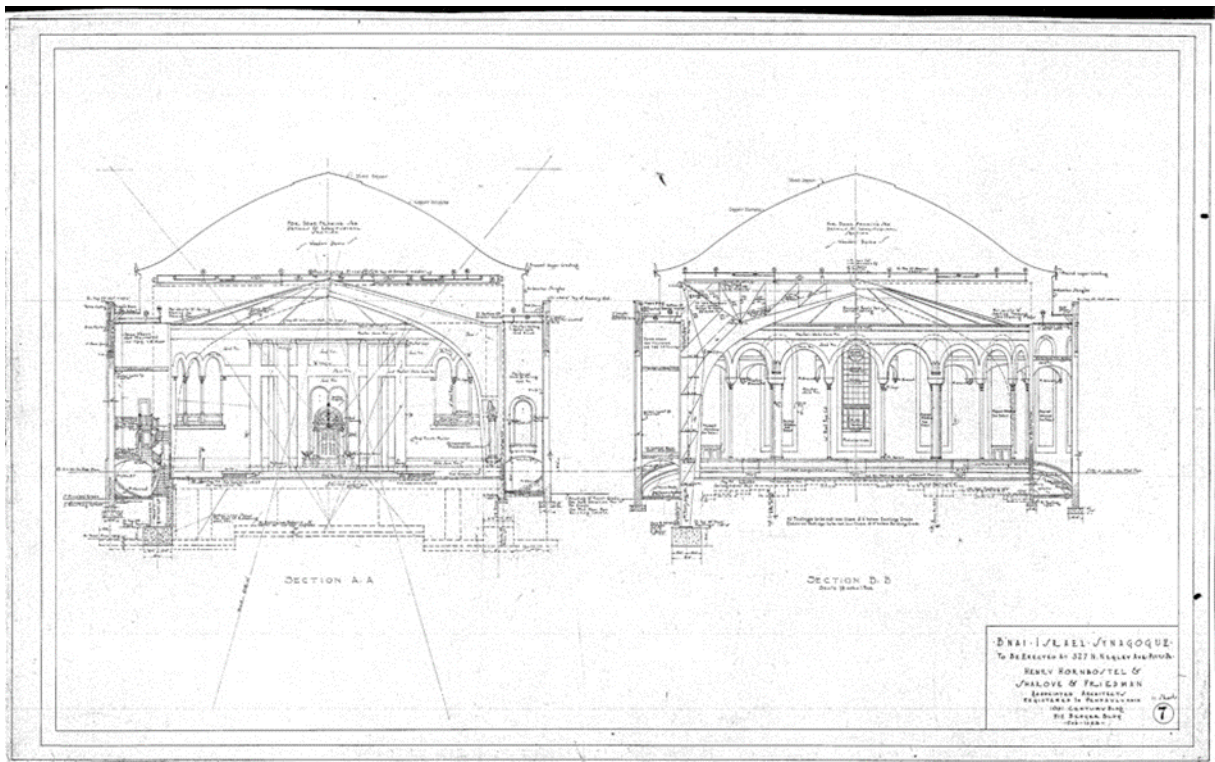
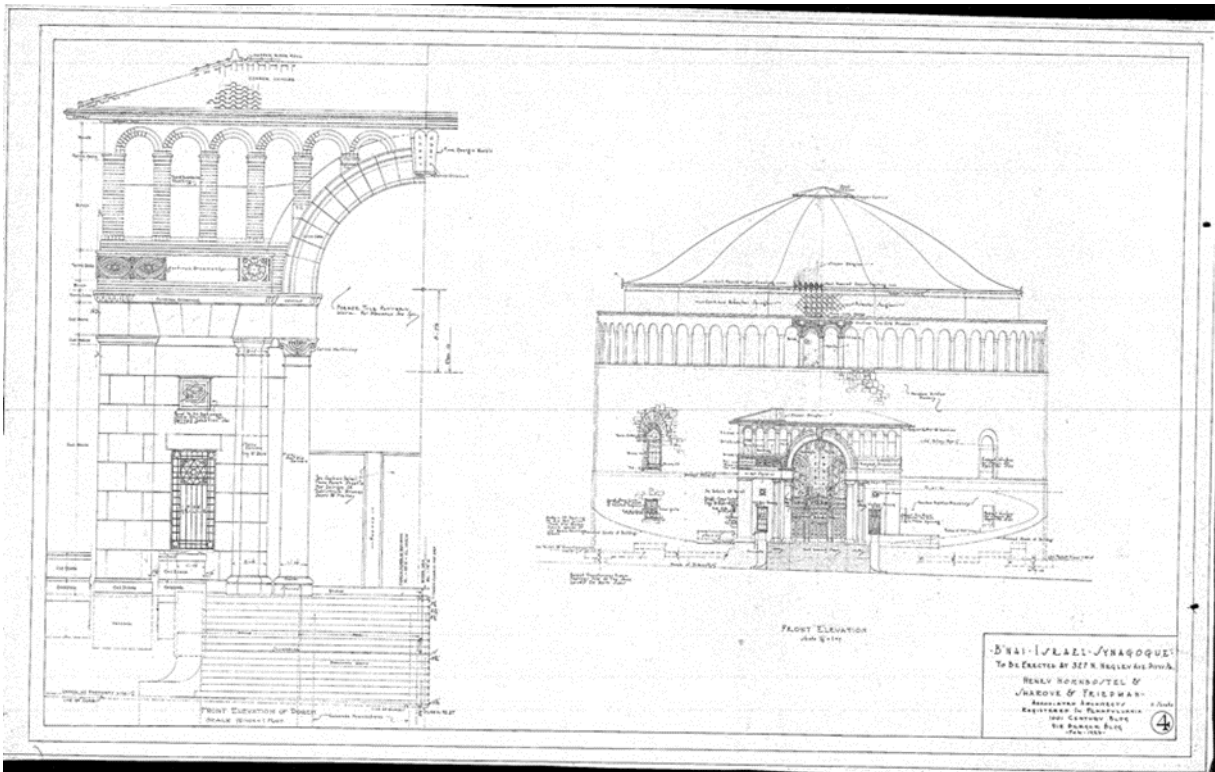


NOMINATION OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK

CITY COUNCIL REPORT



**NOMINATION OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE - HISTORIC NOMINATION STAFF REPORT

Name of PropertyB'nai Israel Synagogue
Address of Property327 N. Negley Avenue
Property Owner327 NN LLC and 333 NN LLC
Nominated by:.....Beacon Communities
Date Received:August 22, 2023
Parcel No.:83-J-210, 83-J-210-1, and 83-J-210-2
Ward:.....11th
Zoning Classification:R2-H
NeighborhoodGarfield
Council District:.....9 - Burgess

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION:

1. Act on the Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for Historic Designation (6 September 2023)
2. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (4 October 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 (4 October 2023)

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION:

4. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (3 October 2023)
5. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (17 October 2023)

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE CITY COUNCIL:

6. Conduct a public hearing within 120 days of 17 October 2023 (14 February 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

1. On 22 August 2023 the staff of the Historic Review Commission received an application for the nomination of the B'nai Israel Synagogue to be designated as a City Historic Structure.
2. **Description of the B'nai Israel Synagogue** (as *extracted from the nomination form*)

B'nai Israel consists of two interconnected but temporally and architecturally distinct parts: the original, drum-shaped synagogue of 1923 and an L-shaped community building added in phases between 1950 and 1953. In 2022, the community building received alterations and an addition to adapt it for multifamily residential use.

Rotunda:

The synagogue rotunda contains B'nai Israel's historic sanctuary and its original lobby, which was accessed off of N. Negley Avenue (primary access was later moved to the rear of the site for ease of automobile access). The rotunda was designed by architect Henry Hornbostel, assisted by the partnership of Sharove & Friedman, in the Byzantine style. It is a circular stone drum with a recessed, dodecagonal attic story topped by a low copper dome. Two limestone belt courses divide the cylinder into zones: a foundation zone of random ashlar, a tall main zone of not-as-random, but irregular stone; and an upper, frieze-like zone of a blind arcade built of stack-bond brown brick accented with limestone capitals and spandrels filled with cut stone grapes and Stars of David. Each arch is filled with rubble stone. Above the blind arcade, the recessed exterior wall of the attic is sheathed in multi-colored asbestos shingles.

On the rear (west) half of the drum, nine tall arched windows rise through the upper belt course. Originally divided clear glass, these are now stained glass windows of abstract design by Jean-Jacques Duval and added in 1965.

The synagogue's main entrance faces east onto N. Negley Avenue and consists of three pair of paneled wood double doors set into a wall of smooth-dressed ashlar. An inscribed date stone is found in the lowest course just south of the doorways. Above them, an arched mosaic depicts the Ten Commandments held by lions rampant against a multi-colored harlequin background which echoes the pattern of shingles on the attic.

The entrance is framed by a three-bay, stone-and-brick portico reminiscent of Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel. The side bays flank a central arch which breaks into the brick arcade of the portico's upper wall much as the windows in the rotunda break into the blind arcade in its frieze. The arch's keystone is inscribed in Hebrew. The arch is supported by columns of pink Georgia marble with capitals carved with temple menorahs. Alongside, limestone octagonal columns and piers support a heavy entablature. The terra cotta frieze is ornamented with Stars of David, rainbows, and grapes. Under the portico roof are Guastavino vaults of warm brown brick with ornamental iron tie rods securing the structure. The porch floor is brick, and it is reached by concrete steps from the sidewalk on N. Negley Avenue.

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Community Building:

The community building is L shaped and joins the rotunda at the junction of its angle at the rotunda's southeast. Its two wings were built in 1950 (south wing) and 1953 (west wing). The community building addition was designed by Sharove, Rosenberg, & Friedman in the International Style, its severe geometry softened by bas reliefs on the Negley Avenue elevation. It was originally two stories, with a flat roof and facades veneered in brick and stone, and contained a social hall, chapel, rabbi's study, and classrooms. As part of its conversion to residential use in 2022, the community building received a two-story addition to its roof, and the original social hall in the south wing was demolished for an open courtyard, with the original facade retained as a screen wall.

The 1950 south wing extends southward from the rotunda with its long facade parallel to Negley Avenue. The original first floor, which historically contained the social hall, is clad in stone with brick piers separating five floor-to-ceiling window openings facing east toward N. Negley Avenue. The glazing has been removed from these windows and the openings retained, framed in aluminum. This arrangement is slightly recessed within a projecting frame of limestone. The limestone lintel extends northward to form a shallow canopy over the window openings and the former entrance to the social hall, now the building's residential entrance. This consists of an aluminum-framed, glazed storefront, further recessed in the bay closest to the rotunda, and reached by a series of concrete steps and landings. There is an inscribed date stone reading "B'NAI ISRAEL 1950" set in the wall just south of the entrance.

Above the facade's original window openings, set into the stone walls above their protecting limestone lintel, are five stone bas reliefs depicting a scroll, menorah, burning bush, hands of the High Priest, and breast plate of the High Priest. A larger bas relief of the Ark of the Covenant surmounted by two winged figures and a Star of David occupies the bay south of the windows. South of this, and set back slightly from the main volume of the social hall, is a small service wing with a separate entrance to the outdoors. The first-floor facade is tied back to the main volume of the wing with modern metal truss beams. A flush panel system encloses the main volume of the wing where it was originally open to the interior of the social hall.

The second floor, clad in variegated light-brown brick, was set back from the original first floor east elevation but was infilled to ground level when the social hall was converted to a courtyard in 2022. It has seven regular bays, each containing an original horizontal window opening. Part of each opening was infilled with gray brick in 2022 to accommodate the new arrangement of living spaces inside. The second-floor walls above the windows are flush to the original concrete coping with no cornice or other ornament.

The third and fourth floors were added in 2022. They are set back still farther beyond the second floor, clad in the same flush panel system as the lower wall in the courtyard, and have regular fenestration aligned vertically with that below.

The rear wing of the community building is visible only from the parking lot at the end of the driveway from N. Negley Avenue on the north side of the site. This wing extends westward behind the rotunda. Its original two stories are entirely faced in light brown brick. A third and fourth story, added 2022, are set back from the original parapet. These and a full-height hyphen connecting the rear wing to the rotunda are faced in the same flush panel system as the additions to the south wing.

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3. History of the B'nai Israel Synagogue *(as extracted from the nomination form)*

B'nai Israel was founded as an Orthodox congregation in 1904 and chartered in 1911. Members met in private homes until about 1912, when they rented the second floor of the Cameraphone Theater on Penn Avenue near Frankstown Avenue. The congregation continued to grow during the 1910s as the Jewish population of the East End burgeoned. Needing more space, it next rented the Masonic Building on Collins Street. This building had classrooms, offices, and an auditorium that seated approximately 200, but it still was not large enough to hold the full congregation during High Holiday services. On these occasions, B'nai Israel rented the Rittenhouse Ballroom.

In 1920, the congregation hired Benjamin A. Lichter as its rabbi. Born in Lithuania and raised in the Jewish community of Pittsburgh's Hill District, Lichter exercised strong leadership. He led the congregation's shift into Conservative practice and found it a new home in a mansion at 401 N. Highland Avenue. The congregation still held Sabbath services at the Masonic Hall on Collins Street and High Holiday services at the Rittenhouse.

Lichter also established a building fund campaign and purchased the Colonel Henry P. Bope estate at 327 N. Negley Avenue in 1920 as a site for a dedicated synagogue. The congregation hired veteran architect Henry Hornbostel, newly relocated to Pittsburgh from New York, to design its new sanctuary. For this commission, Hornbostel brought on the young local partnership of Sharove & Friedman to assist him. Construction broke ground on October 22, 1922. The cornerstone was laid on September 23, 1923. The incomplete sanctuary was first used for High Holiday services in 1924 and was completed in 1927.

The site plan retained the two existing buildings on the site: a brick Second Empire-style house, which the congregation called "the mansion" and renovated to contain a chapel, offices, library, and classrooms; and another building, presumably a carriage house, which it called "the barn" and utilized as a social hall. The classrooms served the East Liberty branch of the Hebrew Institute, a Hebrew school founded in the Hill in 1913. "The mansion" and "the barn" remained in use alongside the Hornbostel sanctuary until their demolition for the west wing of the Community Building in 1951.

Along with the rest of the country, Pittsburgh saw a population boom after World War II. B'nai Israel's membership also increased during this period, enabling the congregation to expand its facility with the construction of the Community Building. Sharove, Rosenberg, & Friedman drew plans for a modern addition to the sanctuary to replace the functions of "the mansion" and "the barn" in 1948. The L-shaped Community Building was built in phases, with the south wing complete in 1950 and the west wing dedicated in 1953. The addition housed classrooms, offices, a new social hall, an all-purpose room, and a chapel, Deaktor Chapel, completed in 1958.

In the early 1950s, B'nai Israel's membership was at its peak. In 1964-1965, the congregation undertook its last improvement to its facility, the installation of stained glass windows designed by Jean-Jacques Duval and a refurbishment and rededication of the sanctuary in honor of Rabbi Lichter, who had died in 1963. This entailed painting over of parts of the original dark-painted and gilded ornamental wall painting in the sanctuary and replacing the canvas ceiling while retaining the Persian Tree of Life motif.

By the 1970s, the congregation was no longer growing, but shrinking along with the populations of East Liberty and Pittsburgh. In the 1990s, the congregation merged with Congregation Beth Jacob

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of New Kensington and founded Adat Shalom Congregation in the suburb of Fox Chapel. On June 30, 1995, the B'nai Israel congregation held a formal closing ceremony at the synagogue.

Since that time, the sanctuary has been unused. The Community Building was occupied for a time as a charter school, then rehabilitated in 2022 as apartments. Planning is underway for a new, community-based adaptive reuse for the rotunda.

B'nai Israel was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2021.

4. Significance of the B'nai Israel Synagogue *(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 B'nai Israel Synagogue meets several of the criteria as follows.

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

B'nai Israel meets this criterion for designation.

B'nai Israel's significance as a work of architecture applies mainly to its rotunda, but extends to the community building as well, even with its recent alterations and additions.

Amid Pittsburgh's wealth of distinguished religious architecture, the B'nai Israel rotunda—attributed primarily to Henry Hornbostel—is exceptional in plan, design, and ornament. Its geometry is bold, distinctive, and symbolic. Its Byzantine style, wreathed in arches and richly embellished, is a rare departure from the Beaux Arts architectural language that grounded most of Hornbostel's work, and that was in vogue for large religious and public buildings in the 1910s and 20s. The sanctuary's random coursed stone walls make it seem to arise almost organically out of the ground, while it is ornamented in fine materials which are, themselves, works of art: colorful, glittering mosaic and Hornbostel's signature stone and terra cotta ornament, here depicting Jewish symbols such as stars, grapes, and rainbows. In its design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship, B'nai Israel is unique and outstanding among works of Hornbostel and among synagogues in western Pennsylvania.

Next to the striking originality and ornament of the rotunda, Sharove, Friedman, & Rosenberg's community building addition has been often overlooked, but has architectural merit of its own which has been respected in its most recent alterations and additions to convert it to multi-family housing. In style, the community building is unabashedly modern; its long, low-slung massing and flat roof contrast with the majestic cylinder of the 1923 rotunda. But in its materiality and in its deferential height and setback, the addition is compatible with the original sanctuary. The reliefs on its Negley Avenue facade, throwbacks to the Art Deco of the 1920s and 30s, anchor this otherwise neutral composition to the long history and tradition of Judasim.

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4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States:

B'nai Israel meets this criterion for designation.

B'nai Israel is significant as the combined design of two major architects at work in Pittsburgh during the first half of the twentieth century: Henry Hornbostel and Alexander Sharove. Both made important contributions to the built environments of Pittsburgh and the region, including B'nai Israel.

Henry Hornbostel: Henry Hornbostel (1867-1961) was born in Brooklyn and received his architectural education at Columbia University in New York and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the 1890s, he began working for the New York firm of Wood and Palmer, becoming a partner in 1897. George Wood left the firm shortly thereafter, but the partnership of George Carnegie Palmer and Hornbostel—in various permutations, sometimes including other partners—lasted until 1921. Hornbostel also sometimes formed ad hoc partnerships with other architects outside of his firm as projects dictated. He excelled at large-scale building projects, such as campus master plans and monumental government and institutional buildings, and at working creatively within Beaux Arts paradigms to give architectural expression to modern building types, such as skyscrapers, and works of engineering, such as bridges. Hornbostel designed architectural treatments for the Williamsburg, Manhattan, Queensboro, and Hell Gate bridges in New York; campus plans and buildings for Carnegie Technical Institute (now Carnegie Mellon University) and the University of Pittsburgh; a monumental city hall for Oakland, CA, and state education building for New York; and Rodef Shalom Synagogue at 4905 Fifth Avenue for Pittsburgh's oldest and largest congregation.

Hornbostel designed Rodef Shalom in 1907 while still in New York and in partnership with Palmer. By 1922, when he began working on B'nai Israel, that partnership had dissolved and Hornbostel had moved to Pittsburgh. The B'nai Israel congregation left no record of why it selected Hornbostel to design its new synagogue, but his much-admired work for Rodef Shalom, a short distance away, was surely influential.

Hornbostel was not a conservative designer of traditional houses of worship, and this shows in B'nai Israel. Hornbostel scholar Charles Rosenblum states that B'nai Israel exhibits “how the eclectic mix of historicism and invention of his early career could apply relevantly to machine age projects.” At B'nai Israel, Hornbostel cloaked the steel-framed sanctuary in the Byzantine style, a reference to the earliest synagogues, whose stylistic attributes shared those of other houses of worship of the eastern Roman Empire. Characteristic were round arches, mosaics, and high domes, creating dramatic open sanctuary spaces. All of these are present in B'nai Israel, in addition to Hornbostel's signature stone and terra cotta ornament, also prominent at Rodef Shalom and his buildings for Carnegie Mellon University.

Alexander Sharove: For the B'nai Israel commission, Hornbostel associated with the young partnership of Sharove & Friedman. Alexander Sharove (1893-1955) was born in Virginia to Russian immigrant parents. The family observed Orthodox Judasim. Sharove graduated from the Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon) School of Architecture in 1919

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and made his permanent home in Pittsburgh, where he was a member of congregation Rodef Shalom. In around 1920, he formed a brief partnership with his classmate Philip Friedman, but spent most of his career in independent practice until his death in 1955. Sharove was an architectural polymath who designed commercial buildings, apartment buildings, public housing, and single-family homes in a variety of styles, but came to specialize in houses of worship, especially synagogues.

In the 1920s and 30s, Sharove designed synagogues in a loose interpretation of the Classical Revival Style executed in pale buff brick, seemingly inspired by Hornbostel's work on Rodef Shalom and the campus buildings of the nearby Carnegie Mellon University. Examples include Congregation Poale Zedeck (6318 Phillips Avenue, Squirrel Hill: 1929), Beth Shalom (5915 Beacon Street, Squirrel Hill: 1931), and temple Beth El in Richmond, VA (1931), in red brick and with a more restrained Colonial Revival touch. Sharove also designed the Freehof Hall addition to Rodef Shalom with Harry H. Lefkowitz in 1954.

By the 1950s, Sharove had adopted the International Style. In this decade, until his death in 1955, Sharove seems to have been in demand as a designer of Modern synagogues.

Commissions include Tree of Life (Shady and Wilkins avenues, Squirrel Hill: 1953), Temple Beth Shalom in Johnstown, PA (ca. 1951), Beth Am in Monessen (1954), Knessett Israel in Kittanning (1954), Beth Israel in Washington (1955), and Agudath Shalom in Lynchburg, VA (1955). Before all of these, he designed the community building addition to B'nai Israel in 1948. Sharove's buildings from this period share certain characteristics: low-slung massing, flat roofs, a mix of stone and brick veneer to differentiate volumes, and integral reliefs and/or frieze bands inscribed with one of the ten Commandments or with the name of the temple.

Most of these elements are incorporated in the Community Building addition to B'nai Israel, strongly suggesting that Sharove was its primary designer.

Less is known about Joseph Friedman. His other known commissions are Poale Zedeck (1929), also in partnership with Sharove, and several middle-class single-family homes in Squirrel Hill.

The respective roles of Hornbostel and Sharove & Friedman in designing the B'nai Israel rotunda are not documented. Sharove's daughter argues that Sharove was the primary designer,⁸ but historians unanimously attribute the design of the synagogue primarily to Hornbostel. Architectural historian Walter Kidney argues that Sharove & Friedman's Poale Zedeck is derivative of Rodef Shalom, and this would have been an unlikely regression for the imagination behind the "bold creation" of B'nai Israel. Kidney concludes, "The weight of the credit has been given to Hornbostel in the past, and this seems to be right."

In 1948, the congregation thought enough of Sharove & Friedman to engage them again— even though their formal partnership seems to have long ended—to design the community building. Here, Sharove & Friedman share a title block with Hyman Rosenberg, a member of the B'nai Israel congregation. Rosenberg had an office in the same building as Sharove; he may have been a brief associate. His only other known

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commission is a ca. 1941 storefront at 1506 E. Carson Street which was either never built or has been remodeled.

7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.

B'nai Israel meets this criterion for designation.

B'nai Israel is associated with the Jewish history of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania. The congregation and its synagogue played an important role in the establishment of a middle-class, Conservative Jewish community in the East End of Pittsburgh between 1923 and 1969.

Jews began to arrive in Pittsburgh in large numbers between 1870 and 1890, mostly from Russia and eastern Europe, seeking to escape religious persecution and pursue economic opportunity. Many settled in the Hill District, then the most heavily populated and integrated neighborhood in the city. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Hill was home to Black migrants from the South as well as Irish, Italian, Greek, Syrian, and Jewish immigrants: all groups which shared the experience of discrimination. In 1910, the Hill was home to many Jewish institutions, including 11 synagogues, all Orthodox; the Irene Kaufmann Settlement House on Centre Avenue; several Hebrew schools, English-speaking Jewish Sunday schools, and institutions perpetuating Yiddish language and culture; and the Labor Lyceum, a Jewish union hall and socialist community center. Barred by discrimination from working in Pittsburgh's steel mills, Jewish workers found jobs as unskilled laborers in bakeries and cigar and textile factories. Many lived in tenements without running water, indoor sanitation, or central heat.

Pittsburgh's Jewish population increased rapidly from about 10,000 in 1900 to 40,000 in 1917, peaking around 1920. Also during this period, the children of the Hill's original Jewish immigrants grew up, and many of them entered the middle class and moved to areas further east of downtown, such as Oakland, Squirrel Hill, East Liberty, and Highland Park. New streetcar lines made these neighborhoods accessible to downtown commuters.

In 1904, enough Jews had moved to East Liberty that they organized their own Chevra, a grouping of Jews around a common geography. From this, the B'nai Israel congregation was formed. Its founders were not necessarily wealthy, but had enough money to move to a newer, less-crowded neighborhood in pursuit of a better life. The authors of a 1979 commemorative history of B'nai Israel reflected that the early Jewish citizens of the East End "were probably somewhat liberal-minded in their relation to Jewish custom; they were moving to neighborhoods where synagogues would be more distant and laws of kashrut would be more difficult to keep." Indeed, B'nai Israel's congregation transitioned from Orthodox to Conservative, phasing out separate seating for men and women, for example, in favor of family pews.

Over the next two decades, B'nai Israel's membership burgeoned, as more and more Jews bought homes in East Liberty, Morningside, and Highland Park, especially around

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N. St. Clair St. and N. Negley and Stanton avenues. Not only was the congregation larger, it was wealthier, its members more educated and established. Jacob Feldman, a historian of Jews in western Pennsylvania, notes that these newer members of B'nai Israel "no longer were merely peddlers or storekeepers in East Liberty.... Many of them took the Penn Avenue streetcar to their jobs or businesses downtown."

The post-war development of the Stanton Heights neighborhood adjacent to Morningside swelled B'nai Israel's population with even more financially-comfortable, young, modern families, enabling the congregation to add a modern community building to its Negley Avenue sanctuary and demolish "the mansion," the old house on the property that had been pressed into service for 30 years.

When B'nai Israel's membership began to taper off in the 1970s, congregation officials considered the loss of Jewish families from Stanton Heights a major cause. Actually, broad trends in retail, transportation, and residential preference were affecting all aspects of urban neighborhoods at a national level, from commerce to demographics to attendance at synagogues, schools, and churches. When B'nai Israel's congregants followed suit, leaving the city for the suburbs in the 1990s, they left their landmark building behind.

At its peak, at the middle of the 20th century, B'nai Israel's membership stood at over 900 families, rivaling the numbers of the major synagogues in Oakland (Rodef Shalom) and Squirrel Hill (Beth Shalom, Tree of Life). B'nai Israel's large property and distinctive architectural presence on prime East Liberty real estate signified the successful migration of Pittsburgh's Jewish community from the crowded Hill to the leafy East End, from new immigrant to established citizen, and from poverty to prosperity in the first half of the 20th century.

10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

B'nai Israel meets this criterion for designation.

B'nai Israel's location on a prominent thoroughfare near the junction of four neighborhoods (East Liberty, Garfield, Morningside, and Highland Park), along with its imposing size, distinctive geometry, and unique combination of materials and ornament, make it a landmark of unmistakable prominence in Pittsburgh's East End.

5. Integrity

In addition to significance, the ordinance specifies that "Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration."

B'nai Israel Synagogue has good integrity. Its integrity of location and setting, on residential N. Negley Avenue near the busy commercial center of East Liberty, are unchanged since its construction. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship of the rotunda are strong.

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Renovations to the community building to convert it to residential use in 2022 have added to its volume without obscuring its Negley Avenue facade and largely without destroying its original design, materials, or workmanship; perhaps most importantly, the 1950 stone bas reliefs have been preserved in place. The west wing has been more heavily altered, but it is not visible from the public right-of-way. B'nai Israel's distinctive Byzantine rotunda and ornament incorporating Jewish iconography on both the rotunda and community building give it strong integrity of feeling and association with its original purpose as a Jewish house of worship and center of congregational life.

6. Photos



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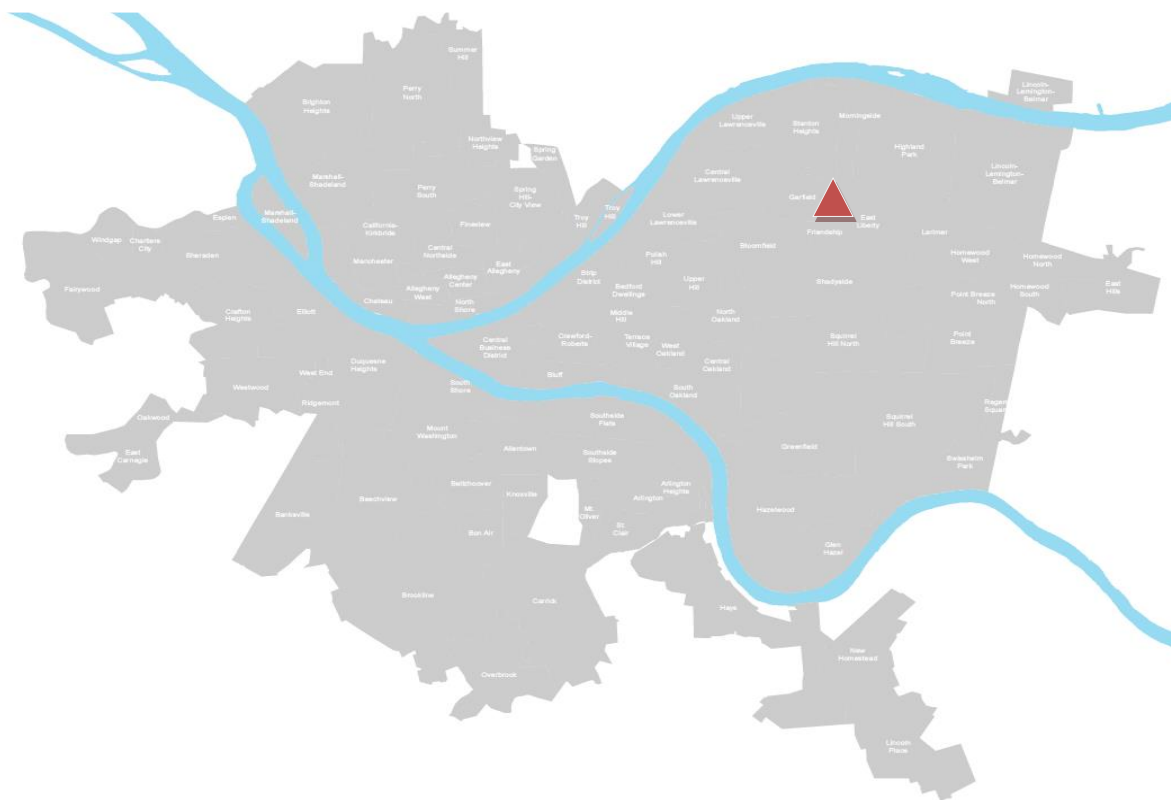
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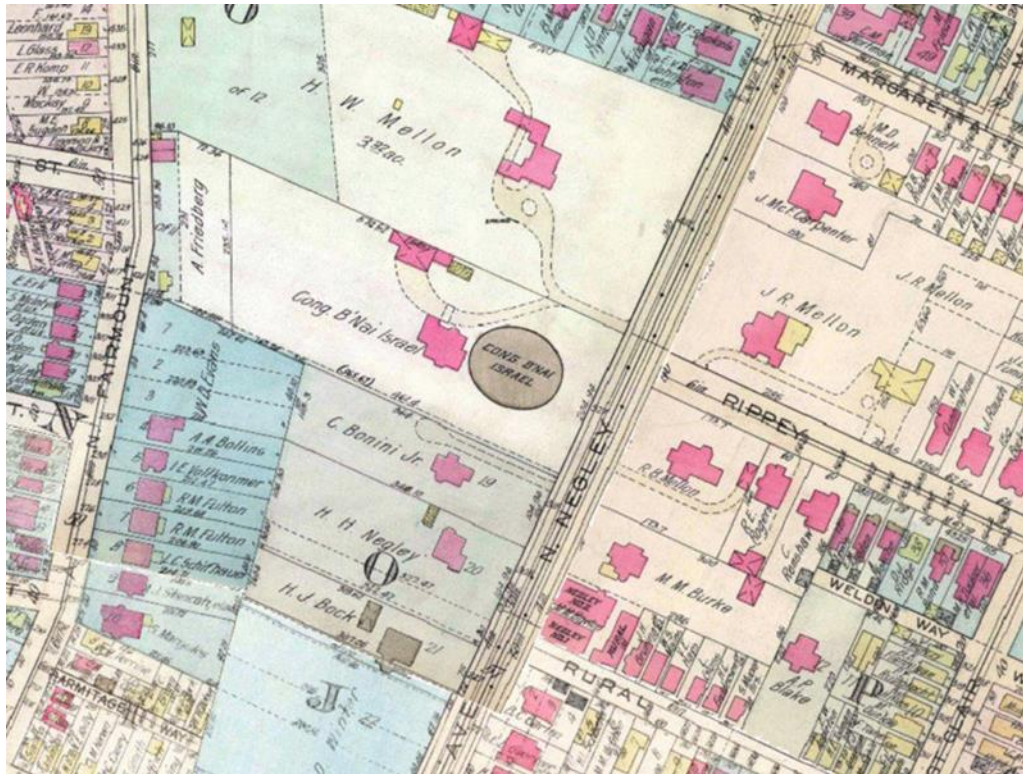
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7. Maps



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Excerpt, *G.M. Hopkins Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh, 1923*. The former Bope house (“the mansion”) and its carriage house (“the barn”) are shown still standing on the property along with the B’nai Israel sanctuary.

8. Recommendation of the Historic Review Commission

The Historic Review Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation of the B’nai Israel Synagogue. On October 4, 2023 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate the B’nai Israel Synagogue as historic.

9. Recommendation of the City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation the B’nai Israel Synagogue. On October 17, 2023 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate the B’nai Israel Synagogue as historic.

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10. Meeting Minutes

HRC MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 6, 2023 – PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION HEARING

NOMINATION OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK

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Pittsburgh HRC –September 6, 2023

B'nai Israel Synagogue
327 N. Negley Avenue

Historic Nomination

Owner:
327 NN LLC

Ward: 11th

Lot and Block: 83-J-210

Neighborhood: Garfield

Nominator:
Beacon Communities

Council District: 9th

Nominations Received: 8/22/23

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

Proposed Changes: Determination of nomination viability.

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 3**, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, **Criterion 4**, identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, **Criterion 7**, association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, and **Criterion 10**, unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh. She states that the property retains integrity and recommends that the Commission provides a positive recommendation to City Council.
 2. The Commission discusses the criteria for nomination.
-
-

Motion:

1. Mr. Falcone moves to accept the nomination based on **Criteria 3, 4, 7, and 10**.
 2. Mr. Loysen seconds.
 3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.
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**NOMINATION OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

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HRC MINUTES – OCTOBER 4, 2023 RECOMMENDATION

NOMINATION OF THE B'NAI ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

Pittsburgh HRC –October 4, 2023

B'nai Israel Synagogue
327 N. Negley Avenue

Historic Nomination

Owner:

327 NN LLC

Ward: 23rd

Lot and Block: 24-P-190

Neighborhood: East Allegheny

Nominator:

Beacon Communities

Council District: 1st

Nominations Received: 5/22/23

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

Proposed Changes: Recommendation to City Council

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 3**, exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship, **Criterion 4**, identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, **Criterion 7**, association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States, and **Criterion 10**, unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh. She states that the property retains integrity and recommends that the Commission provides a positive recommendation to City Council. She adds that a presentation was also given at Planning Commission and they were in support of the nomination.
 2. Angelicque Bamberg, Historic Preservation Consultant to owner Beacon Communities, who wrote the nomination is present to speak.
 3. The Commission discusses the criteria for nomination.
 4. Mr. Falcone appreciated the deep connection to the Jewish community of Pittsburgh. Ms. Aguirre notes the significance of the Henry Hornbostel design.
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Motion:

1. Mr. Falcone moves to recommend the nomination to City Council based on **Criteria 3, 4, 7, and 10.**
 2. Mr. Hill seconds.
 3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.
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PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES –OCTOBER 17, 2023

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2. DCP-HN-2023-01135 – 327 N Negley Avenue Nomination of former B'nai Israel Synagogue Garfield Neighborhood Ms Quinn presented the historic nomination for DCP staff. This was the historic nomination for the B'nai Israel Synagogue located at 327 North Negley Avenue. It was built in phases generally starting from 1923 up through 2022. The Historic Review Commission decided this property was worthy of a positive recommendation to City Council under four criteria. The first one was for its architectural design. This structure is of Byzantine design, which is very unique for the City of Pittsburgh. It is also known for its glittering mosaics above the main door and reliefs linking the addition to the main building creating a unified appearance. The most recent addition was built in 2022 which is a compatible design but very clearly is a new build. The Historic Review Commission felt this property was also significant as the work of famous architect engineer Henry Hornbostel. He was the designer of both Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh campuses as well as the historic Rodef Shalom Synagogue, which he designed in New York before he moved to Pittsburgh. Along with Henry Hornbostel, the B'nai Israel Synagogue was designed by Alexander Sharove who was raised as an Orthodox Jew and understood the importance of each of the aspects of the synagogue. He also designed the Tree of Life Synagogue as well as synagogues in Johnstown, Monessen, Kittanning, and the City of Washington, PA. Probably most significantly this property was found to be noteworthy under criteria 7. Briefly, it represents social history in the City of Pittsburgh, reflecting the development of the Jewish community in East Liberty. Early Jewish settlers inhabited the Hill District, and as their community grew and became more affluent they chose to move to the suburbs, which was East Liberty at the time. To support the Jewish community this synagogue was built in the 1920s. The Jewish community continued to increase until 1969 when the synagogue was closed and no longer used. Finally, the Historic Review Commission felt this property was significant under criteria 10, which is for visual landmarks. Driving up North Negley Avenue one really notices and remembers seeing this building. The building integrity maintains its character defining features that were put together by the original architect. For those reasons the Historic Review Commission felt that this property should have a positive recommendation to City Council. 4 Chair Burton-Faulk opened the floor for public testimony. Ms McElhaney recognized Angelique Bamberg, Historic Preservation Consultant to the owners of this property, Beacon Communities. Ms Bamberg wanted to give the commission some context about why this nomination was coming before them. In addition to being nominated for city historic designation the synagogue is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A couple of years ago when the housing conversion of the 1950s wings got underway, it received HUD funding and that triggered a review of that project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The owners of the building consulted with community stakeholders including representatives from the city, from preservation organizations, Jewish organizations, and surrounding area community organizations and came up with a plan to provide some preservation outcomes to this project. In addition to the housing rehabilitation one of the things the owners agreed to do was to nominate the synagogue to be a city designated historic landmark. She stated that was why this came before the commission, and the owners were in full support and initiated this nomination under their memorandum of agreement with the state and with HUD. Chair Burton-Faulk asked commissioners if they had any comments or a motion. MOTION: That the Planning Commission of the City of Pittsburgh deliver a positive recommendation for approval to Pittsburgh City Council. MOVED BY: Ms O'Neill SECONDED BY: Ms Blackwell IN FAVOR: Ms Blackwell, Ms Burton-Faulk, , Ms

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Deitrick, Ms Dick, Ms Ngami ,Ms O'Neill, Ms Ruiz CARRIED D. Director's Report No Director's Report. E. Adjournment The meeting adjourned at 3:52 PM. Approved by: Secretary Disclaimer The official records of the Planning Commission's meetings are the Minutes of the Meetings approved by the Commission's Secretary, Jean Holland Dick. The Minutes are the ONLY official record. Any other notes, recordings, etc. are not official records of the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission cannot verify the accuracy or authenticity of notes, recordings, etc. that are not part of the official minutes 2. DCP-HN-2023-01135 – 327 N Negley Avenue Nomination of former B'nai Israel Synagogue Garfield Neighborhood Ms Quinn presented the historic nomination for DCP staff. This was the historic nomination for the B'nai Israel Synagogue located at 327 North Negley Avenue. It was built in phases generally starting from 1923 up through 2022. The Historic Review Commission decided this property was worthy of a positive recommendation to City Council under four criteria. The first one was for its architectural design. This structure is of Byzantine design, which is very unique for the City of Pittsburgh. It is also known for its glittering mosaics above the main door and reliefs linking the addition to the main building creating a unified appearance. The most recent addition was built in 2022 which is a compatible design but very clearly is a new build. The Historic Review Commission felt this property was also significant as the work of famous architect engineer Henry Hornbostel. He was the designer of both Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh campuses as well as the historic Rodef Shalom Synagogue, which he designed in New York before he moved to Pittsburgh. Along with Henry Hornbostel, the B'nai Israel Synagogue was designed by Alexander Sharove who was raised as an Orthodox Jew and understood the importance of each of the aspects of the synagogue. He also designed the Tree of Life Synagogue as well as synagogues in Johnstown, Monessen, Kittanning, and the City of Washington, PA. Probably most significantly this property was found to be noteworthy under criteria 7. Briefly, it represents social history in the City of Pittsburgh, reflecting the development of the Jewish community in East Liberty. Early Jewish settlers inhabited the Hill District, and as their community grew and became more affluent they chose to move to the suburbs, which was East Liberty at the time. To support the Jewish community this synagogue was built in the 1920s. The Jewish community continued to increase until 1969 when the synagogue was closed and no longer used. Finally, the Historic Review Commission felt this property was significant under criteria 10, which is for visual landmarks. Driving up North Negley Avenue one really notices and remembers seeing this building. The building integrity maintains its character defining features that were put together by the original architect. For those reasons the Historic Review Commission felt that this property should have a positive recommendation to City Council. 4 Chair Burton-Faulk opened the floor for public testimony. Ms McElhaney recognized Angelique Bamberg, Historic Preservation Consultant to the owners of this property, Beacon Communities. Ms Bamberg wanted to give the commission some context about why this nomination was coming before them. In addition to being nominated for city historic designation the synagogue is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A couple of years ago when the housing conversion of the 1950s wings got underway, it received HUD funding and that triggered a review of that project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The owners of the building consulted with community stakeholders including representatives from the city, from preservation organizations, Jewish organizations, and surrounding area community organizations and came up with a plan to provide some preservation outcomes to this project. In addition to the housing rehabilitation one of the things the owners agreed to do was to nominate the synagogue to be a city designated historic landmark. She stated that was why this came before the commission, and the owners were in full support and initiated this nomination under their memorandum of agreement with the state and with HUD. Chair Burton-Faulk asked commissioners if they had any comments or a motion. MOTION: That the Planning Commission of the

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