

Staff Report and Findings of Fact Nomination to the Spokane Register of Historic Places Union Block – 218-220 N Howard Street

FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1. SMC 17D.100.090: “Generally a building, structure, object, site, or district which is more than fifty years old may be designated an historic landmark or historic district if it has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, county, state, or nation.”**
 - Originally built in 1890; the Union Block meets the age criteria for listing on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.
- 2. SMC 17D.100.090: The property must qualify under one or more categories for the Spokane Register (A, B, C, D, E).**
 - The 1890 Union Block building is significant and eligible for listing in the Spokane Register of Historic Places under Category A in the area of Commerce for its association with the group of commercial or commercial/residential buildings that were constructed immediately after Spokane’s 1889 Great Fire to serve the needs of Spokane’s citizens and business owners in the downtown core. One of the reportedly ten remaining buildings from this period, it continues to serve as a commercial space on the ground floor with residential uses on the upper floors, as it did historically.
 - The building is also significant under Category C as the work of a master, for its association with the prominent Spokane architect, Herman Preusse. Preusse, the first professional architect to practice in Spokane, was the designer of the 1890 Union Block. He was born in 1847 in Hanover, Germany. After his early education, when he studied engineering, he gained architectural experience working for his stepfather, well-known architect Wilhelm Mehl, for three years. He then took on his studies in architecture at the College for Applied Science and Art in Holzminden, Germany, Germany’s first school of architecture. In 1883, when the Northern Pacific Railroad successfully constructed a line that connected Spokane with Chicago and beyond, Spokane’s officials sought an architect to assist with the design of new downtown commercial buildings that would boost its image as ‘a progressive and prospering city.’ Fortuitously, they found assistance in achieving their goals in Herman Preusse. Many of Spokane’s most notable buildings were designed by Preusse.
 - The period of significance for the Union Block is 1890 to 1972. 1890 based on the initial construction date for the property and the period of rebuilding immediately after Spokane’s Great Fire of 1889; and 1972 which is the date of a renovation of the street front level. That renovation to the storefronts has achieved significance as it is over 50 years old.
 - The Union Block has contained numerous different businesses, saloons, restaurants, and other retail establishments on the street level and housing above since it was constructed in 1890. The original upper two floors contained single room occupancy (SRO) “sleeping” rooms with shared bathrooms. The SRO configuration remained until the recent rehabilitation that created larger, modern apartment units on floors 2 and 3.
 - The Union Block displays elements of the Richardsonian Romanesque style which was popular from 1880-1900. It was often seen in civic buildings and churches, but also can be seen in Spokane’s downtown buildings from the post-fire rebuilding era in these vernacular commercial buildings.
- 3. SMC17D.100.090: “The property must also possess integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association.”** *From NPS Bulletin 15: “Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance...it is not necessary for a property to retain all its historic physical features...the property must retain, however, the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity.”*
 - The Union Building retains integrity of location, materials, workmanship, and association. The renovation of the ground floor occurred in 1972 or over 50 years ago and has gained significance. The building retains its overall form. The design of the building has been altered to a degree with the addition of replacement windows, which are nonetheless in their historic location and openings. While detracting

from the pre-2023 appearance of the building, they retain sufficient integrity to support the overall design of the building.

4. Once listed, this property will be eligible to apply for incentives, including:

Special Valuation (property tax abatement), Façade Improvement Grants, Spokane Register historic property plaque, and special code considerations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Union Block is eligible for listing on the Spokane Register under Category C – Architecture for its design by master architect, Herman Preusse as well as being a good example of Richardsonian Romanesque style. It is also significant under Category A in the area of Commerce for its association with the group of commercial/residential buildings that were constructed immediately after Spokane’s 1889 Great Fire.

Preservation Officer Review: Megan Duvall
Nominations Committee: Yes
Landmarks Commission Review: Pending

Report: 8/28/2025
Site Visit: 9/3/2025
Hearing: 9/17/2025