

Cover photo: 1501 and 1509 S. Summit, 2019.

Central High Neighborhood Historic District

Local Ordinance District DRAFT Report

Little Rock Historic District Commission



LOD DRAFT Report
Central High Neighborhood
Historic District
July, 2022

Executive Summary

The Central High neighborhood is the surrounding residential and commercial landscape of the Little Rock Central High School. As the focus of national attention during the 1957 desegregation crisis, both the school and the neighborhood gained local and national significance. Pre-dating this event, the neighborhood's history and prominence began as Little Rock's first suburb. With multiple eras of historical value overlaying the area, the architectural character and value of the neighborhood is significant to the story of Little Rock's built environment and a present touchstone to the past that can be experienced today.

In recognition of this history, as well as the historical and aesthetic value of the individual structures within this area, the Central High Neighborhood Historic District was nominated to the National Register of Historic Place in 1996. Thirteen (13) years later, despite welcoming thousands of visitors annually from around the world to visit the National Historic Landmark and Museum, the neighborhood was in jeopardy of losing its national designation. In 2012, the historic district was expanded to increase the number of historically significant resources and fill the deficit of lost structures.

Today, the Central High Neighborhood Historic District is identified as an endangered historical resource. The district suffers extensively from demolitions, property neglect, and incompatible alterations. The City of Little Rock has enacted multiple indirect tools to address this endangerment over the years, but these have fallen short of impacting the issue in a meaningful way. To remain a National Register historic district, the district must retain a ratio of 51% or more of its historic fabric. The results of a recent staff analysis of the past decade shows that the district's current eligibility ratio is estimated to be 59% and dropping. This pattern of regressive development suggests a continued and persistent trajectory resulting in the irreplaceable loss of the district's National Register designation, property owner access to state and federal economic funds, and the special character of a locally and nationally significant neighborhood.

To retain and steward the surviving historical character and value of the neighborhood; safeguard property owner access to economic development tools; and strengthen and stabilize the economy of the neighborhood as the surrounding landscape of the Central High School National Historic Landmark, staff recommends the creation of a local ordinance historic district.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	0
List of Figures	2
1. Introduction	3
1.1 Terms	3
2. History & Significance	4
2.1 1870-1915: Early Development	4
2.2. 1915-1940	8
2.3 1941-1961	11
3. Past Preservation Initiatives.....	13
4. The Projected Loss of the Central High Neighborhood Historic District.....	14
4.1 Demolitions.....	14
4.2 National Register of Historic Places Designation	15
2.3 Stabilizing Property Owner Investment.....	15
5. Solution: Local Ordinance Historic District	17
5.1 What is a local ordinance district?.....	17
5.2 Path to Approval	18
5.3.3 Staff Capacity	19
5.3 Path Following Approval	19
5.3.1 Increase Representation on Historic District Commission.....	19
5.3.2 Design Guidelines.....	19
Appendices.....	20
Appendix A.....	20
Appendix B	21
Appendix C.....	22
Appendix D.....	23
Appendix E	24
Appendix F	25
Appendix G.....	26
Bibliography	27

List of Figures

Figure 1. Vacant and deteriorating houses in the Central High Neighborhood Historic District, photos by Preserve Arkansas.....	3
Figure 2 Section of "Bird's eye view of the city of Little Rock, the capitol of Arkansas 1871", Library of Congress.....	4
Figure 3 , Milton L. Rice’s House on Oak Grove shortly after being building, c. 1871, courtesy of the Central Arkansas Library System.....	4
Figure 4. Section of “Printed map of the original platting of the city of Little Rock”, undated, Arkansas Digital Archives.	5
Figure 5 Rice-Bowman House in its current state, photo courtesy of Quapaw Quarter Association, 2019.	5
Figure 6. Section of “Perspective map of the city of Little Rock, Ark., State capital of Arkansas, county seat of Pulaski County. 1887”, Library of Congress.	6
Figure 7. South Battery median, snapshot of aerial from Google Maps.	6
Figure 8. Centennial Public School, postcard, c. 1905-1915, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.....	7
Figure 9. Arkansas Baptist College, c. 1930, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.....	7
Figure 10. The Martin A. Sharp House at 1422 Summit, built in c. 1900 in the two-story Queen Anne style.....	8
Figure 11. Home at 1400 S. Summit, built in 1905 in the Queen Anne style.	8
Figure 12. W.R. Stewart House at 1406 S. Summit, built in 1905 in the Colonial Revival style by architect Charles L. Thompson.....	8
Figure 13. Three examples of the American Foursquare style in a row at 2305-2315 S. Summit,.....	9
Figure 14. West Side Junior High School, c. 1915-1925, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.....	9
Figure 15. Central High during construction, c. 1927, courtesy of the Central Arkansas Library System. .	10
Figure 16. Warren Lenon House at 2005 W. 16th.	10
Figure 17. Clayborn House, 2022, substantially altered.	10
Figure 18. Clayborn House, 2019, Google Maps.....	10
Figure 19. Vacant lot at 1424 Schiller Street where the home of Dee Brown once stood.....	11
Figure 20. 2108 Marshall built c. 1935 in the Minimal Traditional style.	11
Figure 21. 1801, 1803, and 1805 W 18th Street all built in 1948 in the American Small House style.	12
Figure 22. Cover of the ReLocal report, "A Way Forward-Strategies and Tolls for addressing Vacancy in Little Rock", PlaceEconomics, 2016.	13
Figure 23. Chart showing permitted demolitions in Central High neighborhood from 2010-2021.	14
Figure 24. 2301-2309 Summit, before rehabilitation and infill construction, 2013.	16
Figure 25. 2301-2309 Summit, after rehabilitation and compatible infill construction, 2019.....	16
Figure 26. Private Investment by Residential Property Owners from 2010 to 2021.....	17
Figure 27. Chart showing MacArthur Park cases compared to applicable Central High permits and the projected combined total.	19
Figure 28. Home Owner's Loan Corporation, Little Rock Map, c. 1940.....	21
Figure 29. Parcel Map of West with Vacant Building Recommendations.	22
Figure 30. Parcel Map of West with Vacant Lot Recommendations.	23

1. Introduction

Figure 1. Vacant and deteriorating houses in the Central High Neighborhood Historic District, photos by Preserve Arkansas.



The Central High Neighborhood Historic District is an endangered historical resource. The district suffers extensively from demolitions, property neglect, and incompatible alterations. Over the past decade, this pattern of regressive development suggests a continued and persistent trajectory resulting in the irreplaceable loss of the district’s National Register designation, property owner access to state and federal economic funds, and the special character of a locally and nationally significant neighborhood.

The City of Little Rock has enacted multiple indirect tools to address this endangerment over the years, but these have fallen short of impacting the issue in a meaningful way. To remain a National Register historic district, the district must retain a ratio of 51% or more of its historic fabric. The results of a recent staff analysis shows that the district’s current eligibility ratio is estimated to be 59% and dropping.

To retain and steward the surviving historical character and value of the neighborhood; safeguard property owner access to economic development tools; and strengthen and stabilize the economy of the neighborhood as the surrounding landscape of the Central High School National Historic Landmark, staff recommends the creation of a local ordinance historic district (Appendix A, pg. 20).

1.1 Terms

Below are terms that will be used throughout this document:

Local Ordinance Historic District means a geographically definable area in which historic structures and their setting are protected by public review, typically by a Historic District Commission.

Historic District means a geographically definable area with a significant concentration of buildings, structures, sites, spaces, or objects unified by past events, physical development, design, setting, materials, workmanship, sense of cohesiveness or related historical and aesthetic associations. This is an honorary designation.

Contributing means a structure which is a good example of a recognized architectural style, and which retains unaltered the major architectural details of that style. When a district is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, every structure is designated “contributing” or “non-contributing.” An area must have more than 50% “contributing structures” to be listed on the National Register.

Non-Contributing means either an historic structure which has been altered so much that the character-defining elements of its architectural style have been eliminated, or a

structure less than 50 years old, the basic age for National Register consideration.

Overlay District means a regulatory tool that creates a special zoning district, placed over the existing base zone(s), which identifies special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone.

Historic Resource Survey means a systematic method of documenting historic resources through fieldwork and research, often including documentation of photographs, maps, and a written description on a form.

2. History & Significance

The Central High Neighborhood Historic District's lifespan covers over 150 years of built history, 70 years of which pre-date the 1957 desegregation crisis. The district holds many identities within its long narrative: a pastoral scene of farms and manors in the late 19th century, Little Rock's first suburb in the early 20th century, the site of a major moment for civil rights in the mid-20th century, and, for most of its history, an interracial, mixed-use neighborhood of the middle and working class.

With multiple eras of historical value overlaying the area, the architectural character and value of the neighborhood is significant to the story of Little Rock. The district's history is representative of residential development and social change during the city's formative years. For residents and visitors today, the neighborhood presents itself as a valuable touchstone to the past.

2.1 1870-1915: Early Development

The Central High District was once an acreage of rolling hills directly west of the "Original City of Little Rock". In the late 19th century, the land was peppered with farms, parks, forests, and manors (Figure 2).

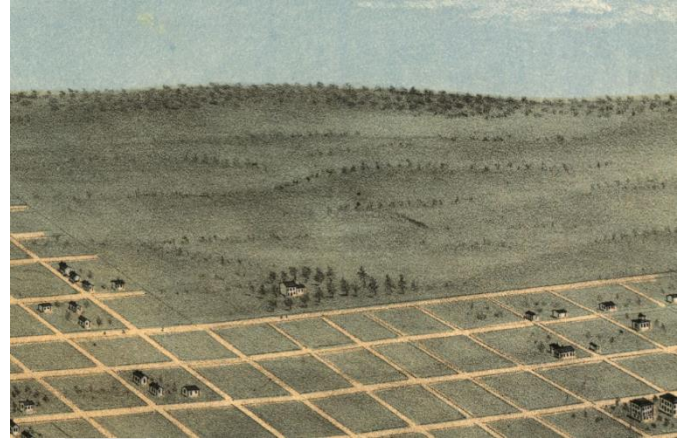


Figure 2 Section of "Bird's eye view of the city of Little Rock, the capitol of Arkansas 1871", Library of Congress.

The oldest surviving home from this period is the Rice-Bowman House. In 1870, carpetbagger Milton L. Rice built an estate on twelve acres known as Oak Grove (Figure 3). The expressive and imposing home was constructed in the Gothic Revival style and its tower is still visible from a distance. The Rice-Bowman House has been significantly altered over time and, today, resides in a severely deteriorated state at 2015 S. Battery (Figure 4).



Figure 3, Milton L. Rice's House on Oak Grove shortly after being building, c. 1871, courtesy of the Central Arkansas Library System.

The twelve acres of Oak Grove were sold to H.A. Bowman, a real estate developer. Bowman subdivided and platted the land in 1897 as the Oak Terrace Addition (Roy, Witsell, & Nichols, 1984). Bowman lived in the grand home until his death in 1935, after which his son occupied the structure. The home was extensively remodeled during the Bowman family residence.

H.A. Bowman was not the only real estate developer platting and subdividing in this western section just outside the city. Major parcel additions were platted between 1877-1892; however, little development occurred until 1890 (Figure 5). The Centennial Addition (1877), bound by Pulaski Street and Park Ave (1889) and 12th Street and Wright Ave, was the largest parcel addition, encompassing 160 acres. Directly to the west of the Centennial Addition was the Park Addition which held the West End Park, shown in Figure 6, the foregrounds of Central High School.



Figure 5 Rice-Bowman House in its current state, photo courtesy of Quapaw Quarter Association, 2019.

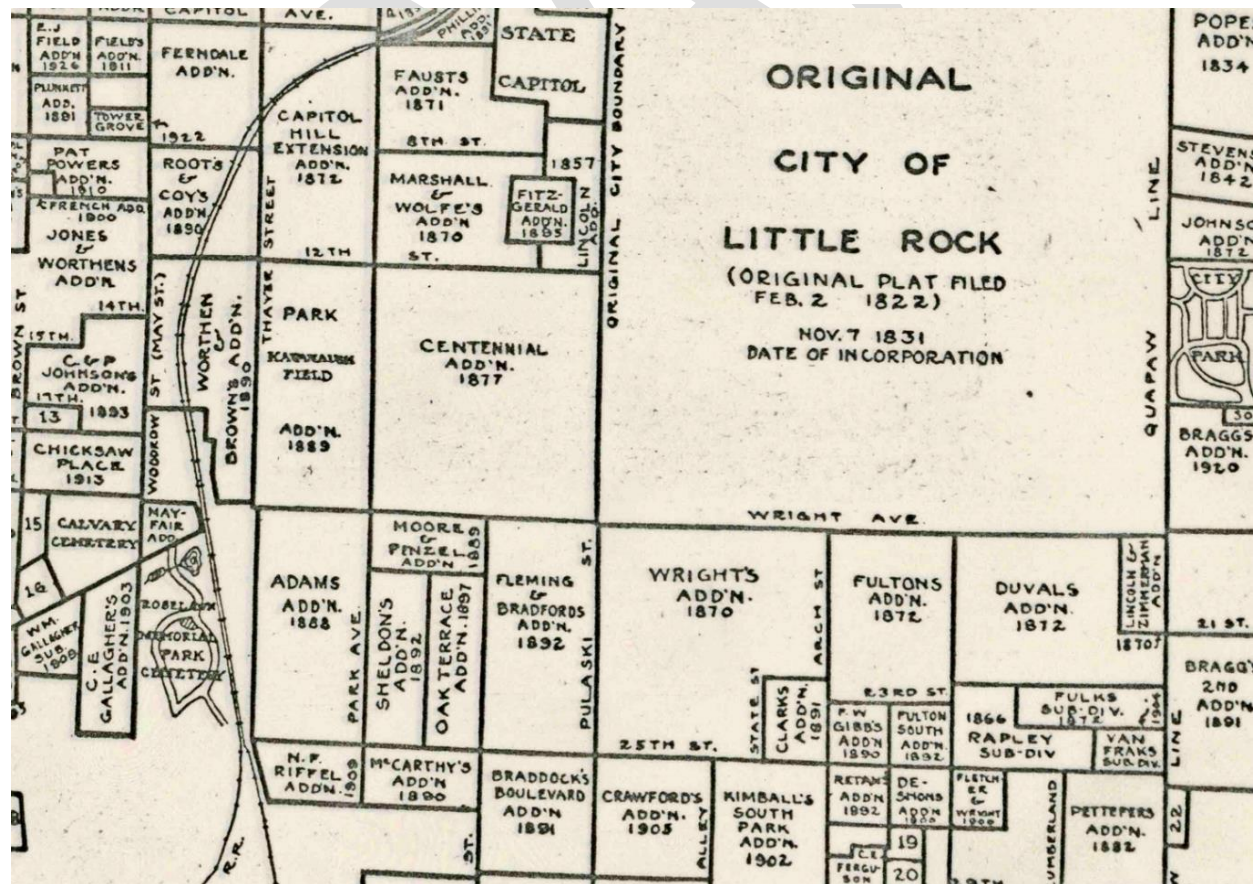


Figure 4. Section of "Printed map of the original platting of the city of Little Rock", undated, Arkansas Digital Archives.

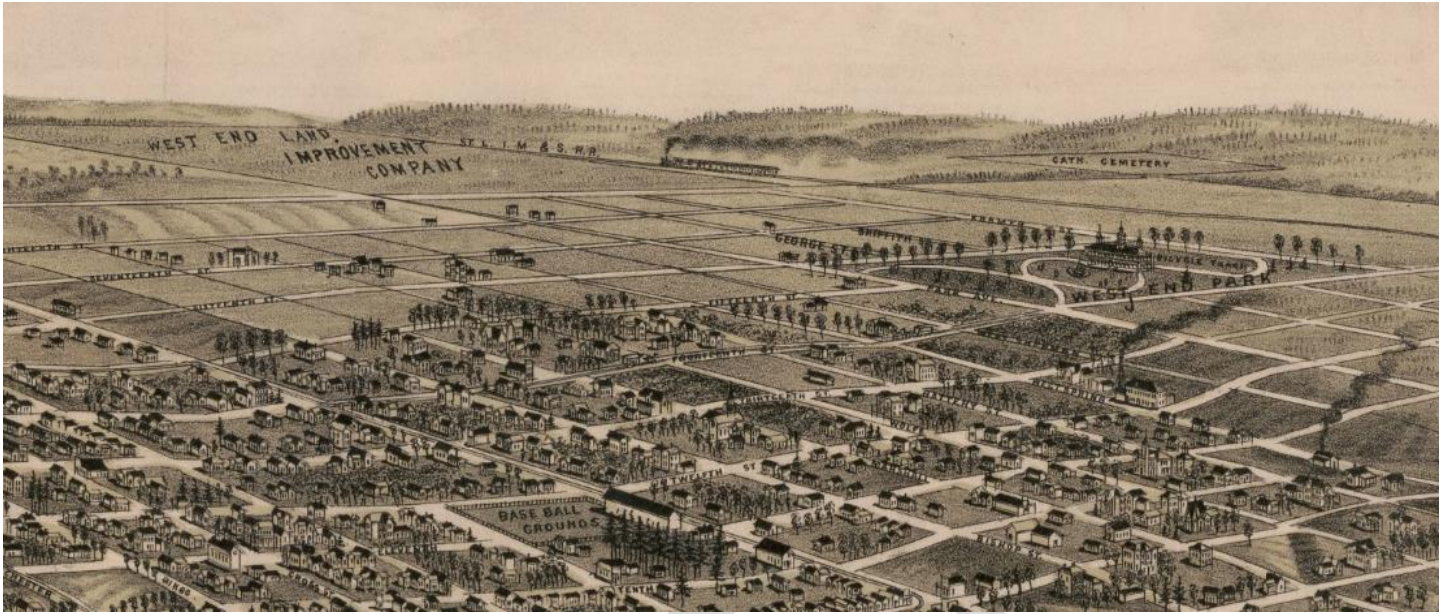


Figure 6. Section of “Perspective map of the city of Little Rock, Ark., State capital of Arkansas, county seat of Pulaski County. 1887”, Library of Congress.

The Central High District is laid out in the typical grid street pattern with standard size lots. The only deviation from this is found in the 2000 block of South Battery Street in front of the Rice-Bowman House (Figure 7). When Bowman platted Oak Terrace Addition, a flow garden was placed as a median through the center of Battery Street. During the neighborhood’s early development, a brochure published in 1890 advertised the growing suburb as “a capital place for a picnic and big enough for half the families of town to go at once without disturbing each other”.¹

By 1887, the northeast area had been developed modestly (Figure 6), primarily the Centennial and Park additions. A rapid growth in construction took place in the early part of the 20th century, commonly related to the Gilded Age of the United States, causing many additions to be platted within just a few years of each other and, consequently, blocks to be developed sporadically.

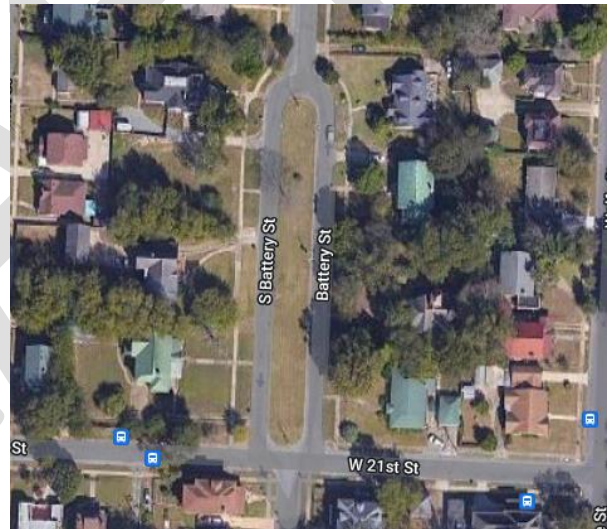


Figure 7. South Battery median, snapshot of aerial from Google Maps.

Improvements in infrastructure were a significant selling-point for developers for the neighborhood. This portion of Little Rock was developed alongside new turn-of-the-century amenities such as streetcar lines, water and sewage services, paved streets, and sidewalks, electricity, and fire protection.² The expansion of the streetcar lines came to the district in 1887, linking with downtown lines and terminating at West End Park. A second line came in 1893

¹ “Guide to Little Rock”, 1890, pg. 57.

² “Central High History”, pg. 25-26.

traversing 13th street and a separate branch going south on Martin Luther King Drive (then High St) from 15th to 21st. Parallel with progress in infrastructure came regress in civil rights policies. In 1903, the Arkansas legislature adopted the Streetcar Segregation Act, assigning Black and White passengers to “separate but equal” sections of streetcars (Central Arkansas Library System & Metrailler, 2012). Despite Black boycotts and White criticism, the policy was upheld alongside other Jim Crow era laws in Arkansas and the city of Little Rock.

In 1905, a third streetcar line was established linking the other two on S Park Ave and winding its way south to Wright Avenue as well as branching out at 16th street going east to join an earlier track. The evolution of the streetcar lines lends a view to the pattern of growth during this time.³

In addition to infrastructure, the strong presence of educational structures throughout the district at this time is notable. The first of these was the Centennial Elementary School. Designed by architect Thomas Harding in 1893 in the Romanesque Revival style, the school was constructed in 1894 (Figure 8). In 1971 it was demolished except for the bell tower and its grounds were purchased by the city to create a park called Centennial Park.

In 1885, Arkansas Baptist College was established by the Colored Baptists of the State of Arkansas for the education of black theologians. The building reflects the Second Empire style and exists today at 1600 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive (Figure 9). Additionally, in 1908-10, the James Mitchell School at W 24th and Battery Streets was designed in the Classical Revival style by Charles Thompson with later



Centennial Public School, Little Rock, Ark.

Figure 8. Centennial Public School, postcard, c. 1905-1915, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

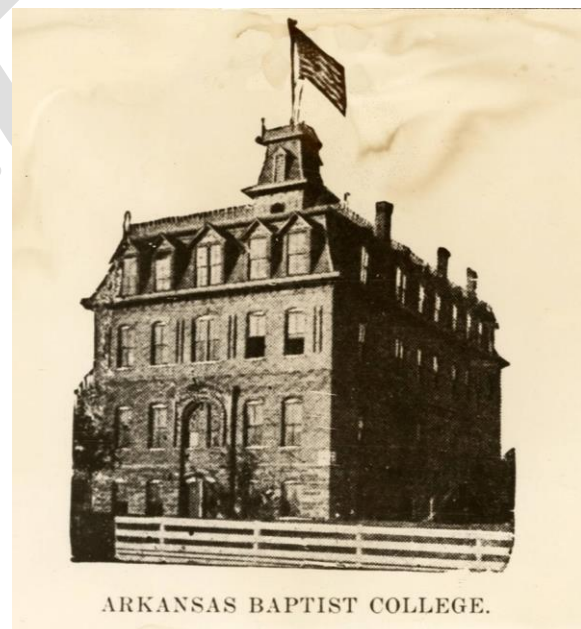


Figure 9. Arkansas Baptist College, c. 1930, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

³ Maps of the historic streetcar lines and streets can be viewed at maps.littlerock.gov in the “Historic Sites” web application.

additions by Thomas Harding and Thomas Harding Jr.

Due to a sporadic development pattern, popular residential architectural styles during this early development were sprinkled throughout the district, rather than confined to single additions. This has resulted in the Central High District possessing a wide variety of architectural styles and building scales. Most styles seen throughout the historic areas of Little Rock can be found within this district.

The predominant styles of this period (1879-1915) within the district were Queen Anne (Figures 10 and 11) and Colonial Revival (Figure 12). Other architectural styles that are seen in remnants from this era are Richardsonian Romanesque, Classical Revival, Italianate, and Second Empire⁴. Cottage homes and larger two-story homes were often built side by side. Small homes could typically be purchased for \$2,000 or less while larger homes were advertised for \$5,000-\$7,000.⁵ A souvenir brochure of 1902 notes “a larger percentage of the laboring classes own homes in Little Rock than in any other city of corresponding size.”⁶ With this variety of housing stock and a high percentage of laboring class homeowners, the neighborhood was stable and composed of a mixed class. According to city directories, the Central High District was home to White and Black families alike and housed a range of professions: clergymen, barbers, mail carriers and clerks, cooks, maids, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and businessmen.⁷

2.2. 1915-1940

In the early and mid-twentieth century, the Central High District was a neighborhood that “evolved to accommodate the housing



Figure 11. Home at 1400 S. Summit, built in 1905 in the Queen Anne style.



Figure 10. The Martin A. Sharp House at 1422 Summit, built in c. 1900 in the two-story Queen Anne style.



Figure 12. W.R. Stewart House at 1406 S. Summit, built in 1905 in the Colonial Revival style by architect Charles L. Thompson.

⁴ For more information on home addresses reflecting these styles, see the 1996 National Register Nomination form for Central High.

⁵ “Central High History”, pg.36.

⁶ “Central High History”, pg.36.

⁷ “Central High History”, pg.38.

booms of the interwar period and the post-World War II era” (Higgins & Higgins, 2012).

During World War I, another educational institution was constructed in the northern section of the district, just one block away from Centennial. The West Side Junior High opened in 1917 and served as a school as well as a community center, complete with a pool (Figure 14). The structure was threatened by demolition in the early 1990s. In 1999 it was listed on Preserve Arkansas’ Most Endangered List. In 2003, the building became a multi-use space for the UAMS and Arc Arkansas.



Figure 14. West Side Junior High School, c. 1915-1925, courtesy of the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

For residential development, the neighborhood saw another building boom surrounding the 1920s. The most prominent residential architecture styles built in this time were the American Foursquare (Figure 13), Craftsman, English Revival, Spanish Revival, and a specific type of Colonial Revival. The James H. Penick House at 1623 Summit, was built in 1926 and is a strong example of this era of Colonial Revival architecture. The home was designed by the Little Rock architecture firm of Theo Sanders and Frank Ginocchio and displayed Federal Revival style features, such as the front portico. Penick was a leader in banking in Little Rock and active in several public service positions.⁸

The Clayborn House, built in 1932 at 1800 Marshall, is a strong example of the Craftsman style (Figure 18, pg. 10). The house was independently listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006 as the home of influential Black community leader and reverend, John Henry Clayborn. The home has been significantly altered since its listing and will likely be delisted if resurveyed (Figure 17, pg. 10).



Figure 13. Three examples of the American Foursquare style in a row at 2305-2315 S. Summit,

⁸ His philanthropy included the Little Rock Junior College (now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock), and the Little Rock Boys’ Club. The Boys’ Club named their new facility the James Penick Boys’

Club. There is a collection at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies containing Penick’s materials from his life and work.



Figure 18. Clayborn House, 2019, Google Maps.



Figure 17. Clayborn House, 2022, substantially altered.

Another notable residence of this period was the Warren Lenon House at 2005 W. 16th Street. Built in the mid-1890s, the home was remodeled by Charles L. Thompson to its present English Revival style in 1918 (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Warren Lenon House at 2005 W. 16th.

The most well-known structure in the district was built in 1927. The Little Rock High School (now Little Rock Central High School) was constructed in the Collegiate Gothic Revival and Art Deco styles and was designed by architects George R. Mann, Eugene John Stern, John Parks Almand, George H. Wittenberg, and Lawson L. Delony. The grounds were designed by landscape architect John Highberger. Before construction was finished, the National Association of Architects named the school “America’s Most Beautiful High School” (Figure 15). The design of the school, which reached an expense of \$1.5 million in 1927, was to inspire awe in learning for its students and community.



Figure 15. Central High during construction, c. 1927, courtesy of the Central Arkansas Library System.

The famous author and librarian, Dee Brown, grew up in the Central High District in the mid-1920s, graduating from high school in 1927 (Brown, 1993). According to the 1926 Little Rock City Directory, Brown and his family lived at 1424 Schiller Street. He returned to Little Rock in 1973 after retirement until his death in 2002. In 1993 he published “When the Century Was Young”, a book of memories that focuses on Little Rock in the 1920s and 30s. The Brown’s home during the 20s and 30s on Schiller was demolished sometime between 1970 and 1998 (Figure 19, pg.11).



Figure 19. Vacant lot at 1424 Schiller Street where the home of Dee Brown once stood.

Life changed dramatically in 1929 and the Great Depression era brought about a need for affordable housing in Little Rock. The neighborhood saw an influx of the economic Minimal Traditional architectural style. This type of home was prominent in the 1930s and 1940s as an attempt to reflect revival styles without elaborate decoration. The home at 2108 Marshall is a good example of this style (Figure 20). Today, many of these homes are wrapped in vinyl or metal siding with the original wood siding still beneath.



Figure 20. 2108 Marshall built c. 1935 in the Minimal Traditional style.

⁹ Blockbusting was a technique used by realtors to persuade white homeowners to sell their property

2.3 1941-1961

Other small, economic home styles thrived in the district during and following World War II. Plain Traditional homes were constructed during the New Deal era all the way to the late 20th century and American Small Houses were constructed from c. 1930-1950. The residential structure at 1500 W 21st, built in 1932, displays an earlier form of the Plain Traditional style. The homes at 1801-1805 W 18th Street, all constructed in 1948, are a strong cluster example of the American Small House (Figure 21, pg. 12).

Another structure that gained popularity in the district in the mid-twentieth century is the Ranch style home. This house style, along with the Plain and Minimal Traditional homes, was utilized in the district as infill developments for vacant lots and as replacements of older homes that were demolished. Cluster examples of the Ranch style home can be found at 1808, 1820, and 1822 Bishop. These infill and replacement houses in the district following the Second World War valued affordable and efficient construction.

Other social and economic impacts to the district shaped its form during this era. White flight, housing shortages in the city, blockbusting⁹, and the idealism of suburban growth to the west (past University Street) could have meant the post-war death and abandonment of the Central High District. Many homes and commercial buildings pre-dating World War I were lost during this era due to the changing needs of the neighborhood and the limitations of economic and social determinants.

The evolution of the neighborhood leading up to the 1957 desegregation crisis was one of stability and diversity, despite the impacts of global and national events. Little Rock's 1940

for fear of another race or economic class moving into the neighborhood.



Figure 21. 1801, 1803, and 1805 W 18th Street all built in 1948 in the American Small House style.

Home Owner's Loan Corporation ("HOLC") map¹⁰ (Appendix B, pg. 21) displays ratings of neighborhood sections evaluating mortgage risk. The Central High District was broken up into four sections with various ratings: A "Best", B "Still Desirable", C "Definitely Declining", and D "Hazardous". Ratings were primarily based on racial makeup with influences of home ownership, occupations, and the age of the properties. HOLC maps commonly saw interracial neighborhoods as unstable.

It should be noted that the period of significance for the Central High District (1870-1961) runs parallel to the period of Jim Crow nationally and locally.

Contrasting to the condition of the neighborhood provided by the HOLC, memories of the neighborhood from residents of this time were nostalgic and positive despite social injustices within daily life.¹¹ These reflections were gathered sometime around 1996 and were focused on residents who lived there sometime within 1910-1960. Residents remembered the neighborhood as clean, well-maintained, familial, "middle class", "not elite", and "a family neighborhood".¹² Additionally, the results of a

local real estate property survey of the neighborhood completed in 1940 confirmed several characteristics: rent in the neighborhood was in the top half of rent available citywide, home ownership was prominent, residents lived in their homes for 10 to 19 years, and, in the blocks of Battery, Schiller, Summit and Wolfe, homeowners lived at the same address for more than two decades.¹³

The district today holds 950 historic resources as touchstones to the past, including four schools, two churches, and twenty-two commercial buildings. The 150 years of physical history that remains in the Central High District is worthy of preservation.

Though buildings are constructed on a specific date, the life they live and contain beyond this date is capable of possessing multiple and, sometimes, polar identities. Buildings that are able to stand the test of time become resources for these identities. The ability to interact with these resources, to recognize their histories as valuable, and to continue to engage with them, will determine

¹⁰ For more information on HOLC maps and Redlining in Arkansas, visit: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/redlining-11958/>

¹¹ "Central High History", pg. 39-41.

¹² Ibid, 39.

¹³ "Central High History", pg. 40-41.

the formation of Little Rock's identity and meaning for the future.

3. Past Preservation Initiatives

The Central High neighborhood is the surrounding residential and commercial landscape of the Little Rock Central High School. As the focus of national attention during the 1957 desegregation crisis, both the school and the neighborhood gained local and national significance. Equally, the neighborhood's history and prominence pre-dates the desegregation crisis as Little Rock's first 20th century suburb. With multiple eras of historical value overlaying the area, the architectural character and value of the neighborhood is significant to the story of Little Rock's built environment and a present touchstone to the past that can be experienced today. In recognition of this history, as well as the historical and aesthetic value of the individual structures within this area, the Central High Neighborhood Historic District was nominated to the National Register of Historic Place in 1996 (Smith, 1996).

With this first historic resource survey, the National Register (NR) district was comprised of 824 properties. Thirteen (13) years later, despite welcoming thousands of visitors annually from around the world to visit the National Historic Landmark and Museum, the neighborhood was in jeopardy of losing its national designation.

In 2009, the Central High Neighborhood Design Overlay District ("DOD") was created to protect the historic architectural integrity and sense of place of the district (City of Little Rock, Ord. No. 20,180, § 1, 10-20-09, 2019). The overlay added an additional layer of review to specific projects, mainly new construction, and large-scale renovations. However, the DOD boundaries stop at W. 17th Street, leaving more than 50 blocks of the historic district without this added protection.

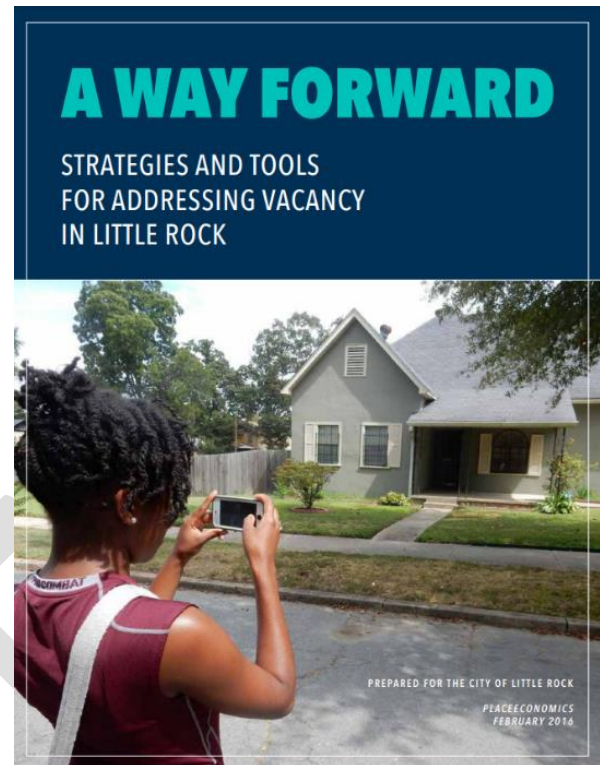


Figure 22. Cover of the ReLocal report, "A Way Forward-Strategies and Tools for Addressing Vacancy in Little Rock", PlaceEconomics, 2016.

In 2012, the historic district was expanded to increase the number of historically significant resources and fill the deficit of lost structures (Higgins & Higgins, 2012). As a result, the expanded NR district was comprised of 934 properties and the period of significance was expanded from 1870-1946 to 1870-1961. So far, these attempts have not been effective enough to stabilize investment and prevent the loss of historic fabric in the district.

In 2014, the Central High Neighborhood Historic District was listed on *Arkansas's Most Endangered Places List* by Preserve Arkansas, with the identifiers: abandoned, endangered, and demolished (Preserve Arkansas, 2014).

In 2016, PlaceEconomics conducted a ReLocal report for the City of Little Rock, "A Way Forward – Strategies and Tools for Addressing Vacancy in Little Rock" (PlaceEconomics, 2016). This report divided the core of the city into four

areas of study. The Central High neighborhood compromised the majority of one of these areas, identified as “West” in the report. In the West, 297 vacant buildings were identified (Appendix C, pg. 22), the largest share of vacant buildings among the other study areas. 21% of its parcels were compromised of vacant lots, totaling 634 parcels (Appendix D, pg. 23). This study did two things: provide a resource for data and policy recommendations for the City of Little Rock and confirmed the predicted threats to the Central High neighborhood.

Apart from this vacancy study, a formal analysis of the neighborhood’s economy and loss of historic fabric has not taken place. Moreover, a formal historical resource survey of the properties within the Central High NHD has not been conducted since 2012. This means the exact impact of these losses on the district is currently unmeasured and the true state of the district for National Register designation is unknown.

4. The Projected Loss of the Central High Neighborhood Historic District

4.1 Demolitions

Anticipating the effects of demolition and alterations, Planning & Development staff conducted an in-house analysis of the district based on permit data, the 2012 National Register data, and consultation with the National Register team at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

Staff identified forty-two (42) demolitions within the district since 2010 (Figure 24) (Appendix F, pg.25). Of these demolitions, twenty-three (23) were contributing structures. Once these demolitions occur, the structures, even if reconstructed, will never contribute to the district’s National Register totals. Furthermore, the lots are then counted towards the district’s non-contributing totals.

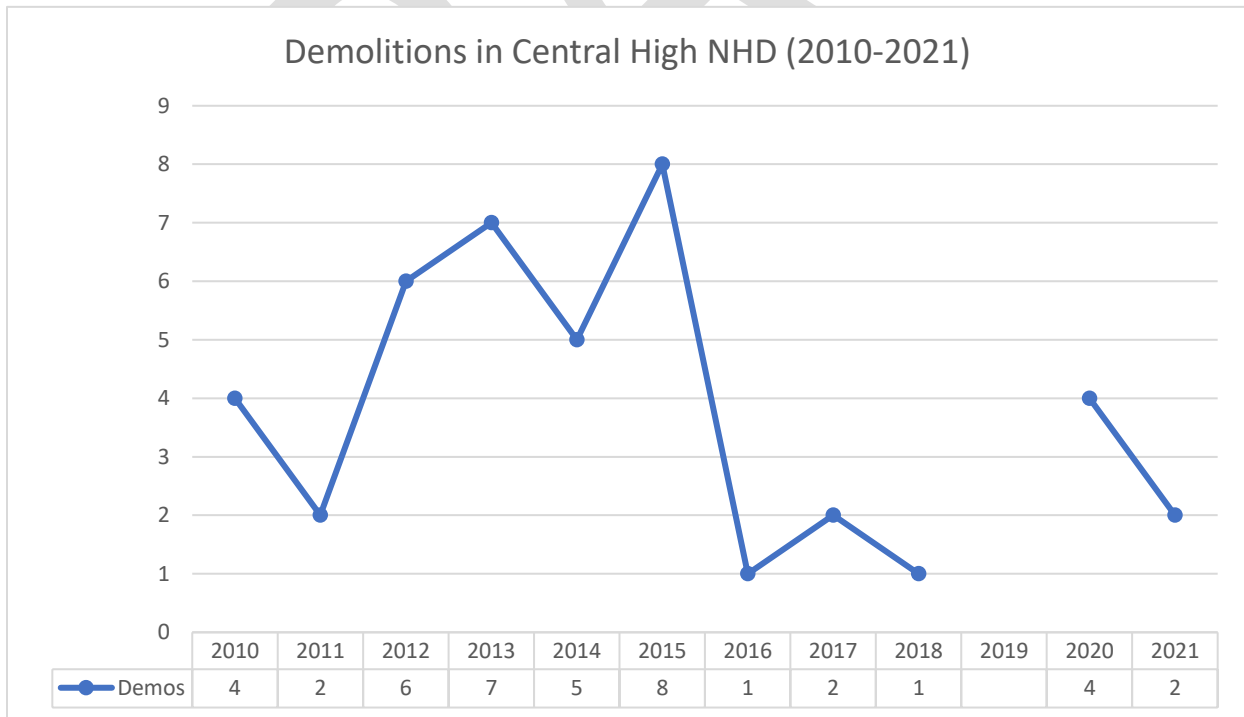


Figure 23. Chart showing permitted demolitions in Central High neighborhood from 2010-2021.

4.2 National Register of Historic Places Designation

From this analysis, staff estimates that there are currently 950 properties (historic resources) in the district. Of these, 555 are “contributing”, 385 are “non-contributing”, 9 are “independently listed”, and 1 is a National Historic Landmark (Appendix E, pg. 24). With these best-case-scenario estimates, the NR eligibility ratio is predicted to be 59% with a 2-7% margin. To remain a National Register historic district, the district must retain a ratio of 51% or more of its historic fabric. The 2-7% margin anticipates the identification of further loss if formally surveyed, due to incompatible alterations and deterioration by neglect. Staff concludes that the creation of a local ordinance district is necessary to meaningfully support an environment of stability and prevent the loss of historic significance.

Historic District Totals

59% 950 properties
555 contributing
(2-7% margin) 385 non-contributing

If the district continues to lose contributing structures—by demolition, neglect, and incompatible alterations—the Central High Neighborhood will be irreplaceably lost. The loss of the district’s National Register designation is not the only casualty in this circumstance. Property owners of contributing structures are currently eligible for rehabilitation tax credits and other state and federal economic tools. Property owners of non-contributing structures are currently eligible for state grants to bring their property to contributing status. The access to these economic tools will be removed if the district is delisted.

2.3 Stabilizing Property Owner Investment

The majority of property owners in the Central High NHD benefit from the district’s NR designation. Since 2010, property owners in the district have jointly invested at least \$45,991,641.00 in their properties. Of these projects, fifty-eight (58) received state and/or federal rehabilitation tax credits with \$2,116,010.63 awarded. Often, rehabilitation tax credits make projects successful that would otherwise not be financially feasible. For example, the three residential properties at 2301-2309 Summit utilized tax credits for the two remaining structures (Figure 24 and Figure 25, pg. 13).



Figure 24. 2301-2309 Summit, before rehabilitation and infill construction, 2013.



Figure 25. 2301-2309 Summit, after rehabilitation and compatible infill construction, 2019.



Figure 26. Private Investment by Residential Property Owners from 2010 to 2021.

There is a positive trend towards continued investment and improved development by residential property owners (Figure 26). The pattern of investment, however, has been noticeably sporadic across the district (Appendix G, pg. 26). This is likely due to the issue of vacant, unused property owned by either multiple heirs or out of town owners. In many cases, these owners hold out on selling the property in anticipation of property values increasing but refuse to maintain their property or put it to active use during that time.

In an area with 15% building vacancy and 21% lot vacancy (PlaceEconomics, 2016), investments are unprotected from the impact of surrounding dereliction and inactivity. These circumstances have made it difficult for the private sector to achieve a concentration of activity, investment, vitality, and quality conditions for residents.

5. Solution: Local Ordinance Historic District

5.1 What is a local ordinance district?

A Local Ordinance District (“LOD”) is a geographically definable area in which historic

structures and their setting are protected by public review at the municipal level (rather than state or federal), typically by a Historic District Commission. Little Rock currently has one local ordinance district, MacArthur Park Historic District. The MacArthur Park Historic District is reviewed by the Little Rock Historic District Commission (“HDC”). An additional local ordinance district, such as Central High Neighborhood Historic District, would be included in Little Rock’s existing local preservation ordinance (Code of Ordinances, Sec. 23-76--23-160). This existing ordinance helps to preserve the visual characteristics of historic districts while providing a framework for redevelopment by stabilizing investment and increasing property values.

The proposed LOD for the Central High District would be identical to, and encompass, the area of the existing National Register district (Appendix A, pg. 20). The neighborhood would gain a public review process for the alteration, restoration, construction, moving and demolition of structures within the district through the HDC, as well as representation on the Commission. Applications would be reviewed by the HDC and staff against specific

design guidelines tailored to the district. The local ordinance would not review ordinary maintenance, interior improvements, or property use (such as zoning).

The anticipated impacts of the creation of a local ordinance district for the Central High Neighborhood Historic District would be:

- the preservation of the existing historic character of the neighborhood,
- compatibly designed infill development,
- fewer demolitions,
- fewer vacant lots and vacant buildings,
- the increased stabilization of the neighborhood's economy,
- and the protection of property owner investment.

5.2 Path to Approval

To create a local ordinance district, the City of Little Rock must follow the provisions outlined by the Arkansas General Assembly (A.C.A. § 14-172-203) and its Historic Preservation ordinance (Sec.23. Article IV). Below is a summary of the legal process:

1. Historic District Commission staff presents a report to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program ("AHPP") and the Little Rock Planning Commission ("PC") for recommendations.
2. The AHPP and the PC have 60 days to provide recommendations on the report to the HDC.
3. The report and recommendations will be read at a Historic District Commission public hearing. The report and proposal of the LOD shall follow public notice provisions.
4. The final report, including all recommendations, shall be presented to the Board of Directors with the recommendations from the AHPP, PC, and HDC.
5. The Board of Directors will vote to approve or deny the proposal. If approved, there

must be the passing of an ordinance to implement the creation of the local ordinance district.

This effort could take 6 to 8 months depending on public hearing schedules. During this time, staff recommends the passing of a moratorium on demolitions to prevent further loss of historic fabric until an LOD can be established and a review process can take place.

5.3 Path Following Approval

5.3.1 Increase Representation on Historic District Commission

With the establishment of an additional LOD, the Little Rock Historic District Commission would expand its membership from seven (7) members to eight (8) or nine (9) members to include representation from the Central High Neighborhood Historic District. Nine (9) members would be ideal to avoid a tie vote on items. Each member shall be appointed by the Board of Directors.

5.3.2 Design Guidelines

Following the creation of a local ordinance district, design guidelines must be established to provide review standards for development specific to the district. Until these guidelines are in place, staff recommends the use of the existing

5.3.3 Staff Capacity

If the Central High Neighborhood local ordinance district is established, staff would see at least a 100% increase—twice as much—in case load activity alone (Figure 9). This could necessitate the addition of staff in the Planning & Development Department.

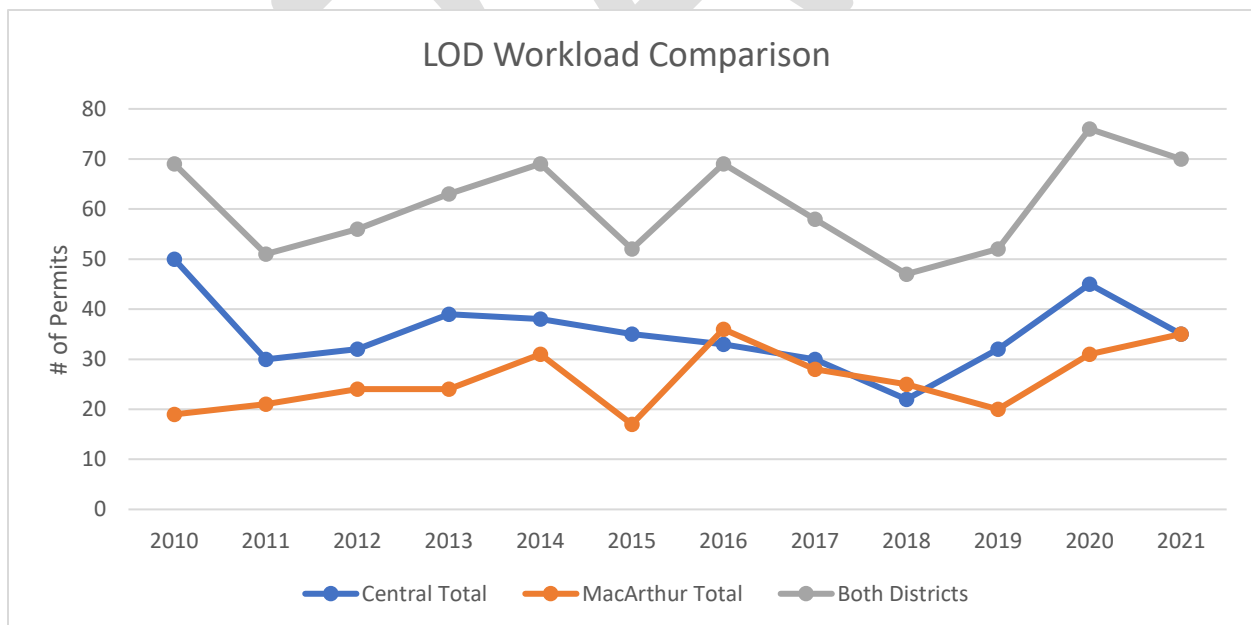
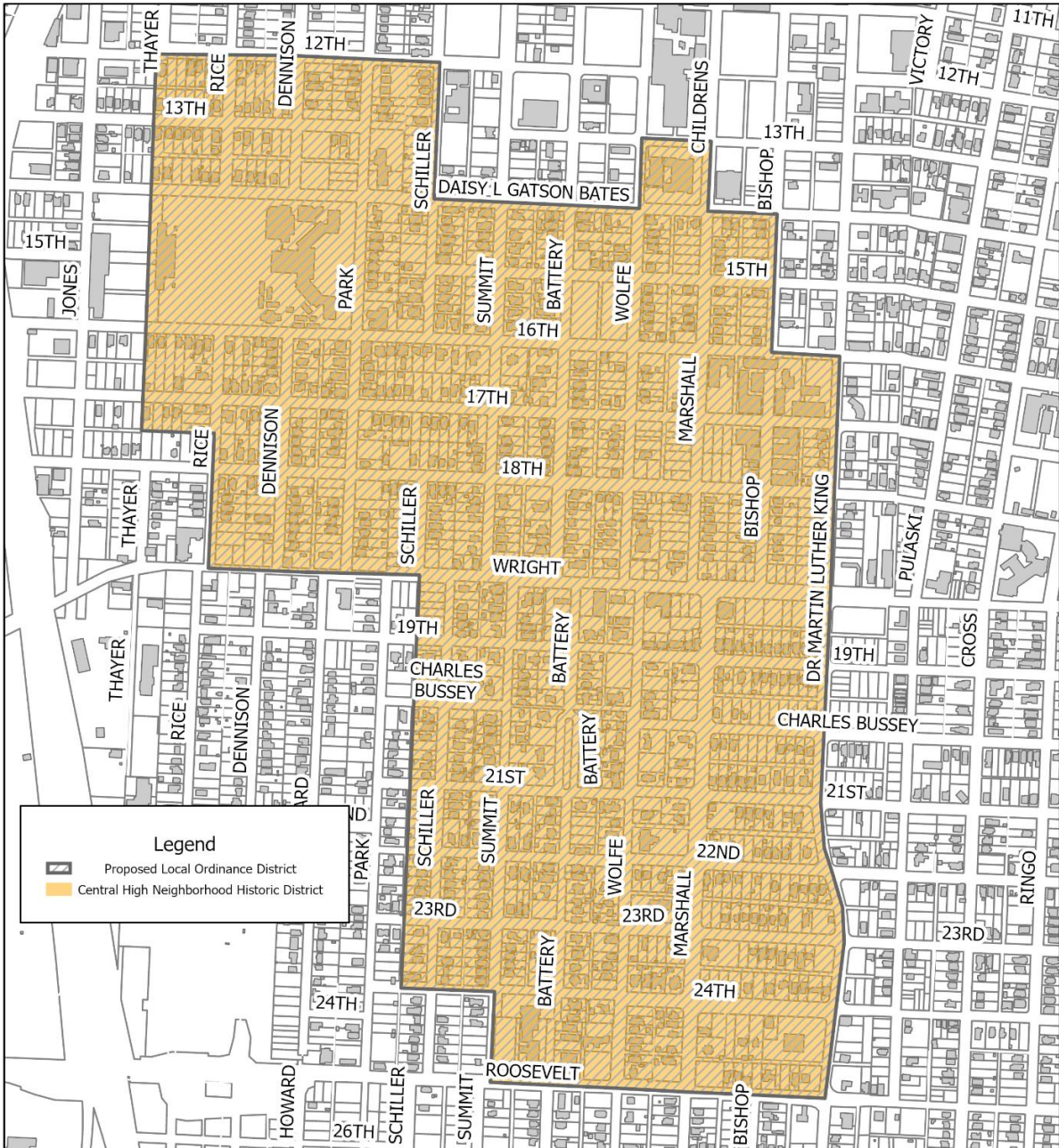


Figure 27. Chart showing MacArthur Park cases compared to applicable Central High permits and the projected combined total.

Appendices
Appendix A



Proposed Local Ordinance District Boundaries



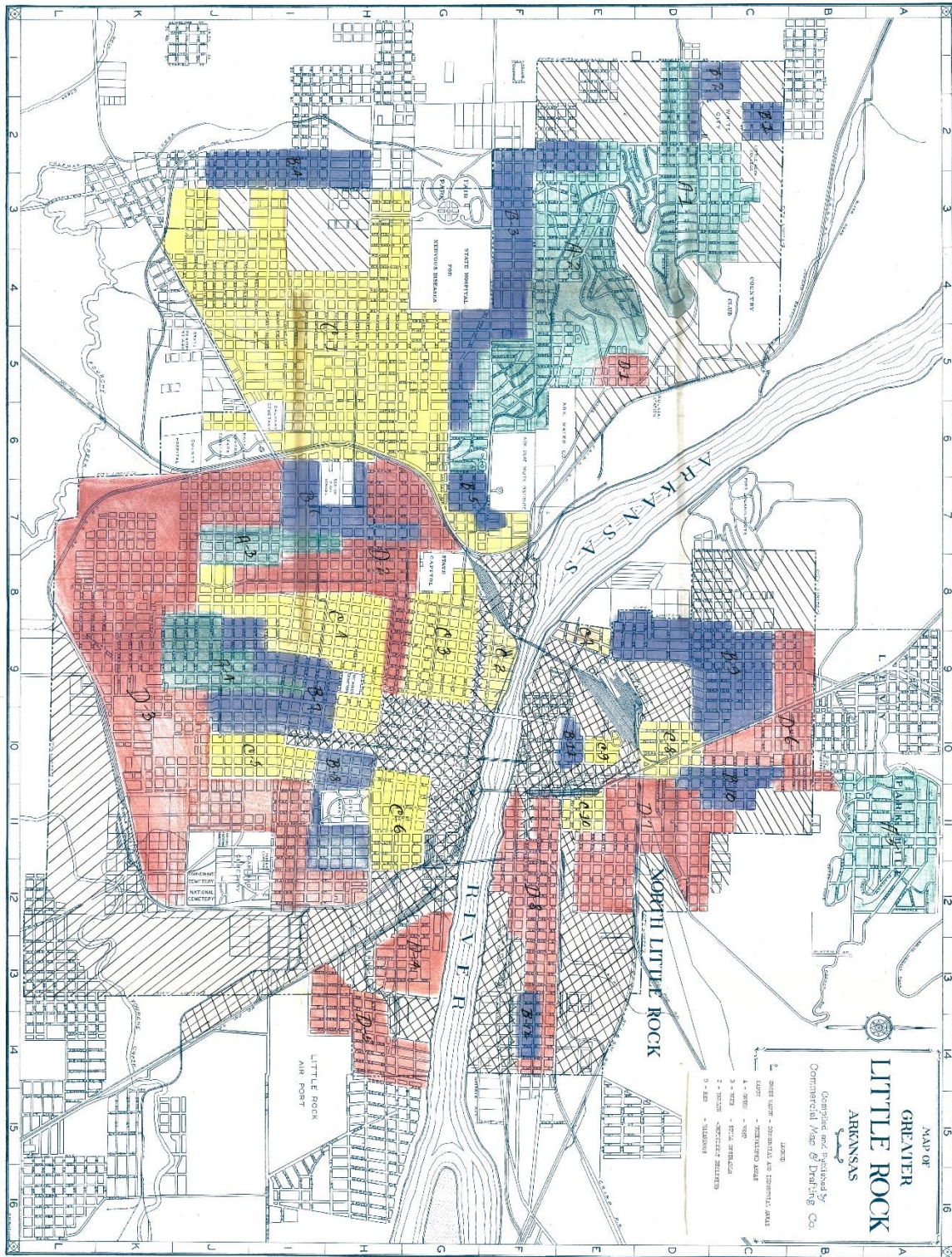


Figure 28. Home Owner's Loan Corporation, Little Rock Map, c. 1940.

Appendix C

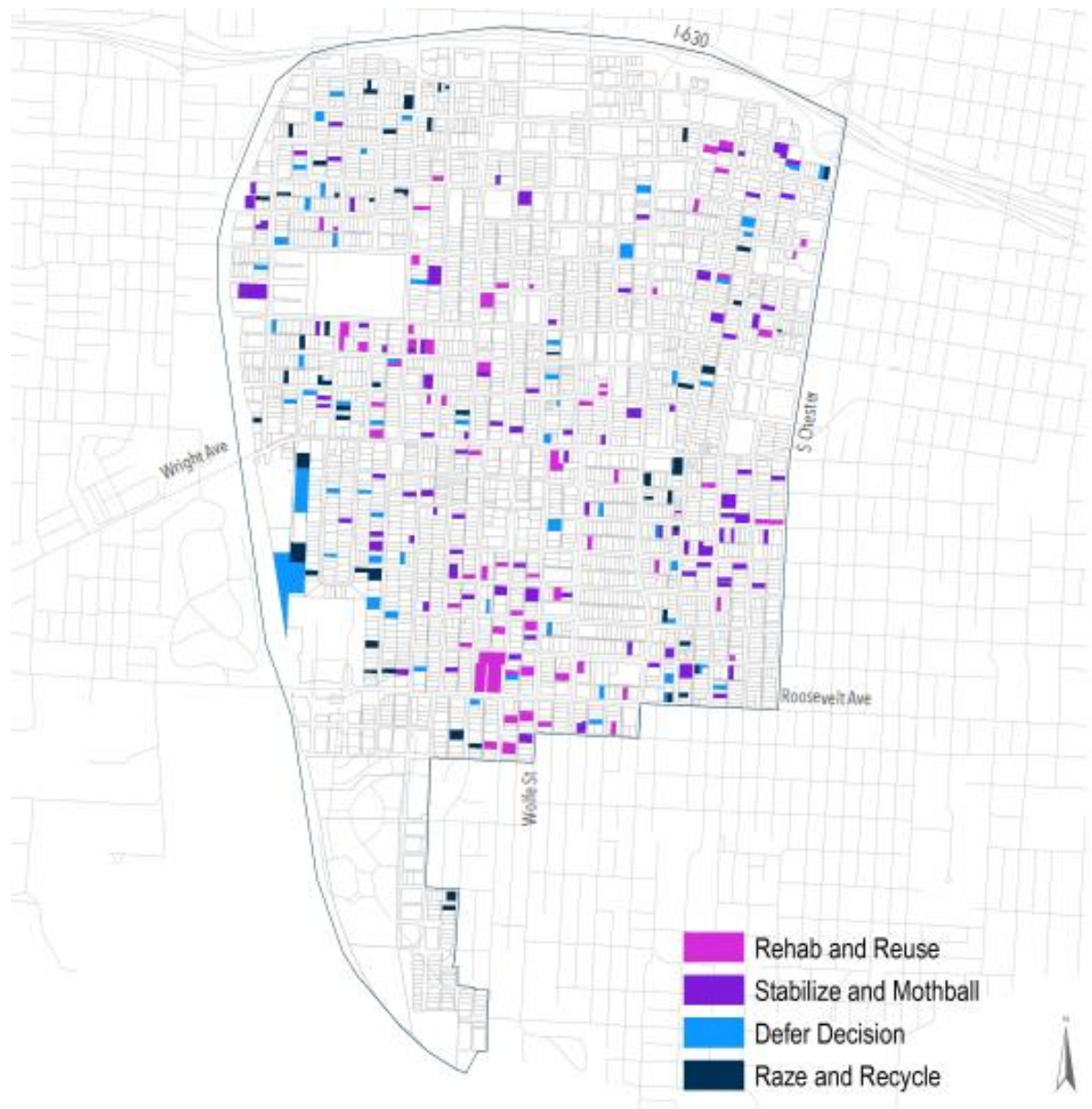


Figure 29. Parcel Map of West with Vacant Building Recommendations.

Appendix D

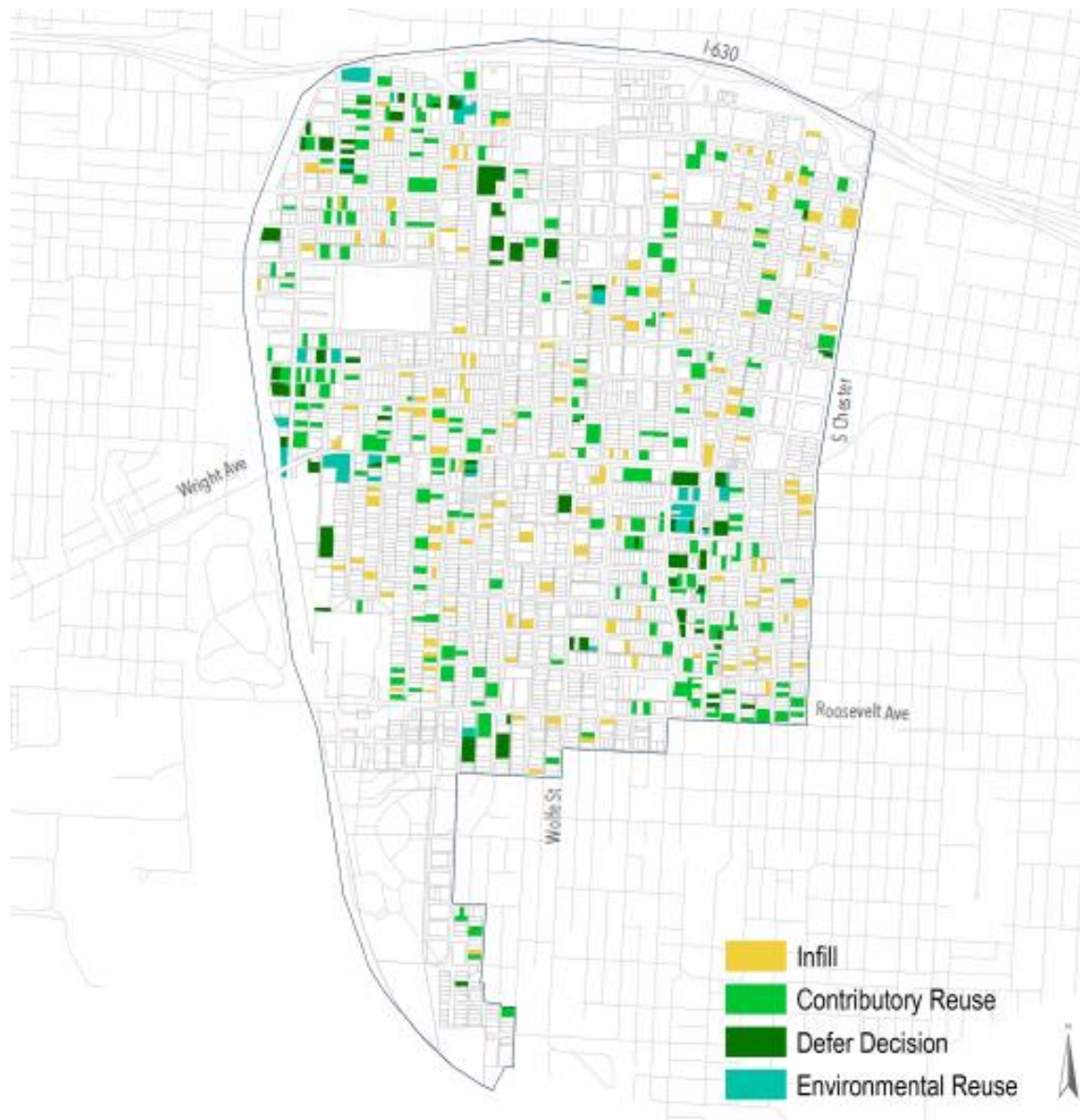
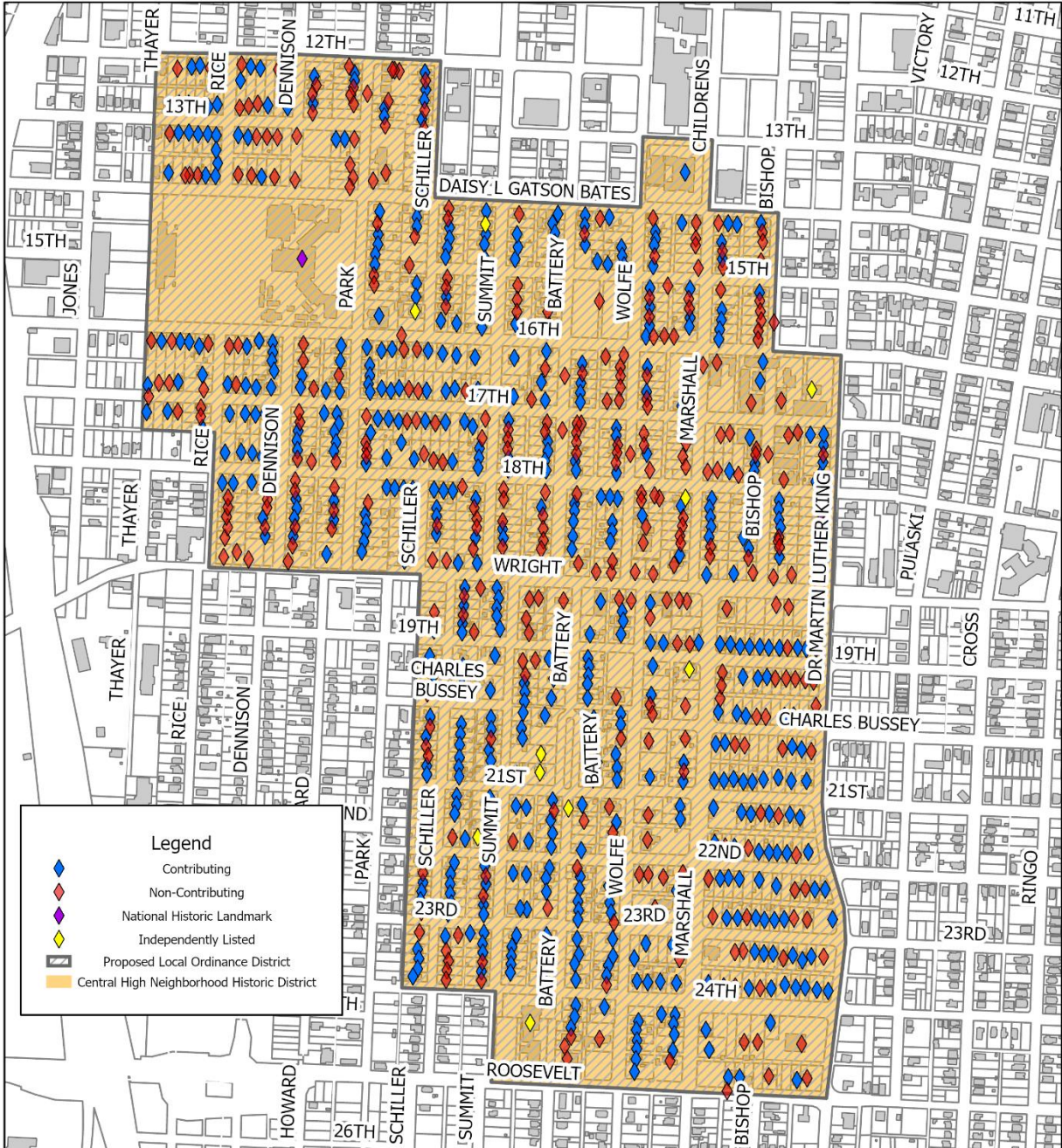
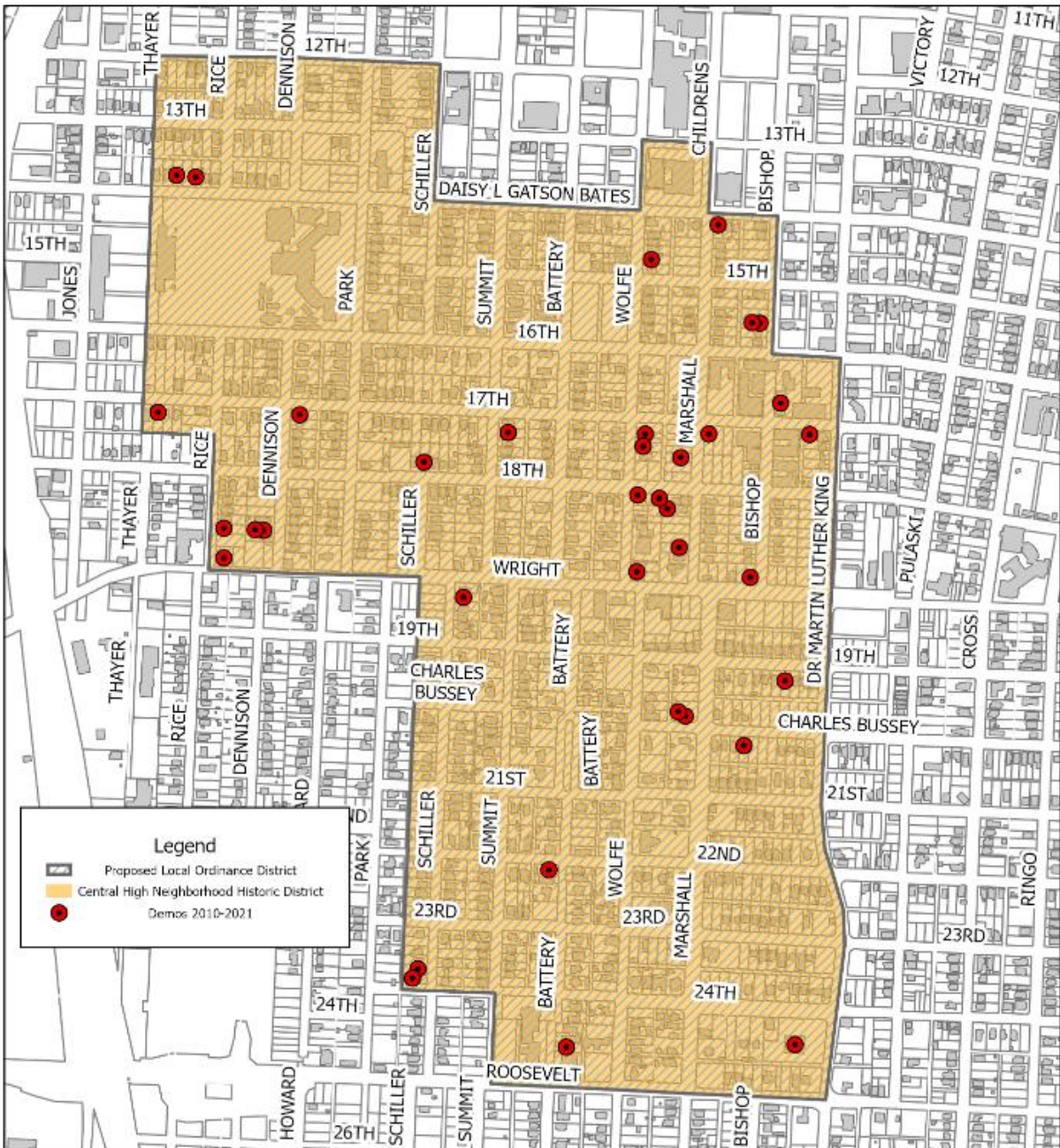


Figure 30. Parcel Map of West with Vacant Lot Recommendations.



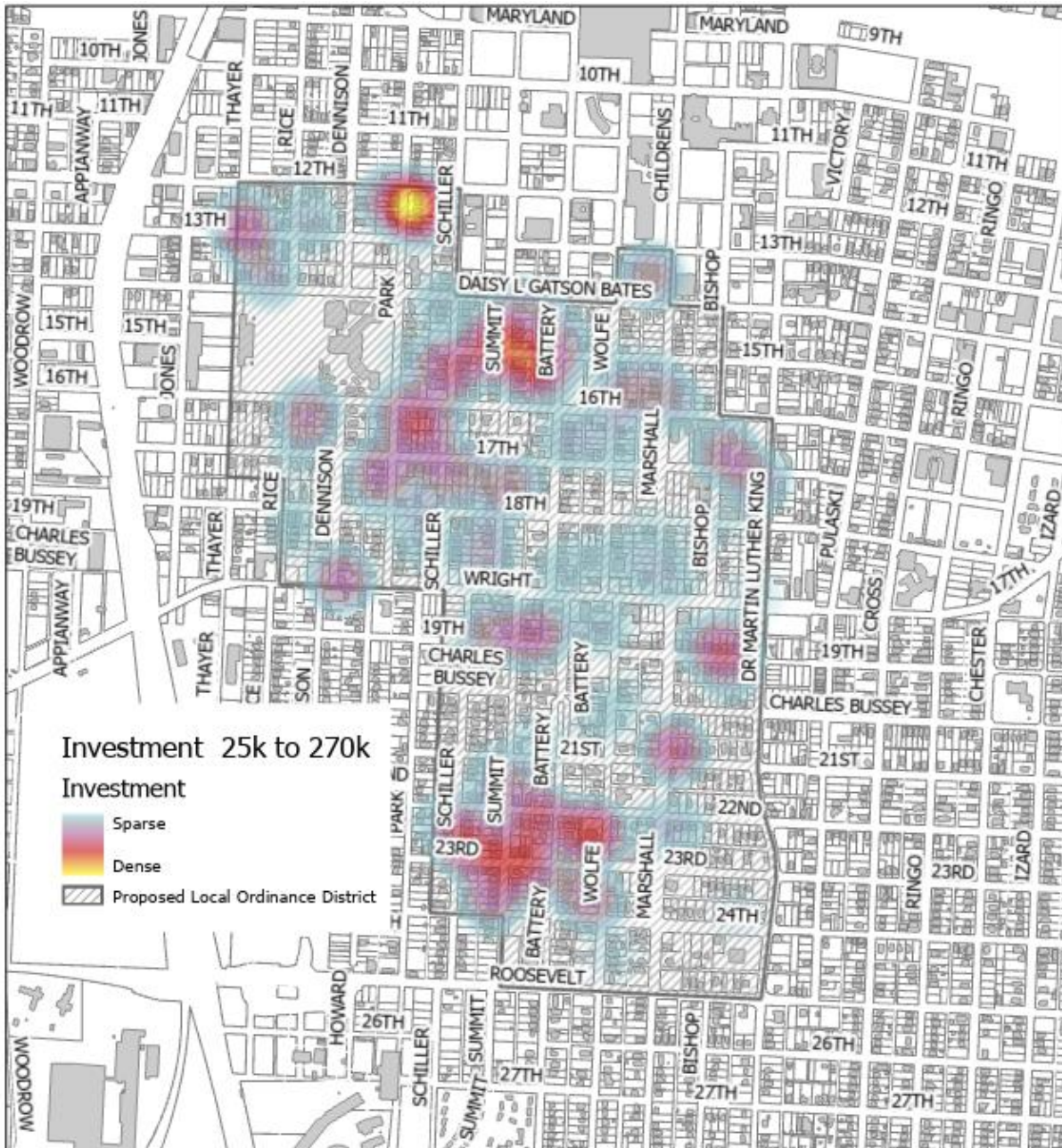
Central High Neighborhood Historic District Structure Status





Central High Neighborhood Historic District Demolitions





Central High Neighborhood Private Investment



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