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Bill Petros/Current File Photo

The preservation review board is slated to consider historic designation of Eldbrooke United Methodist Church in Tenleytown.

City board to weigh historic merit of Tenley buildings

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A grounding for historic designation of properties in Tenleytown, American University Park and Friendship Heights could be secured by a D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board vote in September.

As part of a "multiple-property thematic document," the D.C. Historic Preservation Office and Tenleytown Historical Society have offered an explanation of the area's history and identified several potential landmarks. Approval by the board would not grant any protection, but preservationists hope it would pave the way for nomination of individual properties for landmark designation.

"It sets the stage for future nominations," said Jane Waldman, a member of the board of directors for the historical society. "In and of itself it establishes no protection."

The nomination is not for a broad historic district, which preservationists agreed did not fit Tenleytown because it lacks continuity, said Kim Williams, the Historic Preservation Office's national register coordinator.

Instead, it provides contextual and background details for the neighborhood that would otherwise be detailed only in individual nominations. It examines Tenleytown's growth from a rural village to suburb. If the board already has this information, it will be simpler for a party to nominate a specific property, Waldman said.

"It's basically sort of an umbrella document that allows you to evaluate specific properties," said David Maloney, deputy state historic preservation officer.

Amy McVey, who chairs the Tenleytown-American University Park advisory neighborhood commission, said she first learned of the proposal this week from a community e-mail.

The commission expects to take up the issue at its Sept. 13 meeting, she said.

While city agencies and preservation groups can nominate properties for historic designation, she said the owners should be at the center of it.

"I agree with it only if the owner of the property wants it," McVey said.

The nomination specifically names dozens of properties, including homes, businesses, churches and schools. Other unnamed sites could be nominated in the future.

The document also highlights four potential historic districts. Those are: Mount Airy, around Brandywine and Ellicott streets and Belt and River roads; Armesleigh Park, between 38th, 39th, Albemarle and Warren streets; the Perna Duplexes, in the 4100 block of Chesapeake Street; and the 5300 block of 41st Street.

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The practice of nominating areas for merely potential designation is not unprecedented, Williams said. The board has approved similar recommendations for apartments and monuments.

The recommendations stem from a study completed in 2003 of nearly 900 properties by the historical society and a professional historian. It was funded by a \$24,990 grant from

the National Park Service through the Historic Preservation Office.

"Historic preservation has been said by the Office of Planning to be an excellent planning tool," Waldman said. "It retains the character of a place."

Williams admitted her office has a backlog of nominations, hence the four-year gap, due to emergency nominations that were rushed to the board.

The board will consider two properties from the initial survey — the 1926 Eldbrooke United

Methodist Church and neighboring 1855 Methodist Cemetery — for historic designation at the September hearing. Both were submitted by the historical society.

Eldbrooke is under contract to an undisclosed potential buyer, according to Dr. Charles Parker, who presides over Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, which owns the property. The congregations merged two years ago when the building off River Road was shuttered due to its poor condition.