

Prospect Hill Prospectus



Spring 2001

edited by Chris Sturbaum

ANNUAL SPRING NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY

Jackson Street

(between 3rd and Prospect)

Saturday, June 2

5:00 PM

Rain date: June 3

Around the Neighborhood

It was a nice white Christmas on the Prospect Hill this year. As spring approaches, the sound of remodeling fills the air. Tracy Odea and family are finally nearing the completion of a sizable two-story project on Fairview Street. Down the street on the alley between Third and Fourth streets, a small house is being redone and a new owner will be moving back to the neighborhood he grew up in. Josh

Gardner grew up as the son of the Fairview Methodist minister over on Davisson Street and he looks forward to walking to work from the hill. Projects on Euclid and all around the neighborhood are ongoing as the neighborhood rebuilds itself.

You will notice a lot of stories in this issue written by your own neighbors. This reflects a change in editorial policy. We will publish the next newsletter only when we have enough story submittals from neighbors. It is a

great opportunity for each of you readers and neighbors (or your children), to write about anything you like. This issue has stories about gardening, fiddling, a cat, a clown, a famous local preservationist and a story of a resident of the neighborhood who is no longer with us. Please have some fun and get your story in the newsletter. It will make our newsletter a real neighborhood newsletter with stories from your own neighbors. So get inspired! Tell us something about yourself, your pet, your porch, your neighbor, literally anything you are interested in writing. Write a poem, tell us what you like or don't like about anything. Write a news story about something important in the community, but please answer our invitation to write. E-mail your submission to me at barbchri@bloomington.in.us. I am looking forward to our next newsletter. Hope you enjoy this one.

There is talk of a Bloomington Restorations Inc (BRI) tour of Prospect Hill and a possible neighbors only garden tour as well as an upcoming neighborhood picnic. The times will be announced so stay tuned and write something OK?

McDoel Conservation District Created

This winter, the McDoel Historic Conservation District became a reality. The 1920's bungalow district includes some even older structures, but mostly it is a slightly more recent version of our own west side early working class suburb. The early history of McDoel centered on the Monon switchyards (named the McDoel Yards in 1910 after a company president), stone mill work along the rail line and the Gentry

Brothers Circus which wintered in what became the northern part of the neighborhood. The prosperous and roaring 20's saw the Shower's factory build where later the RCA and Thompson plants were located. The bungalow development was largely for workers in the new factory of what was then, one of the largest furniture companies in the country. One can imagine the optimism and excitement of that era: The "War to End All Wars" had been fought and won. The USA was now a world power. The new factory jobs were allowing young couples to buy their first houses and the stock market was booming! The years ahead proved rockier than anticipated with the depression and the gradual decline of the Showers Brother's empire. The RCA years followed the Second World War and again, the housing supported the revived factory until it gradually declined, was bought by Thompson who finally slunk off to Mexico, leaving McDoel to again find it's way through hard times. But a new appreciation for the old traditional neighborhood patterns and the old houses started attracting still another generation of homebuyers to McDoel. The old factory sight is struggling to find a new commercial/industrial use and when it does, the McDoel neighborhood will still be there. A survivor of two world wars, a depression and the closing of three factories, McDoel Gardens Neighborhood isn't planning on going anywhere. Threatened by landlord neglect, property speculators and expanding business and hospital use, the neighbors felt they needed some protection to encourage new homeowner investment. The recent recognition and protection granted by the Historic Conservation District Designation could

truly help this neighborhood prosper again.

The recent passage of the McDoel Conservation District has created something entirely new in the neighborhood preservation movement. New ideas are often distrusted and this case was no exception, as both neighbors and landlords saw things differently. But if we just stay to the facts of the matter, the following is a brief summary what a Conservation District is and how it affects homeowners:

- 1) The homeowner can still do anything to his house he can do now: add on, put on vinyl siding, change windows or restore it historically. It has no impact at all on what you can do to your own house, unless you want to tear it down.
- 2) New construction such as infill housing or garages can have design guidelines to help them fit into the existing neighborhood pattern. In McDoel this only addresses the pitch of the roof and the use of historic setbacks from the street to match the existing houses.
- 3) New commercial buildings would have some guidelines to help them blend with the historic area.

And that is the Conservation District in a nutshell. The CD doesn't ever have to become a full district. This allows protection for an area without all the restrictions of a full historic designation.

This new tool could be a helpful one to address some problems in our own Prospect Hill Neighborhood bordered by 5th, Morton, 2nd and Walker streets. Here are some issues the CD could help with:

- 1) We could have design guidelines for infill projects, both residential and commercial, to help them blend into the neighborhood. This could be important on any of our borders and empty lots. It also reviews new and sometimes oversized garage projects in the neighborhood. There will be changes on Kirkwood and this is another tool to help ensure good design.
- 2) Demolition would be reviewed. This could help protect the homes of neighbors who live on the borderlines from unwanted parking lots or adjacent commercial projects happening without review or neighborhood input.
- 3) Historic Conservation District status would connect the rest of the Prospect Hill Neighborhood in an official way to the existing Historic District. This could have a benefit by increasing property values the way this kind of official notice tends to do.

If this is ever to be an option for Prospect Hill, we will want everyone to really understand the issues and the choices and act together to strengthen our great old neighborhood.

Historic Sidewalks and Prospect Hill

This summer there will be a lot of road and sidewalk work going on. West Third Street will be repaved from Jackson Street to Adams. Jackson Street will also be redone on the hill between Third and Fourth streets, including the sidewalks in

front of the Dunning House and the four square to the south on the corner of Third and Jackson. A few years ago, the old limestone and brick sidewalks would have routinely been dug up and taken to the landfill. But both of these projects will involve restoration of historic sidewalks. The West Third plan includes ten brick sidewalks that date from the early days of Prospect Hill. Thanks to a Neighborhood Improvement Grant from HAND, the neighborhood association is contracting the sidewalk work in coordination with the road project. PHNA has already restored many historic WPA walks using this program in recent years. The city crews will rebuild the curbs leaving place for the brick to be replaced by our contractor. This coordination makes the project more affordable and efficient.

As to the Jackson Street work, all the sidewalks to the bottom of the hill on both sides, including the one to the south of the Dunning sidewalk, will be restored or replaced in the historic pattern of WPA sidewalks. Important drainage and utility work will be combined with this project. It will look like our own version of the "big dig" at the bottom of the hill when the underground storm sewer is dug up and replaced. The old limestone masonry in the storm sewer is in good shape but the limestone roof is cracking. There have always been flooding problems at the bottom of Jackson Street and the owners are looking forward to some relief from the water by this project. There is also an original water main in the street that needs to

be replaced. It will be a messy summer but the repairs are for the long term and if any neighborhood can appreciate the long view, it should be ours. We will enjoy these sidewalks for the rest of our lives and maybe some day, an unborn preservationist will wish to protect them.