

Special report: Astor Neighborhood a city gem

Old trees, narrow streets, houses with porches add to area's uniqueness

By Heather Stur

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Astor Neighborhood residents are connected for a reason: front porches.

"It's a very open community because of that," said Dan Madigan, a member of the Astor Neighborhood Association board of directors.

"When you sit out in your front yard instead of your back yard, you tend to see your neighbors and talk to them. People are friendly here."

The front porches may have brought people together, but the people themselves are responsible for creating a neighborhood people want to be a part of.

"You have neighbors that are interested in being involved," said Michael Nass, president of the Astor Neighborhood Association.

The Astor Neighborhood, which is bounded by Mason Street, Grignon Street, Roosevelt Street and the Fox River, combines physical characteristics that have existed for decades with residents interested in preserving the community and making it a safe, sustainable place to live and raise a family, Nass said.

The two elements create a neighborhood that often is looked at as a gem of Green Bay's community image and is considered by some people to be the way neighborhoods should be designed in the future, said Bill Weber, director of planning for Minneapolis-based URS Inc.

He is a consultant to planners who are updating Green Bay's comprehensive plan.

A good example

"A lot of people seem to want neighborhoods with parks, narrow streets, mature trees," Weber said, referring to a survey given to members of the Planning Department's Citizens Advisory Committee.

"Green Bay has local examples of how to do it right, and the Astor Neighborhood is one of them."

Most homes in the east-side neighborhood were built between 1830 and 1930.

The area, part of which is on the National Register of Historic Places, contains 12 different architectural styles including Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, Chateausque and Italianate.

Homes sit close to one another and to sidewalks.

Tree boughs arch over the streets.

The Astor Neighborhood Association formed about 20 years ago, and is proof residents can have a say in what goes on in their neighborhood if they band together, Nass said.

About 10 years ago, association members came together to fight the opening of a tavern on a primarily residential street, he said.

The association's most recent accomplishment was to get the speed limit lowered on a four-block stretch of South Monroe Avenue from Howe Elementary School to the city border with Allouez, Madigan said.

The limit was changed from 30 mph to 25 mph a few weeks ago.
Voicing concerns

"We organized, worked with schools and councilmen and got it done," Madigan said.

Now association members are working with city officials to get a new band shell built at St. James Park.

And if future city planning affects the Astor Neighborhood, association members will organize and speak out again, Nass said.

"If there was an initiative to widen a street or plow down some trees, we'd be there to say we're concerned about this," Nass said.

"We're a means for people to voice concerns about what's going on in their neighborhood."

— from the Astor Neighborhood Association Web site