



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated July 8, 2022 from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the Cambria Heights - 222nd Street Historic District designation, designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on June 28, 2022 (Designation List No. 527). The Cambria Heights - 222nd Street Historic District consists of the properties bounded by a line beginning on the southern curblineline of 115th Road at a point on a line extending northerly from the northwestern property line of 115-60 222nd Street, extending easterly along the southern curblineline of 115th Road and across 222nd Street to a point on a line extending northerly from the northeastern property line of 115-59 222nd Street, southerly along said line and the eastern property lines of 115-59 through 115-103 222nd Street, westerly along the southern property line of 115-103 222nd Street, continuing westerly across 222nd Street and the southern property line of 115-104 222nd Street, and northerly along the western property lines of 115-104 through 115-60 222nd Street to the point of beginning, Borough of Queens, Community District 13.

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of any designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement, or renewal of the area involved.

On June 28, 2022, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District (LP-2655) as a New York City Historic District. The Historic District consists of 46 row houses framing 222nd Street between 115th Road and 116th Avenue in the Cambria Heights neighborhood of Queens, Community District 13.

The Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District stands out in its neighborhood and throughout New York City as a remarkably cohesive and distinctive group of row houses built in the Storybook style. Designed by the firm of Monda & Bertolazzi, the district's 46 houses remain exceptionally well-preserved more than 90 years after their completion, in 1931, by the Brooklyn-based developer Selective Homes Inc.

Today, the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District is one of the architectural highlights of its neighborhood and the Borough of Queens. Unusual among the city's row house districts

for its whimsical, imaginative Storybook-style facades set behind deep front lawns, it evokes the early days of Cambria Heights' development, when residents flocked to the area with their automobiles to inhabit a new suburban landscape promising a fairytale life during the Great Depression.

Located in southeastern Queens adjoining the Nassau County border, present-day Cambria Heights was farmland within the old town of Jamaica worked in part by enslaved people until the statewide abolition of slavery in 1827. It remained rural into the 1920s, when the Cambria Heights name first came into widespread use. As Queens doubled in population during that decade, Cambria Heights and its neighboring communities experienced a boom in suburban middle-class house building made possible by increasing automobile ownership and the construction of a network of new bridges and highways. Key to Cambria Heights' development was the Southern State Parkway, which extended eastward from the neighborhood starting in 1927. At the time, Linden (then Foch) Boulevard, which is located just south of the historic district, was one of the city's main conduits to the Southern State and to the celebrated recreational amenities of Long Island including Jones Beach, opened in 1929.

The Storybook style is primarily associated with California, where it flourished as a small-house style in the 1920s. Largely inspired by fairytale illustrations and stage sets of early Hollywood movies, the style grew out of the waning Arts-and-Crafts movement, merging its emphasis on traditional materials and hand craftsmanship with a lighthearted approach to vernacular medieval architecture. Distinguished by its playfulness, the style's colors were bright, proportions and features were stretched and exaggerated, and materials were freely mixed and randomly applied to suggest weathering and patching over the centuries. These houses' small scale, exuberant detailing, cheerful facades, varied rooflines, and deep lawns imbue 222nd Street with a stage-set quality typical of the Storybook style.

Other Storybook features include the houses' brightly colored roofs and colored diamond-pane sashes; the stretched proportions and flat, pasted-on appearance of their half-timbered gables; the artificial aging of their facades with scattered stone blocks; and their prominent, whimsical chimneys, peppered with stone and decorated with large stucco fields and playful brick

patterning and motifs.

Each row of 23 houses mirrors the other across 222nd Street. Despite the row's visual variety, each house is of one of six general types. Five of these types are paired houses sharing a vestibule, and the other type is a single house.

In planning 222nd Street, Selective Homes adapted a model rooted in English Garden City concepts and previously used in Jackson Heights, utilizing driveways within the block interiors to allow for uninterrupted front lawns. Construction began in May 1931, and three months later, Selective Homes entered an agreement with five other builders completing similar projects nearby to market their projects collectively as "Parkway Homes of St. Albans." Although all the houses were completed by the end of 1931 and several sold quickly, some remained unsold until 1934, likely due to the deepening Depression.

Into the 1950s, the district's houses were owned and occupied by white middle-class families. The history of 222nd Street after that time reflects the broader changes occurring in the neighborhood as it changed from almost entirely white to a predominantly Black community starting in the 1960s. Although Black families initially faced considerable hostility from some white Cambria Heights residents as they began purchasing homes there, the neighborhood had largely transitioned to a middle- and upper-middle class Black community by 1975. Cambria Heights is now one of the city's major Haitian American communities as well as a magnet for families from Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. Today, the neighborhood remains one of several prosperous, predominantly African American, and Afro-Caribbean neighborhoods in southeastern Queens.

The Historic District contains only residential use and is located within an R2A zoning district. R2A contextual zoning districts are intended to preserve low-rise neighborhoods characterized by single-family detached homes on lots with minimum widths of 40 feet. R2A zoning district regulations allow for a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.5, which includes all space within a building except garages. The maximum building height is 35 feet, and the perimeter wall may rise no higher than 21 feet. One off-street parking space is required for each dwelling unit.

On September 14, 2021, LPC held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District (Item No. 1). Two speakers testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of the local City Council Member and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The LPC also received written submissions in favor of the designation from the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance and from four residents of the Historic District.

All landmark buildings within the Historic District are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(a) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed district on August 10, 2022 (Calendar No. 21). There were no speakers, and the hearing was closed.

CONSIDERATION

The City Planning Commission has evaluated the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District in relation to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements and plans for the development, growth, and improvements in the vicinity of the area involved. The City Planning Commission believes that the designation of the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District aligns with plans for the area’s future development and improvement. The Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. The City Planning Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the Cambria Heights – 222nd Street Historic District designation and the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal in the vicinity of this Historic District.

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