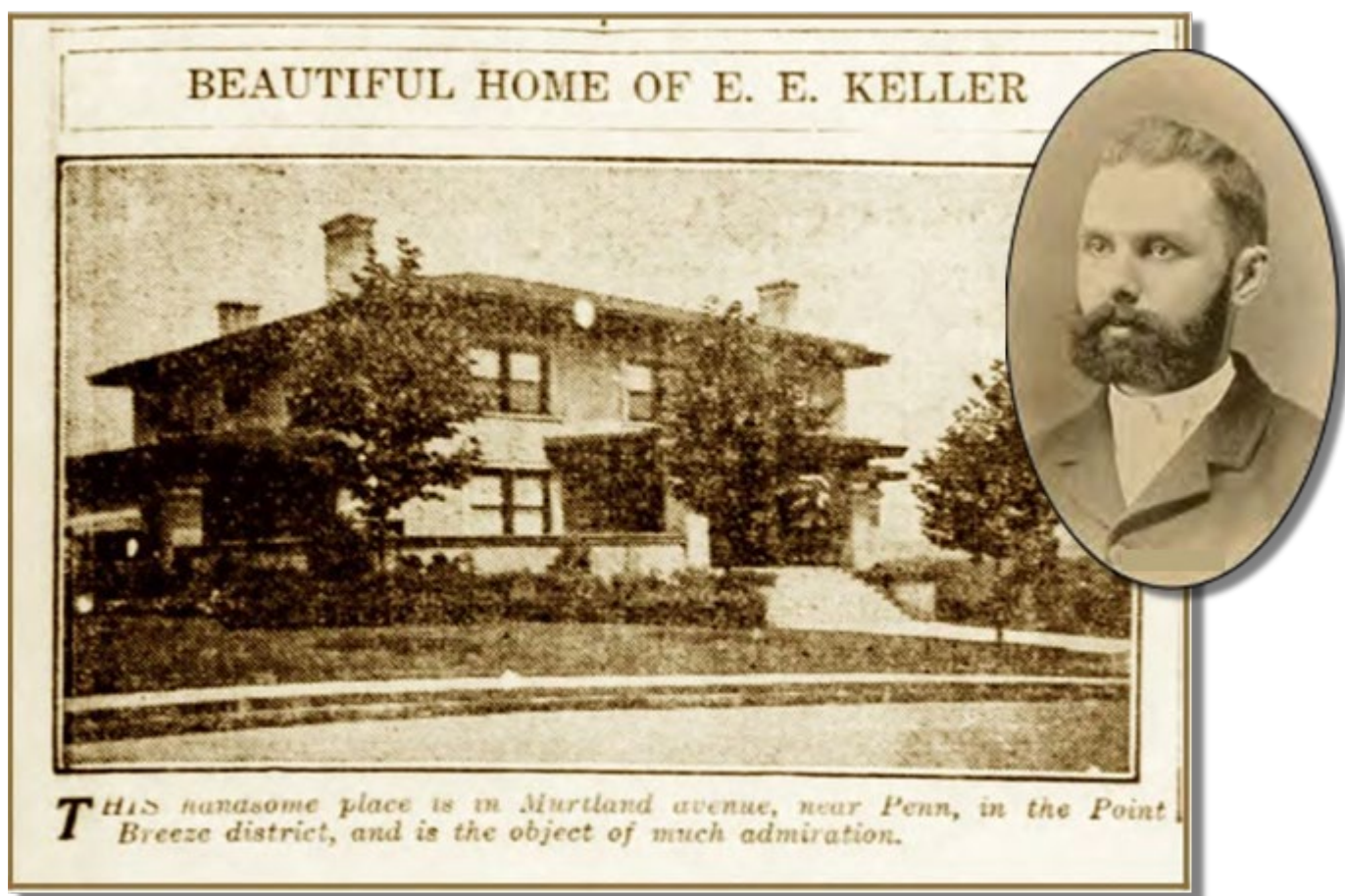


**NOMINATION OF THE ELLA AND EMIL KELLER HOUSE  
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

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**ELLAN AND EMAIL KELLER HOUSE - HISTORIC NOMINATION STAFF REPORT**

**Name of Property** ..... Ella and Email Keller House  
**Address of Property** ..... 201 N. Murtland Street  
**Property Owner** ..... Dr. David Fisher  
**Nominated by:**..... Matthew Falcone  
**Date Received:**..... May 8, 2023  
**Parcel No.:** ..... 126-C-122  
**Ward:**..... 14th  
**Zoning Classification:**..... R1D-L  
**Neighborhood**..... North Point Breeze  
**Council District:**..... 9 - Burgess

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION:**

1. Act on the Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for Historic Designation (7 June 2023)
2. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (5 July 2023)
3. Review the Report prepared by staff for the property in question, and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (5 July 2023)

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION:**

4. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (5 September 2023)
5. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (5 September 2023)

**FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE CITY COUNCIL:**

6. Conduct a public hearing within 120 days of 5 September 2023 (3 January 2024).
7. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and the City Planning Commission and take action on the Historic Designation.

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**FACTS**

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1. On 8 May 2023, the staff of the Historic Review Commission received an application for the nomination of the Ella and Emil Keller House to be designated as a City Historic Structure.

**2. Description of the Ella and Emil Keller House (as extracted from the nomination form)**

201 North Murtland is a two-story, three-bay wide house with rectangular massing, with the main block of the house measuring approximately 50-foot square in plan. It is clad on all four sides in gray Roman brick laid in a running bond that rests upon a foundation of smooth-tooled coursed ashlar, with terra cotta and carved limestone accents. The house projects a sense of horizontality, in part from its a low- pitched, pyramidal hipped roof of faded green Spanish- or Mission-style tile and wide, overhanging, boxed eaves. After more than a century, the green glaze has faded from the tiles and they now appear largely as terracotta in color. They are believed to be original based on physical inspection and their mention in a 1905 newspaper description of the house. The house’s location at the center of the sloped site results in a partially exposed basement on the north end of the front façade and on the rear façade, and a fully exposed basement on the north façade. Roughly centered on each façade is an original projecting wing (i.e., open brick porch on the front, enclosed brick sun parlor on the south, open wood- framed porch on the rear, and brick porte cochere on the north). Like the main roof, all are covered by low-pitched hipped roofs of faded green tile.

Structurally, the house rests on a stone foundation of random rubble that is dressed, as noted, with smooth-tooled coursed ashlar where visible on the exterior. Brick bearing walls divide basement spaces; floors throughout the house are framed in wood. The floor decks of the terrace, front porch and sun parlor are comprised of cast concrete with embedded steel beams. Beneath them are full-height extensions of the main basement space. A steel beam is also visible in the garage ceiling (with steel specified rather than wood for fire-resistance).

**3. History of the Ella and Emil Keller House (as extracted from the nomination form)**

In April 1904, Emil and Ella Keller purchased lots 64 and 65 in the Westinghouse Park subdivision, just across Meade Street from the Black estate and across Murtland from the sprawling lawns and gardens of Greenlawn. Their new property, which consisted of the eastern two-thirds of the current parcel at 201 North Murtland Street, was expanded in May 1907, when they purchased lot 66, to create the present- day boundaries. The Kellers received their building permit in mid-June 1904, with B. F. Lee Company listed as the contractor, and by the end of the month construction was under way. Less than a year later, the house was complete. The estimated construction cost listed on the building permit was \$17,000, which would be equal to approximately \$600,000 today when adjusted for inflation (with some calculators determining a value nearly twice as high). The purchase price for lots 64 and 65 was an additional \$15,000, meaning the Kellers made an investment of more than a million dollars when adjusted for inflation.

A description in the May 7, 1905 edition of the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette Sun* stated that “The house is a notably beautiful one standing in Murtland Avenue. . . and is built of gray brick with green tile roof. The plans for the house were drawn by Mr. and Mrs. Keller, who took possession of their new domicile but a few weeks ago (see Figure 15 for the complete

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article describing the house).” The 15-room house afforded more than ample space for the two Kellers, containing a 16-foot-wide center stair hall, 16 x 29-foot living room, sun parlor, library, spacious dining room, butler’s pantry, large kitchen, breakfast room, three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a second-floor den and an extensive basement with integral garage. Additionally, there was a servants’ suite on the second floor adjacent to the rear steps down to the kitchen, which contained bedrooms and a bathroom, along with a chauffeur’s apartment in the basement. Given the Keller’s social standing and frequency of entertaining, it seems a near certainty that they had regular, live-in domestic help. However, a search of city directories has thus far only uncovered the name of one live-in servant. James Heard is listed in 1907 as “gardener” and again in 1909 as “butler.”

The enthusiasm of both Kellers for their multiple automobiles suggests that they never hired a chauffeur, despite having designed accommodations for one. While it is not known if Emil Keller ever drove to work, his new home provided an easy commute to work by rail via the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Homewood Station, a quarter mile to the northeast—during which he was often accompanied by George Westinghouse. The pair could be in Downtown or the Turtle Creek Valley in just over twenty minutes.

The Financial Panic of 1907 meant that the Kellers would ultimately end up occupying their new home for less than five years. The crisis resulted in numerous Westinghouse interests being forced into receivership, including the Westinghouse Machine Company, which Emil Keller headed (and became the receiver for). In the reorganization that ensued, George Westinghouse was forced out of the presidency of Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company (though he remained president and director of sixteen of his other companies). Keller was similarly ousted as vice president and general manager of the Machine Company in the spring of 1908 shortly after he had led the company out of receivership. The Kellers remained in their Murtland Street home until late 1909 before moving to Detroit, where Mr. Keller had previously established business ventures.

**4. Significance of the Ella and Emil Keller House** *(as extracted from the nomination form)*

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. The nominator is of the opinion that the Ella and Emil Keller meets several of the criteria as follows.

***Criterion 2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;***

The property is the most significant extant resource within the City of Pittsburgh representing the broad contributions of Emil Ernest Keller to the fields of science and industry. Highlights of his accomplishments include a pivotal role in settling the “current wars,” between George Westinghouse/Nikola Tesla (alternating current) and Thomas Edison/General Electric (direct current) through his work planning, installing and maintaining all electric lighting at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, the first large-scale proof-of-concept of the Westinghouse system; heading Westinghouse Machine Company for nearly fifteen years and overseeing its move from Lawrenceville to East Pittsburg and subsequent expansions; pioneering the development of electric vehicles; being an early adopter and promoter of automobile

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technology in Pittsburgh; and designing with his wife, Ella Miller Keller, their innovative home in North Point Breeze.

On June 16, 1891, Keller, then 27 years old, accepted the position of electrical engineer in the Department of Electricity for the World's Columbian Exposition, working under department chief John P. Barrett. Keller had expected Barrett's department "to have full responsibility in carrying out the lighting of the Fair. . . and to install and operate whatever lighting plant should be decided upon." However, in the spring of 1892 controversy arose and Barrett's role was diminished to oversight of electrical exhibits only.

In January 1894, following the successful run of the fair, Keller was chosen by George Westinghouse to become vice president and general manager of the Westinghouse Machine Company, then located in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood—his election by the board of directors being a mere formality.

During his years in Pittsburgh, Keller helped lead a number of Westinghouse ventures in addition to managing Westinghouse Machine Company. In 1902, Keller undertook for George Westinghouse the development of a new method for commercially manufacturing storage batteries. Keller noted that he and his assembled engineers "made a substantial beginning in the storage battery business, under the Westinghouse name, in a short time." The ultimate result was the formation of a storage battery department, which grew into the Westinghouse Storage Battery Company in 1909. In 1906, Keller was selected to oversee creation of a new Westinghouse subsidiary, The Detroit Insulated Wire Company to manufacture insulated wire, streetcar cables, lead pipe for conduits, and other electrical supplies. His work there ultimately became the impetus for the Kellers selecting Detroit as their home after leaving Pittsburgh. Additionally, Emil Keller served as vice president and director of the Pittsburgh Meter Company; and director of the Westinghouse Foundries Company of Pittsburgh, East Pittsburgh, Trafford City, and Attica, New York; Security Investment Company; Nernst Lamp Company; and the Westinghouse Interworks Railroad Company. In terms of social and professional activities, he was a member of the Duquesne Club, Edgewood Golf Club, Oakmont Country Club, Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania, and the Engineers Club of New York City, along with the Automobile Club of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Amateur Photographers' Society.

In 1936, Keller authored a historical account of his years working with George Westinghouse. The 25- page collection of personal reflections was titled, "George Westinghouse, As I Knew Him," and was part of an unpublished Westinghouse Air Brake anthology, *Anecdotes and Reminiscences of George Westinghouse, 1846-1914, Contributed by his Former Associates,* which was created to mark the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Westinghouse's birth.

***Criterion 3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;***

201 North Murtland Street is a skillfully designed, eclectic Pittsburgh house that successfully and uniquely blends Prairie style form with Neoclassical decorative elements. It is also

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distinguished by the overall quality of its design, the number of innovative features that Emil and Ella Keller specified for their new home, and the continued presence of most of these features (see more below under “Integrity”).

The attribution of the design of the house to the Kellers comes from the aforementioned *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* article from 1905, which explicitly states that “The plans for the house were drawn by Mr. and Mrs. Keller.” No architect is mentioned in this or any other articles about the planning and completion of the house. *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, which invariably named architects associated with projects, was silent in its 1904 announcement that construction had begun, instead calling the project “the dwelling . . . for E. E. Keller.” Additionally, Pittsburgh building permit records list the builder, B. F. Lee Company, but no architect, and multiple newspaper articles announcing the assignment of the permit are conspicuously silent about an architect, when it was standard practice to provide the name. Emil Keller’s background in engineering and years of project management for major Westinghouse construction projects lends further credibility to the idea that he led the design of the house, with assistance from his wife.

**5. Integrity**

201 North Murtland Street meets the criteria for integrity as it applies to location, design, materials, and workmanship.

**Location:** The building retains integrity in regard to location. It remains in its original location on the northwest corner of Murtland and Meade Streets. The neighborhood continues to reflect its residential character. Though the arbors, fences and gates of the backyard are gone, the site retains original shade trees, remnants of the sunken tufa garden, and the buff brick garden wall.

**Design:** The house retains integrity in regard to design. It retains its form, massing, method of construction, and its original purpose as a large, single-family home. The character-defining design elements of the Prairie and Neoclassical styles remain (as enumerated above under Criterion 3). The early and innovative integral garage continues to serve the house.

**Materials:** The house retains integrity in regard to materials. Still present are the original carved limestone, gray Roman brick, terracotta ornamentation, terracotta tile flooring on the terrace, stained oak and leaded glass at the front entry, bands of carved and scroll-cut wood moulding, stained glass windows, and green roofing tiles.

**Workmanship:** The house retains integrity in regard to workmanship. Exterior details were exceptionally designed and executed and continue to reflect a high level of skill and sophistication. Examples are many and include the detail and consistency of the carved stone, the detail of the terracotta ornamentation, the uniformity of the brickwork, the quality of the stained and leaded glass (especially the large skylight over the grand staircase), the quality of the carved wood egg-and-dart moulding, and the fact that the faded green tiles are still present and functioning on all five roofs. As mentioned above, the house is particularly distinguished for the quality and expanse of Greek fretwork, executed in varying sizes in both terracotta and wood and on both the exterior and interior.

Overall, exterior alterations have been very minor and include the addition of generally-compatible storm windows, replacement of the front porch ceiling, the addition of metal front

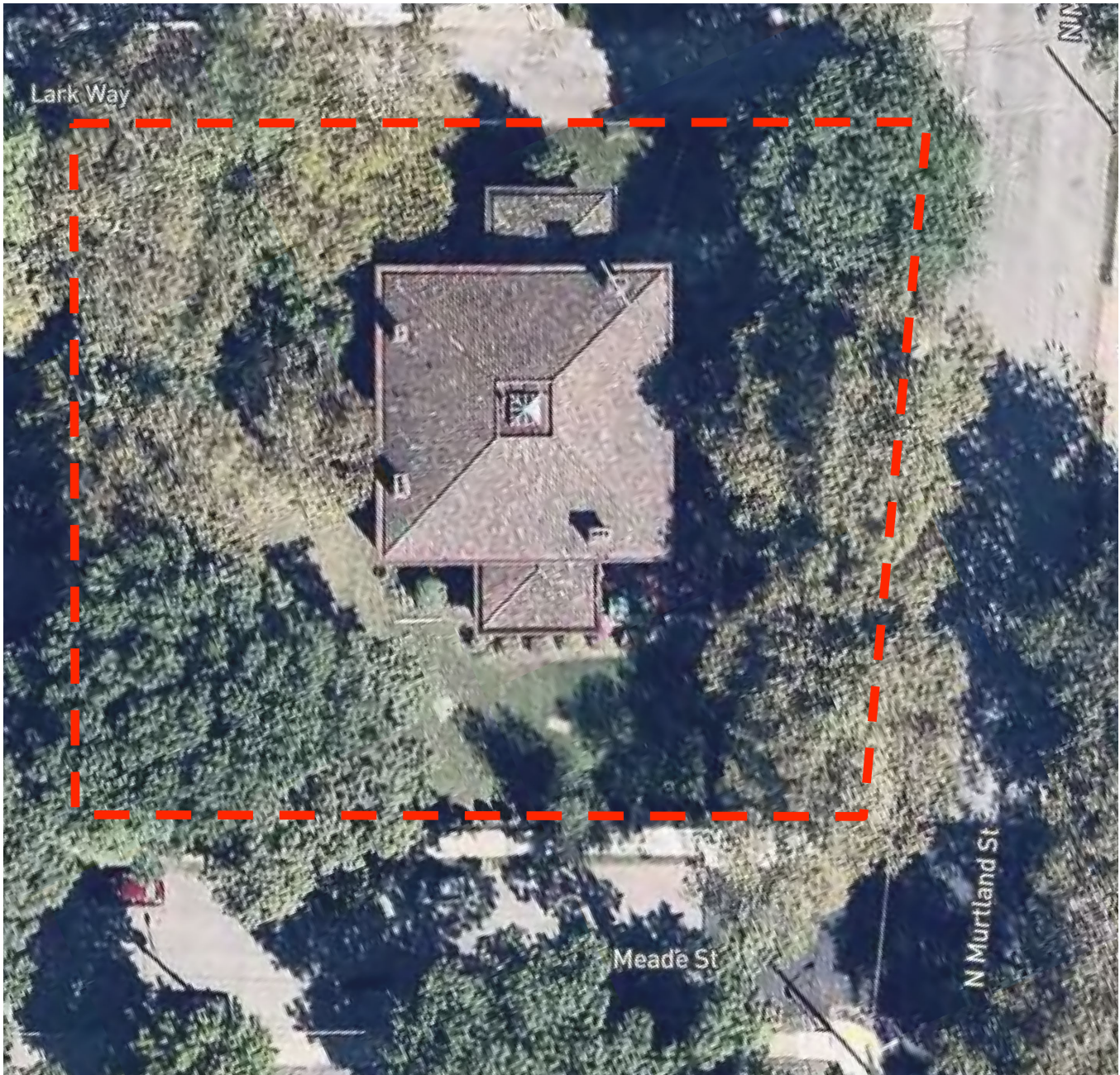
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porch railings, removal and storage of original front porch lighting, the addition of the south steps from the back porch. cutting a passage through the terrace wall to access the side yard, and the loss of built landscape elements, like arbors and fencing. In short, the exterior of the house looks essentially as it did when Ella Keller invited her society friends to a bridge luncheon to mark the opening of the house in May 1905.

**6. Photos**



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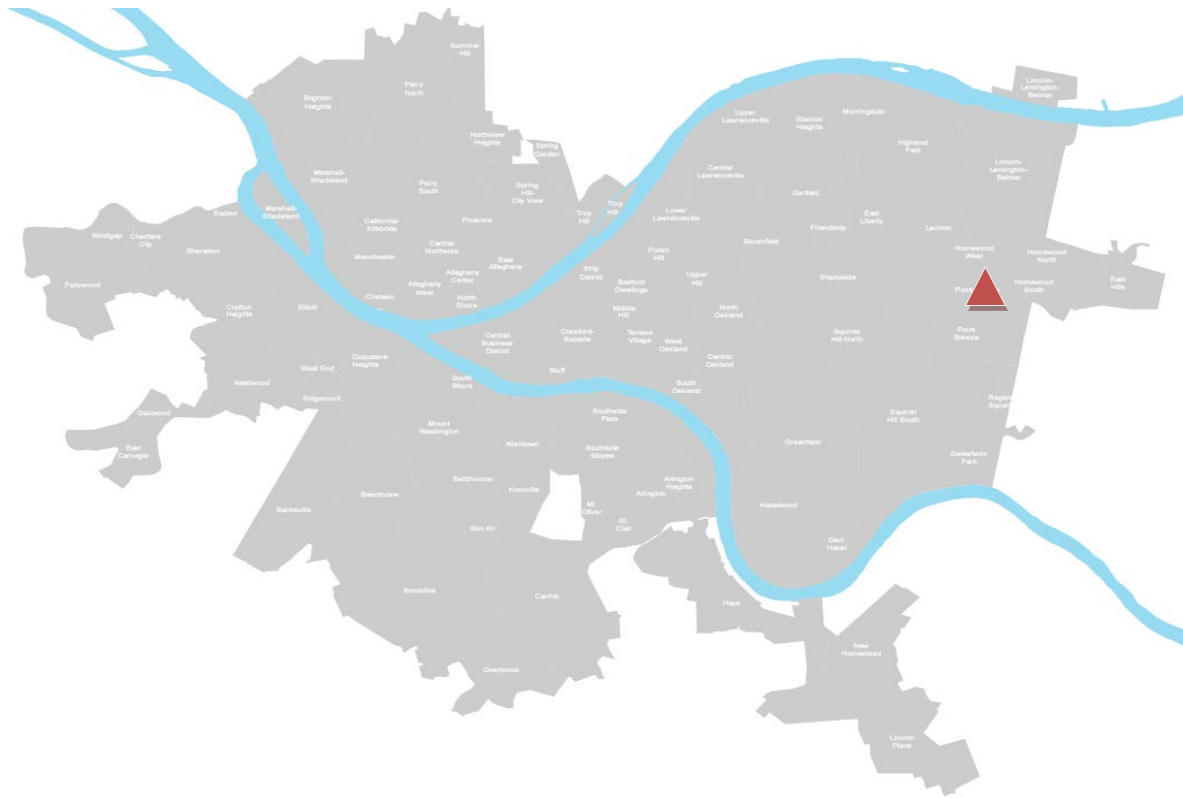


# NOMINATION OF THE ELLA AND EMIL KELLER HOUSE TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK

## CITY COUNCIL REPORT

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### 7. Maps



### 8. Recommendation of the Historic Review Commission

The Historic Review Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation of the Ella and Emil Keller House. On July 5, 2023 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate the Ella and Emil Keller House as historic.

### 9. Recommendation of the City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation the Ella and Emil Keller House. On September 5, 2023 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate the Ella and Emil Keller House as historic.

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**10. Meeting Minutes**

**HRC MINUTES – JUNE 7, 2023 – PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION HEARING**

**NOMINATION OF THE ELLA AND EMIL KELLER HOUSE  
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

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**Ella & Emil Keller House**

**201 N. Murtland Street**

**Historic Nomination**

**Owner:**

**Dr. David A. Fisher**

**Ward: 14th**

**Lot and Block: 126-C-122**

**Nominator:**

**Matthew Falcone & Dr. David A. Fisher**

**Neighborhood: North Point Breeze**

**Council District: 9th**

**Nominations Received: 5/8/23**

**National Register Status: Listed: X Eligible:**

**Proposed Changes: Nomination for historic designation.**

**Discussion:**

**1. Ms. Quinn gives a short presentation on the property. She states that the nominator as well as staff found that the property is significant under Criterion 2, identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspect of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, and Criterion 3, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship. She states that the property retains integrity and recommends that the Commission votes affirmatively on nomination**

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**viability.**

- 2. Ms. Aguirre states that while they are not taking public testimony at this time, she does want to enter into the record the 23 letters of support received so far.**
- 3. The Commission discusses the nomination and the criteria for designation.**

**Motion:**

- 1. Mr. Green moves that nomination is viable based on Criteria 2 and 3.**
- 2. Mr. Hill seconds.**
- 3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.**

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**HRC MINUTES – JULY 5, 2023 RECOMMENDATION**

**NOMINATION OF THE ELLA AND EMIL KELLER HOUSE  
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**Ella & Emil Keller House**

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**Proposed Changes: Nomination for historic designation.**

**Discussion:**

**1. Ms. Quinn gives a short presentation on the property. She states that the nominator as well as staff found that the property is significant under Criterion 2, identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspect of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, and Criterion 3, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship. She states that the property retains**



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**integrity and recommends that the Commission provide a positive recommendation to City Council.**

**2. Ms. Aguirre asks for public testimony.**

**3. Dr. David A. Fisher speaks as the owner of the property in support of the nomination.**

**4. Ms. Aguirre asks for additional public testimony; there is none. She acknowledges for the record the numerous letters of support received for the nomination. She asks for comments and questions from Commissioners.**

**5. The Commission discusses the nomination and the criteria for designation.**

**Motion:**

**1. Mr. Hill moves to provide a positive recommendation to City Council based on Criteria 2 and 3.**

**2. Mr. Dash seconds.**

**3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.**

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**PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES –SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 - DRAFT**