

Ditmas Park West Historic District

Borough of Brooklyn

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendaring June 17, 2025



West Side of Westminster Road, LPC, 2025

The proposed Ditmas Park West Historic District contains 128 freestanding houses built between 1903 and 1910 along five streets in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn. Adjoining the Ditmas Park Historic District (designated in 1981) to its east, Ditmas Park West is among the finest and best-preserved sections of historic suburban Flatbush, an expansive area of turn-of-the-20th-century houses extending southward from Prospect Park (a designated Scenic Landmark) to Brooklyn College. This area also contains the Prospect Park South and Fiske Terrace-Midwood Park Historic Districts, which were designated in 1979 and 2008, respectively.

Flatbush's suburban development began when it was still an independent town, before its 1894 annexation by Brooklyn, and Brooklyn's absorption into New York City in 1898. Suburbanization was made possible by the 1878 opening of the Brooklyn, Flatbush & Coney Island Railroad—the predecessor of today's B and Q subway lines—along the eastern boundary of the proposed district, and its subsequent extension, as the Brooklyn & Brighton Beach Railroad, into Lower Manhattan around 1900. Flatbush's first suburban development, called Tennis Court, was begun in 1886, and the influential Prospect Park South development was started in 1899.

In 1902, Lewis H. Pounds purchased the former John Ditmas farm, which had been worked using the labor of enslaved people into the 19th century. Bisected by the Brighton Railroad, the property extended from Coney Island Avenue eastward to Ocean Avenue. Pounds began developing the eastern portion as Ditmas Park in 1902, and the western portion as Ditmas Park West in 1903. Pounds' primary role as developer was in improving the land, installing infrastructure, laying out streets, and marketing the development; most of the lots were sold to local builders to develop themselves. Unlike Ditmas Park, which was marketed to the elite, Ditmas Park West was intended to fill the need for "dwellings of moderate cost ... in a select neighborhood with good, permanent street improvements." All of the proposed district's houses were built between 1903 and 1910, giving Ditmas Park West remarkable architectural cohesiveness.

Most Ditmas Park West houses were completed in the Queen Anne or Colonial Revival styles, or in a mixture of the two, while others exhibit Tudor or Shingle style influences. Some houses incorporate elements of the then-emerging Prairie style. Though diverse in style and design, they form harmonious suburban streetscapes little changed from the early 20th century. The historic landscape plan, which includes front lawns and grass strips between the sidewalks and streets, remains intact.

As was typical of suburban Flatbush, all of Ditmas Park West's early homeowners were white. Residents in 1910 included Harry Grattan, at 523 Rugby Road, who had developed both sides of Rugby Road within the proposed district after buying the property from Lewis Pounds. Several Ditmas Park West homeowners were immigrants from Germany, England, Ireland, and Scotland. Many families took in lodgers during the Depression, and some houses were being used as two-family homes by 1950. Although Ditmas Park West was impacted by Brooklyn's population decline during the 1960s and 1970s, local organizations, as well as individual residents, have been crucial in maintaining its historic character. Today, with its streetscapes of historic freestanding houses remaining largely intact, the proposed Ditmas Park West Historic District continues to appear much as it did more than a century ago.

