In 1930 Southside Automobile established Buick dealership at 3654 South Grand Blvd. At the time, the St. Louis automobile industry was peaking. The location was optimal for an automobile business because it was along the axis of a trolley line securing plenty of foot traffic. According to the Sanbourne maps, at the time of 3654 South Grand’s edification, the automobile industry was prolific in this particular area of St. Louis: automobile repair shops, pop-up dealerships, public parks made for driving, among other things.

The original construction was an ornate Spanish Colonial style building: large arched windows optimal for daylighting the interior, an iconic tower feature at the southwest corner, curving details accenting the south and west facades. A freight elevator located at the north east corner of the building could hoist cars from the ground level to the roof. Rounded columns two foot in diameter on the ground floor supported the incredible loads on the building. At two floors, the building grossed 30,000 Sq.Ft.

The building would vacate in 1959 due to the automobile industry waning, and the neighborhood decline due to white flight. After three years of vacancy, the building was sold and renovated into a medical facility that would remain at the 3654 South Grand location for the remainder of the century. In comparison to the original building, the Medical Building’s renovation featured an upper level curtain wall, partially closed archways, and diminished windows. The exterior was again revised under new ownership in 2001, when the International Institute of St. Louis bought the building. With funding from the Donna Brown grant, the International Institute gutted the interior of the building. Exterior updates changed the building significantly by infilling all exterior windows and relocating the front entry to the side parking lot.
CONSTRUCTION

Southside Buick Auto Center 1923

Andy Burger Motor Autos

Vacant

Ronald S. Lefors BS Co.

PRESENT

1923-1944: Southside Buick Auto Center

1944-1958: A second use of the building sits vacant for 1 year between a transition away from automotive uses.

1959-1961: The building sits vacant for 2 years between a formal and programmatic transition away from automotive uses.

1961-1999: A new program use in the building also brings on a new formal dynamic: The first reduction in the amount of exterior openings and the introduction of new materials to the facade.

2000-2001: BUILDING HISTORY

Inclusion & Neighborhood Resilience

Medical Building 1981-1999: The building resides on a new formal dynamic: The first reduction in the amount of exterior openings and the introduction of new materials to the facade.

Institutional Building 2019: Building established.
South Side Buick Co.
Original State of Building

Square Footage: 30,000 sq. ft.
Stories: 2
Owner: Paul Lanson
Built: 1926
Function: Buick Service Station
Material: Concrete, Steel, Stone

The South Side Buick Company was originally a service center for Buick cars in the St. Louis area. Thanks to the innovation in the use of the concrete as a structural system and the introduction of a large freight elevator in the northeast corner of the building, the building was capable of lifting and storing cars temporarily on the roof and second floor. The facade had Spanish colonial aesthetic with ornate details accenting the west and south facades and the arcade of windows. A tower as tall as three stories anchored the southwest corner, marking the company’s presence along S. Grand Blvd.
MEDICAL OFFICE BUILDING

Square Footage: 30,000 sq. ft.
Stories: 2
Owner: Private
Renovated: 1993
Function: Medical Offices
Material: Concrete, Steel, Stucco, Aluminum

In 1993 the building was renovated as a medical office facility. By then, many of its ornate details had been missing as well as the iconic southwest tower, while the windows were reduced in response to the new use. It is unknown when the tower disappeared and if it was removed for structural reasons. It is speculated that the new use led to the reduction of the window size, and the cladding of the building’s second floor.
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ST. LOUIS
Current State of Building

Square Footage: 30,000 sq. ft.
Stories: 2
Owner: International Institute of St. Louis
Renovated: 1993
Function: Offices, Gathering Space, Learning Center
Material: Concrete, Steel, Stucco

In the early 2000s the International Institute moved into the building after the exterior and interior were extensively renovated. The exterior was completely closed off by infilling the arcade windows at ground level and covering with a layer of stucco. The upper level curtain wall and windows were also completely covered over with a layer of sheet metal, with a grand and monochromatic cornice added. The International Institute has since moved out in 2014 to its current location on Arsenal St. Although the building is still owned by the IISTL, it currently sits vacant.
PEDESTRIAN VIEWS

Northwest Corner

Southeast Corner

Southwest Corner

Northeast Corner
NEIGHBORHOOD VIEWS

Northwest Corner

Southeast Corner
NEIGHBORHOOD VIEWS

Southwest Corner

Northeast Corner
To qualify for listing under Criterion A (Commerce) or C (Architectural), the resource must retain both integrity of design and association. Under Criterion A the resource must have a significant as-
association with one particular automobile company, even if only for a short period of time and should also have associations with the historical context discussed in Section E. Integrity concerns under Criterion A would not be as stringent as under Criterion C, but the basic form, exterior wall cladding and roof forms visible from the exterior [such as elevator penthouses] should be intact, although some details may have changed, such as parapet caps or loss of skylights. In addition, it must still retain enough of its unique characteristics to distinguish the building from a simple warehouse, such as automotive ramps or auto freight elevator shafts. In addition, most window openings, whether in the original showroom area or upstairs must retain their original openings, even if boarded over or the windows replaced, providing a sense of the original fenestration patterns. On the interior, it is expected that distributorship buildings qualifying under Criterion A will at least retain much of its open floor plates, but not necessarily the showroom features.

Our research shows that Southside Automobile Company was a very prominent company during the 1920s-1940s, displaying possibility for the building to qualify under Criterion A, Commerce. Since the building was greatly altered a great deal, qualifying under Criterion C, Architectural, would not be possible.

Original Building Condition

Proposed Historic Restoration

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1936
BUILDING STRUCTURE

- Ground Floor Slab
- Ground Floor 26" O Concrete Columns
- Second Floor Slab
- Second Floor 18" O Concrete Columns
- Roof Slab
- Renovated Facade

Exterior Concrete Wall Column
Concrete Interior Column
Steel Beam for Shear Forces