

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station    **AGENDA ITEM:** VII  
**OWNERS:** City of Houston    **HPO FILE NO:** 10PL89  
**APPLICANTS:** Same    **DATE ACCEPTED:** Apr-23-2010  
**LOCATION:** 7301 Avenue F    **HAHC HEARING:** May-20-2010  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A    **PC HEARING:** May-27-2010

### SITE INFORMATION

Reserve B, Block 1, City of Houston Canal Street, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, concrete and brick municipal building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station building at 7301 Avenue F is the only existing municipal structure of the former City of Magnolia Park, one of Houston's oldest Hispanic neighborhoods. Magnolia Park was laid out as a park in 1890 on a 1,374-acre site belonging to Thomas M. Brady near the confluence of Buffalo and Brays Bayous, seven miles downstream from Houston, and was redeveloped into a residential community starting in 1909. The City of Magnolia Park incorporated as an independent municipality in 1913 and was annexed to the City of Houston in 1926. Though the earliest residents were whites, Mexican Americans from South Texas began arriving by 1911. Most of the new arrivals worked in jobs tied to the railroad and ship channel. By 1929, Magnolia Park was surrounded by refineries, factories, textile mills, industrial plants and wharves, and had become the largest Mexican settlement in Houston.

The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station building was constructed in 1923. The architectural firm of McLelland & Fink designed the building in a simple classical revival style that was popular during the early 20th century. McLelland & Fink contracted Charley Dahl to construct the building. On July 1, 1923, the new city hall building was dedicated in conjunction with the tenth anniversary of Magnolia Park's incorporation as a municipality. The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station is architecturally significant as a type of municipal building popular in Texas towns during the 1920s: the combined city hall-and-fire station. The building served as a fire station for fifty years until 1973, and has since been a Harris County polling place and offices for community service programs for residents of Magnolia Park.

The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station is a standing reminder of the unique history of one of Houston's oldest neighborhoods. It is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) and meets Criteria 1, 4, 6, and 8 for Landmark and Protected Landmark designation.

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## HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

### *Brief History of the City of Magnolia Park*

Originally designed in 1890 as an excursion park containing 1,374 acres, the community of Magnolia Park is located seven miles southeast of downtown Houston.<sup>1</sup> Magnolia Park was redeveloped into a residential community starting in 1909 and became an incorporated municipality on June 29, 1913.<sup>2</sup> Though the earliest residents were whites, Mexican Americans from South Texas began arriving by 1911. Most of the new arrivals worked in jobs tied to the railroad and ship channel. By 1929, Magnolia Park was surrounded by refineries, factories, textile mills, industrial plants and wharves, and had become the largest Mexican settlement in Houston.

During its brief existence as a municipality in the early 20th century, the City of Magnolia Park went through three temporary City Hall facilities before moving into a permanent building in the early 1920s. The first of these temporary City Hall facilities was located at 7917 Harrisburg Road by 1915. A second City Hall building was located at 7617 Harrisburg Road by 1917. The third City Hall building was located at 7401 Harrisburg Road by 1919.<sup>3</sup>

Magnolia Park also had a Fire Department which had a more stable history. The City of Magnolia Park's Fire Department had two fire stations by 1925. Built before 1917, the Central Fire Station was addressed at 7301 Avenue F. Meanwhile, Fire Station #2 was located at 7821 Harrisburg Road.<sup>4</sup> By the start of the 1920s, city administrators of Magnolia Park decided to move the city hall facility to a city-owned, more centrally located property.

### *The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station*

The Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station building located at 7301 Avenue F is the only extant municipal structure of the now dissolved City of Magnolia Park. The building is a brick and concrete two-level structure designed in a simple classic revival style that was popular during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has four bay doors to house fire trucks and vehicles. On the top left face corner of the building, the inscription, "City Hall" can be seen. Attached to the outside of the building is a

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<sup>1</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Magnolia Park, Texas," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/MM/hvm6.html> (accessed January 24, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Morning News newspaper, "Magnolia Park Incorporates," June 30, 1913, page 12.  
Houston Post newspaper, "Vision of J. R. Cheek Has Turned Acres of Wooded Land into Modern City," December 9, 1923, pages 54-55.  
Dallas Morning News newspaper, "New Texas Charters," January 31, 1909, page 3.

<sup>3</sup> City of Houston telephone directories of 1915-1919 archived in Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

<sup>4</sup> 1917 City of Houston telephone directory archived in Houston Metropolitan Research Center lists original fire station at 7301 Avenue F.  
1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, volume 6, sheet 646.

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12 x 12 calaboose which was designated as the Magnolia Park city jail. The building was situated next to the Magnolia Park water and natural gas plants.<sup>5</sup>

The architectural firm of McLelland & Fink contracted Charley Dahl to construct the building.<sup>6</sup> Dahl was a local building contractor who resided in Magnolia Park. The firm of McLelland & Fink would also design the historic courthouse for the county of Polk, Texas in 1923.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the only one of its kind in Houston, this building was uniquely designed to office a city hall administration, a fire station and a jail facility.

From 1916 to the early 1920s, the site at 7301 Avenue F was occupied by the original fire station for Magnolia Park. This building was demolished to build a new structure which would consolidate the city hall and fire department administrations.

On July 1, 1923, the new city hall building was dedicated in conjunction with the tenth anniversary of Magnolia Park's incorporation as a municipality. The administration of Mayor Frederick A. Baldinger,<sup>8</sup> opened the building. Along with providing the administrative offices for the mayor, city aldermen and city jail, the building continued to serve as the central fire station for Magnolia Park. Fire Station #2 remained at 7821 Harrisburg Boulevard.<sup>9</sup>

The building had only been in existence for two years when efforts were being made by the nearby expanding City of Houston to annex the City of Magnolia Park. The historic decision from Magnolia Park administrators to accept a proposition for annexation into Houston most likely was made in this new building. Then on October 16, 1926, Magnolia Park and Houston voters approved the proposition to annex Magnolia Park.<sup>10</sup> The City of Houston now became owner of the Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station building.

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<sup>5</sup> 1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, volume 6, sheet 637 shows water and gas plants next to city hall building.

<sup>6</sup> Dedication plague of building shows McLelland & Fink as architects that contracted C. Dahl. Plague is located in current Fire Station #20 at 6902 Navigation Boulevard.

<sup>7</sup> 1920 census records for City of Magnolia Park, precinct #2, enumeration district 108, page 5 shows Charley Dahl employed as a foreman in construction.

Texas Historical Commission marker #402 shows county courthouse for Polk County, Texas was built in 1923 by the firm of McLelland & Fink, <http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/shell-county.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Houston Post newspaper, "Vision of J. R. Cheek Has Turned Acres of Wooded Land into Modern City," December 9, 1923, pages 54-55.

Dedication plague of building shows Frederick Baldinger as mayor of Magnolia Park when building was dedicated in July, 1923. Plague is located in current Fire Station #20 at 6902 Navigation Boulevard.

<sup>9</sup> 1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, volume 6, sheet 646.

<sup>10</sup> Dallas Morning News newspaper, "Merge Magnolia Park with City of Houston," October 18, 1926, page 3.

Houston Chronicle newspaper, "Merger Voted; Salary Hike Beaten: All Bond Issues Approved; Union Wins in Suburb," October 17, 1926 pages 1 & 14.

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Following the annexation of Magnolia Park, the building no longer served as a city hall but continued as a City of Houston facility. The Houston Fire Department acquired the building and designated it as Fire Station #20.<sup>11</sup> In 1926, the Houston Fire Department divided the area of Houston into four regions with a battalion fire station assigned to each region. Shortly after annexation, Fire Station #20 was designated as a battalion station which would serve as a headquarters for the fire stations in the southeast region of Houston. A battalion fire chief was assigned to Fire Station #20.<sup>12</sup>

Being in close proximity to the Houston Ship Channel, Fire Station #20 was also uniquely equipped to handle hazards such as chemical spills and fires along the seaport. Over the years, Fire Station #20 was called the “Foam Station,” for it stored special liquid foams and discharging equipment to extinguish chemical fires.<sup>13</sup> The small jail attached to the exterior of the building was utilized by the police department as the location was designated as a substation for Precinct #1 of the Houston Police Department.<sup>14</sup> The building continued to serve as a fire station for fifty years until 1973 when Fire Station #20 was moved to a new facility at 6902 Navigation and Marcario Garcia Boulevard.<sup>15</sup>

With the removal of Fire Station #20, the building no longer served as a fire station, but the structure continued to serve the community. It would be utilized for decades as the Harris County voting precinct #64 for voters in the Magnolia Park area. In time though, voting precinct #64 would be moved from here to the local YWCA facility located at 7300 Navigation Boulevard.<sup>16</sup>

Still owned by the City of Houston, this historic building has entered the twenty-first century to office community service programs for residents of Magnolia Park.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Houston, volume 6, sheet 637.

<sup>12</sup> McRae, Max “Fire Company 20,” [http://www.maxmrae.com/early\\_companies/fsno20.htm](http://www.maxmrae.com/early_companies/fsno20.htm).  
1930 census records for City of Houston, precinct #2, enumeration district 101-125, page 28 show William I. Peabody as battalion fire chief and residing in Magnolia Park.

<sup>13</sup> McRae, Max “Fire Company 20,” [http://www.maxmrae.com/early\\_companies/fsno20.htm](http://www.maxmrae.com/early_companies/fsno20.htm).

<sup>14</sup> 1932 City of Houston telephone directory shows address as police substation for precinct #1.  
1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Houston, volume 6, sheet 637 shows Police Dept. at location.

<sup>15</sup> McRae, Max “Fire Company 20” [http://www.maxmrae.com/early\\_companies/fsno20.htm](http://www.maxmrae.com/early_companies/fsno20.htm).  
Houston Fire Department, “Fire Station #20,” <http://www.houstontx.gov/fire/firestations/station20.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Compiled by Union y Progreso, Inc. “Magnolia Park City Hall,” unpublished manuscript archived in vertical files of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

<sup>17</sup> Harris County Appraisal District records online show that City of Houston is owner of property at 7301 Avenue F.  
Brochure of Parnell Intermediary Services Inc. shows address at 7301 Avenue F.

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## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The Magnolia Park City Hall and Fire Station is architecturally significant as a type of municipal building popular in Texas towns during the 1920s: the combined city hall-and-fire station. As early as 1915, when the town of Houston Heights, Texas, built a two-story brick building that consolidated the offices of the city government, located on the second floor, above the ground-floor garage stalls of the city's fleet of fire-fighting equipment, the combined city hall-fire station was established as a public building type that enabled smaller Texan towns to provide city services in an efficient and economical manner. During the 1920s, such architecturally notable examples of this type as the two-story Mercedes (TX) City Hall and Fire Station of 1927, the Weslaco (TX) City Hall and Fire Station of 1928, and the one-story Rosenberg (TX) City Hall and Fire Station of 1930 were built. The architecturally distinguished University Park (TX) City Hall and Fire Station of 1937 demonstrated the appeal of this building type for suburban towns as well. Magnolia Park's City Hall and Fire Station was representative of examples built in the first half of the 1920s decade, such as the Corsicana (TX) City Hall and Fire Station of 1925, which were not as architecturally ambitious as those built in the second half of the 1920s decade.

Architecturally, the Magnolia Park City Hall and Fire Station is much more like a two-story downtown commercial building of the 1920s than a civic building. It was built up to the sidewalk line on Avenue F rather than set back from the street (although the Avenue F front is framed by 73rd Street, which dead-ends at its intersection with Avenue F). The east two-thirds of the city hall and fire station were originally faced with the bi-fold wood doors of the three fire truck garage stalls. The narrower westernmost bay of the Avenue F elevation contained the entrance door to the stair leading up to the city offices, which was protected by a suspended canopy, and ganged double-hung wood windows, like those used to light second-floor spaces. The parapet atop the wall of the western bay contains a centered scalloped pediment framing a cast stone panel inscribed "City Hall." The parapet is outlined with cast stone coping. Vertical piers faced with recessed panels divide the east bay from the west bay and bracket the ends of the street elevation. The piers have cast stone bases and circular cast stone caps. Like Corsicana's City Hall-Fire Station, Magnolia Park's civic building is faced on its street front with dark red brick. Its west and east side elevations as well as the north-facing rear elevation are faced with buff brick. The Magnolia Park City Hall and Fire Station has been expanded to the east. All windows and doors facing Avenue F have been replaced, although the sizes of the original openings have been preserved. Magnolia Park was a working class community. The location of the City Hall and Fire Station on the grounds of the Magnolia Park Gas Plant and Water Works, flanked by the Houston Belt & Terminal Railway tracks to the west and the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railway tracks to the east attested to the industrial economy of Magnolia Park.

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

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1917 City of Houston telephone directory archived in Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

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1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Houston, volume 6, sheet 637.

1920 census records for City of Magnolia Park, precinct #2, enumeration district 108, page 5.

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1932 City of Houston telephone directory.

1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Houston, volume 6, sheet 637.

McRae, Max "Fire Company 20" [http://www.maxmrae.com/early\\_companies/fsno20.htm](http://www.maxmrae.com/early_companies/fsno20.htm).

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Compiled by Union y Progreso, Inc. "Magnolia Park City Hall," unpublished manuscript archived in vertical files of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

Brochure of Parnell Intermediary Services Inc.

## **APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S**    **NA**    **S - satisfies**    **D - does not satisfy**    **NA - not applicable**

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Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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;

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(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. 33-224(b)).

**OR**

The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2));

**OR**

The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

**OR**

The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station at 7301 Avenue F.

## **HAHC and PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION**

Recommended to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Magnolia Park City Hall and Central Fire Station at 7301 Avenue F.



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**EXHIBIT A**  
**MAGNOLIA PARK CITY HALL AND CENTRAL FIRE STATION**  
**7301 AVENUE F**



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**EXHIBIT B**  
**SITE LOCATION MAP**  
MAGNOLIA PARK CITY HALL AND CENTRAL FIRE STATION  
7301 AVENUE F  
NOT TO SCALE

