

FACT SHEET

National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District

The Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Housing and Economic Development is preparing a nomination of Chicago's historic Park Boulevard System to the National Register of Historic Places. The City's park boulevard system is one of Chicago's finest historic resources. Authorized by the State legislature in 1869 and built over the next twenty years, this "necklace" of boulevards and connected parks is nationally important for its landscape architecture and planning and remains an equally important city and neighborhood resource. The nomination covers roughly 26 miles of boulevards and contains over 3,000 properties.

Chicago's park boulevard system was the first major comprehensive system in the country, and its design was seminal in the creation of such systems in cities nationwide. The system's boulevards and parks were created in the late 1800s to spur residential real-estate development and to help create healthful, accessible and livable neighborhoods in what was then the largely undeveloped outskirts of Chicago. It created one of the city's most recognizable and lasting urban features, helped to define the historic visual character of many of Chicago's neighborhoods, and provided an amenity that elevated the city by enriching both its visible character and its quality of life. Because of their location along the park boulevard system, the buildings along the boulevards and associated parks typically have a high quality of architectural design and craftsmanship, which further distinguishes the boulevard system.

Major Points

- The purpose of the nomination is to recognize the historic significance and importance of the boulevards, as well as to qualify the historic buildings that line the boulevards and associated large parks for federal and state historic preservation incentives. Listing may also help the boulevards and parks qualify for possible grant funds in the future.
- **National Register listing is primarily honorary. Unlike Chicago Landmark designation, it does not place any additional requirements or restrictions on property owners.** National Register listing would, however, encourage preservation and enhance public awareness of the boulevards' historic significance.
- Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places need to meet at least one of four National Register criteria. The proposed historic district is being nominated to the National Register under two criteria: Criteria A for community planning and development (local significance) and Criteria C for both landscape architecture (national significance) and architecture (local significance).
- National Register listing would qualify historic (termed "contributing") buildings along the boulevards and parks for various preservation and rehabilitation incentives, should eligible property owners elect to participate in those programs—principally the State Property Tax Freeze Program for rehabilitation of owner-occupied residences and the 20% Federal rehabilitation tax credit program for commercial, industrial and rental residential properties.
- Properties within National Register historic districts are defined as either "contributing" or "non-contributing." "Non-contributing" properties are 1) properties built outside the boulevards' major period of development (called the "Period of Significance"), i.e., generally those built after 1942; 2) vacant lots; or 3) properties that have had such major exterior changes that they no longer convey their historic character.

- The “period of significance” for the proposed historic district is 1869 (when the Illinois state legislature established the park commissions that created Chicago’s park boulevard system) to 1942 (the end of boulevard and park improvements funded by “New Deal” Federal government spending). In addition, the period of significance for the south side of the Midway Plaisance separately extends to 1964 and includes the University of Chicago’s construction of architecturally significant, post-World War II buildings such as the 1959 Laird Bell Law School by Eero Saarinen and the 1964 School of Social Service Administration by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
- The proposed district boundaries were determined on a block by block basis. All buildings facing park boulevards and the streets facing the associated parks, as well as buildings facing side streets between boulevards and the nearest parallel alleys, were evaluated. The proposed district’s percentage as well as concentration of contributing properties vs. non-contributing properties needs to be maximized to meet National Register guidelines for listing. In defining which blocks and properties were included, if a block had less than 50% contributing buildings, it typically was not included. Whole vacant blocks were excluded. Smaller vacant lots and large non-contributing buildings were eliminated as much as possible. Buildings that were alone on a block were not generally included unless they were both contributing and had particular architectural or other known historical associations.
- Information on the National Register of Historic Places and the nomination process may be found on the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) website at <http://www.illinoishistory.gov/PS/historicplaces.htm>. Information on the available preservation and rehabilitation incentives may be found on the IHPA website at <http://www.illinoishistory.gov/PS/financial.htm>.

Next Steps

- The National Register nomination for the proposed Chicago Park Boulevard System Historic District is scheduled to be reviewed by the Program Committee of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. As a Certified Local Government, the Commission comments on proposed National Register nominations to the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council (IHSAC), which reviews such nominations on behalf of the State of Illinois. The Program Committee meeting will be held in the Historic Preservation Division conference room at 33 N. LaSalle St. on Tuesday, August 30, 2011, beginning at 9:30 am. A meeting agenda will be posted on the Commission on Chicago Landmarks website at http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/landmarks_commission.html when it is available.
- The Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council (IHSAC) will then consider the National Register nomination for the proposed district at its quarterly meeting in September. Its meeting will be held in Chicago at the Chicago Architecture Foundation meeting room in the Santa Fe Building, 224 S. Michigan Ave., first floor, beginning at 9:30 am. An agenda for the meeting can be found on the IHSAC website at <http://www.illinoishistory.gov/PS/IHSAC.htm> . If approved by IHSAC, the nomination will be forwarded to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., for its review and final determination.

For more information:

Property owners with questions about the proposed nomination or the National Register of Historic Places in general should call Terry Tatum of the City of Chicago’s Historic Preservation Division office at 312-744-9147 or contact him by email at ttatum@cityofchicago.org. Additional information about the proposed nomination is available on the City of Chicago’s Historic Preservation Division website at <http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd/provdrs/hist.html>.

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