

What does designation bode for Fletcher Place, Garfield Park?

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IN 2003, THE Indianapolis Cultural Development Commission created five cultural districts – Mass Ave, Fountain Square, the Wholesale District, Canal and White River State Park, and Broad Ripple. Indiana Avenue was soon added. The designation came with money – big money – which helped the districts create stronger identities through public art installations, improved wayfinding and marketing efforts.

The subsequent five-year effort helped those districts gain a great deal of traction and in some cases allowed them to turn the economic development corner. And although the Market East District was added in 2014, the initiative has largely been dormant for more than a decade.

But now comes the city’s Department of Metropolitan Development with a one-time fund of \$500,000 – money which has been awarded for specific projects applied for by potential or emerging cultural districts. More on that below.

But the recent announcement also included the creation of three new cultural districts – Midtown Arts District/Butler University, and two among the Urban Times family, Fletcher Place and Garfield Park.

No funding was attached to those designations, however. And though obviously pleased with the achievement, neighborhood leaders are not totally clear on what the designation means.

The Fletcher Place effort was spearheaded by Abby Maci Reckard of the Lille Bønne Community Living Room. Her application was for a specific project, renovations of the historic Danish Church at 701 E McCarty St. which houses her venture.

While not awarded the grant funding, the petition was successful in earning Fletcher Place/Holy Rosary-Danish Church a designation as a new cultural district in Indianapolis. “The Holy Rosary-Danish Church enclave has distinctive roots as a neighborhood built by immigrants,” Recard said. “From the Danes, Germans, Irish, and Welsh who settled here in the mid-1800s, to the Italians and Central Europeans who grew it into a commercial hub in the early 1900s, Fletcher Place/Holy Rosary-Danish Church is a flourishing cultural district, due in large part to the influence

Big Car’s big expansion coming

THE LARGEST expansion yet of the Big Car Collaborative is expected to emerge this coming spring, with the opening of Big Car’s new 40,000-square-foot contemporary art museum within a renovated former industrial building located on the campus east of Shelby Street between Cruft Street and Nelson Avenue.

The yet-to-be-named building will include five exhibition spaces for contemporary art – including an expansive main gallery for large-scale, immersive installations; 18 studios for artists; a large commercial kitchen offering culinary training and serving the on-site cafe and bar; five storefronts for creative small businesses; two audio recording studios (including the new home for WQRT); and a performing arts and event space that can accommodate 500 people standing and 300 seated.

Executive Director Jim Walker said, “This publicly accessible art museum and community space will significantly boost cultural development in Garfield Park.” ■

and culture of its immigrant heritage.”

The neighborhood has traditionally hosted the hugely popular Italian Fest, and this year added a new event, Epicurean Indy. The festival’s goal was to elevate the many culinary traditions from around the world, with Reckard adding that organizers are “looking to the future cultural innovations to come out of community.”

Jim Walker, executive director of Big Car Collaborative and Garfield Park neighbor, explained that the Garfield Park neighborhood designation came as a direct result of Big Car’s application which included letters of support from City-County Councilor Frank Mascari, the Garfield Park Neighbors Association, Friends of Garfield Park and the hip-hop festival known as Chreece.

“In a recent follow-up meeting between Big Car staff and the city, we discussed next steps that include working out a plan with our community leaders for how to approach and

benefit from the new designation by the city,” Walker said.

Rich Whitney, president of the Garfield Park Neighbors Association, said the Association “we fully support our new status, but will also continue to help folks understand what it means and what steps still need to be taken. We look forward to the opportunities that come with a designation like this and will stay connected to the work. We support the work Jim and Big Car have done/are doing and will continue to act as a bridge for all parties here.” One such bridge, he noted, involves the emerging business community.

Walker noted that the designation “is made possible by cultural leaders and neighbors working for decades to invigorate our neighborhood with art and beauty. This has happened at anchors like the Garfield Park Art Center (which opened in 2006) and the McAllister Center operated by Indy Parks – and through Big Car’s collaborations with the neighborhood through public art and cultural events since 2011.”

Big Car has also brought many additional art experiences – including First Fridays – to the neighborhood starting with the opening of Tube Factory in May of 2016. Likewise, Big Car has invested in long-term affordable housing for artists with 18 homes on the block surrounding Tube Factory. By 2026, the block surrounding Tube Factory will have seen a total investment of \$13 million.

The following organizations in the Urban Times zone were among those awarded funds by the Department of Metropolitan Development, although no dollar amounts were attached to the press release:

□ To the Fountain Square Neighborhood Association and Fountain Fletcher District Association – to support a collaboration that brings together two complementary efforts of the two associations to enhance the public assets in Fountain Square.

□ To the Mass Ave Cultural Arts District – to launch a phased implementation of the Mass Ave “NEXTvision,” focusing on foundational elements to enhance connectivity, experience and identity along the corridor.

□ To the Madam Walker Legacy Center – for the curation of engraved bricks/ stars honoring influential leaders and artists along the Indiana Avenue Walk of Fame that will extend from the historic Walker Building to the Indianapolis Urban League.

□ To 10 East Arts and the John Boner Community Centers – for the installation of public art in vacant storefront windows, alleys and building rooftops.

□ To the Cottage Home Neighborhood Association – for equipment, decor and tools to support the annual Cottage Home Block Party. ■

IHPC’s Holy Cross decision is headed to court

ST. PHILIP NERI Catholic Church has filed a petition requesting judicial review of a decision on the abandoned Holy Cross church by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission. According to a press release from St. Philip Neri, the decision prevents the church “from exercising its religious freedom over the future of church property.”

The action is in response to an Oct. 1 ruling by the IHPC denying the petition to demolish the former Holy Cross Church and rectory. The commission designated the Holy Cross Church campus a historic district in March 2024 to prevent St. Philip Neri from taking any action on the property without IHPC approval.

Church officials said that since then, St. Philip Neri Church has spent more than \$80,000 – or nearly 20% of its annual budg-

et – on expenses related to the historic designation.

“This is about religious liberty,” said the Rev. Jeffrey Dufresne of St. Philip Neri Pastor. “The disposition of sacred buildings is the sole jurisdiction of church authorities, and the decision of what to do with Holy Cross Church belongs to St. Philip Neri Parish. The city’s involvement in this matter has been an egregious overreach and an infringement on our constitutional rights. We are hopeful we’ll prevail in state court.”

Holy Cross Church was merged with St. Philip Neri Parish in 2014. In 2015, the portico collapsed, sending limestone toppling into the street and sidewalk below. The church has been closed and boarded up since 2019.

According to the church’s press release, developers who have assessed the building

have deemed restoration financially unfeasible, with recent restoration costs estimated at \$7.5 to \$8.5 million for a property valued at only \$1 million.

Subsequent to the Oct. 1 decision denying the demolition, the IHPC conducted a finding of fact, the result supporting the ruling. The findings were approved at the Nov. 5 hearing.

The findings indicated the application for demolition are not in compliance with the Holy Cross Historic Area Plan for several aesthetic reasons, as well as to be damaging to the historic fabric of the area. It also ruled that the denial does not result in substantial hardship, nor does it deprive the owner of all reasonable use and benefit of the property. Denial also does not preclude the applicant from not using the property, from selling the property, or for another user to reuse the buildings, similar to many

other former Catholic churches.

Another point was that no reasoning was provided as to why the rectory is in poor enough condition to necessitate demolition. In fact, a 2025 appraisal of the rectory provided by the applicant determined the overall condition to be fair. While the church building does require repairs, the applicant’s submitted appraisal and engineering reports indicate that, while the church building has extensive deferred maintenance, it is judged to be in fair condition.

The findings also indicated that demolition would have a substantial negative effect on the historic integrity of the area. It was noted that the church is the centerpiece of the district, and the namesake of the surrounding neighborhood. Demolition of the buildings erases the history and architecture of the site, for the neighborhood and the city. ■