

## HD-24-03 Green Acres Neighborhood

Staff Report:  
Commission

Bloomington Historic Preservation

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**The Green Acres Neighborhood qualifies for local designation under the following highlighted criteria found in Ordinance 95-20 of the Municipal Code (1) a, c; (2) g**

- 1) Historic:
  - a) Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation; or is associated with a person who played a significant role in local, state, or national history; or**
  - b) Is the site of an historic event; or
  - c) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the community.**
  
- 2) Architectural:
  - a) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or engineering type; or
  - b) Is the work of a designer whose individual work has significantly influenced the development of the community; or
  - c) Is the work of a designer of such prominence that such work gains its value from the designer's reputation; or
  - d) Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or
  - e) Contains any architectural style, detail, or other element in danger of being lost; or
  - f) Owing to its unique location or physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the city; or
  - g) Exemplifies the built environment in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style**

### **Case Background**

The Green Acres neighborhood, roughly bounded by SR46, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Illinois Central RR tracks, and Indiana University campus was subdivided in the 1920s and 40s from a 160 acres farm established in the 1840s by William Moffat Millen. Unusual for neighborhoods in Bloomington and the US in general, the neighborhood's development was slowed but not halted by the Depression and World War II, and so the neighborhood demonstrates a

southwest to northeast gradient of consistent suburban development from the 1920s through 1960s. The neighborhood has not been previously studied as a potential district, although it has been repeatedly surveyed for historic properties. In 2007, a neighborhood plan was developed by the Green Acres Neighborhood Association that listed historic structures included in the 2001 interim report, and described “historically preserved homes well maintained and in good condition” as one of the neighborhood’s strengths.”

On the May 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), five adjacent Demolition Delays came up for consideration on N Jefferson Street bordering campus between E 7<sup>th</sup> Street and E 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Built between 1940 and the early 1950s, these houses are rated contributing on the Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory. Throughout their history, these houses were home to artists, students, blue-collar workers, and academics. At this meeting staff recommended the release of these Demolition Delays because in our opinion none of the houses individually or as a group met criteria for designation. One of the homes, a fairly intact 1940 bungalow at 324 North Jefferson Street, had been owned as the home and studio of a significant local sculptor, Jean-Paul Darriau, who is best known locally for the Adam and Eve sculpture on the IU campus and the Red Blonde Black and Olive statues at Showers Park. According to national standards except in exceptional circumstances, a site must have achieved significance fifty or more years ago to be considered for historic designation. Although the building itself is over eighty years old, Darriau occupied and worked in the house from 1978 to 2007.

Some Commissioners expressed concern about the potential demolition of a block of five contributing buildings and its impact on the neighborhood, inquiring whether there was any neighborhood interest in the establishment of a historic or conservation district, while others expressed skepticism whether there was enough historical context or public support to justify the consideration of a larger district. The Historic Preservation Program Manager shared that he had not yet heard any interest in a district and agreed with the opinion that the Commission should not move to nominate such a large district on its own. The commission then recommended that staff produce a report on the history of the larger neighborhood for the subsequent meeting, and tabled the vote to release demolition delay.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> the Historic Preservation Program Manager shared a brief history of the neighborhood along with maps indicating the location of rental properties, as well as the 2018 Bloomington historic survey map showing the locations of buildings that had been singled out as Contributing, Notable, or Outstanding. A longtime neighborhood resident, Marines Fornerino attended the meeting and spoke in favor of designation, over the following months she would prepare the application submitted by the petitioning residents. The commission voted that a map be drawn of the Green Acres neighborhood

boundaries. Steve Wyatt of Bloomington Restorations Inc (BRI), was also in attendance, and suggested that he would consider relocating one or more of the houses up for Demolition Delay.

The following HPC meeting on June 13<sup>th</sup> was attended by five Green Acres residents who spoke in favor of designating the neighborhood, and the HPC voted to petition the director of the Department of Housing and Neighborhood Development to extend the Demolition Delay period by thirty days to a maximum of 120 days in order to give the residents time to prepare an application and hold their three required public meetings. The extension was granted, and the petitioners organized three public meetings in the neighborhood's Christian Science Church on 3<sup>rd</sup> street on July 11<sup>th</sup>, July 20<sup>th</sup>, and July 27<sup>th</sup>. In each of these meetings the petitioners presented the same information on the history of the neighborhood and the meaning of designation as a Conservation District, questions and comments were taken from the attendants and a petition was presented for those who wished to express support. Two of these meetings were also attended by members of the press.

Running up against the release date of the five demolition delays on August 14<sup>th</sup>, and the preceding August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the HPC—for which applications must be received two weeks in advance--the petitioners asked whether a special meeting could be called by the HPC Chair to vote on the nomination before August 14<sup>th</sup>. At the July 25<sup>th</sup> HPC meeting the Chair motioned to call a meeting on August 12<sup>th</sup>, and the motion was approved. The petitioners submitted their application, petition, and supplementary information on Monday July 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **Historic surveys and rating historic properties:**

The last historic sites survey to include the Green Acres neighborhood was conducted in 2018 by Bloomington Restorations Inc. The results from this survey are included on the Bloomington Historic Preservation GIS map. The survey counted one Outstanding property, the 1845 Millen House, which is included on the National Register of historic places; five Notable properties including the firehouse at 2201 E 3rd St, the Elaine Doenges House at 201 S Hillsdale, and several other architecturally distinct modernist houses at 316 N Hillsdale Drive, 2412 E 4th St, and 2563 E 8th St; 183 structures rated Contributing; and 11 rated non-contributing. 244 structures were not counted in the survey. Many of these are mid-century houses in the eastern part of the neighborhood that retain a good deal of their historic integrity, but BRI staff did not include them in their survey which they had intended as a general indicator of the location of historic structures though not a comprehensive list. Because the eastern half of the district is relatively modern, it has not been surveyed as thoroughly as by state or local surveyors as some of Bloomington's older neighborhoods. While some parts

of the district like the southern end of Roosevelt Street and the intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> and Clark have lost most of their historic structures, a walk through the neighborhood gives the impression that most of it is built up contiguously of structures that are over fifty years old, retain their important historic features, and demonstrate a legible historic pattern of occupation and development.

### **Historic Background: Criteria (1) A, C**

- A.** The built environment of the Green Acres neighborhood is of significant interest to the development of Bloomington at a time when the City and University began to experience extensive growth thanks to New Deal and postwar policies promoting home ownership and higher education. Although the western half of Green Acres was platted in 1923 as Highland Homes and contains several blocks of well-preserved 1920s cottages and bungalows, most of the area's development took place between the 1930s and 1960s, making Green Acres effectively Bloomington's first postwar suburb.

In the 1930s, mortgage insurance, financing options, and construction standards enforced by the Federal Housing Administration rebooted America's homebuilding industry. Kit houses, including the minimal ranches ubiquitous in Green Acres, were built to these standard for safe, efficient, tasteful, and affordable design. Many of the components for these houses were manufactured in Lafayette and New Albany Indiana.

Following the Second World War the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill, offered new financial aid to veterans for home ownership and education. Facing a massive influx of new students and residents, the campus-adjacent neighborhood filled out rapidly in the following two decades providing housing for students, faculty, and workers occupied in the rapidly expanding University. The smooth transition from the prewar gridded plat in the western end of the district to the winding parklike roads streets in the eastern half, occupied by a clear gradient of postwar housing development clearly demonstrates the development and evolving cultural tastes of this important juncture in Bloomington's history.

- C.** The development of Green Acres largely coincides with the tenure of Indiana University President Herman B Wells (1937-1962), a period of massive expansion in the size and academic breadth of the University. The economically mixed suburb located adjacent to campus has been home to many artists, academics, and university staff who were attracted to Bloomington for work and housing opportunities played a part in this cultural, economic, and social transformation. Since the neighborhood's

development, Green Acres has been consistently defined by its cultural, special, and economic relationship to campus as well as the development of Bloomington outward from its prewar core.

### **Architectural Significance: Criteria (2) E, F, G**

**E.** In this criterion, staff opinion differs from the applicants' assertion that the buildings in the proposed conservation district contain any architectural style, detail or element in danger of being lost. While several houses within the bounds were brought to the Historic Preservation Commission for Demolition Delay and parts of the district are zoned for higher density development, staff does not believe that the styles of homes represented in this area contain characteristics in danger of being lost. The styles represented in this area come from two of the most prolific periods of housing development in US history—the 1920s and post-war building boom—and few houses in the neighborhood demonstrate features that are rare or generally threatened. This is not to say that that changes to substantial parts of the Green Acres neighborhood would not affect the historic integrity of the whole or that there are not building styles or details from this era that are in risk of being lost. 1920s and postwar kit houses, national homes, and minimal ranches can be found throughout Bloomington albeit not in many contexts so consistent and substantial.

**F.** Applicants argue that Green Acres “owing to its unique location or physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the city.” This is a large area adjacent to campus that has been home to thousands of renters and owners as well as countless visitors. The neighborhood is of course familiar to its current and former residents and has substantial sentimental value. In the context of the city as a whole, it is difficult to make the case that Green Acres represents an established and familiar visual feature. Located between the 46 bypass, railroad tracks, 3<sup>rd</sup> street, and the west end of campus, the neighborhood is not a thoroughfare, and the parts of the neighborhood north of 3<sup>rd</sup> street are not likely familiar to most Bloomington residents. While the neighborhood does contain some distinctive buildings, these are mostly located on quiet roads at some distance from the street.

**G.** Owing in part to its rapid development and integrity of historic resources, the green Acres neighborhood exemplifies the built environment in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. The bulk of the neighborhood was built up from the 1940s through 1960s with American Small Houses, Ranches, Bungalows, Cottages, and Split-levels. While the neighborhood's historic period of development spans four decades, the style of much of the neighborhood can be best described as Minimal Traditional—the blending of colonial, craftsman, and modernist architectural influences. For the most part the buildings avoid ostentatious ornamentation and

emphasize efficiency and the use of local materials, most notably in this case Indiana limestone which is ubiquitous in Bloomington's post-war construction. Although homes built in the late 1950s and 1960s are generally larger and embrace more modern design elements than the FHA influenced homes of the New Deal and immediate post-war periods, the neighborhood nonetheless demonstrates consistent stylistic influence. Notable houses in the neighborhood draw greater influence from the new architectural schools burgeoning in this period including International and Usonian design.

**Staff Recommendation: Meets Criteria for Designation (1) a, c; (2) g.**

Staff recommends that the Green Acres Conservation District is eligible for designation as a local conservation district. After careful consideration of the application and review of the Historic District Criteria as found in Ordinance 95-20 of the Municipal Code, staff finds that the district meets multiple criteria listed in the code.

The district meets Criteria 1(a) as Bloomington's first substantial postwar suburb and demonstrating a continuum of development influenced by federal policy as well as the growing importance of higher education in Bloomington's culture and economy. This significance is represented both by the characteristics of the built environment and by the significance of notable residents for the history of the City and University.

The district meets Criteria 1(c) for its significant value as part of development of the city of Bloomington because it served as housing for the massive influx of students, faculty, and staff who greatly expanded and developed Indiana University after World War II, contributing to the cultural, economic, and social transformation of the city during this time. The housing stock is characterized by the burgeoning economic opportunities of this period that enabled the growth of homeownership for veterans across the class spectrum.

The property meets Criteria 2(g) because the built environment of the district, which includes the streetscape and buildings, maintains high integrity and still conveys the distinct architectural character from their period of construction.

**A note about historic postwar suburbs:**

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established a framework for standardizing the approach to Historic Preservation in the US and over the following decade guidelines were established for evaluating the integrity and

significance of historic sites and structures. These guidelines and the growing body of interpretive literature are meant to be uniformly applicable so that those working in the field or applying for historic designation can make objective determinations. As a rule the threshold age for eligibility is fifty years with an exception for sites that have achieved exceptional significance before that time. The majority of America's housing stock was built after World War II, and in the past thirty years has become subject to the same considerations for eligibility as properties from before this period of massive growth. In 2002 the National Park Service published National Register Bulletin NRB46 Historic Residential Suburbs to provide a historical context and tools for evaluating the eligibility of suburbs, including postwar developments.

This Bulletin considers that "The post-World War II building boom... resulted in the widespread development of suburban subdivisions that were not only large in size but vast in number. In coming years as many of these approach 50 years of age, there will be increasing pressure to evaluate their eligibility for listing in the National Register" and that "Because of their large size and great number, residential suburbs present a challenge to preservationists and decision makers." During this period traditional craftsmanship has given way to mass production and manufactured components, and many decisions makers in preservation and other fields feel squeamish that something built in their childhood could now be considered "historic."

For modern buildings that are not architecturally distinctive on their own or associated with specific individuals or events, their eligibility for listing often depends on their inclusion in a larger context. In a historic site survey, these properties would be considered "Contributing," a level of designation that indicates a building is likely not eligible for listing on its own, but could contribute to a district that demonstrates integrity and significance as a whole. The Green Acres neighborhood, for instance, contains five buildings designated "Notable" for their stand-alone architectural significance and one "Outstanding" property, the 1840s Millen House which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural and settlement-period significance. To be eligible as a District, the neighborhood must "retain the spatial organization, physical components, aspects of design, and historic associations that it acquired during its period of significance." Such an area may, and likely will, contain properties that are non-Contributing but the overall effect should not disrupt the integrity of the district.