

Sunset Park South Historic District

Borough of Brooklyn

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendaring January 22, 2019



428 to 414 54th Street, LPC, 2017

The proposed Sunset Park South Historic District consists of approximately 285 buildings located along 54th through 59th Streets between 4th and 5th Avenues in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn. Constructed around the turn of the 20th century as Sunset Park was developing into a working- and middle-class community, the proposed district is notable for its fine rows of well-preserved houses designed in the popular revival styles of the time, incorporating neo-Grec, Romanesque Revival, and Renaissance Revival details and ornamentation and representing the turn-of-the-century architectural development of Sunset Park.

Sunset Park was largely farmland until the 1890s, when it was transformed by new transportation links and the industrial development of its waterfront. Crucial to the neighborhood's growth were the 1889 opening of the 39th Street Ferry to Lower Manhattan and the 1893 extension of the Brooklyn Union Elevated Railway along 3rd Avenue, which linked the area with Downtown Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Bridge. The 1890s also saw the development of Bush Terminal, a waterfront complex of piers, warehouses, and factories that quickly grew into New York's largest commercial and industrial facility, employing 20,000 people. Formerly known simply as the Eighth Ward or as part of South Brooklyn, the neighborhood took its name in the early 20th century from the park planned in 1891 and completed in 1911 ten blocks north of the proposed district.

Transportation, industrial, and recreational improvements spurred the construction of speculative row houses to house port workers and professionals. Among these were several rows constructed within the proposed district by 1892, including the unusual group of four transitional neo-Grec/Romanesque Revival style houses at 460 to 466 54th Street (P. L. Burnett, 1892). Reflecting the broader Sunset Park community, early owners and residents of the proposed district included German, Irish, Italian, Danish, Finnish, and Swedish immigrants engaged in both blue- and white-collar occupations. Reflecting the relatively modest financial means of its new residents, many of the proposed district's houses were constructed as two-family homes, which enabled their owners to supplement their incomes by taking in renters.

Working for local developers and builders, a number of Brooklyn architects are represented in the proposed district, including Henry Spicer, Thomas Bennett, and Henry Pohlmann. Houses ranged from the relatively ornate—such as the Renaissance Revival style row at 413 to 433 56th Street (Thomas Bennett, 1899-1901) with their full-height projecting bays, lavish classical reliefs, and deep bracketed cornices—to simpler rows, like the brick-fronted group of 26 houses (Henry Spicer, 1895) filling the north blockfront of 59th Street between 4th and 5th Avenues. Most of the proposed district was constructed within a period of ten years, with the colorful brick row at 444 to 468 59th Street (Henry Pohlmann, 1902) among its last.

With its high level of historical integrity, the proposed Sunset Park South Historic District remains one of its neighborhood's standout sections, containing distinctive historic streetscapes recalling Sunset Park's early development as an attractive working- and middle-class residential neighborhood created by local architects and developers for both native-born and immigrant New Yorkers.

