



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

**COMMISSION FOR
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL
PRESERVATION**

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

November 9, 2016

REQUEST: Federal Hill Local Historic District Designation: Hearing One

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

APPLICANT: Federal Hill Neighborhood Association

STAFF: Walter Gallas

SUMMARY: Determination that the proposed designation of Federal Hill as a local historic district meets CHAP Criteria for Evaluation 1 and 3; the proposed boundaries are supported by findings of fact; and outreach to property owners and property owner responses are sufficient. Request that staff prepare a full and proper study with findings of fact for presentation at Designation Hearing Two.

SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT:

Summary Description

Situated on a street grid with street names retained from its original settlement, Federal Hill demonstrates distinctive characteristics of a significant place combining various architectural styles and workmanship well-preserved over the course of its long history. Federal Hill comprises about 24 city blocks just south of the Inner Harbor. At its northeast corner, Federal Hill Park rises steeply from Key Highway overlooking the downtown skyline and providing open recreational space for the community.

The neighborhood retains remarkably intact streets of largely residential properties reflecting the eras in which they were built and the economic status of their early residents. Likely the oldest house in the district at 130 East Montgomery dates to the late 1700s, built of wood with side gables. This form continues in many early examples in Flemish bond brick construction with gabled roofs and dormers. Simple Greek Revival rowhouses are found throughout the district, along with many Italianate rowhouses, along with a few detached houses with small front gardens. Details include stained glass, bracketed cornices, and iron fencing.

Commercial structures, some with ornate storefronts, along the two primary thoroughfares, Light Street and Charles Street, reflect a range of 19th and early 20th century styles. A market, a few churches and an adaptively re-used high school are examples of institutional buildings in the district.

Summary Significance

Federal Hill figures in many important events in Baltimore's history and in the development of industry and commerce. The district's name alludes to the celebration in 1788 of Maryland's ratification of the Federal Constitution, which culminated on the hill. In 1797, an observatory opened on Federal Hill which enabled merchants to receive advance word of ships approaching the harbor. Many early settlers of Federal Hill fought in the War of 1812, and residents watched the bombardment of Fort McHenry from the hilltop. During the Civil War, the hill was fortified and occupied by Union troops.

The Federal Hill neighborhood, situated as it is on the south side of the Inner Harbor, was the home of shipyards from the late 18th century and the home of the related business owners and workers. As the industry evolved and wooden hulls and sails were replaced by iron hulled steamers and engines, the yards adapted as well. In World War II, Federal Hill yards armored, refurbished, and repaired ships to meet the war effort.

Glass making, canning, packing, fertilizer production, brewing, baking, and paint manufacturing all thrived in Federal Hill over the years, often owned and operated by European immigrants. African Americans have made their homes throughout Federal Hill as well from before the Civil War. In the mid-20th century as maritime industry and other uses shifted along the Inner Harbor, the desirability of Federal Hill as an urban neighborhood was recognized by those who joined long-time residents in restoring and renovating properties as part of the back-to-the city movement beginning in the late 1950's.

Federal Hill was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

APPLICATION OF CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS:

Staff applied the Criteria for Evaluation in Section 2.2 Criteria for Designating Districts and Landmarks of CHAP *Rules and Regulations*:

Criteria for Evaluation

The quality of significance in Baltimore history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, public interiors, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history; or
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in Baltimore's past; or
3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
4. That have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in Baltimore history or prehistory.

Analysis

Staff determined that the proposed Federal Hill district is eligible for local historic district designation under Criteria for Evaluation 1 and 3.

Criterion 1:

The Federal Hill district is significant under Criterion 1 because it represents the housing and neighborhoods of various working class groups over a period from the 1790s to 1945. Federal Hill was home to many groups of immigrants and migrants, including French Acadians, Germans, African Americans, Irish and workers from the rural South, all of whom contributed to the economic development - especially the maritime trade - of the city from the late 18th century to World War II.

Criterion 3:

The Federal Hill district is significant under Criterion 3 for representing a unique and intact neighborhood that contains a collection of buildings spanning three centuries and embodying many examples of various architectural types and styles adapted to the needs of a working-class neighborhood.

Primarily a rowhouse neighborhood, Federal Hill exhibits several development periods of 19th century rowhouse architecture including antebellum two-story gabled and two-story-plus attic rowhouses, and many postbellum two- and three-story Italianate style rowhouses. The neighborhood retains the original hierarchy of streets and housing stock, with the largest buildings on the main thoroughfares, and the most modest homes on small alley streets. This inherent diversity of housing stock translated into economic and social diversity in the neighborhood. In addition, many of these rowhouses exhibit historic architectural alterations which embody the changing styles and uses in the neighborhood. Many gabled houses were altered with Italianate details, or storefronts were added as they were continuously modified. The physical evidence of these changes over time adds to the significance of the district.

CHRONOLOGY OF OUTREACH FOR DESIGNATION PROCESS:

- 3/18/2008 - CHAP staff presents at Federal Hill Neighborhood Association (FHNA).
- 11/5/2009 - CHAP staff meets with the Preservation Group of the FHNA.
- 5/22/2013 - CHAP walks neighborhood with the FHNA.
- 2/18/2014 - FHNA votes unanimously “to support our request for the creation of the local historic district.”
- 2/22/2014 - FHNA sends letter to Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, requesting that the City explore local historic district designation.
- 8/12/2014 - Mayor responds to the request.
- 2/10/2015 – CHAP staff attends FHNA board meeting.
- 1/6/2016 - CHAP mails letter to all property owners requesting support or opposition.
- 2/10/2016 – CHAP staff attends FHNA board meeting.
- 2/11/2016 – CHAP and Planning staff meet with Federal Hill Main Street manager.
- 2/16/2016 – CHAP staff attends FHNA meeting.

- 3/1/2016 – CHAP holds meeting in the neighborhood to provide information to stakeholders.
- 4/13/2016 – CHAP staff attends FHNA board meeting.
- 6/20/2016 – CHAP staff attends FHNA board meeting
- 7/26/2016 - CHAP and FHNA mail second letter to all property owners.
- 9/14/2016 – CHAP staff attends FHNA board meeting.

In addition:

- CHAP provided information for several articles for the FHNA news and Facebook page
- CHAP set up a GovDelivery email list to provide information.
- CHAP created FAQ brochure

BOUNDARY ANALYSIS AND JUSTIFICATION:

The proposed boundaries of the Federal Hill local historic district are generally Hughes Street/Key Highway to the north; Covington Street to the east; Cross Street including the Cross Street Market to the south; and Hanover Street to the west. This encompasses about 24 blocks of an intact neighborhood of late 18th to early 20th century historic structures named for a distinctive hill overlooking Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. Federal Hill was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. The proposed local district differs from the National Register district in two ways: the proposed local district does not include properties east of Covington Street to the water and it includes the Cross Street Market.

The northern boundary of the district at the base of Federal Hill Park along Key Highway extends west along Hughes Street. While some noncontributing buildings line sections of this boundary, it conforms with the National Register.

Across Covington Street to the east, there is considerable development of housing beginning in the late 20th century and is of a scale and character considerably different from that of historic Federal Hill. The exclusion of this non-historic and non-contributing construction is the justification for the eastern boundary of the local historic district.

Regarding the southern boundary of the district, while the architectural character of the Cross Street is the same on both sides of the street, Cross Street itself serves as the boundary between the Federal Hill and the Federal Hill South National Register districts and the corresponding neighborhood associations.

The western boundary of the district is informed by the boundaries of abutting local historic districts. On the west side of the proposed local historic district, the 900 and 1000 blocks of S. Hanover Street (from Henrietta Street to Cross Street) abut the Sharp-Leadenhall local historic district. At the northwest corner of the proposed district at the corner of S. Hanover and Hughes Street is the Otterbein local historic district, with its mix of historic and 20th century structures.

PROPERTY OWNER SURVEY:

All property owners within the boundaries of the proposed district were mailed notices with information about the designation process along with the proposed district boundaries. (See letter attached separately.) Articles were run in *The Hilltopper*, the neighborhood association newsletter. Two mailings were sent to a list of approximately 1,000 property owners, sent to their address of record. Property owners were asked to express their support or opposition to the local district designation through an on-line survey or by making a call to the CHAP office.

There were 170 non-duplicated survey responses from property owners within the proposed boundaries:

In Support: 93 (55%)
Opposed: 77 (45%)

CHAP *Rules and Regulations* direct staff to report to the Commission the results of the property owner surveys; they do not specify a required level of support. Nevertheless, a map plotting the survey results on the proposed district map (see separate attachment) reveals a relatively even distribution of responses throughout the proposed district—and a majority of those responding supporting local historic district designation.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

In accordance with CHAP *Rules and Regulations* regarding the designations of districts and landmarks, staff worked with the Federal Hill Neighborhood Association to identify the potential boundaries of the local historic district, conducted several rounds of neighborhood surveys, applied the CHAP Criteria for Evaluation, and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Identification and Registration, and confirmed the compliance of the proposed designation with the requirements for Local Government Certification under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Staff determined that the proposed district meets the requirements for local district designation as established by the Commission.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the determination that the proposed designation of Federal Hill as a local historic district meets CHAP Criteria for Evaluation 1 and 3; the proposed boundaries are supported by findings of fact; and outreach to property owners and property owner responses are sufficient. Request that staff prepare a full and proper study with findings of fact for presentation at Designation Hearing Two.



Eric Holcomb
Director