

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development
Designation Study
BZH-26781**

Date: January 15, 2013

Applicant: Department of Community Planning and Economic Development, nominated by the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission

Address of Property: 2707 ½ East Lake Street

Project Name: Town Talk Diner Designation Study

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Publication Date: January 8, 2013

Public Hearing: January 15, 2013

Appeal Period Expiration: January 25, 2013

Ward: 9

Neighborhood Organization: Longfellow Community Council

Attachments: Designation Study, Dated January 8, 2013

A. SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

District/Area information	
Historic District	N/A
Neighborhood	Longfellow

Historic Property information	
Current name	Town Talk Diner
Historic Name	Town Talk Diner
Current Address	2707 ½ East Lake Street
Historic Address	2707 ½ East Lake Street
Original Construction Date	1946
Original Contractor	Sebco, Inc.
Original Architect/Designer	Sebco, Inc.
Historic Use	Restaurant
Current Use	Restaurant (Vacant)
Other Historical Designations	N/A

The Town Talk Diner is a narrow two-story building constructed in 1946 between two larger, older buildings, near the intersection of 27th Avenue South and East Lake Street. The storefront is designed in the Streamline Moderne style, and features many hallmarks of the style. The large “Town Talk Diner” sign over the first floor is the most striking detail of the small façade.

BACKGROUND: In January 2011, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported the closure of the Town Talk Diner due to various business problems. As with similar news about various properties that might be considered eligible, this item was reported to Commissioners by staff during the “New Business” section of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission on February 1, 2011.

At their regularly scheduled meeting on February 15, 2011, the HPC initiated a nomination of the Town Talk Diner during the “New Business” portion of the meeting. After completing an initial review, CPED recommended to the Heritage Preservation Commission on March 1, 2011, that the property exhibited at least one of the local designation criteria found in section 599.210 of the Heritage Preservation Ordinance. The HPC adopted CPED’s findings and placed the Town Talk Diner under interim protection and called for a designation study to be conducted.

On December 6, 2012, CPED brought the completed designation study to the Committee of the Whole of the Planning Commission. The Committee recommended the property be designated. The Planning Commission did express concern about difficulties future tenants of the space may experience due to restrictions on altering the sign due to designation.

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In a letter dated December 8, 2012, the State Historic Preservation Officer found the Town Talk Diner to be eligible for local designation (see Appendix D of the designation study).

B. EVALUATION

An inventory form prepared by Will Stark of The 106 Group in 2002 states: "This property is recommended as not eligible for listing on the NRHP. The property does not contribute to significant broad patterns of history, is not known to be associated with persons important in our past, and is not architecturally distinguished." This inventory was reviewing eligibility for the National Register of Historic places, however, and did not take local designation criteria into consideration.

C. CONSIDERATION FOR DESIGNATION

Based on the 2011 nomination, CPED-Planning staff prepared 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:

599.170. 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.

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

599.280. 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

Consistency with designation criteria:

The Town Talk Diner appears eligible for designation as an individual landmark per the ordinance's criteria 1, 4, and 5. It may meet criteria 2, 3 and/or 6, though the study did not uncover enough information to state definitively if any of those three are met. The Town Talk Diner does not appear significant under criterion 7. Below is a summary of each criterion; please see the attached designation study for in-depth analysis of each of the designation criteria.

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

The Town Talk Diner opened in 1946. This post-war period marked the return of a significant number of former soldiers to the country and the work force. Many in Minneapolis found employment at the Minneapolis - Moline tractor factory, which was located approximately 2 blocks west of the Town Talk Diner at Lake Street and Hiawatha Avenue. Paul Pearson took advantage of the small vacant strip left in the streetscape to build the diner on a busy street near a significant employer. The Town Talk Diner is a unique example of infill development in a part of the City that was largely built out by the post-war period.

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

It is evident that Paul Pearson and his family were successful restaurateurs in the City of Minneapolis. The study did not uncover any clear evidence to identify the Pearson family as being significant enough to the history or development of the City of Minneapolis to warrant designation of the Town Talk Diner based solely or partially on association with the family.

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

The Town Talk Diner may be associated with distinctive elements of neighborhood identity, though based on current library research this cannot be stated for certain. Based on current research, there is not a substantial enough record of the diner's specific role in evolution of the Longfellow neighborhood to make a definitive determination about its specific neighborhood identity. Future research could be conducted into the relationship between the Minneapolis Moline plant and those businesses that spring up in the surrounding area to serve the employees.

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

The Town Talk Diner embodies characteristics of the Streamline Moderne architectural style. The Town Talk Diner was originally built as a narrow one-story building, necessitating a small, simple storefront with relatively few features or embellishments. However, many hallmark features of the Streamline Moderne style are present, including the vertical wave/ribbing pattern found next to the window and on the side adjacent to the door, the form of the front door itself, the use of metal to compose the entire storefront, the sign and the use of lighting on the sign. The storefront and sign combine to present a strong example of the Streamline Moderne style.

The sign is the most significant character defining feature of the diner. The sign defines the Town Talk Diner - with the exceptionally small size of the space and the way that the storefront is dwarfed by the two larger adjoining buildings, the sign is likely the only reason that the Town Talk Diner existed for as long as it did. The fact that the sign has survived in what appears to be an unaltered state and in relatively good physical condition is an uncommon occurrence.

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

The Town Talk Diner was constructed as an infill development between two buildings built nearly 40 years earlier, in an already developed area. Lake Street was an important east-west street car line, and then became an equally important east-west road for automobiles after the decline of the street cars. The large sign was an innovative way to draw attention and customers to the diner, which would otherwise have been easy to overlook. The Town Talk Diner represents a unique example of infill development in an otherwise fully-developed part of the city.

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

There is not sufficient evidence to state that the Town Talk Diner exemplifies the work of any builder, engineer, designer, artist, craftsman or architect that is presently considered to be a "master" of their trade. The architect and builder listed on the

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building permit is “Sebco Inc.” Research did not reveal any significant information about Sebco Inc., so it is difficult to identify them as a master of their trade based on this one example.

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

There is no evidence that the Town Talk Diner has yielded or is likely to yield information important to prehistory or history. There may be unknown below ground resources on the site. However, discovery and recovery of any below-ground resources would likely require the demolition of the structure.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Notification of the designation study was sent on December 28, 2012. As of the publication of this report, staff has not received any public comments.

G. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt staff findings and **approve** the landmark designation of the Town Talk Diner, and forward the designation study and recommendation to the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council with a recommendation to **approve** the designation of the portion of the property at 2707 ½ East Lake Street historically known as the Town Talk Diner.

H. ATTCHMENTS

- Designation Study dated January 8, 2013