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Preserving character



By P.J. LASSEK World Staff Writer
10/10/1999
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This story about historic preservation zoning being sought by the Brady Heights Neighborhood Association listed the incorrect government planning agency as Kent Schell's employer. Schell works for Tulsa's Urban Development Department.

Cathryn Young, co-founder of the Brady Heights Neighborhood Association nearly 20 years ago, sits in front of the Brady Mansion. Tate Brady, Patterned his mansion after Robert E. Lee's home in Arlington, Va. It is being renovated and is one example of how the neighborhood wants to preserve its character with historic preservation zoning.
STEPHEN PINGRY / Tulsa World

Brady Heights group seeks historic preservation zoning

In the early 1900s, oil was booming in Red Fork and the Brady Heights neighborhood was the "Silk Stocking District" of Tulsa.

As the early 2000s approach, oil's presence is fading, and the architectural character of the historic north- side area is struggling to survive.

"We are at a turning point -- we can protect the character or let the next round of development in the area set the tone for the future" said Emily Warner, a

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member of the Brady Heights Neighborhood Association.

The neighborhood group is seeking historic preservation zoning that would dictate the look of facades on newly built or rehabilitated residences.

The Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission will hold a public hearing Nov. 17 on the zoning request, which is subject to City Council approval.

If approved, Brady Heights will join Gillette, North Maple Ridge, Swan Lake and

Yorktown as neighborhoods that have the special HP zoning overlay.

“It’s ironic that we were the first neighborhood in Tulsa to get on the National Register for Historic Places, yet we don’t have any zoning to protect us,” said Tim Lovell, the neighborhood group’s president.

Brady Heights’ approach to preservation zoning has some elements that are a first for Tulsa and could, if approved, end up serving as a model for other areas, said Kent Schell, planning manager for Indian Nations Council of Governments and staff to the Tulsa Preservation Commission.

Each neighborhood with HP zoning creates its own guidelines to protect the integrity of the area’s architecture, he said.

Unlike much of Tulsa, the development of Brady Heights in the early 1900s was not driven by any particular growth pattern.

“The wealthy folks wanted to be up on a hill to catch the breezes above the river,” Warner said of the nine-block area located east of the Tisdale Express way between Denver and Cheyenne avenues and Fairview and Marshall streets. “So the bankers, oilmen and city leaders active between 1910 and 1920 built here.”

Those who built in the area included such people as merchant and entrepreneur Tate Brady, the area’s namesake; J.S. Hopping, founder of Fourth National Bank; G.V. Vandever, founder of one of Tulsa’s oldest department stores; philanthropist Hubban Rudisill; George Winkler, architect of the Mayo Hotel; I.S. Mincks, owner of the Mincks-Adams Hotel; architect John Blair; Judge Gubser; Postmaster J.M. Crutchfield; and numerous oil families.

The neighborhood developed up until the 1930s, but the bulk of the homes were constructed in the teens, Lovell said.

The area is filled with a variety of architectural styles, including a 1910 Prairie house, a 1920 Neoclassic mansion, two Dutch Colonial houses, and numerous Victorian, Queen Anne and Bungalow houses.

Although the area ultimately set the architectural standard for other middle- to upper-class developments in Tulsa, its deterioration over the years has led to the demolition of numerous homes. Of the 143 that remain, many are in need of a face-lift or major rehabilitation.

“We have 30 buildable lots. Infill development is a very important piece and is really driving our initiative,” Warner said. “Currently, anyone can build whatever they want.”

Cathryn and Wess Young, the founders of the neighborhood association nearly 20 years ago, say the HP zoning “is the only way to control our destiny.”

The neighborhood’s assets are its unique diversity and the beautiful architecture, residents say.

“We are very diverse in ethnicity and income levels,” Warner said. “We have artists,

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professionals, elderly on fixed incomes, and low-income residents."

"Our goal is to keep it that way. We want everyone to stay. We don't want any more houses demolished," she said. "Our goal has been to find a way to accomplish that, and we think we have."

A group effort involving the neighborhood, Tulsa Development Authority, several banks, architects and Realtors has resulted in the construction on one of the available lots of a nearly completed two-story home on the corner of Marshall Street and Denver Avenue. This type of neighborhood endeavor is the first for Tulsa, Schell said.

"We hope this home sets the tone for the neighborhood. It fits with the architecture and has already increased appraised values in the area," Warner said.

To address the cost issues that often arise in HP-zoned areas, the group has prepared a matrix that has options for rehabilitation loans for all different income levels.

"The association is even committed to creating an HP zoning fund for the elderly and low-[4] income so that they could have extra funds to make historically correct repairs and rehabilitation," Lovell said.

Establishing a neighborhood fund is another first in Tulsa and may be a first in the state, Schell said.

The neighborhood group also is seeking to change its tax- exempt status, which would allow donations to be tax deductible, Lovell said.

"The private sector can play a vital role in revitalizing the area," he said.

The group also got a commitment from the Tulsa Institute of Architects to provide design guidance for low-income residents with cost on a sliding scale, Warner said.

The neighborhood also has organized a citizen-based, fix-up, paint-up effort for minor improvements, she said.

"Brady Heights has led the way in trying to identify resources to make HP zoning work for everyone in the area. It clearly meets the criteria for HP zoning," Schell said.

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By P.J. LASSEK World Staff Writer

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