VILLAGE OF DOWNERS GROVE
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
APRIL 20, 2016 AGENDA

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| 16-ADR-0004  
1000 Burlington Ave | Designation of a Historic Landmark | Scott Williams Planner |

REQUEST
The petitioners are seeking a Historic Landmark Designation for the train station located at 1000 Burlington Avenue based on the criteria that the property has significant value as part of the historic, heritage, and cultural characteristics of the community, represents the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, and is a source of civic pride and identity for the community.

NOTICE
The application has been filed in conformance with applicable procedural and public notice requirements.

GENERAL INFORMATION

OWNER: Village of Downers Grove
APPLICANT: 801 Burlington Avenue  
Downers Grove, IL 60515

PROPERTY INFORMATION

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: Classical Revival/Beaux Arts
BUILDING DATE: 1911
HISTORICAL BUILDING USE: Downtown Train Station
EXISTING BUILDING USE: Downtown Train Station
PROPERTY SIZE: 3,250 square feet
PIN: 09-08-502-006

ANALYSIS

SUBMITTALS
This report is based on the following documents, which are on file with the Department of Community Development:

1. Application/Petition for Public Hearing
2. Project Summary
3. Plat of Survey
4. Owner Consent Form
5. Certificate of Acknowledgement Form
6. Historic Landmark Information Form
7. Photographs
8. Sanborn Map

The Village would like to thank the Friends of the Edwards House for their assistance in preparing this application.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Village of Downers Grove is seeking a Historic Landmark Designation for the Main Street train station located at 1000 Burlington Avenue under criteria 12.302.B.1, 12.302.B.3, and 12.302.B.6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. The station represents a fusion of styles and is a notable local landmark due to its function and association with historical events.

Construction of the original train station began during the civil war and was completed in 1864 to take advantage of the railroad line and Downers Grove as a farming distribution center. The original train station was located at the northwest corner of current day Main Street and Burlington Avenue. It was the precipitating factor leading to the development of the downtown with Samuel Curtiss establishing the first subdivision in what is now the business district. Transit oriented development and the associated rail service resulted in new businesses and large single family homes.

Due to the number of livestock being shipped and the desire to become more pedestrian friendly, a new passenger station was constructed in 1911. The new train station is the current Main Street structure. The old station then served as a freight receiver and was subsequently razed for parking in 1948.

A significant historical event that impacted the train station as well as the community was the 1947 Zephyr train crash. The crash was caused by the collision between a 14 ton International Harvester tractor that had fallen onto the tracks and the Twin City Zephyr traveling at 70 miles per hour. The community immediately came together to respond to this emergency crisis. The restoration efforts of the train station included using many of the original bricks with the loss of some decorative trim at the top.

The train station represents the Classical Revival architectural style inspired by the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago where renewed interest in classical forms was encouraged. This type also appropriated characteristics from the Greek Revival style. Although the roof is hipped at the side pavilions and flat at the main building, the main door is centered between pilasters with symmetrical windows. Terra cotta banding is present at multiple elevations and is used to frame the brick sections of the building. The roof is tiled at the pavilions with membrane used on the main building. It should be noted that the windows and doors are modern and possess no historical value.

The train station is the third busiest Metra Station outside of Union Station and is a gateway to Chicago and suburban communities. Train watchers and enthusiasts are commonly seen. Furthermore, its identity goes beyond just being a physical place for commuters to catch a train. It is also the central hub of activity where the community gathers for live music, farmer’s markets, holiday tree lighting, parades and other events. With an adjacent fountain seating bordered by landscape islands, it serves as a common meeting point, frame of reference of the downtown, and focus of pedestrian movement. Lastly, the train station features prominently in print as well as social media and has come to visually represent Downers Grove.
COMPLIANCE WITH HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

The petitioner has outlined the request in the attached narrative letter and photographs. The petitioner will further address the proposal and justification to support the requested landmark designation at the public hearing.

Landmark designations require evaluation based on Section 12.302 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Landmark Designation Criteria. Staff finds the request complies with Section 12.302A and Section 12.302.B, Landmark Designation Criteria #3 as described below.

Section 12.302.A.
The proposed landmark is either over fifty (50) years old; in whole or in part or is under fifty (50) years of age and possesses exceptional importance such as might be recognized immediately for its reflection of an extraordinary political event or architectural innovation; and

The train station was constructed 1911. This standard is met.

Section 12.302.B
That one or more of the following conditions exist:
1. The property has significant value as part of the historic, heritage or cultural characteristics of the community, county, State or Nation;
   The history of Downers Grove and the train station are intertwined; the downtown and entire community would not have developed without a train station. The current train station has served residents since 1911 and has been home to many events throughout its history. The structure is the center of the community, hosting various festivals and activities. The structure is a significant value to the community. This criteria is met.

2. The property was owned by a person or persons of historic significance to the community, county, State or Nation;
   This criteria does not apply.

3. The property represents the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural period, style, type, method of construction or use of indigenous materials;
   The train station features a unique combination of distinguishing characteristics of the Classical Revival + Beaux Arts style. The structure has a symmetrical window design with classic pilasters surrounding the primary entrance. Great effort was made to restore to original condition after a catastrophic accident in 1947. This criteria is met.

4. The property represents notable work of a master builder, designer, architect or artist whose individual work has influenced the development of the community, county, State or Nation;
   This criteria does not apply.

5. An area that has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.
   This criteria does not apply.

6. A source of civic pride or identity for the community.
   The train station is the central hub for transportation and community events. It is a source of civic pride as it is featured prominently in village publications and is used to host various community events. This criteria is met.

7. The property is included in the National Register of Historic Places.
   This criteria does not apply.
**NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENT**

Staff received one inquiry into whether landmarking would lead to higher maintenance costs for taxpayers. The new historic preservation ordinance permits routine maintenance without requiring additional approval.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff finds the petition complies with the criteria in Section 12.302 for Landmark Designation. Based on the findings above, staff recommends the Architectural Design Review Board make a positive recommendation to the Village Council for landmark status of 1000 Burlington Avenue.

Staff Report Approved By:

[Signature]

Stan Popovich, AICP
Director of Community Development
The Main Street train station is a significant value of the historic characteristics of the Village of Downers Grove. The history of the Main Street train station begins with the railroad.

No single event had more influence in the development of Downers Grove than the coming of the railroad. In 1858 a committee representing Downers Grove, Brush Hill (now Hinsdale) and Naperville, filed a petition with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q) requesting they build a branch line from Chicago to Aurora, which would pass through their respective towns. One of the points the committee made in its petition to the railroad was that, “Downers Grove was a rich, established farming center” for livestock and grain deliveries. The railroad company was persuaded and construction of the new train station began in 1862, during the Civil War. Samuel Curtiss established the first subdivision in what is now the business district of downtown Downers Grove.

In spite of a shortage of manpower and the high cost of supplies during the war, the train station was completed in 1864. The soldiers who returned from war were astonished at all the changes in the Village. When they had left there was no railroad, but the impact that the railroad made on the Downers Grove community was there to stay.

With the new rail line in place, it was obvious that Downers Grove now needed a new train station. Some thought it should be located at Belmont Road because of an offer of donated land. The committee charged with choosing the station site, preferred the current Main Street location. The owner of the Main Street land had no intention of donating his land and insisted on $500 and not a penny less. The committee of local businessmen raised the $500 to purchase the Main Street land for the new passenger station and a new era began for Downers Grove.

The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 caused great devastation to the city and loss of jobs for many residents. The railroad was invaluable in bringing supplies, lumber and tools to help rebuild Chicago during its time of need.

By 1875 there were several commuter trains each day with a travel time of only one hour to downtown Chicago. Men now were able to work in the city and return home to the comfortable community of Downers Grove. By 1895 the Village could boast that it included water works, an organized fire department, electricity, telephones, brick streets and tree lined streets. A developer’s flyer boasted that Downers Grove was the “Handsomest Suburb of Chicago with NO codfish aristocracy, criminals, toughs, or saloons.” With the excellent rail service, Downers Grove was able to grow from a small town with log cabins to a town filled with new businesses and gracious large homes.

The ladies of the day were not happy about livestock being herded down the middle of downtown Downers Grove streets. So after years of planning, a new passenger station was constructed in 1911 near the original station. The old station then became a freight receiver facility for coal and animal delivery. In 1948 the old station was razed and the space was used for parking.
At 10:41pm on April 10, 1947, the resources of the Village were challenged when the Twin City Zephyr was speeding through Downers Grove at 70 miles per hour when it collided with a 14 ton International Harvester tractor that had fallen off an eastbound freight train just a few minutes before. Residents reported hearing a deafening roar as the big diesel locomotive burst into flames, some said nearly 100 feet high, and ripping up the rails for over 300 yards. The impact caused the train to become airborne. The first two coaches jackknifed and crashed into the brick train station. Police officers watched in horror and quickly radioed for more help. Residents came running to assist the survivors. The American Legion opened its doors to feed and comfort stranded passengers. The Tivoli Theater lobby opened to provide medical help for some 65 injured survivors of the wreck. Unfortunately, there were three fatalities: the train engineer and two passengers. In a strange twist of fate, the Ticket Agent had closed the station early that night, thus saving lives, including his own. After an investigation, it was determined that the tractor had not been properly attached to the rail car. This caused the car to rock uncontrollably and the tractor to fall off. International Harvester accepted the blame for improperly securing the tractor. For long-time residents, this disaster became an unforgettable memory.

Only three days later, the rails were rebuilt and train traffic resumed. Then work began to rebuild the Main Street Station. They used many of the original bricks and great effort was made to recreate the fine station that was built in 1911. Only some decorative trim at the top of the station was lost, and the train station soon returned to operation and its previous glory. September 26, 1952 marked the last day for steam commuter locomotives and the closing of the Downers Grove roundhouse and train yard. Now all diesel operations would originate and terminate in Aurora.

In 1997 the Downers Grove Historical Society placed a plaque at the Main Street Station to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the tragic 1947 train crash. The station has had some interior updates over the years including lighting, windows, and even a coffee shop. These were all appropriately done so that the Main Street Station looks just as good as it did when it was originally constructed.
In addition to its significant history, the Main Street Station also represents the distinguishing characteristics of the Classical Revival/Beaux-Arts architectural style. This style was inspired by the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago where a renewed interest in classical principles was encouraged. Beaux-Arts means “beautiful arts or fine arts” in French and refers to the ideas that were taught at Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a prestigious art school in Paris. The Classical Revival/Beaux-Arts style appropriated majestic forms and decorative details from Classical Greece and Rome, often using formal symmetry, columns, pediments, and balustrades. Other features seen in this style include porticoes, flat roofs, and grand entrances. The doors and windows are typically symmetrical with the main door often centered between pilasters. The Classical Revival/Beaux-Arts style was commonly used for public and institutional buildings because of its formal and monumental design. Many of the Classical Revival/Beaux-Arts style characteristics can be seen on the Main Street Station including the main door centered between pilasters, a flat roof, symmetry, columns, and decorative detailing.
The Main Train Station is a source of pride and identity for the Downers Grove community as it hosts many community events, along with its purpose to move commuters and visitors.

“I’LL MEET YOU AT THE MAIN STREET STATION”

A hub of transportation. A hub of activity. A hub of the community. The Main Street train station, located at 5001 Main Street in the heart of the Village of Downers Grove, is, and long has been, all of these. First opened in 1911, the Downers Grove Main Street Station has literally seen the town grow up around it. For generations, the station has been the gateway for area residents wishing to travel the 21 miles into the City or to the end-of-line in Aurora, connecting – with just a short hop -- the Village to all the commerce, culture and cuisine that the Chicago metropolitan area has to offer. Having been nearly destroyed by the Zephyr Train Wreck in 1947, the Main Street Station not only survived but was refurbished to achieve a higher grandeur.

Today, the Main Street Station is the third busiest Metra station outside of Union Station in Downtown Chicago. Train watchers and enthusiasts are commonly seen observing or photographing the rich variety of locomotives that traverse the BNSF as it intersects the Main Street Station. But it has been, and is far more than merely a place to board a train or watch one go by. Grinning daily at the equally historic Tivoli Theater across the tracks, the Main Street station frequently comes alive with activity. It hosts live music over the summers during Friday night car shows and eager shoppers during Saturday morning farmers’ markets. It serves as a gathering place over the winter as the site of the official Village Christmas tree and the ever-popular tree lighting ceremony. Community parades begin and end there. Music, singing, and dancing often take place there.

The Main Street station also contributes a vital civic function. It is a popular place for candidates for political office to collect signatures for the petitions necessary to place them on the ballot and to greet coming and going passengers as they campaign for office, hoping to secure their votes. Similarly, members of the Downers Grove Village Council regularly hold “Coffee with the Council” meetings there, openly interacting with the community and inviting conversation on the issues of the day. And although she is over a century old, the Main Street Station is no luddite. On the contrary, she is a darling of social media, has been photographed countless times, and even has her own Wikipedia and Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Downers-Grove-Main-Street-Metra-station/239462019452324?rf=111947192192170 A source of civic and historic pride, the Downers Grove Main Street Station has been a meeting and gathering point for residents and visitors alike for over 100 years.
Resources:
1976 Day Calendar from the Downers Grove Historical Society
Downers Grove Revisited by Montrew Dunham
Downers Grove 1832-1982 by Montrew Dunham and Pauline Wandschneider
Train crash interviews and newspaper clippings from the Downers Grove Museum
Photo #17 – 1921 Sanborn Map
Photo #16 – Elevations and floor plan - 1929
Photo #1  View looking northeast – 1915

Photo #2  View looking northeast – 1918

Photo courtesy of: The Downers Grove Museum
Photo #3  View looking southeast – 1920

Photo courtesy of: The Downers Grove Museum

Photo #4  View looking southwest – 1955

Photo courtesy of: The Downers Grove Museum
Photo #5  Zephyr train crash – 1947

Photo #6  Zephyr train crash – 1947  

Photo courtesy of: The Downers Grove Museum
Photo #7  Zephyr train crash – 1947  

Photo courtesy of: The Downers Grove Museum

Photo #8  Zephyr train crash – 1947
Photo #18 – 1947 Newspaper article regarding Zephyr crash
Photo #19 – 1947 Newspaper article regarding Zephyr crash
Photo #9  View looking southeast

Photo #10  North elevation
Photo #11  View from southwest

Photo #12  Main building south elevation
Photo #14  Terra cotta banding

Photo #15  Main Street Station at Christmas