

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: Briarcliff Plaza

2. Location: 2.6 miles northeast of Atlanta city hall, the district is bounded by Ponce de Leon Avenue NE to the north and North Highland Avenue to the east. It straddles Cleburne Terrace NE to the west.

3a. Description: The Briarcliff Plaza shopping center was constructed in 1940. Located at the corner of Ponce de Leon Avenue NE and North Highland Avenue NE, with Cleburne Terrace bisecting the center's two buildings, it is part of the busy retail and commercial area known as the "Ponce Corridor." Briarcliff Plaza is comprised of two separate buildings (1027 and 1061 Ponce de Leon Avenue) and the parking lot dedicated to the buildings. The site is approximately 2.27 acres, inclusive of the parking lot. Poured concrete sidewalks line the front and sides of each building within the district, and a sidewalk is also present behind the 1061 Ponce de Leon building. The sidewalks along Ponce de Leon Avenue, North Highland Avenue, and Cleburne Terrace feature planting strips, medium height trees, and bicycle racks at the front and rear of 1061 Ponce de Leon Avenue. The district's two buildings are one-story and are nearly identical in design, style, and materials. The lower portions of the buildings are composed primarily of glass and metal storefronts framed in colored tile, concrete columns, and glass block walls. In 1983, the buildings were renovated, which included adding the colored tiles, constructing the half round columns applied with colored and clear tiles, installing new windows and storefronts, and creating additional storefront entries. Above the storefronts along the buildings' primary facades, original Streamline Moderne metal canopies remain intact, affixed in some places with non-historic neon lettering. Above the canopies, the upper portions of the buildings' primary facades (facing Ponce de Leon Avenue, Cleburne Terrace, and North Highland Avenue) are sheathed in original marble panels. The secondary facades of the two buildings consist of painted brick. The most notable features of these buildings include historic Art Deco-style neon signage, and original decorative curved fluting with Streamline Moderne Fins, set into the marble panel parapet walls. The buildings are in good condition and retain fair integrity of materials and workmanship. The location and design of the district is intact to the historic period, and the district retains integrity of feeling and association.

3b. Period of Significance: 1940-1968

3c. Acreage: 2.27

3d. Boundary Explanation: The district boundary includes the two 1940 commercial buildings and the 1940 surface parking lot fronting Ponce de Leon Avenue on the 1027 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE and the 1061 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE parcels. These two buildings and the parking lot comprise the city's first shopping center with dedicated off-street parking. The district layout is unchanged from its original date of construction.

4a. National Register Criteria: A and C

4b. National Register Areas of Significance: Architecture, Commerce, Community Planning and Development

4c. Statement of Significance: Briarcliff Plaza is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Commerce for its contribution to and association with the advent of increased automobile ownership and use and the impact of this trend on communities, residential development, and patterns of urban and suburban growth in Atlanta. It was the first automobile-oriented shopping center in Atlanta and Georgia that included dedicated off-street parking for its customers. This new type of community shopping center broke away from the development patterns of Atlanta's traditional commercial nodes that were designed for pedestrian and streetcar shoppers, and is representative of the evolution of the American shopping center in Atlanta and statewide. Briarcliff Plaza's automobile-centric design was the forerunner for larger regional shopping centers such as Lenox Square (1959, developed by Noble Properties) and Phipps Plaza (developed by Ogden Phipps in 1969), which was the first multi-level mall in Atlanta. Briarcliff Plaza is also significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a notable example of the Streamline Moderne style in Atlanta. Additionally, Briarcliff Plaza's design incorporated Art Deco elements in its illuminated neon signage, creating a vibrant shopping destination in a predominately residential area. The Streamline Moderne style was often applied to buildings with a transportation-related function or design, such as bus stations, drive-in restaurants, and gas stations, and limited extant examples in Atlanta include the Varsity restaurant (61 North Avenue NW, Jules Grey, 1940) and the Atlanta Constitution Building (143 Alabama Street SW, Robert and Company, 1947). At Briarcliff Plaza, the Streamline Moderne style, coupled with the Art Deco elements, created a unique design in Atlanta. Designed by George Harwell Bond, renowned Atlanta architect and engineer, the complex's expansive horizontal form accented with curved corners; sleek marble panels; overall restrained, focused ornament; and curvilinear canopy all contribute to a feeling of motion that is a hallmark of the Streamline Moderne aesthetic.

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: The district is being nominated at the local level of significance as the first shopping center to include dedicated off-street parking in its design, and a representative example of the Streamline Modern style, in Atlanta.

5. Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by the property owner, and the nomination materials were prepared by consultant Regina Brewer.