

City of Detroit

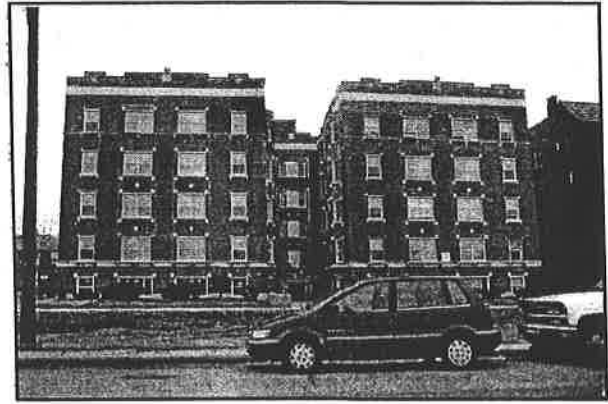
CITY COUNCIL

Historic Designation Advisory Board

Proposed Nelson Court and West Chicago Boulevard Apartments Non-Contiguous Historic District Final Report



2710-40 West Chicago Boulevard



3410 West Chicago Boulevard

By a resolution dated October 26, 2005, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Nelson Court—West Chicago Apartments Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The Nelson Court is located at 3410 West Chicago Boulevard and the West Chicago Boulevard Apartments is located at 2710-40 West Chicago Boulevard. The area is located west of the Boston-Edison Historic District and was once densely developed with large-scale apartment buildings of the first third of the twentieth century. Urban decline has made these two structures among the few survivors of that development. Significant for their social history, the two apartment buildings are the only contributing resources in the district; there are no non-contributing resources.

BOUNDARIES:

The boundaries of the proposed district encompass the real property on which the two historic resources stand, together with a portion of adjacent rights-of-way.

The boundaries of the non-contiguous portion of the district containing the West Chicago

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Boulevard Apartment are outlined in red on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the east, the east boundary, extended north and south, of Lot 34 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the south, the centerline of Chicago Boulevard.

On the west, a line drawn fifteen (15) feet west of and parallel to the west line of Lot 37 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the north, the centerline of the east-west alley lying between Chicago Boulevard and Rochester Avenue.

The boundaries of the non-contiguous portion of the district containing the Nelson Court are outlined in heavy black on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the east, the east boundary, extended north and south, of Lot 83 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the south, the centerline of Chicago Boulevard.

On the west, the west line, extended north and south, of Lot 86 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the north, the centerline of the east-west alley lying between Chicago Boulevard and Rochester Avenue.

Legal Description: Lots 34 through 37 and the east fifteen (15) feet of Lot 38; and Lots 83 through 86, Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

HISTORY and SIGNIFICANCE:

2710 Chicago, originally named West Chicago Boulevard Apartments, was built pursuant to permit #18985, issued September 12, 1923. Apparently the owner, Glen K. Sprague, was also the architect; little is known about Sprague, who is listed as an architect in City Directories of the 1920s. The building was noted as being of brick and tile, to contain forty-one units, and to cost \$115,000.

3410 Chicago, the Nelson Court Apartments, was built pursuant to permit #66996, issued June 16, 1925 to the owner, Albert Nelson, The building was to contain fifty units.

The two structures formed part of a high-class community of apartment buildings located just west of the residential community now known as the Boston -Edison Historic District. This area was once an impressive collection of high-style apartments buildings, the dense development creating an intensely urban streetscape rare in Detroit. Unfortunately, urban decline has removed most of the buildings; that loss of integrity has eliminated from possible historic designation an area which certainly would have met the criteria as an historic district.

The surviving apartment buildings at 2740-10 West Chicago and 3410 West Chicago are significant as part of the city's recent past involving the programs and policies that were part of the recovery after the 1967 riots. These West Chicago properties were preserved as a direct result of the community's massive rebuilding effort that followed the wide-spread destruction on the west side of Detroit. These properties are significant as important examples of Detroit's post-riot efforts to empower community-based organizations to remedy, restore and preserve decent, safe and affordable housing—one of the most critical social, economic and community deficiencies acknowledged to be contributing factors leading to the civil unrest of 1967. The buildings are also significant as properties renovated by building trade Local 124, the first African American construction trade union in Detroit. While the vacant lots surrounding the buildings at 2740-10 and 3410 West Chicago are a stark reminder of the demolition that has occurred in Detroit, the buildings stand today as a significant historic link to the local community's exceptional efforts at recovery that followed the civil disturbance of 1967.

In the first half of the twentieth century in the city of Detroit, African Americans' housing availability was restricted through redlining and wide-spread discriminatory real estate practices. As the housing in the existing African American areas became extremely overcrowded, police brutality and racial inequality throughout the country became intense issues and the city reached a breaking point. On July 23rd, 1967 Detroit police raided an illegal after-hours establishment, or "blind pig" on Twelfth Street, in the center of one of the city's largest African American neighborhoods. The police arrested eighty-five people outside the saloon and soon nearly two hundred people gathered in anger. Allegations of police brutality were shouted, beer bottles and rocks became missiles. By 8:00 A.M., three thousand people were in the streets.

Eight days of rioting followed, claiming forty-three lives, sending over one thousand persons to hospitals for treatment and causing \$45 million in property damages. Over 2,500 stores were damaged or burned. The Michigan National Guard and U. S. Army troops were finally called in to restore order. Governor George Romney declared a state of emergency and was ridiculed on national television by President Lyndon Johnson for his lack of control. While many other U. S. cities suffered major riots in the 1960s, none compared to the size and scale of Detroit's.

Author Sidney Fine concluded that the riot was a spontaneous protest primarily by young black Detroiters directed particularly at the police and merchants. It was a signal to those in power that concessions must be made. In the mid-1960s, the United States had experienced sixty riots across the country, all demonstrating the growing desperation of inner city poor.

The civil disturbance that tore the city apart required fundamental changes in order to put it back together again. The rioting brought local, state and national attention to the city's problems. However, it was the city's recovery - a community based response to the police brutality, political frustration and substandard housing - that had the far greater impact on the lives and well-being of the city's residents. Before the summer was over, New Detroit, the nation's first urban coalition, was founded with aims to improve education, employment, housing and economic development in the city. Even before the civil disturbances of July, 1967 an activist group was formed named United Tenants for Collective Action (UTCA). UTCA sought to force landlords to live up to building code requirements which were being indifferently enforced by city officials. Headed by Fred D. Lyles, Jr., over five hundred inner city residents living in

substandard rental properties joined together and went on a rent strike to instigate change in their housing conditions. The United Tenants for Collective Action organized twenty buildings in the rent strike, and picketed and demonstrated to bring media attention to the issue of substandard and unsafe inner-city housing. United Tenants then collected the rents into an escrow account so the rent money could ultimately be used to repair the properties. Angry tenants stated that their buildings had numerous code violations including inadequate heating, broken windows, no screens, crumbling plaster, fire hazards and vermin. UTCA won a signal victory against prominent slumlord Albert Goodman in June, 1968. Goodman had responded to the picketing and demonstrations at his apartment buildings and the withholding of rent by issuing eviction notices. When the UTCA secured a court ordered injunction to prevent Goodman from collecting rents in the affected buildings, he agreed to turn over the management of seventeen of his buildings to UTCA. Most of those buildings were in the Twelfth Street area. The arrangement provided that Goodman was to receive twenty-five percent of the net income from the apartments and the remainder was to go to the UTCA to fund needed building repairs. To facilitate the management of the seventeen buildings, UTCA formed an adjunct nonprofit organization, United Tenants for Collective Management, Incorporated in July, 1968.

About three weeks after the agreement was signed, UTCA leader Fred Lyles, Jr. was shot through the window of his office. The murder attempt left him paralyzed and the assailant was never found. Even after this traumatic set-back, UTCA regrouped and continued working to improve housing conditions for African Americans in the inner city of Detroit. In 1969, the UTCA and Marvel Unlimited Inc., joined together to purchase twenty-one apartment houses in Detroit with financing from a group of one hundred Detroit-area investors lead by David H. Parsons, chairman of the board of Bank of the Commonwealth. The venture was one of the most ambitious projects of its kind. Kenneth Sledge was the new president of the UTCA and he said that the venture marked a significant step forward in constructive community action. The properties at 2740-10 West Chicago and at 3410 West Chicago were acquired in 1969 for rehabilitation by UTCA.

In 1970, an agreement was drawn up and commitments were approved for mortgage loan financing to be provided by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to finance extensive renovations at the West Chicago properties mentioned above. These two properties were part of a larger group of loans involving a total of eight Detroit apartment buildings to be renovated by UTCA which were approved by MSHDA's Deputy Director for Statewide Inner-City Programs, Cullen DuBose. At that time, the African American architectural firm of Howard Sims and Associates was hired and a development team was formed to work on the rehabilitation of the UTCA properties. The West Chicago apartment buildings were to be renovated with new kitchens, baths, new mechanical and electrical systems. The renovations were financed by loans from MSHDA under a new Housing and Urban Development program called "Operation Rehab." President Lyndon B. Johnson had created the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1965 to ensure decent, safe, and affordable housing for the country's less fortunate. HUD programs were utilized in the city of Detroit with varying degrees of success until 1969 when former Michigan Governor George W. Romney joined the administration of President Richard M. Nixon as Secretary of HUD. Secretary Romney helped create the new Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970. One of the new HUD programs created was called Operation Rehab. Operation Rehab's goal was to remodel absentee-owned apartment units in fifteen major cities and salvage useable structures for inner city residents. In

Detroit, Operation Rehab helped to maintain and improve existing apartment structures and prevented the housing shortage from becoming even worse for African Americans. United Tenants was one of the first organizations in Detroit to utilize the new federal programs and state programs enacted for housing rehabilitation in 1970. These programs included rehabilitation loans made by the Michigan State Housing Authority (MSHDA) and HUD's new Operation Rehab program. The United Tenants project was divided into two parcels (called Operation Rehab Parcel I and Operation Rehab Parcel III) in United Tenants' application to MSHDA. Parcel I included properties at 2690 Boston, 2740 West Chicago, 2611 Gladstone and 8250 Epworth in Detroit. Parcel III included the properties at 2978 Gladstone, 3410 West Chicago, 2211 Pingree and 274 Watson in Detroit. Five of these eight properties that were acquired and renovated by United Tenants have since been demolished and thus their connection to this part of Detroit's post-riot history has been lost. The apartment buildings that remain at 2740 and 3410 West Chicago are the two buildings now being proposed for historic designation.

According to the MSHDA Mortgage Loan Feasibility report for the United Tenants project, approximately twenty five percent of the units in the apartment buildings that were part of United Tenant's Operation Rehab developments were initially uninhabitable. Some of the special considerations for the projects included a commitment from the FHA for a stipend of \$200 per family relocated. The City of Detroit's Building Department cooperated with the project by providing special inspections and processing procedures. Federal Housing Authority (FHA) Rental Program #236 was used to subsidize the rental rates. And lastly, the housing consultant for the project was the Metropolitan Detroit Citizens Development Authority (MDCDA), which was an organization funded by the New Detroit coalition. It is remarkable that an activist group of previously un-empowered African-Americans was able to establish an organization and utilize the complex new federal and state programs to rehabilitate housing in Detroit. United Tenants hired black-owned firms and labor to the extent possible in their projects and became a driving force for change in Detroit's inner city housing. On July 23, 1970, Kenneth Sledge, Director of UTCA, presented a statement to the United States Senate Committee on Banking and Currency regarding the need for federal housing programs and, specifically, three bills being introduced to address urban housing problems in the U. S. In his testimony before the Senate Committee, Mr. Sledge cited inadequate building code enforcement, poor zoning ordinances and the lack of adequate public improvements in urban neighborhoods as housing ills requiring assistance from the federal government. The United Tenants group was eventually dissolved in 1974. United Tenants hired members of Detroit's first African American building trades union for the rehabilitation work on their properties. For years, African American workers in Detroit had been effectively barred from membership in trade unions and thus were significantly under-represented in the construction trades in Detroit. As reported in the *Detroit Free Press* (December 26, 1968) a survey conducted by the Federal Executive Association (FEA) confirmed the huge disparities faced by African Americans seeking union membership. The FEA found that five unions with a combined membership of 2,960 - structural iron workers, riggers, glass workers, asbestos workers and insulators had no African American journeymen. The iron workers had an apprentice class of 143; only one was African American. The plumbers union, with three thousand members, reported having just ten black journeymen; the electricians, with 2,500, had only seventy-five black journeymen.

In 1968, a group of African American workers took things into their own hands. They formed an independent union, United Construction & Trades Local 124. Fifty men initially signed on

and in six months began working on an inner city rehab project. Unfortunately, the Detroit Building Trades Council protested the use of non-AFL-CIO members on that project, and local congressmen were compelled to intervene. After the initial controversy, the Allied Trades Apprenticeship Incorporated, Local 124, was established as Detroit's first African American Building Trades union.

The buildings at 2710-40 and 3410 West Chicago are significant as part of Detroit's response to the riots. African American activists were given the opportunity to own and rehabilitate large apartment buildings for their community. The Operation Rehab program was used by the activist group United Tenants' nonprofit housing entity in a collaborative venture with Bank of the Commonwealth as part of the bank's efforts to rebuild Detroit for African American Detroiters. The City of Detroit's history was dramatically changed by the 1967 riots, just as the quality of housing for many Detroit residents was historically changed by the response, rehabilitation and restoration that followed.

DESCRIPTION:

The West Chicago Boulevard Apartments located at 2710-40 West Chicago Boulevard is a typical middle-class apartment building of its date. Like many other such structures, its plan is in a "C" shape, with the arms of the "C" facing the street and the entrances in the recessed court between the wings on either side. The building is best described as reflecting the vernacular of the time, with suggestions of derivation from the Romanesque and the classical. It is four stories tall on a high basement, and is topped by a parapet hiding a nearly flat roof.

The front facade and the facades within the entrance court are of dark red face brick with grey stone trim; the stone may well be cast as opposed to natural stone. Each of the pair of street facades is of three bays, the outer two brought forward slightly and containing paired windows at basement and first floor level, and large openings above. The central bay displays two widely spaced single windows at each floor. The basement wall is of alternating horizontal bands of brick and stone, topped with a molded water table. The pairs of windows on the first floor are topped by blind arches with alternating voussoirs of brick and stone, and the brick walls are laid in a sort of rustication, with every fifth course of bricks well recessed. At the top of the first floor, brick dentils are surmounted by a stone water table. The walls above are smooth with a stone roundel between the windows of the outer bays. A stone cornice supports a brick parapet with a blind arcade of stone pilasters and brick arches.

The treatment of the entry court is similar. The bays closest to the street are like the outer bays of the street facades, but with a single window only. Further into the court, there is a slightly recessed bay on either side, three single openings in width, which have the entry doors, with stone surround, in the rearmost of the three vertical rows of openings. On either side there is then a narrow bay at a forty-five degree angle, with a single window at each level, and a single blind arch in the parapet. The courtyard facade facing the street is divided into three, with a wide center bay and quite narrow bays flanking, the side bays displaying a single small window at each floor (likely serving bathrooms). The wide center bay has two widely spaced windows at each floor, those on the first floor being arched like those on the street facades. At the top of the central bay, the parapet rises into a simple triangular pediment with a shield and swags in stone in the center.

The area was once densely built up with apartments of this general character, closely spaced on the street. Thus, the side and rear facades were not meant to be seen, since they were hidden by adjacent buildings. A single narrow bay one window wide carries the face brick and stone of the main facades back along each side wall and the side and back facades are then carried out in common brick and without any decoration whatever.

All of the windows appear to be recent replacements; while it is reasonable to assume that the original windows were double-hung, the original pattern of fenestration within the openings is not known.

The Nelson Court located at 3410 West Chicago Boulevard is a typical middle-class apartment of its date. Like many other such structures, its plan is in a "C" shape, with the arms of the "C" facing the street and the entrance in a recessed court between the wings on either side. Stylistically the building is best described as reflecting the vernacular of the time; there is little detail strongly suggestive of an historical style. It is four stories tall on a high basement, and is topped by a parapet hiding a nearly flat roof. The level of the entrance court is lowered so that the main entrance, centered in the recess and facing the street, is at basement level.

The front facade and the facades within the entrance court are of red face brick with grey stone trim; the stone may well be cast as opposed to natural stone. Each of the pair of street facades is of four bays, the center two bays containing paired windows at each level, with single windows in the two outer bays. The brick walls of the high basement are laid in a sort of rustication, with every fifth course of bricks well recessed; at the top of the basement wall is a stone course containing projecting stone sills supported on brackets below the first floor windows. All of the windows are surrounded by brickwork with stone squares marking the corners of the openings. In the spandrel area between the paired windows of the central bays, a brick border contains brick laid in a herringbone pattern with a stone square placed on the diagonal centered in the panel. The upper portion of the fourth floor wall and the parapet above show evidence of tuckpointing, and a broad horizontal stripe (of stucco?) likely marks the placement of a cornice now removed.

In the entrance court, the treatment is much the same, but on either side two bay windows rise through all the floors and terminate below the former cornice line; these bays also show signs of detail removed at the top. The spandrels of the bays have herringbone panels similar to those on the street facades. The depressed main entrance on the rear wall of the court faces the street and has a stone surround with a heavy cornice above. Above, large picture windows on the first through third floor are contained in a single border of narrow stone, within which are stone blocks and herringbone brick. Another large opening on the fourth floor has its own stone border at the sides and top, and a projecting sill supported by brackets.

The area was once densely built up with apartments of this general character, closely spaced on the street. Thus, the side and rear facades were not meant to be seen, since they were hidden by adjacent buildings. A single bay one window wide carries the face brick and stone of the main facades back along each side wall and the side and back facades are then carried out in common brick and without any decoration whatever.

All of the windows appear to be recent replacements; while it is reasonable to assume that the

original windows were double-hung, the original pattern of fenestration within the openings is not known.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets criterion A as provided in the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act and in local ordinance. This criterion refers to resources that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed historic district. A draft ordinance is attached for City Council's consideration.

Note: Much of the history in this report is substantially derived from research done by Rebecca Binno Savage for the owner of the buildings.

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FINAL REPORT



The Proposed Expansion to the Nelson Court & West Chicago Boulevard Apartments Non-Contiguous Historic District (2725 West Boston Boulevard)

By resolution dated *December 5, 2007*, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee with the official study of the proposed expansion of the Nelson Court and West Chicago Boulevard Apartments Non-Contiguous Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The Nelson Court is located at 3410 West Chicago Boulevard and the West Chicago Boulevard Apartments is located at 2710-40 West Chicago Boulevard. The proposed boundary expansion will add the former Andorra Apartments located at 2725 West Boston Boulevard to the original district. The Nelson Court and West Boston Boulevard Apartment Non-Contiguous Historic District is local approximately four miles from the city central business district. All three buildings are located west of the Boston-Edison Historic District (*NR 1975*) in an area that was once densely developed with large scale apartments buildings build during the first third of the twentieth century. Urban decline has made these structures among the few survivors of that development.

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the proposed district encompass the real property on which the two historic resources stand, together with a portion of adjacent right away, and the addition of the real property lot on which stands 2725 West Boston Boulevard.

The boundaries of the non-contiguous portion of the district containing West Chicago Boulevard Apartment are outlined on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the east, the east boundary, extended north and south, of Lot 34 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P81 Plats, WCR)

On the south, the centerline of Chicago Boulevard.

On the west, a line drawn fifteen (15) feet west of and parallel to the west line of Lot 37 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the north the centerline of the east-west alley lying between Chicago Boulevard and Rochester Avenue.

The boundaries of the non-contiguous portion of the district containing the Nelson Court are outlined in heavy on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the east, the east boundary, extended north and south, of Lot 83 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the south the centerline of Chicago Boulevard .

On the west, the west line, extended north and south, of Lot 86 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the north, the centerline of the east-west alley lying between Chicago Boulevard and Rochester Avenue.

The boundaries of the non-contiguous portion of the district containing Andorra Apartments are outlined in heavy black on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the north the centerline of West Boston Boulevard.

On the east, the east line extended north and south of Lot 312 Dexter Heights Subdivision (L 30 P 81 Plats, WCR)

On the south the centerline of the east-west alley lying between Linwood and Lawton.

On the west, the west line extended north and south of Lot 309 of the Dexter Heights Subdivision (L 30 P81 Plats, WCR).

Legal Description: Lots 34 through the east fifteen (15) feet of Lot 38; and Lots 83 through 86, Dexter Heights Subdivision (L30 P81 Plats, WCR)
Lots 309 through 312, Dexter Blvd. Heights Subdivision (L30 P81 PLATS WCR).

History and Significance:

2710 Chicago, originally named West Chicago Boulevard Apartments, was built pursuant to permit #18985, issued September 12, 1923. Apparently the owner, Glen K. Sprague, was also the architect; little is known about Sprague, who is listed as an architect in City Directories of the 1920s. The building was noted as being of brick and tile, to contain forty-one units, and to cost \$115,000.

3410 Chicago, the Nelson Court Apartments, was built pursuant to permit #66996, issued June 16, 1925 to the owner, Albert Nelson, the building was to contain fifty units.

2725 West Boston Boulevard, originally named Andorra Apartments, was built pursuant to permit #26061, issued March 24, 1927 to Harry Slatkin, owner; at a construction cost of \$143,000. According to the original permit Harry Slatkin is also listed as the contractor.

The three structures formed part of a high-class community of apartment buildings located just west of the residential historic district known as Boston-Edison. This area was once an impressive collection of high style apartments buildings, the dense development creating an intensely urban streetscape in Detroit. According to the United State census the city's physical size and population more than tripled during the 1920s when Detroit experienced a rapid growth and expansion. The apartment buildings located in the area were home to the city's emerging profession class, many of whom worked in middle and upper managerial white collar positions. Unfortunately, urban decline has removed most of the buildings; that loss of integrity has eliminated from the possible historic designation an area which certainly would have met the criteria as an historic district.

The surviving apartments buildings at 2725 West Boston, 2740-10 West Chicago and 3410 West Chicago are significant as part of the city's recent past involving the programs and policies that were part of city's recovery after the 1967 civil disturbance. These West Boston and West Chicago properties were rehabilitated as a direct result of the city's massive rebuilding effort that followed the wide-spread destruction on the west side of Detroit. These properties are just a few examples of Detroit's post riot efforts to empower community-based organizations to remedy, restore and preserve decent safe and affordable housing-one of the most critical, social, economic and community deficiencies acknowledged to be contributing factors leading to the civil unrest of 1967. The buildings are also culturally significant as properties renovated by building trade Local 124, an African American construction trade union organized during this post-disturbance period in Detroit. While the vacant lots surrounding the buildings on West Boston and West Chicago are a stark reminder of the demolition that has occurred in Detroit.

In the first half of the twentieth century in the city of Detroit, African Americans' housing availability was restricted through redlining and wide-spread discriminatory real estate practices. As the housing in the existing African American areas became extremely overcrowded, police brutality and racial inequality throughout the country became intense issues and city reached a breaking point. On July 23rd, 1967 Detroit police raided an illegal after-hours establishment, or "blind pig" on Twelfth Street (now Rosa Park Blvd), the center of one of the city's largest African American neighborhoods. The police arrested eighty-five people outside the saloon and soon nearly two hundred people gathered in anger. Allegations of police brutality were shouted, beer bottles and rocks became missiles. By 8:00 A.M. three thousand people were in the streets.

Eight days of rioting followed, claiming forty-three lives, sending over one thousand persons to hospitals for treatment and causing \$45 million in property damages. Over 2,500 stores were damaged or burned. The Michigan National Guard and U.S. Army troops were finally called in to restore order. Governor George Romney declared a state of emergency and was ridiculed on national television by President Lyndon Johnson for his lack of control. While many other U.S. cities suffered major uprisings in the 1960's, none compared to the size and scale of Detroit's.

Author Sidney Fine concluded that the riot was a spontaneous protest primarily by young black Detroiters directed particularly at the police and merchants. It was a signal to those in power that concessions must be made. In the mid-1960s, the United States had experienced sixty riots across the country, all demonstrating the growing desperation of inner city poor.

2725 West Boston Boulevard

One of the leading African American organizations working to improve housing for African Americans in Detroit was the Plymouth United Church (Congregational) of Christ. Starting in 1960, Plymouth Congregational Church, led by Reverend Nicholas Hood II, saw the construction of new housing as one of its priorities. The Plymouth Church's work began in 1958 when the City's first plans for the Medical Center Urban Redevelopment Project were presented. Maps for the proposed urban renewal project indicated that no African American churches were to remain in the area. All were scheduled to be demolished along with the aging housing stock. Shortly thereafter, African American churches in that community, with a combined membership in excess of 20,000 people, united and obtained the right to rebuild on "urban renewal" land.

In 1965 in Detroit, the churches recognized that without some kind of housing which people in that community could afford, there would be no neighborhoods from which to draw a congregation. So Plymouth Church took as its concern the providing of housing for people who had been displaced from the urban renewal area known as "Black Bottom" around the new Medical Center. Plymouth Congregational's brochure stated, ". . . when these areas have been cleared and rebuilt, the housing which has been put back into the areas have been of luxury variety for of a low-cost public housing variety. This means that those with very high incomes or very low incomes were being provided with housing, but no new housing was being built for the . . . masses of Negroes who were being displaced from the areas that were being renewed by the city. This was economic exclusion." ("Plymouth Church & Housing," Rev. Nicholas Hood, Pastor, 1966)

Plymouth Congregational formed a separate nonprofit affiliate named Plymouth Housing Corporation in 1963 for the purpose of being the builder and the holder of assets related to housing development. The group began by developing the Medical Center Courts, the area also included Friendship Baptist Church as part of the project. Plymouth Congregational Church required that African American tradesmen be used in the construction of their new housing. African American workers (this was prior to the establishment of Local 124) were utilized for much of the Medical Center Courts' construction. The project contained 230 rental townhouse units designed by the firm of Madison, Madison & Madison. By 1971, the group had developed a total of 812 units of housing and another 201 were under development.

These efforts were led by Reverend Nicholas Hood II, pastor of Plymouth United Congregational Church. Rev. Hood is amongst the most accomplished African Americans of the late 1960's in Detroit. On a national level, Rev. Hood served as Chairman of the Committee for Racial Justice and was a founding member of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s., Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In November, 1965, Rev. Hood was the second African American to be elected to Detroit's City Council, serving for 28 years. He was also the

first African American to receive a degree from North Central College in Illinois. Rev. Hood was the founder of the Cyprian Center and the Cyprian Foundation, whose chief mission is to serve developmentally disabled persons. Rev. Hood received the Distinguished Graduate Award from Yale University Divinity School in 1974. In Detroit, Rev. Hood formed another nonprofit housing organization called "Modern American Living" in 1966.

In 1970, new underwriting criteria were adopted by MSHDA, the HUD-processor for Operation Rehab projects to comply with amendments enacted in Public Act 346, its enabling and governing legislation. Those amendments required the use of Limited Dividend Housing Associations (LDHA's) as sponsors for MSHDA-financed projects, and granted MSHDA broad powers with respect to the make-up of such entities, resulting in MSHDA's requirement that LDHA sponsors have individuals or substantial corporations as general partners rather than non-profit corporations. For this reason, the rehab project at 2725 West Boston was developed by a Limited Dividend Housing Association whose general partners were officers and affiliates of Plymouth Congregational's housing entities. The West Boston Apartments Limited Dividend Housing Association Limited Partnership was formed for 2725 West Boston.

According to the Certificate of Limited Partnership filed with the State of Michigan on April 14, 1972, the general partners of the West Boston Apartments partnership were Roger C. Miller and U.H. Construction Company, Inc., a Michigan corporation formed by Clarence C. White, its president. Rev. Roger C. Miller, general partner, was the Elective Director of Plymouth United Church of Christ in 1972. Clarence White was Executive Director of "Modern American Living," the non-profit housing corporation founded and chaired by Reverend Hood. The business address listed for partnership was 4282 St. Antoine, Detroit, MI 48201, the location of Rev. Nicholas Hood's non-profit Plymouth Housing Corporation's offices at the Medical Center Court low-income apartment project. Developed by principals of Reverend Hood's Plymouth Congregational housing group, 2725 West Boston clearly was a rehabilitation project that was part of the church's work.

The West Boston Apartments partnership obtained a commitment to finance the acquisition and rehab of the property at 2725 West Boston from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) in December of 1971. The rehab project for 2725 West Boston utilized the FHA mortgage insurance available under HUD's Operation Rehab program. The loan commitment was referenced in MSHDA's records as Det. Pro#66, MSHDA Loan # 219 and HUD Project #044-44335. In April of 1972, the West Boston Apartment Partnership purchased and began substantial rehabilitation of the 2725 West Boston property. The building has changed hands, but has never been vacant and stands today as the lone occupied surviving property on that block.

The buildings at 2725 West Boston and 2710-40 and 3410 West Chicago are a part of Detroit's response to the civil disturbance. African American activists were given the opportunity to own and rehabilitate large apartment buildings in the city. In the case of Plymouth Church, the established nonprofit housing corporation entity of the church was given the opportunity to rehabilitate an apartment building using Operation Rehab loans. The operation-Rehab program was used by the activist group United Tenants' in a collaborative venture with (Bank of the

Commonwealth) Comerica as part of the bank's efforts to rebuild Detroit for African American Detroiters. The city of Detroit's history was dramatically changed by the 1967 civil disturbance, just as the quality of housing for many Detroit residents was historically changed by the response, rehabilitation and restoration that followed.

Description:

The Andorra Apartments, located at 2725 West Boston Boulevard is a small scaled, four story light brick 37-unit apartment building that was designed in the Spanish revival style popular with this type of building in the 1920s. Its central entrance bay is set back, creating a light court in the front, its open space now paved. The building features an ornamented masonry Arabesque arch over the entrance opening, which is now occupied by a glass and aluminum double-door. The gable roof over this entrance pavilion is covered in Spanish tiles, as are small pent roofs elsewhere. The fourth floor windows are generally arched, with a balconet hung from the central window between twisted columns of the tripartite arched window arrangement. Although the roof is not seen from the street, the parapet features a stepped, Spanish Baroque-like pediment centered over the central entrance bay. Window openings, likely double-hung sash originally, have been altered with inappropriate configurations.

In 1971, when this building was rehabilitated by West Boston Apartments Limited Dividend Housing Association Limited Partnership, historic preservation as we know it today was in its infancy. This building, like its two neighbors on West Chicago Boulevard, was not likely considered historic, just shy of fifty years old and not a particularly outstanding example of its types of architecture. Consequently, the rehabilitation work then undertaken did not have reason to conform to the Secretary's Standard for Rehabilitation, and thus detracts from the original character of the building today.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets criterion A as provided in the Michigan Local Historic districts Act and in local ordinance. This criterion refers to resources that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed historic district. A draft ordinance is attached for City Council's consideration.

Note: Much of the history in this report is substantially derived from research done by Rebecca Binno Savage for the owner of the buildings.