

CITY COUNCIL
HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: Janese Chapman, Director
Lisa DiChiera, Deputy Director

DATE: April 16, 2025

RE: Proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District

In accordance with **Sec. 21-2-29 (d) – Reports and hearings** – we respectfully request of the Honorable Detroit City Council to receive the Historic Designation Advisory Board’s final report and ordinance recommending establishment of a new Historic District for the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat. The ordinance has been approved by the Law Department as to form and for introduction and setting of a public hearing.

City of Detroit

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Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District

3201-3203 Virginia Park Street, Detroit, Wayne County, MI
Final Report



Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat, 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street, Detroit, MI. Photo by HDAB staff, 2023.

By a resolution dated June 25, 2024, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District in accordance with Chapter 21 of the 2019 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District is located approximately four and a half (4.5) miles northwest of downtown Detroit and consists of 0.122 acres, and two (2) contributing resources.



Reference map showing boundaries of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District, 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street, Detroit, Wayne County, MI.

BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District, as shown on the map on page 29 of this report, using cardinal directions are as follows:

Beginning at a point, that point being the intersection of the centerlines of Virginia Park Street and Wildemere Street; thence south along said center line of Wildemere Street to its intersection with the centerline of the alley lying between Virginia Park Street and Vicksburg Street; thence westward to the southern extension of the western boundary of the eastern 15 feet of lot 431 of the Wildermere Park Subdivision; Liber 19, Page 98, Plats, Wayne County Records; thence north along said western boundary extended to the centerline of Virginia Park Street; thence east to the Point of Beginning.

[Legal description of the property parcel at time of proposed designation: Virginia Park Lot 432 and the east 15 feet of Lot 431 of the Wildemere Park Subdivision, L19 P98 PLATS, Wayne County Records, City of Detroit, Michigan. Commonly known as 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street, Detroit, Michigan.]

Boundary Justification

The boundaries described above delineate the parcel presently and historically occupied by the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat and garage and contain the original footprint of the Rosa and Raymond Parks flat and garage. The 15-foot side yard west of the flat is considered noncontributing.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District is significant under Historic Designation Advisory Board **Criteria Number One**: “sites, buildings, structures, or archaeological sites where cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political, or architectural history of the community, city, state, or nation is particularly reflected or exemplified.” The proposed district is also significant under National Register **Criteria A** at the local level, for its role in Ethnic Heritage: Black, and Social History.

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District is also significant under Historic Designation Advisory Board **Criteria Number Two**: Sites, buildings, structures, or archaeological sites which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the community, city, state, or national history. The proposed district is also significant under National Register **Criterion B**: “properties that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.”

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District is also significant under National Register **Criterion Consideration G**: “Properties that are eligible for having achieved significance within the past fifty years and have exceptional importance.” The local and national designation of the Rosa and Raymond Parks flat was recommended in the Survey Report, *The Civil Rights Movement and the African American Experience in 20th Century Detroit, Michigan*, by Quinn Evans Architects, prepared in 2021.

Period of Significance

The period of significance of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District is defined as **1961 to 1988**, the period during which the Parks occupied the flat. Because its period of significance extends to less than fifty years ago, it must meet National Register Criteria Consideration G. It meets the requirements because Rosa McCauley Parks was an exceptionally significant individual, and because her civil rights activities at both the national and the local level continued throughout her occupation of the property. Additionally, her husband Raymond Parks supported Rosa Parks' work and was a charter member of the NAACP in Montgomery, Alabama and was involved in the labor rights movement in Montgomery.

Early History of the Site

Evidence of the earliest human activity in the vicinity of Detroit dates to the Late Woodland period (500-1000 CE). This native culture of hunters and gatherers lived in small villages near the Detroit River. The proposed district, four miles from the Detroit River, did not have an immediate aquatic resource and is less likely to have archaeological evidence of Native Americans. The land near 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street is part of the traditional territory of the *Confederacy of Three Fires*, comprised of the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), and Bodewadmi (Potawatomi) Nations and referred to as *Waawiyatanong*, or "where the water goes around," in the Anishinaabemowin language of the Anishinaabe indigenous community. The region's original inhabitants, including Anishinaabe as well as Wyandot, Iroquois, Fox, Miami, and Sauk tribes are known to have traveled throughout the area near 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street by using multiple trail systems including the Shiawassee Trail that now roughly corresponds to today's Grand River Avenue, just a half mile to the south.¹

Detroit was incorporated as a town in 1802, and the Michigan Territory was organized that same year with Detroit as its territorial capital. Judge Augustus B. Woodward designed a new plan for Detroit in 1805, and the city sprawled outward from the Detroit River as the population grew in the 19th century. One of the major streets or "spokes" of Woodward's plan for Detroit was Grand River Avenue. Grand River was a major transportation route, and residential subdivisions developed along Grand River as early as 1887 at the Joy Road intersection.

Between 1916 and 1926, the City of Detroit annexed ninety square miles of land from the surrounding rural townships as people left the older Detroit residential areas and crossed West Grand Boulevard to live in one of the many fashionable new suburban neighborhoods still within the city limits. The area now known as the Wildemere Park neighborhood was once a rural part of Greenfield Township, north of Grand River Avenue. The development of the Wildemere Park neighborhood grew from the north to south as development spread from downtown. The explosive physical growth of the city of Detroit, particularly its growth northwesterly from the city center to the Wildemere Park neighborhood occurred approximately four-and-a-half-miles from downtown Detroit. This area of Virginia Park Street, between Dexter and Twelfth Streets

¹ Jennifer Reinhardt, City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board, Final Report, *The Blue Bird Inn*, October, 2020.

was annexed by the City of Detroit in 1907. New homeowners in the area knew that once the city of Detroit annexed an area, they would receive Detroit services such as fire and police protection, Detroit public high school privileges, sewers, and water connections. Developers were quick to advertise their lots once they knew that annexation was imminent. Early residential suburbs such as these fostered an emerging American aspiration for life in a semi-rural environment, apart from the noise, pollution, and activity of a crowded city, but close enough to the city for daily commuting to work.² Throughout the twentieth century, development in northwest Detroit grew at a rapid pace, and by 1928 the area at Grand River and Joy Road was “probably the fastest-growing shopping center in the city of Detroit,”³

The two-family dwelling where the Parks lived was built in 1917 in the Wildermere (sic) Park subdivision. Platted in 1893, it consisted of the eight blocks bounded by Wildemere Avenue, Dexter Avenue, Virginia Park Street, and Lothrop Street. At the time, this was still part of Greenfield Township; the Wildermere Park area was annexed into the city of Detroit in 1907. The neighborhood was first depicted on a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map in 1915, when Virginia Park Street was called Maidstone Avenue. The neighborhood was still in development at the time, with residences concentrated to the south and west, closer to the intersection of Dexter Avenue and West Grand Boulevard.⁴

A City of Detroit building permit (#15990) was issued to L. Nosanchuk, (Louis Nosanchuk) the builder/owner, on June 2, 1917 for construction of the dwelling and garage. The dwelling is listed in the 1919-1920 Detroit City Directory at the original address, at 975 Virginia Park and Wildemere Streets. In 1920 the address changed to the current address, and 3201 Virginia Park Street (the ground-floor unit is 3201; the second-floor unit is 3203) was occupied by Frank A. Miller. The City Directory lists Miller as Vice President and Secretary of the U. S. Pattern & Manufacturing Company. According to the 1920 Federal Census, Miller was a patternmaker, born in Michigan but of German immigrant parents, and the household included his wife Mabel, her mother Margaret Viney, and his son Raymond. At this time the neighborhood was composed of white people born in Michigan, Canada, and several other states; many of them had parents from Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Economically, the neighborhood was dominated by blue-collar and lower-middle-class workers, including clerks, deliverymen, salesmen, teachers, and a pharmacist. Miller remained in the flat until the early 1930s. It was occupied in the late 1930s and early 1940s by James Mondes, a Greek immigrant who worked as a counter clerk in a general store. The neighborhood composition had not changed much since the 1920s.⁵

The Sanborn Fire Insurance map of 1950 shows a sketch of the dwelling. It is described as a rectangular two-story two-family flat of frame construction with brick veneer. It has a one-story

² David L. Ames and L. F. McClelland, National Register Bulletin: *Historic Residential Suburbs, Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 2002, p. 65.

³“Joy Road Zone Spreads Fast,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 19, 1928.

⁴ Sandra Little and Ruth Mills, Quinn Evans Architects, National Register of Historic Places nomination for the *Rosa (McCauley) and Raymond Parks Flat*, 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street, Detroit, Michigan, 2019.

⁵ *Ibid.*

full-length porch across the front with a flat composition roof and a one-story, partial-length porch across the rear with a shingle roof. At the rear (southeast corner) of the lot was a shingle-roofed one-story frame garage. City directories were not published during and immediately after World War II, but it appears for part of this period the occupant was Hiram Gibbs. During the post-World War II era, the neighborhood gradually transitioned to majority African American. As urban renewal in historically segregated African American neighborhoods like Black Bottom and Paradise Valley displaced black residents, they began moving into white neighborhoods like this one, which was not far from the historically black middle-class Old West Side neighborhood to the southwest.⁶

Detroit's African American Neighborhoods

The contents of this section of the report are largely taken from the Survey Report "Twentieth Century Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit" by Quinn Evans Architects (2021) prepared for the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and the City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board.

In 1820, the African American population in Detroit was recorded at just 67 residents. Detroit's Black population remained relatively small until the turn of the twentieth century. Its upper and middle class African American residents were integrated into the city overall, while working class Blacks clustered on the East side along with White working-class immigrants. It was the explosion of Detroit's automobile industry after 1907 and Henry Ford's introduction of the assembly line and the five-dollar workday in 1914 that brought the first large population of African Americans to Detroit.

The new immigration created a change in African American housing patterns within the city. In the decade between 1910 and 1920 Detroit's Black population increased by over 14%; between 1920 and 1930 it rose to over 49.6%. As African Americans moved in large numbers into the city, White residents interpreted this as a threat and reacted to establish and maintain racial homogeneity. Blacks who attempted to move into White neighborhoods in the 1910s and 1920s faced increasing resistance, from White property owners refusing to sell or rent to Blacks, to the establishment of racial covenants, to actual violence against African Americans who attempted to break the color line. While segregation was not the city's official policy at the time, the White police force and city officials either passively supported or actively enforced *de facto* segregation. As a result, most of Detroit's African American residents were involuntarily segregated into a few small areas of the city on the city's East side known as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. As more and more people were packed into relatively small areas, houses and apartments were subdivided in an attempt to expand living space well beyond its capacity. Extremely overcrowded conditions and lack of maintenance by landlords reduced the housing in these areas to what were termed slums, though the neighborhoods themselves retained a vibrant sense of community.

⁶ Little and Mills, National Register of Historic Places.

The mostly residential district of Black Bottom was located south of Gratiot Avenue between Brush Street and the Grand Trunk Railroad Tracks, eventually extending all the way to the Detroit River on the south. The commercial counterpart to Black Bottom was Paradise Valley, extending a few blocks to either side of the main commercial corridors of Hastings and St. Antoine Streets from Gratiot to Mack, and eventually expanding north toward Forest Avenue. Although historically Black Bottom was considered a residential area and Paradise Valley a commercial one, in practice there were businesses located throughout Black Bottom and Blacks lived in homes, boarding houses, and apartments on the side streets of Paradise Valley. Most of the historically Black churches, businesses, and social and political organizations founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were located in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley.

By the 1920s there were several small middle-class enclaves developing outside of the lower east side. Like their White counterparts, Black Detroiters aspired to home ownership, but due to restrictive racial covenants and racial prejudice, there were few areas open to them. Black residents looking to purchase homes had to search for areas well away from established White neighborhoods. The largest of these was the “Black West Side,” a community bounded by Tireman Avenue, Epworth Street, Warren Avenue, and Grand River Avenue. The “Black West Side” boundaries became obsolete once the Black population moved north of Tireman Avenue after the Supreme Court decision of 1948 ruling restrictive covenants as unconstitutional. In the 1950s, the racial makeup of the Wildemere Park neighborhood began changing as the black population of Detroit moved northward, and the neighborhood became more integrated.

Rosa Parks’ Civil Rights Activism – Introduction

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat was included in the Multiple Property Submission prepared by Quinn Evans Architects for the *20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit, Michigan* in 2020. The Parks’ flat’s significance falls under two periods covered in that document, “Modern Civil Rights, 1954-1964,” and “Second Revolution, 1964-1976.” These two periods were characterized, nationally and in Detroit, by the maturation of the modern civil rights movement and the efforts of African Americans to capitalize on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in enforcing and expanding gains made earlier in the century. Despite modest advances in employment and housing equality, African Americans still faced significant discrimination and barriers to equal access in all areas of their life and work. Two strands of activism developed during the period, one that focused on nonviolent civil disobedience, modeled after the movement led nationally by Martin Luther King, Jr., and a more militant approach which, in the late 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to the Black Power Movement and black nationalism, in which African Americans demanded self-determination, control over black institutions, and pride in their race, heritage, and achievements.

Although Rosa Parks was best known for her 1955 refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, triggering the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Parks in fact remained a key and active figure in the national civil rights movement throughout the 1960s-1980s, the period in which she lived in the flat at 3201 Virginia Park Street. During this time, she used her reputation and presence to support nationally significant civil rights efforts both north and south, and worked both visibly and behind the scenes to combat inequality in employment, housing, and public accommodations both in Detroit and across the nation. Most often associated with Martin

Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolent strategy of civil disobedience, Parks also admired Malcolm X and associated with and supported the activities of black militants in Detroit.

Rosa McCauley Parks (1913-2005)

Often called the “mother of the civil rights movement,” Rosa Louise McCauley (1913-2005) was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, on February 4, 1913. After meeting Raymond Parks (1903-1977), who was already a civil rights activist, Rosa married him in 1932, and began working for the Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Rosa Parks was active in the NAACP for over a decade before the incident that would make her famous, traveling throughout Alabama working on voter registration drives and documenting instances of racism and persecution.⁷

Raymond Parks (1903-1977)

Raymond Parks was a Civil Rights activist in the early years of his life in Alabama. Born in Wedowee, in Randolph County, Alabama, Raymond Parks was the son of David, a carpenter, and Geri Culbertson Parks. He spent his childhood caring for ill family members and was orphaned as a teen. A mutual friend introduced Raymond to Rosa in the spring of 1931. He proposed on their second date. They married on December 18, 1932, in Pine Level, Alabama. Parks did not receive a formal education as there was no nearby black school to attend. He taught himself to read with the help of his mother. He became an avid reader and cultivated a thorough knowledge of current events and an appreciation for poetry. He held several jobs before moving to Tuskegee, Alabama. Later, he learned barbering at the Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. He worked at the Atlas Barber & Beauty Shop in downtown Montgomery and later in Detroit at Whitlow's Barber Lounge (8034 Wildemere St.) when the couple moved. In March 1931, nine black youths were falsely accused of raping two white women on a freight train in Scottsboro, Alabama. Raymond Parks was a charter member of the



Rosa Parks, shown in the documentary “The Remarkable Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks.”



Raymond Parks, ca. 1947, photo from the Library of Congress.

⁷ “Parks, Rosa,” *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, Detroit Historical Society, accessed April 1, 2025, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopediaof-detroit/parks-rosa>.

Montgomery NAACP and was active in fundraising and advocating for the Scottsboro Boys' defense; while they were jailed, he brought them food. Eight of the nine youths were convicted and sentenced to death within a month.⁸ Activism continued to be a part of his life and he was heavily involved in the Montgomery labor rights movement, supporting efforts to unionize day laborers in the city. Raymond Parks supported his wife's activism and encouraged youth to get a good education in order to eliminate discrimination in the United States.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger because she was, in her own words, "tired of giving in." Her arrest and subsequent trial prompted local civil rights activists to initiate a boycott of Montgomery busses, propelling the civil rights movement and a young Martin Luther King, Jr. to national attention. Nearly two years later, the Supreme Court declared bus segregation unconstitutional. For Parks and her husband, however, the resolution did nothing to mitigate the hate and harassment to which they were continually subject.⁹ The Parks decided to move to Detroit, where Rosa Parks' brother Sylvester McCauley was living, in August 1957. For a time, they lodged with her brother in his house at 2672 South Deacon Street.¹⁰ Rosa Parks, however, only stayed for a few months, leaving in October 1957 to take a position as the hostess of the Holly Tree Inn on the campus of Virginia University in Hampton, Virginia. Parks returned to Detroit for good in late 1958.

The first years that Rosa and Raymond Parks were in Detroit, the couple experienced economic and health struggles. Raymond was initially unable to work in his profession as a barber because he wasn't licensed in Michigan, Parks was ill and, as she told the *Michigan Chronicle* in May 1959, "work is hard to find."¹¹ The couple briefly lived in an apartment at 449 E. Euclid Street (no longer extant) in 1958. In October 1959 the Progressive Civic League, a black professional group based in the west side, offered them both work and lodging in their meeting hall at 1930 West Grand Boulevard (no longer extant), where Rosa worked as the manager/treasurer of the organization and Raymond as caretaker. Curiously, Parks was generally disregarded by both the black and white civil rights community in Detroit in these early years. Even organizations like the NAACP, for whom both Parks had worked so hard in the years leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott, did little to help the couple, and the local chapter did not ask her to speak for almost two years.¹²

Their plight eventually began to draw the attention of the national press. A headline in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in July 1960 read "Montgomery Heroine in 'Great Need'," and a group of twenty local churches organized an event to honor and raise money for the couple.¹³ Their

⁸ Library of Congress webpage: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/early-life-and-activism/scottsboro-boys/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ In 2014, the Deacon Street house was purchased by Parks' niece, Rhea McCauley, and donated to American artist Ryan Mendoza. Mendoza disassembled the house and transported it to Germany, where it was rebuilt. In 2018, it was dismantled again and shipped to Rhode Island, where it apparently remains in storage.

¹¹ "Alabama Boycott Heroine Can't Find a Job!" *Michigan Chronicle*, May 23, 1959.

¹² Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 151-152.

¹³ "Montgomery Heroine in 'Great Need,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 2, 1960, 3; Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 154-55; "Negro Churches to Hail Heroine of Bus Boycott," *Detroit Free Press*, June 11, 1960, 10.

situation had improved by the spring of 1961. Raymond Parks found employment at a barber shop on Wildemere Avenue in the Twelfth Street neighborhood, and Rosa began a job at the Stockton Sewing Company, albeit working ten-hour days for little pay. It enabled them to move to the ground floor of a two-flat dwelling at 3201 Virginia Park Street, on the corner of Wildemere Avenue near Raymond's barber shop.¹⁴ The two-family dwelling had been purchased by an African American family, the Campbell family, in approximately 1948. The Campbell family was from Montgomery, Alabama and had connections to the Parks. It was while living at 3201 Virginia Park Street that Rosa Parks would accomplish her most significant civil rights work during her time in Detroit.

Rosa Parks' Civil Rights Activism

Rosa Parks' post-Montgomery civil rights work is, as her biographer Jeanne Theoharis has noted, often overlooked. In addition to the slowness of the Detroit civil rights community to recognize her value immediately after she arrived, the national press generally seemed more interested in her as a symbol of the Southern civil rights movement, and treated her time in Detroit as a postscript, much as they characterized her refusal to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus as a spur of the moment decision, rather than the result of over a decade of civil rights activism. However, as Theoharis put it, "(f)rom the time in 1957 that Rosa Parks and her husband arrived in Detroit, the civil rights icon worked tirelessly...Parks' commitment to fight Jim Crow—North or South—was unrelenting."¹⁵

In Detroit, Parks found "(t)he northern promised land that wasn't," where racism "was almost as widespread as Montgomery."¹⁶ It may not have been as overt as the segregated busses and schools of the South, but in Detroit blacks were definitely second class, and the excuse that "this is not the South" was used to dismiss charges of discrimination. She almost immediately encountered the inequalities faced by African Americans in securing equal employment and housing, as evidenced by her difficulties in finding a job and a permanent place to live. When she and her husband moved into 3201 Virginia Park Street, she observed that it was almost entirely populated by African Americans. While at the time blacks were increasingly able to move into formerly white neighborhoods like this, their housing options were still limited, leading to overcrowding and the subdivision of single-family homes in the neighborhood.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Parks' early activism in Detroit was often related to the struggle for equal housing. In July 1963 she was a featured guest at a demonstration organized by the Detroit branch of the NAACP against housing discrimination in Oak Park, a suburb of Detroit, alongside Myrlie Evers, widow of slain civil rights activist Medgar Evers. Remembering her time in public housing in Alabama, Parks also worked to secure funding for public housing for African Americans in Detroit.

Parks appeared at several high profile national civil rights events in the summer of 1963. On June 23, two months prior to the March on Washington, Parks was front and center at the Walk

¹⁴ Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 158.

¹⁵ Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit* (New York: Harper Collins Press, 2017), 196.

¹⁶ Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks: A Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2000), 67.

to Freedom, the Detroit civil rights march that preceded its national cousin. Organized by a coalition of civil rights leaders in Detroit, including Reverend C. L. Franklin of New Bethel Baptist Church and Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr. of Central Congregational Church, both a few blocks from Parks' flat, the Walk to Freedom drew around 200,000 participants and featured a speech by King that presaged his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington. However, Parks' participation was barely mentioned (although she was pictured with King and parade marshal David Boston on the stage at Cobo Hall), even in the *Michigan Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* did cover Parks' appearance at a luncheon later that week, when she made a pointed comparison between housing segregation in Detroit and bus segregation in Montgomery, suggesting that Detroiters were as tired of the former as she had been of the latter when she made her famous protest.¹⁷

In August of 1963, Parks traveled to Washington DC to participate in the March on Washington. Although she was prominently featured on the dais at the Lincoln Memorial and was among the six women honored in the "Tribute to Women" at the event, Parks and her fellow women activists were shunted into a different march route, and it was not lost on her or the other women that they were being marginalized despite their prominent role in the movement.¹⁸ Later that fall, Parks attended two civil rights conferences in Detroit, the Northern Negro Leadership Conference, organized by Reverend Franklin, and its rival conference, the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference organized by Reverend Cleage. It may have been at the latter conference that she first met Malcolm X, who presented his famous "Address to the Grassroots" there.

After nearly twenty years in the civil rights movement, Parks secured her first paid political position when newly elected Congressman John Conyers hired Parks to work in his office in March 1965. Conyers, a native of Highland Park, Michigan (an independent city within the boundaries of Detroit), was a thirty-six-year-old civil rights lawyer who had worked as a legal observer during Selma, Alabama's voter registration campaign in 1963. Relatively well-known in the state for this and for his work as a legislative aide to Congressman John Dingell, Conyers ran in 1964 for a newly redrawn US congressional district on the west side of Detroit, which had created an opportunity to send a second black person in Detroit's congressional designation (Congressman Charles Diggs, Jr. represented a district on the city's east side). Parks, who had met Conyers through their mutual work to expand voting rights in the south, volunteered to work on his campaign in 1964. Although there were other black men in the primary race, most notably Richard Austin, who would later become Michigan's longtime Secretary of State, Conyers' more progressive and independent political views aligned better with Parks' philosophy. Although most of her work was behind the scenes, she proved a powerful advocate for Conyers with her friend Martin Luther King, Jr., and it was Parks who persuaded King to come to Detroit and endorse Conyers. It was very rare for King to make a political endorsement, and Conyers later noted that it "quadrupled my visibility in the black community... Therefore, if it wasn't for Rosa Parks, I never would have gotten elected." Conyers won the primary and the general election, becoming the sixth African American in the House of Representatives.¹⁹

¹⁷ "She Started the Revolt," *Michigan Chronicle*, June 29, 1963.

¹⁸ Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, 160-162.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180-182.

Conyers later said that Rosa Parks was the first person he wanted to hire for his congressional staff, considering her the most important civil rights activist in the state.²⁰ While Parks was officially an administrative assistant, and she did perform tasks like filing and answering the telephone (greatly surprising some constituents), she also served as an informal legislative aide, traveling around the city to visit constituents, gather information, and represent Conyers at meetings. As a black Congressman, Conyers often received communications from constituents reporting discrimination in housing and employment, and his office was reported to be a “hotbed of local and national black political organizing,” an atmosphere that may have appealed to Parks from her days working for the NAACP in Alabama. She also traveled with Conyers to national events, although Conyers’ aides later stressed that she followed her own political agenda at these, not Conyers’.²¹ This relatively high-profile job brought her back into public attention, and she received both fan mail and hate mail.

The same month she began working for Conyers, Rosa Parks journeyed back to Alabama to participate in the Selma to Montgomery march, part of a high-profile voting rights campaign organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Parks was a featured speaker at the post-march rally, but she first had to get there; she later recalled that, because she was not wearing a special jacket to identify her as a marcher, she kept being pulled out of the march. “Whenever they would put me out, I would just stand on the sidelines until somebody would pass by and say, ‘Mrs. Parks, come on and get in the march.’ I would say, ‘I was in it, but they put me out.’”²² At the rally, which was broadcast nationally, Parks was introduced as “the first lady of the movement,” and her speech reportedly drew the most enthusiastic response of any that day.²³ Parks was also horrified by the murder of Viola Liuzzo, a white activist from Detroit who was killed by the Ku Klux Klan in the aftermath of the Selma to Montgomery march and was among the mourners at Liuzzo’s funeral in Detroit. That August of 1965, Parks was among those invited to the White House to watch President Lyndon Johnson sign the voting rights act into law.²⁴

Parks had joined the Friends of SNCC in Detroit, a northern chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the leading national organizations of the civil rights movement, in the early 1960s. By 1966 she was a co-leader of the Detroit chapter, along with fellow civil rights campaigner Dorothy Dewberry. The Detroit chapter at that time supported a voting rights campaign in Lowndes County, Alabama, which had over five thousand black people eligible to vote, but not a single one registered. Parks helped to organize a fundraiser, and spoke at a mass meeting in Lowndes in March 1966.²⁵

²⁰ Theoharis, 164.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 170, 182-183.

²² Unattributed newspaper clipping preserved in the Rosa Parks Papers, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss85943.001808/>.

²³ Theoharis, 170, 188.

²⁴ “Johnson Signs Voting Rights Bill Into Law,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 7, 1965, 2.

²⁵ Theoharis, 170, 190.

Black Radicalism in the late 1960s and 1970s

In the latter part of the 1960s, Parks became increasingly more visible and radical in her civil rights activism. While she is usually associated with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the nonviolent movement advocated by him and by SNCC, she also supported more militant approaches. Parks had never been afraid of being associated with politically risky activism; in the early 1960s she supported the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, even as she and King were being pictured together there as attending a “Communist Training School.” Like her Detroit compatriots Reverends Cleage and Franklin, she saw the value in working across the spectrum of the civil rights movement and felt no conflict between working on behalf of the SCLC and the NAACP while also criticizing the latter organization for being too conservative. She was a supporter of the Black Power and black nationalist movements, both of which advocated for self-pride and self-determination for African Americans. Like Reverend Cleage, Parks saw militancy as a natural and necessary answer to the illegal and violent activities of white supremacists. She called Malcolm X, not King, her “hero,” and attended his last speech at Ford Auditorium in Detroit in 1965, a week before he was assassinated.



Photo taken at Cobo Hall in Detroit, 1963; New York Public Library Digital Collections.

The flat on Virginia Park Street was geographically at the heart of the growing radical black movement in Detroit. According to biographer Douglas Brinkley, “The Parks’ flat functioned as a bit of a salon in Virginia Park, filled with robust discussion and debate. Many of the young men who came by greatly admired Malcolm X, like the Parks did, and shared their feelings about the importance of the continued struggle.”²⁶ The flat was just a few blocks from Reverend Cleage’s Central Congregational Church, where in October 1966 she attended Stokely Carmichael’s speech on Black Power; during that speech, Carmichael singled her out as his hero.²⁷ Edward Vaughn, a leader of the radical black consciousness movement, later remembered that Parks was highly active in the movement. “Honest to God, almost every meeting I went to, she was always there,” he said. Vaughn had opened the first African American bookstore in Detroit not far from the Parks’ flat, and it became the intellectual center of the movement. Parks and her husband supported the bookstore and often participated in the intellectual and political discussions held there.²⁸

²⁶ Brinkley, *Rosa Parks*, 191-192.

²⁷ Theoharis, 191.

²⁸ Quoted in Theoharis, 222.

Parks and her husband were eyewitnesses to the 1967 rebellion in Detroit, which was sparked by an incident about a mile from their flat. They could see the flames and smell the smoke of burning buildings from the flat, and Raymond Parks' barbershop was looted and his tools stolen, while their car was vandalized. During the height of the rebellion, Parks fielded calls in Conyers' office, which acted as a clearinghouse for information.²⁹ During the rebellion, three young black men were killed by police at the Algiers Motel, at the Woodward Avenue end of Virginia Park Street. After the officers involved were cleared in the incident, the Citizens City-wide Action Committee, a grassroots organization of black militants and nationalists chaired by Reverend Cleage, held a "people's tribunal" to hear the case. Over two thousand people attended, and it was covered in the national and international press. Rosa Parks sat on the jury, which found the officers guilty of murder. Although the verdict was in no way legally enforceable, it did give the community a chance to grieve and express its outrage.³⁰

Parks' work on behalf of the radical wing of the movement did not diminish her connection to King and his successors. She was on the platform at King's funeral in April 1968, and joined the rally at the SCLC's Solidarity Day in Washington DC the following June, an event to lobby for more equitable access to housing, employment, and welfare programs. At the end of August, she was part of a "militant group" of blacks at the Democratic Convention who refused to back any presidential candidate in protest of the party's insufficient prioritization of black issues.³¹ A few days later, she was in Philadelphia for the National Conference on Black Power, while in early 1969 the SCLC asked her to lend support to the Mother's Day march in Charleston, South Carolina, to back striking hospital workers.

The intersection of racism and sexism remained a focus of interest for Parks into the late 1960s and 1970s. She had joined the Women's Public Affairs Committee of 1000 (WPAC), an integrated women's community and political action group, in the early 1960s, and this group sponsored a tribute and fundraising dinner for Parks at Cobo Hall in 1965, which drew Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King, Jr. and an activist in her own right, and Reverend Ralph Abernathy, another civil rights leader and friend of King, as speakers. In 1969, Parks introduced Shirley Chisholm, the first black Congresswoman, at a WPAC event in Detroit. When Angela Davis, militant civil rights activist, spoke to a crowd of 12,000 at the State Fairgrounds in June 1972, Rosa Parks (who had worked to free Davis following her arrest in 1970) introduced her, praising Davis as a "dear sister who has suffered so much persecution" and recognizing that Davis was among her successors in the civil rights movement.³² Parks was a co-founder of a defense fund for Joan Little, an African American woman who had been arrested for murder after killing a white prison guard who attempted to rape her, in 1975.³³ Little was the first woman to successfully use self-defense against sexual assault as an argument for acquittal.

²⁹ Theoharis, 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 179, 221.

³² John Oppedahl, "12,000 Hail Angela Davis," *Detroit Free Press*, June 19, 1972, 3A, 8A.

³³ "Joan Little Defense Committee Minutes and Membership List," Box 3, Folder 1, Rosa L. Parks Collection Papers, 1955-1976, Accession Number 775, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University. Little was eventually acquitted.

The 1970s represented a difficult time for Parks. She, her husband and her mother all experienced health issues that also strained the family's finances, despite her job with Congressman Conyers. An effort in 1976 to raise money to build and maintain a house for Parks (with the intention that it would eventually become a memorial), was never realized. Raymond Parks died in 1977, and her brother Sylvester McCauley passed away a few months later. Her mother followed two years later.



Rosa Parks on the porch of 3201 Virginia Park Street. *Detroit Free Press* photo, 1964.

Despite her economic and health troubles, Parks continued her civil rights work in Detroit and nationwide. She attended and gave an introduction at the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana in 1972, spoke at the national commemorative event in Montgomery, Alabama to mark the twentieth anniversary of the bus boycott, and participated in labor pickets and anti-Vietnam War rallies. She served as a trustee for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Social Change, and supported Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH (she was honored by PUSH for her achievement in the field of civics in April 1975).³⁴ Following a confrontation between police and Republic of New Afrika members in Mississippi in 1971, Parks, through her role in Conyers' office, intervened to obtain assurances from the Justice Department that the people in custody would be treated humanely, an action that was only later recognized as hers. She also supported local Black candidates during the 1960s and 1970s, including Coleman Young, George Crockett, Richard Austin, and Erma Henderson.³⁵

Continued Activism, 1980s to 2005

Parks maintained her quest for racial justice into the 1980s. She helped in 1985 to organize a boycott of a Dearborn ordinance designed to keep nonresidents (i.e. African Americans) out of city parks; Dearborn rescinded the ordinance on the eve of the boycott. That same year, Parks ran unsuccessfully for the vice president of the Detroit NAACP chapter, and in 1987 she was again organizing a boycott, this time of a local retail chain discriminating against black employees.³⁶ In the 1980s, she also spoke out against South Africa's apartheid regime, speaking at a protest in front of the South African Embassy in Washington, DC, in 1984 and flying to other antiapartheid

³⁴ "Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Social Change," Folder 4, Box 3; "PUSH Foundation," Folder 15, Box 3, both in Rosa L. Parks Collection Papers, 1955-1976, Accession Number 775, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

³⁵ Theoharis, 225, 186-187.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 230-31.

events around the country. In 1987, Parks founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development to educate black youth on black history and encourage the development of leadership skills. The Institute hearkened back to her establishment of youth wing of the Montgomery NAACP in the 1940s, and reflected her belief that the civil rights struggle would outlive her.³⁷

Rosa Parks authored several books including “*Rosa Parks: My Story*” with Jim Haskins, Puffin Books, New York, 1992; “*Quiet Strength*” with Gregory J. Reed, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994; “*Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue with Today’s Youth*” with Gregory J. Reed, Lee & Low Books, 1996; and her last book, “*I am Rosa Parks*,” Random House Children’s Books, New York, 1997, a children’s book which she co-authored with Jim Haskins.

Parks retired from John Conyers’ office in 1988, and finally moved from the ground floor flat at 3201 Virginia Park, where she had lived for over twenty-seven years. For the next six years, Rosa Parks lived a few a dozen blocks north at 9336 Wildemere (extant), until 1994 when she was assaulted in her home by a young man who also robbed her. A group of Detroiters, including Judge Damon Keith, former mayor Coleman Young, Conyers, and Martha Jean “The Queen” Steinberg arranged for her to move to the Riverfront Towers apartment building in downtown Detroit (250 Riverfront Drive, extant), where she resided for the rest of her life. Although now retired, she continued her interest in civil rights until her death, and in her final years was the recipient of many honors including, in 1996, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in 1999 she received the Congressional Gold Medal. In 1975, Detroit’s 12th Street was renamed Rosa Parks Boulevard. Rosa Parks passed away on October 24, 2005 at the age of 92. She was the first woman to lie in honor in the rotunda of the U. S. Capitol, and she was just the second private person (not a government official) to be honored this way. Her funeral was held at Greater Grace Temple at in Detroit, one of the largest churches in the city that has been the host of many high-profile funerals (most recently for Aretha Franklin in 2018). Parks’ funeral was attended by more than four thousand in the church, and hundreds more who stood outside.³⁸ Rosa Parks is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Detroit.

Conclusion

The role of Rosa Parks in the civil rights movement before and after the Montgomery bus boycott has often been overshadowed by that event. Her image has, in the collective consciousness, been fixed by that moment and solidified by the fact that those who interviewed her or wrote about her in the decades between the boycott and her death focused almost exclusively on her experience and the legacy of that event. Yet, as her biographers have pointed out, Parks spent more than half her life in Detroit, not Alabama, and she used the fame she had acquired following the boycott to bring attention to racial inequality in Detroit and across the country.

³⁷ Theoharis, 234-235.

³⁸ Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit* (New York: Harper Collins Press, 2017), 307-309.

Congressman John Conyers, for whom she worked for over twenty years, recognized the power her mere attendance could bring to an event, noting that “she spoke with her presence.”³⁹ From the March on Washington in 1963 to boycotts in the 1980s, from the NAACP to the Black Power movement to anti-apartheid, Parks made her presence felt as a leader of the civil rights movement. Throughout those years, she lived at 3201 Virginia Park Street. It was the residence she had occupied for the longest of any in her time in Detroit, twenty-seven years total, and it is the location most closely related to her contributions to civil rights during this period.

DESCRIPTION

The Rosa and Raymond Parks flat, located approximately four and one-half miles northwest of the Detroit River, was constructed in 1917 in the Wildermere Park subdivision. Situated east of Grand River Avenue, west of Rosa Parks Boulevard, north of West Grand Boulevard, and south of Joy Road, the dwelling is located in the Wildemere Park area of the near western side of Detroit. Placed on generally flat terrain, Virginia Park Street is twenty to twenty-one feet wide and oriented in a northeast-southwest direction. Sidewalks line each side of Virginia Park Street and the houses on the 3200 block of Virginia Park Street are set back from the road by a berm with medium-sized trees planted in the berm.

Two-Family Dwelling, 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street (1917)

Initial owner: Louis Nosanchuk, builder

Later ownership: The Campbell family (1948 – present)

Significant residents: Rosa and Raymond Parks

This two and one-half story two-family dwelling was built in 1917 according to City of Detroit permit #15990. The dwelling has been owned by the Campbell family since 1948 and remains in their ownership to the present day. The dwelling is on lot number 432 in the Wildermere (sic) Park subdivision. Today, the property includes the eastern 15 feet of lot 431 which is west of the building and was not part of the original lot. **The additional land, purchased as a side yard after the Parks residency and therefore after the period of significance, is considered non-contributing to the district.** With the addition of the 15-foot side yard, the parcel addressed as 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street measures forty-five (45) feet wide by one-hundred-and-eighteen (118) feet long. The two-family dwelling measures twenty-four (24) feet wide by fifty (50) feet long.

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat is located on a rectangular residential lot, a corner property at the southwest corner of the intersection of Virginia Park Street and Wildemere Avenue. The home’s front (north) façade faces Virginia Park Street. There is a small front yard with a manicured lawn, and a lawn in the berm (right of way) between the sidewalk and the street. There is a tall hedge at the western property line, and foundation plantings in front of the porch. A medium-sized oak tree is located in the berm (right of way) at the street. The east elevation abuts the sidewalk, while at the west elevation there is a fifteen-foot-wide strip of grass between the west elevation and the property to the west (**considered noncontributing to the district**).

³⁹ Theoharis, 207.

The fifteen-foot-wide strip is surrounded by a chain link fence enclosing the lot. The adjacent property to the west is now vacant. At the rear (south) of the dwelling is a small backyard. A two-car garage is located at the rear line of the lot, adjacent to the alley and facing Wildemere Avenue. Chain link fences enclose the yard between the dwelling and garage. The east fence, abutting the sidewalk, sits on a low concrete knee wall.



The dwelling is a two-and-one-half story vernacular style two-family home with a partially raised basement. It is of brick masonry construction with the north (front) and east elevations of dark red brick, while the south and west faces are common dark orange brick. The roof is of wood-framed construction and covered with asphalt shingles. The roof is hipped at the front and gabled at the back. A hipped dormer projects from the roof on the north side. A square brick chimney rises from the middle of the roof on the east side.

At the front façade, two sets of concrete steps flanked by stepped brick cheek walls topped with stone coping lead up on either side to the full-length front porch. Each set of steps has decorative iron railings to each side. The porch has a concrete slab floor and a flat roof carried on four brick piers. A brick wall with stone coping spans the porch between the two center piers. The brick piers extend through the roof of the porch to form a second-story open porch with decorative iron railings between the piers. The first floor of the front elevation has single-leaf entry doors at either side. They are flat panel wood doors with aluminum storms. Between the doors is a three-sided bay window.

The second floor has a similar arrangement. Here, there is only one wood door, on the east end, and it has an inset full-height glass panel. At the west end is a single window. The hipped dormer has three windows on the north side and is sided with fish scale asphalt shingles. All of the windows on the front façade are wood framed with double-hung, one-over-one wood sash covered by aluminum single-pane storm windows. The doors and windows have stone lintels and sills, with the exception of the dormer windows and the second-floor bay window and west end window, whose heads are covered by a wood fascia that runs under the eaves.

At the east elevation, there are five symmetrically spaced square basement windows with nine-light panes covered by wood-framed storms. The first and second floors have identical fenestration patterns. At the north end are small horizontal two-light windows; the lower window is covered by wood, but the upper window has single panes. Proceeding south, the next set of windows are tripled with the center units slightly larger than the flanking sash. South of this, each floor has single rectangular windows. At the south end are paired windows of equal size.

Except for the basement and the horizontal windows, all are double-hung, one-over-one wood sash with aluminum single-pane storms windows. All windows on this elevation have stone sills and lintels except for the second-floor windows whose heads touch the narrow wood fascia that runs under the eaves.

The south elevation has a full-length two-story porch. The first-level porch has a concrete floor carried on brick piers and enclosed by concrete block on the east side and wood lattice on the other sides. Concrete steps are set on the south side and flanked by a metal railing. A metal railing encloses the porch on both levels, and the upper porch is supported by three decorative metal railings. At the first floor of the dwelling there are two single-leaf entry doors. They are wood flat panel doors with small windows in the upper half. Both have stone lintels and aluminum storm doors. At the second floor is another single-leaf door and a rectangular window opening. Here, the door appears to be an original four-paneled wood door with an upper glass panel. It also has a stone lintel and aluminum storm door. The window is double-hung, one-over-one with an aluminum storm, and it has a stone sill but its head abuts the narrow wood fascia that runs across the top of the wall. The gable end on the half story is sided with asphalt fish scale shingles. It has paired rectangular windows with double-hung, one-over-one sash.



2009 image from Google Maps Street View depicting double stained-glass windows no longer present on the east façade. Condition of window openings at time of study can be seen on page 26.

At the west elevation, there are three symmetrically spaced square basement windows with nine-light panes covered by wood-framed storms. The first and second floors each have three symmetrically spaced single rectangular windows. At the north end of the second floor is a slightly offset window denoting an interior stair. The first and second floor windows are double-hung, one-over-one units with aluminum storms. Most have stone lintels and sills with the exception of the three upper windows on the second floor whose heads touch the narrow wood fascia that runs under the eaves.

Elements such as doors, railings and storm windows are modern types and their installation timeframe is unknown. The date of the planting of the hedges and installation of chain link fence is unknown. All of these elements are considered non-historic. There is photographic evidence (above) that the small double windows on the Wildemere Street façade (east façade) of the

building previously contained stained glass (date of removal unknown). These windows were not present at the time of this study and the first-floor window openings were boarded.

Interior (First Floor Flat)

The flat historically occupied by Rosa and Raymond Parks covers the entire first floor except for the stairs to the second-floor flat which are entered from the west door on the north elevation. The first-floor flat is entered from the east door on the north elevation and leads immediately into a small foyer with a single leaf door straight ahead (south) to the dining room. West of the foyer is the living room, which contains the three-sided bay window with double-hung sash. Paired wood French doors with beveled glass panes lead from the living room into the dining room to the south. A door on the west wall of the dining room opens into the front bedroom on the west side, while the east wall of the dining room has a tripled window with double-hung sash. The front bedroom has one double-hung window at the northwest corner along with a small closet on the north wall. A short hallway connects the dining room to the kitchen at the back (south) end of the dwelling. The hallway contains an original wood built-in shelving unit with two drawers on the west wall. A door on the west side of the hallway leads to the second bedroom. In this room, there is another single double-hung window located on the west wall along with a closet on the south wall. The foyer, dining room, and two bedrooms all have original hardwood floors, plaster walls and ceilings, and wood base and window trim. Many of the original five-panel wood doors also remain.

A door on the east side of the hallway accesses the bathroom. The bathroom has white porcelain mosaic floor tile and white subway tile halfway up the wall with plaster above. The bathroom contains the original white porcelain-clawed bathtub and wood and mirror wall cabinet. The toilet and vanity sink are modern. The bathroom has one double-hung window on the east wall. At the rear of the dwelling is the kitchen. It has linoleum flooring, plaster walls with a wood chair rail, and paired east-facing double-hung windows. A porcelain sink is located on the east wall of the kitchen. There is also an exit doorway on the rear south wall leading to the first-floor porch on the south side of the dwelling. The exterior door is a modern replacement.

Garage, 3201-3203 Virginia Park Street (c.1917)

The detached garage at the rear (south) end of the property is a one-story, rectangular building. It has a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles. All elevations are sided in wood clapboard painted yellow with flat trim boards on the corners and around the openings. The metal garage door is located on the east elevation facing Wildemere Avenue. Two window openings on the north elevation have been boarded up, while a single-leaf entry door is located on the west elevation.

Integrity

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat retains a high degree of integrity. Aside from replacement doors, the exterior appears virtually unchanged from its appearance during its occupation by Mrs. and Mr. Parks. The interior of the flat occupied by Mrs. and Mr. Parks is highly intact, reflecting its original floor plan and most of the original interior finishes. The garage is included as contributing to the historic district.

Criteria

The proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat historic district appears to meet Criteria Number One and Number Two adopted by the Historic Designation Advisory Board, as well as National Register Criterion Consideration G:

- (1) HDAB Criteria Number One: Sites, building, structures or archeological sites where cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political or architectural history of the community, city, state or nation is particularly reflected or exemplified.
- (2) HDAB Criteria Number Two: Sites, buildings, structures, or archaeological sites which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the community, city, state, or national history.
- (3) National Register Criterion Consideration G: properties that are eligible for having achieved significance within the past fifty years and have exceptional importance.

List of Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

The proposed Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat historic district consists of two contributing building resources: the dwelling and the garage.

The 15-foot side yard west of the building is noncontributing to the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District. The side yard is fifteen (15) feet east of the western boundary of the parcel legally described as “432 east 15 feet of lot 431 of the Wildermere Park Subdivision; Liber 19, Page 98, Plats, Wayne County Records.”

COMPOSITION OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine members, who are residents of Detroit, and two ex-officio members. The appointed members are Melanie A. Bazil, Carolyn C. Carter, Louis Fisher, Eric Hergenreder, Theresa Holder-Hagood, Calvin Jackson, Osvaldo Rivera, Sharon Sexton, and William Worden. The ex-officio members, who may be represented by members of their staff, are the Director of the City Planning Commission and the Director of the Planning and Development Department. Ad hoc members for this study are Dr. Gloria House, friend of Rosa Parks, and Ms. Lanay Gilbert-Williams, president of the Wildemere Park Neighborhood Association.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The local historic designation report is derived from the National Register of Historic Places nomination prepared by Sandra Little and Ruth Mills of Quinn Evans Architects in 2019. The Historic Designation Advisory Board report was prepared by Rebecca Savage, Lead Architectural Historian.

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Wildermere (sic) Subdivision Plat, 1893.

DESIGNATION PHOTOS

Photographer: Rebecca Savage
Taken July 19, 2023.



1 of 5: view of north-facing façade from corner of Virginia Park and Wildemere Streets, looking southwest.



2 of 5: oblique view of north-facing façade and west-facing side elevation, showing non-historic side lot, looking southeast.



3 of 5: view of east-facing side elevation, looking west. Note window openings previously occupied by stained-glass windows (on first and second stories, left of front porch).

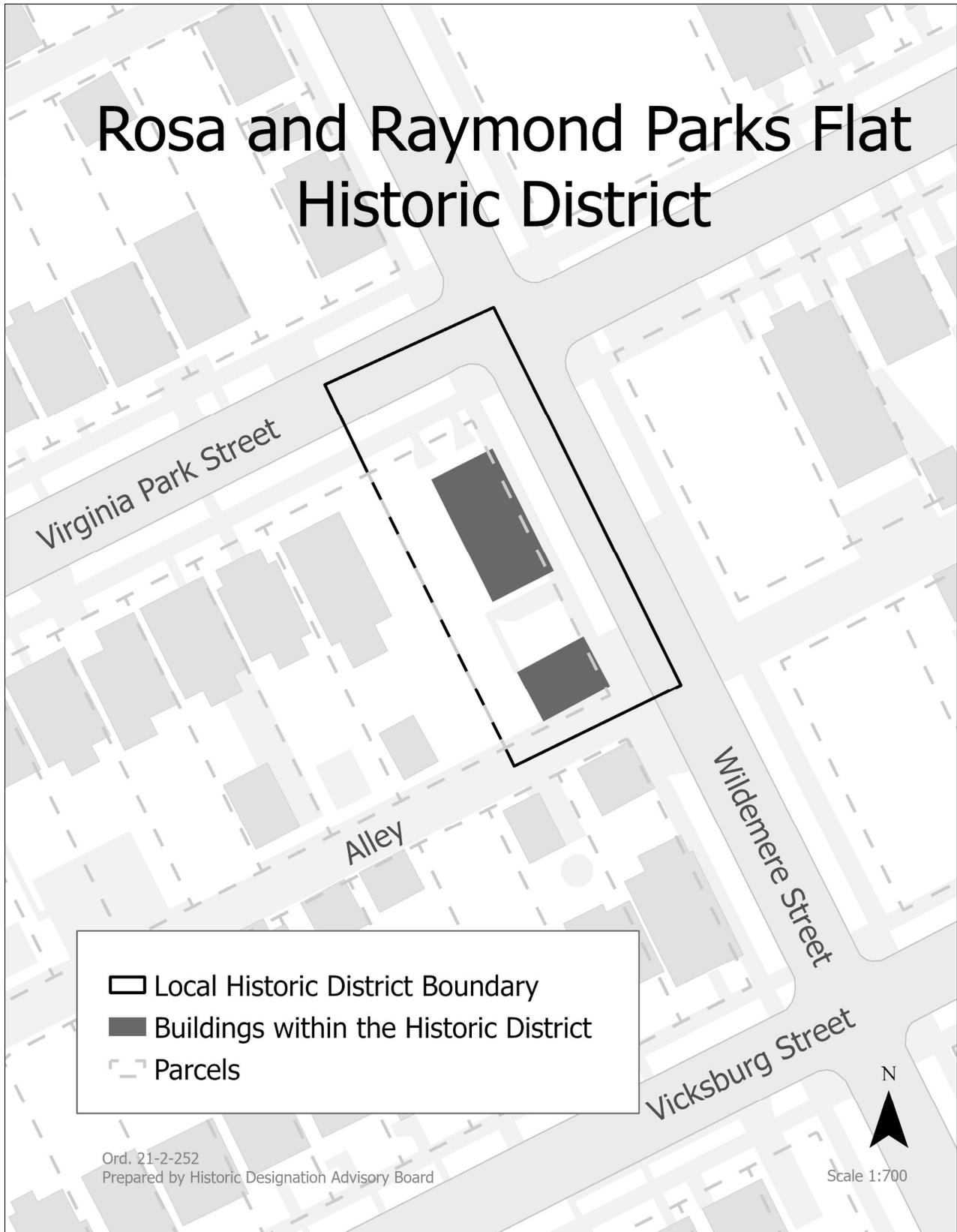


4 of 5: view of south-facing rear elevation, looking northwest.



5 of 5: oblique view of contributing garage, looking south.

Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District



S U M M A R Y

This ordinance amends Chapter 21 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, *History*, to establish the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District and to define the elements of design for the district by adding Article II, *Historic Districts and Landmarks*, Division 5, *Designated Districts*, Section 21-2-252, *Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District*.

1 **BY COUNCIL MEMBER _____:**

2 **AN ORDINANCE** to Chapter 21 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, *History*, to establish the
3 Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District and to define the elements of design for the district
4 by adding Article II, *Historic Districts and Landmarks*, Division 5, *Designated Districts*, Section
5 21-2-252, *Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District*.

6 **IT IS HEREBY ORDAINED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY OF DETROIT**
7 **THAT:**

8 **Section 1.** Chapter 21 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, *History*, is amended by adding Article
9 II, Division 5, Section 21-2-252 as follows:

10 **Sec. 21-2-252. Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District.**

11 (a) A historic district to be known as the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District
12 is established in accordance with the provisions of this article.

13 (b) This historic district designation is certified as being consistent with the Detroit
14 Master Plan of Policies.

15 (c) The boundaries of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District, as shown on
16 the map on file in the Office of the City Clerk, using cardinal directions are as follows: beginning
17 at a point, that point being the intersection of the centerlines of Virginia Park Street and Wildemere
18 Street; thence south along said center line of Wildemere Street to its intersection with the centerline
19 of the alley lying between Virginia Park Street and Vicksburg Street; thence westward to the
20 southern extension of the western boundary of the eastern 15 feet of lot 431 of the Wildermere
21 Park Subdivision; Liber 19, Page 98, Plats, Wayne County Records; thence north along said
22 western boundary extended to the centerline of Virginia Park Street; thence east to the Point of
23 Beginning.

1 (d) The elements of design, as defined in Section 21-2-2 of this Code, for the district
2 are as follows:

3 (1) *Height.* The contributing duplex building in the district is a house that is two-and-
4 one-half stories tall. The building's half story is contained within the roof. The one-
5 story garage is a contributing building.

6 (2) *Proportion of buildings' front façades.* The proportion of the building's front
7 façade is taller than wide.

8 (3) *Proportion of openings within the façades.* The proportion of openings varies for
9 each façade. The front façade, on the north of the building, is typical of the
10 vernacular style two-family house in Detroit. The two front entrance doors are on
11 the east and west side of the front façade and the front façade has an upper porch
12 door at the second story's east side. Each of the entry doors has an aluminum screen
13 door and a wood mid-century era single-leaf door that contains a small vertical
14 window. There are three double-hung aluminum windows in the center of the
15 façade on each level. There is a double-hung aluminum window in the western side
16 of the second level. At the attic level is a dormer containing three small double-
17 hung windows. The front façade is composed of approximately 40 percent
18 openings. The windows and openings on the west façade, facing the adjacent
19 property, are in varying locations. On the west façade are three double-hung one-
20 over-one wood windows on the first and second story. There are three fixed single-
21 pane square wood windows at the basement level. An additional window for the
22 staircase landing at the north side of the second story is a double-hung wood
23 window. The west façade is composed of approximately 30 percent openings. The

1 south façade has two rear entry doors with aluminum screen doors and a mid-
2 century wood single-leaf door with a small horizontal window in each. The second-
3 story porch has an entry door at the eastern side and a double-hung wood window
4 at the western side of the porch. The second-story porch door has an aluminum
5 screen door and an original four-paneled wood door with a window at the upper
6 half of the door. There are paired double-hung wood windows in the south gable at
7 the attic level. The south façade is composed of approximately 20 percent openings.
8 The east façade has windows in matching configurations at the first and second
9 stories. At the northern side of the east façade are small, paired wood windows at
10 the first and second stories that are single-pane casement windows, although the
11 window on the first floor is boarded from the interior. At the south of the small
12 windows are three grouped double-hung aluminum windows. South of these
13 windows is a single double-hung aluminum window. Paired double-hung
14 aluminum windows are at the southern side of the east façade. Five symmetrically
15 spaced square basement-level windows each have a wood-frame storm window
16 protecting the original divided wood windows inside. The east façade is composed
17 of approximately 40 percent openings.

18 (4) *Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades.* The rhythm of solids to voids in the front
19 façade of the vernacular style house is arranged horizontally at regular intervals.

20 (5) *Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets.* The overall character of the district is
21 one of a visually distinct residential area. The residential pattern of Virginia Park
22 Street has a repetitive rhythm of setbacks and spacing between the houses. Lot sizes
23 are inconsistent and range from 50 feet wide to 30 feet wide by 118 feet deep. There

1 are approximately 11 feet between the houses, although there is a range in spacing
2 along the street. Approximately 15 percent of the lots of the 3201 block of Virginia
3 Park Street are vacant land, due to demolition.

4 (6) *Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.* The two-family residential building
5 in the district has its entrances placed at the east and west side of the front façade.
6 There is a concrete porch projection on the front façade of the house. The entrance
7 steps and porch projections have a range of placement and styles throughout
8 Virginia Park Street, although they create a rhythm with a similar set-back from the
9 sidewalk. The detached garage has its vehicle door facing Wildemere Street, along
10 the east elevation, and is entered through a single pedestrian door on the north
11 elevation.

12 (7) *Relationship of materials.* A variety of building materials exist throughout the
13 district, including metal, wood, concrete, aluminum, limestone, asphalt, and glass.
14 The north, west, and east façades are sheathed in dark red brick. The south façade
15 is sheathed in light orange brick. The south façade's gable is faced with maroon
16 colored fish-scale asphalt shingles. The roof is covered in light brown asphalt
17 shingles. Two sets of concrete stairs lead to the front entrance. Window frames and
18 sashes are aluminum with limestone sills and lintels. Aluminum gutters surround
19 the roof line of each level. Black wrought iron railings are at each staircase and at
20 the porch levels on the north and south facades. Elements such as doors, railings,
21 and storm windows are modern types and their installation timeframe is unknown.
22 The detached garage is sided with wood clapboard and has an asphalt shingle roof.
23 Landscape elements include a concrete driveway, curbs, and sidewalks, as well as

1 a grey metal chain link fence at the Wildemere Street property line, the western
2 property line, and at the alley. Planting areas surrounding the house consist of grass
3 lawns, yew, and boxwood shrubs. A medium sized oak tree is planted in the berm
4 at the street. The date of the planting of the hedges and installation of chain link
5 fence is unknown.

6 (8) *Relationship of textures.* Textural effects on the two contributing buildings include
7 brick siding, wood clapboard, and asphalt shingles contrasting with glass windows.
8 The most significant texture is the use of dark red striated brick contrasting with an
9 asphalt shingled roof and asphalt fish-scale siding on the north façade dormer and
10 rear south gable. The garage is sided with wood clapboard, and has a hipped
11 shingled roof and metal garage door.

12 (9) *Relationship of colors.* There are varying colors used on the house and garage,
13 including light brown, dark red, black, white, and light yellow. The dominating
14 colors are the dark red of the brick, light yellow of the window trim, and light brown
15 of the roof shingles. An additional color is the light grey of the concrete steps and
16 concrete block porch foundation. There are green lawns, street trees, and shrubs in
17 the district. Sidewalks and the driveway consist of slabs of naturally colored gray
18 concrete. The garage is faced with yellow wood siding and the south façade has
19 been covered by a white siding with a light brown roof and dark grey vehicle door.

20 (10) *Relationship of architectural details.* The vernacular style house notably features
21 front porches on the first and second stories of the north and south facades, a rear
22 gable end on the south façade, and concrete stairs. A notable architectural detail is
23 the projecting hipped dormer at the north façade. The district's contributing

1 resources include a two-and-a half story home and a one story garage. The
2 vernacular style garage has a hipped roof and is rectangular in plan.

3 (11) *Relationship of roof shapes.* The district has two contributing resources. The
4 residential building has a hipped roof at the front and gabled roof at the back. The
5 garage has a hipped roof.

6 (12) *Walls of continuity.* The setbacks on Virginia Park Street are approximately 15 feet
7 from the curb and create strong visual walls of continuity.

8 (13) *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.* The flat
9 terrain of the Wildemere Park neighborhood is bordered to the north by West Euclid
10 Street, to the south by West Grand Boulevard, to the west by Dexter Avenue, and
11 to the east by Linwood Street, which are approximately 30 feet in width. The 15 feet
12 west of the east line of Lot 410 of the Wildemere Park Subdivision is considered
13 noncontributing to the district. Landscape features of the neighborhood include
14 asphalt paved streets, concrete curbs, driveways, and sidewalks. There are private
15 lawns and yards on the interior streets. Sidewalks line each side of the streets in the
16 area and are set back from the road by a grass berm. Street trees are sometimes in
17 the grass berm, but not always extant due to their limited lifespan. Virginia Park
18 Street is lined with single-family and duplex residential properties that are separated
19 from the adjacent streets' side lots by an alley. The typical treatment of Virginia
20 Park Street's single-family and duplex dwellings is that they are erected on a flat or
21 slightly graded front lawn. The front lawn area is generally covered with grass turf,
22 subdivided by a straight concrete sidewalk leading to the front entrance.

1 (14) *Relationship of open space to structures.* The district is adjacent to similar duplex
2 and single-family houses to the west, east, north, and south. On Virginia Park Street
3 and the nearby side-streets, public sidewalks line each side of the street and are set
4 back from the road by a grass berm. Alleys are located between each pair of streets.
5 Most of the alleys are dirt or gravel, while some alleys are paved with concrete. All
6 houses have rear yards as well as front yards. Fences of metal, wood, or composite
7 vinyl separate individual properties from the alley and sides of the houses. The
8 majority of fences on Virginia Park Street are of metal chain link. Backyard fences
9 are common throughout the district. There are a number of vacant lots in the
10 Wildemere Park neighborhood.

11 (15) *Scale of façades and façade elements.* The Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat is a two-
12 family residential building that is two-and-a-half stories tall in scale. Elements and
13 details are in proportion to the building's façade.

14 (16) *Directional expression of front elevations.* The directional expression of the front
15 elevation of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat is to the north, the street-front
16 direction of Virginia Park Street, as are the neighboring houses.

17 (17) *Rhythm of building setbacks.* The similar setbacks of the façades of the Virginia
18 Park Street houses adjacent to the district creates a consistent orientation on the
19 street. Most residential houses on the side streets are set back from the sidewalk by
20 approximately 15 feet.

21 (18) *Relationship of lot coverages.* The lot coverage of the district's contributing two-
22 family dwelling and contributing garage is approximately seventy 70 percent.

1 (19) *Degree of complexity within the façades.* The degree of complexity has been
2 determined by features typical and appropriate for the vernacular style duplex. The
3 district's two staircases leading to the front porch, four brick piers, hipped dormer,
4 and second-story porch are all contributing to the complexity of the front façade.

5 (20) *Orientation, vistas, overviews.* The orientation of the Wildemere Park
6 neighborhood streets is to the northwest. The district's contributing buildings are
7 oriented toward the northwest. The primary vista is created by the landscaped lawns
8 of houses on Virginia Park Street. Because of the standard setbacks and the general
9 lack of front yard fencing, most of the streetscape appears as an unbroken greenbelt.

10 (21) *Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.* The front façade of the Rosa and Raymond
11 Parks Flat is a symmetrical, balanced composition. The vernacular style building
12 has a highly ordered symmetric composition with the entrance doors at the east and
13 west side of the front porch and the front steps leading to each entrance door.

14 (22) *General environmental character.* The district is in a residential area of the
15 Wildemere Park neighborhood, mostly built in the period between 1910 to 1930.
16 Located approximately four-and-a-half miles from the City's center, the
17 surrounding area to the north, south, east, and west features several substantial
18 residential subdivisions of duplex and single-family houses. East of Virginia Park
19 Street is Linwood Street, a residential, retail, and commercial corridor including
20 religious and retail structures, beauty and barber shops, and an auto repair facility.

1 **Section 2.** All ordinances or parts of ordinances, or resolutions, in conflict with this
2 ordinance are repealed.

3 **Section 3.** This ordinance is declared necessary for the preservation of the public peace,
4 health, safety, and welfare of the people of the City of Detroit.

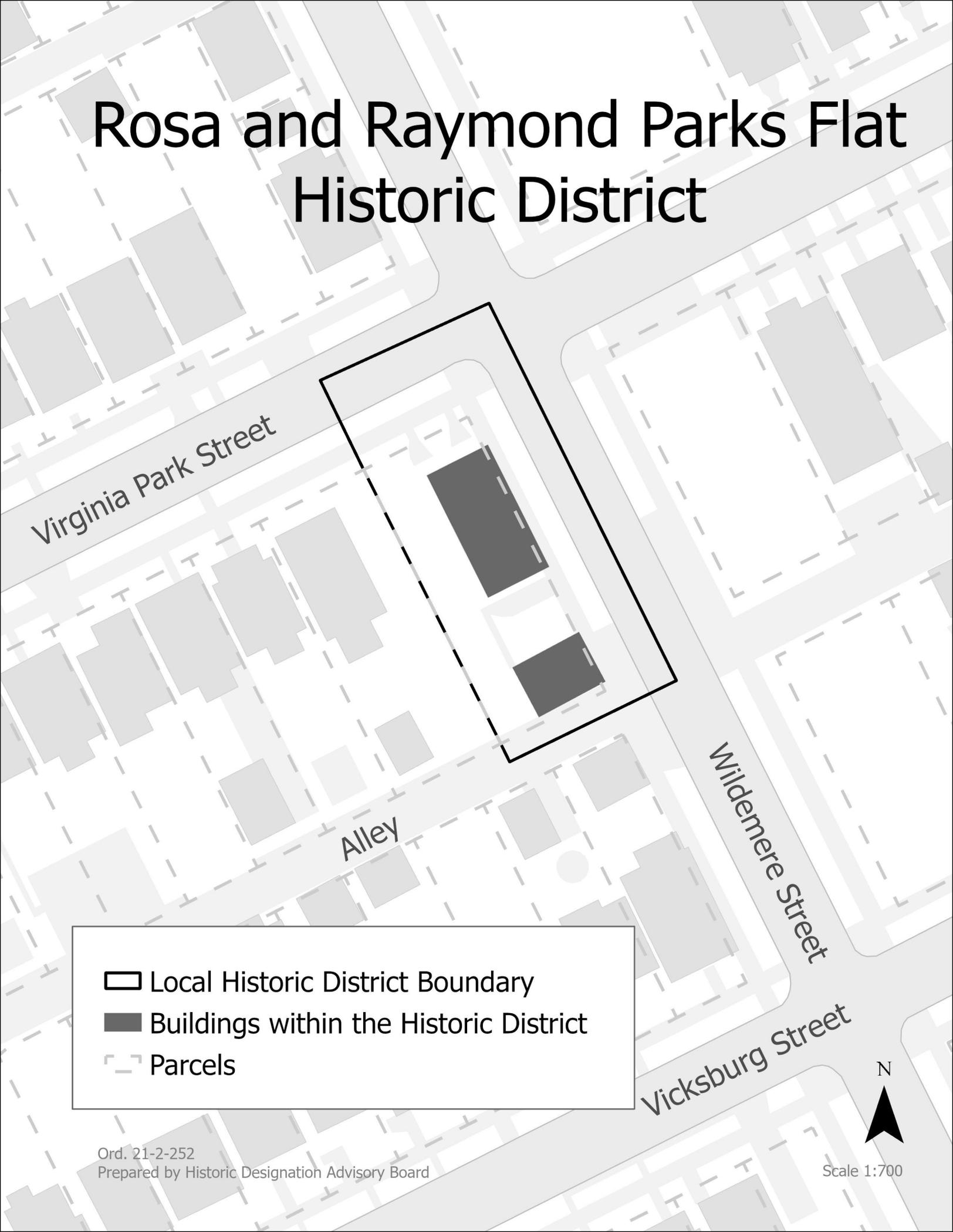
5 **Section 4.** If this ordinance is passed by a two-thirds majority of City Council members
6 serving, it shall be given immediate effect and shall become effective upon publication in
7 accordance with Section 4-118(1) of the 2012 Detroit City Charter; otherwise, it shall become
8 effective in accordance with Section 4-118(2) of the 2012 Detroit City Charter.

Approved as to Form:



Conrad L. Mallett,
Corporation Counsel

Rosa and Raymond Parks Flat Historic District



Virginia Park Street

Alley

Wildemere Street

Vicksburg Street

 Local Historic District Boundary

 Buildings within the Historic District

 Parcels

