

Historic Resources Survey
McGee Street
for M19 Master, LLC



Rosin Preservation, LLC
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INTRODUCTION

Rosin Preservation, LLC conducted a historic resources survey of an area along McGee Street in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (*Figures 1 and 2*). The McGee Street historic resources survey area consists of a three-block area from East 17th Street to East 20th Street along McGee Street. The survey includes resources that front McGee Street, or have a side elevation fronting McGee Street (*Figure 3*). Many of the resources were identified and documented in the *Midtown Survey Final Report. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)*. The survey area also includes several National Register-listed resources associated with the automobile row context that characterizes early twentieth century commercial development along this corridor.

The survey process evaluated the resources within the survey area boundary to identify resources that may form a National Register Historic District, making them eligible for financial incentives for preservation, such as state and federal historic tax credits

The McGee Street Historic Resources Survey encompassed two objectives:

- 1) to identify, record, photograph, and evaluate through intensive-level architectural/historic survey those individual properties and potential historic districts in the project area that, on the basis of age and integrity, meet the eligibility criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and to substantiate such assessments; and
- 2) to identify and characterize those portions of the project area which, on the basis of insufficient age or integrity, warrant no further study to exclude them from consideration for nomination in the National Register of Historic Places and to substantiate such assessments.

Historic Preservation Specialist Sophie Roark conducted a field survey in July of 2017 to document and assess extant historic resources. Ms. Roark completed the field survey, photography, and archival research and entered data into a Microsoft Access database. Finally, Ms. Roark analyzed the data, prepared a historic context, and developed preservation recommendations to complete this report.

Figure 1. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. Source: Google Maps, 2017.

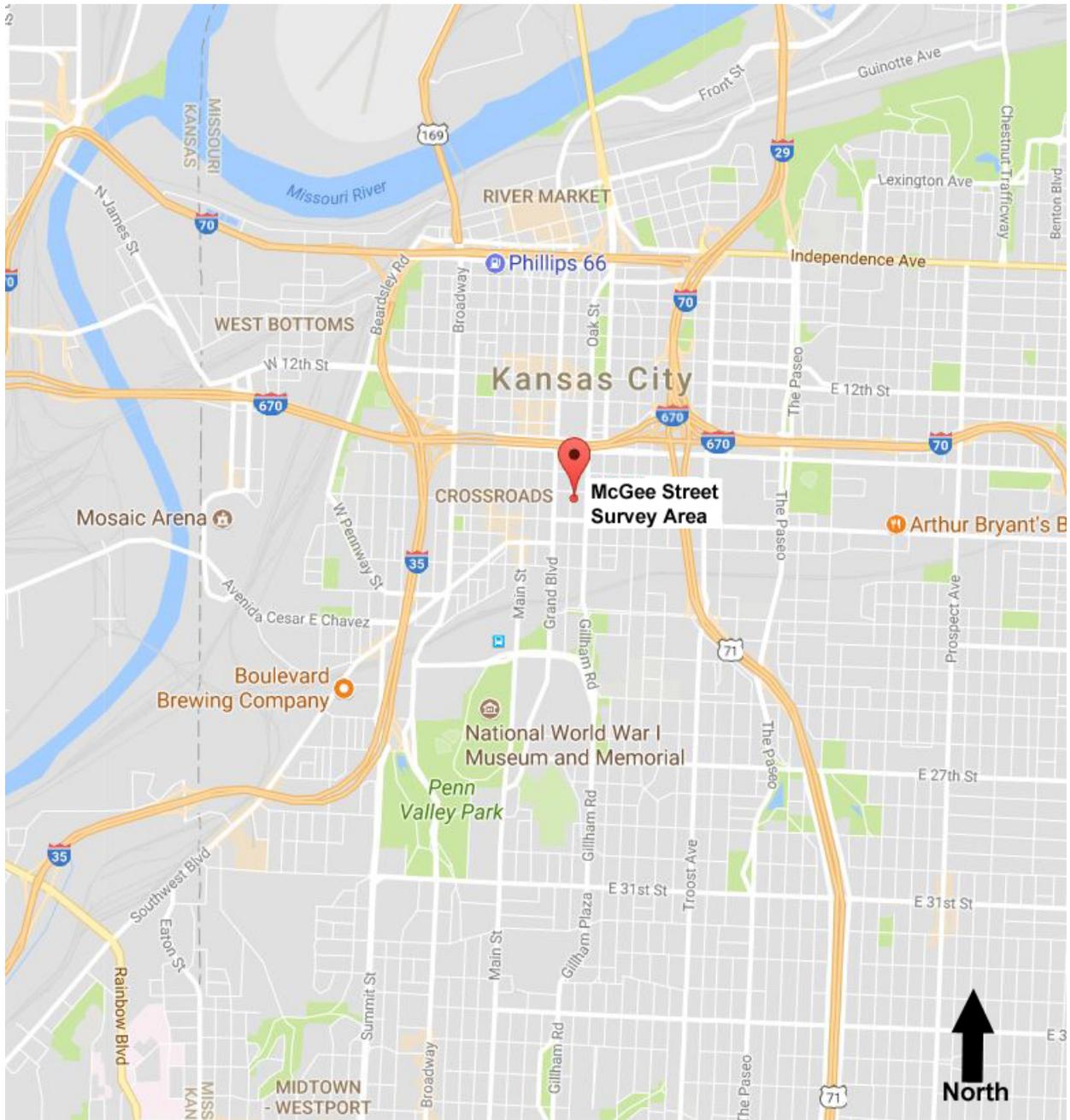


Figure 2. McGee Street Kansas City, Missouri Source: Google Maps 2017.

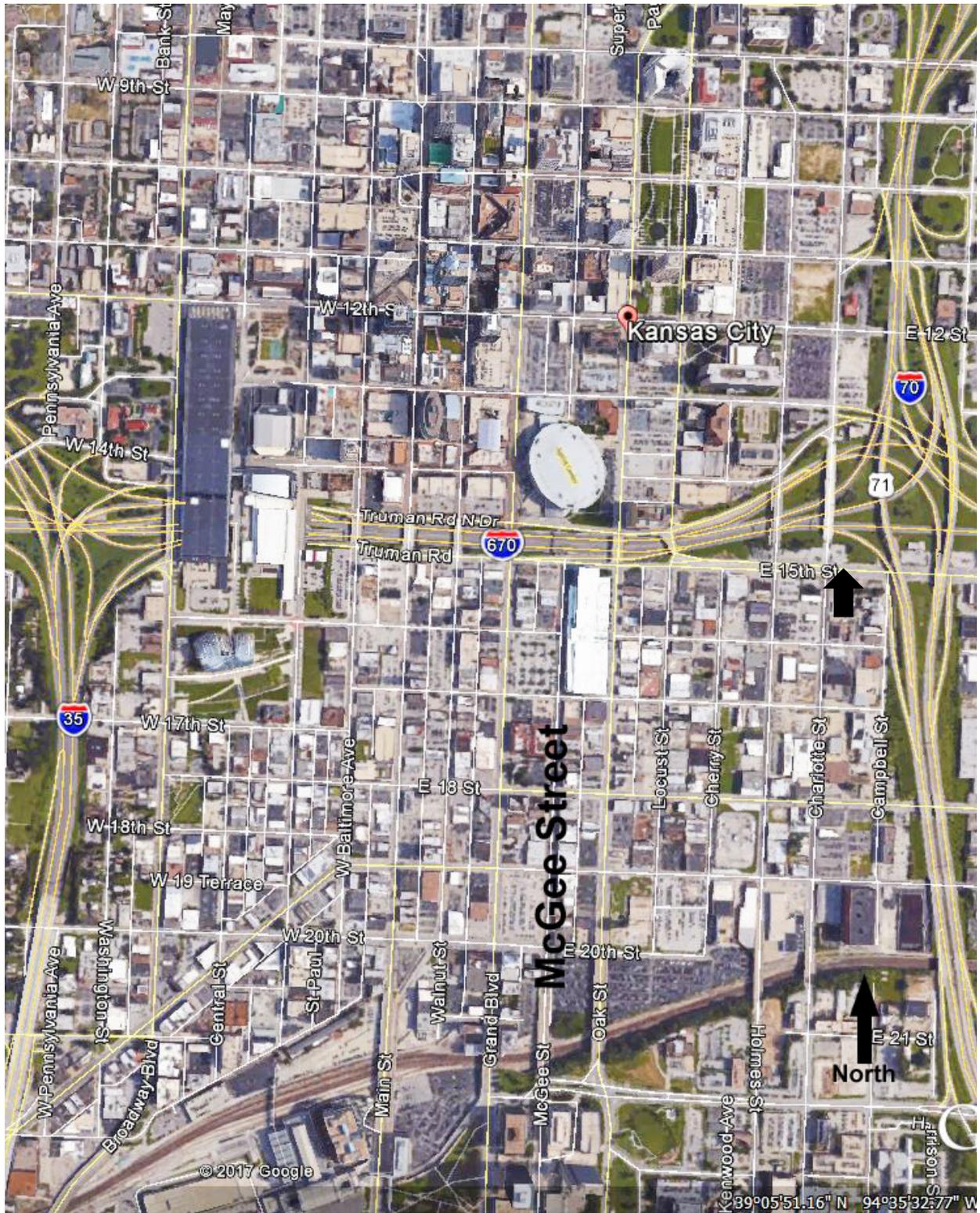


Figure 3. Resources surveyed in the McGee Street survey area. Source: Google Maps 2017.

McGee Street Survey

Resource Number

— survey area boundary



METHODOLOGY

Rosin Preservation surveyed resources within the survey area in conformance with the procedures for intensive-level survey outlined in *National Register Bulletin 24: Guidelines for Local Survey: A Basis for Preservation Planning*, and *Instructions for Completing the Architectural/Historic Inventory Form* established by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Information for each building was recorded on an *Architectural/Historic Inventory Form* also developed by the State Historic Preservation Office. Evaluation of resources for significance was in accordance with *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.

FIELD SURVEY

Defining the survey area

Rosin Preservation performed a preliminary site visit to identify the historic and non-historic properties within the proposed survey boundaries. The boundaries encompassed properties fronting McGee Street between East 17th Street on the north and East 20th Street on the south (*Figure 3*). This survey area includes the area identified in the *Midtown Survey Final Report, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)* as a potential historic district associated with automobile-related commercial buildings.¹ The survey team analyzed aerial photos and conducted a windshield survey of adjacent streets to justify the current survey area boundaries, which represent a logical grouping of historic resources. The boundaries are slightly reduced from the *Midtown Survey Final Report* recommendation because some resources identified in that report are no longer extant or are not geographically connected to each other. The survey team evaluated the existence of potential resources on adjacent Grand Boulevard (west) and Oak Street (east) and determined that these streets should be excluded for several reasons. While these resources may share the auto-related context with resources on McGee Street, there are large gaps of surface parking lots between resources and the few extant resources have already been listed individually in the National Register or have experienced substantial alterations (*Figures 4, 5, and 6*). The density of intact historic auto-related resources does not extend beyond McGee Street in the 1700-1900 blocks.

In addition to the resources that line the 1700-1900 blocks of McGee Street, the 1985 survey report also identified for inclusion in a potential historic district resources north of the current survey area in the 1500 and 1600 block of McGee Street, as well as resources fronting Grand Boulevard in the 1500 and 1600 blocks. Grand Boulevard runs parallel to McGee Street, one block west. All but three resources in the 1500 block of McGee Street have been demolished and replaced with either paved parking lots or the two-block-long *Kansas City Star* Printing Plant building (2004). The resources on the west side of the 1500 and 1600 blocks of Grand Boulevard were listed in the National Register as boundary expansions of the Walnut Street Warehouse and Commercial Historic District.² The resources on the east side of the 1500 block of Grand Boulevard were not included in that boundary expansion. Three dis-contiguous buildings on the east side of the 1500 block of Grand Boulevard were also identified in the *Midtown Survey Final Report* for inclusion in the potential auto-related district. The

¹ Sherry Piland and Ellen J. Uguccioni, *Midtown Survey Final Report Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri 1981-85*, (Kansas City: Kansas City Landmarks Commission, 2008).

² The Walnut Street Warehouse and Commercial Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on September 17, 1999. The original nomination included only resources on Walnut Street, one block west of Grand Boulevard and two blocks west of McGee Street. Boundary increases in June and December 2008 added the resources on Grand Boulevard in the 1600 and 1500 blocks, respectively.

three buildings on the east side of the 1500 block of Grand Boulevard are isolated from the primary dense cluster of historic resources lining McGee Street. The large paved parking lot that occupies the 1600 block between creates a substantial physical separation between the historic resources on Grand Boulevard and the historic resources on McGee Street.

The current survey boundary represents a dense concentration of resources previously identified as a potential historic district representing Kansas City's early automobile row. The resources that occupy full blocks on the east sides of the 1700, 1800, and 1900 blocks of McGee Street were included in the survey area because they abut McGee Street. The *Kansas City Star* Building that occupies the west side of the 1700 block, constructed in 1911 to house the operations of city's primary newspaper, was identified in the *Midtown Survey Final Report* as potentially individually eligible for the National Register. There is currently a study underway to determine the National Register eligibility of this building. A paved parking lot, constructed in 1978, occupies the 1900 block. The three blocks of McGee Street included in the survey area represents the most cohesive, continuous grouping of historic resources associated with automobile row.

Figure 4. The west side of the 1700 block of Oak Street. Camera facing southwest. Photo by Sophie Roark, 2017.



Figure 5. The east side of the 1800 block of Grand Boulevard. Camera facing southeast. Photo by Sophie Roark, 2017.



Figure 6. This map shows the density of extant buildings in the survey area (outlined in black) along with the surface parking lots that line Oak Street and that separate the 1500 block of Grand Blvd from the concentration of extant historic resources. Source: Kansas City Parcel viewer, 2017.

— survey area boundary



Documentation

During field survey Rosin Preservation examined every resource in the survey area regardless of age or historic function. The definition of an individual resource was determined on a case-by-case basis based on original construction and current use. In some cases, parcel boundaries separated single buildings or include buildings that were historically constructed and used separately. Building descriptions and narratives describing building histories elaborate on their historic addresses, parcel subdivision, and justification as a resource.³ The team took high-resolution digital photographs and recorded information about the exterior physical appearance of each resource, specifically building materials, architectural style, and condition. Front and rear elevation photographs conform to Missouri SHPO standards for survey documentation. Rosin Preservation completed survey forms for all resources within the survey area.

COMPILATION OF DATA

Rosin Preservation compiled survey information in a Microsoft Access database using a template based on the Missouri SHPO Historic Resources Survey Form. The database fields record each building's physical features (e.g., plan, materials, architectural style and/or property type, outbuildings, etc.) as well as historical information (e.g., date of construction, original and current function). When linked with digital records from past and future surveys, this database will enhance the understanding of historic resources in Kansas City. The database can also use the City's parcel identification information system to link to Geographic Information System (GIS) and mapping software to facilitate analysis and to create visual presentations of the data. The total resource count includes buildings and structures, such as surface parking lots that occupy an entire parcel. The final database contains thirty entries.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Historical research is critical to understanding the history of Kansas City's commercial development and the evolution of the built environment. Research occurred concurrently with field survey and data review. This approach allowed the team to merge field and research data to create a strong and understandable relationship between the events in Kansas City's history and its built environment, to develop a historic context for the survey area, and to establish dates of construction for individual properties.

A variety of primary sources provided background information about the trends, buildings, and developments that created the current built environment in the survey area. Several secondary sources documented and evaluated specific buildings and provided information used to develop a historic context of the area. The *Midtown Survey Final Report. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)* documented all buildings in the survey area in 1982. That report included brief building histories and photographs that were useful in dating recent alterations. Several buildings in the survey area are already listed individually in the National Register. These National Register nominations contained information used to understand the development of the automobile industry in Kansas City. *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* were useful to determine construction details and address changes. Building Permits archived at the Kansas City Historic Preservation Office were a valuable primary source for determining construction dates, building owners, architects, builders, and dates and scopes of

³This report assigned physical addresses to match the addresses identified and documented in the 1985 Midtown Survey Report so that those survey forms will reconcile with the same resources documented in this study. Some parcels have multiple addresses and the primary address shown on the parcel viewer, which was used as a base map in this report, does not always represent every address assigned to that property. Property history descriptions in survey forms describe historic and current address discrepancies.

alterations. Polk City Directories dating from 1910 to 1977 archived at the LaBudde Special Collection at the University of Missouri Kansas City provided information on building tenants that demonstrated the cohesive character of automobile-related businesses in the area. Deed research at the Jackson County courthouse proved valuable to determine owners and parcel divisions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The consultants analyzed three categories of data to identify contiguous historic districts and/or individual properties that appear potentially eligible for National Register listing. Since the survey boundaries pre-sorted for non-residential function, the following three categories address issues important in determining the significance of a property or properties and National Register eligibility.

- Architectural Style/Property Type
- Date of Construction
- Architectural Integrity

The “Survey Results” section of this report provides a detailed description of this analysis and the survey findings.

Architectural Analysis

After compiling and reviewing the results of the field survey, Rosin Preservation analyzed architectural styles and vernacular property types by reviewing photographs and database information. Rosin Preservation assigned each building an architectural style and/or vernacular property type. *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* by Richard Longstreth provided guidance for identifying properties by architectural style, building form, and function and ensured the use of terminology consistent with National Register nomenclature.

Establishing Dates of Construction and Property Histories

Construction dates were primarily determined from building permits. In the case of resources lacking building permits, historic aerial photographs and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps were helpful to estimate construction dates. Estimated dates are indicated in the database with the addition of “circa” before the date.

Evaluation of Integrity

All properties eligible for listing in the National Register, whether for individual significance or as contributing elements to a historic district, must retain sufficient architectural integrity to convey the period of time in which they are significant.⁴ The National Park Service uses the following areas to define integrity. A property must retain integrity in a majority of these areas to be eligible for the register.

- Location: The place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.

⁴ A contributing property to a historic district does not have to meet the same threshold for significance or integrity as an individual landmark, but it must contribute to the significance of the district. Properties contributing to a district that is significant in the area of architecture must retain a higher degree of architectural integrity than properties in a district significant for associations with an important individual or with historical events or patterns of history.

- Design: The combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
- Setting: The physical environment of a historic property.
- Materials: The physical elements that were combined during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.
- Workmanship: The physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
- Feeling: A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.
- Association: The direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.⁵

Based on visual inspection, each building received an integrity rating of Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor based primarily on how much of the building's original design, workmanship, exterior materials, and overall feeling of a past period of time remain.⁶ Each resource has an integrity statement on the survey form.

When evaluating the architectural integrity and potential register eligibility of individual resources, the consultants employed the "glass half-full" approach, considering the reversibility of alterations as well as the quality of alterations. The goal was to give as many buildings as possible the opportunity to access state and federal historic tax credits to help fund rehabilitation and adaptive-reuse, either as individually-eligible resources or as contributing resources to a historic district. The following criteria served as the basis for rating architectural integrity in this survey. Resources in the survey area were evaluated as either having integrity (equivalent to either "Excellent" or "Good") or not having integrity (either "Fair" or "Poor.") Integrity statements were provided on survey forms for each resource.

Excellent

- The majority of the building's openings are unaltered or were altered in a sensitive and appropriate manner using similar materials, profiles, and sizes as the original building elements;
- The exterior cladding material has not been altered;
- Significant decorative elements are intact;
- Design elements intrinsic to the building's style and form are intact;
- The overall feeling or character of the building for its historic function and the time period in which it was erected is intact. Changes over a period of time are sympathetic and compatible to the original design in color, size, scale, massing, and materials;
- Character-defining elements from the time period in which the building had significant associations with events or important individuals remain intact, specifically storefronts, vehicular entrances, and rear access to elevators for multi-story buildings; and

⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, DC: National Register Publications, 1998), 45.

⁶ Architectural integrity differs from physical condition. A building with excellent integrity may be in very poor condition; conversely, a building with very poor integrity may be in excellent condition.

- If over fifty years in age, the building appears to be individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or would be a contributing element to a historic district.

Good

- Alteration of original building openings or spaces has occurred using new materials and profiles, but not causing irreversible damage to the original configuration of openings and spaces;
- Significant portions of original exterior cladding materials remain;
- Significant decorative elements remain intact;
- Alterations to the building are reversible and the historic character of the property could be easily restored;
- Additions to a secondary elevation are in an appropriate manner, respecting the materials, scale, and character of the original building design;
- The historic feeling or character of the building is slightly weakened by change or lack of maintenance, although the character-defining features of the storefronts, vehicular entrances, and rear access to elevators for multi-story buildings remain visible; and
- The building would be a contributing element to a historic district and/or it might be independently eligible for register listing if restored in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Fair

- The majority of the building's openings were altered in an inappropriate manner using new materials, profiles, and sizes, although the historic masonry openings remain visible;
- Exterior cladding material has been altered or added; however, there is some indication upon visual inspection that if removed, enough of the original cladding material might remain that the property could be restored to its original appearance;
- Additions were made in a manner respecting the materials, scale, and character of the original building design and, if removed, the essential form of the building remained intact;
- Historic feeling or character of the building is compromised on the front elevation, but the property could be restored, although reversal of alterations and removal of inappropriate materials could be costly; and
- If the property has associations with a district's area of significance, the building might be a contributing element to a historic district if the historic openings on front elevations remain visible and rear vehicular entrances and rear access to elevators for multi-story buildings remain intact.

Poor

- The majority of the building's openings, such as windows and doors, were altered in an inappropriate manner using new materials, profiles, and sizes;
- Exterior materials were altered;
- Alterations are irreversible or would be extremely difficult, costly, and possibly physically damaging to the building to reverse;
- Later additions do not respect the materials, scale, or character of the original building design;
- The overall historic feeling and character of the building is significantly compromised; and

- Further investigations after removal of non-historic materials and alterations may reveal that the structure retains greater architectural integrity than originally apparent and should be re-evaluated.

Evaluation Criteria

In addition to retaining the integrity of their historic architectural design, properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places must meet certain criteria of historic significance. Historic significance is the importance of a property to the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture of a community, a state, or the nation. To be listed, properties must have significance in at least one of the following areas.

- Criterion A: Association with events, activities, or broad patterns of history.
- Criterion B: Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- Criterion C: Embody distinctive characteristics of construction, or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- Criterion D: Have yielded, or be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

To qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criteria A and/or C, properties must retain strong integrity in the areas of design, materials, association, feeling, and location. To be eligible for **individual** listing under Criterion A, a building should retain excellent integrity in setting, materials, association, and feeling for its period of significance. It should also clearly illustrate its architectural style or property type, possessing the distinct physical characteristics that define it as this property type. For example, because many commercial resources in the survey area are one or two stories tall, are on narrow lots, and have restrained commercial styling, it is important that the primary façade retain its original fenestration and spatial arrangements; in particular, the historic storefront elements or vehicular entrance treatments that define this property type. In addition to the above requirements, to be listed as an **individual** resource under Criterion C, the property must be an outstanding example of a specific style of architecture or property type, or be the work of a master, retaining excellent integrity in setting, materials, design, and the architectural elements that define the style or property type.

To be eligible for listing as a **contributing resource** to a historic district under Criterion A, a property should retain sufficient stylistic and structural features to link the property with its period of significance. Specifically, integrity of façade arrangement and fenestration are important. Additions are acceptable if they are on secondary elevations and are subordinate in size, scale, and massing to the original building. On commercial buildings, façade arrangement and fenestration define the property type. The primary façade should retain sufficient character-defining elements to express the distinct separation of upper floors from the ground floor. The individual historic windows do not have to be present as long as the rhythm of the fenestration and bays is evident. Secondary elevations should retain historic vehicular entrances, particularly those with direct access to elevators, a characteristic specific to multi-story automobile-related resources. Window, door, and storefront infill or replacement should not destroy or obscure original openings. These types of alterations must be judged on the impact on character-defining features to determine if the property retains sufficient integrity to contribute to a district. Alterations to the primary façades of large buildings may be acceptable if they do not alter a significant portion of the façade and the original appearance of the façade can be restored. Alterations

to the façades of simple small buildings should be minimal and should not significantly impact the original appearance of the building. Parapets and upper stories should remain intact if the first story has been altered.

National Register Eligibility

Physical characteristics and historic significance provide the basis for evaluating resources for their National Register eligibility. Information about each resource, such as date, function, associations, and physical characteristics, also affects the significance of the property.

The consultants analyzed data relating to the architectural integrity and historic significance of each property within the survey area to identify contiguous districts and individual properties that appear potentially eligible for National Register listing.⁷ Rosin Preservation used the following standard terminology to complete this analysis.

- **Individually Eligible** applies to those properties that retain excellent architectural integrity and clearly represent associations with established historic context(s).
- **Contributing to a District** applies to properties located within a historic district that enhance the district's historic associations and the historic architectural qualities for which the district is significant. A National Register District is a significant concentration of sites, buildings, structures, or objects that are united historically or aesthetically by design or physical development. Contributing properties do not have to be individually distinctive, but must contribute to a grouping that achieves significance as a whole. The majority of components that define a district's historic character, even if they are individually undistinguished, must possess integrity, as must the district as a whole. A property that independently meets the National Register Criteria for Evaluation can also be a contributing property to a district if it has associations with the district's areas of significance. Contributing buildings typically have "Excellent" or "Good" integrity. Buildings with integrity ratings of "Fair" may still be contributing if they retain their historic masonry openings, even if they have been filled with an inappropriate material, and if they retain the historic vehicular entrances on secondary elevations.
- **Non-Contributing to a District** applies to properties that are located within a historic district but have lost their historical integrity, were not present during the period of significance, or do not relate to the documented significance of the district. Buildings with integrity ratings of "Poor" may become eligible as contributing resources if non-historic alterations are reversed.
- **Not Eligible** applies to individual properties outside a concentration of resources that would constitute a district, those that no longer possess historical integrity due to alterations, or those that do not relate to the documented significance for the area. do not relate to the documented significance for the area
- **Less than Fifty Years of Age** applies to properties that are less than fifty years of age. The National Register Criteria for Evaluation exclude properties that achieved significance within the last fifty years,

⁷ The Missouri State Historic Preservation Office staff makes official determinations of National Register eligibility for properties in Missouri.

unless they are of exceptional importance. The integrity and significance of such resources cannot be adequately evaluated. Fifty years is the general threshold of time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance. For this survey, the fifty-year cut-off was 1968.

SURVEY RESULTS

The McGee Street Historic Resources Survey examined thirty (30) resources, including twenty-eight (28) buildings and two (2) structures along McGee Street between East 17th Street and East 20th Street. (*Figure 3*). Of the thirty resources, twenty-eight buildings are at least fifty years of age. Two structures are surface parking lots (Resources #19 and #30) constructed within the last fifty years. Three resources (Resources #6, #16, and #24) are individually listed in the National Register.⁸

LOCATION AND SETTING

The survey area is a three-block corridor along the north-south McGee Street one-half mile south of Kansas City's downtown core. Numbered streets run east-west and named streets intersect on a north-south axis to create an orthogonal street grid. Interstate 670 separates the survey area from the downtown central business district. McGee Street is discontinuous where it terminates at the southern boundary of the highway corridor. It continues into downtown north of East 13th Street and the large-scale Sprint Center arena. The Kansas City Star Plant building, constructed in 2004, occupies two blocks on the east side of McGee Street from East 15th Street to East 17th Street south of the highway. This two-block area was historically similar to the current survey area prior to the construction of the *Kansas City Star* Printing Plant. The 1911 *Kansas City Star* Building and its associated surface parking lots occupy the block bounded by East 17th Street, East 18th Street, Grand Boulevard, and McGee Street. A surface parking lot fills the 1900 block on the west side of McGee Street.

The east side of McGee Street between East 17th Street and East 19th Street and the west side of the 1800 block are lined with one- to four-story commercial buildings that create a streetwall separated from the street by a concrete sidewalk. The density is such that buildings abut each other with the exception of three non-historic surface parking lots that create narrow voids between buildings. Two buildings (Resources #18 and #25) have deeper setbacks as part of their historic designs that allow parking in front of the buildings. Storefronts face McGee Street and alleys provide vehicular access to rear entrances.

East 20th Street marks the end of the extant historic commercial character along this corridor. The McGee Street viaduct crosses railroad tracks south of East 20th Street and surface parking lines that portion of the road. Crown Center, south of the railroad tracks, is a circa-1970 large-scale mixed use development and is notably different in scale and character from the historic commercial corridor to the north.

⁸ The nomination for the Interstate Securities Building (Resource #24) is pending review at the National Park Service.

FUNCTIONAL PROPERTY TYPES

In order to better understand the development of automobile row along McGee Street, the consultants identified the surveyed properties based on their original function as well as their architectural style and/or vernacular building form. A property type is a set of individual resources that share physical or associative characteristics. Property types link the ideas incorporated in the historic contexts with actual buildings that illustrate those ideas. By examining resources according to (1) historic function and (2) architectural style, the analysis addressed both shared functional characteristics as well as physical (architectural style/building form/type) characteristics (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Historic Function

Function	Total
Commercial	
Automobile-related	25
General commercial storefront	2
Other	1
Parking lot / Vacant lot	2
Total	30

The consultants identified different categories of historic building functions based on function and use for the surveyed properties. The overwhelming majority of resources are commercial buildings with an automobile-related function such as sales, parts, or service. Resource #24, the last building constructed in the survey area, was built for an auto financing company. Two commercial buildings (Resources #22 and #23) were initially occupied by other businesses, specifically the Cowie Electric Company and the *Kansas City Star* newspaper.⁹

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

The buildings in the McGee Street area are predominantly commercial buildings. The majority of resources exhibit two building forms: one-part commercial blocks and two-part commercial blocks. Most resources are brick with some terra cotta cladding or stone trim. Rear elevations are typically brick, clay tile, or concrete masonry unit.

They primarily have flat roofs and rectangular plans oriented with the short end facing the Street. Two buildings, Resources #27 and #18, have barrel roofs. A defining feature of the early commercial property types is a well-defined ground floor “storefront” that distinctly separates it from the upper stories and reflects a difference in public and private uses. In the case of auto-related commercial buildings, the first floor often served as a public retail space while upper stories were storage, offices, or service, necessitating the installation of large elevators.

Stylistic treatments for the commercial properties in the survey area reflect architectural styles popular in the era in which they were built. Depending on the date of construction, structural elements include concrete frames, steel members and concrete block to support automobiles and or machinery on upper floors. Similarly, storefronts incorporate combinations of brick, glass, metal, and wood. Banded windows on upper floors and transoms topping storefronts are common features. Terra cotta, stone, and brick banding, terra cotta inlays, parapets, and cornices are decorative elements applied to the restrained commercial style buildings.

⁹ Resource #24, the Interstate Security Building was an office space for an auto-finance company.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND BUILDING FORMS

Classifications based on shared physical attributes include categorization by architectural styles and/or vernacular building forms. The architectural styles and vernacular forms identified in the survey area and assigned to the surveyed properties follow the terminology and classifications accepted by the National Register of Historic Places program. This hierarchy and nomenclature relies heavily on the forms and styles discussed for commercial buildings in *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* by Richard Longstreth. Longstreth classifies commercial buildings by building function and form, such as the “one-part commercial block.” This terminology is often combined with the building’s style (i.e., “Italianate one-part commercial block”), if applicable.

COMMERCIAL BUILDING FORMS

Commercial architecture is distinguished first by building form and second by its architectural style. In *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*, Richard Longstreth identifies and categorizes buildings common to central business districts and neighborhood commercial areas according to the composition of their façades. Despite intricate detailing and stylistic treatments or the lack thereof, the organization of the commercial façade can be reduced to simple patterns that reveal major divisions or zones. Due to their functional nature, many commercial buildings exhibit restrained architectural details. The cornice area followed by the first-story storefront are the most prominent and distinctive features of a commercial building. In addition to the storefront, cornice, and parapet, important character-defining elements of commercial buildings include bulkheads, transoms, signs, and doors. Commercial buildings and the streetscapes they create define the distinct functional and visual character of the survey area. Dating from the early to mid-twentieth century, most of the surveyed commercial resources are one- to four-story buildings. The dominant traditional building material is brick.

The most conspicuous alterations reflect the modernization of first-story display windows and entrances. Many of these alterations have left the original openings and spatial relationships of the storefront and, in many cases original vehicular openings, intact. Other changes are easily reversible, such as the wood or metal sheathing over original openings or transoms. Where left exposed, the upper stories usually retain their historic integrity and original appearance.

The categorizations of One- or Two-Part Commercial Blocks, and Free-Standing Commercial Block apply to buildings four stories and under. Utilizing Longstreth’s basic commercial building property types, the most abundant in the survey area are One-Part Commercial Blocks (14), Two-Part Commercial Blocks (11) and Free-Standing Commercial Blocks (3) (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Building Forms

One-Part Commercial Block	14
Two-Part Commercial Block	11
Free-Standing Commercial Block	3
Not Applicable (parking lot)	2
Total	30

One-Part Commercial Block

The One-Part Commercial Block building is a simple one-story cube with a decorated façade. In many examples, the street frontage is narrow and the façade comprises little more than plate glass windows and an entrance with a cornice or parapet spanning the width of the façade. These buildings share party walls with adjacent buildings. In the McGee Street survey area, one-part commercial blocks include narrow storefronts with a single display window and entry like the front elevation on 1725 McGee Street (Resource #4) (*Figure 7*). Some examples have wider storefronts with multiple display windows and a horizontal massing like the building at 1701 McGee Street (Resource #1). The auto-related one-part commercial buildings in the survey area often feature vehicular entrances on front and secondary elevations and have alley access to the rear of the building. The building at 1809 McGee Street (Resource #8) and the building at 1909 McGee Street (Resource #17) both have vehicle entries on the front elevation. There are fourteen One-Part Commercial Block buildings distributed throughout the survey area.

Figure 7. 1725 McGee Street. (Resource #4). Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



Two-Part Commercial Block

Slightly more complex than their one-story cousins, Two-Part Commercial Blocks are typically two- to four-stories in height. They have a clear visual separation of use between the first-story customer service/retail space and the upper-story office, meeting room, or service uses. Similar to One-Part Commercial Block buildings, the styling of the first story focuses on the storefront glazing and entrance(s). The design of the upper stories identifies the building's architectural influences. The building at 1832 McGee Street (Resource #29) is a good example of a two-part commercial block with decorative keystones and a parapet on the front elevation. Architectural detailing is limited to the front façade and the building shares walls with other buildings on either side (*Figure 8*). Two-Part Commercial Blocks in the McGee Street survey area have characteristics associated with their automobile-related function such as vehicular entrances, typically on secondary entrances, and alley

access to the rear elevations. The Two-Part Commercial Block buildings in the survey area also have large elevators used to move cars between the ground floor and upper stories. These elevators appear on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and are still visible mostly on the rear elevations where the elevator shafts rise above the roofline. The building at 1817 McGee Street (Resource #10) is a good example of a Two-Part Commercial Block with a terra cotta arch, cornice, and coping ornamenting the upper story on the front façade and an elevator shaft rising above vehicular doors on the rear elevation. There are eleven Two-Part Commercial Block buildings in the survey area.

Figure 8. 1832 McGee Street (Resource #28). Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



Free-Standing Commercial Block

The Free-Standing Commercial Block is a building form related to the One-Part Commercial Block. It is more commonly a mid- to late-twentieth century commercial development that occupies a lot independent of the surrounding streetscape. Designed to be independent, free-standing commercial block buildings do not share party walls and often have architectural detailing on side elevations because they are visible. Examples of the Free-Standing form house government offices, banks, auto service stations, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, and a variety of retail and professional businesses. These resources are often identified as office buildings or specialty stores between one and six stories and do not necessarily have first-floor retail space with discernible storefronts. The Interstate Security Building at 215 East 18th Street (Resource # 24) is a good example of a free-standing commercial block (*Figure 11*). The building, designed in 1950 to occupy a corner lot with an adjacent parking area, housed offices for a finance company and lacks a retail storefront.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

While simple vernacular design defines the vast majority of the buildings in the McGee Street survey area, several resources exhibit formal architecture styling primarily reflecting *Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Revivals*. Executed in permanent masonry materials, the buildings are primarily commercial blocks with applied ornament. Upper story windows, parapets, engaged columns, and masonry surfaces are common elements that

display stylistic influences, mostly in the form of applied materials with historical forms. Arched windows, inlaid geometric shapes, and contrasting masonry banding and texture are common devices. Ten resources distributed throughout the survey area express elements of a revival style. An additional two recourse express elements of the Modern Movement style.

Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Revivals

Historical revival styles, characterized by borrowed elements from earlier, typically European, styles, dominated American architecture in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. In addition to faithful appropriation of a specific style, revival styles incorporated eclecticism, or the selection of elements from diverse styles for architectural decorative designs on a single application. Applied to one- and two-part commercial blocks, stylistic elements were often simplified and minimal. Symmetry and restrained ornamentation, often executed in terra cotta, stone or brick characterized Revival style commercial buildings in the first years of the twentieth century. Accentuated cornices were a frequent element. Windows often had decorative caps or surrounds. Ornamental framing in the form of stringcourses or cornices delineated each story.¹⁰

The McGee Street survey area commercial buildings were relatively vernacular in their conservative detailing, but did incorporate stylistic elements such as herringbone brick, terra cotta or stone trim, embellished windows, decorative cornices, and brackets. The commercial building at 1727-29 McGee Street (Resource #5) has a decorative relief cornice and stone sills and coping (*Figure 9*). The building at 1827 McGee Street. (Resource #13) has terra cotta framing, decorative keystones, and cornices (*Figure 10*).

Figure 9. 1727-29 McGee Street (Resource #5).
Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



Figure 10. 1827 McGee Street (Resource #13).
Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



¹⁰ Richard Longstreth. *The Building of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*. (Washington DC: The Preservation Press, 1987), 29.

Modern Movement

The Modern Movement genre encompasses the variety of architectural styles developed in the mid-twentieth century that broke from the historical revival styles of previous eras. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1970s, architects sought inspiration in the innovations of man and machine rather than in the architecture of the past or in nature. The goal was to create completely new forms that reflected the energy, creativity, and engineering ingenuity of the age. As the first formal style to emerge from the Modern Movement, Art Deco utilized stylized geometric ornament to emphasize modernity and progress. Subsequent styles, such as Streamline Moderne, International, and New Formalism, stripped the building of all formal ornament. Form, construction, and man-made materials became the main components of architectural expression. These later styles were predominantly used for large-scale, free-standing commercial buildings in urban areas. The Interstate Securities Building at 215 East 18th Street (Resource #24) is nominated for individual listing in the National Register as a significant example of Modern Movement architecture in Kansas City as designed by local master Edward Tanner (*Figure 11*).¹¹

Figure 11. 215 East 18th Street (Resource #24). Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



¹¹ The nomination for Interstate Securities Building is pending review at the National Park Service.

DATES OF CONSTRUCTION

The consultants utilized survey forms completed as part of *Midtown Survey Final Report. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)*, along with Sanborn Maps, and building permits on file at the city of Kansas City Historic Preservation Office to determine dates of construction. The dates of building alterations were not considered in this analysis. *Table 3* presents the distribution of buildings by estimated date of construction.

Table 3. Dates of Building Construction

Era	Total	Percent
1910 – 1929	24	80
1930 – 1945	2	6.6
1946 – 1968	2	6.6
1969 - 1990	2	6.6
Total	30	100

Eighty percent of the resources were constructed between 1910 and 1929. The area was largely transformed from its historic residential character to a commercial corridor by 1920 and automobile-related commercial buildings continued to infill the streetscape until the Depression largely halted new construction. Several buildings infilled remaining open lots or replaced earlier buildings (Resource #25 replaced an earlier service station) between 1940 and 1950. Two surface parking lots structures (Resource #19 and #30) were constructed after 1969, outside of the recommended period of significance (*Figure 12*).¹²

¹² Resource #19 replaced a circa 1885 dwelling that had been converted to an automobile related business. The parking lot was constructed circa 1990. Resource #30 replaced a series of automobile-related buildings that appear on the 1951 Sanborn Map. The parking lot was constructed circa 1978.

Figure 12. Dates of construction. Source: Jackson County Parcel Viewer, 2017.

McGee Street Survey

Date of Construction
 — survey area boundary

- 1911-1929
- 1930-1945
- 1946-1968
- 1968-1990



INTEGRITY

All properties eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places must retain sufficient architectural integrity to convey the period of time for which they are significant. As described above in the Methodology, each building was evaluated for integrity. Based on visual inspection, each building received an integrity rating of Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor based primarily on how much of the building's original design, workmanship, exterior materials, and overall feeling of a past period of time remain.¹⁵ Individual integrity assessments are provided on survey sheets. Eight resources retain excellent integrity, thirteen resources have good integrity, six resources have fair integrity and one resource has poor integrity. Two resources are not fifty years of age (*Table 4, Figure 13*).

Table 4. Integrity ratings

Integrity	Total	Percent
Excellent	8	27
Good	13	43
Fair	6	20
Poor	1	3
Not 50 years old	2	7
Total	30	100

¹⁵ Architectural integrity differs from physical condition. A building with excellent integrity may be in very poor condition; conversely, a building with very poor integrity may be in excellent condition.

Figure 13. Integrity rating. Source: Kansas City Parcel Viewer, 2017.

McGee Street Survey

Resource Number
 — survey area boundary

- excellent
- good
- fair
- poor
- less than 50 years old



HISTORIC CONTEXT

KANSAS CITY'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Kansas City incorporated in 1853 with a population of 2,500 near the confluence of the Kaw and Missouri Rivers. Along with nearby Westport and Independence, Kansas City's primary commercial activity in its early years focused on outfitting the migration west along major trails that passed through the area. The rivers formed a natural northern boundary and development began extending south and east in the nineteenth century. The initial development near the current River Market area began the street grid with named streets running north and south and numbered streets extending east and west. An early city hall and a public square were between 4th and 5th streets and Main and Walnut streets in the 1850s.¹⁴ Early development focused on the north-south Main Street and Grand Boulevard and extended south to 20th Street when the city annexed McGee's addition in 1859.¹⁵ Construction of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad bridge over the Missouri River at Kansas City in 1869 signaled a shift from pre-Civil War river transportation to the railroads dominating shipping and passenger transportation. The regional connectivity afforded by the new railroad system spurred industry and associated urban development. Kansas City utilized the railroads to import manufactured goods and export agricultural products such as cattle.

This new focus on railroad transportation shaped the significant urban development that occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century while the city's population expanded rapidly to nearly a quarter of a million people by 1910.¹⁶ The city expanded south, first to 31st Street by 1885 and further to include Westport, three miles south of the downtown business district in 1897. Early city-sponsored public transportation used horse-drawn street railways and later electric streetcars to reach residential neighborhoods surrounding the urban core. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, McGee Street between 15th and 20th Streets was characterized by single family housing.¹⁷

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AUTOMOBILE AND RAILROAD INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Kansas City experienced significant growth between the decades of 1910 and 1930 when the population increased by 150,000 people to reach 399,736.¹⁸ The 1909 annexation that extended the city to 75th Street set the southern boundary that remained in place until the post-World War II expansion.¹⁹ The transportation infrastructure development during that period included the boulevard system, reflecting the nationwide City Beautiful Movement, and also the construction of Union Station in 1914, a large-scale commitment to the railroad system. At the same time, the new auto industry grew rapidly. A Kansas City auto show in 1907 attracted 20,000 spectators, though only a couple hundred Kansas Citians owned an automobile at that time.²⁰ Mass production on the newly invented assembly line made automobiles more affordable and during the decade between 1910 and 1920, production and sales increased exponentially. Ford opened an assembly plant in the West Bottoms industrial area of Kansas City in 1912 and companies in the vicinity previously devoted to manufacturing carriages began assembling automobiles such as Studebakers.²¹ The city's railroad network and

¹⁴ George Erhlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 1826-1990* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 35.

¹⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps Kansas City, Vol 3, Sheet 251, 1895.

¹⁸ Erhlich, 66.

¹⁹ Ibid, 35.

²⁰ Susan Richards Johnson and Nicole M. Sabatini. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, "Kirkwood Building," February 2001, 8-19.

²¹ Susan Richards Johnson and Nicole M. Sabatini, 8-21.

manufacturing capacity made it a wholesale distribution center for cars, parts, and accessories. Rather than replacing the railroads as a dominant transportation method, the early automobile industry in Kansas City relied on a symbiotic relationship with the railroad network to import parts for assembly and automobile sales and to distribute parts machined in Kansas City manufacturing facilities.

By 1923, 55,000 Kansas City residents owned cars.²² The built environment reflected the marked rise in personal automobile ownership. Six hundred miles of roads in Kansas City allowed for geographic sprawl outside of historic streetcar routes. Residential development spread out as far south as 65th Street by 1917 and home owners in existing residential neighborhoods added garages.²³ Developer J.C. Nichols pioneered the automobile-destination shopping center model with the construction of the Country Club Plaza five miles south of downtown Kansas City in the 1920s.

AUTOMOBILE ROW

While increased personal automobile ownership influenced large-scale development patterns, it also spawned a new and distinctive commercial development pattern associated with the sales and service of automobiles. The rise of automobile rows, or clusters of automobile-related commercial buildings, occurred in cities across the country in the first decades of the twentieth century. These commercial districts share some common design elements that characterize them as the first commercial buildings associated with the new industry.

While automobile makers bore the cost of tooling and operating factories, they looked for cost savings in developing large-scale sales and distribution networks. Granting selling rights to local entrepreneurs, many of whom were already involved in transportation-related businesses, proved effective for developing sales outlets. Dealers constructed or leased buildings to house their sales and service operations at a furious pace during the nineteen teens. Automobile dealerships largely followed the commercial building models of the time with streetfront display spaces and rear utilitarian space, but the buildings designed and constructed specifically to sell automobiles adapted that traditional formula in several notable ways. First, automobile dealers sought locations along main thoroughfares outside of established dense commercial centers to maximize lower rents and taxes and to have access to more space.²⁴ Their commercial buildings retained traditional storefronts to display sales items, but expanded glazing to display their larger product. Locating along a thoroughfare brought customers along an existing transportation corridor. Clustering of similar businesses occurred when dealerships opened near each other and smaller ancillary businesses, such as services garages and auto parts stores and distributors, filled in the gaps. This model repeated in numerous cities to create districts of automobile-related businesses.²⁵

KANSAS CITY'S AUTOMOBILE ROW: MCGEE STREET AND GRAND BOULEVARD

Kansas City's automobile row developed rapidly beginning around 1910. New commercial buildings designed as automobile showrooms replaced single-family houses along thoroughfares just south of the city's center. A roughly ten-block area between Truman Road (15th Street) and 20th Street along Grand Boulevard and McGee Street became a grouping of automobile-related businesses specifically clustered around McGee Street's north south streetcar route. Like other cities nationwide, Kansas City automobile dealers chose an area just outside of downtown. Early showrooms at 1829 McGee Street (Resource #14) and 1821 McGee Street (Resource #12),

²² Ibid, 8-19.

²³ Ibid, 8-19.

²⁴ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985): 83.

²⁵ Liebs. Ibid, 83.

both constructed in 1912, were close to each other on the same block and took advantage of the streetcar route that passed by with commuters who could see into their storefront windows. Kelly-Springfield Motor Truck Company occupied 1829 McGee Street in 1918 and Elgin Motor Car Sales Company and Sayers and Seoville Company Auto occupied 1821 McGee Street. A 1914 dealership at 1827 McGee Street (Resource #13) filled in the space between the two. Republic Rubber Company occupied that space in 1918. The building at 1901 McGee Street (Resource #16) was constructed in 1912 with two distinct storefronts. An automobile dealer historically occupied the larger storefront space and smaller ancillary businesses such as auto parts suppliers occupied the smaller storefront. In 1918, the Dey Motor Car Company occupied 1901 McGee Street. As was common for the new automobile districts, dealers clustered along McGee Street and auxiliary businesses filled in the gaps.

At the same time automobile dealers were constructing commercial buildings that transformed McGee Street from a residential neighborhood, the construction of Union Station in 1914 influenced the character of new construction south of 19th Street that began focusing on industrial and commercial uses to take advantage of the railroad corridor.²⁶ The streetcar route along McGee Street ceased operation after a 1916 City Ordinance, signaling a burgeoning reliance on personal automobiles for transportation.²⁷ When McGee Street was dedicated to automobile traffic, the area thrived as a dense node of automotive sales and service businesses. Automotive-related businesses continued to locate around and infill the space between established dealerships after the initial period of construction between 1912 and 1918. The building at 1921 McGee Street (Resource #20) was constructed in 1919 and 1920 and housed Van Tire Company. It was near the H&R Sales Company and RB Auto Repair Shop that anchored the corner of McGee Street and W. 20th Street (no longer extant). By 1920, one half of all automotive businesses in Kansas City were located along McGee Street and Grand Boulevard.²⁸

Early automotive-related businesses in the new automobile row shared many characteristics with other contemporaneous commercial buildings. One- to four-story buildings had narrow set-backs and density that created a streetwall. Storefronts featured glazing to display their retail product, though in the case of dealerships, these windows were typically on a larger scale. Vehicular entrances were a common feature on both primary and secondary elevations. Early multi-story dealerships had showrooms on the first floor and used upper stories for storage and service. This vertical organization required large elevators to move cars in the interior. Elevators often had direct access to the exterior to facilitate the delivery and movement of vehicles and parts.

Like other commercial buildings, auto dealerships used architecture to convey the quality of their product.²⁹ Permanent materials such as brick and terra cotta often clad the exterior covering substantial frames to support interior loads (*Figures 14 and 15*). Interior showrooms were elaborate and well-appointed to communicate luxury and stability of the company. Interior organization prioritized showroom public space and placed offices in the rear or upstairs. Service functions were typically in the rear where vehicular entrances accessed the space.

²⁶ Erhlich, 66.

²⁷ Elizabeth Rosin, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, "1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building," December 2008, 8-7.

²⁸ Rosin, 8-7.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 8-7.

Figure 14. 1817 McGee Street (Resource #10) has a brick façade with terra cotta detailing. Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



Figure 15. 1817 McGee Street (Resource #10) in 1940. Source: Kansas City 1940 Tax Assessment Photographs Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.



Building permits indicate many of the buildings along McGee Street were owned by real estate developers and leased to auto-related companies. The Maston Realty and Mining Company, which also sold auto insurance, constructed the building at 1832 McGee Street (Resource #29) in 1919 and leased it to the Republic Rubber Company and Newell Motor Car Company in 1920. Charles C. Smith designed, and or constructed, several buildings in the area including the building at 1832 McGee. The Belfast Investment Company developed several buildings and also hired Charles C. Smith for design and construction. The buildings at 1717 McGee Street (Resource #2), 1721 McGee Street (Resource #3), 1829 McGee Street (Resource #14), and 1901 McGee Street (Resource #16) were all developed by Belfast Investment Company and constructed by Charles C. Smith. George Hoffman and George Bowling, prominent Kansas City real estate developers developed the building at 1827 McGee Street (Resource #13). Irwin Kirkwood, a Kansas City developer, constructed the Kirkwood Building at 1737-41 McGee Street (Resource #6) specifically to accommodate the Gridley Motor Company and the Indiana Truck Company, two auto-related businesses.³⁰

Postwar auto dealerships: a new model

Adopting traditional commercial forms for buildings lent legitimacy to the new automobile industry when the first Automobile-related businesses opened around 1910. By the end of the 1920s, the auto industry was established and dealers and service providers began to move out of the early, dense automobile row districts. Greenlease Cadillac Building at 2900 Gillham Road (National Register listed 2003) was constructed in 1918 as a stand-alone dealership with a service department one and a half miles south of the main cluster of automobile row. While the Greenlease Cadillac Building was a Revival style commercial building, several later dealerships outside of the initial cluster forming automobile row exhibited later stylistic influences that evoked Moderne style. The Sight Brothers Chevrolet Building at 3201 Gillham Plaza was constructed in 1934 with horizontal massing and a Streamline Moderne curved façade. The sleek aesthetic and stand-alone site distinguish the 1930s-era dealership from its earlier predecessors grouped in one and two-part commercial blocks along automobile row. The J. C. Nichols Company, a large-scale developer, built The Faddis Motor Company building at 7 West 62nd Terrace in 1945 as part of a commercial node serving the Brookside neighborhood eight miles south of downtown. The building has streamlined accents and a rounded corner with a large display window.

The economic disruption of the Depression and the reduced automobile production during the war years were a setback to the entire industry. When production and consumer sales resumed in the postwar period, the physical environment of automobile row was considerably different than the early twentieth century districts. The trend toward larger lots further away from dense downtowns intensified with auto-industry guidance dictating specific architectural designs intended for larger sites along highways.³¹ The post-war economic boom marked the auto industry's heyday with a production of over seven million new automobiles in 1955 alone.³² Volume sales from a reduced number of auto makers that had consolidated or merged with smaller companies characterized the postwar auto industry. Dealerships relocated to high traffic areas and designed buildings and sites to accommodate sprawling inventories, service stations, and used car lots. In Kansas City, main transportation thoroughfares continued to be popular locations for automobile businesses. In 1960, automobile dealers are listed along Troost Avenue in the 4500 block, the 6200 block, and the 5400 block, but are more dispersed along the road rather than clustered as densely as the McGee Street automobile row.³³ Several

³⁰*Midtown Survey Final Report Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri 1981-85*, (Kansas City: Kansas City Landmarks Commission, 2008).

³¹ Lieb, 86.

³² *Ibid*, 90.

³³ Durham Motor Company Inc. was at 6227 Troost Avenue, Feld Ervin Motor Company Inc. was at 4551 Troost Avenue, and Sam Miller Coach Co. was at 5408 Troost Avenue in 1960. Polks City Directory, Kansas City, Missouri, 1960.

dealerships along Highway 71 south of the city exemplified the postwar trend of high-traffic locations that could offer sprawling lots. Economy Car Sales at 9501 Highway 71 located along the highway in a suburban setting and Debacker-Weidemier Chevrolet Inc. was at 117th Street and Highway 71, fourteen miles south of downtown.³⁴

Postwar automobile-related businesses in Kansas City moved away from the original model of adjoining commercial blocks and instead spread out to individual locations. By 1960, automobile-related businesses were no longer concentrated in their historic automobile row along McGee Street. Of sixty-nine dealers listed in the commercial directory in 1960, only one was located in the historic automobile row corridor at 1601 McGee Street, which is no longer extant.³⁵ In spite of the loss of dealerships, the area along McGee Street between East 15th Street and East 20th Streets remained commercial in character throughout the twentieth century and the change in character from automobile-related businesses occurred slowly to incorporate other light industrial and retail uses alongside automobile-related parts and machine operations. By the late 1960s, the character along McGee Street was no longer strictly automobile-related businesses. In 1967, machinery supply, drafting supplies, lithograph services, food service equipment supply and a compressed gas supplier operated along McGee Street between East 17th Street and East 20th Street.³⁶ A notable change occurred in the late 1960s when several businesses moved out and left vacant spaces around 1967. Shortly after, the *Kansas City Star*, a local newspaper headquartered along McGee Street, began buying buildings that had previously been occupied by automobile-related businesses, signaling a change in use away from retail, commercial, and light industrial.

Mann Automatic Transmission Company, an auto repair business operated at 1900 McGee Street (no longer extant) in 1967. That building was vacant in 1968. Jones Auction Company moved out of 1827 McGee Street (Resource #13) in 1968 and the building remained vacant through the 1960s. Beach-Wittman used the building at 1820 McGee Street (Resource #27) as warehouse space until 1967. The building was vacant in 1968. Puritan Compressed Gas Company operated their equipment division in 1701 McGee Street (Resource #1) until 1967. The building sat vacant until the *Kansas City Star* purchased it in 1970. The *Kansas City Star* purchased lot number 421 of block 32 in Mastin's subdivision, which is currently a parking lot associated with 1808 McGee Street (Resource #25) in 1970. The newspaper company also purchased lot 10 of Block 32 in Maston's Subdivision which is 1824 McGee Street (Resource #28) in 1973 and the buildings at 215 E. 18th Street (Resource #24) and 1808 McGee Street (Resource #25) in 1975.³⁷ By 1970, the buildings in the 1900 block fronting Grand Boulevard had been razed and replaced with a surface parking lot.³⁸ The buildings fronting McGee Street on the west side of the 1900 block were razed in 1977 and a surface parking lot was constructed in their place (Resource #30).³⁹ Demolition of the buildings along McGee Street's 1900 block, along with the vacant spaces available for the newspaper to use as auxiliary space signaled a decline in occupancy, specifically for the automobile-related businesses that had historically occupied the area.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Polks City Directory Kansas City, 1960. The circa 2003 *Kansas City Star* Building occupies the site.

³⁶ Polks City Directory Kansas City, 1967.

³⁷ The building at 1717 McGee Street (Resource #2) was occupied by the *Kansas City Star* in 1981 at the time of the Midtown Historic Resource Survey documented the building. Deed records in file at Jackson County Courthouse, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri

³⁸ Historic aerial photograph 1970, <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer> accessed August 24, 2017.

³⁹ "Death of a City Block Recalls 100-Year Parade of History," *Kansas City Star*, October 15, 1977.

SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The McGee Street Historic Resources Survey evaluated all of the resources within the survey area individually and within the context of the concentration of buildings as a district. This report recommends a potential McGee Street Automotive Historic District that is significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of commercial buildings specifically constructed for the automobile industry as it flourished in this area of Kansas City between 1912 and 1968.

The development of commercial buildings on the east side of McGee Street between East 17th Street and East 20th Street and on the west side of the 1800 block of McGee Street was part of a larger trend in which early automobile-related businesses grouped together on automobile rows in cities across the country beginning around 1910. The concentration of commercial buildings along McGee Street in the proposed historic district represents this trend in its location just outside downtown Kansas City. The commercial buildings share common design elements such as restrained exterior styling, masonry and steel structures, freight elevators, enlarged storefronts, and vehicular entrances that communicate their historic function as automobile-related commercial buildings constructed during the early twentieth century.

Proposed Boundaries

The recommended historic district boundaries represent the most unified grouping of buildings that together retain the character of the historic streetwall created by compatible heights and continuous storefronts. The survey area included all of the resources that along McGee Street. The two largest resources, the *Kansas City Star* Building in the 1700 block and the paved parking lot in the 1900 block, were recommended for exclusion from the proposed historic district. The *Kansas City Star* Building is not associated with auto-related commercial context for the area and the significance of this building should be evaluated independently. The parking lot is less than fifty years old and is also not associated with the auto-related commercial context. While other contemporaneous automobile-related buildings historically developed along adjacent Grand Boulevard and Oak Street, many are no longer extant. Additionally, McGee Street was historically the nexus and primary corridor associated with Kansas City's automobile row. The few remaining automobile-related buildings along Oak Street and Grand Boulevard that retain integrity are listed in the National Register, either individually or are part of the existing Walnut Warehouse and Commercial Historic District.

The *Midtown Survey Final Report. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)* identified transportation related automobile properties and a potential district consisting of the resources along McGee Street within the same boundaries this report recommends, along with some discontinuous buildings on Grand Boulevard. The buildings identified in that report located on the west side of Grand Boulevard in the 1500 and 1600 blocks are currently listed in the Walnut Street Warehouse and Commercial Historic District. The 1985 report identified three buildings on the east side of Grand Boulevard in the 1500 block as automobile-related properties. This survey examined that block and recommends that those buildings be excluded from the recommended McGee Street Automotive Historic District. The buildings on the east side of the 1500 block of Grand Boulevard are dispersed within a larger block of buildings unrelated to the automotive context and are not continuously connected to each other or to the grouping of automobile-related buildings along McGee Street (*Figures 16 and 17*).

Figure 16. The buildings at 1517 Grand Boulevard, 1523 Grand Blvd., and 1527 Grand Boulevard. The *Midtown Survey Final Report. Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri (1981-85)* identified these buildings as transportation related automobile properties. Photo by Sophie Roark, 2017.



Figure 17. The east side of the 1500 block of Grand Blvd. is separated from the recommended McGee Street Historic District (outlined in black) by a large surface parking lot. Parcels highlighted in purple represent NR-listed buildings or districts. Source: Kansas City Parcel viewer, 2017.

McGee Street Survey

— recommended historic district

1500 block of Grand Boulevard



NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY

Based on dates of construction, architectural integrity, and historical associations, the survey data identified a potential historic district that appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register. That potential district includes three resources previously listed in the National Register, twenty-three contributing resources, and two non-contributing resources.

HISTORIC DISTRICT

A historic district is a grouping of resources that shares significant associations of history and/or architecture. These resources must be in a concentrated geographical area to create a unified entity that is clearly distinct from the resources outside the district boundaries. Resources within a historic district can include individually distinctive resources (resources that might also qualify for individual register listing) as well as resources that lack the qualities of design or association to merit individual listing. District boundaries can encompass resources that lack integrity or association with the historic context and are considered “non-contributing,” although resources of this type must be a minority within the district. Large resources at the edges of the potential district that would otherwise be identified as non-contributing can be excluded from the proposed boundaries. This is the rationale used to exclude the *Kansas City Star Building* (Resource #23) and the block-long paved parking lot (Resource #30), both on the west side of the survey area.

The recommended McGee Street Automotive Historic District is a cluster of early twentieth century automobile-related commercial buildings that possess significance at the local level for their association with the development of Kansas City’s automobile row from 1912 to 1968, the recommended period of significance (*Figures 18 and 19*). The period of significance begins with the construction date of the earliest extant commercial building in the district and year when the commercial character of the area shifted from its historically automobile-related function. The district is recommended eligible under Criterion A as an intact example of an early twentieth century automobile row. The resources are recognizable to their period of construction as buildings that facilitated the sales and service of automobiles and related parts. Service was always an important component of this early urban grouping of commercial buildings constructed when the automobile was a new product. As large-scale suburban dealerships usurped the position of McGee Street as the epicenter of auto sales, the service and parts manufacturing functions surged and remained viable until the occupancy and character decidedly shifted away from the historically dominant automobile character in the late 1960s.

Figure 18. Streetscape on the east side of the 1800 block of McGee Street. Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



Figure 19. Streetscape on the west side of the 1800 block of McGee Street. Photo by Brad Finch, 2017.



General Registration Requirements

Resources eligible for listing as a contributing property to a historic district must retain the architectural and structural features that tie the resource to its original function and period of significance. Alterations to primary building facades are acceptable if they do not alter a significant portion of the façade, if the changes are reversible, and if the original appearance of the façade can be restored. Infill of original fenestration openings should not destroy or obscure the original openings and should be fully reversible. Secondary elevations and the presence of vehicular entrances and direct exterior access to elevators in multi-story buildings are also important features of contributing resources. The resource should represent associations with the area of significance and the context of the early automobile industry in Kansas City.

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Contributing resources do not meet the criteria necessary to merit individual listing in the historic register, although they represent significant associations and retain sufficient integrity to be contributing resources to a historic district. It is possible that additional research, beyond the scope of this project, could identify an area of significance or important historical associations for a Contributing resource that would change its status to Individually Eligible. Twenty-three (23) resources in the survey area are recommended as contributing to the potential McGee Street Automotive Historic District (*Figure 20, Resources #1, 3-5, 7-15, 17, 19-22, 25-29*).

The buildings form a linear corridor lining McGee Street for three blocks on the east side and one block on the west side. The buildings retain integrity and communicate their significance as a collective grouping of early twentieth century automobile-related commercial buildings. While storefront alterations were common for commercial building in constant use throughout the twentieth century, the resources in the potential McGee Street Automotive Historic District largely retain their historic configurations and many still have the dimensions of vehicular entrances. Elevator penthouses and vehicular entry doors are visible on many of the resources, particularly on the rear elevations. The combination of formal commercial buildings with decorative terra cotta ornament mixed with smaller utilitarian buildings with vehicular entrance bays incorporated into storefronts communicates the corridor's historic function as an automobile row containing dealership showrooms and service businesses clustered together. Two contributing resources (Resources #6 and #25) have parcels with non-historic paved parking lots. The parking lots do no impact the integrity of these two resources.

NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Non-Contributing resources are those that have lost significant integrity or are less than fifty years of age and do not exhibit exceptional significance. There are two non-contributing resources in the proposed district. Resource #2 is recommended as non-contributing due to alterations to its storefront, materials, and form that compromise its ability to convey significance. Resource #19 is a structure (surface parking lot) that is recommended as non-contributing because it is less than fifty years of age and does not represent the historic character of the district.

Figure 20. Contributing and Non-Contributing resources in the potential McGee Street Historic District. Source: Kansas City Parcel viewer, 2017.

McGee Street Survey

Resource Number

— survey area boundary

— recommended historic district boundary



- contributing
- non-contributing
- individually NR listed
- potentially individually eligible



POTENTIALLY INDIVIDUALLY ELIGIBLE RESOURCES

The survey identified the 1911 *Kansas City Star* Building (Resource #23) as a resource that may meet at least one of the four National Register Criteria for Evaluation and retain sufficient architectural integrity and historical associations to qualify it for individual listing with local significance in the National Register of Historic Places. Aside from the basic research required to determine that this building was not historically associated with the automobile-related context relevant to the majority of resources in the survey area, the research required to properly assess this resource was outside the scope of this project.

CONCLUSION

CAPITALIZING ON HISTORIC COMMERCIAL ASSETS

The potential McGee Street Automotive Historic District represents Kansas City's earliest extant automobile-related commercial buildings. Together, they formed the local automobile row and today they are the most concentrated and intact grouping of their kind in downtown Kansas City. The buildings in this potential district tell a unique and important story. They define the commercial history of the community and provide tangible reminders of the past that create a unique sense of place. The on-going continuum of development already obscures some of the area's beginnings and early development. As Kansas City's urban development evolves, recognizing distinctive links to historically significant trends will enhance the quality of life already appreciated by residents and visitors.

The goal of this survey was to identify and evaluate historic resources as part of on-going efforts to maintain a vital commercial center and to move toward change in a positive manner — as a catalyst for capitalizing on the synergy of the old and new. To achieve this goal, it is necessary first to recognize and understand the assets that contribute to the survey area's unique physical and cultural character; and to develop goals, policies, and initiatives to assist the community in the future identification, interpretation, evaluation, and protection of its remaining cultural resources.

The survey findings can provide the basis for many preservation decisions, including nominating eligible buildings and districts to the National Register of Historic Places and evaluating the impacts of government actions on historic resources. As a planning tool, the National Register encourages preservation without public control over private property interests. Listing a property does not impose responsibilities upon the private property owner for maintenance or restoration, but can provide owners with access to financial incentives. Survey results can also help the City better protect its historic resources by raising awareness among the public of the significance of the city's building inventory and by boosting interest in private investment in the rehabilitation of historic buildings for new uses.

BENEFITS OF PRESERVATION

Preservation has its own intrinsic value in celebrating a community's history. As noted by John W. Lawrence, former Dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane University, it enables the citizens of today and tomorrow "to understand the present as a product of the past and a modifier of the future." It allows a greater awareness of the relationships of the past, the present, and the future — a deeper understanding of the continuity and contrasts of life.

Another compelling argument for protecting historic resources is simply that people like them. People seek out historic settings because they offer quality craftsmanship and materials, create variety, and encourage human interaction in a familiar context. Moreover, preservation has proven value as a tool for economic development.

As described by nationally recognized real estate professional Donovan D. Rypkema in his book *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, commitment to preservation may be one of the most effective acts of fiscal responsibility governmental entities can undertake. Older neighborhoods and commercial centers represent a considerable taxpayer investment in infrastructure and building stock. Conservation of buildings, neighborhoods, and sites

of historic and aesthetic value is one of the best tools for recovering the worth of past investments while fueling new economic activity.

SOME BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- ✓ The physical appearance of its buildings and streetscapes reflects the community's overall vitality and economic health.
- ✓ Maintaining the vitality of the city's older commercial areas, by rehabilitating older buildings and designing quality new buildings, can attract larger commercial ventures to the community, even if these ventures do not locate in the historic core of the city.
- ✓ Rehabilitation of individual buildings is more attainable and stabilizing to a local economy than a single large economic development project.
- ✓ Cultural resources represent the unique evolution, history, and diversity of a community and a region and differentiate them from other areas. Rehabilitating older buildings and sites distinguishes one community from another by preserving the unique character of each.
- ✓ The value of a property is determined by the buildings, public improvements, and activities around it. Rehabilitation of a historic property directly benefits adjacent property owners and nearby businesses.
- ✓ The value of rehabilitated properties in a city's historic core increases more rapidly than the real estate market in the larger community.
- ✓ Older buildings are ideal for many smaller and start-up businesses, which typically generate a majority of new permanent jobs.

The most successful revitalization efforts in the country utilize historic rehabilitation as the core of their revitalization strategies. These efforts document that the most successful approach to create sustainable communities merges the old and the new. The creative combination of preservation, adaptive reuse, and new construction capitalizes on the aesthetics and craftsmanship of other eras, provides opportunities for architectural innovation, and promotes problem-solving, thereby enhancing the community's character and fabric.

The State of Missouri and the federal government recognize the role rehabilitation of historic buildings can play in strengthening the local economy. To encourage sustainable neighborhoods and communities as well as to encourage preservation of important cultural resources, they provide incentives to encourage rehabilitation of historic buildings. The investment tax credit for rehabilitation of historic buildings is available from both the state and federal governments.

The **20 percent Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit** applies to owners and some renters of income-producing National Register listed properties. All residential and commercial properties (income-producing and

owner-occupied) listed in the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for a **25 percent Missouri Historic Preservation Tax Credit**. When used together, the federal and state tax credits provide a significant financial incentive.

In exchange for the tax credits, the rehabilitation work must comply with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation*. The Secretary's Standards are designed to address changes that will allow older buildings to function in the twenty-first century. The common-sense guidelines address new construction as well as the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Several properties in the survey area have already taken advantage of the tax credits with dramatic results.

In addition to the economic advantages to preservation, preservation is also an effective and important tool for the conservation of natural resources. After years of exploiting resources, people are now considering how their surroundings fit into the larger environment. Better stewardship of older buildings and structures recognizes the important embodied energy contained in built resources. Buildings contain energy that has already been expended, materials that have been mined or harvested, manufactured, shipped, and assembled. Material from demolished buildings accounts for up to 40 percent of landfill materials, the cost of which is indirectly borne by taxpayers. At the same time, new construction consumes new energy and resources.

When considered together – the embodied energy, the cultural memory, the craftsmanship and artistry – preservation provides a critical mechanism to ensure the long-term vitality and sustainability of our unique built environments. Financial incentives, such as historic tax credits, provide the means to encourage individual owners to take actions that benefit our communities as a whole.

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