

FAIRGROUNDS (67)

LOCATION

The Fairgrounds neighborhood's boundaries are defined as Grand Avenue on the East, Emily on the North, Warne on the West, and Fairgrounds Park on the South.

HISTORY

A large majority of the existing neighborhood was previously the old Grand Prairie Commonfield, being composed of a series of narrow eastwest strips laid out by the French for agricultural purposes. The remainder of the land consisted of several former land grants designated as surveys. In the early 1850s, the larger surveys were subdivided into smaller tracts. Sections nearest to Fairgrounds Park were developed first in the late 1860s. The area to the west was developed in the 1880s and continued through the turn of the century. The area to the south of O'Fallon Park was developed after 1900, and included the existing neighborhoods O'Fallon Park, Plymouth Park and Wanstrath Place.



The Fairgrounds neighborhood received its name as a result of the many fairs that were held at present-day Fairgrounds Park. Of particular importance was the creation of the St. Louis Agricultural and Mechanical Association in 1855, which held its first fairs at a site of 50 acres at the northwest corner of Grand and Natural Bridge Plank Road. The fairgrounds were closed during the Civil War, as it was converted into barracks, but reopened again in 1866. Throughout the latter portion of the century, the grounds were expanded and more elaborate buildings were constructed. These included a new amphitheater, Art Gallery, Natural History museum, and the Zoological Gardens. A large Mechanical Hall was opened in 1876. In 1883, the Jockey Club was organized, where emphasis was placed upon horse racing. It was at this time that the Fairgrounds began to lose popularity. The opening of the Exposition Building downtown further decreased attendance. The last Fair was held in 1902. The City eventually bought the grounds for \$700,000 for use as a park, which was dedicated in 1909.

CHARACTERISTICS

Fairgrounds is a residential neighborhood found in the City's Northside. Adjacent to Fairgrounds Park, the area offers conveniently located recreational facilities and older homes. East of Grand Boulevard, the homes consist mainly of two- and four-family flats, with a few single-family dwellings. These homes date back to the late 1800s, with most being built between 1890 and 1920. A number of the homes are in varying degrees of deterioration, due primarily to age and lack of maintenance. The housing stock located on the West Side of Grand Boulevard consists primarily of two- and four-family flats with few single-family structures that were built between 1900 and 1920. A large number of these have been demolished.

Commercial development can be found along Grand Boulevard from St. Louis Avenue to Natural Bridge, as well as between Kossuth and Florissant. A better-established commercial strip can be found along Natural Bridge, west of Fair Avenue. This area

contains within it a bank and new medical facilities. There is also a minor commercial strip found along Kingshighway and north of Natural Bridge along Shreve Avenue.

Public transit lines were established early in the area, mostly due to the presence of the Fairgrounds and ball parks.



INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The neighborhood schools includes Eliot Elementary School, with nearby Central Visual/Performance Arts High School, Beaumont High School, and Bryan Hill Elementary School. The expanded Divoll Branch Library at 4234 North Grand serves the Fairgrounds neighborhood and surrounding communities. There is a Schnucks located at the corner of Grand and Lee, and a post office located within the bank at the corner of Grand and West Florissant.

The Fairgrounds neighborhood is located adjacent to Fairgrounds Park, which includes playgrounds and recreational space such as an open-air skating rink, tennis courts, and baseball diamonds, as well as an outdoor pool and fishing pond. Also located within the park is the historic “Bear Pit.” The Herbert Hoover Boys and Girls Club sponsors youth football activities, the Kids Symphony, and Let’s Make a Wish.

The Neighborhood Counsel is a not-for-profit housing development agency that acts as an umbrella organization for the Fairgrounds East Community Organization, Fairgrounds West Community Organization, and the Fairgrounds Community Development Organization. Together, these organizations work to improve the quality of life, encourage commercial development, provide community resources, provide outreach facilities, and coordinate volunteer activities. Also active in the neighborhood is the Youth Job Training Program, which provides on-site training and experience for six local youths.



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Neighborhood Counsel and the Fairgrounds East and West Neighborhood Organizations have been working hard to attract new commercial development. There are currently plans for the construction of an Aldi, already under construction, and new Walgreens, both at the intersection of Grand and West Florissant. There are also plans for a new commercial strip at Grand and Warne.

The Fairgrounds Neighborhood Organizations are planning a house tour in September 2000 to attract outside residents and new home owners.

The City’s 3rd Ward, in which Fairgrounds is situated, has recently received a \$5 million state assistance grant/tax credit, available through the Missouri Department of Economic Development’s Community Development Corporation (CDC) program. The Neighborhood Counsel has received \$40,000 from this grant and

plans to use the money to hire a full-time economic development specialist. The Fairgrounds Neighborhood Organizations are also planning to rehab older buildings and build new houses along Prairie.