



**Excelsior Downtown Historic District
Designation Study
Excelsior, Minnesota**

Prepared for

The City of Excelsior

Prepared by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT ADMINISTRATION.....	1
METHODOLOGY	2
DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCELSIOR DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT.....	8
WATER STREET.....	11
SECOND STREET.....	13
THIRD STREET.....	13
GEORGE STREET.....	14
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE.....	35
RECOMMENDATIONS	44
FINAL ACTION.....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	46

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INTRODUCTION: PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

This project, commissioned by the city of Excelsior through its Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC), was initiated by a contract between the city of Excelsior and Hess, Roise and Company. Excelsior City Manager Myles McGrath served as Project Director, assisted by Cheri Johnson, Administrative Assistant and Deputy City Clerk. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of the Minnesota Historical Society, acting as an agent of the National Park Service and its Certified Local Government (CLG) Grants Program, administered the project. Participating SHPO staff included Michael Koop, CLG Coordinator, and Mandy Skypala, Grants Administrator. In accordance with the terms of the CLG Grants Program, the city of Excelsior matched federal funding for the project with a cash appropriation.

Hess, Roise and Company is a Minneapolis-based historical consulting firm specializing in cultural resources surveys, National Register nominations, HABS/HAER documentation, preservation planning, archival research, and historical publications and exhibits. Marjorie Pearson, Ph.D., principal and vice president of the firm, acted as the Principal Investigator for the project. She was assisted by architectural historian Elizabeth Gales and research and survey historian Nathan Weaver Olson. Marjorie Pearson did the preliminary documentary research assisted by Nathan Weaver Olson. Dr. Pearson, Ms. Gales, and Mr. Weaver Olson participated in field survey. Mr. Weaver Olson did the site research. Dr. Pearson was responsible for site and boundary evaluation and the preparation of this report.

METHODOLOGY

Previous Actions

The Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission was established in 1980 by the Excelsior City Council. In 1981 and 1982, the HPC designated thirty historic sites that were subsequently approved by the Excelsior City Council. The following sites are located in the area that was designated as the Excelsior Downtown Historic District in 1998:¹

- Excelsior School House, 261 School Avenue. This property was also listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Excelsior School on November 13, 1980.
- Trinity Episcopal Church Chapel, 300 Second Street.
- Frank L. Perkins House, 332 Second Street.
- Fruit Growers Building, 450 Third Street. This property was also listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Excelsior Fruit Growers Association on January 4, 1982. It was removed from the National Register on July 1, 2002.
- Clark/Knowlton/Aldritt House, 371 Water Street.
- Bennett's Livery Barn, 432 Second Street.
- Phillips Building, 420 Second Street.
- IOOF Building, 250-252 Water Street.
- Gould Greenhouse Office, 368 George Street.
- Gould Harness Shop and Library, 374 George Street.
- Frank and Elmer Bardwell Residence, 429 Second Street.

On December 21, 1998, the Council of the City of Excelsior designated the Excelsior Downtown Historic District, which is shown on the map in Figure 1. Prior to the designation, 75 properties within the proposed district boundary were photographed. An inventory form was prepared for each property, and each was classified as contributing or non-contributing to the historic district. At that time, 59 structures and one site were classified as contributing to the historic character of the area. Fifteen properties, "where historic features have already been significantly altered or new construction has occurred" were classified as non-contributing. General characteristics of the district are identified under Section 1067:25, Subd. 1, of the Excelsior City Code. Items 1 through 9 of Subd. 1 list additional guidelines that apply with respect to the district.

¹ For more detailed information on these sites see *Historic Excelsior* (Excelsior: Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, 1982).

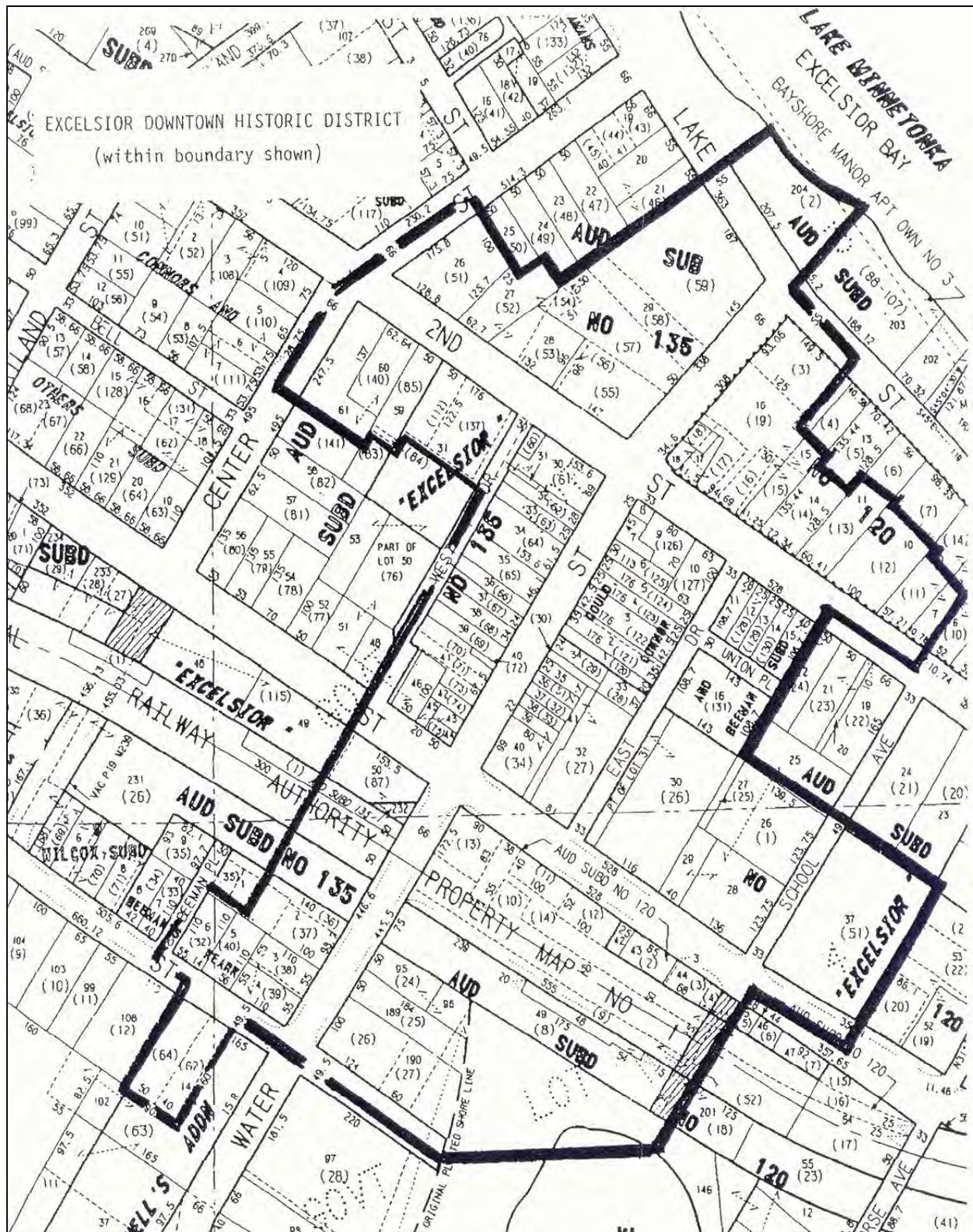


Figure 1. Excelsior Downtown Historic District, December 1998.

Current Project

In December 2001, Hess, Roise and Company received a contract to evaluate the boundary of the district as designated in 1998, to revise and update the inventory forms, and to prepare a historic context discussion and statement of significance for the Excelsior Downtown Historic District.

To carry out this project, Hess, Roise and Company has undertaken the following major tasks:

Preliminary Research

Each region of Minnesota has an architectural history that reflects the time of its settlement and development, its ethnic background, and its exposure to national architectural trends. Prior to undertaking a designation study of an area, it is important to become familiar with the history of the area, especially the settlement and development patterns that might influence the nature of construction.

Hess, Roise and Company had undertaken extensive background research of Excelsior in 2000, while preparing an intensive survey of the historic residential area of the city. Our files from that project were reviewed, as well as additional documentary and pictorial materials from the Minnesota Historical Society and SHPO site files on Excelsior. Several local histories provide useful information about Excelsior.²

Copies of the historic district map and existing inventory forms were obtained from the city of Excelsior.

Field Survey

Field work, accompanied by digital photography, was undertaken in January and February 2002, with the purpose of comparing conditions between 1998, when the district was originally designated, and 2002. Even though all the buildings were photographed in 1998, the inventory forms contained only minimal architectural descriptions.

In-depth Research

Concurrently with the fieldwork, Mr. Weaver Olson undertook historical research at the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society.³ The historical society is the repository of street files on Excelsior properties that were initially compiled in conjunction with a survey of Excelsior undertaken in 1978. The volunteer staff of the historical society have continued to add materials to the files, thus providing a detailed picture of changes to Excelsior properties during the past twenty-five years. The street files contain information on construction dates, builders, original and later owners, and architectural modifications, as well as descriptive information about the properties at the time of the survey. Few Excelsior properties were designed by architects. Much of the information had been compiled as a result of a systematic review of local

² Besides *Historic Excelsior*, additional titles include *The Lake, the Land, and the People: A Historical Portrait of the City of Excelsior* (Excelsior: Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society and Excelsior City Council, 1978); *Walking the Trails of History: Excelsior, Minnesota, South Shore of Lake Minnetonka*, 3d rev. ed. (Excelsior: Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, 1986); and Ellen Wilson Meyer, *Happenings Around Excelsior* (Excelsior: Tonka Printing Company, 1982).

³ Thanks to Betty Peck and Grace Knowlton for their assistance and knowledge of the area.

newspapers, historic maps and plats, and city directories. Historic photographs were also gathered and oral histories recorded. Many of the files contain copies of photographs taken in 1956 for tax assessment purposes.

Not every property could be documented precisely through existing records. In such cases, construction dates were derived from map and stylistic analysis. Dates as recorded in the Property Information Database of the Hennepin County Assessor's Office were used for a number of properties.

Assessment of District Boundaries and Contributing and Non-contributing Properties

Based on our field survey work and in-depth research, a recommendation for a revised district boundary was prepared and submitted to the city manager and the Excelsior HPC in March 2002. The recommendation was also based on the guidelines for defining historic district boundaries as contained in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* and *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*⁴. Following discussions with a subcommittee of the HPC and the city manager in April, the boundary recommendation was slightly revised as shown on the map in Fig. 2. Following a full meeting of the HPC on July 16, 2002, we were asked to reconsider the district boundary to include the Congregational Church properties. (The map in Figure 2 excludes these properties.)

Fieldwork and research were also the basis for identifying contributing and non-contributing buildings and sites and establishing a period of significance for the historic district. A list of those assessments was submitted to the city in June 2002.

The Excelsior Historic Preservation Ordinance (Section 340:00) and Heritage Preservation Program and Designation of Historic Districts/Sites (Section 1067) do not specifically address the issue of period of significance. Section 1067:25, Subd. 1, recognizes that the Excelsior Downtown Historic District has contributing and non-contributing buildings and sites, but contains no further definitions. Consequently we looked to *Bulletin 16A* for guidance, but recognize that in a local district, other factors have an impact. According to *Bulletin 16A*, the "period of significance is the length of time when a property was associated with important events, activities, or persons, or attained the characteristics that qualify it for listing. . . . For properties associated with historic trends, such as commercial development, the period of significance is the span of time when the property actively contributed to the trend. . . . For architecturally significant properties, the period of significance is the date of construction and/or the dates of any significant alterations or additions. . . . Fifty years ago is used as the closing date for periods of significance where activities begun historically continued to have importance and no more specific date can be defined to end the historic period." (p. 42) Further discussion of the period of significance for the Excelsior Downtown Historic District is contained in the statement of significance.

⁴ *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977, updated 1997); *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991).

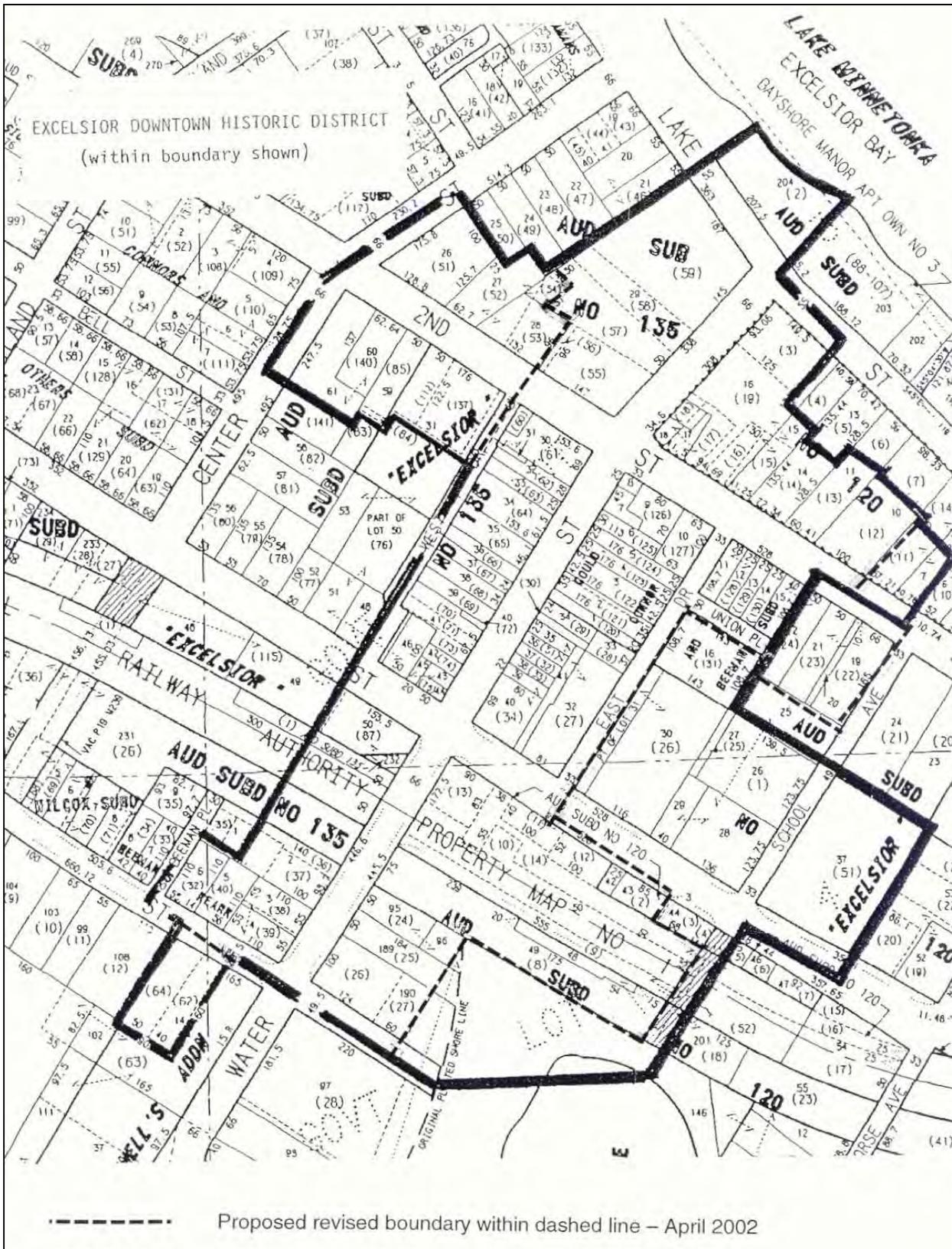


Figure 2. Recommendation for revised boundary. April 2002.

Bulletin 16A explains that “a contributing building, site, structure, or object adds to the historic associations [or] historic architectural qualities for which a property is significant because: it was present during the period of significance, relates to the documented significance of the property, and possesses historic integrity.” By contrast, “a noncontributing building, site, structure, or object does not add to the historic architectural qualities, [or] historic associations for which a property is significant because: it was not present during the period of significance or does not relate to the documented significance of the property; due to alterations, disturbances, additions, or other changes, it no longer possesses historic integrity or is capable of yielding important information about the period.” (p. 16)

Within the Excelsior Downtown Historic District, a number of commercial buildings are architecturally compatible with the overall character of the district, but are judged non-contributing because they postdate the period of significance. Others retain portions of their historic fabric but have been largely rebuilt or covered with newer, non-historic materials, so the facades are also judged to be non-contributing. In the case of the Congregational Church, the building, located on a historic site, postdates the period of significance. However, the tower and the steeple evoke its original historic character. The site of the Excelsior Fruit Growers’ Association Building remains historic and contributing, despite the unfortunate loss of the building. It must also be recognized that new construction is likely to continue within the boundaries of the historic district, subject to the local ordinance and guidelines. While such construction would be “non-contributing” to the period of significance, it is possible that such construction would be judged “contributing” for its appropriateness of design.

Revision of Inventory Forms

The existing inventory forms have been revised, based on field survey work and historic research, to provide more detailed architectural descriptions and assessments of changes to buildings over time. The goal is to provide a better background record to the HPC as it reviews applications for future changes. These forms also contain SHPO-assigned inventory numbers and UTM coordinates to assist with input into the statewide data base. Inventory forms have been created for a few properties that are recommended for inclusion in the district. Some properties that were included in the original district never had inventory forms. Forms have been created for these properties as well.

Preparation of the Excelsior Downtown Historic District Report

The following report describes the general characteristics of the historic district by building type and then characterizes the streets of the historic district. A list of the properties with their contributing or non-contributing status follows. This is followed by a statement of significance that discusses the history of Downtown Excelsior and contains the basis for the designation of the district. (All historic photographs are from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.)

The draft report was submitted to the Excelsior HPC for review, then forwarded to the Excelsior City Council. At a meeting on August 26, 2002, the City Council voted unanimously to approve the report and its recommendations.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCELSIOR DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

General Characteristics

The Excelsior Downtown Historic District extends along three blocks of Water Street, Excelsior's historic commercial and business street, from the municipal docks on Lake Minnetonka at the north to George Street on the south. In addition, it extends to the east along portions of Second Street and Third Street. The streets themselves, with rights-of-way of 66 feet, are fronted by platted city lots of varying depths. The streets are paved with bituminous material, edged by concrete curbing and concrete sidewalks and adorned with a variety of street features. On the north side of Third Street, east of East Drive, the road is fronted by a grass-covered, tree-lined boulevard between the curbing and the sidewalk. The platted city lots bordering the rights-of-way contain the buildings, structures, and landscape features that create the Excelsior Downtown Historic District.

The entire area within the Excelsior Downtown Historic District was part of the "Business Center of Excelsior, Lake Minnetonka" as depicted in 1887. The lakefront of Lake Minnetonka forms the northern boundary, while the north side of George Street defines the southern boundary. The rear property lines of the lots on the west side of Water Street generally form the western boundary. Because the district extends eastward along Second and Third Streets, the eastern edge is generally bounded by the west side of School Avenue. These boundaries are defined partly by use and building type and partly by visual character. They focus on Water Street as the core of Excelsior's downtown. They recognize the historic transportation routes to Excelsior via the lake and the railroad. They also acknowledge the role of important local industries such as lumber and fruit growing and shipping. The period of significance extends from the 1870s, the date of the earliest surviving buildings in the district which catered to the local tourist industry, to about 1955, when commercial buildings were constructed to provide services to an increasingly suburbanized community. The recommended historic district contains a total of 73 properties, 57 of which are contributing buildings (2 have non-contributing facades), 3 of which are contributing sites, and 13 of which are non-contributing buildings or structures.

Building Types

The Excelsior Downtown Historic District contains buildings of several types, most of which relate to various commercial aspects of the district.

Commercial Buildings/Commercial Blocks

This category applies to the majority of the buildings within the historic district. One or two stories high, they are masonry or concrete block structures, usually faced with brick. They incorporate display windows and shop entrances in the first-story storefronts with separate entrances to the second story. Storefronts have been modified over time to accommodate changing needs and tastes. The brick facing may incorporate decorative detail at the windows and roof cornices. This provides a certain amount of stylistic expression, generally variations on the Romanesque Revival and Renaissance Revival. If the building has a second story, it has been traditionally used for office space or small flats or apartments. The building form as used in Excelsior in the late nineteenth century, has been adapted and modified throughout the twentieth

century. As a type, the commercial block has been highly adaptable to the changing retail and service businesses in Excelsior.

Automotive Service Buildings

This building type is a variant on the commercial block. The earliest manifestation, as well as the oldest surviving frame commercial building in the historic district, is the Bennett Brothers Livery Stable (1899), at 432 Second Street, which was converted for automotive use in 1922. More typically the automotive service building is one story high, sometimes with a basement if the site allows, and made of concrete blocks with concrete floors. It incorporates large window and door openings that facilitate the display and servicing of automobiles. Many of these buildings had adjacent gasoline filling pumps. Many of the early gasoline filling stations were modeled after the form of a house with a gabled roof. A portion of the former Pure Oil station, at 284 Water Street at the corner of Third Street, still survives and has been incorporated into a larger commercial structure. Other early filling stations have been replaced by automotive service buildings that postdate the period of significance. Only two automotive service buildings, the Phillips Building (1915) at 420 Second Street, and a portion of Wistrand Motors (1922) at 421 Third Street still serve their original function. All others have been converted and modified for other commercial retail uses.

Industrial Service Buildings

The most prominent examples of this type within the historic district are the structures built near the railroad tracks, south of Third Street, to facilitate the operations of Excelsior's two leading lumber companies, Lyman Lumber and Hennessy, later Lampert, Lumber. The latter facility has been converted for retail use. Some of the sheds of Lyman Lumber remain in use for storage purposes.

Fraternal Organization Buildings

The International Order of Oddfellows (IOOF) and the Masons have two of the most impressive buildings within the historic district. The prominence of each is accentuated by its height, width, and stylistic details. The Romanesque Revival style IOOF is two stories but the height of the second story is elevated above the neighboring buildings. The Georgian Revival style Masonic Temple is two stories above a raised basement. Nonetheless both buildings relate to their neighbors with their brick facades and, in the case of IOOF, commercial space at street level.

Residences/Boarding Houses

Several of these residential structures are among the earliest buildings in the historic district. All are wood-frame structures, usually two- to two-and-one-half stories high, incorporating hipped or gabled roofs, porches, and other picturesque details, that reflect the prevailing Second Empire, Victorian, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival styles. Some were built as private residences but soon adapted for boarders who came for short-term visits to Lake Minnetonka or Crystal Bay on Galpin Lake. Others have been modified for various kinds of commercial or service uses.

Other Special Types

The railroad depot, a small wood-frame building that is now in use as a museum, replaced the earlier depot structure in 1952.

The Excelsior Dock Theater, the last of a line of buildings showing movies in Excelsior, was built in 1940 on a block of Water Street that became available for new development after the La Paul Hotel (Excelsior Bay Hotel) was demolished in 1929. A concrete structure, it incorporates Art Moderne details in its design.

The Congregational Church is one of Excelsior's oldest institutions, founded in 1853. The historic church building, located at Third Street and School Avenue, was built between 1870 and 1871. With its tall picturesque tower, it dominated the view of the town from the lakefront. The present building and its adjacent Sunday School building date from 1971, after the period of significance for the historic district. Nonetheless, the tower and steeple of the present church serves as a visual marker in the community.

Street Features

Nineteenth-century photographs show that Excelsior had unpaved streets edged by wood sidewalks, slightly raised above the level of the street bed. By the early years of the twentieth century, some form of paving, probably crushed gravel, had been introduced, and the sidewalks had been replaced by solid slabs of concrete. Street railway tracks ran in two directions along Water Street and curved westward along Second Street up the hill. In fact, the introduction of the street railway tracks was the impetus for improved street paving. Tall wood poles held electric lines, telephone lines, and arc lamps suspended above the street. By 1932, the streets were paved by some kind of paver blocks, possibly granite. The tracks were still in place, but the arc lamps above the street had been removed.⁵



Water Street in 1940.

Once the streetcars were taken out of service and bituminous pavement became more readily used as a paving material in the years after World War II, Excelsior followed this pattern of street repaving. Several years ago, the City of Excelsior installed electrified cast-iron double-arm lamp standards for street lighting along Water Street between Lake Street and George Street. These standards follow a historic pattern that has often been used in urban environments. Street trees have also been planted on Water Street between Lake Street and George Street and in front of 409 Second Street. Decorative cast-iron grates fabricated by the Neenah Foundry have been installed at the bases of the trees. Artificial stone pavers have

been placed on the sidewalk in front of 409 Second Street and along Masonic Alley. A contemporary Metropolitan Transportation Authority bus shelter sits on the sidewalk in front of 35 Water Street.

⁵ A selection of historic photographs can be found in *Walking the Trails* and through the Minnesota Historical Society Visual Resources Database: Hennepin County, Excelsior. Meyer, 55, 66, 73, discusses various aspects of sidewalk construction and street paving.

WATER STREET

Water Street has always been Excelsior's principal commercial thoroughfare, with the portion of Second Street to the east of Water Street serving a secondary commercial function. Traditionally Water Street linked the boat docks, railroad line, and later Twin Cities Rapid Transit line, at the lakefront with the railroad lines and train depot south of Third Street.

Water Street between the Municipal Docks at Lake Street and Second Street

East Side, Numbers 1 through 35

West Side, Numbers 10 through 50

Historically, the docks at the foot of Water Street (aka [399] Lake Street) provided access to visitors, tourists, and residents of Excelsior, who came by steamer across the lake. The existing docks, which are owned by the city, serve the recreational needs of residents and visitors. The Casino and the Blue Line Pavilion, which stood just south of the docks, are long gone. A small landscaped park area, created in 1997, recalls the earlier history of the site with the incorporation of the 1920 ticket booth from the Blue Line Pavilion. Two large hotels were situated on the blockfronts south of Lake Street, the La Paul Hotel on the west side, and the White House on the east side. When those two buildings were demolished, these blockfronts were opened up for other kinds of commercial development, during and after World War II. Of particular interest are the Excelsior Dock Theater (originally Tonka Theater), built in 1940 with later modifications, and the Laramie Motors Building (now the Tonka Building), built in 1945. Although these and other buildings along this stretch of Water Street are relatively late in the period of significance, they relate architecturally to the overall architectural character of Excelsior's commercial buildings in height, scale, and materials. These characteristics include a height of one to two stories, masonry cladding, storefronts with display windows and shop entrances, generally in line with the building fronts. Others postdate the period of significance, so would be judged non-contributing, but are sympathetic to the overall district character.

Water Street between Second Street and Third Street

East Side, Numbers 205 through 287

West Side, Numbers 206 through 284

Historically, this stretch of Water Street has been the heart of Excelsior commerce with businesses and services that catered to the needs of residents and visitors. Historical views of Water Street tend to focus here. Much of the two blockfronts were built up with wood-frame structures by the end of the 1880s, as depicted in a photograph of a Decoration Day parade in 1892.⁶ Many of the buildings on the west side were destroyed in a catastrophic fire on New Year's Day, 1895.



Water Street in 1892.

⁶ Minnesota Historical Society, Photograph Collection, Neg. No. 58766, Location No. MH5.9 EX2 r1.

This provided the opportunity for a major building campaign, and Water Street began to assume much of its present character and appearance in the wake of the fire. Wood-frame buildings were replaced by one- and two-story brick commercial blocks that display the features described above. Many of them were constructed by a local builder, Charles F. Miller. Several others were the product of another local builder, W. B. Morse. Relating to the commercial blocks, but also standing out from them, are the two fraternal organization buildings, IOOF and the Masonic Temple. All of these buildings have undergone some modifications, especially in their storefronts, to adapt them to new uses and changing tenants. By the 1927, the end of the west blockfront at Third Street was marked by a gasoline filling station, followed by one on the east side in 1946. The one on the east side was replaced by the commercial building at No. 287 that postdates the period of significance, so it would be considered non-contributing; however, it is compatible with the overall district character. No. 284 on the west side was decommissioned after about ten years, then expanded for a drycleaning service. It remains in commercial use.

West Drive extends behind the buildings on the west side of Water Street in this block and forms the western boundary of the district. East Drive, originally called Willow Street, extends behind the buildings on the east side of Water Street. This is intersected by an alley called Union Place, originally Willow Place, that extends easterly towards School Avenue. Both the drive and the alley provide access to a municipal parking lot that is in the interior of the block bounded by Water Street, Second Street, Third Street, and School Avenue. Masonic Alley, located north of the Masonic Temple, also leads to East Drive and the municipal parking lot.

Water Street between Third Street and George Street

East Side, Numbers 301 through 371

West Side, Numbers 300 through 370

When the railroad lines were active, these two blockfronts were divided by the railroad tracks. The tracks have been removed, except for a small section adjacent to the railroad depot, but the railroad right-of-way survives. The presence of the tracks made it advantageous for the two lumber companies to locate their buildings and storage yards just to the south. The wood-frame Hennessy/Lampert Lumber Company Building survives on the west side of the street, although adapted for new uses. Lyman Lumber retains some storage sheds set far back from Water Street, and the small city park immediately adjacent to the street has been named Lyman Park. The railroad depot (1952) in its latest incarnation also survives and is now in use as a museum. The two corners at Third Street have been marked by automotive service buildings, one since the 1920s, the other since 1950, although the present structures postdate the period of significance. A third automotive service building, No. 370, located at the George Street corner, has been adapted for other commercial uses.

Historic photographs of Water Street seem to indicate the presence of trees close to the street on these blockfronts. These trees would have sheltered the residential buildings near the George Street end of the block. Two surviving residences have been modified and adapted for commercial use (Nos. 350-352 and 366). No. 371, one of the oldest buildings in the historic district, was in use as a boarding house as early as 1876, and is now a bed-and-breakfast establishment. While No. 353 remains a private residence, it was constructed by Maurice Leach to promote his homebuilding enterprise which had its offices next door in the commercial

building at No. 345. The commercial building at No. 344, built just after World War II, is typical of later examples of the type in the historic district.

SECOND STREET

The portions of Second Street that intersect with Water Street have long served as a secondary commercial and service street. By the early twentieth century, this role was reinforced by the presence of street railway tracks.

Second Street, west of Water Street

North side, Number 355

South side, Number 352-354

These two commercial buildings both relate to the larger corner properties. No. 355, originally built as an automotive services building, is attached to the larger structure at 38-50 Water Street and has been successfully adapted for commercial retail use. No. 352-354, a modest building that has seen a wide variety of tenants, has been modified over time to meet new needs.

Second Street, between Water Street and School Avenue

North side, Numbers 409 through 463

South side, Numbers 402 through 478

These two blockfronts are varied in character. The south side contains both the Bennett Brothers Livery Stable (1899), now adapted for other commercial uses, and the Phillips Garage Building (1915). Both are significant reminders of the role that personal transportation played in the lives of residents and visitors to Excelsior. The Minnetonka State Bank building (No. 409) on the north side, is a notable specialized commercial building. Other commercial buildings on these blockfronts are only one story high and built after World War II, although their architectural characteristics make them compatible with the district. The other defining buildings are the residences, most of which were originally used as boarding houses to accommodate visitors to Lake Minnetonka. These have been adapted for various commercial and service uses.

THIRD STREET

Third Street, historically, has been closely related to the presence of the railroad tracks just to the south, which made conditions favorable for locating various businesses.

Third Street, between Water Street and School Avenue

North Side, Numbers 421 through 471

South Side, Number 450 and unassigned

Few buildings in the historic district actually have Third Street addresses. The north side of this block contains an automotive services building that has been partially adapted for other commercial uses and the buildings of the Congregational Church that postdate the period of significance. These are interrupted by a large municipal parking lot. The south side of the street contains the contributing site of the Excelsior Fruit Growers' Association warehouse, formerly

an Excelsior historic site that was also listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This historically significant early twentieth-century warehouse and storage building was demolished in 2001. Also on this side are the storage structures that were built for White Eagle Oil and a garage constructed for Lyman Lumber, none of which are contributing structures to the district.

GEORGE STREET

George Street is predominantly residential but has taken on a commercial aspect at and near its intersection with Water Street. A portion of the north side forms the southern boundary of the district.

George Street, between Beeman Place and Water Street

North Side, Numbers 361 and 369

George Street, between Water Street and Galpin Lake

North Side, unassigned

The two residences, both built about 1900, just west of Water Street, acquired their Downtown Excelsior associations after World War II. Both have been modified and adapted for commercial use. Another automotive service building, later adapted for commercial use is at the Water Street northwest corner. The section of George Street to the east of Water Street is all part of the historic Clark property at 371 Water Street.

The following pages contain brief listings of all properties in the historic district and identifies them as contributing or non-contributing. Addresses are based on on-site review and the Hennepin County property records. More detailed descriptions and histories are contained in the revised Excelsior Downtown inventory forms.

Street	Address:	Historic Name:	Construction Date:	Significance:
Lake	[399]	Port of Excelsior	various; 1997	Site and structure contributing to local historic district
Water Street	1	Port of Excelsior	1951/1976	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	10	Laramie Motors Co.	1957/1976	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	21-23	National Tea Co.	1947, 1964, 1992	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	26	Tonka Theatre	1940	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	28-30	Hennessy Building	1955	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	29, 31, 33	Building, 29, 31, 33 Water Street	1950	Contributing to local historic district
Water	34-50	Laramie Ford	1945	Contributing to local

Street				historic district
Water Street	35	Nygren's Clothing Store	1971	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	205-207	Bacon Drug	1941, 1975	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	200-206	Sampson Building	1917	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	211-213	Smith and Co. Store	ca. 1920?	Contributing to the local historic district
Water St.	212	Wheeler Building	1898	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	216	Wheeler Building	1898	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	217	The Happy Hour	1914 and later	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	218, 220, 226	Apgar Building	1895	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	219	August Hay Meat Market	ca. 1895	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	223, 227	Bullens General Store	ca, 1895	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	228	Apgar Real Estate Office	1896	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	229-231	Welter Building	1902	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	232, 234-238	Miller Block	1900	Contributing to historic district
Water Street	235-237	Fred Hawkins Building/Gluek Building	1904	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	239	J. D. Jamieson Grocery	1904	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	240	Building, 240 Water Street	1901	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	243	Tony's Barber Shop	ca. 1946	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	244	Miller's Excelo Bakery	1909	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	249	Excelsior Masonic Temple	1926	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	251	Building, 251 Water Street	1899 and later	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	250-252	IIOF Temple/Morse Dry Goods, Olds Dry Goods	1897	Local HPC site; contributing to local historic district
Water	254-256	Building, 254-256 Water	1898	Contributing to local

Street		Street		historic district
Water Street	260	Building, 260 Water Street	1912	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	261	Building, 261 Water Street	1899	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	264	Building, 264 Water Street	1915, 1970s	Contributing to local historic district; non-contributing facade
Water Street	266	Building, 266 Water Street	1915	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	270-274	Building, 274 Water Street	1915, 1970s	Contributing to local historic district; non-contributing facade
Water Street	278	Building, 278 Water Street	1912	Contributing to historic district
Water Street	284	Pure Oil	c. 1932, 1961, 1997	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	287	Tonka Printing Inc.	1964, 1978	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	300	Gas Station, 300 Water Street	1972	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	301	Mobil Gas Station	1970	Non-contributing to local historic district
Water Street	305	Excelsior Depot	1952	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	337	Lyman Lumber Company	1920/1995	Site is contributing to local historic district
Water Street	340	J. E. Hennessy Lumber Co./Lampert Lumber Co.	ca. 1906, 1960, 1984	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	344	Knapp Radio and TV	c.1946	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	345-347	Leach Home Builders	1920, 1976	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	350-354	W. P. McDonald House	ca.1890, 1979	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	353	Leach House	1925	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	356	Building, 356 Water Street	c. 1900, 1979	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	366	Elliot/Scheid House	ca. 1900, 1994	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	370	Texaco Gas Station	1930	Contributing to local historic district
Water Street	371	James Harvey Clark House	1858/1875	Local HPC site; contributing to local

				historic district
Second Street	350-354	Dillman Building/Minnetonka Record	1900	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	402-406	Stemmer Company	1920	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	409	Minnetonka State Bank	1899	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	420	Phillips Garage	1915	Local HPC site; contributing to local historic district
Second Street	425	Building, 425 Second Street	1959	Non-contributing to local historic district
Second Street	429	Bardwell House	1879	Local HPC site; contributing to local historic district
Second Street	432, 436, 438	Bennett Brothers Livery Stable	1899, 1970	Local HPC site; contributing to local historic district
Second Street	440	Building, 440 Second Street	ca.1959	Non-contributing to local historic district
Second Street	441	Maple Inn	ca. 1885	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	444	Building, 444 Second Street	ca.1955	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	449	A. H. Smith House	1901, 1978	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	463	Shrodes/Lyman House	1902	Contributing to local historic district
Second Street	464	Building, 464 Second Street	ca. 1950	Contributing to historic district
Second Street	474	Lyman House	1906 or 1907	Contributing to local historic district; recommend inclusion
Second Street	478	House, 478 Second Street	ca. 1900, 1950s	Contributing to local historic district; recommend inclusion
Third Street	421	Wistrand Motor Company/Phillips Motor Company	1922	Contributing to historic district
Third Street	450	Excelsior Fruit Growers Building (site)		Local HPC site; site is contributing to local historic district.
Third Street	471	Congregational Church of Excelsior	1971	Non-contributing to local historic district

Third Street	Garage	Garage off Third Street	ca. 1980?	Non-contributing to local historic district
Third Street	Metal Structures	White Eagle Oil and Refining Co.	1920s?	Non-contributing to local historic district
George Street	361	House, 361 George Street	ca. 1900	Contributing to local historic district
George Street	369	DeGroot House	c. 1899	Contributing to local historic district



399 Lake Street—
contributing.



1 Water Street—
non-contributing.



10 Water Street—
non-contributing.



21-23 Water Street—
non-contributing.



26 Water Street—
contributing.



205-207 Water Street—
contributing.



200-206 Water Street—
contributing.



211-213 Water Street—
contributing.



212 Water Street (right) and
216 Water Street (left)—
both contributing.



217 Water Street—
contributing.



218, 220, 226 Water Street—
contributing.



219, 223, 227 Water Street—
contributing.



228 Water Street—
contributing.



229-231 Water Street (center)—
contributing.



232, 234-238 Water Street (center)—
contributing.



235-237 Water Street (right)—
contributing.



239 Water Street—
contributing.



240 Water Street—
contributing.



243 Water Street—
contributing.



244 Water Street—
contributing.



249 Water Street—
contributing.



251 Water Street—
non-contributing.



250-252 Water Street (right) and
254-256 Water Street (left)—
both contributing.



260 Water Street (center)—
contributing.
264 Water Street (left)—
non-contributing facade.



261 Water Street—
contributing.



266 Water Street—
contributing.



270-274 Water Street—
non-contributing facade.



278 Water Street (right)—
contributing.



284 Water Street—
contributing.



287 Water Street—
non-contributing.



300 Water Street—
non-contributing.



301 Water Street—
non-contributing.



305 Water Street—
contributing.



337 Water Street—
contributing site.



340 Water Street—
contributing.



344 Water Street—
contributing.



345-347 Water Street—
contributing.



350-354 Water Street—
contributing.



353 Water Street—
contributing.



356 Water Street—
contributing.



366 Water Street—
contributing.



370 Water Street—
contributing.



371 Water Street—
contributing.



350-354 Second Street—
contributing.



402-406 Second Street—
contributing.



409 Second Street (right)—
contributing.



420 Second Street—
contributing.



425 Second Street—
non-contributing.



429 Second Street—
contributing.



432, 436, 438 Second Street (right)—contributing.
 440 Second Street (left)—non-contributing.



441 Second Street—
 contributing.



444 Second Street--
 contributing.



449 Second Street--
 contributing.



463 Second Street—
contributing.



464 Second Street—
contributing.



474 Second Street—
contributing.



478 Second Street—
contributing.



421 Third Street—
contributing.



450 Third Street—
contributing site.



471 Third Street—
non-contributing.



Garage on Third Street—
non-contributing.



Metal structures on Third Street—
non-contributing.



361 George Street—
contributing.



369 George Street—
contributing.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Introduction

The Excelsior Downtown Historic District is significant to the city of Excelsior as it embodies the architecture and other physical characteristics of a section of the city that reflect important aspects of its history and development, ranging from its early tourist industry in the years after the Civil War to a suburb in the extended Twin Cities area in the years after World War II. The historic district can be seen as part of the broad statewide context “Minnesota Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Region 1870-1945,” as well as a general local context that may be called “Downtown Excelsior.”

The historic district also meets criteria stated in Section 340:15. Subd. 2, of the Excelsior City Code. In particular, it has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City of Excelsior; it contains properties that embody distinguishing characteristics of various architectural styles, periods, forms, and treatments; approximately one-quarter of the properties in the historic district are identified as the work of a “master builder” whose individual work influenced the development of Excelsior; and its unique location, scale, and other physical characteristics represent an established and familiar visual feature of the City of Excelsior.

Early Excelsior Development

Excelsior, located on the south shore of Lake Minnetonka, was founded by George Bertram in 1852, with the first group of settlers, who had relocated from New York State and New England, forming the Excelsior Pioneer Association in 1853. Each member was entitled to a farm and one village lot of not less than one acre. The streets of the village, which was formally incorporated in 1877, were laid out and oriented to the lakeshore rather than following a strict north-south grid. (For the purposes of direction, Water Street is considered to run north-south, while Second Street, Third Street, and George Street are considered to run east-west.) Thirteen acres along the lakefront were set aside as a public ground, designated the Excelsior Commons. Among the early institutions established in the village were several churches and the local school.

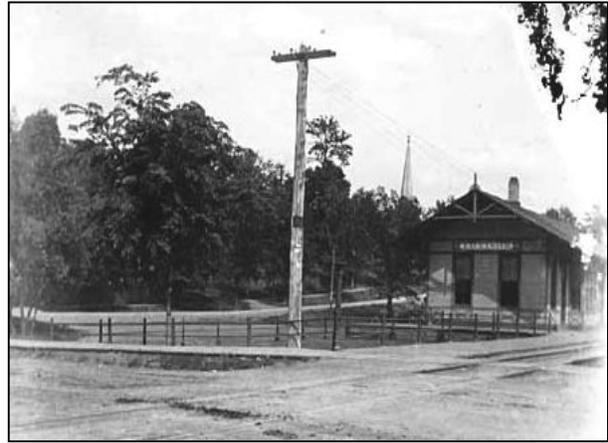
At the foot of Water Street and east of the Commons were a series of steamboat docks and pavilions for passengers and recreation. The settlement at Excelsior was connected to the larger communities of Minneapolis, Saint Anthony (which was incorporated into Minneapolis in 1872), and Saint Paul by steamboats on the lake as early as the 1850s and by railroad in 1880, when the Minneapolis and Saint Louis Railway line was extended to the southeast edge of the village. This was followed in 1882 by the Minneapolis, Lyndale and Minnetonka Railway, also called the Motor Line, which came to the boat docks, and in 1886, the Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba, later the Great Northern, Railroad, whose tracks paralleled the Minneapolis and Saint Louis through Excelsior.⁷

The beauty of Lake Minnetonka established its popularity as a destination for summer tourists, and Excelsior catered to this population with hotels, summer cottages, and boarding houses. Only a few buildings of these types remain in the historic district from this phase of Excelsior’s history. Two hotels stood on sloping sites above Water Street, north of Second Street, in close

⁷ Meyer, 25, 27, 33.



Steamboat docks in 1896.



Railroad station in 1895.

proximity to the lake. The White House, on the east side, was built in 1872 and enlarged in 1886 and 1896. It was finally demolished in 1946, after serving as a home for the aged since 1929. The Hotel La Paul, on the west side, opened in 1896, and survived as the Excelsior Bay Hotel until 1929, when it was demolished after a fire. Several smaller buildings that were used as auxiliary hotel facilities or as boarding houses are located on the White House block with Second Street addresses. No. 429, the Bardwell House, was built in 1879, although not moved to this precise location until about 1898. No. 441, the Maple Inn, was built in about 1885 and in use as a boarding house by 1901. At the other end of Water Street at No. 371, James H. Clark began advertising for boarders in his newly enlarged house by 1876.⁸

Early Commerce

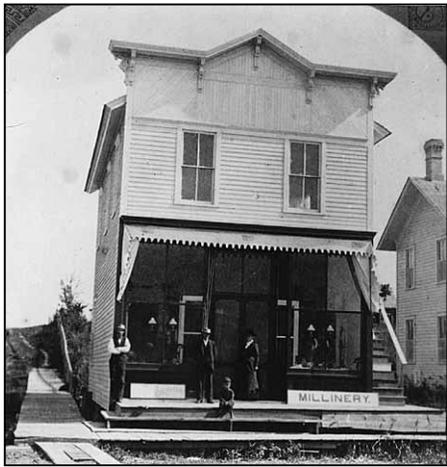
The thriving village required businesses and commerce to serve both residents and tourists. Because of its proximity to the lakeshore and its relatively even grade, in contrast to the steep hills found in most parts of the town, Water Street was always the major commercial thoroughfare. W. B. Jones opened a store on the west side of Water Street between Second Street



LaPaul Hotel on Water Street in the 1890s.

and Third Street in 1860. He also became the first Excelsior postmaster, operating the post office out of his store. By the time Theodore Bost joined him in business in 1874, the original store building was so decrepit, it had to be rebuilt. Jones and Bost served virtually all the local merchandise needs from drygoods to hardware. Later in the decade, they were joined by Murray and Aspden's Variety Store and Thorman and McArty's meat market and ice house. E. D. Newell opened a millinery shop and ladies' furnishing store, and Miss M. M. Eddy started a dressmaking business above Jones's store in 1879. The Congregational Church of Excelsior, built in 1871 with a

⁸ Meyer, 23, 24, 42, 93, 118.



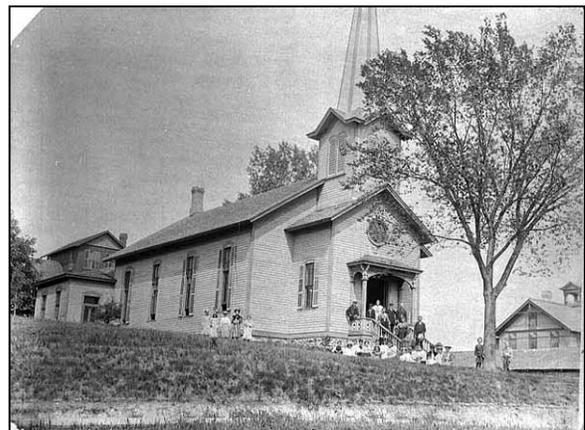
Newell Millinery Shop, Second Street at Water Street.

prominent tower and steeple, rose on a hill to the east of downtown.⁹

By the end of the 1880s, most of both sides of Water Street between Second Street and Third Street had been built up with one- and two-story wood-frame structures that housed a variety of businesses, as well as cafes and restaurants. However, the rather tenuous state of these buildings, might be indicated by a report from the Board of Health to the Village Council in 1885: “There are in said village 104 dwellings, 6 hotels, 5 boardinghouses, 29 summer cottages, 25 buildings occupied for both business and residence, 3 churches, 1 schoolhouse, 37 stables and 10 buildings used for various other purposes. . . Sanitary conditions in village are fair. Back yards and business properties on Water St. between Second and Third in poorest condition.”¹⁰

The Fire of 1895 and New Construction

Water Street may have changed according to the dictates of commerce, but even greater impetus to change was the New Year’s Day fire of 1895, which destroyed most of the buildings on the west side of the street between Second Street and Third Street. On January 4, 1895, the *Minnetonka News*, whose print shop had been burned out, proclaimed, “Excelsior is all right. Preparations are being made to rebuild. Buildings must be of brick.”¹¹



Congregational Church of Excelsior.

By 1900, much of Water Street between Second and Third Streets had been rebuilt with more substantial brick commercial structures, many of them by local contractor Charles F. Miller. These included: Nos. 212 and 216 (1898); Nos. 218, 220, and 226 (Apgar Building, 1895); Nos. 219, 223, 227 (ca. 1895); Nos. 234-236 (Miller Block, 1900); Nos. 254-256 (1898); and No. 261 (1899). The most impressive of the new buildings was the headquarters of the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), built in 1897 at 250-252 Water Street. The organization leased its first-floor space to A. T. Morse for his dry goods establishment. The Minnetonka State Bank constructed its new brick building at 409 Second Street, just east of Water Street, in 1899.¹²

⁹ Meyer, 11, 18, 21, 24. See also George M. Warner and Charles E. Foote, ed. *History of Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881), 252-256.

¹⁰ Quoted in Meyer, 31. Photographic images are available in the Minnesota Historical Society collection: MH5.9 EX2r1 and MH5.9 EX2 r5.

¹¹ Meyer, 41-42. *Historic Excelsior*, 24.

¹² Meyer, 49, 56.



Minnetonka State Bank, ca. 1925.

Despite the impetus for brick commercial buildings on Water Street, the Bennett Brothers built their new livery stable with frame construction at 432 Second Street in 1899. Livery services were crucial in a community like Excelsior, enabling those who arrived by train or boat to travel around the immediate area.¹³

By the end of the nineteenth century, the village of Excelsior was becoming popular as a year-round community, in addition to its earlier roles as the center of an agricultural settlement and a service hub for the tourism and resort industries. Large residences were constructed on the edges of the downtown area, including those still standing at 463, 468, and 478 Second Street, 350-354 and 366 Water Street, and 361 and 369 George Street. In

the era before the introduction of zoning restrictions that separated residential and commercial uses, it was not unusual for private residences to be located close to commerce.

The Railroad and Location of Industry

The presence of the railroad tracks south of Third Street and the first passenger and freight depot, built in 1883, attracted local industries that took advantage of the railroad to ship their products. Prominent among them were the lumber industry. George Dickinson had established his lumber business by the tracks near Courtland Street in 1889. Albert and Frank Lyman bought out Dickinson in 1894, and in 1897, Albert Lyman established a new lumber yard on the north side of Third Street, east of Water Street, on a hill that was subsequently cut down in the twentieth century. By 1903 the company was building a new warehouse near the depot, south of Third Street and fronting Water Street. Lyman Lumber was joined in 1906 by Hennessy Lumber on the west side of Water Street. Hennessy Lumber became Lampert Lumber in 1938, and the Water Street building survives as a retail shopping complex. Lyman Lumber's original warehouse no longer fronts Water Street, but its presence is recalled by Lyman Park and several storage sheds off Third Street to the east of Water Street.¹⁴

Another organization that took advantage of the railroad was the Excelsior Fruit Growers' Association. It was organized as a cooperative to facilitate the shipment of fruits, including grapes and berries, to a wide range of markets. In 1912, the association built a wood-frame



Excelsior Fruit Growers Building in 1915.

¹³ *Historic Excelsior*, 22.

¹⁴ Meyer, 35, 126; *Walking the Trails*, 23.

warehouse on the railroad right-of-way, fairly close to Water Street. In 1921, a basement and new foundation were constructed at 350 Third Street, and the building moved to the new site. During the 1920s about 15,000 bushels of apples and 30,000 gallons of cider were shipped annually. The association disbanded in 1968. Although the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and named a historic Excelsior site, it was demolished in 2001, the victim of severely neglected maintenance.¹⁵

Street and Transportation Improvements

The twentieth century also brought improvements to the streets of the village and local transportation. In 1902 the village council passed an ordinance prohibiting the construction of wood sidewalks except where “cement stone” sidewalks were not practical. Specifications for new “cement sidewalks” were adopted in 1908.¹⁶

The first streetcar line operated by the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Suburban Railway Company, part of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company, opened on September 30, 1905. A special waiting pavilion was built near the docks on the lakeshore to accommodate streetcar passengers. In 1907 the line became a double track that was lit at night by overhead arc lights. As part of the expansion, the transit company acquired the site of Trinity Episcopal Chapel on Third Street, east of Water Street. The original church building was moved to its present site at 322 Second Street and enlarged. In 1915 the village council and the Commercial Club began discussing the need to extend the double streetcar track along Water Street, as well as the need to pave Water Street. Excelsior’s first traffic signal was installed in 1917 at Water Street and Second Street.¹⁷

Early Twentieth century Commercial Buildings on Water Street

Further building improvements were made along Water Street between Second Street and Third Street in the years before World War I. New commercial blocks included No. 206 (Wood Block, 1905), Nos. 229-231 (Welter Block, 1902, following a fire that destroyed three wood-frame buildings); No. 239 (1904); No. 240 (1901); No. 244 (Pfeiffer’s Bakery, rebuilt in 1909 after a fire); No. 260 (1912); Nos. 264, 266, 270-274 (1915); and No. 278 (1915). The Wood Block was destroyed by a major fire in 1916 and rebuilt as the Sampson Block by 1918. Other buildings served cafes, contained lodgings, and provided entertainment. Fred Hawkins Hotel and Café, originally Hardy’s Café, was built at 235-237 Water Street in 1904. The remnants of a painted sign announcing “Fred Hawkins Hotel & Café” are still visible on the south wall of the buildings. The building housing the Happy Hour Theater, showing silent films accompanied by a pianist, was built in 1914 at 217 Water Street. For a few years, it provided



Streetcar pavilion on Lake Minnetonka, 1905.

¹⁵ *Walking the Trails*, 44; *Historic Excelsior*, 16.

¹⁶ Meyer, 55, 66.

¹⁷ Meyer, 58, 63, 73, 76.

competition for the Excelsior Theater which had opened at 223 Water Street in 1912, once Bullens General Store had vacated the building. The Happy Hour was renamed the Lake Theater in 1929, remaining in business until 1940.¹⁸

Picturesque Lake Minnetonka noted in 1906:

Excelsior has had some serious losses among her business houses from fire, but like Chicago, her progressiveness overtopped the loss and after each catastrophe, handsome new buildings seem to rise Phoenix-like from the ashes, until today Water street presents a metropolitan appearance.



Water Street in 1920.

Excelsior has one bank, four hotels, and numerous boarding houses, three grocery stores, three meat markets, two drug stores, two blacksmith shops, three dry goods stores, two barber shops, two hardware stores, three shoe stores, one feed store, two lumber and fuel yards, one livery barn, two harness shops, two complete telephone systems, a gas lighting plant, a partial water system, the Western Union Telegraph Company, the United States Express Company, two newspapers, and two real estate offices. . . .

In alighting from the train one has a short walk down Water street, the main business thoroughfare of Excelsior. The general impression conveyed is, that during the summer months at least, Excelsior is a busy place.¹⁹

Two local builders were very important in creating the physical character of Excelsior's downtown. Charles F. Miller, the more prolific of the two, is credited with constructing at least nineteen buildings, all substantial brick structures that reflected the popular stylistic trends of the time, from Romanesque Revival in the 1890s to Renaissance Revival in the 1910s. Miller (1864-1951) had come to Minnewashta from Indiana with his parents in 1870. Trained as a carpenter, he became a mason and contractor in the early 1890s. When Excelsior's Water Street suffered its disastrous fire in 1895, Miller found much work constructing new brick buildings. Starting with the Apgar Building at Nos. 218-226 in 1895, he continued as far south as No. 274 Water Street in 1915. His most impressive work was the headquarters of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, of which he was a member, built in 1897. While he worked for various clients, he

¹⁸ *Walking the Trails*, 28-31, 41-42; Grace Knowlton, *Movies Come to Excelsior* (Excelsior, Minn.: Tonka Printing Co., 1997), 2-17; Meyer, 75. The Wood Block is illustrated in *Picturesque Lake Minnetonka* (Minneapolis: S. E. Ellis, 1906), 11. The rusticated concrete block facing of the exterior is similar to that still seen on No. 244 Water Street.

¹⁹ *Picturesque Lake Minnetonka*, 12.

retained ownership of several Water Street buildings, and in 1935 he constructed a central heating plant to provide steam to all of them.²⁰

William Morse, an Excelsior contractor who specialized in stone and concrete construction, provided two distinctive fireproof buildings to Downtown Excelsior. The Happy Hour Theater, built in 1914, had a concrete façade adorned with relief sculpture. This façade has been remodeled several times, first for the



Water Street in 1910.

Lake Theater, and later for the various retail establishments that subsequently occupied the building. The following year, 1915, Morse constructed the Phillips Garage Building at 420 Second Street. Reinforced mushroom columns, based on the design developed by Auguste Perret in France, support the concrete floor slab, that was poured in place into wood forms. The construction technique was unprecedented in the state at the time.²¹

Automotive Buildings

The construction of Phillips Garage was indicative of the rise in popularity of the automobile. By the 1920s, Excelsior had automobile dealerships, gasoline filling stations, and a licensed automobile taxi service. A small gas station stood at the northwest corner of Water Street and Second Street, and gas stations were built at two of the four corners of the intersection of Water Street and Third Street by 1927. (The other two corners of the intersection had gas stations by 1950.) The only one of these buildings to survive is the Pure Oil Station at 284 Water Street, which has been partially enclosed by another building. One gas station and one automotive service building are still in business at Water and Third, but the buildings postdate the period of significance. Aside from Phillips Garage, which also housed an automobile dealership, the only auto dealer building of this decade to survive is No. 421 Third Street.²²

Downtown in the 1920s

In 1924, the Excelsior Amusement Park was built by F. W. Pierce on the lakefront, east of the docks. Known for its roller coaster and other amusements, it attracted thousands to Excelsior during the summer season. The park was closed and dismantled in 1974. One small remnant survives in the Port of Excelsior park, created in 1997 adjacent to the municipal docks. This concrete kiosk, built in 1920 by local builder A. C. Weinholz, served as ticket booth for the streetcar boats, and then was used as a ticket booth at the amusement park.²³

The other major addition to Downtown Excelsior during the 1920s was the new Masonic Temple at 249 Water Street. Designed in the Georgian Revival style, it was built in 1926 by C. E.

²⁰ “Man Who Built Excelsior Starts Central Steam Plant,” *Minnetonka Record*, December 20, 1935; “Funeral Services Held for Pioneer Excelsior Builder,” *Minnetonka Record*, October 25, 1951.

²¹ Knowlton, 7, 16-17; *Historic Excelsior*, 23.

²² Meyer, 86; *Walking the Trails*, 27.

²³ *Walking the Trails*, 37.

Carlson.²⁴ While the Masons had established a lodge in Excelsior in 1875, it had previously met in facilities that it had not owned.



Ticket booth by Lake Minnetonka.

Plamore Bowling Alleys, located in the basement of 219 Water Street, was destroyed by a fire. The new Admiral Inn, located on the first floor, suffered smoke damage. Then in March 1945, the Tonka Theater had a major fire. Because of wartime building restrictions, rebuilding was delayed. It was finally reopened in July 1945.²⁶

In 1942, the post office moved again, from 234 Water Street, where it had relocated in 1915 from 409 Second Street, to newly renovated space in the Welter Building at 229 Water Street. Also in 1942, after much discussion about the abandoned rails of the streetcar line in Water Street, the village council transferred title to the Metal Reserve Corporation so they could be used in the war effort. The rails were removed in June by a group of WPA workers and the street subsequently repaved.²⁷

Post-War Building Boom

The end of World War II brought a major building boom to Excelsior and the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area. With pent-up demand and new federal programs for housing, highways, and urban redevelopment, Excelsior experienced increased suburbanization, part of a larger trend. Downtown Excelsior saw additional building, particularly on

The Depression and World War II

Streetcar service ended in Excelsior on August 11, 1932, to be replaced by motor buses. Like all Minnesota localities, Excelsior suffered during the economic depression of the 1930s. After several years of trying to obtain the necessary permits, the owners of the Lake Theater were able to open the new Tonka Theater at 26 Water Street on May 1, 1940.²⁵

Fires had a major impact on Water Street during the 1940s. On February 7, 1941, the Red Owl food store at No. 205 suffered a major fire. The store was subsequently rebuilt. In January 1942, the



First bus between Excelsior and Minneapolis, 1932.

²⁴ Meyer, 90.

²⁵ Meyer, 96, 105.

²⁶ Meyer, 108-110; Knowlton, 18.

²⁷ Meyer, 111-112.

the blocks of Water Street between Lake Street and Second Street and Third Street and George Street where earlier hotels and residences had been demolished. Small-scale commercial buildings were also constructed on Second Street, east of Water Street. For the most part, the buildings constructed between 1945 and 1955 on Water and Second housed retail establishments and provided services similar to those previously located on Water Street, including food stores, auto dealerships, appliance services, and local office space. The old railroad depot was replaced by the present structure in 1952. By 1955, all the city lots that comprise the downtown district had been developed, which appears to be an appropriate end date to the period of historic significance.

Later Changes

Nonetheless, changes to both buildings and businesses have continued to occur. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a wave of building rehabilitation and expansion, which was not always sympathetic to the historic character of the existing buildings. Changes in patterns of retailing and services have meant major changes to the character of many of the local Downtown Excelsior businesses. Traditional retail service establishments, such as drug stores, food stores, and hardware stores, have been replaced by specialty and antique shops.

The Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society was established in 1972 to increase awareness and appreciation of the community's rich history. In 1980, the Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission was established to officially designate historic sites within the municipal boundaries. In an effort to strengthen and enhance the character of Water Street, the city government and the Chamber of Commerce implemented a street beautification campaign in the early 1990s that installed street trees and historic lamp standards for street lighting.

Recognizing that inappropriate changes and new development were still occurring in Downtown Excelsior, the Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission recommended the designation of an Excelsior Downtown Historic District that was subsequently adopted by the Excelsior City Council on December 21, 1998. The City Council also adopted guidelines for alterations and new construction within the historic district, based on the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.²⁸

²⁸ Excelsior City Council, Ordinance No. 300, Section 1067.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Excelsior Downtown Historic District be revised in accordance with the boundaries shown on the map in Figure 3. The following properties will be added to the existing district:

464 Second Street. The eastern half of the building was inadvertently excluded from the original map.

474 Second Street

478 Second Street

The following properties will be excluded from the existing district:

368 George Street

374 George Street

261 School Avenue

301 Second Street

317 Second Street

322 Second Street

332 Second Street

329 Second Street

347-353 Second Street

348 Second Street

471 Second Street

468 Third Street

These properties either are non-contributing, lack integrity, do not fit into the commercial downtown theme of the district, or are already local HPC sites.

In addition the boundary line is redrawn to reflect the extent of the property associated with 371 Water Street.

FINAL ACTION

The Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission reviewed the draft report and then forwarded it to the Excelsior City Council. At a meeting on August 26, 2002, the City Council adopted the report and its recommendations by unanimous vote.

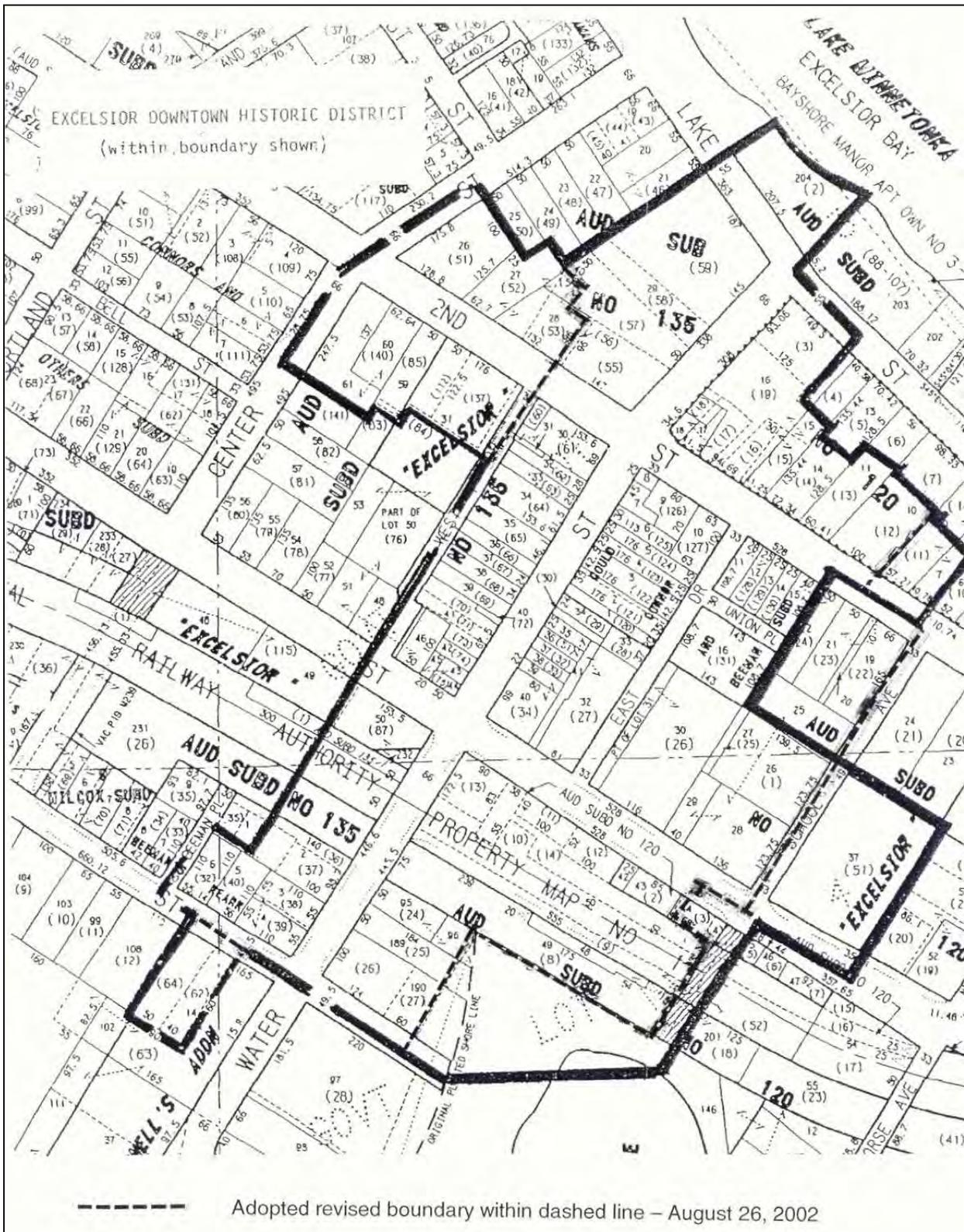


Figure 3. Final boundary recommendation as adopted August 26, 2002.

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