



## NAPERVILLE PRESERVATION, INC.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2021

Gabrielle Mattingly  
City of Naperville  
400 South Eagle Street  
Naperville, IL 60540

Gabrielle,

Attached please find an application for local landmark designation for the 1910 Kroehler YMCA.

You can contact me with any questions at 630-430-1195

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Becky Simon".

Becky Simon, President  
Naperville Preservation, Inc.

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR  
THE 1910 KROEHLER YMCA BUILDING  
34 South Washington Street,  
Naperville, Illinois**

Prepared by:  
Naperville Preservation, Inc.  
Rebecca Simon  
Jane Ory Burke  
Joe McElroy

09/24/2021



*Kroehler YMCA  
Image Courtesy of Naper Settlement*

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## DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

### Summary Paragraph

The 1910 Kroehler YMCA building is located at 34 South Washington Street in downtown Naperville on the east side of Washington Street, Naperville's north-south thoroughfare and primary route through the downtown area. The rear facade faces the western edge of Central Park. The main entrance is located on the west (main) facade facing Washington Street. Built between 1909 and 1910, the structure is an excellent example of architects Shattuck and Hussey's iconic work for YMCA. Walter F. Shattuck and Harry Hussey were well known as the go-to architects for YMCA buildings across the country and around the world.

### Narrative Statement

Travelling through America's main streets, the local YMCA building is instantly recognizable. Simply said, you know it when you see it. In the first half of the 20th century, YMCA buildings were so recognizable and so ever present, that model train kits often included a miniature YMCA building for the home hobbyist to add to their layout.

YMCA helped shape America, and the Kroehler YMCA helped shape Naperville.

Naperville's Kroehler YMCA sits squarely between two other designated local landmarks, the Gothic Revival Naperville Woman's Club and the Richardsonian Romanesque Old Nichols Library. Kroehler YMCA is the northern half of the gateway leading into Naperville's Central Park.

The original 1910 building was constructed of raked red brick, which was carried over into the two subsequent additions. The third story is decorated on all four sides by extruded brick piers. The choice of brick was intended to convey a sense of legitimacy and respectability to the still young YMCA. All of the brickwork appears to be in good condition.

The exterior has excellent integrity, only the front doors and stairs were changed in 1959. The door surround is original and the front stair location is the same despite its extension. The double-hung windows have original intact limestone sills, with three limestone keystones in the arches over the two triple windows in the front facade, all of which match the aesthetic integrity of the archway entry. The building had exterior fire escapes on the north and south walls; the south fire escape remains.

The third story metal cornice and the arched pediment over the front door reference Italianate elements, and a parapet wall with a limestone cap surrounds a flat roof. An intact carved limestone cornerstone marks the south west corner of the building.

The two north additions, a larger pool built in 1973 and racquetball courts added in 1977, are non-contributing resources of the historic property and are excluded from this application.

The interior of the 1910 building was framed around a central stairwell. The building's original lower level had a locker room, Boys Club room, bowling alley, and an indoor pool. The first floor offered a game room, reading room, and gymnasium. On the second floor you would find a lecture and banquet hall, the gymnasium gallery (removed in the 1950s), and an amateur darkroom. The third floor had 22 private rooms for rent.

The building is currently owned by the YMCA of Metro Chicago. Since it was in use as recently as Spring 2020, we must assume it is not in distressed condition. However, YMCA of Metro Chicago will not allow visits to the building's interior.

## **OWNER CONTACT EFFORTS**

This property is up for sale and therefore at risk of demolition.

Naperville Preservation has made sustained efforts to talk with YMCA of Metro Chicago since January 6, 2021. In September we asked them to respond with consent or opposition to our application for local landmark status. We have not received a reply. We have notified them of the filing of this application.

## ORIGINS/CONSTRUCTION

### Summary Paragraph

As one of Naperville's most important founding businessmen, Peter Kroehler, the owner of Kroehler Lounge Company and former twice-elected mayor, left a legacy that is preserved in 5th Avenue Station (the former Kroehler factory) and the Kroehler Mansion. Peter Kroehler also personally led the campaign to build a YMCA in Naperville. In 1909 the Chicago YMCA office told Naperville that our town was just too small to support a YMCA. Napervillians, however, thought otherwise. The campaign to build a YMCA kicked off June 22, 1909, and within 15 days, the town of 3,400 raised \$26,260 (over \$784,000 in 2021 dollars).<sup>1</sup>

### Narrative Statement

"The citizens of Naperville have for some time realized the necessity of having a home for their young men. At a recent public meeting it was decided to organize a Young Men's Christian Association and a Board of Directors was elected. After careful consideration and investigations the Board of Directors decided the best way to supply this need was to erect a new Y.M.C.A. Building."<sup>2</sup>

The effort had wide support in the town. The fundraising campaign began on June 20, 1909. On July 14, 1909, after only four weeks, the Naperville Clarion quoted Ernest J.T. Moyer, president of YMCA Board of Directors: "The liberality and public spirit of our citizens, proven by their contributions of time and money, has made it possible to secure a fund of sufficient size to erect a fine new building that Naperville will be proud of. The credit for carrying the campaign must be widely distributed."<sup>3</sup>

The building was built between 1909 and 1910 by the citizens of Naperville, and it was entirely funded by community donations in a fundraising campaign led by one of Naperville's leading citizens and then mayor, Peter Kroehler.

During the fundraising drive, each evening when the day's quota was reached, the Congregational Church rang the bells in its tower and Scott's Store moved the hands on a giant clock to mark the fundraising progress.

The firm of Shattuck and Hussey of Chicago was hired to design the Kroehler YMCA. This firm designed more than 35 YMCAs across the United States, and as far away as Hong Kong, between 1906 and World War I. They specialized in, "producing functional and low-cost buildings...Their understanding of YMCA building principles could be transferred from building to building...and reduced risk to local YMCA committees," such as Naperville's.<sup>4</sup>

With great fanfare, the Kroehler YMCA cornerstone was laid on Memorial Day 1910.<sup>5</sup> Construction continued throughout the winter, but as the building neared completion, resources began to run low, so another fundraising campaign began, and \$15,000 was pledged in only eight days! The campaign was authorized so as to, "...open the building free from all debt."<sup>6</sup> The building was opened to the public less than a year after work began, on March 26, 1911.<sup>7</sup>

## HISTORIC ANALYSIS

### Summary Paragraph

For more than 100 years the Kroehler YMCA served as Naperville's community center. It is located within the National Register Historic District in the oldest part of downtown Naperville. It bears repeating that the YMCA helped shape America, and the Kroehler YMCA helped shape Naperville. In a story repeated all across America, the Kroehler YMCA was a centerpiece of the growing town as Naperville transformed from an agricultural community to a full fledged town. YMCA has been so central to the history of America that 56 YMCA buildings are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>8</sup>

### Narrative Statement

It is more than a building; the Kroehler YMCA is a turning point in Naperville's history. It is an historic marker, highlighting the period when Naperville transitioned from an agricultural town to a thriving city with factories where young men came to work. When a young man left the family farm in the country, where would it be safe, clean, and affordable for him to live while he found his feet in a larger town? The YMCA, of course!

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded by George Williams. YMCA was associated with industrialisation and the movement of young people to cities to work. YMCA combined preaching in the streets and the distribution of religious tracts with a social ministry. "Philanthropists saw them as places for wholesome recreation that would preserve youth from the temptations of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution and that would promote good citizenship."<sup>9</sup>

Combine George Williams' sense of civic responsibility with Peter Kroehler's commitment to physical fitness and you get the Kroehler YMCA. Peter Kroehler was a fitness buff ahead of his time. Today Naperville is peppered with health clubs and fitness centers, but in 1909 most people were confined to elegant and uncomfortable clothes, so physical exercise was not yet a popular idea.

The Kroehler YMCA is located between two buildings already recognized as local historic landmarks -- the Naperville Woman's Club/German Evangelical People's Church and the Old Nichols Library. It backs to Central Park, home of the Naperville Municipal Band since 1859. As noted in the 1977 National Register of Historic Places nomination, "The Naperville Historic District embraces an area where one can trace the history of one small piece of an immense metropolitan region from its earliest settlement, through the stages of small town and city, up to its recent suburban role on the basis of visual reminders alone."<sup>10</sup>

As Naperville grew, so did its community needs. Not only did the YMCA provide housing, it was also the cultural and recreational hub for the community, offering valuable programs. The

Kroehler YMCA included an indoor swimming pool, and in decades to come, residents of all ages learned to swim in the Kroehler YMCA pool.

The Depression came, and the Kroehler YMCA stepped in to give lessons in home canning to help families on relief put up food for the winter.

During World War II it would not have been possible for a town of 5,200 to put up a new building, but “the Y” needed to grow, so Naperville residents donated \$175,000 in cash and pledges.<sup>9</sup> Also during WWII, the Naperville Red Cross was headquartered in the Kroehler YMCA. That is a measure of how important the Kroehler YMCA has been to Naperville.<sup>11</sup>

On October 1, 1959, Genevieve Towsley, a chronicler of Naperville’s history, published an article in The Naperville Sun describing the history of the YMCA in Naperville: “The YMCA - Fifty Years of Service.” She not only described the community effort that built the building, but she also described the importance of the YMCA to the community.

In the 1920’s girls and women began to be admitted to use the facilities, such as the pool and gymnasium. Groups that were not strictly sponsored by the YMCA began to meet in the building. “Gradually it became more and more a community center.”

Towsley noted that the “Y” fulfilled its role as community center by providing a meeting place for many organizations not affiliated with the YMCA program.

Towsley observed that the “Y” had maintained a large sphere of influence over its fifty years. Her article concludes: “The city’s mushrooming population makes more demands on the YMCA than ever before. The organization has withstood lean years and war years. As it starts on its second half century of service in Naperville, it faces a challenging future. With able leadership it will continue to be the hub of wholesome social and educational activity for Naperville.”<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to see how countless thousands of men and women, boys and girls, have benefited from the athletics, programming, and shelter provided by the YMCA. Over the decades the Kroehler YMCA has provided courses in English for immigrants, served as a meeting place for Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Christian Scientists, Square Dance Club, Girl Scouts, Newcomers Club, Youth Council, Indian Guides and Princesses, coed Dance groups. The video of the 100th birthday celebration on April, 2011 mirrored the sense of community and joy in the 1910 opening day celebrations.

The Kroehler YMCA was built from sheer community will power, and served for over one hundred years as a central meeting place for innumerable community events and organizations. The Kroehler YMCA is at the heart of Naperville and it is featured in Naperville Heritage Society’s brochure: “Historic Walking Tour - Downtown”<sup>13</sup>

### Kroehler YMCA Closing

June 1, 2020, after 110 years of community service, the Kroehler YMCA shut its doors, a victim of falling revenue exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chicago Metropolitan YMCA continues to operate other facilities in Naperville.<sup>14</sup>

## **ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS**

The architectural style most closely associated with the building is Italianate. The metal cornice and dominant lintel over the front door are some of the elements that reference the Italianate style, which is found throughout downtown Naperville in both commercial and residential buildings. The intact cornerstone is hand carved with an Arts and Crafts motif of leaves.

The exterior design of the building reflects the image YMCA sought to project. Like many YMCA buildings, the Kroehler YMCA was built in brick. This was an intentional choice to convey a sense of strength. With the Kroehler YMCA, extruded brick piers on all four sides of the third story mirror an architectural rhythm to the orderliness that YMCA strove to provide inside. Also on the third story, a metal cornice just below the building's parapet wall ties the building together visually and defines the upper story.

The interior architecture of the building reflects its purpose. The lower level housed a pool, the ground floor was a gathering space and reading room, the second floor housed a meeting hall and gym gallery, and the third floor had private rooms for rent.

All across America YMCA Buildings are iconic. The Kroehler YMCA is one of those iconic buildings. It was designed by the prominent YMCA architects Walter F. Shattuck and Harry Hussey. If there was an architectural style called, "YMCA," the Kroehler YMCA would fit it perfectly.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **The 1910 Kroehler YMCA meets all criteria for designation as a Naperville local landmark, and Naperville Preservation, Inc. recommends that it be so designated.**

Reviewing the Naperville municipal code requirements for local landmark designation:

- 2.1 The building is over fifty (50) years old.
- 2.2. Although only one of the further five conditions is required, Kroehler YMCA meets four of the five further conditions:
  - 2.2.1. Kroehler YMCA was associated with notable Naperville resident Peter Kroehler and notable YMCA architects Shattuck and Hussey;
  - 2.2.3. Kroehler YMCA embodies the distinguishing characteristics of YMCA buildings across America in architecture, period, style, and method of construction;
  - 2.2.4. Kroehler YMCA represents the notable architects Walter F. Shattuck and Harry Hussey whose work has substantially influenced the development of America;
  - 2.2.5. Kroehler YMCA is included in the Naperville National Register Historic District.

Naperville Preservation, Inc. recommends the 1910 Kroehler YMCA be designated as a local landmark.

#### Concerns

The building is owned by the Chicago Metropolitan YMCA. Until it closed in Spring 2020, the Kroehler YMCA was advertised as being a "safe, nurturing environment" with "all the amenities of a fitness center". Thus, we can assume it is not in distressed condition, although it has some maintenance challenges. However, Metro Chicago YMCA will not allow visits to the building's interior for Naperville Preservation to make a more thorough assessment.

The building is currently for sale and is a prime target for demolition. Naperville Preservation believes that the original building of the 1910 Kroehler YMCA should be considered for addition to the Naperville list of local landmarks.

#### Solutions

It is encouraging that YMCA of Metro Chicago has already worked to preserve some of its historic buildings, and others have been preserved by third parties.<sup>15</sup>

“In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced that the Wabash YMCA in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago would receive a National Preservation Honor Award. When the Wabash YMCA closed its doors in 1969 due to lack of funding, Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood lost an institution that had been a center of activity for half a century. After extensive renovation carried out by neighborhood churches and with the financial support of the city, this landmark stands as a center of the community.”<sup>16</sup>

The Victor F. Lawson House YMCA on Chicago’s south side has been successfully repurposed as affordable housing and is now on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>17</sup>

### Finally

- Adaptive reuse: Many old Naperville buildings have found new lives, and continue on as economic engines, producing revenue for their owners: North Central College’s Old Main, Naperville Post Office, and Meson Sabika, to name just a few. Old YMCA buildings have been repurposed through adaptive reuse across the country including in Chicago. A silver LEED example is on the Texas A&M University campus.<sup>18</sup>
- National Register status: If the property owners pursue National Register status, a broad array of state and federal tax incentives and tax credits could be available to them.
- Affordable Housing: Adaptive reuse of this building could potentially include affordable housing, bringing Kroehler YMCA’s story full circle and back to its roots. Granite City, Illinois, has successfully repurposed its old YMCA as affordable housing.<sup>19</sup>

Historic Preservation is good business. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program has leveraged over \$102.64 **billion** in private investment to preserve 45,383 historic properties since 1976.

“Some studies have shown that local landmark designation, particularly designation of a historic district, can stabilize or increase property values due to the desirability of living in a neighborhood where owners are highly invested in their historic properties, in turn contributing to the neighborhood’s desirability.”<sup>20</sup>

Just 27 miles east of Naperville, the Old Chicago Post Office received \$196M in historic tax credits towards the building’s rehabilitation and renovation, with a total project budget of over \$1B. Now the building is 90% occupied and the exterior is Gold LEED certified. It is expected to generate \$19M in annual property tax revenues.<sup>21</sup>

Some benefits of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit are as follows:

- Helps close the financing gap between the cost of a rehabilitation project and the return on investment;
- Encourages the preservation of historic buildings through promotion, recognition, designation, and reuse;
- Increases the value of rehabilitated properties;
- Revitalizes downtowns and neighborhoods; and
- Reuses the built environment in a sustainable manner.

## NOTES

- 1 Ogg, page 87
- 2 Naperville Clarion, June 16, 1909
- 3 Naperville Clarion, July 14, 1909
- 4 Lupkin, page 146
- 5 Ogg, page 87
- 6 Naperville Clarion, November 23, 1910
- 7 Ogg, page 87
- 8 List of YMCA Buildings
- 9 YMCA
- 10 Wagner
- 11 Towsley, page 139
- 12 Wood, page 129
- 13 Naperville Heritage Society
- 14 YMCA of Metro Chicago
- 15 YMCA of Metro Chicago
- 16 Lakeview
- 17 Lawson
- 18 Texas A & M University
- 19 Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- 20 Landmarks Illinois
- 21 Bauzon

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Naperville Clarion, June 16, 1909

Naperville Clarion, July 14, 1909

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## PHOTOGRAPHS



*Kroehler YMCA  
34 S Washington  
August, 2021*



*Kroehler YMCA cornerstone*



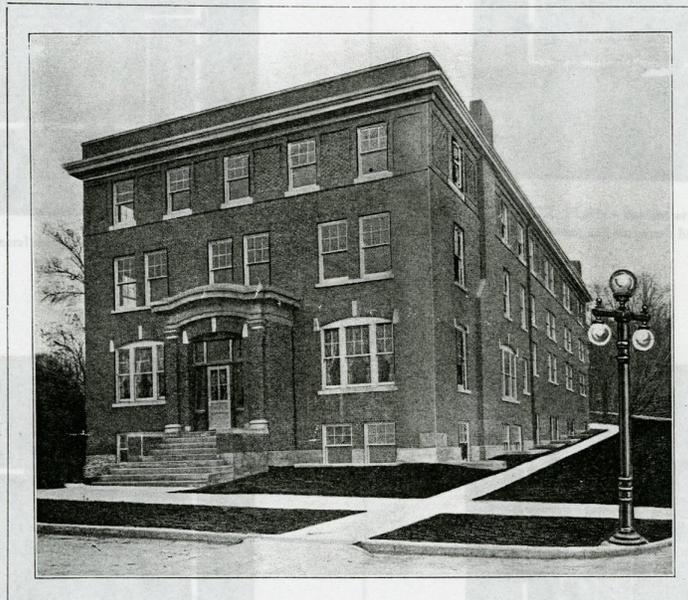
*Kroehler YMCA grand opening.  
Image courtesy of Naper Settlement.*



*Historic postcard of the Kroehler YMCA.  
Image courtesy of Naper Settlement*

NHS files

A Door of *OPPORTUNITY*  
for Men and Boys of Nap-  
erville and DuPage County

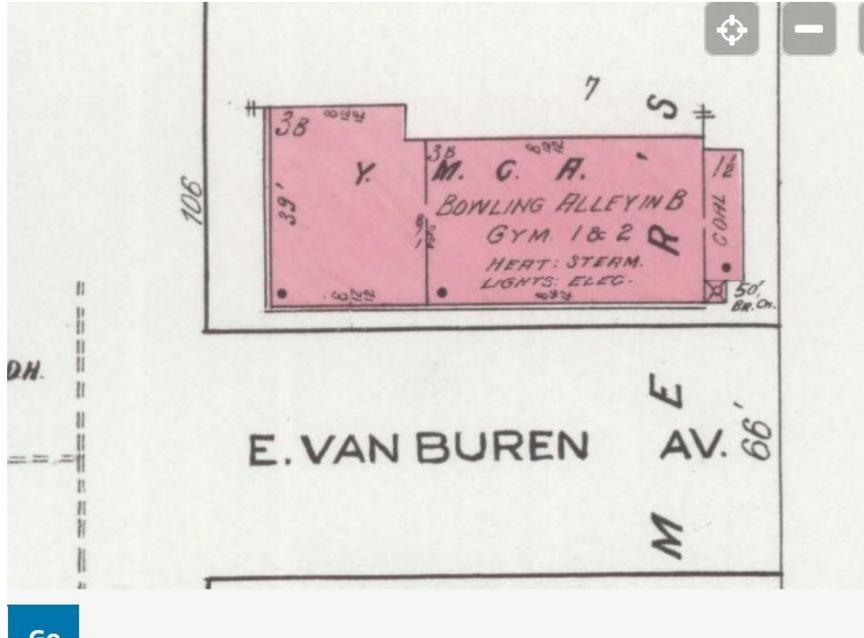


*Will YOU Help Open It?*

*Historic photograph of Kroehler YMCA.  
Image courtesy of Naper Settlement*



*Kroehler YMCA Gym, 2020  
Image courtesy Witico*



1921 SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP  
Library of Congress



**34 S. Washington St.**

**Kroehler YMCA**

PIN: 07-13-420-005  
07-13-420-006

EXHIBIT A

CITY COUNCIL

JAN 21 2003

AGENDA ITEM

*N2g*

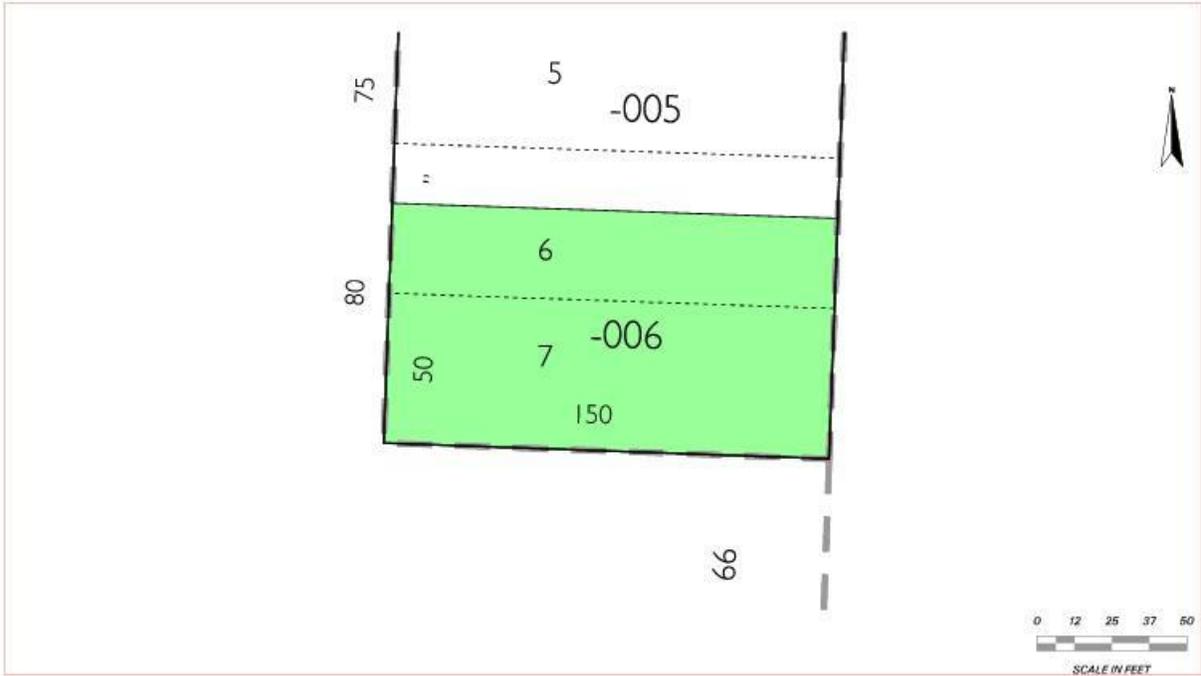
(3)

FRED BUCHOLZ

R2006-130189

DUPAGE COUNTY RECORDER

*2003 Kroehler YMCA aerial plat  
DuPage County Recorder  
Submitted to and accepted by Naperville City Council*



*Kroehler YMCA PIN map  
Naperville Township Assessor Office*

**APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Rebecca Simon for Naperville Preservation, Inc.  
15 Butternut Drive  
Naperville, IL 60540  
630-430-1195  
napervillepreservation@gmail.com

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:**

The south 5.0 feet of lot 4, and all of lots 5, 6, and 7 in Block 3 in Hosmer's Addition to the town of Naperville, being a subdivision of part of the east ½ of section 13, township 38 north, range 9, east of the third principal meridian, and of part of the west ½ of section 18, township 38 north, range 10, east of the third principal meridian, according to the plat thereof recorded January 26, 1843 as document 414, in DuPage County, Illinois.

**COMMONLY KNOWN AS:**

34 S. Washington St.  
Naperville, IL 60540

**PARCEL IDs:**

07-13-420-006; and 07-13-420-005

**OWNER INFORMATION:**

YMCA OF METRO CHICAGO  
1030 W. Van Buren Street  
Chicago, IL 60607  
tel: 312.932.1200

Dorri McWhorter, President and CEO

**APPENDIX**

**AFFIDAVIT**

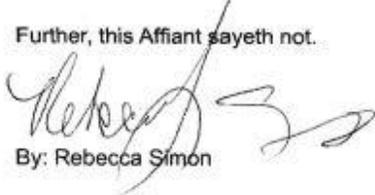
RE: Owner Notification

Landmark Designation Application for the Kroehier YMCA

34 S. Washington Street

The undersigned, being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says that the attached letter, marked Exhibit A and made a part hereof, has been, in accordance with the procedures of the City of Naperville, served by first class U.S. Postal mail, to the owner of the real property commonly known as 34 S. Washington Street in Naperville, Illinois.

Further, this Affiant sayeth not.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rebecca Simon", is written over the typed name.

By: Rebecca Simon

9/24/2021

24

**Exhibit A**



**NAPERVILLE PRESERVATION, INC.**

Rebecca Simon  
Naperville Preservation, Inc.  
15 Butternut Drive  
Naperville, IL 60540  
(630) 430-1195  
napervillepreservation@gmail.com  
September 24, 2021

Dorri C. McWhorter  
YMCA of Metro Chicago  
1030 W. Van Buren Street  
Chicago, IL 60607

Dear Ms. McWhorter,

This letter is to inform you that on September 24, 2021, an application for landmark designation of the property located at 34 S. Washington Street in Naperville, the Kroehler YMCA building, was filed with the City of Naperville Zoning Administrator. Per Section 6-11-3:1.4 of the City of Naperville Municipal Code, the Zoning Administrator shall mail to you a copy of the completed application.

Should you have any questions, you may contact me at the above listed phone number or email address.

Sincerely,

  
Rebecca Simon

9/24/2021

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Certificate of Acknowledgment

This certificate is attached to a Waperville Preservation, INC.

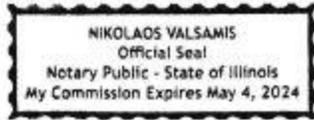
dated 9/24/2021

Document Information: Acknowledgement for consent

STATE OF ILLINOIS  
COUNTY OF COOK

This instrument was acknowledged before me on September 24, 2021, by  
Rebecca L. Simon

(Seal)



*Nikolaos Valsamis*

Notary Public Signature

Nikolaos Valsamis

Print name

May 4<sup>th</sup> 2024

My commission expires

**Exhibit B**



**NAPERVILLE PRESERVATION, INC.**

Rebecca Simon  
Naperville Preservation, Inc.  
15 Butternut Drive  
Naperville, IL 60540  
(630) 430-1195  
napervillepreservation@gmail.com  
September 14, 2021

Dorri C. McWhorter  
YMCA of Metro Chicago  
1030 W. Van Buren Street  
Chicago, IL 60607

Dear Ms. McWhorter,

This letter is to inform you that our organization, Naperville Preservation, Inc. intends to apply for local landmark designation for the 1910 Kroehler YMCA, the property located at 34 South Washington Street in Naperville, Illinois. Respond to us no later than Thursday, September 25, indicating whether or not you consent to the application for designation.

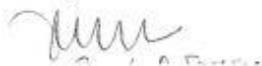
Should you have any questions, you may contact me at the above listed phone number or email address.

Sincerely,

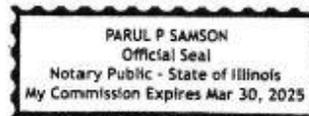
  
Rebecca Simon

9/14/2021

Notary:

  
Parul P. Samson

09/14/2021



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**AFFIDAVIT**

RE: Owner Consent for Landmark Designation of the Kroehler YMCA, 34 S. Washington Street

The undersigned, being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says that the attached letter, marked Exhibit B and made a part hereof, has been, in accordance with the procedures of the City of Naperville, served by first class U.S. Postal mail, to the owner of the real property commonly known as 34 S. Washington Street in Naperville, Illinois.

Further, this Affiant sayeth not.

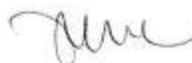
  
By: Rebecca Simon

Further, this Affiant sayeth not.

By: Rebecca Simon

SUBSCRIBED and SWORN to before me this 14th day of September, 2021

Notary:

  
Parul P. Samson  
09/14/2021

