

SOUTHWEST GARDEN (13)

LOCATION

Spanning both the Garden District and Southwest City, Southwest Garden is bound by I-44 to the northeast, Missouri Botanical Gardens and Tower Grove Park to the east, Scanlan and Connecticut to the south, Hampton to the west, and Columbia, Southwest Avenue, and South Kingshighway to the northwest.

HISTORY

Spanning the neighborhood, Vandeventer and Southwest Avenues follow the route that was the first public road from St. Louis to Jefferson City, Old Manchester Road. An extension of Market Street, this route was the only way west without crossing the Missouri or Meramec Rivers. Until the alignment of the Missouri Pacific and Frisco Railroads, however, the area remained rural.

In the 1840s on the highest point in the city, St. Louis County established a sanitarium on Arsenal, a rural road leading out from the near-southside Arsenal to Old Manchester Road. When the City separated from the County in 1876, the facility fell under City control and is now State Hospital.

With the railroad and nearby Russell and Christy coal and clay mines operating in the late 1800s, immigrant workers populated the area. While Italians settled in The Hill area, Germans settled between the Hill and Arsenal, forming St. Aloysius Gonzaga parish. This German community resulted in frame shotgun houses and flats built around present-day Sublette Park.

More block-wide masonry construction was built in the early part of this century. East of Kingshighway was Henry Shaw's estate. After the dedication of Shaw's Gardens and Tower Grove Park, subdivision platting occurred widely in the 1920s as streetcar lines reached their height.

CHARACTERISTICS

By far, Southwest Garden has the largest range of land uses of any St. Louis neighborhood. Along the Union Pacific Oak Hill line are industrial uses. At Kingshighway and Vandeventer are an automobile dealership, a drive-through bank, a gas station, and a Walgreens. Smaller businesses are clustered at Vandeventer and Shaw, along Southwest Avenue from Marconi to Sublette, and at intersections along Hampton. There are two large grocery stores, one occupied at Arsenal and Brannon and one vacant at Macklind and Southwest.

There are three residential subareas that are distinctly separate. Most linked to the Garden is the eastern portion of the neighborhood within the Garden District between Tower Grove Avenue and South Kingshighway. Across Kingshighway, the central section is a unique pocket about Reber Place between Kingshighway and the railroad. Finally, the large western area is that about Sublette Park between the railroad and Hampton.

The Garden District has quiet streets that run for no more than three blocks. Between Shaw Avenue and I-44 are brick, two-story single-family and two-family homes with wide front porches. Between Shaw and Shenandoah are mostly apartments and multifamily flats. The prize real estate, though, are the large single-family homes

between Shenandoah and Magnolia. Bordering Tower Grove Park, these homes compete with any of the city's private places.

Similar to the area of the Garden District next to Tower Grove Park, Reber Place and the west edge of Kingshighway, which likewise border the park, host beautiful homes. This area is a little more random in its range of housing. Whereas the Garden District is mostly either apartments or large single-family houses, Reber Place was built up over longer range of time, and it shows in the variety of size and styles of homes on its blocks. While this area's eastern edge is the traditional boulevard edge of a large city park, the western edge is a railroad and its accompanying industrial uses, having adverse effects on neighboring homes.

Finally, the area around Sublette Park has a small-town feel. Its Main Street is Southwest Avenue, with a deli, a hardware store, a specialty grocer, a barber, a full-service gas station, an automobile repair shop, dry cleaners, and a corner bank. Arsenal and Sublette support the institutional uses of a nursing home, a mental hospital, a fire station, and a police station. Given Southwest Avenue's history as old Market Street, the homes in this area greatly range in age, size, and style. Unlike the other two subareas of Southwest Garden, Sublette Park is a mix of masonry and frame construction. Additionally, while the other areas were built up as large tract subdivisions, many homes in this area were built independently. Ironically, this area contains the oldest and the newest of homes. In the most recent half-century, when most of St. Louis was already built, the State Hospital sold portions of its land to both institutional and residential developments. More typical of the suburbs, south of the park is a subdivision of modern two-story frame homes built on cul-de-sac streets.

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Southwest Garden Neighborhood Association has its own office and networks all organizations in the area. The group closely works with the property owners' association to match good tenants with good landlords and with the Southwest Neighborhood Housing Corporation to maintain and increase owner-occupancy. Finally, the neighborhood association seeks out potential developers for in-fill construction and encourages investment among existing businesses and landlords.

Southwest High School, recently reopened, joins Roosevelt as the only two nonmagnet public high schools in South St. Louis. The Kingshighway Library will expand its building and parking.

Most recently, Missouri Botanical Gardens has engaged in planning for the neighborhood, creating the Garden District, which covers the area east of Kingshighway. Though the Garden had sought to tear down adjacent homes for parking in the past, the facility's direction now appears more open to considerations of adjacent neighborhood needs for revitalized housing.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The construction of the Monsanto Center and the neighboring completion of a full interchange on Interstate 44 for Vandeventer have been respectively the most recent examples of large private and public investment into the neighborhood. Both of these developments were made possible by the suasion and partial payment of the Garden. Future planned developments include the creation of a landscaped parking lot with a shuttle, where multifamily flats once stood; and the acquisition of properties for a future

MetroLink station.

Though vacant and deteriorating properties are being redeveloped, the lack of new housing lingers, despite some infill sites mostly scattered west of Kingshighway. Fortunately, the largest potential for infill development and subsequent private reinvestment into adjacent existing homes is the Oak Hill Line running through the neighborhood. Along this industrial corridor are the largest tracts of land possible for transit-oriented development. The neighborhood already supports pedestrian commercial nodes at Castleman Circle and along Southwest Avenue as well as automobile commercial dealerships along Kingshighway and parts of Vandeventer. The high density of housing and mix of commercial activity supports potential for a light-rail line with easily two stops for each of its halves.

Possible sites for in-fill retail are between existing businesses along Southwest Avenue and for a major grocer (currently in talks) at the old National store. Housing renewal is most needed in the multifamily units near the Garden and in the shotgun houses on Brannon. Many four-families could be converted to two-families, which is necessary to market them. Many students and young couples live there currently, but moderate-income families would not want to cram into space where occupancy is already limited to two or fewer per unit.

Southwest Garden is a mix of small businesses, chain stores, industry, apartments, homes, institutions, and public amenities. All of these have been crucial to the neighborhood's identity, appeal, and lasting strength. Any major redevelopment plan should include all of them.