CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission **Planning and Development Department**

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Marion L. Martin House
OWNERS: Robert and Margaret Murray
APPLICANTS: Same
LOCATION: 2521 Stanmore Drive – River Oaks

AGENDA ITEM: II.g
HPO FILE NO: 11L255
DATE ACCEPTED: Jul-8-11
HAHC HEARING: Aug-17-2011

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 8 and Tr. 9A, Block 41, River Oaks Sec. 1, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story stucco-clad single-family residence. It sits on the River Oaks Courts on Stanmore Drive.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Marion L. Martin House at 2521 Stanmore Drive, designed by architect Cameron Fairchild, was built in 1936-37 as a speculative home by the River Oaks Corporation. This stucco-clad Colonial-Revival style house is one of five homes sited around a horseshoe-shaped court on Stanmore Drive. Architect Cameron Fairchild designed all five of the houses that the River Oaks Corporation built around the first of the River Oaks Courts on Stanmore Drive in 1936. Fairchild began his long architectural career in Houston in 1925 and was noted for his eclectic single-family residences in affluent Houston neighborhoods, particularly River Oaks.

The first owner of the house was Marion L. Martin, who worked in finance and later owned his own company, Marion L. Martin & Co, a local division of the Fidelity Deposit Company of Maryland.

The Marion L. Martin House at 2521 Stanmore qualifies for Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 4, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

River Oaks Courts

The Marion L. Martin House at 2521 Stanmore was built by the River Oaks Corporation as a speculative home and completed in 1937. The concept of the River Oaks Courts was conceived by the River Oaks Corporation as a way to avoid placing homes on the heavily traveled San Felipe Road. By turning homes inward around a horse-shoe and thus in a sense creating a common front yard, the River Oaks Corporation was able to place more homes for sale. There are six such courts on Stanmore Drive, and two on adjacent Sharp Place. The house at 2521 is one of the first five homes built under this concept. These original homes were intended to sell for about $15,000.

Architect Cameron Fairchild was hired to design the first five homes (2517, 2521, 2523, 2525 and 2529 Stanmore Drive) to create a unity of design that would showcase the idea to homebuyers. The 1980 *Houston Architectural Survey* tells that similar “enclave” plans were used successfully in contemporary garden suburbs such as in Greenbelt, Maryland.

The survey also reports that:

> "H.A. Kipp, engineer for River Oaks Corporation, laid out site plan. E.B. Crawford was contractor for the houses. Court was originally designed for seven houses, but River Oaks Corporation partitioned off middle lots to provide larger sites on either side."

The homes received a lot of notice and articles appeared in *Good Housekeeping* and the *Houston Post*.

In February 1937, *Good Housekeeping* extolled the virtue of planned suburbs, and described the River Oaks Court homes:

> "Today, fortunately, in many of our cities and towns "new developments," as new community planning is often called, are to be found. Consider these carefully. Where large tracts of land are bought and planned for residential sections by a responsible real-estate company, your risks are lessened. Good developments have the proper restrictions in architecture, intercommunity planning, parkways, recreation centers for children, fine schools, churches, and even convenient shopping centers.
>
> This month, we illustrate a group of moderately priced houses, built on a central court, in the beautiful River Oaks section of Houston, Texas, under the direction of Hugh Potter….Here are moderately priced houses, ideally planned, which are excellent examples of the importance of neighborhood. They are a part of a beautiful general plan, where the finest residences with the largest property are at the core or heart of some 1000 acres, graduating to smaller plots which come under the same fine restrictions, careful zoning, and good architectural and building standards. Notice the care with which the garage drives are kept to the back, adjoining a boulevard; notice the space between the houses and the privacy which each house enjoys, although sharing the charm of the trees, green grass and roses of the central court…
>
> Thus we see that the restrictions, the zoning, the careful planning by real-estate developers to keep each small section a part of a beautiful whole, maintain property values and pleasant surroundings at a high standard through a period of years. This, then, establishes the fact – Neighborhood is of First Importance."

On December 20, 1936, the *Houston Post* ran the following about the courts:

> "River Oaks Corporation today presents something new in subdivision development and home building, an idea which relates land platting to home architecture. The above five homes have been completed, facing a private court on Stanmore drive. Each home is different in design, but there is architectural harmony within the group. The court idea presents a new defense from traffic hazards, especially where children are concerned. The property in the center of the court has been set aside and developed into a private park, utilizable as part front yard by all residents of the court. The homes were designed by Cameron D. Fairchild, Houston architect. Each has an electrically controlled heating system."

The first owner of 2521 Stanmore was Marion L. Martin, who worked in finance and later owned his own company, Marion L. Martin & Co, a local division of the Fidelity Deposit Company of Maryland. He and his family lived in the house until 1945, when it was purchased by a Houston physician, Dr. A. Louis Dippel. Dr. Dippel was a graduate of University of Texas and held an office in what is now Midtown on Fannin Street.

Edward C. Hutcheson purchased the home in 1954 and lived in the home until his death in 1986. Hutcheson was the son of prominent Houstonians William Palmer and Eleanor Hutcheson, who were John Staub's first clients in Houston for 1405 North Boulevard in Broadacres. Edward Hutcheson was educated at the Hill School and graduated from Princeton University. He saw action in World War II. He met his wife Beechie Chew, the daughter of a naval officer, in Rhode Island while recovering from malaria. When they returned to Houston after the war, he put himself through the Southwest College of Law with Beechie's assistance. He enjoyed the study of history and wrote a family history *The Freedom Tree*. He was a founder of the Texas Bill of Rights Foundation and was involved with organizations that dealt with poverty and education. After Hutcheson's death, Beechie married Ike Kampmann and moved to San Antonio. They had several children.

In 1988, the house was purchased by Reginald and Patricia Hirsch; Patricia and Richard Rice bought the house in 2000; and the current owners, Meg and Nelson Murray, purchased the house in 2004.

Cameron Fairchild

Born in Waco, Cameron Fairchild began his architectural practice in Houston in 1925. Over the course of a long career, he became noted for his eclectic single-family "country houses" in affluent Houston neighborhoods such as Shadow Lawn, Boulevard Oaks, Braeswood, Riverside Terrace, and River Oaks.

Fairchild was especially identified with River Oaks, where he designed the Lamberth–Abercrombie House at 2221 River Oaks Boulevard (1928, COH Protected Landmark), one of the first houses built on River Oaks Boulevard. Fairchild designed all five of the houses that the River Oaks Corporation built around the first of the River Oaks Courts on Stanmore Drive in 1936. Fairchild also designed 2112 Brentwood (1934, COH Landmark); 2911 Ella Lee Lane for his brother William Fairchild (1936, COH Landmark), 3244 Ella Lee Lane; 3320 Chevy Chase Drive; and the 17-story River Oaks Apartments (1965).

During his long career, Fairchild designed or remodeled numerous public buildings in Houston, including the Jesse H. Jones Library Building at the Texas Medical Center (1954); the 14-story downtown First Savings Building (1964; demolished 2002); and South Texas College of Law. He was also responsible for numerous alterations and additions to Trinity Church on Main Street, where he was a parishioner, vestry member, and senior warden.

Fairchild was also very active in Galveston, where he designed many homes for the city's elite, and public buildings such as the seven-building student housing complex at University of Texas Medical Branch (1955). Beyond Houston and Galveston, Fairchild designed the Cody Memorial Library (1939) and the Lois Perkins Chapel (1948) on the campus of Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, and the Taylor Public Library in Taylor, Texas (1959). According to the Taylor Public Library website, Fairchild was chosen to design the library "because of his high standing in the profession of architecture and because Taylor had been the childhood home of both Mr. Fairchild and of his wife, the former Helen Tarkington."

Fairchild was born in Waco, Texas, on August 20, 1902. He was educated at Southwestern University in Georgetown and the University of Texas, from which he graduated in 1924. From 1924 to 1925, he worked for the Austin architect George L. Walling. In 1925, Fairchild began independent practice in Houston. He took a brief leave from architecture to serve in the armed forces during World War II. Fairchild served two terms as president of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He maintained his practice for over 50 years before retiring to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where he died in June 1985.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The house at 2521 Stanmore is designed in the Colonial Revival style. It faces northwest on the southeast lot of the court. The two-story house is clad in stucco. The original house features a hipped roof. A later addition to the northeast of the house is set back from the original house and its roof intersects with the original house. Although clearly a later addition, it relates to the original in form, height and detailing.

The original house has a three part front facade. The central bay contains the entrance, which has been slightly modified to contain double doors. The doors are paneled wood with glass lights. A small portico with a pedimented roof, Doric columns and pilasters projects slightly from the front façade. While there is evidence of a small canopy or portico in the 1936 photograph and on the 1951 Sanborn maps, the current portico with its pedimented roof is a later renovation to the house.

To either side of the front entry are two sets of triple wood sash windows set in a 4-over-4, 6-over-6, 4-over-4 combination on the first story facade. The windows have non-working shutters placed to either side. Above the entry on the second story is one 6-over-6 wood sash window with working shutters. This window is flanked by two sets of smaller triple wood sash windows set in a 4-over-4, 6-over-6, 4-over-4 combination. These are placed directly under the roof eave, which slightly overhangs the house. A belt course, faced in stucco, runs between the first and second stories.

The addition features two sets of triple wood sash windows set in a 6-over-6, 9-over-9, 6-over-6 combination on the first story facade. On the second story façade are two sets of smaller triple wood sash windows set in a 4-over-4, 6-over-6, 4-over-4 combination. As with the original house, the second story windows are placed directly under the roof eave, all windows have non-working shutters, and a belt course, faced in stucco, runs between the first and second stories.

The house is undergoing remodeling by Stern and Bucek Architects. More information about this will be in the accompanying Certificate of Appropriateness application. The changes to the front façade of the house will include the following:

- The addition of a 9-light gabled dormer window to the attic story, above the entrance.
- A redesign of the existing, non-original porch and entry doors.

The house is in excellent condition. If designated, the house will become the first house designated on the River Oaks Courts on Stanmore Drive.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Courtney Spillane, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Block Books.

City Directories, 1937 to present.

Fox, Stephen, ed., *Houston Architectural Guide*, 2nd edition, American Institute of Architects/Houston Chapter, 1999.

Good Housekeeping, "The Studio Decorated this House for Exhibition in Houston, Texas," February 1937.

Houston Architectural Survey, City of Houston, 1980.

Houston Post, "Plan for the Development of River Oaks Court," June 21, 1936.

Houston Post, "Five Homes on River Oaks Private Court," December 20, 1936.

poslfit.homeip.net/cgi-bin/genea2.pl?id=15310

www.findagrave.com

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S - satisfies NA - not applicable

S	NA	
☒	☐	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
☐	☒	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
☐	☒	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
☒	☐	(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
☐	☒	(5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
☒	☐	(6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
☐	☒	(7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
☐	☒	(8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

AND

☐	☒	(9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224b).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of Marion L. Martin House at 2521 Stanmore Drive.

EXHIBIT A
MARION L. MARTIN HOUSE
2521 STANMORE DRIVE
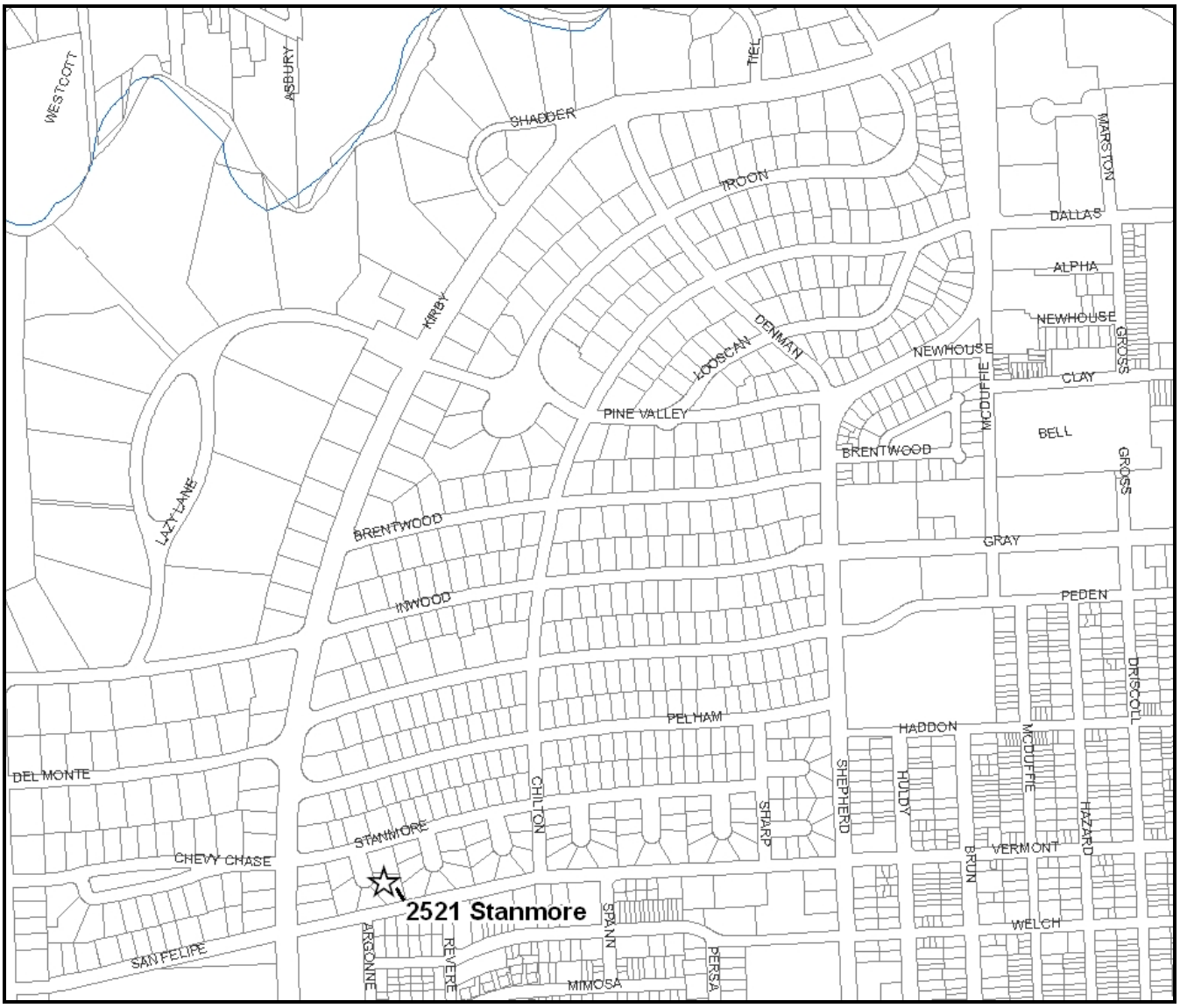
EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
MARION L. MARTIN HOUSE
2521 STANMORE DRIVE
NOT TO SCALE