

## Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights (75A-056)

Capitol Heights was established in the early twentieth century as a residential suburb located in western Prince George's County, adjacent to the southeastern boundary of Washington, D.C. In 1904, the subdivision was platted in three sections by Otway B. Zantzinger, a Baltimore-based businessman.<sup>1</sup> The area that became Capitol Heights was originally a large parcel of woodland. Zantzinger's subdivision included approximately 4,000 lots on land that was originally a large parcel of woodland. The majority of lots in Capitol Heights were long, narrow, rectangular parcels, approximately 20 feet wide and 100 feet deep.

Zantzinger advertised the new subdivision as "High and healthy. Finest spring water, Plenty of shade. Only one car fare to any part of the city. East Capitol st., Central ave., 55th st., and 61st, run through the property [*sic*]." Lots were priced between \$20 and \$60 and offered for sale with one dollar down, and one dollar a month.<sup>2</sup> Later advertisements noted that the segregated subdivision was intended for whites only.<sup>3</sup> As part of his commitment to the success and growth of the neighborhood, at his own expense, Zantzinger constructed an elementary school for Capitol Heights residents. Opened in 1905, the school had over 100 children in attendance in its first year.<sup>4</sup> By 1907, Zantzinger had sold over 3,500 lots and more than 1,000 residents had made Capitol Heights their home.<sup>5</sup>

Although the subdivision was not directly located on the railroad or streetcar lines, the adjacent neighborhoods of Maryland Park and Seat Pleasant were served by the rail lines. Residents of Capitol Heights lived within a mile of railroad and streetcar stops. Because of its relative convenience to public transportation and the affordability of the houses due to low construction costs, Capitol Heights proved to be a popular new subdivision. Capitalizing on this popularity, in 1909, Zantzinger platted Greater Capitol Heights, a 400-acre tract of land located on the southern edge of Capitol Heights that included an additional 4,500 lots.<sup>6</sup> Like those in Capitol Heights, lots in Greater Capitol Heights were approximately 20 feet wide, 100 feet deep, and set on rectilinear blocks.

A review of the 1910 census indicates that residents of Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights were white, had small families, and had working-class jobs that included firemen, salesmen, electricians, plasterers, carpenters, post office workers, merchants, and printers.<sup>7</sup> The growing community incorporated as the Town of Capitol Heights in 1910 in an effort to improve roads and public services for residents.<sup>8</sup> Advertisements for Greater Capitol Heights in 1911 boasted of 500 houses, 1,500 people, eight stores, four churches, and a public school.<sup>9</sup> Other ads promoted the community as "cool and delightful. No Landlord. No Rent. No Building Restrictions. No Malaria. No Mosquitoes. No Sleepless Nights. Pure Water. High Elevation. Perfectly Healthy. Beautiful Shade."<sup>10</sup> The community was noted as being "Within the one-fare radius" but "nevertheless completely out of the city and an ideal site for the founding of homes by those who have long been forced to see their slender means being exhausted by city

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<sup>1</sup> Prince George's County Circuit Court, Land Records, Plat Book BB 5:74-76.

<sup>2</sup> Display Ad, *The Washington Post*, 12 July 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Display Ad, *The Washington Post*, 9 May 1906.

<sup>4</sup> "Capitol Heights School Opens," *The Washington Post*, 13 September 1905, SP4.

<sup>5</sup> "The Zantzinger Boom," *The Washington Post*, 24 February 1907, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Prince George's County Circuit Court, Land Records, Plat Book BDS 1:60-65.

<sup>7</sup> 1910 U.S. Federal Census, Election District

<sup>8</sup> George D. Denny, Jr., *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Brentwood, MD: Tuxedo Press, 1997), 100.

<sup>9</sup> Display Ad, *The Washington Post*, 23 July 1911.

<sup>10</sup> Display Ad, *The Washington Post*, 20 June 1913.

rentals.”<sup>11</sup> In 1925, Capitol Heights was finally served by a bus line that ferried residents between their neighborhood and Washington, D.C.<sup>12</sup> The arrival of the bus line, along with increased ownership of automobiles, resulted in a change of demographics as more African Americans began to move into the once-segregated Capitol Heights in the mid-twentieth century.

By third quarter of the twentieth century, the historic commercial core of Capitol Heights was losing many businesses, largely because of the construction of a new Central Avenue that bypassed the town. By the 1970s, the once-bustling commercial corridor along Old Central Avenue had begun to decline and buildings were being abandoned.<sup>13</sup> In November 1980, the Washington Metro line opened the Capitol Heights Metro Station at the northernmost tip of the original Capitol Heights subdivision. Located at the corner of East Capitol Street and Southern Avenue, S.E., the Metro provided an affordable, fast way for residents of Capitol Heights to travel into the District of Columbia.<sup>14</sup> Town officials hoped that the Metro would bring new businesses, an increase in property values, and new tax revenue to the community.<sup>15</sup> However, the new Metro station did not bring the anticipated changes to Capitol Heights and many of the commercial buildings along Old Central Avenue were demolished in the 1980s. Vacant lots and parking lots that took the place of the commercial buildings in Capitol Heights have no visual or physical relationship to the neighborhood.

Residential construction in Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights was largely completed by the mid-1970s. The sense of a neighborhood remained despite the loss of the commercial core. Today, Capitol Heights contains over 4,100 residents, of which 92 percent are African American.<sup>16</sup>

There are currently no designated Historic Sites or Historic Resources in Capitol Heights.

## Windshield Survey

A windshield survey of Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights was conducted in February 2008. The survey area contains approximately 1,994 primary resources. The community contains a wide variety of buildings constructed between 1904 and the present. The majority of buildings constructed in Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights date from the 1910s through the 1970s. There are a number of popular twentieth-century architectural styles represented in the community including Craftsman, Colonial Revival, and illustrations from the Modern Movement. Vernacular interpretations from the Queen Anne style are also present in the survey area. Common building forms present include rowhouses, Foursquares, Bungalows, Cape Cods, ranch houses, and split-foyers. The residential buildings are modest and display minimal ornamentation, typical of their use for middle- and working-class residents. The majority of houses are small one- or one-and-one-half-story designs. The topography of the neighborhood is hilly with houses built on sloping lots often with partially exposed basements. Streets in both subdivisions adhere to a roughly rectilinear grid, which is traversed by some angled streets. Buildings in

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<sup>11</sup> “Easy to Buy Home Site,” *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1916.

<sup>12</sup> “News from Suburbs of Capital,” *The Washington Post*, 12 April 1925.

<sup>13</sup> Town of Capitol Heights, Maryland, “Capitol Heights,”

<http://www.mdmunicipal.org/cities/index.cfm?townname=CapitolHeights&page=home>, accessed 20 December 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas B. Feaver, “3.52 Miles of Subway to Open Saturday,” *The Washington Post*, 16 November 1980, p. B1.

<sup>15</sup> “Michael Eastman, “P.G.’s Magic Mile: Metro Fever Hits Capitol Heights,” *The Washington Post*, 15 May 1980, p. MD1.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Fact Sheet: Capitol Heights town, Maryland,”

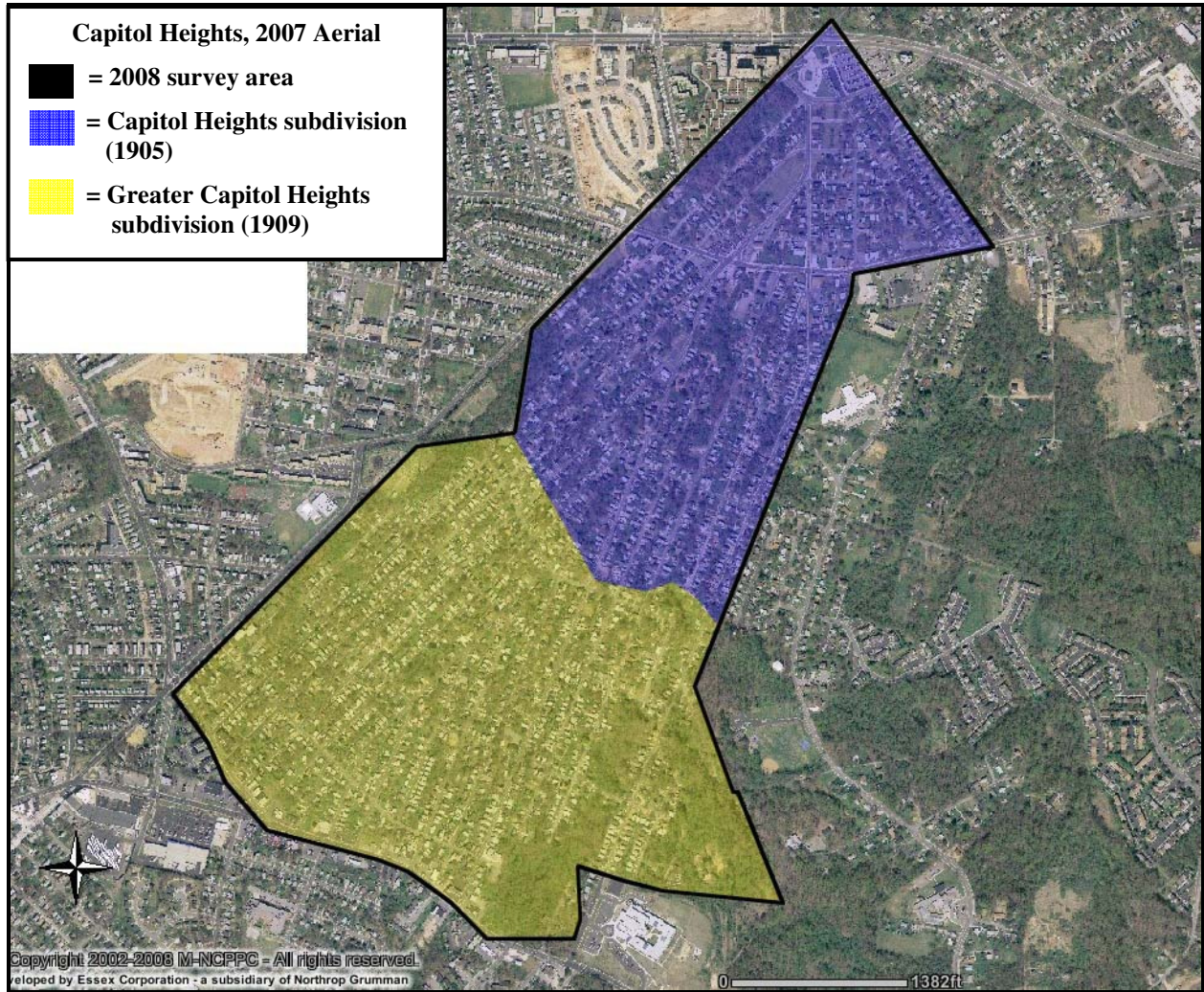
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?\\_event=Search&geo\\_id=&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=capitol+heights&\\_cityTown=capitol+heights&\\_state=04000US24&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show\\_2003\\_tab=&redirect=Y](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=capitol+heights&_cityTown=capitol+heights&_state=04000US24&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show_2003_tab=&redirect=Y).

the community are predominantly residential, with limited commercial buildings located along Old Central Avenue, Central Avenue, and a few scattered throughout the community. Some residential buildings in the community have been rehabilitated for commercial use.

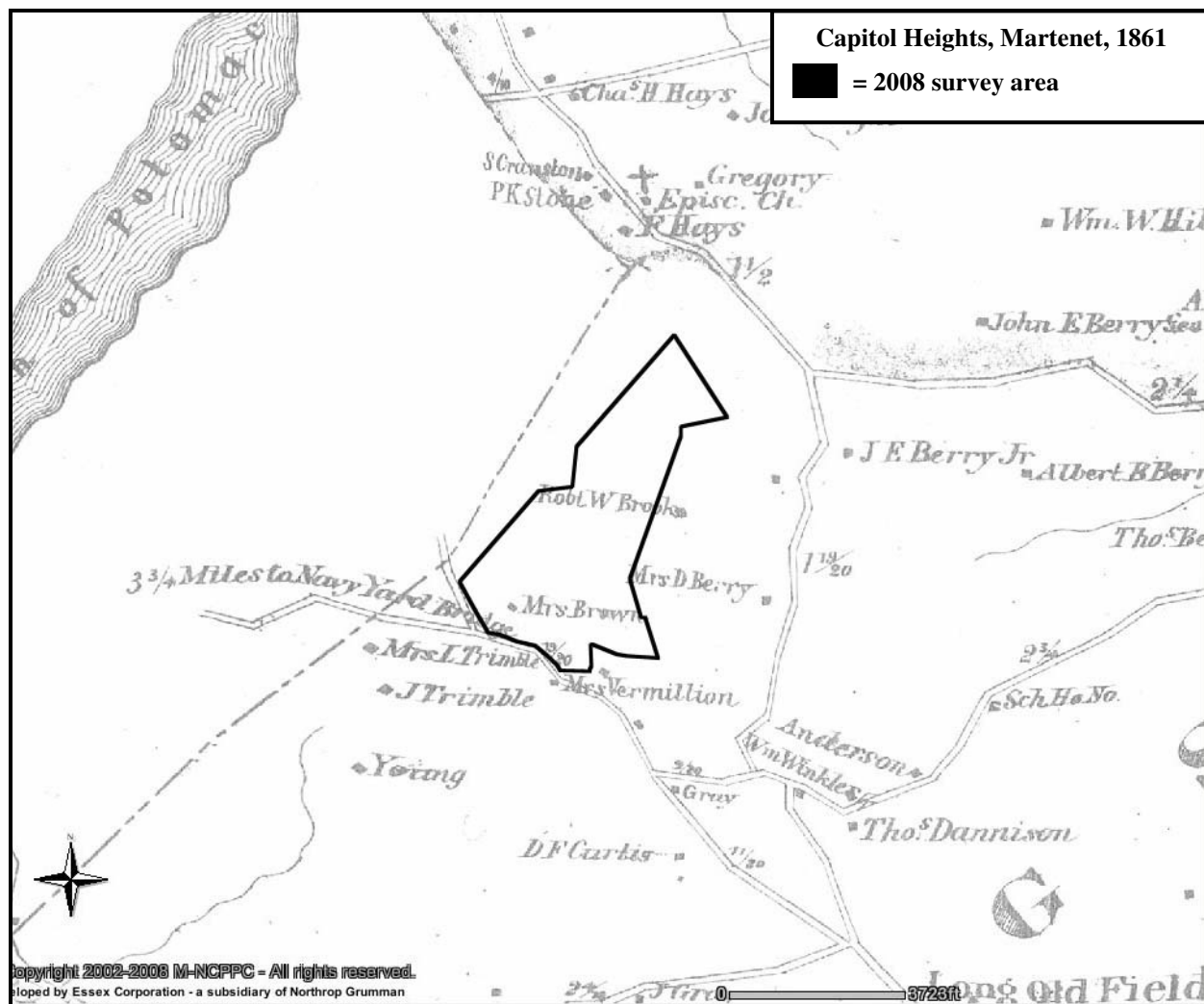
## **Historic District Evaluation**

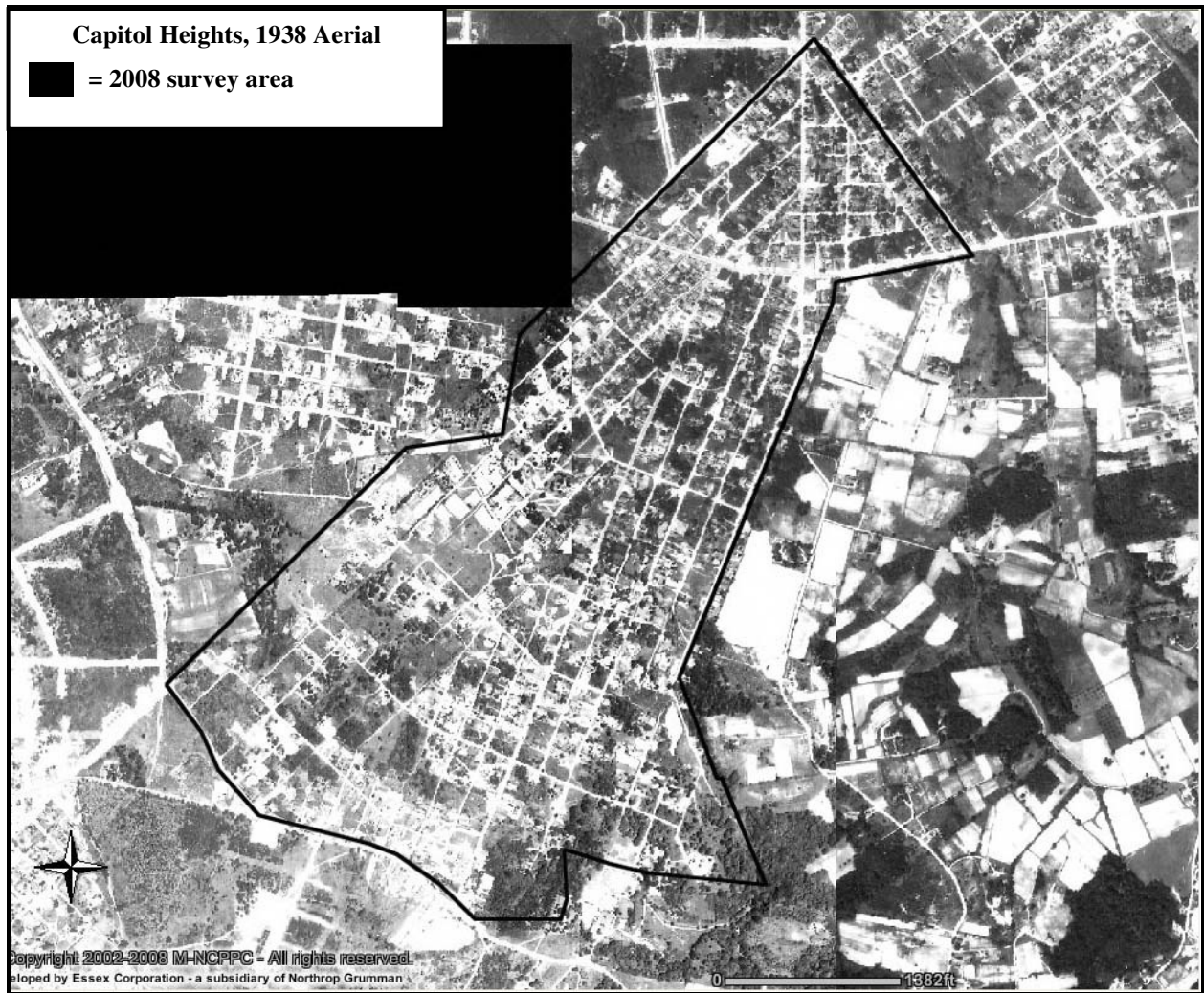
Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights represent several Prince George's County Heritage Themes including suburban growth and residential architectural styles. However, despite the community's significance as an early-twentieth-century residential suburb, Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights are not recommended eligible for listing as either a local Prince George's County historic district or as a National Register Historic District. Although Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights are representative of the suburban growth and expansion in Prince George's County, the community does not have a sufficient concentration of resources to represent any one particular phase of development. The neighborhood was initially developed in the early twentieth century with sporadic development through the 1970s. A 1938 aerial map of the area documents the limited construction in the community at that time. Many original buyers in the subdivisions purchased several lots, which were later resubdivided, resulting in a large amount of non-historic infill that does not contribute to the historic character of the neighborhood. The buildings present a wide variety of twentieth-century architectural styles and buildings forms that do not create a cohesive community. The loss and demolition of the early-twentieth-century commercial corridor along Old Central Avenue removes an integral part of the community's history. Both Capitol Heights and Greater Capitol Heights have retained their integrity of location, materials, and workmanship. Although the community retains the plan and design of the original plats, the demolition of buildings and the construction of the Metro have resulted in a loss of design, feeling, and association.

Prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc.  
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Capitol Heights, looking southeast, 5101-5105 Cumberland Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)





Greater Capitol Heights, looking south, 5111-5113 Doppler Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Greater Capitol Heights, looking northeast, 710-708-706 Elfin Avenue (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)





Capitol Heights, looking east, 628-630-632 Larchmont Avenue (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Capitol Heights, looking north, 5930-5936 Old Central Avenue (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)





Capitol Heights, looking east, 5501-5505-5507 Brenner Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Capitol Heights, looking southwest, First Baptist Church of Capitol Heights, 6 Capitol Heights Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)





Capitol Heights, looking northwest, 16-18-20 Capitol Heights Boulevard (*EHT Tracerics*, 2008)





Capitol Heights, looking northeast, 23-25 Capitol Heights Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)





Capitol Heights, looking southeast, 21-29 Capitol Heights Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)