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North Elevation neighborhood makes the Historic Places register

By MIKE FERGUSON mferguson@billingsgazette.com Dec 15, 2016



Elisabeth DeGrenier and Kevin Kooistra of the Western Heritage Center, left, and Billings transportation planner Lora Mattox stand on North 31st Street in the North Elevation neighborhood on Wednesday.

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CASEY PAGE, Gazette Staff

The North Elevation neighborhood, one of Billings' most stately residential areas, has earned a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

It's Billings' first residential neighborhood to be listed on the register.

“It really shows what a neighborhood can do when neighbors gather together and want something,” said Billings' historic preservation officer, Lora Mattox. “The neighbors have been working on this for more than 10 years.”

Mattox learned the neighborhood's application was approved on Monday in an email from John Boughton, national register coordinator in the State Historic Preservation Office.

The Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board employed historians at the Western Heritage Center to help complete the 118-page application.

“It’s a huge honor to be part of that first (residential) district named in Billings,” said Elisabeth DeGrenier, volunteer and outreach coordinator with the Western Heritage Center. She is credited with doing much of the work involved in getting the application together. “You walk the neighborhood and you feel like it’s its own community in Billings.”

The North Elevation neighborhood contains 109 properties and is bounded by 12th Avenue North, the alley between North 31st and North 30th Streets, Ninth Avenue North and North 32nd Street.

North Elevation joins two Billings districts already on the register: the Billings Townsite Historic District along Montana Avenue and the Old Town Historic District along Minnesota Avenue.

In addition to the neighborhood's initiative and the work of the Western Heritage Center, Mattox credited the city of Billings and SHPO for grants to help pay for the application process as well as "the many volunteers who gave hundreds of hours to the project."

Each property owner in the neighborhood can pay about \$50 for a sign that denotes the neighborhood's inclusion on the register, Mattox said. "The register is very budget-friendly," she said. "They are nice signs."

What neighbors don't have to do as a result of Monday's announcement, she said, is fling open their doors to buses full of visitors.

"I don't think there will be hordes of tourists," she said with a laugh. "I walk the neighborhood at lunch, and there are already a lot of people walking there. It really is just an honorary status."

According to Mattox, the designation doesn't limit property owners from improving their homes. Billings' historic preservation ordinance requires a review for exterior home renovation "only if a majority of the neighbors ask the city for a review," she said.

The movement to preserve Billings' historic neighborhoods is apparently gaining popularity. "When we got the nomination done, we got calls from people west of the district wanting to be included," Mattox said. "As time and funding become available, (the district) could extend all the way to Pioneer Park."

DeGrenier said it will be “up to the neighbors” how they want to use their newfound status.

“Your house is still your house. If you want to build an addition, they’re still able to do that,” she said. “It was such a fun project to work on, and so cool to work with the residents. No one had anything bad to say about (being listed on the register).”

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North Elevation could be Billings' first historic residential neighborhood

Mike Ferguson

City Government Reporter

City reporter for The Billings Gazette.

