

February 27, 2023

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The Honorable James Langfelder, Mayor of Springfield
Honorable Aldermen and Alderwomen of the City Council
James Zirkle, Esq., Corporation Council, City of Springfield

Municipal Center West, Room 106
300 South Seventh Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701

RE: Central Springfield National Register Historic District

Dear Mayor Langfelder, Aldermen and Alderwomen of the City Council, and Mr. Zirkle, Corporation Council,

I am writing to you in regard to the Central Springfield National Register Historic District, of which I prepared and completed a Boundary Extension and Additional Documentation Nomination in 2015. The City of Springfield engaged the Lakota Group in 2014 to prepare the nomination.

In 1977, Illinois SHPO first nominated the historic core of downtown Springfield to the National Register of Historic Places incorporating 63 contributing and nine non-contributing buildings. In 1986, Illinois SHPO prepared a second nomination, amending the original to include six new contributing properties. The 2015 nomination, which amends the 1986 nomination, adds 71 additional contributing buildings and 18 non-contributing properties. In total, the Historic District now includes 158 commercial and institutional buildings, representing a variety of defined architectural styles and vernacular commercial building types from the early and mid-1800s to the 1960s.

The National Register of Historic Places, established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 passed by the U.S. Congress, is this nation's official list of buildings, sites, structures, and objects worthy of preservation for future generations. The National Park Service and Illinois SHPO jointly administer the National Register in the State of Illinois. While National Register listing, whether individually or as part of a district, does not restrict the use or disposition of properties, it does make commercial and income-producing buildings eligible for the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program (HPTC), a significant incentive to encourage building adaptive use and rehabilitation. In Illinois, National Register-listed properties are also eligible for both the State of Illinois and River Edge Historic Preservation Tax Credit programs. All three programs have led to significant reinvestments in historic properties in communities across the state over the decades. Therefore, listing historic downtown commercial buildings in the National Register provides important financial benefits to property owners. These benefits were the prime motivating factor to undertake the 2015 Boundary Extension: to consider other properties eligible for inclusion in the National Register that could also potentially take advantage of the tax credit incentives.

In regard to 618 and 622 Washington Street, both properties were included as part of the 2015 Boundary Extension Nomination. As specified by the National Park Service, the base requirement for listing properties in the National Register, is that they must be 50 years of age or older. Other standards for listing include whether the property is associated with a significant historical event that shaped broad patterns of our history, the life of a person significant in our past, or they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Contributing properties added in the 2015 Boundary Extension nomination are considered significant under the last standard for their distinctive architectural design.

When drawing historic district boundaries, properties will be evaluated as "contributing" or "non-contributing" to the history and significance of the historic district. Contributing properties are any buildings that add to the historical integrity or architectural qualities that make the historic district significant. Non-contributing properties are those younger than 50 years of age, have substantial alterations from their original design, or do not meet other National Register eligibility requirements.

When completing the nomination, our firm evaluated the property at 618 Washington Street as contributing to the district, given its intact upper façade representative of the Art Deco and Commercial architectural styles found in many downtowns during the 1910s and 1920s. This a unique vernacular expression of both styles. It is my understanding the building was modified with a circa 1990s Post Modern storefront, which in itself would not disqualify the building for its contributing status. As long as the building exhibits a strong sense of feeling, association, design, and workmanship, it remains contributing to the history and architecture of the district. In time, the storefront will itself be considered significant as it reaches 50 years of age in the years ahead.

As 622 Washington Street, the building was classified as non-contributing to the district principally due to the age of its last alteration, which occurred in 1973 according to our research. Therefore, as the nomination was prepared in 2015, the property alteration was not 50 years of age and therefore not eligible as a contributing property to the district. If the nomination were to be prepared today, it would be considered a contributing property as it would meet the 50-year threshold. It would also serve as a representative example of a Late Modern-International Style commercial building found in many downtowns across the country. When making this evaluation, we understood through our research that this building consisted of two original buildings that received a façade slipcovered alteration. If the façade alteration had been reversed, both original buildings would be considered contributing buildings. Last, if additional research and documentation demonstrate that the façade alterations occurred before 1966, then the building would also be considered a contributing resource to the Central Springfield National Register Historic District.

The Central Springfield National Register Historic District is an important preservation and economic development tool that can leverage tax credit benefits to facilitate new retail, office, and residential uses in historic buildings. Local tax-increment financing should be used in support of tax credit investment projects that generate higher property values and tax dollar receipts. Many cities across the country make use of tax-increment financing for such aims.

I am available to answer any additional questions from the Council.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Kalogeresis", written in a cursive style.

Nicholas P. Kalogeresis, AICP
Associate Principal