

CENTRAL WEST END (38)

LOCATION

One of the Central West End's major assets is its central location. Lying between Delmar Boulevard to the North, Interstate 64 to the South, North Vandeventer Avenue to the East, and Kingshighway and Union Boulevards via Lindell Boulevard to the West, it lends urban convenience to both its businesses and residents.

HISTORY

Urban development in the Central West End (CWE) began at its eastern edge in the 1880's. Much of the development of this part of the city is due in great measure to the advent of the 1904 World's Fair. Mansions went up quickly all around the Central West End during this time, but later the construction turned more to high-rise apartment buildings.

Historically, the Central West End neighborhood has a claim to St. Louis's most prominent shopping area, Maryland Plaza, and most famous entertainment district, Gaslight Square. Gaslight Square reached its zenith in the late 1960s. Originally housing antique shops and music studios, it became a bustling center that included quality restaurants and night spots. Unfortunately, both Maryland Plaza and Gaslight Square had declined by the 1970s.



Its history has been richly colored by the coming and going of an incredible number of churches. The present home for the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis, Cathedral of St. Louis was built in 1914 to replace the much smaller riverfront "Old Cathedral." In addition to the strong Catholic presence, many religions adorned the Central West End streets with their houses of worship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The well-known "Holy Corners" at the intersection of Washington and Kingshighway was once home to the Second Baptist Church, St. John's Methodist Church, and Temple Israel, all of which have since followed many of their parishioners westward. The St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at 4949 Forest Park Avenue was completed in 1930, and a large gymnasium and educational building was added to the west of the church in 1961. As evidence that the trek to the West is still a contemporary issue, despite all of the Central West End revitalization efforts, the Greek Orthodox Church will soon be joining the ranks of those churches that have left their homes in the Central West End for new homes in West St. Louis County.

Roughly around World War I, another prominent institutional element began to form—the medical center complex. The complex is centered around the 1914 move of Washington University Medical School from its downtown location on Locust Street. This move was followed in late 1914 by the opening of Barnes hospital and the relocation of St. Louis Children's Hospital to Kingshighway. The Barnes College of Nursing served the area as well from 1915 through roughly 1995, when the school moved to University of Missouri–St. Louis in north St. Louis County.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Central West End includes most of the city's private streets and luxury apartment buildings, along with some of the finest commercial and religious architecture. While there is neither one prevalent style nor dominant building type, an overall richness of detail and quality of construction create a strong sense of prosperity in the district. The private places include Portland Place and Westmoreland Place on the West side of Kingshighway, and Hortense Place and Lenox Place on the East side of Kingshighway.

The Central West End Neighborhood boasts the popular Euclid Avenue Business District. The district has three prominent business nodes along Euclid Avenue: the Euclid-McPherson, the Maryland Plaza, and the Euclid-Laclede. A recent development also created the Cathedral Square Special Business District

The Central West End is one of the city's largest neighborhoods, ranking second in population. Even with this population density, the neighborhood residences are 74 percent single family homes. In comparison to the rest of the city the Central West End is overwhelmingly the home of the high-rises, with the neighborhood having the largest number of five-plus family homes.

Most recently, large single family homes have been converted into multiple dwellings or rezoned for business. Some homes were also leveled to make way for apartment buildings. The most modern element of change is the overwhelming popularity of condominium housing in the Central West End.



INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

As a national leader in the health services industry, St. Louis owes much of this prominence to the hospitals, research, and teaching facilities that have made the Central West End their home. The Washington University Medical Center—the Washington University Medical School; the consolidated forces of Barnes, Jewish, and Christian Hospitals; the Central Institute for the Deaf (CID); and Barnard Free Skin and Cancer Hospital—combine to form this strength. In addition to its national acclaim, though, the Medical Center is locally one of the greatest assets in the neighborhood. The Medical Center has sponsored the Washington University Redevelopment project since 1975. This program calls for extensive rehabilitation of existing housing, construction of new dwelling units, commercial rejuvenation, and improvements in traffic and general neighborhood appearance. Complementing these anchors in the community are institutions such as St. Louis College of Pharmacy, Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Missouri.

Neighborhood organizations in the Central West End are abundant. The various organizations have formed to address the needs of their part of the neighborhood and have been incredibly active over the past decade. The organizations include the Central West End Association, West Pine/Laclede, Laclede Place, Maryland-Boyle, Olive, Pershing Row, Washington, Washington–Olive Triangle, Washington Place, Waterman, Fullerton's Westminster, and Westminster.

Perhaps one of the largest growing sectors of institutions within the Central West End is that of the social service providers. In the area of mental illness alone, institutions such as

the Independence Center, the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the West Central Outreach are located in the neighborhood. Although these organizations are great assets to our region, some residents have voiced their concerns over the concentration of their locations in the Central West End.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Washington University Redevelopment has recently used its powers of eminent domain to take control of the old Forest Park Hotel property and its 24-hour adjoining deli located at West Pine and Euclid Avenue. Having been vacant for several years, the property will now be advertised for sale. The Redevelopment Corporation is also responsible for the redevelopment of the 4300 and 4400 blocks of Laclede Avenue into the private streets together known as Laclede Place.

Development in the Central West End is very progressive and sensitive to the changing needs of its modern community, as can be seen in the recent demolition of the circular high-rise Regency Nursing Home at 4560 West Pine Boulevard, which was built in 1965. Razed in 1998, new luxury condominiums now fill the site.

A major current development in the Central West End is occurring at the site of the recently demolished Argyle apartments at the northwest corner of Lindell Boulevard and Euclid Avenue. The decaying apartments will be replaced by a much-needed parking garage and an expanded public library. The architectural style and pedestrian-oriented nature of the area was preserved in the design of this project by placing the library on the ground floor of the garage and creating an aesthetically pleasing façade.



Definitely the largest private redevelopment effort in the area—and one of the largest nationwide—is the revitalization and reopening of the fabulous Chase Hotel. At its opening in Spring 1999, the Chase joined the already redeveloped Park Plaza apartments to reform the Chase-Park Plaza, which had closed its doors in 1989.

Along Forest Park Parkway, planning for a technology corridor, or the “technopolis,” is being pursued. Among the plans for the near future is the expansion of The Center for Emerging Technology, which will soon be doubling its size.