

= Milwaukee Avenue Historic District =

The Milwaukee Avenue Historic District is a historic district in Minneapolis , Minnesota in the Seward neighborhood . The district comprises two city blocks of small homes on quarter @-@ sized lots . These houses were built between 1884 and 1890 by William Ragan , a Minneapolis real estate speculator . Built for lower @-@ income residents , the houses had deteriorated in condition by the end of World War II , and by the 1970s , were planned for demolition . A group of residents and concerned citizens fought to save the houses , eventually leading to their inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and the federal protection and rehabilitation that comes with the designation . Today , the houses sit along a bike- and pedestrian @-@ friendly mall on which motor traffic is prohibited .

= = Early history = =

During the late 19th century , the population of Minneapolis was growing rapidly , increasing 351 percent from 1880 to 1890 . With the number of people moving into the city , lower @-@ cost housing was needed for immigrants who were new to Minnesota . The street had originally been platted as an alley between 22nd and 23rd Avenues South , but William Ragan developed it as a street and labeled it 22 ½ Avenue . The houses were situated close together on narrow lots , with very narrow side yards and no front yards . This almost gives the impression of rowhouses . Most of the houses were built with brick veneer on timber frames , and they have uniform @-@ sized roof slopes , modified flat arch windows , and open front porches .

The street kept its ' ½ ' until 1906 , when petitioners asked the Minneapolis City Council to change the street 's name to Woodland Avenue because they said the ' ½ ' made them feel like they lived in an alley . For an unknown reason , the street 's name was not changed to Woodland Avenue , but to Milwaukee Avenue . The Avenue 's proximity to the Milwaukee Short Line Railroad has been suggested as a cause .

= = Deterioration and restoration = =

By the time World War II was over , the houses on Milwaukee Avenue were falling into disrepair . They had been neglected throughout the Great Depression and wartime . In 1959 , the City of Minneapolis presented a plan for the Seward neighborhood , which listed the houses on Milwaukee Avenue in ' deteriorated ' condition , meaning they had no indoor plumbing or were severely battered .

In many other neighborhoods , the City had renewed and thus gentrified areas without public hearings , because residents of those neighborhoods were low @-@ income renters . In Milwaukee Avenue 's case , however , the residents were of medium income , and seasoned protesters , since many had protested the Vietnam War . By 1970 , the City of Minneapolis planned to raze the Milwaukee Avenue houses using funds from the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program .

The residents of Milwaukee Avenue and the surrounding Seward neighborhood formed the Seward West Project Area Committee (PAC) in order to try to save the Milwaukee Avenue homes . They argued that the houses had significant historic value and needed to be preserved . The City argued that the houses were legally nonconforming , and rehabilitating them would cost more than just building new houses .

The City furthered its plan of renewing the area and took no heed of the PAC . In response , the PAC secretly submitted an application to the National Register of Historic Places for the Milwaukee Avenue district . It was approved on May 2 , 1974 by Secretary of the Interior Rogers CB Morton . This meant that the City could not alter or destroy the houses using federal funds without a public hearing .

Nine of Milwaukee Avenue 's houses had to be destroyed due to their decrepit conditions and a tenth was moved elsewhere . In the spaces where these houses once stood , townhomes were built

, mirroring the style of the original houses . The rest of the houses got indoor plumbing , new basements , improved woodwork and porches added on . Additionally , a pedestrian mall was built down the center of Milwaukee Avenue to replace a one @-@ way street . The Avenue is now bike and pedestrian friendly , and cars are prohibited .

= = Milwaukee Avenue today = =

Milwaukee Avenue still stands today . In 2007 , to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Milwaukee Avenue 's rehabilitation , self @-@ guided walking tours of eight of the houses were offered to the public .

The houses were featured on local CBS station WCCO @-@ TV 's Finding Minnesota series in 2005 . The two @-@ minute video segment about the avenue featured interviews with a resident of Milwaukee Avenue , as well as Bob Roscoe , an activist who led the fight to save Milwaukee Avenue .