and convey the changing history of the park.

Relates to a Historic Context:

La Raza Park relates to several historic contexts and trends. First, the purchase and creation of a public park in North Denver is closely tied to the City Beautiful and Progressive Movements that shaped Denver and cities across the nation in the early twentieth century. The 'liberation' of the park in the 1970s illustrates the active Civil Rights Movement, and in particular the Chicano Movement, which had a great impact on the nation's political and social fabric. Finally, the La Raza Park's official renaming, 2020 relates to the present-day national reckoning with the nation's history and how public monuments and property can shape our understanding of history.

The physical changes to the park, from its origins as open landscape, to becoming the first municipally-owned playground in Denver, to a pool (that was neglected by the city) and its more formal, ceremonial contemporary form, illustrates the development patterns of the City of Denver and parks planning and philosophy.

Period of Significance:

The proposed period of significance for the La Raza Park historic district is prior to and including 2021. This period of significance recognizes the historical significance of the land as undeveloped land, beginning before its platting in 1871. The period of significance also captures the historic and cultural significance of La Raza Park and its representation of development patterns in Denver through 1993. However, local and national events between 2013 and 2021 had great influence on the park and justify an expanded, exceptional period of significance.

Exceptional Significance:

Generally, preservationists require a property to be of a certain age before it is eligible for designation. In Denver, local landmarks should generally be 30 years of age before they are designated as landmarks. This allows historians and preservation professionals the benefit of hindsight, and the ability to evaluate if something is indeed significant. However, some resources or events are so immediately recognized and documented as significant, that they are considered to have exceptional significance and thus may be eligible for designation even when they achieved significance more recently.

In the case of La Raza Park, while the resource is more than 30 years of age, the period of significance extends to 2021 due to its exceptional importance. For 50 years, community leaders and activists advocated for the name of the park to be officially changed to La Raza Park. While the community referred to it as La Raza Park, rather than Columbus Park, and regularly spray painted the signs to remove the name Columbus, the City and County of Denver did not acknowledge this change. Indeed, a 1988 attempt to officially rename the park failed at City Council. However, in the summer of 2020, Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval, who represented the council district where La Raza is located, initiated the official renaming of the park to La Raza Park. This official renaming process must be placed into the political context of the late 2010s.

In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement formed, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of an innocent Black teenager, Trayvon Martin. As the movement grew, Americans were confronted with the systematic racism and white supremacy that formed the basis of the country. Memorials and monuments to the Confederacy were removed across the South. The conversation about Confederate monuments soon grew to encompass monuments to Christopher Columbus. Columbus, an explorer who was once credited with 'discovering' the Americas, has in recent scholarship, come to represent the genocide of indigenous Americans throughout Central America and the Caribbean, and the plunder of American resources by European countries. Many indigenous groups and allies protest monuments to Columbus on this basis, and these objections gained traction during the wider conversations and policy changes happening in the late 2010s.

By 2020, protests against systematic racism in the country were common, and growing. Sparked by the murder of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, by Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020, scholars have noted that these protests represent the largest, sustained protests in American history. Indeed, one scholar described the murder of George Floyd "as a watershed moment for the movement against systemic racism in the United States". In Denver, the protests were reflective of both national and local concerns. Protestors from across the metro area gathered in Aurora to march in honor of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man who was murdered by Aurora police in 2019. Community members also led the charge to rename the Denver neighborhood of Stapleton to Central Park, removing its association with former Denver Mayor, Benjamin Stapleton, who was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan.

In the midst of these ongoing conversations that were reshaping the city, Councilwoman Sandoval and Latino/Chicano members of the Northside community renewed their call to rename Columbus Park. Tapping into conversations and precedent set in the South during 2015, they argued that Columbus was not a historical figure to be celebrated or commemorated. Instead, naming the park La Raza would better represent the history of the park and the Chicano/Latino community who lived there now. However, there was still sentiment among some in the Italian-American community that this name change was erasing the history of the earlier Italian community in the Northside. While this disagreement was acknowledged by organizers, they still felt it was appropriate to remove the name of Columbus from the park and hoped La Raza could come to represent the entire community.

In December 2020, the name of the park was officially changed to La Raza Park. However, it was not until June 2021 that the park was rededicated with a community celebration. It was at this rededication that a sculpture, La Raza Unida, by notable Chicano artist and activist, Emanuel Martinez, was installed. Given the importance of Chicano/Latino community to the park and its historical and cultural significance, it is appropriate to end the period of significance with the community celebration that renamed the park.

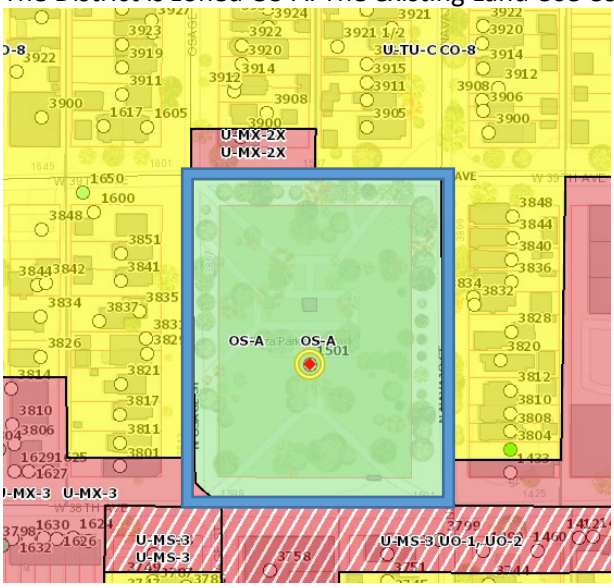
Planning Board Considerations, per Chapter 30-4.6, DRMC:

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 OS-A. The existing Land Use Context (2020) is Denver Park.



Park Typology:

TYPOLOGY	SIZE	PURPOSE/FUNCTION	REPRESENTATIVE FEATURES/ AMENITIES	EXAMPLES
Neighborhood Park	<10 acres	Neighborhood Parks are smaller parks that are close to residents, within walking or biking distance, and fulfill active recreation needs for tennis, playgrounds, informal play fields, multipurpose courts, and passive open space. They serve as a common area for neighbors of all ages to gather, socialize, and play.	• Playgrounds • Play fields • Multi-purpose courts • Passive open space • Picnic areas • Dog parks (context dependent)	• First Creek Park • Dailey Park • Benedict Fountain Park

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan (2040), Blueprint Denver (2019), Denver Parks and Recreation Game Plan For a Healthy City (2019) and Sunnyside Neighborhood Plan (1992)

The proposed district is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, Blueprint Denver, Game Plan and the Sunnyside neighborhood plan.

Comprehensive Plan 2040

The proposal is most directly consistent with the Comprehensive Plan 2040 vision element for Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods. The most applicable goals and strategies are noted below.

Vision Element: Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods

Goal 1: Create a city of complete neighborhoods

Strategy D: Encourage quality infill development that is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood and offers opportunities for increased amenities.

Goal 2: Enhance Denver's neighborhoods through high-quality urban design
Strategy C: Create people-oriented places that embrace community character with thoughtful transitions, aspirational design and an engaging public realm.

Goal 3: Preserve the authenticity of Denver's neighborhoods and celebrate our history, architecture and culture
Strategy B: Continue the city's commitment to existing historic districts and landmarks and increase public awareness of the benefits of historic preservation through education and outreach.
Strategy C: Ensure city policies and regulations support historic preservation and eliminate barriers in city processes to help all neighborhoods preserve what matters most.

Goal 6: Empower Denverites to be involved and collaborative in city government
Strategy A: Continue to strengthen trust and communication between the city and all neighborhoods.

The proposed La Raza Park Historic Cultural District reinforces the vision of Comprehensive Plan 2040 through the preservation of important historical and cultural assets in the Sunnyside neighborhood. It preserves the city's authentic historic character and contributes to a strong sense of community identity. Additionally, it encourages the stewardship of city properties through the continued use of La Raza Park and the preservation of the Kiosko and murals houses within the structure. Designation of the proposed district will not impede the park's ability to grow and change with the needs of the surrounding neighborhood, but will ensure that its cultural legacy is recognized and honored.

Blueprint Denver

According to Blueprint Denver, the district's future neighborhood context is urban. Regarding the quality-of-life infrastructure for the urban neighborhood context, the plan calls for parks of various sizes. Based on Blueprint Denver mapping, the future place type within the district is public park and open space. Blueprint Denver notes that public parks are vital components of the quality-of-life infrastructure and city-owned spaces are planned to remain parks. The proposed designation will help retain the existing character of the park, which also aligns with Blueprint Denver's future places. The district would allow for alterations that are compatible with the historic character of the park, and to meet the needs of the surrounding community.

The designation of La Raza Park is consistent with recommendations found in Blueprint Denver. Blueprint Denver lists historic character as one of the qualities that helps make a complete neighborhood and has several Land Use and Built Form policies and strategies related to historic designation. The most applicable are noted below:

Policy LU-2. Ensure residential neighborhoods retain their unique character as infill development occurs.
Strategy A. Continue the city's commitment to existing historic districts and landmarks and use historic designation to preserve the character of an individual structure or district or where there is historic, architectural, cultural, and/or geographic significance.

Strategy I. Promote incentives to preserve the reuse of historic buildings and the unique historic features of Denver's neighborhoods.

Policy LU-6. Incentivize the preservation of structures and features that contribute to the established character of an area, even if they are not designated as landmarks or historic districts.

Strategy A. Integrate historic resources surveys, like Discover Denver, that identify and provide data on buildings into land use planning and regulations.

The designation of La Raza Park is a result of the completed Latino/Chicano/Mexican American Historic Context, which included a historic resource survey. It was also identified in the Historic Context Study created for the Near Northwest Area planning effort (see below).

Game Plan for a Healthy City (2019)

Denver Parks and Recreation's Game Plan for a Healthy City was adopted concurrently with Blueprint Denver and was part of the city's Denveright planning process. Game Plan identifies four guiding principles, which includes: *Uniquely Denver:* Provide parks and programming that reflect Denver's community and cultural identity.

17. Highlight and protect the system's unique historic, social, and cultural resources.
19. Design parks, facilities, and programs that reflect Denver's distinct places and neighborhood identities

Game Plan also identifies two strategies related to DPR's historic resources, which support the proposed historic designation of La Raza Park:

- Strategy 5.6
  Develop a thorough inventory of all historic park structures and prioritize them for preservation and restoration
  Denver's park system is unique against its urban peers in many ways—from scale to breadth to diversity. One arguably undervalued yet distinctive asset is a wealth of historic structures, cultural assets, and heritage places that speak to the city's earliest days as a community. From pavilions in the city's legacy park spaces to heritage structures that speak to the city's earliest settlers, this layer of culture and history provides a strong sense of place and identity, rooting the community in its past.
  To honor and enhance this unique heritage, DPR should undertake a thorough inventory of all historic park structures and places, identifying location, condition, and level of significance. Further, this information should help the department to prioritize and implement preservation and restoration strategies in a focused and strategic way.
- Strategy 5.7
  CROSS-OVER STRATEGY
  Celebrate the history and culture of our unique neighborhoods and reflect that in the design of parks and facilities. Denver is home to a diverse mosaic of neighborhoods. This strategy focuses on ensuring parks and recreation design and offerings reflect their local neighborhood context. Demographic characteristics, neighborhood history, local culture, and environmental context can all be inputs to inform the design of local parks. Strengthening the local connection will be possible through expanded feedback processes, identifying opportunities to expand participation in design and planning processes. Strategy 2.7 supports this process with its focus on growing departmental capabilities to deepen community outreach.

Through a public process, La Raza Park was determined to be a particularly important cultural and historic resource, and was thus prioritized for preservation by DPR staff, City council and CPD. Additionally, the designation of the park will ensure the continued cultural context of the park and has given the public a chance to participate in a public process to determine the historic and cultural significance of the park.

Sunnyside Neighborhood Plan (1992)

The 1992 Sunnyside Neighborhood Plan identifies La Raza Park as a neighborhood hub and identified a number of recommendations, many of which have been implemented since the adoption of the plan. These include

- Work with Servicios de la Raza on issues of youth and gangs using the park as a "hangout," graffiti and vandalism (Servicios, neighborhood groups)
- Provide additional lighting in and around the park to prevent illicit activity (Parks, Public Works)
- Use the park for neighborhood and community activities and festivals to help establish ownership and pride in the park (neighborhood groups)

The proposed designation is the culmination of decades of neighborhood and community organization to establish ownership and pride in the park. One of the designation criteria identified by the Latino/Chicano community is "I. It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding," and interviews with local community members illustrate the pride the community has in the park.

Historic Context Report: Sunnyside Neighborhood (2021)

La Raza Park was called out as a **key structure** in the recent Sunnyside neighborhood historic context report, prepared for the forthcoming Near Northwest neighborhood plan, which will supersede the 1992 historic context report. As the historic context notes, "the report will be used to inform the efforts of the Discover Denver citywide building survey and the Denver Neighborhood Planning Initiative Near Northwest Area Plan. The report establishes a framework for the historic and architectural significance of individual structures or concentrations of structures as part of a collaborative planning effort of the City to encourage historic preservation in this neighborhood."

The historic context calls La Raza Park out for its connection to the Chicano Movement:

> "In Denver the [Chicano] movement included walkouts, boycotts, marches, and hunger fasts. In the northwest Denver neighborhoods of Sunnyside and Highland the most noticeable protests centered around renaming Columbus Park to La Raza Park, discussed below.[20] The legacy of El Movimiento can be seen throughout Sunnyside at the Troy Chavez Memorial Peace Garden, La Raza Plaza at Columbus Park/La Raza Park, and several murals located in the southeastern part of the neighborhood."

Effect on Surrounding Neighborhoods:
The La Raza Park Historic District designation would help preserve the character of the park and surrounding neighborhood, but will have little impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. The intent of the designation is to recognize this unique district and the features that define it.

Boundary:
The designation application proposes to designate the following legal description:

Lots 1-30, inclusive, and the vacated alley, Block 23, Downing's addition to North Denver, 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 and Community Planning and Development email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization (RNO) and courtesy email notifications
    - Unite North Metro Denver
    - Strong Denver
    - Sunnyside United Neighbors Inc
    - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
    - Historic Denver, Inc
    - Colorado Preservation, Inc
    - National Trust for Historic Preservation
    - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (History Colorado)
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing

Public Comments:
As of 10:30 am June 22, 2023:

- 19 written public comments in support of the historic designation
  Including letters of support from:
    - Denver Latino Commission
    - Sunnyside United Neighbors

LPC Public Hearing, May 2nd:

- 2 public comments in support of the historic designation

Attachments Provided by CPD:

- Designation Application
- Photographs of proposed district
- Map of proposed district
- Public comments received by 10:30 am June 22, 2023