

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

PIF Resource Information Sheet

This information sheet is designed to provide the Virginia Department of Historic Resources with the necessary data to be able to evaluate the significance of the district for possible listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a formal nomination, but a necessary step in determining whether or not the district could be considered eligible for listing. Please take the time to fill in as many fields as possible. A greater number of completed fields will result in a more timely and accurate assessment. Staff assistance is available to answer any questions you have in regards to this form.

General Property Information		For Staff Use Only DHR ID #: 128-6269	
District Name(s): Wasena Historic District 1910-1950s		Open to the Public? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
District or Selected Building Date(s): _____		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Circa <input type="checkbox"/> Pre <input type="checkbox"/> Post	
Main District Streets and/or Routes: Westchester, Winona, Wasena, Howbert, Valley, Floyd, Kerns, Hamilton, Summit, Brighton, and Main streets		City: Roanoke	Zip: 24015
County or Ind. City: Roanoke		USGS Quad(s): Roanoke	

Physical Character of General Surroundings

Approx.
Acreage: 174 acres Setting (choose one): City Urban Town Suburban Rural Transportation Corridor

Site Description Notes/Notable Landscape Features/Streetscapes: The district is bounded by the Roanoke River and Wasena Park [DHR 128-0252] at the northern end and Evergreen Burial Park along the east border. The area is hilly with three ridges running east to west along Wasena Avenue, Hamilton Avenue, and Windsor Avenue (just to the south of the district). Main Street runs from the southern end, serving as the eastern boundary in this area, to the Wasena Bridge in the NE corner that connects the neighborhood to the Southwest neighborhood (Southwest Historic District) and downtown. The district is primarily residential (single-family) with park land along the river, a commercial section along Main Street just south of the bridge and an industrial area to the east of Main Street at the north end. A spur line from the Norfolk & Western Railway (formerly Virginian Railway and currently Norfolk Southern) served this industrial area.

Ownership Categories: Private Public-Local Public-State Public-Federal

General District Information

What were the historical uses of the resources within the proposed district? Examples include: Dwelling, Store, Barn, etc...

Single-family residential, commercial, industrial, public park

What are the current uses? (if other than the historical use) Same as historic

Architectural styles or elements of buildings within the proposed district: Craftsman, Bungalow, American Foursquare, Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, other

Architects, builders, or original owners of buildings within the proposed district: not known

Are there any known threats to this district? Neglect, inappropriate alterations, additions, infill construction

General Description of District: (Please describe building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district and a general setting and/or streetscape description.)

The Wasena Historic District is located immediately south and west of the Roanoke River in the city of Roanoke, Virginia in a hilly area that rises and falls from the bottomlands of the river to several ridges. The neighborhood consists of approximately 450 structures -- the majority of which are residential with a few commercial buildings at the north end of Main Street and industrial buildings located along a railroad spur at the eastern edge of the district. The Roanoke River bounds the district on the north and eastern edges with Main Street continuing the boundary to Summit Avenue on the southern edge. Brighton Street and the Evergreen Cemetery form the boundary to the west. The boundaries follow the original boundaries of the Wasena Land Company as platted in 1910 and 1917. The Old Southwest neighborhood (Southwest Historic District), a turn-of-the-century residential neighborhood, is located across the river to the north. The Raleigh Court Land Corporation developed a large residential neighborhood to the west of Wasena in the 1920s and 1930s. Barbour Heights, a much smaller subdivision developed immediately south of Wasena during the same period. The area to the east of Main Street and south of Floyd Avenue developed in the 1940s and 1950s.

With the exception of the small commercial and industrial areas at the north end of Main Street and to the east along the river, all of the structures in the district are residential. The houses are primarily single dwellings with a few duplexes. Sanborn maps indicate that the neighborhood was approximately 80% developed by the mid 1930s with the exception of Winchester Street, and fully developed by 1951. The houses, which follow a uniform setback, are typically one-and-a-half to two stories and are of frame or brick veneer construction. Styles of houses reflect the diverse tastes of the early 20th century and include good examples of the Craftsman/Bungalow, American Foursquare, Tudor Revival and Colonial Revival styles. The commercial area along Main Street just south of the Wasena Bridge consists of several one-story brick veneer buildings with simple storefronts. Several of the adjacent residential structures on the corners have been converted have a commercial section that faces Main Street or have been converted to commercial use. The Roanoke Ice and Cold Storage Company, built in 1926 at the east end of Wasena Avenue and Howbert Street near the river and railroad spur, consists of a large 5-story brick storage building with 1-story wing and a timber-frame stable building. The Wasena Bridge, which provides access to Old Southwest and downtown Roanoke at the north end of the district, was constructed in 1938-1939 as a W.P.A. project. This concrete bridge replaced an earlier steel bridge that was built in 1911-1912. This bridge serves as the entrance to the Wasena neighborhood.

Wasena Park [DHR 128-0252] bounds the district on the north side. This land under the bridge and along the river has always been reserved as open park land. A stone picnic shelter was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The park also includes a playground, ball fields, tennis courts, a skateboard park and a 1960s reconstruction of a train station. A railroad spur, known as the "belt-line" runs along the southern edge of the park and extends over to the industrial area while the main railroad tracks run along the north side of the river. A smaller, open green space exists along the steep hillside between Valley and Hamilton streets. This area was originally labeled "Wasena Park" in the original subdivision plat. Stone walls extend along the upper edge of this hill as well as in other areas of the neighborhood where the terrain steeply drops off.

Significance Statement: Briefly note any significant events, personages, and/or families associated with the proposed district. It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or genealogies to this form. Please list all sources of information. Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

Wasena, meaning “beautiful view,” was incorporated in 1910 by the Wasena Land Company from farmland purchased from George Howbert. The Wasena Land Company, with P.S. Miller as president, announced immediately that the wooden bridge would be reinforced with a new steel bridge over the Roanoke River and that street grading and the layout of lots would begin (Barnes, 1968: 480). The Wasena Land Company (later the Wasena Land Corporation) stipulated lot size, setbacks, use, cost of construction and ethnicity of current and future grantees (Roanoke City Deed Books). The Wasena Land Company filed its first report in 1910 stating that \$11,000 worth of lots had been sold in the first year (Barnes, 480). By early 1911, the company reported sales of lots in the first ten days amounting to \$48,239. At this time, lots could be purchased for \$2.00 down and \$2.00 per week in a payment plan (Barnes, 486). After a lull in development during World War I, the Wasena Land Company began aggressively selling lots again in 1917 with a large force of sales agents and offices in the well-known Strikland Building downtown on Jefferson Street (Barnes, 545).

The expansion of residential neighborhoods to the south side of the river reflected the rapid growth of Roanoke in the early 20th century and the prosperity of its citizens in the years following World War I. The City of Roanoke soon followed the land companies, annexing Wasena, Ghent/Virginia Heights, Raleigh Court, South Roanoke, Forest Park and sections of Villa Heights in 1919 and additional suburbs in 1926. Naturally, the growth of these suburbs depended on the construction of bridges to cross the river and the availability of transportation as they began to be beyond walking distance to the center of the City. Unlike other suburbs, such as Ghent and South Roanoke across the 13th Street and Jefferson Street bridges, Wasena could not be serviced by the street car lines due to the instability of the steel bridge and the steep incline of Main Street. This prompted the Roanoke Rapid Transit Company to initiate the city’s first bus route in 1924 from the street car terminus on the north side of the Wasena Bridge south on Main Street to Floyd Avenue. Thus, Wasena became the city’s first “bus suburb.” By 1938, the Roanoke Railroad and Electric Company petitioned City Council to begin removing all street car lines except for the Belmont-West End and South Roanoke-Raleigh Court lines and by 1948, the street car had been phased out entirely from Roanoke (Barnes 1968: 777).

The construction of the Virginian Railroad in 1909 also spurred development of the area. The railroad was responsible for the construction of the first wooden bridge to cross the Roanoke River to George Howbert’s land, which would become Wasena. The Roanoke Ice and Cold Storage Company built a large facility next to the river with a spur line to the Virginian Railway tracks in the early 1920s. By 1927, the facility had the capacity to store 10,000 barrels of apples (Barnes, 545). This company continued to function at this location into the 1960s (Roanoke City Directories). Further west along the river, the Norwich area developed near the 13th Street (later Memorial) bridge with industries located near the railroad tracks and the river. These two industrial areas provided jobs for some residents of Wasena. In 1939, the City made a major investment in the infrastructure by replacing the steel bridge with a new concrete bridge that was constructed using WPA funds (Barnes, 775, 793). More public funds were spent on the construction of a stone picnic shelter in Wasena Park in the 1930s. Further evidence of the growth of Wasena and other suburbs in the southwest quadrant of the city was the construction of Wasena Elementary School in 1928 between Wasena and the adjacent Barbour Heights and Raleigh Court suburbs to the south and west.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps indicate that Wasena was approximately 80% developed by the mid 1930s and almost entirely developed by 1951. The neighborhood included a commercial area just south of the bridge on Main Street, an industrial area to the east along the river and railroad tracks, the park at the north end along the river and houses. The houses, which are primarily single family and follow uniform lot sizes and setbacks (with some variances due to topography), represent the diverse tastes of the first

half of the 20th century with good examples of the Craftsman, Bungalow, American Foursquare, Tudor-Revival and Colonial-Revival styles. The houses are mostly one-and-one-half or two stories and of frame or brick veneer construction. Many of the houses were either designed and built as kit houses or inspired by these popular, mass-production houses.

The Wasena Historic District is eligible for listing on the National Register under Criteria A as an excellent example of an early 20th century suburb of Roanoke that developed by private land companies as improvements in bridge connections and public transportation made them accessible. In particular, the Wasena neighborhood developed as the city's first "bus suburb: with the introduction of the first bus route prompted by its development. The district is also eligible under Criteria C with its large and intact collection of early to mid 20th century domestic, commercial, industrial and recreational architecture that represents the full range of architectural styles popular during this period. The district is significant on the local level from the period 1910 to 1960 in the areas of architecture, transportation, commerce/trade, industry and recreation. The Wasena Historic District retains a relatively high level of integrity with almost all of its houses intact as well as the other commercial, industrial, recreational and transportation components. The boundary includes the original street system and lot layout created by the Wasena Land Company and the City's first bus route.

Bibliography:

Barnes, Raymond. *A History of Roanoke*. Roanoke, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968.

Roanoke City Directories (various). The Virginia Room, Roanoke City Main Library, Roanoke, VA.

Roanoke City Deed Books (various). Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Court, Roanoke, VA.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (various). The Virginia Room, Roanoke City Main Library, Roanoke, VA.

Wasena Land Company. 1917 Plat. City of Roanoke Engineer's Office, Roanoke VA, 1917.

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>	City of Roanoke		
Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Miss <input type="checkbox"/>			
Brian Townsend		(Name)	(Firm)	
215 Church Avenue, SW		Roanoke	VA	24011
(Address) brian.townsend@roanokeva.gov		(City)	(State)	(Zip Code) 540-853-2333
(Email Address)		(Daytime telephone including area code)		
Applicant's Signature:		Date: 05/07/2010		

Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for the department to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

Mr. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/>	Dr. <input type="checkbox"/>	City Manager		
Miss <input type="checkbox"/>	Ms. <input type="checkbox"/>	Hon. <input type="checkbox"/>			
Chris Morrill			(Name)	(Position)	
City of Roanoke			215 Church Avenue SW		
(Locality) Roanoke			(Address) VA 24011 540-853-2333		
(City)			(State)	(Zip Code)	(Daytime telephone including area code)

Please use the following space to explain why you are seeking an evaluation of this district.

The City of Roanoke would like to pursue listing the Wasena Historic District on the state and national registers.

Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes No

Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes No