

REO Town Historic District

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National Register Designation

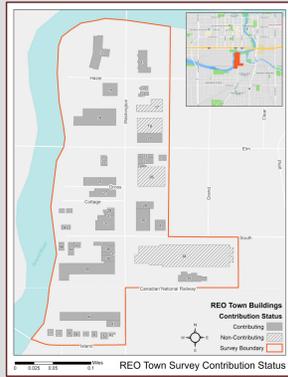
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

What is the National Register of Historic Places?

- Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
- Official list of the Nation's historic places
- Purpose: "to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources" (NPS)

National Historic District

- Primary Goal: Identify historic resources of the Nation
- Optional participation
 - Does not restrict or obligate property owners
- Incentivizes historical renovations and upkeep of historic buildings
 - Rehabilitation Tax Credits



Benefits for REO Town

- Optional 20% tax credit for contributing properties and eligible renovations
- New opportunities for current businesses and incentives to attract new companies
- Enhancement of REO Town's sense of place and identity
- Tools that support the connection of Downtown Lansing and the Lansing River Trail to REO Town to bring new visitors
- Complementary to Lansing's land use plan, District Mixed Use Center

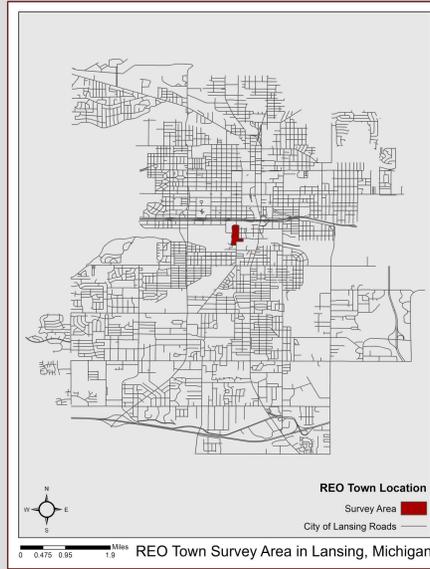
Objectives and Methodology

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This Historic Resource Survey Report was commissioned by the City of Lansing to attain the designation of REO Town to the National Register of Historic Places. As the intensive-level survey is a necessary precursor to the nomination of any district to the National Register of Historic Places, this report is designed to record surveyed property information as well as bring awareness to REO Town's history and significance. A designation on the National Register will improve the City of Lansing's redevelopment readiness by increasing the availability of incentives for economic development and historic preservation.

NEXT STEPS

- The City of Lansing will explore funding routes for the completion of the proposed REO Town Historic District nomination
- Application to Michigan State Preservation Historic Office (MISHPO) for certified local government grant funding to complete nomination
- The City of Lansing will contact all property owners within the proposed REO Town Historic District to include them of designation process
- Community stakeholder meetings will be held by the City of Lansing in REO Town



PROJECT METHODOLOGY

1. Boundary Finalization

The boundary of this survey area follows the commercial and multi-family property lines on both sides of Washington Avenue from the Grand River to Island Street. After further research and discussion with clients, the initial boundaries were confirmed. Following finalization, the team created a parcel map for the proposed REO Town Historic District using Geographic Information Systems (Figure 2).

2. Intensive Level Survey

Parcels in the defined study boundary were assessed and documented using property survey forms. Following survey form criteria provided by the Michigan State Preservation Historic Office (MISHPO), data was collected in the field and from various sources, such as the Riverpoint Neighborhood Historical Survey and the City of Lansing Assessor's Records, to complete intensive-level survey forms.

3. Historical Research

Team members researched the proposed REO Town Historic District as well as the Greater Lansing Area to construct an accurate historical description and timeline for the district. To prepare the historical context for REO Town's proposal, the team gathered information from various archival sources related to REO Town, including the Library of Congress, the City of Lansing, the REO Town Commercial Association, Board of Water and Light, the Lansing State Journal and the R.E. Olds Foundation.

Property Inventory

INVENTORY FORMS

A property survey form was completed for each building within the proposed REO Town historic district. Each form contains identifying location information, physical characteristics, and a statement of significance (Figure 3). Along with an accompanying database, detailed property information is kept organized in compliance with the State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office guidelines.

The primary historical resources used to assemble property survey forms include the Riverpoint Neighborhood Historical Survey (1998), the City of Lansing Assessor's Office, the Lansing State Journal and the United States Congress.

Data used to fill out the inventory forms was also collected in the field by project team members.

REO Town, Lansing, Michigan Historic Resource Survey Report			
Name Cover Building	Street Address 1138-20-22 S Washington Avenue	Municipal Unit City of Lansing	County Ingham
District Name REO Town Historic District			
Year Built 1911			
Resource Type Building			
Architectural Classification Commercial Style	Foundation Brick	Walls Brick	Other Materials Synthetic Vinyl
Plan Rectangle	Roof Flat	Architect Slightly Altered	Builder
Roof Form Flat	Asphalt	Current Use Commercial/Trade	
Historic Use Commercial/Trade	Integrity Significantly Altered		
Area of Significance Commerce			
Narrative Description The Cover building is a three-story brick structure that lies on the west side of Washington Avenue. This building accommodates one to three commercial and/or residential occupants over the years. This structure is in optimal condition and features much of its original architectural design. Besides two additions added to the front and back of structure between 2011 and 2012, the facade of the original structure features brick while the additions are clad with vinyl siding. There is an entrance located on the front facade of the building as well as a central lobby entrance of the south side of the building.			
Statement of Significance In 1911, the structure was listed as the Green Hotel on the Serbon insurance materials. Following its use as a hotel, the building was converted to accommodate three storefronts along the Washington Avenue frontage. The Grand Hotel (1911-1912), S. Washington Ave., the Grand Hotel and Restaurant (1912-1913), S. Washington Ave., and the Dunn and Earle Hotel (1913-1914), S. Washington Ave. In 1910, the only tenant listed at 1138-20-22 S. Washington Avenue in the Cover building was the General Distributing Co., a radio and automotive material distributor. Beginning in the 1930s, the building functioned as the local Lansing headquarters for the United Auto Workers Local 44, an international labor union representing workers in auto, aircraft and agricultural manufacturing. Today, this structure houses two commercial businesses and one private residence. The operations listed in the building are Commerce, Community Development Finance Institution, and CLEAF, the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan. Aside from cosmetic updates, this building retains the bulk of its historic structural configuration and visual appearance. Therefore, this structure is recommended as a contributing element in the REO Town Historic District.			
Eligibility Recommendation Contributing	NR Criteria A,C	NR Exceptions	
Source Lansing Business Directories (various dates); City Assessor Property Index Cards; Serbon Insurance Address (various dates); Appendix A River Point Neighborhood Survey (1998); Picture source: Stanewich & Tecson			

Figure 3. Cover Building Property Form for REO Town Historic Survey

History

LANSING'S BEGINNINGS PROSPERITY IN REO TOWN REO TOWN TODAY

- In 1835, William and Henry Ford made the trek from Lansing, New York to the previously uncharted land of REO Town. They plotted the land and returned to New York. Sixteen investors bought the land and moved to REO Town shortly thereafter.
- The original sixteen settlers remained the only residents in the Lansing area until 1847 when the Michigan State Capital moved to Lansing. The population of Lansing exploded throughout the next decade. The new population brought new industrial manufacturing and trade to the area.
- These industries formed an industrial environment in Lansing that was the basis for the automotive revolution of the 20th century.
- The central location and booming industry made the City of Lansing an ideal location for trade via trains. In 1902, REO Town was the chosen location for the Grand Trunk Railroad Depot. The Depot connected REO Town to the rest of Lansing and crucial industrial suppliers throughout the midwest. After the construction of the depot, the REO Town commercial corridor flourished.
- In 1905 Ransom E. Olds started the REO Motor Company. He built the factory just south of the Grand Trunk Depot in REO Town. The factory supported both REO Town and several surrounding neighborhoods in Lansing for several decades. After the Great Depression, the REO Motor Company struggled to keep up with the other, much larger, auto manufacturers. REO Motor Company eventually declared bankruptcy in 1975.
- After REO Motor company declared bankruptcy, REO Town experienced economic decline throughout the remainder of the 20th century.
- Today, REO Town has begun several revitalization efforts to restore the commercial district back to its former glory.
- In 2010, the Board of Water and Light announced its cogeneration plant and headquarters project in the REO Town district. This project brought new jobs to the area and restored the Grand Trunk Railroad Depot.
- The City of Lansing announced a \$3 million streetscape plan for S. Washington Ave in 2013. The project introduced bike lanes, sidewalk landscaping, and benches along the REO Town commercial corridor.



1835 William and Henry Ford plot the uncharted land of REO Town.



1847 The State Capital moves to Lansing, Michigan.



1902 The Grand Trunk Railroad Depot was constructed in REO Town



1905 Ransom E. Olds starts the REO Motor Company in REO Town

Image sources (in chronological order): USGS Archives, Edmonds, Pinterest.com, Wheelstage.org

Evaluation Results

INTENSIVE LEVEL SURVEY RESULTS NOMINATION RECOMMENDATIONS

REO Town, Lansing meets the National Register of Historic Places Criteria of Evaluation for listing under National Register Criteria A and C.

"The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction," (MISHPO).

REO Town, Lansing is an example of a commercial district developed over the course of 180 years. Originally plotted in 1835, REO Town was divided into 16 parcels and sold to migrants from Lansing, New York. Upon their arrival, the new settlers established the small community of Lansing Township. After ten years of remaining a small neighborhood, the state constitution mandated that Lansing Township be the location for the new state capital. The development that followed the changing of the capital would act as a major catalyst for the township as it became a major economic hub in the State of Michigan. Over the next 12 years, Lansing grew tremendously in its new title as state capital (RTCA). REO Town became known as Upper Town and remained one of Lansing's three main districts (Michigan History). REO Town also became well established due to the railroad system in Lansing that passed through REO Town's Grand Trunk Depot and the wooden plank road network that connected Lansing's primary districts. REO Town embodies a variety of significant architectural styles, construction method and building material types. The varying trends exhibited in REO Town's buildings mark the dynamic changes in style over the years of development in REO Town, Lansing.

We recommend that REO Town, Lansing be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the criteria and levels of significance noted above. Our recommendation for REO Town's period of significance is from 1898, when the oldest building, located at 1212, 1214, and 1216 S Washington Ave, was constructed to 1969, 50 years prior to the present.

In the proposed REO Town Historic District, there are 42 building considered 'contributing' to the historic district and four buildings that are considered 'non-contributing' to the historic district.



Figure 4. REO Town Outdoor Seating along S. Washington Ave (Source: Stanewich)

Planning Recommendations

The proposed REO Town Historic District has abundant untapped potential for significant improvement that will allow the district to better adhere to the Lansing Master Plan. REO Town can use the idea of placemaking to inspire people to reimagine the public space as a new area for growth. Placemaking is a "multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces, and capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well being." (Purdue Extension).

Form Based Codes

- One way to aid in maintaining a National Register Historic District
- Can include a landscape aspect to be used as a guide for architectural and general aesthetics.
- Support the maintenance of density limits and maximum heights to ensure the conformity of new construction to the district's appropriate scale.

Infrastructure

- Becoming a National Register Historic District will allow REO Town to continue making updates that improve traffic around local businesses.
- The listing of REO Town on the National Register of Historic Places will allow commercial property owners access to Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits for qualified rehabilitation work.

Streetscape and Walkability

- The district should utilize this walkable area that promotes local consumer mobility. REO Town can take advantage of the improved streetscape by attracting restaurants prospects that would feature outdoor seating and encouraging current businesses to host sidewalk sales.
- An increase in elements like benches, flower pots, bike racks, lampposts, signs, flowerbeds, green plots and trees could help reduce the starkness of the concrete tremendously.
- Many features could incorporate the REO Town logo (Figure 5).
- REO Town is a great potential stopping point for bikers and pedestrians on the Lansing River Trail and this outlet point needs to be made clear through the use of appropriate signs and lighting.
- The new REO Town streetscape also included a unique brick pattern on portions of the S. Washington Avenue sidewalks. This brick-inlay pattern should be extended north of Elm Street until the Grand River bridge to maintain the aesthetic and define the entrance of the proposed REO Town Historic District at the south end of the bridge.

Connection to Downtown Lansing

- An art installation and REO Town signage by the new substation could act as an attractive and enticing avenue to the area (Figure 6).
- The cohesive use of landscaping will also be a useful tool and could feature elements like potted trees on the Washington Avenue Bridge.
- Using attractive light elements to the district's advantage could play a role in bridging this gap.



Figure 6. Rendering of Substation on S. Washington Avenue (Source: Board of Water and Light)

Zoning

- The City of Lansing would like to see the incorporation of a District Mixed Use Center. This means current property owners will be encouraged to have commercial use on the ground floor and tenants in the upper floors if the building allows.
- The proposed REO Town Historic District has great potential to promote density and walkability with this new vision, as it will add retail and commercial spaces near the Lansing River Trail outlet and within walking distance of surrounding neighborhoods.



Figure 5. REO Town Bike Rack (Source: Stanewich)