To: Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC)  
From: Jenny Buddenborg, Senior City Planner, Community Planning & Development (CPD)  
Date: May 14, 2019  
RE: Landmark Designation for the River Drive Historic District, #2019L-002

Landmark Preservation Commission Suggested Motion:  
I move to recommend approval and forward to City Council for landmark designation of the River Drive Historic District, application #2019L-002, based on History Criterion 1a, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criterion 3b, citing as findings of fact for this recommendation the application form, public testimony, and May 14, 2019, staff report.

Request to Designate a Structure:  
| Application: | #2019L-002 |
| Addresses: | Multiple properties on West River Drive |
| Zoning: | U-TU-B, UO-3 |
| Council: | District 1, Councilman Rafael Espinoza |
| Blueprint Denver: | Urban Neighborhood Context / Low Residential Area |
| Owners: | Multiple |
| Applicant(s): | Councilman Rafael Espinoza |

Case Summary:  
Councilman Rafael Espinoza and three co-applicants/property owners submitted to CPD a Denver Landmark designation application for the River Drive Historic District on April 12, 2019. Staff performed an investigation and found the application to be complete and to meet Denver Landmark designation criteria. As such, staff set the LPC public hearing for May 21, 2019.

Designation Criteria and Evaluation, Chapter 30, Denver Revised Municipal Code:  
To meet landmark designation criteria, in accordance with Chapter 30-4, Denver Revised Municipal Code, a structure must meet the following criteria:

1. Meet one designation criteria in two or more of the following categories:
   - History
   - Architecture
   - Geography
2. Maintain its historic or physical integrity
3. LPC to consider how the proposed Landmark relates to a historic context or theme

Criteria Evaluation:  
Landmark staff found that the application meets History Criterion 1a, Architecture Criterion 2a, and Geography Criterion 3b.
1. **Historical Significance**  
To have historical significance, the structure or district shall be thirty (30) or more years old or have extraordinary importance to the historical development of Denver, and shall:

   a) **Have direct association with the historical development of the city, state, or nation**

River Drive Historic District is directly associated with the historical development of the city as one of the oldest established residential areas of Denver in what was the Town of Highlands. Established by General William Larimer, Jr. in 1858 and incorporated in 1875, the Town of Highlands was annexed by the city of Denver in 1896. The 17 extant properties within the historic district were part of the 1881 River Front Addition in the Town of Highlands and its continued growth as part of what would become the Jefferson Park neighborhood, named after nearby Jefferson Park that was established in 1899. Many of the houses were built in the 1880s and represent some of the city’s oldest building stock that contributed to the early growth of Denver.

The Gurley Brothers, a real estate investment company active in the area at the time, began developing the River Front Addition in 1881. Set on a bluff overlooking the South Platte River and downtown Denver, the district was originally home to working-class residents, many of whom were employed by some of the city’s earliest and most influential industries within walking distance or a short streetcar ride away. The first- and second-generation immigrants who resided in the houses represented the social dynamic within Denver during the district’s period of significance (1885 – 1923) and illustrate the diversity of those who played a significant role in building the city. Scottish, English, German, Welsh and Cornish immigrants who lived in the district played a large role in helping companies like the nearby Zang Brewery, Colorado & Southern Railway and Denver & Rio Grande Railroad thrive.

2. **Architectural Significance**  
To have architectural importance, the structure or district shall have design quality and integrity, and shall:

   a) **Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type**

River Drive Historic District exemplifies several architectural styles and building types representing the Victorian and Arts & Crafts eras. Each is indicative of the time and location in which it was built. Collectively, they illustrate architectural trends over 38 years in Denver’s early history. Some forms are relatively unique to Colorado like the Terrace Type. Other forms and styles related to early Denver development include Queen Anne, Gable Front, Dutch Colonial Revival and Foursquare. Overall, the use of similar materials such as brick and stone, and design elements like arched window openings, brick belt courses and front porches, create cohesion among the properties.

Each structure remains in good condition with impressive retention of character-defining features. The Queen Anne houses retain their symmetrical massing and porches, multiple gables and decorative wood shingles. The Terrace Type buildings are constructed of brick and exhibit flat roofs and corbeled cornices. The one remaining Dutch Colonial Revival house retains its gambrel roof, front porch and dormers and one Foursquare its square plan, hipped roof, broad eaves and full-width front porch.
Minor alterations include porch and window replacements as well as rear additions and new garages that are not visible from the street. These changes do not negatively affect the character-defining features of the district. The district provides an excellent snapshot of architectural styles and forms found in Denver in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

3. Geographic Significance

b) Promote understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity

River Drive Historic District is a rare, intact portion of the 1881 River Front Addition in the Town of Highlands. The structures and setting represent the most complete portion of the Gurley Brothers original development in a neighborhood that has lost much of its physical integrity due to demolition and construction of residential infill in sharp contrast to the district’s historic character. Today, River Drive Historic District includes a fraction of the original River Front Addition, amounting to 2.5 acres, and is considered a part of the residential core of the Jefferson Park neighborhood.

Jefferson Park neighborhood plans dating to 1976 encouraged local designation of the structures along West River Drive due, in part, to their distinctive physical characteristics. The district has two unique attributes that lend to its unique character, related to the natural topography in its proximity to the South Platte River. The first is the curving layout of parcels and street as opposed to the grid system commonly found in the neighborhood and throughout much of Denver. The second is the above grade (and with later modifications below grade) front entrances on several of the homes on the north side of the street, designed to accommodate the slope of the street and surrounding topography. When the houses were built, the road was narrower and higher in elevation than it is today; a 1950s regrading of the street developed a configuration closer to its current state. It is these distinctive features and the
rare, intact nature of the River Drive Historic District within the larger Jefferson Park neighborhood that meet geographic significance.

Integrity:
Chapter 30, DRMC requires that a landmark designated property maintain its historic or physical integrity, defined as “the ability of a structure or district to convey its historic and architectural significance...recognized as belonging to its particular time and place in Denver’s history.” The seven qualities that define integrity are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The 16 primary structures that contribute to the River Drive Historic District retain a high level of physical integrity related to the district’s period of significance (1885-1923). Due to their cohesive appearance, they are recognizable as belonging to that specific time and place in Denver’s history. Each of the contributing properties retain their original residential dwelling in the location of construction and all 17 properties with existing built forms continue to serve in a residential capacity. There are two empty lots within the historic district, the result of demolition, that are non-contributing. One of the houses, located at 2606 ½ W River Drive, is also non-contributing due to extensive alterations that compromised the structure’s integrity of design, materials and workmanship. The form, plan, space, structure and style of the 16 contributing properties are largely unchanged.

When combined with original key exterior materials, such as brick and stone, and the scale of each property, the district conveys a direct association with its period of significance and appears in stark contrast to much of its surroundings. The setting within the district boundary today is like what existed between 1885 and 1923; however, the surrounding area has several multi-family dwellings that are
larger in scale than the properties originally built in the neighborhood. Each end of the district is anchored with new, multi-story residential properties.

**Relate to a Historic Context/Theme and Period of Significance:**
The period of significance for the River Drive Historic District is 1885 to 1923. This captures the span of time during which most parcels were developed, and the city of Denver experienced its initial growth. As part of the Town of Highlands prior to its annexation by the city of Denver in 1896, the district is an important representation of the city’s earliest development and architecture. It is particularly significant given its connection to the immigrant working class who resided within it and supported the growth of the city’s earliest and most influential industries.

**Boundary:**
The designation application proposes to designate the following legal description:

The district includes part of Lots 9 through 19 south of the alley, Lots 19 through 21 west of the alley, and a portion of Lot 22, all in Block 2 of the River Front Addition in the Town of Highlands, as well as a portion of Lot 8 along with Lots 9 through the east 12.5 feet of Lot 21 all in Block 3 of the River Front Addition in the Town of Highlands, in addition thereto, those portions of all abutting public rights-of-way, but only to the centerline thereof, which are immediately adjacent to the aforesaid specifically described area. Located in the NE 1/4 of Section 32, Township 3 South, Range 68 West of the 6th P.M., City and County of Denver, State of Colorado.

**Public Review Process:**
Community Planning & Development has met or exceeded all posting and notification requirements delineated in Chapter 12 (Article III, Section 12-96) and Chapter 30 of the DRMC.

Notifications:
- Owner notification letters regarding the LPC public hearing
- City Council, Planning Board, and Building Inspection email notifications
- Registered Neighborhood Organization and courtesy email notifications
  - Jefferson Park United Neighbors
  - Frontview 40 Condominium Association
  - Federal Boulevard Corridor Improvement Partnership
  - Center City Denver Residents Organization
  - Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC)
  - Historic Denver, Inc.
  - Colorado Preservation, Inc.
  - National Trust for Historic Preservation
  - State of Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Posted signage for Landmark Preservation Commission public hearing
Public Comment:
As of the date of this staff report, CPD has received 1 e-mail from a community member in support of the designation and 4 responses to the City’s online survey, 3 of whom reside in the district and 1 who did not indicate their name and address to verify place of residence.

- 5 in support
- 0 in opposition

Attachments Provided by CPD:
- Designation application
- Map of property
- Public comment