

PROPOSED LOCAL LANDMARK

Engman Public Natatorium

1040 West Washington

SOUTH BEND, INDIANA



**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
OF SOUTH BEND AND ST. JOSEPH COUNTY**

JULY 2018

Engman Natatorium

Pursuant to City of South Bend Ordinance No. 10572-17, as adopted by the Common Council, the structure located at 1040 West Washington, commonly known as the Engman Public Natatorium, is recommended by the Historic Preservation Commission to the Common Council for designation as a Local Historic Landmark.

Designation of historic landmarks is considered on the basis of:

1. Historical and cultural significance
2. Educational value
3. Suitability for preservation

Historical Context:

This property is located on West Washington in South Bend. The property was platted as Bank Lot number eight-nine. The site was formerly at the corner of the now vacated Chapel Lane.

The lot was donated to the City of South Bend by Harry Engman, Jr. Mr. Engman was a partner in the Engman, Matthews Range company of South Bend. The City built the Natatorium in 1921-1922 and named it after Engman. The building was designed by Walter W. Schneider, a local architect of note, to model the Culver Natatorium and that of the Chicago Athletic Club. The Board of Park Commissioners were given \$80,000.00 for the construction and contracting of the "Public Bath House and Swimming Pool". Their president, Mr. Richard Elbel, contracted the pools construction on August 11, 1921 for \$55,501.00 to local contractor Kuehn and Jordan and the remaining moneys were set aside for upkeep and future repairs. The Natatorium was constructed with a top of the line heating system and innovating plumbing and pumps.

In its first ten years the pool was used for public swimming, swimming lessons for young and old and safety instructor training. By 1936, only fourteen years after it first opened, the Natatorium was closed as a result of being declared unsafe. The problems listed in the declaration were all problems that were found to be conditions inherent in buildings devoted to natatoriums: the high humidity within the building contrasted with the cold winter temperatures outside which proceeded to produce condensation on walls, windows, and the roof causing rotting. To remedy the problems the City hired architect Ernest W. Young and allocated \$25,000.00 for the repair of the structure and the installation of a new machine designed to dry the air. The repairs took four months to implement. Upon the reopening of the pool the State ordered that the City must provide a schedule for use of the Natatorium by African-Americans. Local Civil Rights activist J. Chester Allen requested that due to the fact that there were over 5,000 citizens of color living in South Bend that all restrictions should be dropped so all people could use the pool at any time. Mr. John a Rothrock, representative of the State Board of Tax Commissioners who were the sponsors of the renovation project, stated that "he hadn't seen a city as large as South Bend that didn't provide facilities to blacks", however he did

not approve the plan of African Americans using the pool at the same time as the whites. Eventually a schedule was reached that allowed African Americans to use the facility, but, not at the same time as whites.

In 1946 the pool was again closed for a few months for reconditioning. The price for a single swim at this time was \$0.30; a five-swim card cost \$1.20. The Natatorium was open noon to 9:00pm and it offered open swimming, swim lessons for all, as well as private ladies classes and life-saving courses. By the late 1940s the Natatorium offered an adult only night on Wednesdays for those seeking to relax apart from children. The building was also used for water ballet, graduation exercises and water exhibitions.

By 1950 the Natatorium was at the peak of its popularity with over 18,179 people visiting the pool that summer. In 1951 the pool gave lessons in Water Basketball, rented the facility to clubs and associations and began Swim for Health lessons for the handicapped. By 1957 the pool had added 22 new swim classes year-round to handle the huge numbers of patrons and in 1958—to further alleviate the crowding—the pool was opened for four hours on Sunday afternoons. However, as the 1960s approached, the Natatorium began showing signs of age and use, leading to its closing for additional renovations on October 23, 1960. At this time new heating, plumbing, and ventilation systems were installed, as well as new showers and filters for the pool. The City allocated \$37,900.00 through the sale of bonds for these improvements and the pool reopened two months later.

The Natatorium continued to be open for lessons, water shows, High School swim meets and general swimming throughout the 1970s despite dwindling use. By July of 1978 the Natatorium again needed renovations, although the City chose to close the facility instead of executing those updates.

By the 1990s, the property was in dire need of preservation. Community interest resulted in an attempt to designate the structure as a Local Landmark 1997, and again in 2003. In August of 2010, the property was purchased by the South Bend Heritage Foundation, who entered into an agreement to restore and rehabilitate the structure, leading to the establishment of Indiana University's Civil Rights Heritage Center at the Natatorium.

Description of Structure:

The structure is a one story public pool building, rectangular in plan and Neo-Classical in design. The building has a flat roof with a terra-cotta parapet coping and walls with multi-course brick work with additional terra cotta detailing. The windows are 4" glass block in brick openings with terra cotta sills and head and the front door is made from aluminum. The entrance enclosure consists of terra cotta columns at the end with engaged terra cotta pilasters supporting the entablature which reads "Public Natatorium." There are engaged brick pilasters with terra cotta column capitals and plinth on either side of the entrance doors. The foundation is granite, the steps are

concrete, and a tall chimney made of brick with terra cotta detailing and wrought iron detailing.

Extensive modifications were made in 2010 resulting in the building's current configuration. The rear (southern) portions of the natatorium were demolished and replaced with a contemplative garden and modern restroom facilities and office space.

Location Notes/Legal Description:

PARCEL I: Part of Bank Out Lot numbered Eighty-nine (89) of the Second Plat of Out Lots of the Town, now City of South Bend, in St. Joseph County, Indiana, platted by the State of Indiana, described as beginning at the Northwest corner of said Lot Numbered Eighty-nine (89); thence East 1 chain 82 4/5 links; thence South 144.5 feet to the North line of an alley; thence West on the north line of said alley 1 chain 82 4/5 links to the West line of said Lot Numbered Eighty-nine (89); thence North 144.5 to the place of beginning.

EXCEPTING THEREFROM: the easterly 40' therefrom.

Landmarks Criteria:

1. Historical and cultural significance

The building fulfills this criteria as an excellent example of a movement in public entertainment and health. In its beginning the pool was built as part of a movement throughout Indiana and the United States that showed the public interest in swimming as a diversion from heat and as a place for socializing. As time passed and new courses were offered the interest changed from purely social to concerns over health and fitness and water safety. The structure's history also shows the advent of segregation and—eventually—desegregation.

2. Educational value

The building fulfills this criteria as an excellent example of a Neo-Classical designed public building. It was rated Significant according to the May 19, 1986 survey card. The structure is currently rated Outstanding by the Indiana State Historic Architectural and Archaeological Research Database (SHAARD).

To quote George Garner, Curator of the Civil Rights Heritage Center:

“No other building in the city speaks to the history of the African American experience like the Natatorium. Today, as the IU South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center, we offer public tours for multiple age groups that shares this history and engages in discussion about contemporary issues. In addition to South Bend Community and other K-12 school districts, we regularly welcome

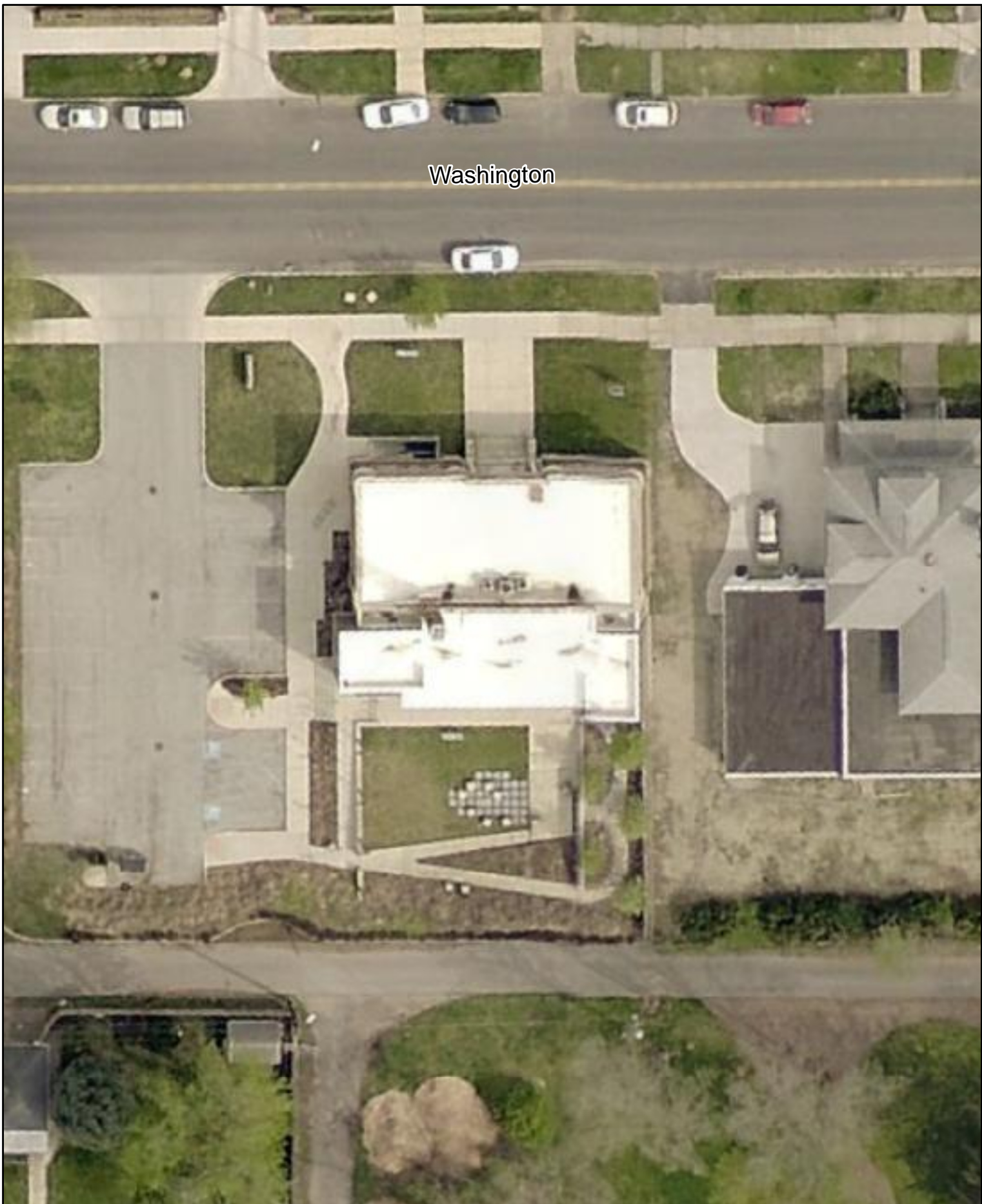
students from Indiana University South Bend, the University of Notre Dame, St. Mary's College, and Holy Cross College. We offer regular public events to enrich and educate such as a monthly film and discussion series, open-microphone poetry readings, lectures, exhibitions of local art and history, and more. We also regularly host meetings for various civil rights and social justice organizations, allowing those who fight today's injustices a place to gather and work towards full equality.

As all of our activities are funded by Indiana University South Bend, our educational mission is paramount. Further, we believe that activism works best when rooted in an understanding of the challenges communities have faced for generations and the experiences of those who had fought for positive changes."

3. Suitability for preservation

The building's alterations in 2010 have significantly changed the composition of the structure, but care was undertaken to execute this process in a sympathetic and façade-preserving manner. The primary street-facing façade of the structure is intact. The main swimming chamber to the rear of the lot was demolished and replaced with a contemplative garden and pool. To quote George Garner, again:

"In 2010, the building underwent a significant renovation. The building's facade remains virtually unchanged, with the interior structure and the back two-thirds of the original building adapted for 21st century use. While recognizing that there have already been extensive changes to the original structure, we are confident that the work of South Bend Heritage Foundation to transform the space into the IU South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center breathed new life into a building that had, in the late 1990s, been targeted for demolition. Historic landmark status confirms and adds protections for future generations, ensuring that the history of this building and the story it tells remains vital."



Washington

0 20 40 80 Feet

1 Inch = 30 Feet

Natatorium



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