

**CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS  
CPED PLANNING DIVISION  
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT  
BZH-26363**

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FILE NAME: 636 Elwood Avenue North – Rappaport Residence

APPLICANT: Mark A. Bell, 612-345-6646

DATE APPLICATION COMPLETE: March 24, 2010

PUBLICATION OF STAFF REPORT: October 18, 2011

DATE OF HEARING: October 25, 2011

APPEAL PERIOD EXPIRATION: November 4, 2011

STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: John Smoley, Ph.D., 612-673-2830

CLASSIFICATION: Landmark Designation Study

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**A. SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND**

<b>District/Area information</b>	
Historic District	N/A
Neighborhood	Near North

<b>Historic Property information</b>	
Current name	Bell Residence
Historic Name	Rappaport Residence
Current Address	636 Elwood Avenue North
Historic Address	636 Elwood Avenue North
Original Construction Date	1912
Original Contractor	Andrew A. Lofstrom
Original Architect	none
Historic Use	Residence
Current Use	Residence
Proposed Use	Residence
Other Historical Designations	N/A



**636 Elwood Avenue North, 2010, photo submitted by Applicant**

The Rappaport Residence is a two-story house designed in a vernacular style with Colonial Revival and Craftsman influences. Andrew A. Lofstrom constructed the house for Abraham S. Oleisky in 1912 for an estimated cost of \$3,000.<sup>1</sup> A side-gabled roof clad in composition shingles is punctured by a brick chimney on the north (rear) side and a shed dormer on the south (front) side. A two story enclosed porch with a shed roof extends off the west side of the residence. A flat-roofed, enclosed entryway serves as the main entrance into the building. Stucco clads the exterior walls with notable exceptions being the shed dormer on the roof and a rear, two-story addition, both of which are clad in narrow horizontal siding. Fenestration consists of a variety of wood framed and leaded glass windows, the majority being 4/1 double hung, all covered by aluminum storm windows. A two-car garage at the rear of the lot is the only other building onsite.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Minneapolis Building Permit #B99434, 636 Elwood Avenue North.

On March 24, 2010, the property owner, Mark A. Bell, submitted a complete application to nominate the property for designation as a landmark, after over a decade of owning and restoring the property with his wife, Gloria.

At their April 20, 2010 meeting the Heritage Preservation Commission approved the nomination of the subject property and directed the Planning Director to prepare a designation study of the property. That study is attached.

On September 9, 2011, the State Historic Preservation Officer found the subject property to be eligible for local designation.

On August 4, 2011, CPED brought the completed designation study to the Committee of the Whole of the Planning Commission. The Committee recommended the property be designated.

## **B. EVALUATION**

The property has been evaluated several times previously. In a 2000 review for the Near Northside Redevelopment Project conducted pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic preservation Act of 1966, the evaluators, the 106 Group, did not find the subject property to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>2</sup> In a 2002 reconnaissance survey of North Minneapolis the evaluators, Mead and Hunt, did not recommend further study of the property to determine whether it was eligible for local and/or national designation as a historic property.<sup>3</sup> Both evaluations are based primarily on considerations related to architecture.

## **C. CONSIDERATION FOR DESIGNATION**

Based on the 2010 nomination, CPED-Planning-Preservation and Design conducted a designation study attached within.

Chapter 599 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Heritage Preservation Regulations, authorizes the HPC to hold a public hearing to consider proposed designations and to make findings and recommendations to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council with respect to proposed designations as follows:

599.270. Designation hearing. Following completion of the designation study the commission shall hold a public hearing to consider the proposed designation, as provided in section 599.170. Any person having a legal or equitable interest in a nominated property shall be allowed reasonable opportunity to give testimony or present evidence concerning the proposed designation.

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<sup>2</sup> The 106 Group, Ltd., *Cultural Resources Survey for the Stage One Portion of the Near Northside Redevelopment Project, Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota, 2000, 30, 46, A-30, Section 106 Files, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN.*

<sup>3</sup> Mead & Hunt, *North Minneapolis Historic Resources Inventory: Bryn Mawr and Near North Neighborhoods (South Area), 2002, Reconnaissance Survey Files, Planning Division, Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Minneapolis, MN.*

599.280. Commission recommendation. Following the public hearing, the commission shall make findings with respect to the proposed designation and shall submit the same together with its recommendation to the Zoning and Planning committee of the City Council. In making its findings and recommendation, the commission shall consider the designation criteria contained in section 599.210, the information contained in the designation study, the State Historic Preservation Officer's comments, the City Planning Commission's comments, the Planning Director's report and all testimony and evidence received at the public hearing relating to the designation.

#### **D. DESIGNATION CRITERIA**

Section 599.210 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations establishes criteria to be considered in determining whether a property is worthy of designation as a landmark or historic district because of its historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological or engineering significance. To be eligible for designation, a property must meet at least one of the following designation criteria:

- (1) The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.
- (2) The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.
- (3) The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity.
- (4) The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.
- (5) The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.
- (6) The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.
- (7) The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### **E. FINDINGS**

1. Consistency with designation criteria:

The Rappaport Residence appears eligible for designation as an individual landmark per the ordinance's criteria 2. It does not appear significant under criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

**Criteria #1: The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic, or social history.**

The property in question does not appear to be the site of historically significant events. The home did not merit mention in the Minneapolis Tribune during its first ten years. Media accounts of the Rappaport family and NAPCO do not indicate that the home was the site of historically significant events.

**Criteria #2: The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.**

636 Elwood Avenue North was the home of Edward Rappaport and his family from 1924-1946. The Rappaport's commitment to family, business, and their Jewish heritage exemplify the perseverance of Minneapolis' Jewish immigrant entrepreneurs in the first half of the twentieth century, as discussed in Part 2 of the designation study.<sup>1</sup>

**Criteria #3: The property contains or is associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity.**

The residence at 636 Elwood Avenue North is loosely associated with distinctive elements of city or neighborhood identity. The home was built for Jewish residents and eventually became owned by African-American residents, following North Minneapolis' general twentieth century demographic shift. But the residents' backgrounds and housing choices do not follow these established historical narratives as discussed in Part 2 of the designation study, thus these characteristics do not meet the City of Minneapolis' thresholds for historical significance.

**Criteria #4: The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or style, or method of construction.**

The Rappaport Residence is a two-story house designed in a vernacular style with Colonial Revival, Prairie, and Craftsman influences. The City has designated numerous buildings that reflect these styles: four Craftsman, seven Colonial Revival, and ten Prairie. Nineteen of these twenty-one buildings were designed as single family residences, like the subject property. While interesting features remain inside the residence at 636 Elwood Avenue, it is not always clear which features date back to the building's origins. 636 Elwood Avenue North is an interesting amalgamation of several architectural styles en vogue in Minneapolis in the early twentieth century, but this characteristic alone is not significant within the context of Minneapolis' residential development.

**Criteria #5: The property exemplifies a landscape design or development pattern distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or quality of design or detail.**

The trees, grass, and vegetation onsite are not arranged in a meaningful pattern and are no more distinguished than vegetation on the average residential lot in Minneapolis (see designation study Figures 2-8).

**Criteria #6: The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.**

While Andrew A. Lofstrom constructed an admirable house at 636 Elwood Avenue North, no evidence suggests that he was a master builder. While the 1912 Minneapolis city directory lists Lofstrom's profession as a carpenter, he did not garner a space in the "Contractors-Carpenters" section of the commercial listings, where over one-hundred other contractors and carpenters did.<sup>2</sup>

**Criteria #7: The property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.**

The subject property has not yielded information important in prehistory or history. Records available at the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office indicate that no archaeological sites have been identified on the subject property nor have any archaeological surveys been conducted on or near the property in question.

The subject property is not likely to yield information important in prehistory. The subject property is not located within 1000 feet of Basset Creek.<sup>3</sup> Sites in close proximity (generally five hundred feet or less) to bodies of water have a higher than average potential to include archaeological evidence of precontact human habitation, since bodies of water generally serve as sources of water, food, and transportation. Being further than one thousand feet from this creek, the property at 636 Elwood Avenue North is far less likely to possess such evidence.

The subject property is not likely to yield information important in history. Building permit records do not indicate the presence of buildings onsite prior to the construction of the present building in 1912.<sup>4</sup> City records indicate the lot was connected to the municipal sewer system in 1912.<sup>5</sup> This indicates an extremely low likelihood of the lot containing privy vaults bearing archaeological evidence. Other archaeological sources of information such as sheet refuse (general surface trash scatters that accumulate over time), trash pits, and builder's trenches may still be present on the lot. Generally, this sort of evidence is found in the backyards of residences. The northernmost portion of the rear yard of this property has been impacted by a parking area and garage whose placement appears original.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Rappaport's previous residence at 620 Girard Avenue North, no evidence exists to suggest that the back yard of the home was used for dismantling automobiles for parts.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, the subject property is not likely to yield information important in history.

**F. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Staff has received no comment letters as of the date of this staff report's publication.

## G. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

CPED recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission **adopt** staff findings and **approve** the landmark designation of the Rappaport Residence, and forward the study and recommendation to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council with a recommendation to **approve** the designation of the property at 636 Elwood Avenue North.

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<sup>1</sup> “Edward Rappaport,” *Minneapolis Star*, 10 September 1955, 3; Joseph Stipanovich, *City of Lakes: An Illustrated History of Minneapolis* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, 1982) 343.

<sup>2</sup> Minneapolis City Directory, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Surveyor General’s Office, Minnesota Public Land Survey Plat Map, Township 29 N, Range 24 W, 4<sup>th</sup> Meridian, 1876 [<http://www.mngeo.state.mn.us/glo/Index.htm>] accessed 11 February 2011.

<sup>4</sup> City of Minneapolis Building Permit Index Card, 636 Elwood Avenue North.

<sup>5</sup> City of Minneapolis Public Works and Engineering Sewer and Water Connections Inspection.

<sup>6</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1912-1951, Vol. 2, 158.

<sup>7</sup> *The Life and Legacy of Edward Rappaport*, directed by Shira Joy Rappaport, St. Paul: IFP Minnesota Center for Media Arts, n.d.