

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Jefferson Davis Hospital

OWNER: Harris County, Texas

APPLICANT: Harris County, Texas

LOCATION: 1101 Elder Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: Feb-13-2002

AGENDA ITEM: I

P.C. MEETING DATE: 04-04-2002

HPO FILE NO.: 02L099

DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-08-02

HAHC HEARING DATE: 03-14-02

SITE INFORMATION

Being a 1.6350 acre (71,220 square feet) tract of land out of a called 2.5853 acre (112,616 square feet) tract described by deed filed July 11, 1988 from Harris County Hospital District to Harris County and recorded under film code number 121-72-2563 of the Real Property Records of said County. Said 2.5853 acre tract being out of the Old City Cemetery tract as recorded in Volume F, Pages 373-374 of the Deed Records of Harris County in the John Austin Survey, Abstract - 1. Bearings based on the East line of called 2.5853 acre tract as recited in aforementioned deed. Said 1.6350 acre tract is more particularly described by metes and bounds therein.

The building on the site is a 3-story, masonry brick institutional building on a high-raised basement.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation for Jefferson Davis Hospital and Power Plant Building

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Jefferson Davis Hospital was the first city-owned, permanent hospital facility that accepted indigent patients. The hospital was welcomed by Houstonians as a medical establishment that could exclusively attend to those who could not afford the luxury of a private hospital. People considered the 150-bed hospital "an honor to the city and a godsend to the afflicted." The building was constructed on one of the oldest sites in Houston, which served as the only cemetery in Houston from 1840 to 1847. The cemetery included burials of the earliest and most prominent and heroic citizens until 1879 when the cemetery was closed. Since there was no widespread removal of graves from the site of the proposed hospital, it was agreed that the hospital would be built with its basement above ground. After the hospital was built in 1924, it was named in honor of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, since a large number of confederate soldiers had been buried on the site. The hospital was designed and constructed in the Neo-classical style and remains today the only building of its prominence and stature in the First Ward neighborhood.

The building consists of a high-raised basement and three stories. The building is 5 x 6 bays wide. The building has a three bay central section with wings. The center bay projects from the building plane and has a cast stone portico with monumental, fluted columns with Ionic capitals. The building is structural concrete frame with clay tile back up with a red brick veneer. The cast stone detailing, brick corner quoins and the entry portico are all elements of the Neoclassical style popular in the early 20th century. Other classical elements include the cast stone keystones over the basement windows and the pedimented entry doors both on the main façade. Above the second floor windows, a belt course surrounds the building just below the cast stone cornice. Above the central three bays, the third floor or attic rises. The space above the outer wings has a modest parapet. The roof is hip on hip and the roof overhang is ornamented with dentilation. The elevator equipment room located on the rear flat roof terrace also has a small, hipped roof. The roof framing of the main building is wood with composition shingle roof cladding. The building has a full, at grade basement.

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The symmetrical front or main façade has a rhythm of A-B-C-B-A. The central bay projects from the building plane. The grand staircase rises above the basement level to a large entry portico. The portico is defined by fluted Ionic pilasters and paired fluted Ionic columns supporting a full entablature. The frieze has carved into it “Jefferson Davis Hospital.” Above the entablature is a cast stone balustrade featuring classical balusters. Cast stone molding and a pediment surround the entry door. The portico porch is skirted with a cast stone, balustrade featuring classical balusters. The corners of this projecting bay have corner quoins as seen on the wings of the building.

The second and fourth bays (B) are four bays wide. On the basement level there is an arched door opening with a cast stone surround and pediment. Also on the basement level are window openings that are paired. Two of the openings are the same size as the paired windows on the first, second and third (attic) floors. Above the third floor the openings are more horizontal in shape. This horizontal-shaped window is repeated on the first floor. The second and third floors have regularly spaced paired window openings.

The outer wings (A) are four bays wide defined by the window openings. At the basement level, each of the windows has a cast stone keystone. The first and second floor windows follow the same fenestration pattern established at the basement level. Above the cornice of the wings is a parapet with minimal detailing.

Originally the building had a symmetrical floor plan with a hipped roof center section with wings also called a three-part plan. Palladio popularized this type of floor plan through his 16th century pattern books and the estates he designed in the Italian countryside. The Neoclassical style borrowed from the Renaissance and reintroduced classical symmetry in residential and civic architecture.

The hospital power plant is similar stylistically to the hospital building. The power plant building is symmetrical with two large arched openings presumably used for trucks or other vehicles. The openings feature cast keystones in the 1 ½-story central bay flanked by smaller wings with window openings. Above the large arched openings are horizontal windows with metal multi-light sashes. A smokestack with concrete veneer rises from the rear of the building.

Jefferson Davis Hospital, opening in 1925, replaced scattered facilities for indigent care. One of those sites, the old Camp Logan Hospital, which had been given to the city in 1919, was only 60 beds and always overflowed to other scattered leased sites. The physicians often depended on donated equipment, even linen supplies. It was the Camp Logan staff doctors and the Harris County Medical Association who generated enough public sentiment to endorse a \$500,000 bond issue for building a new, permanent structure. The site chosen was at Elder and Girard Streets. The building was dedicated on December 2, 1924. Architect for the building was City architect, W. W. Dowdy and construction costs were \$400,000. The contractor was Russell Brown Company of Houston. The hospital had a capacity of 240 beds and was almost completely fireproof. Within five years the rapid growth in population made the hospital lacking in beds and medical space. Houston’s population had increased 111.4 percent since 1920 to 292,352 in 1930, making Houston the largest city in Texas and the twenty-sixth most populous city in the nation. The city had also increased in land area to 72.2 square miles to accommodate its population growth. A new hospital building was completed in 1937 on Allen Parkway and named the Jeff Davis Hospital (demolished 1999). The old hospital site at Elder and Girard Streets continued to be used for related medical purposes including a psychiatric hospital, juvenile detention wards, food stamp distribution center, Cenikor and also served as a records storage facility for the Harris County Hospital District.

The site, however, has a history that dates back to the 1840s when City Council purchased the dedicated the land as a City Cemetery. The site served as the only cemetery in Houston from 1840 to 1847, and “everyone”

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who died during that time period was buried there, including many Republic of Texas Houstonians.” The City of Houston maintained and used the cemetery from 1840 until it was closed in 1879 although burials by family members continued there for sometime thereafter. Burials in the Houston cemetery include: probable Battle of Texas Independence Veterans; most Civil War soldiers and veterans; some City Aldermen, many Masons, Odd Fellows, local church members, ministers, post-Civil War federal troops (including General Wilborn), Czech immigrants, entire families of middle class Anglo, African-American and Hispanic citizens, and hundreds of yellow fever and cholera victims, some of which were buried in mass graves. An agreement was reached to use the site for the hospital. Since there was no widespread grave removal, it was agreed that the hospital would be constructed with its basement above ground. After more extensive research and investigation, the applicant plans to submit an application for the cemetery for its consideration as an archaeological site.

The Texas Historical Commission has determined that the Jefferson Davis Hospital is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The building is in a state of disrepair and has been vacant for a number of years. However feasibility studies have determined that the building is suitable for rehabilitation. The Avenue Community Development Corporation, a local non-profit organization that specializes in the relocation and rehabilitation of houses, intends to partner with ArtSpace Projects, Inc. of Minneapolis, to rehabilitate the building as affordable artist live/work spaces. The additions will be maintained with the exception of the addition at the rear. This addition is a collapsed stucco building and will be demolished.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, 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 | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
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- (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;

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- (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.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends landmark designation of the Jefferson Davis Hospital and Power Plant Building to City Council.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
JEFFERSON DAVIS HOSPITAL
1101 ELDER STREET
NOT TO SCALE

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HISTORIC IMAGE
JEFFERSON DAVIS HOSPITAL
CIRCA 1925