

SUBJECT: A report and recommendation on a proposed Local Historic Conservation District designation in North Avondale.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Location: Various properties within North Avondale

Petitioner: Vice Mayor Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney,
on behalf of the North Avondale Neighborhood Association
P.O. Box 16152, Cincinnati, OH, 45216

Owner: Various property owners within North Avondale

ATTACHMENTS:

Provided in addition to this report are the following exhibits:

- Exhibit A – Updated Location Map
- Exhibit B – Updated Designation Report & Resource Inventory
- Exhibit C – Updated Conservation Guidelines
- Exhibit D – Updated Boundary Map
- Exhibit E – Timeline and Engagement
- Exhibit F – Historic Conservation Board Staff Report
- Exhibit G – Historic Conservation Board Recommendation Letter
- Exhibit H – Cincinnati Preservation Letter of Support
- Exhibit I – North Avondale Business Association Letter of Support
- Exhibit J – Resident Petitions
- Exhibit K – Written Comment

BACKGROUND:

The applicant, Vice Mayor Jan-Michele Kearney, on behalf of the North Avondale Neighborhood Association (NANA), is requesting a Local Historic Conservation District designation consisting of 370 properties, of which 337 are contributing (91%) and 33 are non-contributing (9%), within the neighborhood of North Avondale.

The proposed district (Exhibit A) encompasses all of the properties on both sides of Avon Fields Lane, Avon Fields Place, Red Bud Place, Red Bud Avenue, Betula Avenue, Rose Hill Avenue, Beechwood Avenue, Lenox Place, Lenox Avenue, Glen Lyon Avenue, Dakota Avenue, Redway Avenue, Marion Avenue, and Valley Lane. It also includes a number of properties on Avondale Avenue, Barry Lane, Dana Avenue, Reading Road, and Winding Way. The boundary was selected based on the cohesiveness of architectural character within the district, which retains an excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The area is primarily zoned for large-lot single-family residential (SF-10-T and SF-20-T), with the exception of the Office Limited (OL-T) and Commercial Neighborhood – Pedestrian Oriented (CN-P-T) parcels spanning Reading Road, nine parcels zoned for medium-lot single-family residential (SF-6-T) on Lenox Place, nine parcels zoned Residential Mixed (RMX-T) on Dana Avenue, and one parcel zoned Residential Multifamily 1.2 (RM-1.2-T) on Paddock Road. Reading Road is a designated Transportation Corridor, so all parcels within the proposed district are given the Connected Communities “T” designation.

The concept of the North Avondale Local Historic District first arose in 2023, as historic preservation emerged as a goal of the in-progress neighborhood plan. In early 2024, NANA began gauging residents’ interest in a

historic district via the NANA newsletter, website posts, at monthly meetings, and at the North Avondale Block Party with Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra on July 19, 2024. In August, Vice Mayor Kearney agreed to be the official applicant, and in September, Beth Sullebarger was hired by NANA as the historic preservation consultant to produce the necessary application materials. In the fall of 2024, NANA engaged at two additional North Avondale block parties and began a press blitz with articles appearing in the Cincinnati Enquirer, Fox 19, and WCPO, as well as a radio interview on WVXU.

A kick-off meeting for the Historic District process was held on January 25, 2025. Additional meetings for the project were held on February 19, March 19, and June 10, 2025. The draft guidelines were posted to NANA's website on June 30, and information tables were set up at two additional block parties on July 18 and October 5, 2025. An application was officially accepted on December 23, 2025. See Exhibit E for the full timeline of neighborhood-led engagement.

On March 9, 2026, the Historic Conservation Board voted 5-1 to recommend approval of the proposed designation, including the staff recommendation for revised language in the "Demolitions" section of the Conservation Guidelines. On April 3, 2026, the item was presented to the City Planning Commission and public comment was taken. The City Planning Commission voted to hold the proposed designation with instructions to hold an additional public staff conference and for the applicant to work with City staff on revisions to various sections of the application materials—including the Resource Inventory and the accessory structures, roofs, windows, fences, and landscaping sections of the Conservation Guidelines—in order to correct mistakes and provide further detail and clarity.

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:

After the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting, several revisions were made to the application materials. NANA's Executive Board voted to approve these revisions at their meeting on April 7, 2026. Revisions are highlighted in the Exhibits and detailed below.

Boundary Map (Exhibit D)

Two properties, 1064 Barry Lane and 1026 Avondale Avenue, were added at the request of the homeowners.

Resource Inventory (Exhibit B)

Two properties, 1067 and 1070 Barry Lane, formerly listed as noncontributing structures, were removed from the Resource Inventory because they lay outside the finalized boundary of the proposed district. Four properties, 686 and 690 Red Bud Avenue, 724 Betula Avenue, and 1007 Marion Avenue, were corrected to be listed as noncontributing structures.

Designation Report (Exhibit B)

The number of resources provided throughout the document and list of noncontributing structures on page 25 of Exhibit B were modified to reflect the adjustments and corrections to the Boundary Map and Resource Inventory listed above. The architect profiles were amended to add information about John Scudder Adkins on page 9 and Werner & Adkins on page 14 of Exhibit B.

Conservation Guidelines (Exhibit C)

Introduction: Language was added on page 2 of Exhibit C to clarify that a Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained from either the Historic Conservation Board or Urban Conservator, depending on whether the work is considered a major or minor alteration, and to advise applicants to check with the Urban Conservator's office for minor items that can be reviewed at the staff level.

Door and Window Openings: Language was added on page 9 of Exhibit C to include substitute materials, flexibility on building elevations that are not visible from the right-of-way, and a list of approved windows. On page 10 of Exhibit C, further explanation was added regarding plastic and vinyl windows.

Roofs: Acceptable substitute materials for slate and clay tile roofs were listed on page 11 of Exhibit C.

Walls and Fences: Language was added on page 13 of Exhibit C to explain why fences are relevant to the character of the district and to clarify that non-historic fences may be removed.

Landscaping and Site Features: This section was removed in its entirety from the Conservation Guidelines.

Accessory Structures: Language was revised on page 17 of Exhibit C to apply to all accessory structures, as opposed to only accessory dwelling units, and to be more in line with how accessory structures are treated in other historic districts. These revisions were made prior to the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting.

Demolitions: Language was revised on page 20 of Exhibit C per the recommendation of the City of Cincinnati Law Department to remove any reference to demolition based on Emergency Demolition and Economic Hardship, as these items are already included in §1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code, along with a third provision for Demolition in Compliance with Associated Historic Conservation Guidelines. Additionally, the modified language is more consistent with other historic districts. These revisions were made prior to the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting and were approved by the Historic Conservation Board.

Non-Contributing Buildings: Page 21 of Exhibit C was adjusted to reflect the corrections to the Boundary Map and Resource Inventory listed above.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE:

The applicant nominates the proposed district under the following Criteria, outlined in §1435-07-1 (a) “Becoming a Historic Structure; Determination of Historic Significance,” of the Cincinnati Zoning Code:

1. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and
3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

Staff finds that the proposed district has historic significance as defined by §1435-07-1(a) under Criteria 1 and 3.

Under Criterion 1, the North Avondale Historic District is significant in the history of Cincinnati as an upper-middle-class residential neighborhood developed between 1896 and 1940. Sparked by expanding transportation options, including a new electric streetcar line accessing the neighborhood in the early 1890s, the early subdivision of land in North Avondale encouraged urban expansion from the basin area. This development began in earnest in 1893 with the Rose Hill Park Subdivision, mostly on the west side of Reading Road, followed by other subdivisions on the east side.

The force behind Rose Hill Park was Robert Mitchell, the wealthy owner of the Mitchell & Rammelsburg Furniture Company, who invested his profits in real estate. Many other wealthy Cincinnatians moved to the area to escape the congestion, noise, and pollution of the basin. Buyers who built homes in the neighborhood included other captains of industry such as grocer Barney H. Kroger, clockmaker and jeweler Frank Herschede, and brewer Albert Lackman. As the neighborhood developed in the early twentieth century, North Avondale also became an enclave for affluent German Jews, who moved there from the West End.

Under Criterion 3, the North Avondale Historic District is architecturally significant as an example of the landscape-lawn approach to a suburban subdivision, defined by a park-like character with continuous lawns and picturesque curving streets. This approach was closely related to the British “Garden City” movement. Gaslights add to the area’s historic ambiance. The district retains the overall feel and visual character of its original streetscape dating back to the development of the neighborhood, with substantial high-style houses on large lots.

The cohesiveness and variety of architectural styles in the urban architecture of the area is unique. Homes in North Avondale represent an unusually rich array of architectural styles, including Queen Anne, Shingle, Richardsonian Romanesque, Italian Renaissance, Beaux Arts, Neoclassical, Chateausque, French Eclectic, Swiss Chalet, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Prairie, and Craftsman, that typify the period of significance. The district includes many high-style buildings, providing a highly diverse selection of architectural styles. All of the contributing homes are individually distinctive, and many were designed by prominent local architects including John Scudder Adkins; Grosvenor Atterbury; Matthew H. Burton; John Henri Deeken; Desjardins & Hayward; Elzner & Anderson; A. Lincoln Fechheimer; Charles H. Ferber; S. S. Godley; Harry Hake; Samuel Hannaford & Sons; Anthony Kunz, Jr.; Harry Price; Herbert Spielman; Tietig & Lee; and Werner & Adkins.

ROLE OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:

The Historic Conservation Board recommendation (Exhibit F) is narrowly focused on a determination of historic significance under §1435-07-1(a) and the proposed conservation guidelines' effectiveness at preserving the structures within the boundaries. According to §1435-07-2-B of the Cincinnati Zoning Code, the City Planning Commission reviews broader criteria pertaining to preservation as well as urban planning and economic development. When holding a public hearing to determine whether to follow the recommendation of the Historic Conservation Board, the City Planning Commission shall consider all of the following factors:

1. *The relationship of the proposed designation to the comprehensive plans of the city and of the community in which the proposed Historic Landmark, Historic District or Historic Site is located;*

The proposed designation of the North Avondale Historic District is consistent with the Sustain Initiative Area of *Plan Cincinnati (2012)*. See "Consistency with *Plan Cincinnati (2012)*."

2. *The effect of the proposed designation on surrounding areas and economic development plans of the city;*

The proposed designation will have a positive impact on the long-term stability of the neighborhood and the economic development plans of the city.

3. *Such other planning and historic preservation considerations as relevant to the proposed designation.*

The proposed designation will preserve a unique and historic area of the city by promoting the general maintenance of the building stock and ensuring contextual and compatible new development.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NOTIFICATION:

A joint public staff conference and Historic Conservation Board pre-hearing was held by the Department of City Planning and Engagement on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, virtually on Zoom. Mailed notice was sent to all property owners inside of and within 400 feet of the boundary of the district, as well as the North Avondale Neighborhood Association, the Avondale Community Council, Avondale Development Corporation, and the Paddock Hills Assembly.

A total of 79 members of the public were in attendance at the first virtual staff conference, in addition to the applicant team and members of city staff. There were many questions regarding the details of the district, how it would work in practice, and how decisions about the guidelines were made. Questions were answered by City staff and the applicant team as appropriate.

Attendees in support of the designation expressed that the area within the proposed district is worthy of protection, and a historic district is the primary tool to accomplish that end. Proponents supported the proposed guidelines' ability to regulate new construction and limit demolitions. Proponents also felt that the restrictions within the guidelines were reasonable and that homeowners should expect to interact with the city when making changes to their homes. Some proponents also felt that the designation will protect the neighborhood from perceived threats as a result of the recently passed Connected Communities legislation and provide an avenue for the neighborhood to weigh in on new development.

Attendees in opposition to the designation expressed that the district would impose an unnecessary burden on them, increasing the cost and time involved in making alterations to their homes and limiting their right to do as they please with their property. Opponents also expressed concern about the size and coherence of the district. Some opponents also disagreed with the motivation for the district to limit development as related to the Connected Communities legislation and questioned whether the proposed district would provide the sort of protections the proponents seek.

Joint notice of the March 9, 2026, Historic Conservation Board hearing and April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting was mailed to all property owners inside of and within 400 feet of the boundary of the district, as well as the North Avondale Neighborhood Association, the Avondale Community Council, Avondale Development Corporation, and the Paddock Hills Assembly. Email notice was sent to all persons who registered for the January 27 public staff conference.

At the March 9, 2026, Historic Conservation Board hearing, a total of 12 individuals provided public comments. Seven spoke in support, four spoke in opposition, and one was unsure. The primary comments raised mirrored those heard during the public staff conference. Those in support reiterated the eligibility of the proposed district for its historic significance, the limited scope of the guidelines to regulate only the exterior with a focus on the front façade, the positive impact of historic districts on neighborhood stability, the creation of a way for neighbors to weigh in on development, and the level of community engagement conducted by NANA. Those in opposition reiterated concerns about increased burden in terms of time, stress, and cost, especially for low-income and elderly residents, and expressed concern about the level of community engagement during the process.

At the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting, a total of 13 individuals provided public comments. Five spoke in support, seven spoke in opposition, and one did not provide a position. Comments echoed those provided during the January 27, 2026, public staff conference and March 9, 2026, Historic Conservation Board meeting for both those in support and those in opposition.

A second public staff conference was held on Monday, May 18, 2026, virtually on Zoom. Joint notice of the public staff conference and the June 5, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting was mailed to all property owners inside of and within 400 feet of the boundary of the district, as well as the North Avondale Neighborhood Association, the Avondale Community Council, Avondale Development Corporation, and the Paddock Hills Assembly. Email notice was sent to all persons who registered for the January 27, 2026, public staff conference and attended the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting.

A total of 22 members of the public were in attendance at the virtual public staff conference, in addition to the applicant team and members of City staff. Attendees asked about the process of engagement with the Belvedere Homeowners Association and the reason for the building's exclusion, how corner lots will be treated for regulations referencing visibility from the right-of-way, how existing conditions on properties prior to the designation that are not compliant with the Conservation Guidelines will be treated and verified, and the details of how code enforcement is conducted. Questions were answered by City staff and the applicant team as appropriate.

At this time, staff have received 160 items of public feedback, including petitions and written comments (Exhibits J and K). These responses include 155 individuals representing 96 addresses in support of the proposed designation, and 29 individuals representing 20 addresses in opposition. The breakdown of addresses that have submitted comments to the city comes to 83% comments in support and 17% comments in opposition. Letters of support were also submitted by Cincinnati Preservation and the North Avondale Business Association (Exhibits H and I).

CONSISTENCY WITH PLAN CINCINNATI (2012):

The proposed designation is consistent with the Sustain Initiative Area of *Plan Cincinnati (2012)*, particularly the goal to “Preserve our natural and built environment” (p. 197). The proposed designation provides the legal mechanism to preserve the built environment in North Avondale by regulating demolition and restricting incompatible modifications. The Conservation Guidelines are crafted in such a manner as not to be overly burdensome on residents, but still adequately achieve the conservation goals of the district, ensuring the sustainability of the district and the longevity of the neighborhood.

ANALYSIS:

The proposed North Avondale Historic District was born from the City’s neighborhood planning activities in the community, as part of the goal-setting and visioning process between residents and stakeholders. While the draft plan is not yet complete, the proposed designation represents a legitimate and tangible advancement of the priorities of the community that emerged from that process.

The project has been initiated and led by NANA as a grassroots effort with a final product that came at the behest of residents, representing a level of community ownership and direction that helps to ensure the project is designed to maximally benefit residents.

The level of community engagement for the project has been thorough. NANA conducted outreach through all channels available to them: their website, mailing list, and regular meetings, as well as tabling at multiple large, neighborhood-wide events, and a press blitz that reached three local newspapers and included a radio interview.

Staff finds that the proposed district meets the criteria for historic designation and that the proposed district does represent a cohesive and distinct collection of structures. While there are 16 architectural styles identified in the Designation Report, the proposed Conservation Guidelines are written in a manner that is not overly prescriptive. Modifications are reviewed for compatibility, which is determined on a case-by-case basis according to the specific style of the individual home.

Staff finds that the proposed guidelines effectively balance the regulations necessitated for adequate preservation with the desire to minimize bureaucratic and cost burdens on residents. On existing homes, the proposed guidelines regulate only major exterior modifications, meaning interior renovation and routine exterior maintenance are not subject to review. Additionally, the guidelines express a specific focus on the primary facades of the home, providing leniency regarding rear and side yards (on non-corner lots). Staff also finds that the proposed guidelines appropriately serve to restrict out-of-context new construction from disrupting the unique historic character of the neighborhood without onerous or unreasonable restrictions on new development.

At the April 3, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting, the commissioners requested that the applicant work with City staff on revisions to various sections of the application materials, including the Resource Inventory and the accessory structures, roofs, windows, fences, and landscaping sections of the Conservation Guidelines, in order to correct mistakes and provide further detail and clarity. Revisions were made to the Boundary Map, Resource Inventory, Designation Report, and the Conservation Guidelines to correct mistakes, add clarity about the Certificate of Appropriateness process, list examples of acceptable substitute materials, and streamline or minimize the regulations where appropriate. Staff finds that these revisions meet the request of the commissioners.

RECOMMENDATION:

The staff of the Department of City Planning and Engagement recommends that the City Planning Commission take the following actions:

1. **APPROVE** the proposed Local Historic Conservation District designation of the North Avondale Historic District in North Avondale as described in the Designation Report included as Exhibit B;
2. **APPROVE** the attached map amendment designating the historic district as seen in Exhibit A; and
3. **APPROVE** the proposed Conservation Guidelines as seen in Exhibit C.

Respectfully submitted:



Gabrielle Couch, Senior City Planner
Department of City Planning & Engagement

Approved:



Katherine Keough-Jurs, FAICP, Director
Department of City Planning & Engagement