

District Heights (75A-057)

District Heights was established in the first quarter of the twentieth century as a commuter suburb located approximately two miles east of the District of Columbia in Prince George's County. In the late nineteenth century, the land that became District Heights was farmland owned by Major Leander P. Williams. Williams' farm was located adjacent to the Washington and Marlboro Turnpike, which was constructed in 1869 to facilitate easier transportation between the City of Washington and Prince George's County.¹

In 1925, the 505-acre Williams farm was purchased by the District Heights Company. The company was lead by Washington, D.C. attorney Joseph L. Tepper (president) and David L. Blanken (secretary). Other members included Henry Oxenberg, Gilbert Leventhal, Simon Gordon, and Simon Gerber. The company chose the site because of its elevated location just two-and-one-half miles from Washington, D.C.² Clean water and sewage disposal were provided by natural springs and two streams that ran through the area. Before the construction of any houses, the District Heights Company laid out streets, curbs, sidewalks, water lines, electric lines, and fire plugs. The original streets of the development were covered with gravel.³

By 1926, the District Heights Company constructed approximately 25 houses, which included five-room "California" bungalows and two-story, six-room American Foursquare houses.⁴ The new subdivision was described as a "community of homes for government employees" and a place that "answers the cry of the wage earner for a restricted community coming up to the high ideals of the average workingman and still at a price within his reach."⁵ *The Washington Post* reported that "the monthly payments on the houses are less than the rent for a three-room apartment in the city and it has been computed that the government employe [*sic*] can own his home there entirely within twelve years."⁶ Initial homeowners in District Heights worked for a variety of governmental agencies, including the Postal Service, the Veterans' Bureau, the Treasury Department, and the War Department.⁷ Commercial development was limited to the edge of the community along Marlboro Pike. A service station and the Sanitary Grocery Store (later purchased by Safeway Inc.) were constructed in 1926 to serve the growing neighborhood.⁸ Between 1926 and 1936, the District Heights Company continued to construct new houses and sell lots for the construction of individual houses. The company itself constructed approximately 40 houses prior to 1936.⁹

Unlike suburban developments in northwestern Prince George's County, District Heights was not accessible by streetcar or public transportation. The District Heights Company provided bus service to local residents who were transported twice a day to 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. Public bus

¹ George D. Denny, Jr., *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Brentwood, MD: Tuxedo Press, 1997), 145.

² Darlie Norton, *A History of Suitland: Prince George's County, Maryland, United States of America, 1867-1976* (Denton, MD: Prepared for 1976 Bicentennial, 1976).

³ Denny, *Proud Past*, 146; "Wage Earners Lured to District Heights," *The Washington Post*, 25 July 1926, R1.

⁴ Norton, *A History of Suitland*.

⁵ "District Heights Sewer and Water Bids Ready," *The Washington Post*, 16 August 1925, R3; "Wage Earners Lured to District Heights," *The Washington Post*, 25 July 1926, R1.

⁶ "Homes for Clerks at District Heights Given Inspection," *The Washington Post*, 5 July 1925, R1.

⁷ "District Heights Profitless Homes Developing Begun," *The Washington Post*, 19 July 1925, R2.

⁸ Denny, *Proud Past*, 146.

⁹ Norton, *A History of Suitland*.

service was finally extended to District Heights in 1947 by the Washington, Marlboro & Annapolis Motor Lines (later taken over by WMATA as metrobus routes).¹⁰

The Town of District Heights was incorporated in 1936 by the Maryland General Assembly. At the time, there were 250 residents in the town. The following year, the District Heights Elementary School was constructed, providing the first school for neighborhood residents.¹¹ In 1938, the District Heights Company was succeeded by Thriftie Homes, Incorporated. In the 1940s, District Heights was improved by several different developers including District Hills, Incorporated and Prince Georges Homes, Incorporated [*sic*]. All of the companies constructed modest, affordable, single-family houses with Federal Housing Administration (FHA) financing and planned for federal employees. Typical houses included Cape Cods and minimal traditional-influenced designs.¹² These companies were subsequently replaced in 1946 when Manhattan subway builder Samuel R. Rosoff, dubbed “Subway Sam,” established Washington Estates, Inc. and purchased the remaining 300 acres of undeveloped land in District Heights.

Over the next fifteen years, Washington Estates, Inc. added four additional sections to District Heights and operated as a merchant builder, constructing a large number of modest, modern houses. Rosoff and his son, Nathaniel B. Rosoff, streamlined construction and repeatedly used the same architectural designs throughout the community. The Rosoffs planned a 1,200-house residential development with “a distinct variety in the exterior. No two homes of like exteriors are in the same area.”¹³ Although the same architectural design was repeated on the same street, the exterior material treatment of the buildings varied, providing a diverse housing stock in District Heights. The FHA-approved housing was marketed to returning veterans from World War II (1941-1945). The community was advertised as having “winding roads, wooded lots, and shaded streets, laid out in a manner to preserve the natural charm and beauty....Washington Estates homes are individual, expandable bungalows, each having different exterior design. There are two bedrooms and bath on the first floor and the attics are designed for the addition of two large bedrooms and bath (some already finished) with no change in structure or design.” The first group of 80 houses sold in 1947 from \$12,250 and up.¹⁴

As part of their development, the Rosoffs also constructed District Heights Apartments (now known as the Woodland Springs Apartments). These Colonial Revival-style garden apartments were built from 1949 through 1951. The 925-unit garden-apartment complex was located to the north of the single-family residential development constructed by Washington Estates, Inc.¹⁵ As the Rosoffs continued to plat new sections of District Heights, the houses gradually grew larger, moving from one-and-one-half-story minimal traditional and Cape Cod-inspired designs and one-story ranch houses to two-story Modern Movement split foyers and split levels. The last section of District Heights was platted in 1963 and by 1965, all lots in District Heights had been improved. In 1960, District Heights was excluded from the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission’s jurisdiction and was subsequently known as the City of District Heights.¹⁶

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

¹⁰ Norton, *A History of Suitland*.

¹¹ Norton, *A History of Suitland: Prince George’s County, Maryland, United States of America, 1867-1976* (Denton, MD: Prepared for 1976 Bicentennial, 1976).

¹² Display Ads, *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1940, 29 September 1940, 27 October 1940, 17 May 1942, 2 August 1942.

¹³ “330-Acre Project Opens Today in District Heights,” *The Washington Post*, 7 December 1947, R8.

¹⁴ Display Ad, “Announcing the Opening of Washington Estates,” *The Washington Post*, 7 December 1947.

¹⁵ Robert P. Jordan, “Thousands of Apartments Coming on Greater Washington Scene,” *The Washington Post*, 12 November 1950, R1.

¹⁶ City of District Heights, Maryland, “City History,” <http://www.districtheights.org/cityhistory.cfm>.

Windshield Survey

A windshield survey of District Heights was conducted in February 2008. The survey area consists of approximately 1,328 primary resources. District Heights is a well-developed, planned residential commuter suburb, located southeast of Walker Mill Road, northeast of Marlboro Pike, and west of Ritchie Road. Buildings in District Heights are primarily residential, with limited commercial development along Marlboro Pike. Public buildings include a fire station, municipal center, and several schools. Several churches are also located within the survey area. Buildings range in age from 1925 to ca. 1965. There is little modern infill within the community. Building forms represented include the bungalow, American Foursquare, Cape Cod, minimal traditional, ranch houses, split foyers, and split-level houses. Styles represented in the survey area include Craftsman, Colonial Revival, various examples from the Modern Movement, and limited illustrations of the Tudor Revival and Dutch Colonial Revival. Secondary resources in the community include sheds and garages. The topography of District Heights is relatively flat with some rolling hills. Houses typically have a consistent setback, approximately 25 feet from the road. Houses constructed in the 1960s are sometimes set on the lots at an angle to the street, creating undulating patterns in the streetscape. The earliest sections of District Heights, platted in 1925 and 1929 have a rectilinear pattern, while sections platted from the 1940s through the 1960s have curvilinear streets with long blocks, as recommended by the FHA.

Individual Designation

The District Heights Apartments (now known as the Woodland Springs Apartments) is individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Colonial Revival-style garden-apartment complex meets Criteria A and C and is eligible for listing in the National Register under the Multiple Property Document *Apartment Buildings and Garden-Apartment Complexes in Prince George's County, Maryland, 1934-1955*.

The apartment complex was constructed from 1949 through 1951 by Washington Estates, Incorporated. The property consists of 46 apartment buildings, a clubhouse, pool, basketball court, and several playgrounds. The District Heights Apartments is a representative example of a garden-apartment complex built in Prince George's County in the mid-twentieth century. Constructed in phases, the District Heights Apartments was one of the best examples of garden-apartment complexes constructed after World War II (1941-1945) in response to the large number of returning veterans and increasing number of Federal employees relocating to the Washington metropolitan area. The District Heights Apartments were constructed by Washington Estates, Inc. with Federal Housing Administration (FHA) financing. Located within the town of District Heights, the apartment complex provided a modest alternative to the single-family housing that dominated the residential neighborhood. Its location off of Marlboro Pike and an established bus route made the apartments a convenient, affordable housing alternative. The design and location of the District Heights Apartments exemplifies the formula established by the FHA for successful, mortgage-insured garden-apartment complexes.

The District Heights Apartments meets Criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places as an example of the garden-apartment movement that greatly impacted community planning and development in the United States from the 1930s until the 1950s and more specifically in Prince George's County, Maryland, from 1934 to 1955. The size, scale, and form of the apartments reflect the influence of the FHA's guidelines for garden-apartment complexes. Typical of FHA-funded complexes, the District Heights Apartments were designed to take advantage of the rolling topography and were nestled within the small hills to create a village-like setting. The District Heights Apartments meet Criterion C as a garden-apartment complex that reflects the design influence of the FHA. The Colonial Revival-style design of the buildings reflects the FHA's unstated preference for the Colonial Revival style.

Historic District Evaluation

The six platted sections of District Heights comprise almost the entirety of the City of District Heights and illustrate the evolution of architectural styles and suburban development in Prince George's County from 1925 to 1965.

District Heights represents several Prince George's County Heritage Themes including suburban growth and residential architectural styles. District Heights meets the following Prince George's County criteria for designation as a historic district:

- (1)(A)(i) – District Heights is an example of a suburban residential neighborhood that developed in the second-quarter of the twentieth century in Prince George's County to serve a growing number of federal employees who sought an affordable, attractive, well-planned community with modern amenities. The location of the suburb off of Marlboro Pike and the implementation of a bus line by the neighborhood developers ensured that commuters would have a quick and easy commute into Washington, D.C. As District Heights evolved and new developers began to improve the community, each developer retained the ideal of providing modest, affordable housing for the Washington, D.C. worker. In the 1940s, builders in District Heights employed FHA funding and continued to cater to federal employees while at the same time, attracting World War II veterans.
- (2)(A)(i) and (iv) – District Heights represents the evolution of suburban architecture and residential planning in Prince George's County from ca. 1925 through ca. 1965. Initially designed as a rectilinear commuter suburb catering to Federal employees, the neighborhood continued to grow and develop through the mid-twentieth century as a curvilinear suburb. Employing FHA funding in the 1940s, developers of District Heights incorporated FHA standards for neighborhood design and became a model of suburban planning in Prince George's County that continued through the third quarter of the twentieth century. The collection of domestic architectural styles and housing forms in District Heights documents the evolution of popular style and taste in the twentieth century and demonstrates the larger evolution of suburban architecture in Prince George's County.

District Heights also meets the following National Register criteria for designation as a historic district:

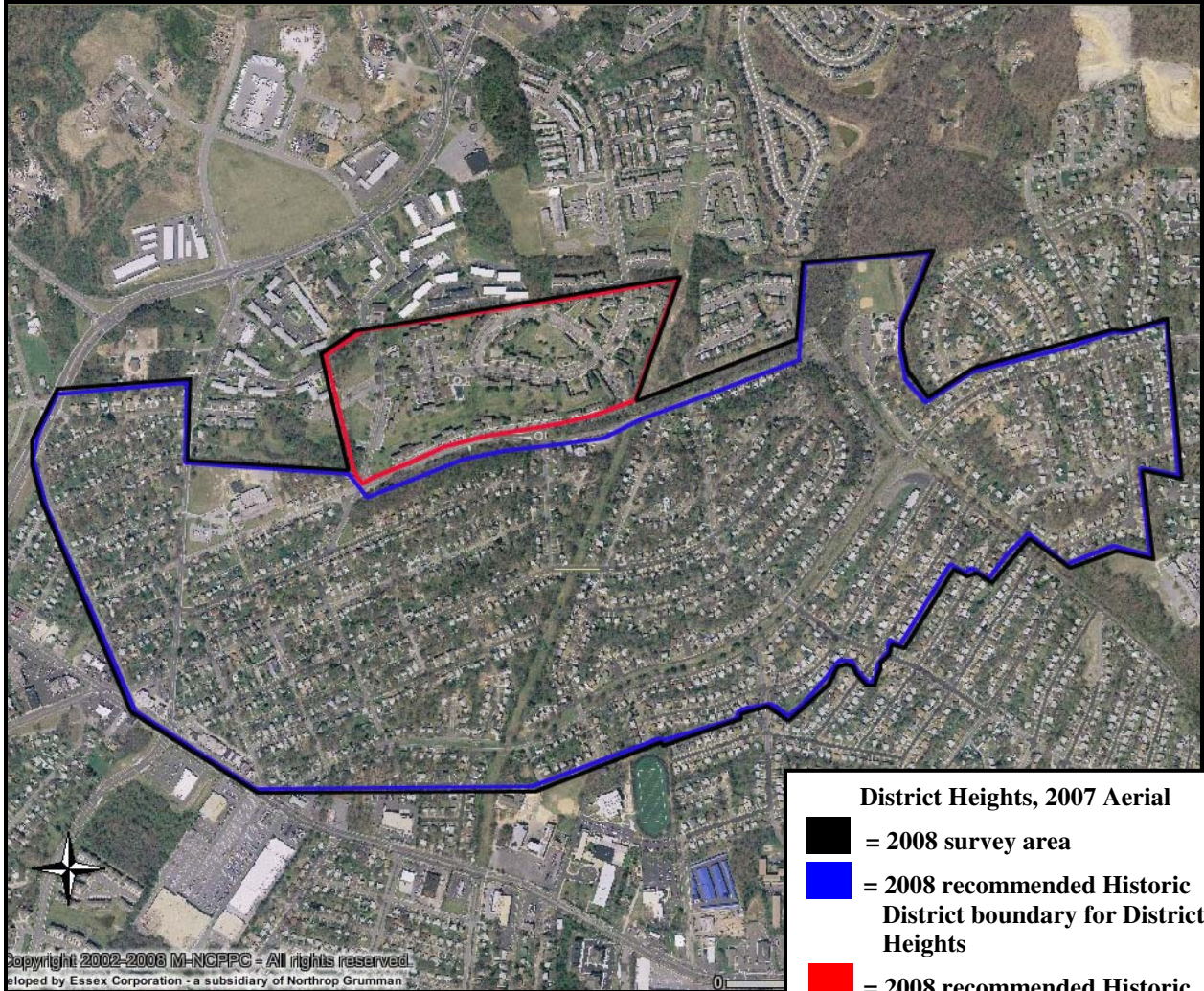
Criterion A – District Heights developed as a suburban residential neighborhood in the second-quarter of the twentieth century to serve a growing number of federal employees who sought affordable, attractive, and well-planned communities in Prince George's County. Development was steady and slow until the onset of World War II, when several developers began to construct houses for the rapidly growing number of employees required by the federal government. The neighborhood continued to develop as a postwar suburb and employed the recommendations provided by the FHA.

Criterion C – The variety of architectural styles and building forms present in District Heights typifies the evolution of residential architecture, design, and planning in twentieth-century Prince George's County. Styles in the community include Craftsman, Colonial Revival, and examples from the Modern Movement. Building forms include the American Foursquare, bungalow, minimal tradition, Cape Cod, ranch house, split-level and split-foyer. The cohesive community remains intact with virtually no infill. Throughout its history, developers of District Heights streamlined construction and repeatedly used the same architectural designs throughout the community. Although the same architectural designs were often repeated in the

subdivision, the exterior material treatments of the buildings were varied, providing a diverse housing stock.

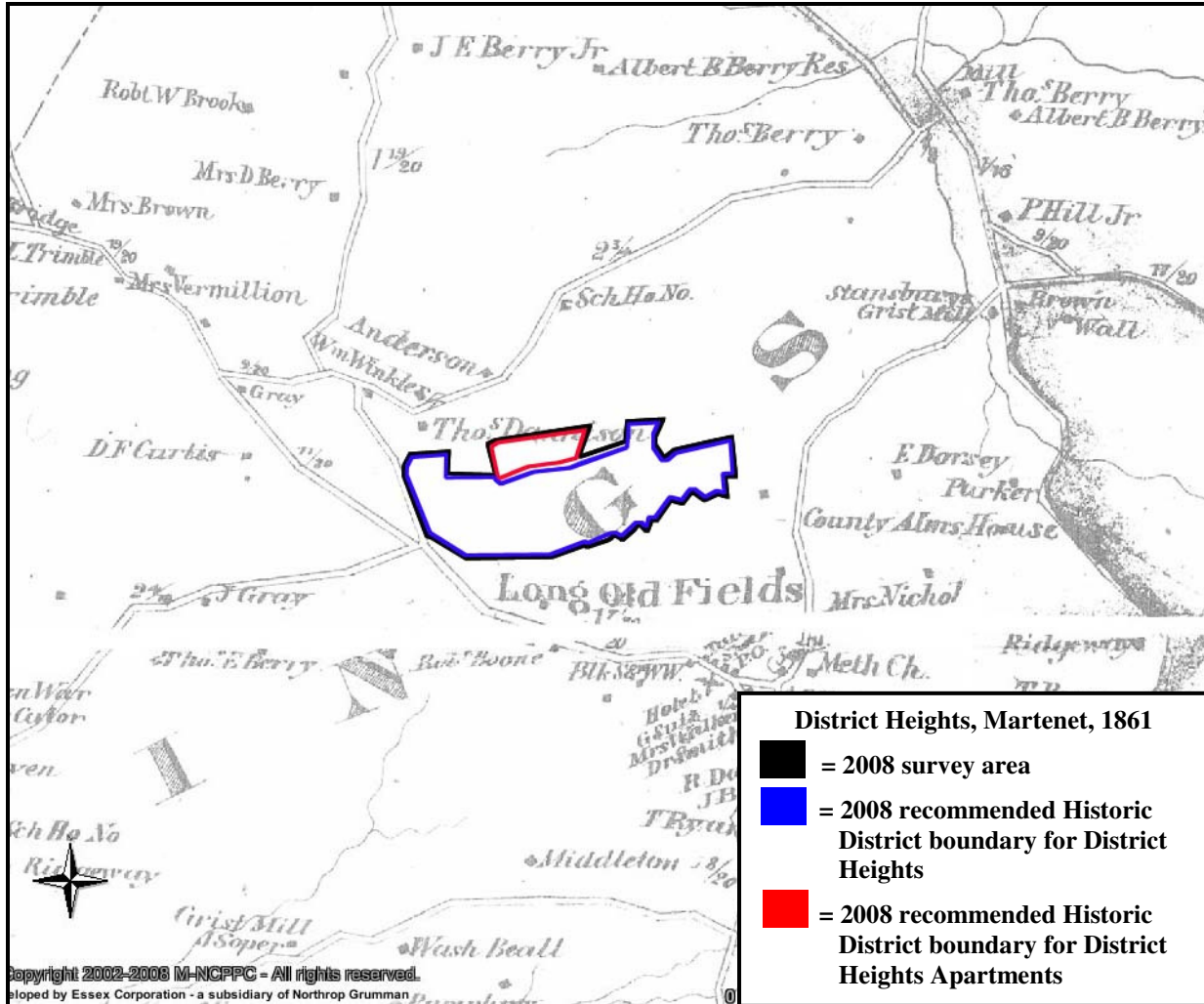
There are approximately 1,328 primary resources within the recommended historic district boundaries in District Heights. The community has retained its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. A reconnaissance-level survey should be completed for District Heights to determine the specific phases of development within the large subdivision. At the time a historic district nomination is prepared for District Heights, the eastern edge of the survey area (east of Marbury Drive) should be studied for inclusion in the district or for a later amendment. Although platted between 1958 and 1963, many of the buildings appear to have been constructed through 1965 and are currently non-historic resources.

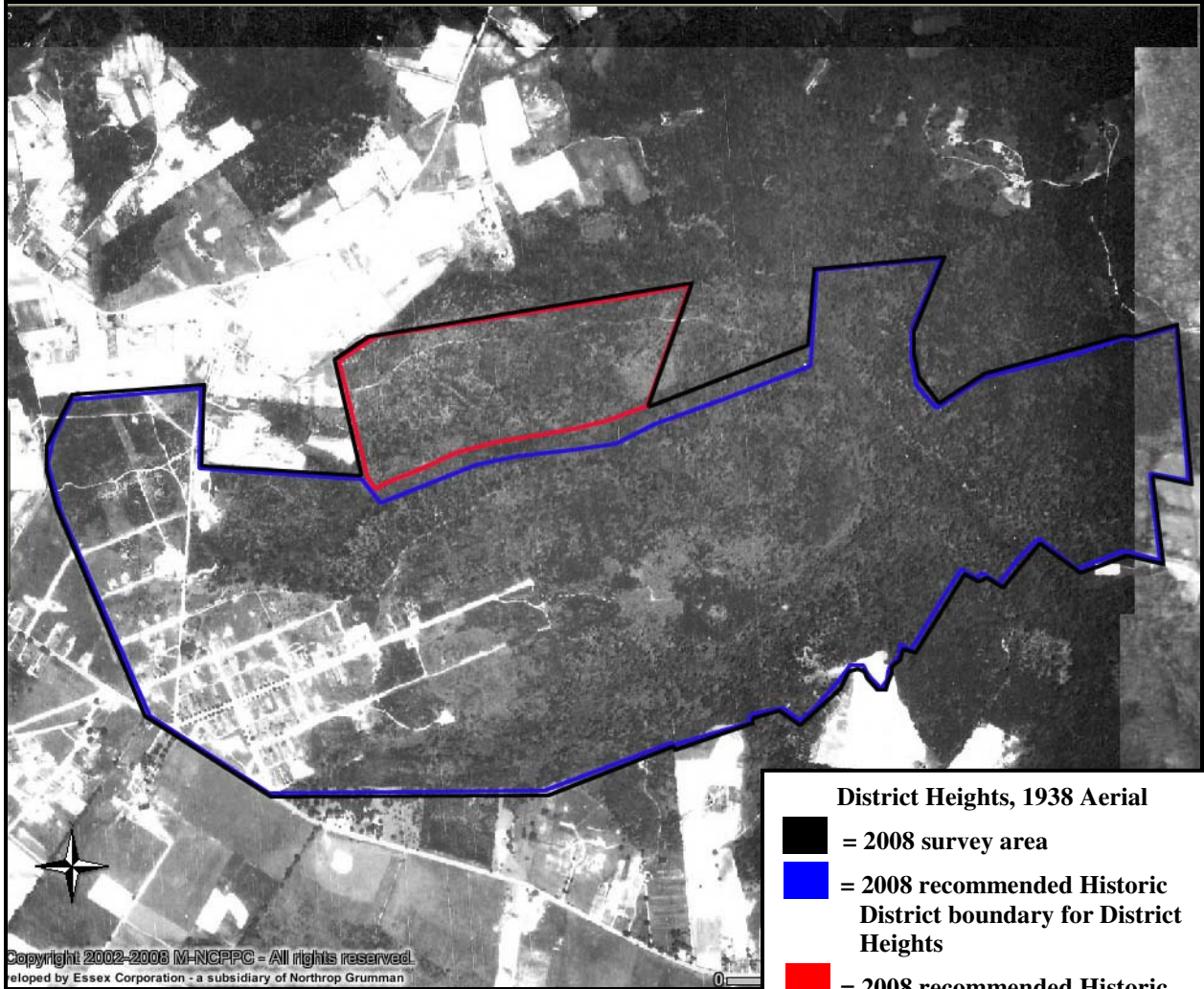
Prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc.
December 2008



District Heights, 2007 Aerial

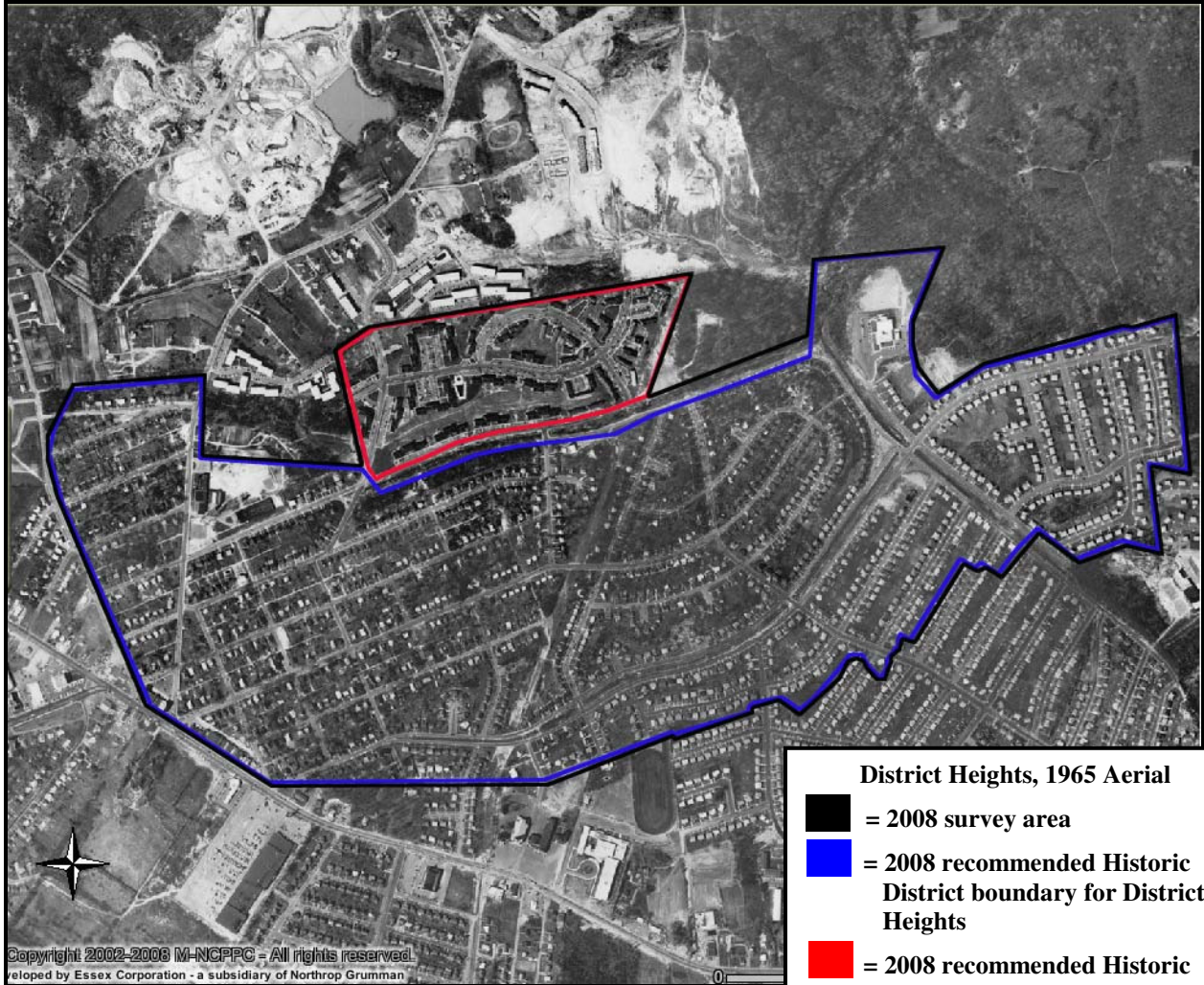
- = 2008 survey area
- = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights
- = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights Apartments





District Heights, 1938 Aerial

- Black line** = 2008 survey area
- Blue line** = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights
- Red line** = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights Apartments



District Heights, 1965 Aerial

- = 2008 survey area
- = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights
- = 2008 recommended Historic District boundary for District Heights Apartments



Looking north, Woodland Springs Apartment Complex (formerly the District Heights Apartments), 6800 District Heights Parkway (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking north, Woodland Springs Apartment Complex (formerly the District Heights Apartments), 6804 District Heights Parkway (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking north, 6306-6308 Elmhurst Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking northeast, 6408-6410-6412-6414 Elmhurst Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking southeast, 6503-6505-6507 Foster Street (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northeast, 6406-6408-6410 Halleck Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking north, 6616-6618 West Court (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northwest, 2205-2203-2201 Breton Drive (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northeast, 7003-7005-7007 Foster Street (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking north, 2207-2205 Ramblewood Drive (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking southwest, 7205-7203-7201 Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking north, 2401-2311 Senator Avenue (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking south, 7209-7207 Lansdale Street (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northwest, 6224-6222-6220 Marlboro Pike (*EHT Tracerics, 2008*)



Looking northeast, 6300-6302-6304 Marlboro Pike (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northeast, 6310-6340 Marlboro Pike (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northeast, 6500-6502-6504-6506 Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking southeast, 6503-6505-6507 Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking northeast, 6714-6716-6718 Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking northeast, 7204-7206-7208-7210-7212-7214 Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking northeast, 2000 Marbury Drive, District Heights Municipal Building (*EHT Tracerics, 2008*)



Looking southeast, 2104-2106 Marbury Drive (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking southwest, 7200 block of Kipling Parkway (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northwest, 2107-2105-2103 Wintergreen Avenue (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking south, 2132-2134 Roslyn Avenue (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking southeast, 6315-6317-6319 Foster Street (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking east, 2200 County Road, District Heights Elementary School (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking southwest, 6113-6111-6109 Alpine Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking north, 6202-6204-6206 Foster Street (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking east, 6317-6319-6321 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking south, 6311-6309-6307 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking west, 2413 Aztec Drive - 6310 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking west, 6308-6306-6304 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries, 2008*)



Looking northwest, 6406-6403-6401 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)



Looking east, 6409-6411-6413 Gateway Boulevard (*EHT Traceries*, 2008)