



70 TAPLEY STREET
SPRINGFIELD
MASSACHUSETTS
01104

Preliminary Report
for the proposed
BIRNIE-TAYLOR-LAY BLOCKS
LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
Springfield, Massachusetts



Prepared for the Springfield Historical Commission
by the Springfield Community Preservation Committee
January 24, 2023

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SUMMARY SHEET

Chairperson: Vincent Walsh

Contact Person: Julisa Davila-Ramos
(Commission Staff)

Address: Springfield Historical Commission
70 Tapley Street
Springfield, MA 01104

Telephone: (413) 787-6020

Commissioners:

Thomas Belton
Judith Crowell
William Duquette
Bryan McFarland
Alfonso Nardi
Vincent Walsh, Chair
Walter Kroll, Alternate

**Expected Date of Public
Hearing:** August 17, 2023

**Expected Date of City
Council Vote:** September 18, 2023

**Number of Properties
Included in the Proposed
Local Historic District** **3**

Conclusion of the Preliminary Study Report: To protect these three early 20th century apartment building which are being renovated with the help of Community Preservation Act funding, the Birnie-Taylor-Lay Blocks Local Historic District should be created.

I. Introduction

The Historic Districts Act, Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40C, is the Commonwealth's enabling statute for creating local historic districts. Local historic districts are the mechanism by which municipalities can designate and protect areas of architectural and historical significance. Within a local historic district, no exterior architectural feature that is visible from a public street, park or water body can be altered without first receiving permission from the local historic district commission. The level of protection provided by a local historic district is much greater than that provided by inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Although being on the National Register is a formal recognition of property's historical significance and can offer limited review of projects funded or assisted by federal, state, or CDBG funds, the property itself is not protected from change if work is done exclusively with private funds. The local historic district provides greater protection and review for properties and has this power as a result of a town or city council vote.

Local Historic Districts were first established in Massachusetts in 1955. There are now more than 200 local historic districts in over 100 municipalities in the Commonwealth, including nine in Springfield. Neighboring municipalities with local historic districts include West Springfield, Longmeadow, Chicopee, and Holyoke.

In 1972, the Quadrangle-Mattoon local historic district was established in Springfield. Over the next six years, five other districts were created, protecting more than 1,200 properties. Three districts expansions have also taken place. More recently, three small historic districts have been created to protect the Immaculate Conception Church complex, the Colony Hills area, and Apremont Triangle area. Single-building LHDs were created to protect Our Lady of Hope Church, Willys-Overland Block, Hubbard & Emily Bliss House, Thomas Wason House, Driscoll Block, Trinity Block, Thurston Munson House, All Souls Episcopal Church, Elias Brookings School, Auchman House, Forest Park Trolley Waiting Pavilion. LHDs can be credited with protecting many of the city's significant structures, maintaining community character, preserving important architectural treasures, and adding to the quality of residents' lives.

II. Methodology

This area of the Metro Center neighborhood was surveyed in 1991 and updated in 1997. In 2000, Byers Street as well as portions of Spring Street, Pearl Street, and Salem Street were part of an expansion of the Quadrangle-Mattoon Street District on the National Register of Historic Place. In 2021, the Springfield Community Preservation Committee recommended, and the Springfield City Council approved, CPA assistance for exterior preservation work to 68-70, 76, and 84-88 Byers Street. The SCPC requires that any historic building assisted with CPA funds be protected by being with a local historic district. The owner of the three properties thus requested the Springfield Historical Commission to begin the designation. The public hearing is expected on August 17, 2023, and the Final Report submitted to the City Council on September 18, 2023.

III. Significance

Byers Street lies along the western edge of the Springfield Armory, running from State Street to Pearl Street. Its development began from State Street. The 1870 map of Springfield shows only four houses on the street, with the remaining land being the back yards of houses facing Spring Street. The first three decades of the twentieth century were a time of increasing industrial and commercial growth in Springfield. As downtown businesses prospered, there was an increasing demand for multi-family housing in the downtown area for clerical and retail workers. Developers replaced many older single- and two-family homes in the Byers/Spring Street area with large brick apartment blocks of eight or more units to meet this demand. The Quadrangle-Mattoon Street District, listed on the National Register in 1974, was expanded in 2000 to include the Byers/Spring Street area.

68-70 Byers Street was built in 1871-1872 as investment property for William Birnie, who lived nearby on Byers Street. It was designed in the Second Empire style by the local architectural firm of Perkins & Gardner. Birnie immigrated from Scotland as a child with his family. He learned the stonemason's trade in New York. As a partner in the firm of Harris & Birnie, he did masonry work on canals and railroads in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Rhode Island. Birnie also did masonry work at the Springfield Armory. As financial manager for Goodhue & Birnie contractors, Birnie worked on a number of development projects in Springfield, including development of part of the Brightwood neighborhood. For much of its early history, this double house was occupied by Ebenezer B. Stedman, a foreman at Kibbe Brothers Candy manufacturers, by Ella Smith, a clerk at Forbes & Wallace Department Store and William K. Smith, an employee of Wason Car Co. Like most of the buildings in this area, the building housed clerical and retail employees of Springfield's downtown businesses. The architectural partnership of Perkins & Gardner designed the Birnie Block. Partner Jason B. Perkins began his training as a carpenter. He moved to Springfield in 1861, where he formed a partnership with Eugene C. Gardner, an association that lasted from 1868 to 1873. Gardner began his own architectural training as a mason. Both men were involved in the construction of a number of substantial residential, commercial, and institutional buildings in Springfield. Perkins was involved in the construction of the Cooley Hotel. Gardner's projects included Springfield Technical High School, the Worthy Hotel, and several Mattoon Street townhouses. Gardner also wrote many articles and books about residential architecture, including *Homes and How to Make Them*, *Illustrated Homes*, and *Home Interiors*.

76 Byers Street was built in 1895 as an 8-unit apartment house owned by Frederick B. Taylor, who came to Springfield from New Jersey around 1863. It was the first large apartment house on Byers Street. At the age of twenty-two, Taylor established the Springfield Door, Sash and Blind Company. He built a number of residential buildings in the city. Like most of the apartment blocks in this area, the Taylor Block housed clerical and retail employees of Springfield's downtown businesses. From 1926 to 1937, it was known as the Anchorage Rooming House, and was used as a boarding house rather than an apartment block. In 1937, it was remodeled back to its original function, with a new Spanish Colonial facade designed by architect H. L. Sprague and constructed by builder

Lorin S. Wood. The Spanish Colonial Revival style is not common in Springfield, where Colonial Revival, Jacobean Revival, and Tudor Revival were popular. A Pennsylvania native, Wood moved to Springfield in the early twentieth century. He worked on a number of significant commercial and institutional structures in the city, including Van Sickle Junior High School, the Indian Motorcycle Building in Winchester Square, and the Clinton Hotel. Sprague, who was responsible for designing many of the Byers/Spring Street district's apartment blocks, moved to Springfield around the same time as Wood. His Springfield projects include the First Baptist Church, Park Memorial Baptist Church, and Classical Junior High School.

84-88 Byers Street was constructed as a 27-unit apartment building in 1925 by William Lay, Inc. and housed clerical and retail employees of Springfield's downtown businesses, as did most of the apartment blocks in this area. It was designed in the Classical Revival style by the architectural firm of Huestis & Huestis. Raymond W. and Harold Cuthbert Huestis came to Springfield from New Brunswick, Canada. H. Cuthbert began his architectural career as a draftsman for Samuel M Green Co., the architectural and engineering firm that constructed the Hotel Kimball. In 1915, H. Cuthbert left Green and formed an architectural partnership with Raymond W. Huestis. The two worked together in Springfield until about 1928. Raymond Huestis later married Coral Mackey, the director of the Springfield Conservatory of Music, and lived at the conservatory's home at 54 Byers Street during the 1940s and 1950s. Builder William Lay moved to the United States from England with his family in the late nineteenth century. He became involved in construction and real estate development in Springfield. Among Lay's projects were the Hotel Bridgeway and the Salvation Army headquarters.

All three buildings were renovated in 2003 for affordable housing. They are again being renovated in 2023 to continue as affordable housing.

Together, the three buildings are an example of the transition of Byers Street from single-family and two-family houses to multi-family buildings.

IV. Justification of the Boundaries

This is a three-parcel historic district proposed to protect buildings being renovated with the aid of Community Preservation Act funds.

The three-parcel historic district is located along the western street line of Byers Street, mid-block between Pearl Street to the Northwest and Frost Street to the Southeast. The district is adjacent to a multi-family structure to the northwest, commercial/institutional buildings along Spring Street to the southwest, a parking lot to the southeast, and the Springfield National Armory site across Byers Street to the northeast.

The Springfield Community Preservation Committee requires that historic resources being assisted with CPA funds be protected by a Local Historic District if they are not already protected by one.

V. Map of the Proposed District



VI. Property Street Address Index

Street Address	Historic Name	Year Built	Inventory form	Architectural Style
68-70 Byers Street	William Birnie Block	1871	SPR.3541	Second French Empire
76 Byers Street	Frederick Taylor Block	1895; 1937	SPR.3542	Spanish Colonial Revival
84-88 Byers Street	William Lay Block	1926	SPR.3543	Classical Revival
Total number of properties to be included in district:			3	

VII. Recommendations for the Ordinance

The new district will be added to existing Springfield Ordinances. There will be some of the exemptions as many current historic districts overseen by the Springfield Historical Commission such temporary structures, color of paint, small signs, at grade sidewalks and driveways, exact reconstruction following disaster, screen windows and doors. The Commission will retain oversight of all other features.

VIII. The Ordinance

Proposed Ordinance

TEXT:

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE REVISED ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, 1986, AS AMENDED BY CHAPTER 2.46 ENTITLED “SPRINGFIELD HISTORICAL COMMISSION”

Be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Springfield, as follows:

“Chapter 49, Article II of the Revised Ordinances of the City of Springfield, as amended, entitled “Historic Districts” is amended by the addition of the following section:

Subsection “49-31”:

49-31 Birnie-Taylor-Lay Block

- A. There is further established under the provisions of and in accordance with the historic districts act, so-called, as mentioned in this chapter, the Birnie-Taylor-Lay Block District as shown on the map, labeled exhibit 27-2AA, entitled “Birnie-Taylor-Lay Block,” said map to be considered part of this chapter.
- B. Exemptions from Controls:
1. Temporary structure or signs, subject to such conditions as to duration of use, location, lighting, removal and similar matters as the Commission may reasonably specify;
 2. Terraces, walks, driveways, and sidewalks provided that any such structure is substantially at grade level;
 3. Storm windows, screens, window air conditioners; antennas, and similar appurtenances as decided by the Commission;
 4. Color of paint
 5. Signs of not more than one (1) square foot in area in connection with use of a residence for a customary home occupation, or for professional purposes, provided only one (1) such sign is displayed in connection with each residence and, if illuminated, are illuminated only indirectly;
 6. The reconstruction, substantially similar in exterior design, of a building, structure or exterior architectural feature damaged or destroyed by fire, storm or other disaster, provided such reconstruction is begun within one year thereafter and carried forward with due diligence.

IX. Inventory Form

See attached

X. Photographs

PHOTOGRAPHS ID	Photograph Description
1	Byers Street Elevation— Birnie, Taylor & Lay Block
2	Byers Street Elevation—Birnie Block
3	Byers Street Elevation—Birnie Block
4	Byers Street Elevation—Birnie Block
5	Byers Street Elevation—Taylor Block
6	Byers Street Elevation—Taylor Block
7	Byers Street Elevation—Lay Block
8	Byers Street Elevation—Lay Block
9	Birnie, Taylor & Lay Block— Rear View
10	Birnie, Taylor & Lay Block—Elevated View

#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6



#7



#8



#9



#10

