



# R Street

## Historic District Plan



## Physical Description & Boundaries

The R Street Historic District is located in Sacramento's original 1848 street grid, approximately four blocks south of the State Capitol. The district consists of former warehousing, commercial distribution, and light industrial buildings that are situated along R Street between 10<sup>th</sup> Street to the west, Quill Alley to the north, 12<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, and Rice Alley to the south.



Figure 286. Adaptively reused warehouses and industrial buildings on R Street.



Figure 287. Buildings that served as warehouses and distribution centers, including the Lawrence Warehouse (middle) and Rochdale building (right), are common on R Street. The building on the far left is the Warehouse Artist Lofts, a recent housing infill development project.



Figure 288. Two brick One-Part Commercial Block buildings with garage door openings along R Street.



Figure 289. Loading docks face the former route of the Western Pacific Railroad tracks, which were converted for light rail service in 1987.

## Brief Historic Context

The R Street Historic District is a former industrial corridor whose development is closely tied to the evolution of railroads in the city of Sacramento. In 1855, the City of Sacramento granted a right-of-way on R Street to the Sacramento Valley Railroad, the first common carrier and first steam carrier railroad west of the Mississippi. Railroad companies were required to construct and maintain levees along their rights-of-way to assist the young city's efforts to protect itself from periodic flooding. In accordance, the Sacramento Valley Railroad constructed a levee along R Street prior to laying its tracks along the corridor. However, the levee did not have the intended effect and, in fact, exacerbated the effects of flooding in Sacramento. During particularly devastating floods in the winter of 1861-1862, the levee trapped floodwaters within the downtown area for months, and parts of it had to be removed to allow the waters to drain from the city.<sup>1</sup>

When it opened in 1856, the Sacramento Valley Railroad's route was the first rail line in California. The 22-mile route stretched from the Sacramento Valley Railroad depot on the waterfront at Front Street, south along the Sacramento River, and then east along R Street to Folsom (then known as Granite City). The route was surveyed by Theodore Judah, who later helped complete the first transcontinental railroad as chief engineer of the Central Pacific Railroad.<sup>2</sup> The Central Pacific Railroad purchased the Sacramento



Figure 290. Photograph taken from the R Street levee during the flood of 1862 (1862). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

Valley Railroad in 1865, and later sold it to the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1884. The Sacramento Valley Railroad continued to operate a rail line on R Street.

By the turn of the century, the City had completed the construction of a new system of levees and flood improvement, and the levee on R Street was no longer necessary. In 1903, the levee was removed and the Southern Pacific Railroad's tracks were rebuilt at grade. Three years later, in 1907, a competing railroad company, the Western Pacific Railroad, opened a separate, parallel line on the Q/R Alley (Quill Alley), half a block north of the Southern Pacific's tracks.<sup>3</sup> The concentration of rail lines on and around R Street transformed it into a center of industrial activity so

that by 1914, it was recognized as the industrial hub of Sacramento. Warehouses, commercial distribution centers, and light industrial businesses, ranging from one to six stories in height, sprang up along the R Street corridor to take advantage of the unparalleled availability of shipping and transportation opportunities there. These buildings were typically clad in brick or concrete blocks and featured open, rectilinear plans that reflected their utilitarian use. Many were served by spurs of the neighboring railroad tracks: buildings on the south of R Street used the tracks of the Southern Pacific, while those on the north used the tracks of the Western Pacific. Industrial development continued along R Street through the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century in response to the growth of domestic shipping, increase in local manufacturing and commercial development, and demands of World War I.<sup>4</sup>

R Street remained Sacramento's center for freight shipping through World War II. After the war, commercial transportation began to shift away from the railroads toward truck-based shipping as an increasing number of state highways were completed. In Sacramento, the businesses along R Street reoriented themselves to accommodate this new type of transportation. While earlier buildings were oriented toward the railroad tracks and had loading docks on R Street, buildings constructed in the mid- to late twentieth century featured loading docks that fronted the surface streets to give trucks easier access. This reorientation allowed R Street to remain an active shipping and distribution center

1 Page & Turnbull, "R Street Corridor Historic District," (National Register of Historic Places Draft Registration Form, California Office of Historic Places, 2013), 8.2.; Richard J. Orsi, "Railroads and the Urban Environment: Sacramento's Story," in *River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, ed. Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M.A. Simpson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 82.

2 Environmental Science Associates, "R Street Corridor Historic District Survey Report" (report, City of Sacramento Preservation Commission, 2017), 6.

3 Page & Turnbull, 8.4.

4 Ibid., 8.5-8.6.



Figure 291. View of R Street, looking east from 10th Street with the W.P. Fuller Company warehouse on the left and Carlaw Bros. Stoneyard on the left (1941). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Eugene Hepting Collection, 1985/024/4807.

until the 1960s.

In 1963, a deep-water sea port opened at the Port of Sacramento in West Sacramento. Its completion redirected shipping activity from its historic centers at Front and R streets to West Sacramento.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the decade, many of the businesses that had operated on R Street for decades had closed, including Carlaw Granite and Marble Works, which had been in business on the corridor since 1879. Rail passenger service had also declined since the end of the war, and in 1971, the Western Pacific and Southern Pacific railroad companies discontinued their passenger service and transferred it to Amtrak.

Freight traffic continued on R Street for a few more years, but the end was near. In 1974, the Southern Pacific railroad began to retire its tracks on the R

Street corridor from 5<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> streets. The Western Pacific's freight line, running north-south between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> streets was acquired by the Union Pacific railroad in 1982. Although freight activity had ended, tracks were again in service along the corridor in 1987 when the former Western Pacific tracks on the Q/R Alley were converted into a section of the Sacramento Regional Transit's light rail line.<sup>6</sup>

R Street has experienced a significant revitalization in the twenty-first century, transforming into one of Sacramento's most vibrant commercial and recreational corridors. Many of the former industrial buildings in the area have been rehabilitated and are occupied by restaurants and local businesses. In 2015, the Lawrence Warehouse building reopened as the Warehouse Artist Lofts, a mixed-use apartment complex with 116 affordable housing units marketed to members of Sacramento's artist community.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 292. View of the Lawrence Warehouse from 11th and R streets with a line of cars parked next to the railroad tracks (1915). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Science Associates, 8; Steven Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 124.

<sup>6</sup> Page & Turnbull, 8.7.

<sup>7</sup> Nour Coudsi, "Warehouse Artists Lofts Offer Affordable Community for Sacramento Artists." Capital Public Radio, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.capradio.org/news/the-view-from-here/2018/01/09/warehouse-artists-lofts-offer-affordable-community-for-sacramento-artists/>.



## Significance

The R Street Historic District was designated for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources by the City Preservation Commission in 1985 in Ordinance #85-076. In 2011, the R Street Historic District was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The following table provides a current evaluation of significance under the requirements and considers the factors based on the above historic district context and the 2018 historic district survey. Additionally, this historic district relates to the Railroad Context Statement and Agricultural Context Statement of the city's General Plan Technical Background Report.

<b>(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts</b>	
<b>(1) Requirements</b>	
<b>(a)</b>	The R Street Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
<b>(b)(i)</b>	<p>The R Street Historic District meets requirement (b)(i) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area that possesses “a significant concentration or continuity of buildings unified by: (A) past events or (B) aesthetically by plan or physical development.”</p> <p>The R Street Historic District features a collection of industrial buildings that are associated with R Street’s development into a busy industrial, shipping, and transportation corridor from the nineteenth to twentieth century. Buildings constructed in the district reflect their primary usage as warehousing, manufacturing, or distribution facilities that were built along a rail, rather than pedestrian corridor. The primary building facades are located on the numbered streets, rather than facing R Street, where the railroad tracks were located. The buildings also exhibit utilitarian designs—including rectangular floor plans, brick or concrete construction, and commercial features—that reflect the unique needs of the companies for which they were built. Most indicative of their orientation, first toward the railroad activity on R Street and the Q/R Alley, and later around truck-based transportation, the buildings in the district include freight and/or garage openings that reveal the continued importance of the corridor for freight transportation for more than one hundred years.</p>

## Period of Significance: 1903-1963

The period of significance for the R Street Historic District begins with the removal of the R Street levee and reconstruction of the Southern Pacific Railroad's tracks at grade in 1903 and ends with the opening of the Port of Sacramento in 1963, which diverted shipping activity away from R Street.

## Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Industrial
- Commercial

## Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Vernacular
- Commercial Styles:
  - One-Part Commercial Block
  - Two-Part Commercial Block
  - Two-Part Vertical Block

### (B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts

#### (1) Requirements

<b>(b)(ii)</b>	<p>The R Street Historic District meets requirement (b)(ii) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area “associated with an event, person, or period significant or important to city history.”</p> <p>The district is significant for its association with Sacramento’s emergence as the center for the railroad industry on the West Coast, as well as the railroad’s role in spurring industrial and transportation-related development in Sacramento. Beginning with the construction of the Sacramento Valley Railroad’s tracks on the right-of-way at R Street in the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial businesses sprang up along R Street to take advantage of the ease of shipping products to and from the port and markets further afield. Industrial development on the corridor reached its peak in the early twentieth century during the height of freight shipping in the United States. The construction of a second, parallel rail line for the Western Pacific Railroad in 1909 on an alley immediately to the north of R Street created a unique concentration of rail lines and unparalleled shipping opportunities that attracted more businesses to the area. R Street became a hub of industrial activity, where warehouses, light industrial buildings, and distribution centers were concentrated along the two rival rail lines and built to face them.</p> <p>Additionally, the district reflects the transition and evolution of traditional distribution and shipping centers to truck-based shipping after World War II. Businesses along the R Street corridor reoriented themselves to accommodate this new form of commercial transportation, constructing truck bays and loading docks in the place of railroad siding. Many remained in operation until the late 1960s, when the opening of the Port of Sacramento redirected shipping traffic to West Sacramento.</p>
<b>(c)</b>	<p>The R Street Historic District meets requirement (c) for listing on the Sacramento Register as it aligns with the goals and purposes of historic preservation in Sacramento, as well as the city’s other goals and policies. Per the Sacramento City Code, the preservation of the district enhances the “city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability, and urban character.”</p>

### (B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts

#### (2) Factors to be considered

<b>(a)</b>	<p>Factor (2)(a) states that “a historic district should have integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.” The R Street Historic District retains sufficient integrity to meet this factor for consideration as a historic district.</p>
<b>(b)</b>	<p>Factor (2)(b) states that “the collective historic value of the buildings and structures in a historic district taken together may be greater than the historic value of each individual building or structure.” The R Street Historic District meets this factor because its buildings and structures represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose collective historic value is greater when taken as a whole.</p>

## Character-Defining Features

The following table is based on the list of character-defining features in the 2017 historic district survey that was completed for the Central City Specific Plan and revised based on the 2018 historic district survey.

Element	Character of Historic District
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Warehouses and manufacturing, shipping, and/or processing facilities, most converted into commercial businesses</li></ul>
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One- to six-story buildings</li><li>• Rectangular plan</li><li>• Oriented to central track of sidings</li></ul>
Cladding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predominately brick, reinforced concrete, corrugated metal, or other fire-proof material</li></ul>
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flat, shallow-arched, monitor, or saw-tooth roofs</li><li>• Square, stepped, or rounded parapets</li></ul>
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rail and/or vehicular shipping docks and bays, often with rolling wood or metal doors</li><li>• Freight and garage door openings face R Street or the Q/R Alley</li><li>• Primary facades and entrances face numbered streets</li></ul>
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May contain limited fenestration, often industrial steel sash windows with multiple panes</li></ul>
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simple, utilitarian architectural design</li></ul>
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimal or no Property</li><li>• Landscape</li></ul>
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Linear features, such as remaining railroad tracks and siding that align with the former routes of the Southern Pacific Railroad and Western Pacific Railroad</li></ul>

## Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the R Street Historic District.



Figure 293. Map of the R Street Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento, 2024.

### Legend

- Contributing Resource
- Non-Contributing Resource



## District-Specific Standards & Criteria

### Design Principle

*Preserve and maintain the contributing resources of the R Street Historic District while encouraging compatible new uses and development in the area that enhance its character as a historic industrial and transportation-related corridor.*

### Rationale

The R Street Historic District preserves a historic industrial and transportation corridor that developed along the route of two parallel railroad tracks from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Adaptive reuse and redevelopment of the historic industrial buildings that line the corridor and sensitively-designed infill projects have helped transform the area into one of Sacramento's most vibrant commercial, cultural, and entertainment centers. With interest and investment in the area expected to continue, it will be crucial to balance new development with the preservation of the contributing resources and historic character of the district.

In addition to the Standards & Criteria Common to Sacramento's Historic Districts in Section 1, the following district-specific standards and criteria apply when planning a project in the R Street Historic District.

### 1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Preserve and enhance the historic street-facing orientation of primary building facades and entrances.
- 1.2 Make every effort to preserve, repair, and maintain any surviving steel frame windows, which significantly contribute to the industrial character of the district.
  - Re-instate multi-lite steel frame windows, where they have been removed, if there is adequate documentation and if feasible.



Figure 294. Buildings are typically oriented to R Street and have window and door openings that face the street.

- 1.3 Avoid filling in or obstructing historic window or door openings.
- 1.4 Re-open historic window and door openings that have been filled in.
  - Use compatible new windows and door materials, types, and forms.
- 1.5 Avoid painting or applying new finishes on historically unpainted exterior masonry, particularly where historic painted signs (ghost signs) are present.
  - Consider removing paint or finishes from historically unpainted exterior masonry, using the gentlest methods possible, during exterior repairs or renovations.
  - Maintain paint on exterior masonry where likely to be the historic condition.



Figure 295. A loading platform at 1001 R Street is used to provide restaurant seating and access to the building.

- 1.6 Preserve and reuse historic loading platforms.
- Encourage reuse of these platforms as part of streetscape improvements to enhance the pedestrian experience.
  - Recreate historic loading platforms using concrete or other compatible material.
- 1.7 Retain existing historic awnings, where possible.
- 1.8 Remove chain linked fences and barbed wire where possible.
- Replace chain link fences with fences that are of a compatible material and height to historic or compatible new fences at contributing properties in the historic district.

## 2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Where rooftop additions are desired, use step backs in order to maintain existing street façade height.
- 2.2 Respect historic open areas that are part of historic configuration or building siting, such as open areas at loading or service zones, to the extent feasible.
- Incorporate historic open areas into project site plan for an outdoor use, such as dining enclosures.

## 3. New (Infill) Construction & Alterations to Non-Contributing Resources

- 3.1 Design the scale, massing, and proportions of new construction to be compatible with those of adjacent contributing buildings on the same block.
- Break larger masses into smaller modules that relate to the surrounding contributing buildings.
  - Where additional height is proposed, consider using step backs for taller buildings to maintain the existing street façade height of adjacent contributing buildings.



Figure 296. Increased building heights and masses are appropriate next to contributing buildings that are taller and larger in scale.

- 3.2 Align windows, doors, and variations in façade treatments to the extent feasible with that of adjacent contributing buildings in order to maintain the existing pattern of door and window openings found on the block face.
- When not possible, utilize the average datum lines of contributing properties.
- 3.3 Preserve the historic pattern of siting buildings with a zero-lot-line setback from the street..

## 4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Pursue a “complete street” approach that enhances pedestrian safety while preserving the historic district’s minimally landscaped industrial character.
- 4.2 Preserve and enhance the visibility of surviving physical elements that are associated with the railroad that historically serviced the area, including track alignments and loading bays that open onto tracks.
- 4.3 Continue the pattern and orientation of sidewalks.
- 4.4 Develop a street furnishing and lighting palette that are compatible with the industrial character, scale, and materials of contributing resources in the district.



Figure 297. Historic loading bays convey the character of the district as a historic transportation corridor.

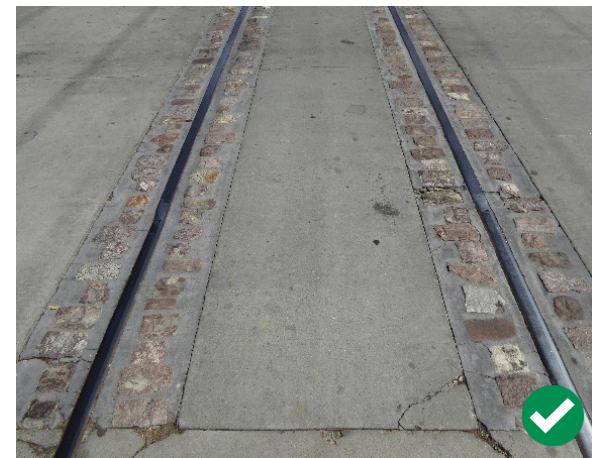


Figure 298. Historic railroad tracks contribute to the character of the district.