

Protecting the Integrity of Denver's City Park: The Possible Designations

There are four ways a Denver park may receive historic designation and varying degrees of protection: by listing on the 1) **National Register of Historic Places**; by designation as a 2) **National Historic Landmark** (the Pavilion and City Park Esplanade have this ,too); by listing on the 3) **Colorado State Register of Historic Properties**; and by designation as a 4) **Denver District Landmark**. The distinctions are:

1. A National Register listing is mainly an honorific designation and does not assure historic preservation although it can be used to identify properties for protection under a state or local preservation program. City Park is already listed on the National Register with 38 Contributing features and/or structures from the significant period of park history from 1880, the date of the earliest plan for a park to 1936 when the work called for in the 1929 Denver Plan was completed;
2. A National Historic Landmark listing, a special category within the National Register of Historic Places, merits distinction because of their exceptional importance to the nation as a whole. Denver's Civic Center Park was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 2012 but City Park does not qualify.
3. A Colorado State Register of Historic Properties listing also provides only limited protections, but makes the listed property eligible to compete for grants from Colorado's State Historical Fund; and
4. The most active protection a park can receive is designation as a **Denver Historic District**. Our City Park would be protected under The City of Denver's Historic Preservation Ordinance, which is Chapter 30 of the Revised Municipal Code, directing the Denver Landmark Commission to adopt the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. **City Park Pavilion** and the **City Park Esplanade** are both **Denver Historic Districts** within City Park.

While any member of the community can submit a nomination for designation, in the form of an application. To qualify as an historic district, one criterion in at least two of three categories must be met: architecture, geography and history. These categories are:

1. As to **history**, association with the historical development of the city, being the site of a significant historic event, or having direct and substantial association with a person or group who influenced society would demonstrate importance. For instance, City Park is associated with the City Beautiful movement in Denver that took place between 1890-1930.
2. As to **architecture**, a district must have design quality and integrity and also embody certain architectural styles. The many renowned landscape designers who contributed to City Park's design, including S.R. DeBoer, the Olmsted Brothers, Reinhard Scheutze, George Kessler, J.B. Benedict, and Edward Bennet provide powerful support for fulfilling the architecture category.
3. For **Geography**, the district must have a prominent location, or have distinctive physical characteristics or make a special contribution to Denver's distinctive character. The iconic City Park Pavilion, Ferril Lake, Duck Lake, the DeBoer Canyon, and the Sullivan and Monti Gateways are some of the significant features in City Park.

These protections are imperfect and Landmark Commission decisions may be overruled by the Mayor and/or the Manager of Parks and Recreation at any time per the Denver City Charter. However, a

Denver District Landmark designation for City Park, along with Design Guidelines, will provide levels of review and assessment that are thoughtful, calm and productive. They provide a potent but imperfect tool for protecting and enhancing our precious, green city spaces with an orderly and collaborative process.

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