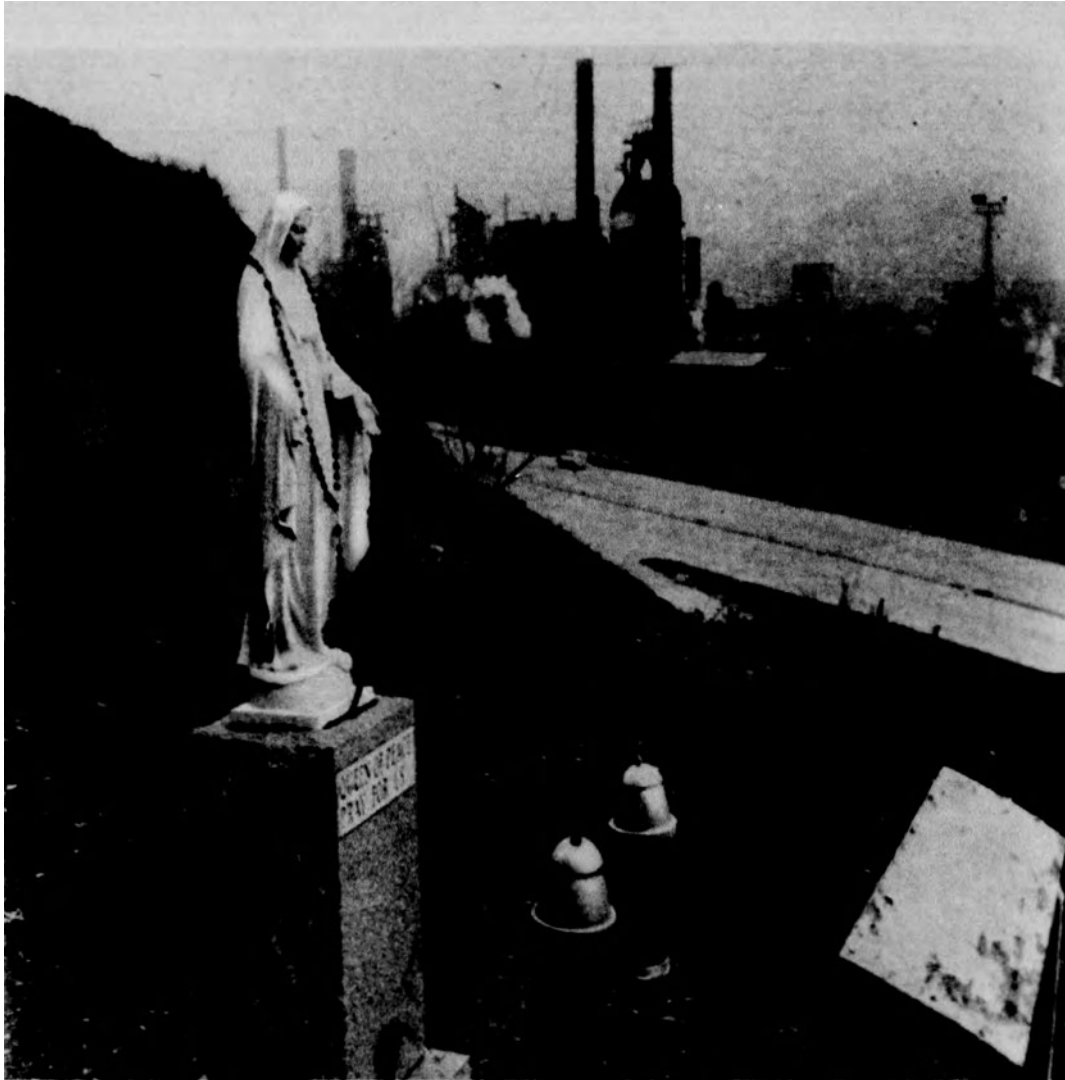


**NOMINATION OF THE BLESSED MOTHER SHRINE
TO BE DESIGNATED AS A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK**

CITY COUNCIL REPORT



BLESSED MOTHER SHRINE- HISTORIC NOMINATION STAFF REPORT

Name of Property Blessed Mother Shrine
Address of Property Wakefield Street
Property Owner City of Pittsburgh
Nominated by:..... Councilman Bruce Kraus
Date Received:..... May 15, 2020
Parcel No.: 29-B-215, 29-B-216, 29-C-23, 29-C-21, 29-C-20, 29-C-19, 29-C-18,
29-C-17, 29-C-16, 29-C-15
Ward:..... 4th
Zoning Classification:..... H
Neighborhood:..... South Oakland
Council District:..... 3 – Kraus

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION:

1. Act on the Preliminary Determination of Eligibility for Historic Designation (1 July 2020)
2. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (1 August 2020)
3. Review the Report prepared by staff for the property in question, and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (1 August 2020)

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION:

4. Conduct a public hearing for the Historic Designation (11 August 2020)
5. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and make a recommendation to the City Council on the Historic Designation (11 August 2020)

FORMAL ACTION REQUIRED BY THE CITY COUNCIL:

6. Conduct a public hearing
7. Review the recommendations of the Historic Review Commission and the City Planning Commission and take action on the Historic Designation

FACTS

1. On May 15, 2020 the staff of the Historic Review Commission received an application for the nomination of the Blessed Mother Shrine to be designated as a City Historic Site.
2. **Description of The Blessed Mother Shrine** (as extracted from the nomination form)

Boundary

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother lies in the southernmost section of South Oakland Park in Pittsburgh, Pa. and is comprised of architectural, sculpted, and landscape elements. It is are roughly bounded by the cliff side extending to the 376/Bates St. Offramp to the south, the houses on Wakefield Street to the East, the southern residential property lines of the houses on Frazier Street and by the southerly continuation of Whitney Way. **Please note this nomination omits parcel 29-C-22**, however includes the parcel in the description, history, and significance sections to provide context. The following parcels constitute the property nominated: 29-B-215, 29-B-216, 29-C-23, 29-C-21, 29-C-20, 29-C-19, 29-C-18, 29-C-17, 29-C-16, 29-C-15 as well as Wakefield Street west of 16 Wakefield Street.

Physical Description

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother occupies a small, roughly rectangular piece of land on a northwest by southeast axis. The sole access to the site lies at the bottom of Wakefield Street, a Belgian cobblestoned street extending from Ward Street. The cobblestones terminate at several concrete barriers and a small, concrete walkway extends from the right of the barriers past two 19th century vernacular homes. In front of the second house, the poured concrete gives way to a modern concrete walkway with a black iron hand railing on left. Approximately fifteen feet to the left of the railing there is a mesh, metal chain link fence that narrows in towards the path as it turns from concrete to a herringbone patterned red brick bound by wooden ties on the left. The path continues a gradual decent down the hill a sign that reads “Shrine of the Blessed Mother -Entrance” establishes a formal entrance to the site.

After this point, a beige vinyl shed sits at left and a cream-colored fence begins and serves as a divider between the houses northeast of the site. Along this fence line are a series of wooden crosses, approximately fifteen feet tall that have counterparts along the left side of the path. In total, there are fourteen crosses that are representative of the fourteen Stations of the Cross. At this point the landscape consists of a gently sloping grassy hills interspersed with fir trees. On the parkway side of the path there is a wooden signpost with a triangular top that contains postings about the shrine’s history, articles about the shrine, and a biography of one of its founders, Philip Marraway. A small opening in the foliage provides a view of the Parkway below framed by two wooden crosses.

Continuing down the path, a single row of wooden benches sits at left and obstructs a portion of the path. Immediately opposite the row sits an altar, a shrine to Jesus, and the Queen of Peace shrine. The altar sits on a rectangular concrete pad accessed by a small concrete walkway surrounded by various types of planted flowers off of the main brick path. The altar is comprised of a marble top supported by two rectangular support pillars on which the Greek letters “Α” (alpha) and “Ω” (omega) hang. Behind the altar is a stone reredos with a rounded-arched opening housing a blue and white statue of Jesus on the cross flanked by vases with cut flowers. The altar is flanked by two of the aforementioned wooden crosses, which when taken in context of the crucifix within the reredos is meant to allude to the predominant iconography associated with Cavalry. There is a peaked, wooden yard shrine between the altar and the Queen of Peace Shrine that houses a picture of Jesus flanked by angels that sits over several prayer cards.

The Queen of Peace shrine sits approximately ten feet west of the altar and faces towards to the parkway. The structure consists of concrete and is framed by rounded-arched opening with two courses of multi-colored brick and masonry work (the outer course is coarse stone while the inner course is smooth brick). The interior is painted light blue, which establishes a backdrop to the statue of the Queen of Peace, which stands atop a rectangular granite pedestal in which the words “QUEEN OF PEACE PRAY FOR US” is engraved. Two small marble shelves flank the statue and provide space for candle votives and two removable plant stands that often support lavish bouquets flank the statue. There is a padded kneeler before the enclosure, which is flanked by two identical concrete statues of angels, which stand on a granite base on which a plaque reads “In honor of Maria and Domenico Campitelli”.

To the left of the shrine stands a bronze plaque which features of an image of the shrine above the words “Parkway Shrine Plaque 2015” and lists the following:

Anonymous donors
Sophia Toma
Sophia McMurtry
Phillip Marraway and Children
Josephine Dinardo
Iolanda and Comillo Sammartino
David Klickovich
Martin Marek
Sophie Koss
Antonio and Pina DiBattista
D’Aquilante Family: In Memory of Eugene and Concetta
John Takach
Giovanna Defetice Audia and John Otto
Cheryl and John Harchuck
Vincent Dunigan
Donna Schulli
Keith Glabb
Sabbia Sciulli
Kason Finke
Chuck Beck
Gradisek Family: In Memory of Angela and Carmine Dinardo
Gino Ginardo
Sam and Angela Verbane
Nancy D’Andrea
Melissa Ruggiero
Diane Faust
Frances Colton
Claudi Bazan Arias and Anoni Prevosti Vives
Campitelli Family
Saint Anthony Community
Paul Surgent
Grance Merta
Fr. Dan Vallecorsa
Fr. Richard Ulam
Mario and Alfonso Provenzano
Gloria Parkinson
Romilda Ianmitto
Joe Alba
James T. Dunigan

The brick path continues past the Parkway Shrine Plaque 2015 and curves to the left, responding to the geographical curvature of the hillside. This curvature creates a small, open segment of green space, manicured with flowers and contains several plaques honoring figures affiliated with the founding of the site and its continued maintenance. The path continues to ultimately terminate at a natural spring that emanates from the cliff side. Two statues of the Virgin Mary (one kneeling, one standing) and a statue of Joseph kneeling that are grouped around several plantings serve as a marker, helping to establish the natural spring as a separate area within the larger shrine site.

The rock face of the hillside is comprised of slate, from which a natural spring ebbs and flows depending on the season and the amount of rainfall. The pathway to the spring gently slopes down the hillside and terminates in a crevice, which captures the spring water and creates a small pool when the spring's flow is in abundance. To the right of the pathway, a small ledge of stone and polished granite has been constructed to ease access to the pool and the water emanating from the hillside. The erosion of the slate surrounding the spring create natural shelving, in which several small votive statues are placed, emphasizing the spring's devotional connection to the overall shrine site. The flow of the natural spring down the hillside creates another opening in the otherwise dense foliage, providing another direct view of the Parkway below.

3. History of The Blessed Mother Shrine (as *extracted from the nomination form*)

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother was first created in 1956 and it should be noted that there are multiple accounts, some of which are tangentially intertwined, that recount the shrine's origin. The earliest recorded report of the shrine's creation can be traced to a Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph article from September, 1956 that identifies Anna Cybak (from Ambridge) as having founded the shrine to honor her Army infantry sergeant son, Paul Cybak, who died while fighting in Saipan in 1944. According to the same article, Anna Cybak was visited by the Virgin Mary in a dream, which inspired her to help create a shrine to the Virgin Mary.

Another early account of the shrine's creation from a 1957 Pittsburgh Press article also attributes Cybak as one of the creators of the site along with long-time Oakland resident Sophie Toma. Toma lived on Wakefield Street and, after her house was razed for the creation of the Penn-Lincoln Parkway, she maintained ownership over an undevelopable plot of land that would become home to the shrine.

According to the Sun-Telegraph article, it was Anna Cybak, Sophie Toma, and their friend Mary Sunyoga (and her son, Steve) who cleared the lot and erected the statue. Different accounts of Toma's motivations for creating the shrine exist, and like Anna Cybak's divine vision, many of these accounts identify that Toma created a shrine in a nearby schoolyard after receiving a vision by the Virgin Mary.

Mary would again appear to Toma and instruct her to move the shrine to its current location.

In another account of the shrine's founding, Philip Marraway is also credited with the sites' inception. Like Toma, Marraway was a resident of Oakland (Forbes Ave.) and worked as a steelworker in the nearby Johns & Laughlin plant along the Monongahela. According to several accounts, on his walk home from work one evening Marraway saw a light beckoning him from the hillside above the parkway.

Marraway followed the source of the light and discovered that it emanated from an image of the Virgin Mary. The next day (purportedly during his lunchbreak), Marraway traveled to the site where he saw the image of the Virgin Mary the previous night and arrived at the same site at the same time as Sophie Toma. They agreed their meeting was divinely inspired and agreed to work together to erect the statue of the Virgin.

Some accounts of the shrine's founding also include the miraculous appearance of a natural spring. In these, the spring was responsible for the placement of the statue (Marraway and Toma carried it through the site until they became stuck in the mud at which point they constructed the pedestal). In

other accounts, the spring miraculously appeared to answer the prayers of those (Josephine DeNardo, in particular) tending to the shrine and its flowers.

In September of 1956, the shrine was blessed by a Rev. Thomas Hornyak, pastor of St. Joachim Church and has continuously grown and evolved to encompass the boundaries of the site described above.

Current stewards of the site cannot recount when specific features were added but photographic documentation over the past seven decades shows part of the shrine's built evolution from a free-standing statute, to one flanked by candles and votives, to the enclosed statue of the Blessed Mother that is present today.

In the early 2000s the shrine's continued existence came under threat as the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission's plans for the Mon-Fayette Expressway proposed removing much of the cliff side, including site of the shrine. Plans to extend the expressway into downtown Pittsburgh were ultimately abandoned.

4. Significance of The Blessed Mother Shrine (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 Blessed Mother Shrine meets two of the criteria as follows.

- 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*

Traditional Cultural Site

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother is a unique representation of lay Catholic religious devotion in Pittsburgh founded and maintained by a community from differing cultural backgrounds who have established routine practices centered on the shrine. The shrine should be considered a Traditional Cultural Site because of its cultural importance to a community of worshipers who, over the past seven decades, regularly make pilgrimage, worship at, and care for its upkeep. Integral to understanding the significance of the shrine to the community it serves, the status of the shrine must be contextualized within established doctrine of the Catholic Church.

While the term "shrine" has differing meanings across cultural and religious practice, the Catholic Church establishes the meaning of the term in its own belief structure in Canon 1230: "A shrine is a church or other sacred places which has the approval of the bishop and which is visited by the faithful as pilgrims."⁹ Today, and at no point in its history, has the Shrine of the Blessed Mother been considered an official "shrine" by the Catholic Church. It remains, as it was at its founding, an expression of faith, belief, and devotion to a lay Catholics throughout the region.

The community of worshipers deserves equal consideration and definition to help understand the shrine's significance. In aggregate, the stories that recount the shrine's creation provide insight into who initially comprised the founding members of the community. Philip Marraway, a Maronite, Lebanese Catholic, Anna Cybak, a Catholic who surname connects back to Eastern Europe, and Sophie Toma, an Italian Catholic all had different cultural origins but were brought together by a common devotion (and intervention) by the Virgin Mary. Although no formal records exist, the cultural diversity of the founders would continue to be a hallmark of the community of worshipers brought together by the shrine. Oral histories and keys artifacts provide an indication of the cultural composition of this community over time. This is perhaps most evident in the Shrine of the Parkway 2015 Plaque that lists individuals and families connected to the site. Surnames on the plaque like McMurtry, Dinardo, Klickovich, Otto, Surgent, and Faust suggest that the community of worshipers today maintains the cultural diversity of its founders. The physical characteristics and manifestations of the shrine can also be viewed as a reflection of the cross-cultural nature of the community of worshipers it services.

Architecturally, the shrine is comprised entirely of vernacular expressions that reflect independent contributions visually reflective of the ethnography of its worshipers. The wooden posts containing information about the site and prayer cards devoted to Jesus have stylistics and cultural connections to wayside shrines prevalent in Germany, Austria, and Poland. The placement of votives and small statuary in the slate hillside surrounding the natural spring draw direct visual connections to grotto shrines popular in France, Italy, Turkey, and throughout the Mediterranean. The Queen of Peace shrine, in all of its documented iterations, has clear connections to publically-accessible yard shrines often found in abundance in Italian-American communities throughout the Northeast.

Finally, the practices of this community of worshipers that directly center on, and involve, the shrine should be noted as a representation of their traditional cultural practices. Since the shrine's founding the Shrine of the Blessed Mother's community of worshipers has been united in devotion to the Virgin Mary, not necessarily by ethnic or cultural identity. The community gathers at 7pm on the 22nd of each month to pray the rosary together, a commemoration the date of the visions of the Virgin that resulted in the shrine's founding. Additionally, masses are occasionally held at the shrine to mark special occasions related to the Virgin Mary, the history of the shrine, and its continued evolution.

Proliferation of Freeways

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother is also directly associated with period of rapid expansion of freeways, highways, and interstate road systems throughout the country as particularly manifested in Pittsburgh. Through this association, the shrine conveys a transitional moment in Pittsburgh's history when neighborhoods and a way-of-life rooted in the late 19th century transformed to the rapid, post-WWII modernization of American society.

Specifically, the construction, and effects, of the Penn-Lincoln Parkway plays a central role to the creation narrative of the shrine as well as one of its intended functions. In 2006 the Penn-Lincoln Parkway East, from the Bates Street Interchange to the Churchill Interchange, was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places when the Federal Highway Administration, in consultation with various State Departments of Transportation and State Historic Preservation Offices, listed the roadway as one of the nationally and exceptionally significant features of the Federal Highway System. The determination states that the Penn-Lincoln Parkway East was eligible under Criterion A in the area of transportation, as Pittsburgh's first modern expressway as well as for its incorporation of significant planning and integration with existing transportation systems, while attempting to limit dislocation of existing development.

It is in the dislocation and impact on existing development that the historical significance of the parkway intersects with that of the shrine. According to early accounts the land on which the shrine was founded belonged to Toma's former home, which was razed to accommodate the creation of the parkway. Other accounts of the shrine's founding reference that Toma was motivated because of a particularly horrific traffic accident on the nearby parkway.

This singular traffic accident, however, should be contextualized within this era of history and the mass-accessibility of automobiles, newly created highways, and the social response they elicited.

Throughout the 1950s American society struggled to adapt to the rapid, prolific access to cars and freeways and resulting deaths and injuries from automobile accidents were legion. A review of headlines from editions of the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph in the year the shrine was created, 1956, illustrates how prevalent deaths from car crashes were at this time in and around Pittsburgh. Between August and September of 1956 alone, headlines such as "427 Die in Traffic; 12 in District", "270 Die in Traffic, Seven from Area", "4 Killed, 15 Hurt in Traffic", "Autos Kill 113 in 56'", "4 Die in Parkway Crash" were prominent features of the front page and the newspaper devoted a weekly section to listing the details of fatal and/or particularly gruesome accidents.¹⁶ Public service announcements and safety propaganda in these same newspapers highlighting the

loss of life from automobile accidents were a frequent occurrence. Driving the number of fatalities was a combination of factors such as the nascent development of car safety technology (seatbelts were not mandatory features in cars until the 1960s), the advent of highways and parkways (and the accompanying availability of faster driving speeds), and the increasing availability of the automobile to different segments of American society. Toma's account of the shrine's founding speaks directly to the proliferation of concerns about automobile traffic (and accidents resulting in death) and ties directly into this narrative.

Connections between the Shrine of the Blessed Mother and the nearby Penn-Lincoln Parkway are also evident in the nomenclature of the site as well as its design and geographic orientation. Early accounts of the shrine refer to it as 'Queen of Peace' and 'Madonna on the Hill'. Although the formal name of the shrine today is the Shrine of the Blessed Mother, it is more commonly known as "Our Lady of the Parkway" or "Shrine of the Parkway" (as it appears on the aforementioned plaque at the site). The shrine (both the overall site and the statue of the Virgin Mary) is oriented in a manner that integrates the hillside's steep topography as to be highly visible to all traveling on the Parkway East.

- 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*

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother occupies a unique geographic location and is a well-established visual feature in South Oakland and within the City of Pittsburgh. Situated on the precipice above Route 376 (the Parkway East), the shrine is highly visible to all east-bound traffic, which numbers among tens of thousands of people every day. To vehicular traffic on the Parkway East, the shrine is most visible at night and in the fall and winter when the crosses and other feature are illuminated and the trees lack their full foliage.

While the Shrine is not visible from any vantage point in the neighborhood streets of South Oakland, it is a well-established if not beloved, featured of the community. Street signs guide neighborhood and travelers through the maze of one-way streets down the hillside to the shrine.

11) Integrity

As a traditional cultural site, the Shrine of the Blessed Mother retains a high degree of integrity in location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association. The shrine remains in its original location on the cliff side of South Oakland. While the physical setting has become more verdant over time, the manicured landscape sparsely populated with trees remains a consistent reflection of the physical condition present at its founding, helps to distinguish the site from the foliage of the surrounding hillside, and maintains its visual relationship with the Parkway East.

The Shrine of the Blessed Mother also maintains its integrity of workmanship, feeling, and association through the presence of vernacular architectural, structural, and sculptural manifestations present at the site.

12) Photos









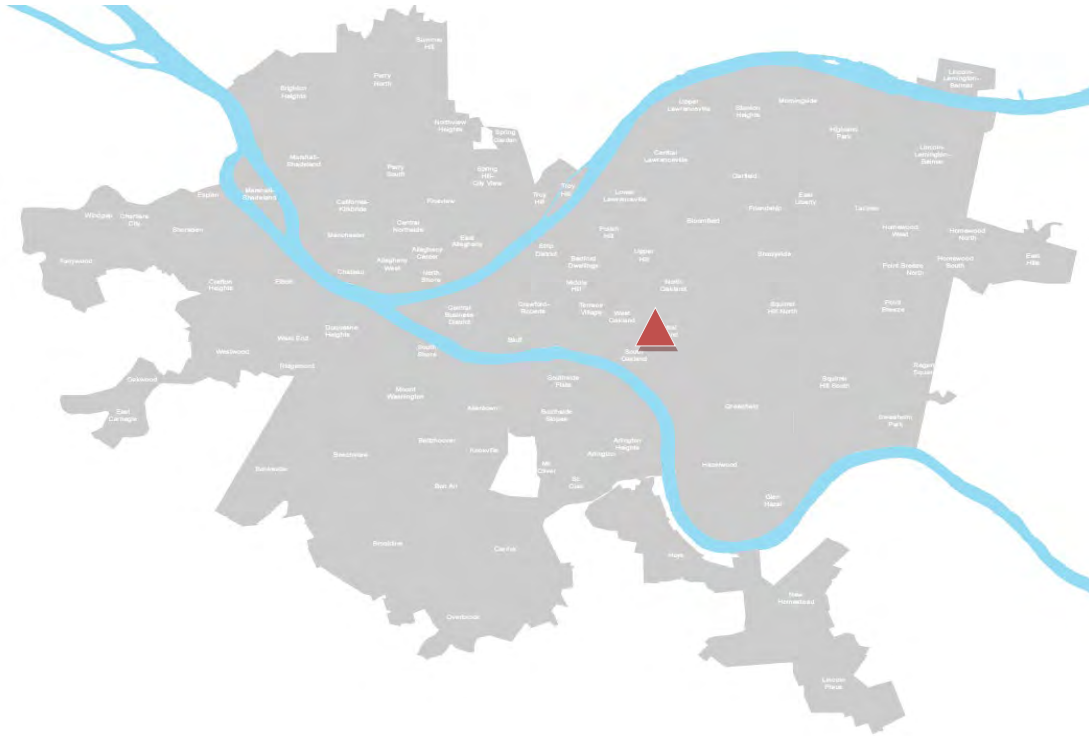








13) Maps



14) Recommendation of the Historic Review Commission

The Historic Review Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation of The Blessed Mother Shrine. On August 5, 2020 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate The Blessed Mother Shrine as historic.

15) Recommendation of the City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission held a public hearing regarding the designation of The Blessed Mother Shrine. August 11, 2020 the Commission voted to recommend to City Council that it designate The Blessed Mother Shrine as historic.

16) Meeting Minutes

HRC MINUTES – JULY 1, 2020 – PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION HEARING

***Shrine of the Blessed Mother
Wakefield Street***

Historic Nomination

Owner:
City of Pittsburgh

Ward: 4th
Lot and Block: Various

Nominator:
Matthew Falcone

Inspector:
Council District:
Nomination Received: 5/15/20

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

Proposed Changes: Nomination for historic designation.

Discussion:

1. Ms. Quinn explains that this nomination is of the property owned by the City. The one parcel owned by the Diocese is not included in the nomination. She states that they will look at this nomination a little bit differently as it is not a building. The shrine is considered a historic site and a traditional cultural property, and she explains a bit more about what that means. She makes a short presentation on the site. She states that the nominator found that the site is significant under **Criterion 7**, association with important aspects or events in cultural or social history, 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, and that the site does retain integrity.
2. The Commission discusses the nomination.

Motion:

1. Mr. Green moves to confirm the viability of the historic nomination based on the listed criteria.
 2. Mr. Falcone seconds.
 3. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; Ms. Aguirre, Mr. Falcone, Mr. Green, and Mr. Hill are in favor and Ms. Loysen abstains. Motion carries.
-
-

HRC MINUTES – AUGUST 5, 2020 RECOMMENDATION

***Shrine of the Blessed Mother
Wakefield Street***

Historic Nomination

Owner:
City of Pittsburgh

Ward: 4th

Lot and Block: Various

Nominator:
Matthew Falcone

Inspector:

Council District:

Nomination Received: 5/15/20

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

Proposed Changes: Nomination for historic designation.

Discussion:

3. Ms. Quinn explains that this nomination is of the property owned by the City. The one parcel owned by the Diocese is not included in the nomination. She makes a short presentation on the site. She states that the nominator found that the site is significant under **Criterion 7**, association with important aspects or events in cultural or social history, 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, and that the site does retain integrity.

Ms. Aguirre asks for public comment.

4. Councilman Bruce Kraus speaks as the nominator. He is proud of the nomination and states that the rich, historic, grassroots residential history of Oakland is often missed. He states that he was contacted by residents about a construction project in the area that could possibly have compromised the shrine, which is how he got involved in the nomination. He asks the Commission to protect this Italian Catholic cultural icon and looks forward to their positive recommendation to City Council.
5. Mr. Christopher Ponticello speaks as the attorney for the Diocese and St. Joachim's Church. He states that although the parcels that are nominated are owned by the City, the parcel owned by the Diocese is an integral part of the shrine. He states that the Church is opposed to the nomination not because they are against historic preservation, but because they see designation as a potential burden and would like to manage their property as they see fit.
6. The Commission discusses the nomination.
7. Mr. Hill notes that they have heard a lot about property rights at today's hearing, and in his opinion the City also reserves the right to designate its property as it sees fit.

Motion:

4. Mr. Green moves to make a positive recommendation based on the listed criteria.
 5. Mr. Hill seconds.
 6. Ms. Aguirre asks for a vote; all are in favor and motion carries.
-
-

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES –AUGUST 11, 2020

2. DCP-HN-2020-00374, Shrine of the Blessed Mother, Historic Nomination

Ms. Quinn made presentation in accordance with the attached staff report.

Ms. Quinn informed that Shrine was built in 1966. She also explained the location and background of structure. Shrine is maintained by local community. Historic Review Commission recommends supporting this nomination.

Chairwoman called for questions and comments from the public.

Mr. Falcone from Preservation Pittsburgh stated that this is a very unusual site that was built by 3 steel worker family and maintained by local families.

Mr. Falcone asked PC members to support Historic Nomination of Shrine of Blessed Mother.

Mr. Dash supported the nomination; presented Shrine was designed, created and maintained by community and is very unique.

There being no more comments from the Public, the Chairwoman called for questions and comments from the Commissioners.

There being no comments from the Commissioners, the Chairwomen called for the motion.

MOTION:

That the Planning Commission of the City of Pittsburgh provides a positive recommendation to City Council for the nomination submitted for the Shrine of the Blessed Mother DCP-HN-2020-00374 for listing as a City-designated historic site.

MOVED BY: Ms. Mingo **SECONDED BY:** Mr. Brown

IN FAVOR: Mondor, Burton-Faulk, Mingo, Askey, Deitrick, Brown, Blackwell, Dick

RECUSED:

OPPOSED:

MOTION CARRIED