

Sunset Park 50th Street Historic District

Borough of Brooklyn

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendaring January 22, 2019



The proposed Sunset Park 50th Street Historic District consists of two rows of 25 houses framing 50th Street between 4th and 5th Avenues in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn. Constructed between 1897 and 1899 as Sunset Park was developing into a working- and middle-class community, this section of 50th Street is one of the neighborhood's finest historic blocks, notable for its cohesive rows of remarkably well-preserved brownstone-fronted houses representing the turn-of-the-century architectural development of Sunset Park.

Sunset Park was largely farmland until the 1890s, when it was transformed by new transportation links and the industrial development of its waterfront. Key to the neighborhood's growth were the 1889 opening of the 39th Street Ferry to Lower Manhattan and the 1893 extension of the Brooklyn Union Elevated Railway along 3rd Avenue, which linked the area with Downtown Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Bridge. The 1890s also saw the development of Bush Terminal, a waterfront complex of piers, warehouses, and factories that quickly grew into New York's largest commercial and industrial facility, employing 20,000 people. Formerly known as part of South Brooklyn, the neighborhood took its name in the early 20th century from the park planned in 1891 and completed in 1911 just north of the proposed district.

These transportation, industrial, and recreational improvements spurred the construction of speculative row houses to house port workers and professionals, many of which were purchased and occupied by immigrants. As in the broader Sunset Park community, early residents of the proposed district included Irish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish immigrants, with longshoremen, deck hands, and other laborers living alongside doctors, steamship captains, and other professionals. Reflecting the relatively modest financial means of its new residents, many of the proposed district's houses were constructed as two-family homes, which enabled their owners to supplement their incomes by taking in renters.

All of the houses in the proposed district were designed by Brooklyn architects Henry Spicer and Thomas Bennett for local developers and are of consistent design, featuring high stoops, angled or round projecting bays, and richly textured brownstone fronts. Their facades incorporate two of the most popular row house styles of the day, the Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival, combining the rough surfaces and sinuous medieval ornament of the former with the angular forms and classical ornament of the latter. With its high degree of historical integrity, the proposed Sunset Park 50th Street Historic District remains one of its neighborhood's standout blocks, an elegant late-19th-century street recalling Sunset Park's early development as an attractive working- and middle-class residential neighborhood created by local architects and developers for both native-born and immigrant New Yorkers.

(Proposed) Sunset Park 50th Street Historic District | LP-2623

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

