



National Park Service News Release

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National Park Service releases study to help save Sweet Auburn District's historic character

ATLANTA – Today, the National Park Service (NPS) released a comprehensive study to help guide future preservation of Atlanta's Sweet Auburn National Historic Landmark (NHL) District, once considered the richest Black community in the world.

The Integrity and Condition Assessment conducted by New South Associates Inc. on behalf of NPS found that Sweet Auburn has lost 47% of its historic buildings since being designated as an NHL by the Secretary of the Interior in 1976. While several prominent buildings endure, iconic landmarks like the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Butler Street YMCA and Walden buildings remain vacant after several years and are at risk for deterioration and demolition by neglect. The loss of these buildings could be detrimental to the district's historic integrity and the city, as a whole. Additionally, development within the district and on its edges challenge ongoing preservation.

"The Sweet Auburn National Historic Landmark District remains an outstanding example of American history and culture," said **Cynthia Walton, regional manager for NPS archeological and historic preservation partnerships**. "It also faces serious preservation challenges. With the information collected in this study, the community can better understand and protect the district's unique character that makes it significant in American history."

Despite the alarming loss of historic buildings noted, the study concludes that "...the district's remaining historic buildings continue to convey the sense of time and place of a small-scale historic commercial area dating from the 1910s to the 1960s."

The study also highlights several preservation successes, including rehabilitation of the Municipal Market and Odd Fellows Building, and establishment of Sweet Auburn Works, a nonprofit serving as an advocacy liaison for the community. Most importantly, the study shows that the Sweet Auburn NHL District remains a cultural center for the larger Sweet Auburn community and an irreplaceable part of American history.

Maintenance of historic properties, whether as a single building or a large district, requires constant attention and active management. NPS will continue to monitor the Sweet Auburn NHL District and welcomes new information concerning the issues identified in the study.

Walton said, “The NPS will continue to follow proposed projects that may diminish the integrity of the Sweet Auburn NHL District. We have recommended several steps to improve the overall health of the district, such as updating NHL and National Register documentation to help properties better secure preservation grants. We look forward to assisting the community as it continuously works to achieve its preservation goals.”

The Sweet Auburn National Historic Landmark District was considered the hub of African American prosperity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Originally named Wheat Street and renamed Auburn Avenue in 1893, the street became the heart of Atlanta’s Black social, religious, cultural and business activities during the segregated Jim Crow era. It birthed some of the nation’s most successful Black businesses and contributed to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s formative development. African American businesses converged on the west end of Auburn Avenue, increased in number from 10 to 72 between 1900 and 1920, and eventually led the nation in the concentration of black-owned businesses.

The district comprises 18.8 acres along portions of Auburn Avenue, Edgewood Avenue, Piedmont Avenue, Courtland Street, John Wesley Dobbs Ave, and Bell Street.

The public may learn more about the Sweet Auburn NHL District Study by visiting <https://go.nps.gov/sweetauburn>.

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About the National Historic Landmarks Program:

The [National Historic Landmarks Program](#), established in 1935, is administered by the National Park Service on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior. The National Historic Landmarks Program is one of more than a dozen programs administered by the National Park Service that provide states and local communities technical assistance, recognition, and funding to help preserve our nation's shared history and create close-to-home recreation opportunities.