

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Eller Wagon Works–Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building
OWNER: Caspian Enterprises Inc.
APPLICANT: Same as Owner
LOCATION: 101 Crawford Street

AGENDA ITEM: III.A
HPO FILE No: 12PL111
DATE ACCEPTED: Sep-5-2012
HAHC HEARING: Sep-20-2012

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 8, 9, 10, and 11, Block 106, Baker SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes two attached three-story brick warehouse buildings.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation for an existing Landmark

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

In 2009, City Council designated the Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building at 101 Crawford Street as a City of Houston Landmark. The property owner is now requesting Protected Landmark designation for the building.

The Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building is an historic three-story brick warehouse building in Houston’s Warehouse District on the east side of downtown. The Warehouse District, with its proximity to rail and shipping, developed mainly from the 1890s through the 1930s to accommodate Houston’s rapid economic expansion in those decades.

The Eller Wagon Works Building, at the southeast corner of Crawford and Commerce, was constructed in 1909 to manufacture horse-drawn wagons just as the automobile industry was getting under way. The brick building features deeply set, segmentally-arched windows and the original business name painted across the top. Frank Eller was a local blacksmith who, with his son Homer, had built a business building carriages and wagons. Eller Wagon Works occupied the building for only a few years before the Ellers moved to a new location on Walnut Street.

In 1920, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company acquired the building and added a second structure to the south side of the original Wagon Works Building. The newer building was designed by prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn, and features an exposed concrete frame and stylized neoclassical decoration. Pittsburgh Plate Glass was founded in Pittsburgh in 1883 and is still in business today as PPG Industries, an international manufacturer of glass and chemical products. Pittsburgh Plate Glass occupied the conjoined structures on Crawford Street until the mid-1950s.

The Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building qualifies for Protected Landmark Designation under Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building is an historic three-story brick warehouse building in Houston’s Warehouse District south of Buffalo Bayou east of Main Street. The Eller Wagon Works Building, located at the corner of Crawford and Commerce, was constructed in 1909 to manufacture horse-drawn wagons just as the automobile industry was getting under way. In 1920, Pittsburgh Plate Glass acquired the building and added a additional structure designed by Alfred C. Finn to the south side of the original Wagon Works building.

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Often referred to as the ‘Warehouse District,’ the area on the north and south sides of Buffalo Bayou and east of Main Street developed rapidly between the 1890s and 1930s as Houston grew from a small town into a major American city. As Houston grew as a commercial center, demand for commercial, warehouse, and industrial space increased near areas of good transportation. Shipping along Buffalo Bayou was Houston’s original means of transport, and numerous rail lines had been built nearby in the second half of the 19th century.

The area between Congress and Buffalo Bayou on the east side of Main Street first developed with residences, but began to evolve at the end of the nineteenth century as a light industrial area due to its proximity to the rail lines and shipping along the bayou. The north side of Buffalo Bayou in the Fifth Ward became known at the turn of the century as the ‘factory district,’ whereas areas east of Main and south of the bayou became known as the ‘wholesale district.’ However, this distinction was soon blurred, as wholesale companies located on north side, and factories, such as Eller Wagon Works, located on the south side.

At the turn of the century, many changes were occurring in Houston that affected industrial patterns and commercial development in the city. Population increased from 27,557 in 1890 to 44,633 in 1900. Electric street cars, introduced in Houston in 1891, came along with a significant expansion of electrical service, and a public sewer system, begun in 1892, was expanded to residential areas south and north of town during the 1890s. These utilities prompted the development of the city’s first electric power plant in 1898 and the first sewage treatment plant in 1901.

Two other events happened in the first two years of the 20th century that irrevocably altered the destiny of Houston. The storm of 1900 devastated Galveston, and left Houston without a rival in the transportation and industrial arenas. In January 1901, the discovery of oil at Spindletop radically altered Houston’s economy.

The first automobile arrived in Houston in 1901. Construction of new houses and businesses continued all over the city at a rapid pace, creating a demand for lumber, hardware, electrical and plumbing supplies, and new factories and warehouses to supply them. Despite the opening of the Houston Ship Channel in 1914 and a consequent shift eastward in industrial development, many companies still needed to be located near the rail depots and distribution points downtown, and most of the new transfer and storage companies continued to be built along railroad tracks in the Warehouse District. Trucking was also growing in importance, and large loading docks with ample parking room for trucks became an indispensable part of warehouse and industrial buildings.

Growth boomed throughout the 1920s when Houston became the largest city in the South. By 1930, Houston’s population was 292,352, almost seven times what it had been in 1900. Because of the oil industry, Houston was not as deeply affected by the Great Depression as other areas of the country, and construction of new buildings continued in the Warehouse District. After World War II, however, growth patterns changed as the railroads waned in importance, and industrial development dispersed through the city. Industrial architecture also changed, as industrial and warehouse buildings were more often constructed of pre-fabricated corrugated metal than of brick and concrete.

Eller Wagon Works

Frank Eller was listed as a local blacksmith as early as the 1892 city directory. He and his son Homer built a business building carriages and wagons. In year before moving into the new building at 101 Crawford, the Frank Eller Co., carriage manufacturers, blacksmiths, and horseshoers, was located at 501-503 Preston. According to their ad in the 1908-1909 directory, Frank Eller Co. not only

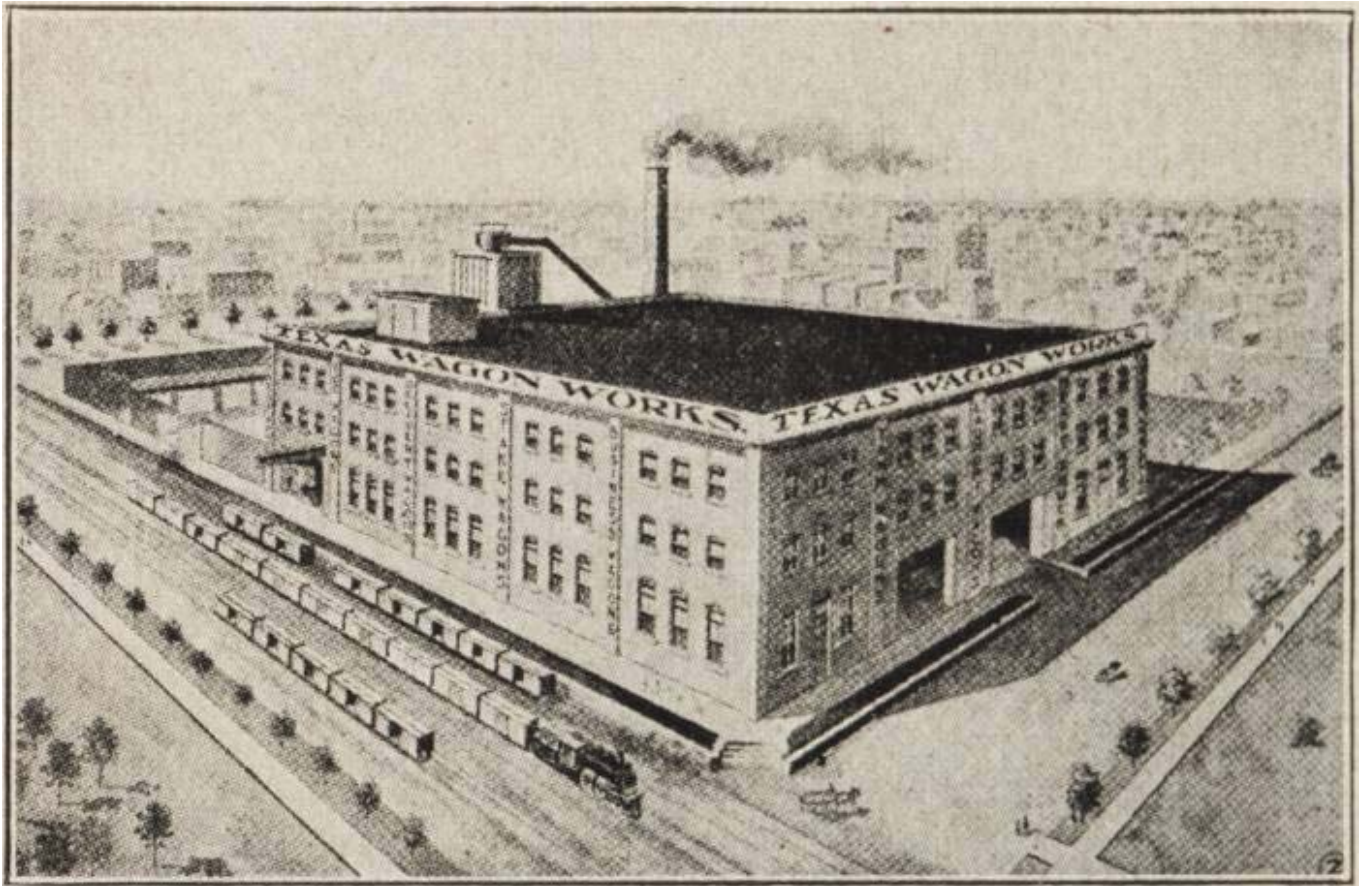
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manufactured all kinds of vehicles and carriages, but also did automobile painting and trimming as ‘a specialty.’ At the time, there were eleven carriagemakers, including Frank Eller Co., listed as doing business in the city of Houston.

Eller Wagon Works occupied its new building for only a few years. By 1913, Eller and Son had moved to a new location at 810-812 Walnut on the north side of Buffalo Bayou, and the Eller Wagon Works Building was now occupied by Texas Wagon Works. A sketch of the building showing the new tenant’s name appeared in a publication of the time, ‘Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Greater Houston’:



According to ‘Pen and Sunlight Sketches,’ Texas Wagon Works was a manufacturer of “highgrade business wagons, medium delivery wagons, laundry and parcel wagons, grain wagons, trucks and trimmings of all kinds. They have a complete automobile repair department and do all kinds of carriage painting.” Frank Eller & Son, now at 812 Walnut Street, was also included in the publication: “One of the most important enterprises in Houston is the wagon manufacturing plant of Frank Eller & Son, 812 Walnut street. They make a specialty of the manufacture and sale of mill, feed, laundry, parcel delivery, grocery, butcher, bakery and dairy wagons, heavy trucks and of the painting, trimming and repairing of automobiles and carriages. The strength and durability of the vehicles turned out by this company are unexcelled, while as constant advertisements of the firms employing them no better medium can be found, fixing the attention, as they do, of every lover of the artistic in vehicles in the crowded thoroughfares through which they pass.”

By 1919, Texas Wagon Works had found a new location at 4514-16 Harrisburg Boulevard, and were now listed as manufacturers of ‘Auto Truck Bodies and Trailers’ in that year’s directory. Frank Eller

had died in 1918, and his son, Homer, was now in business as H.C. Eller Body Co. at 310 Caroline, and like Texas Wagon Works, was listed as an auto body builder and repairer.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company

The new occupant of 101-107 Crawford was a company named the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. The company's ad in the 1919 Directory advertised the company as the successor of the Texas Glass and Paint Co. (previously located on 1719 Commerce at the corner of Chenevert), and as a wholesale and retail merchant of 'Plate and Window Glass, Art Glass and Mirrors, Paints, Varnishes, Brushes, Oils Turpentine, Dry Colors, Roofing, Wall Board.' The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company was founded in 1883 near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and became the first commercially successful producer in the United States of high-quality, thick flat glass using the plate process. In 1898, the company developed a process for producing thinner glass, and by century-end, its plate glass production capacity reached more than 20 million square feet annually, far exceeding that of any U.S. competitor. In the early 1900s, Pittsburgh Plate Glass acquired the Patton Paint Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, its first step into diversifying its business into paints, coatings, and chemical products. The company also became one of the first U.S. firms to expand operations to Europe, when it acquired a glass plant in Belgium. In 1968, Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company officially changed its name to PPG Industries, Inc., to reflect the diversification of its business. Today, the company is an international manufacturer of glass and chemical products, and has manufacturing facilities and affiliates in over 20 countries. PPG is headquartered in downtown Pittsburgh at PPG Place, an office and retail complex designed by renowned architect Philip Johnson and known for its striking glass facade.

In 1920, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building was constructed as an expansion of the Eller Wagon Works Building. The new building contained offices and sales rooms and was designed by the architect Alfred C. Finn, who designed many significant commercial buildings in Houston. Many of Finn's buildings are distinguished by decorative cartouches like those displayed on this building – a 'trademark' of Finn's office thought to be the work of H. Jordan Mackenzie, an architect in Finn's office. Finn also designed a large Pittsburgh Plate Glass paint manufacturing plant on the Crosby-Liberty road in 1940. From the 1920s to the late 1940s, Alfred C. Finn was the busiest and best-known architect practicing in Houston. The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building is significant in the Warehouse District as the work of a distinguished architect, an example of a typical 1920s exposed concrete frame building, and because of its association with a nationally well-known company. The building maintains its essential architectural characteristics and is identifiable as a 1920s industrial/commercial type building. The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company was to occupy the building the two attached buildings on Crawford Street until the mid-1950s.

In the late 1990s, the building was converted into artist lofts, offices, and apartments without appropriate permits. The building made news in 2003 when the City ordered the tenants out of the building until certain building and fire code violations were corrected by the then-owner. In early 2004, the current owner purchased the buildings and undertook a complete restoration. The buildings now house offices, studios, and loft spaces.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Built in 1909, the Eller Wagon Works is a three-story flat-roofed brown-brick Victorian commercial building with deeply set, segmentally arched two-over-two wood-frame sash windows, with taller windows located on the ground level. Five bays along Commerce, each containing three windows, are delineated vertically by raised brick 'piers.' The Crawford Street façade features four similar bays. The

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cornice line is also defined by raised brickwork, and the words ‘Eller Wagon Works’ are painted at the roofline (this is original but has been restored).

Contiguous with the Eller Wagon Works Building is the three-story Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building, added in 1920 when the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company took over the Wagon Works Building. Designed by Houston architect, Alfred C. Finn, the building features an exposed concrete frame and brick curtain walls. Bays in the two upper stories are filled almost entirely with windows on the Crawford Street façade. On the south side elevation, third- and first-story windows have been filled in with brick, leaving windows on the second-story only. A pair of stylized neo-classical cartouches decorates the cornice line on the main façade.

The Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building was renovated in 2004 by the current owner and each building maintains its original appearance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Environmental Site Assessment, GEO Environmental Consultants, Inc. Sept 25, 1996, Oct 15, 1999 update.

“Historic Resources Inventory, Warehouse District, Houston, Harris County,” Volumes 1-4, prepared by Preservation Services, for City of Houston Dept Planning and Development, August 31, 1991.

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<http://scholarship.rice.edu/jsp/xml/1911/20752/1/wrcPenHo.tei.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PPG_Industries

http://www.houstonarchitecture.info/Building/2288/Wagon_Works_Building.php

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, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

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	NA - not applicable
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Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |

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- (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. 33-224(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 Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building at 101 Crawford Street.

HAHC ACTION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Eller Wagon Works-Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building at 101 Crawford Street.

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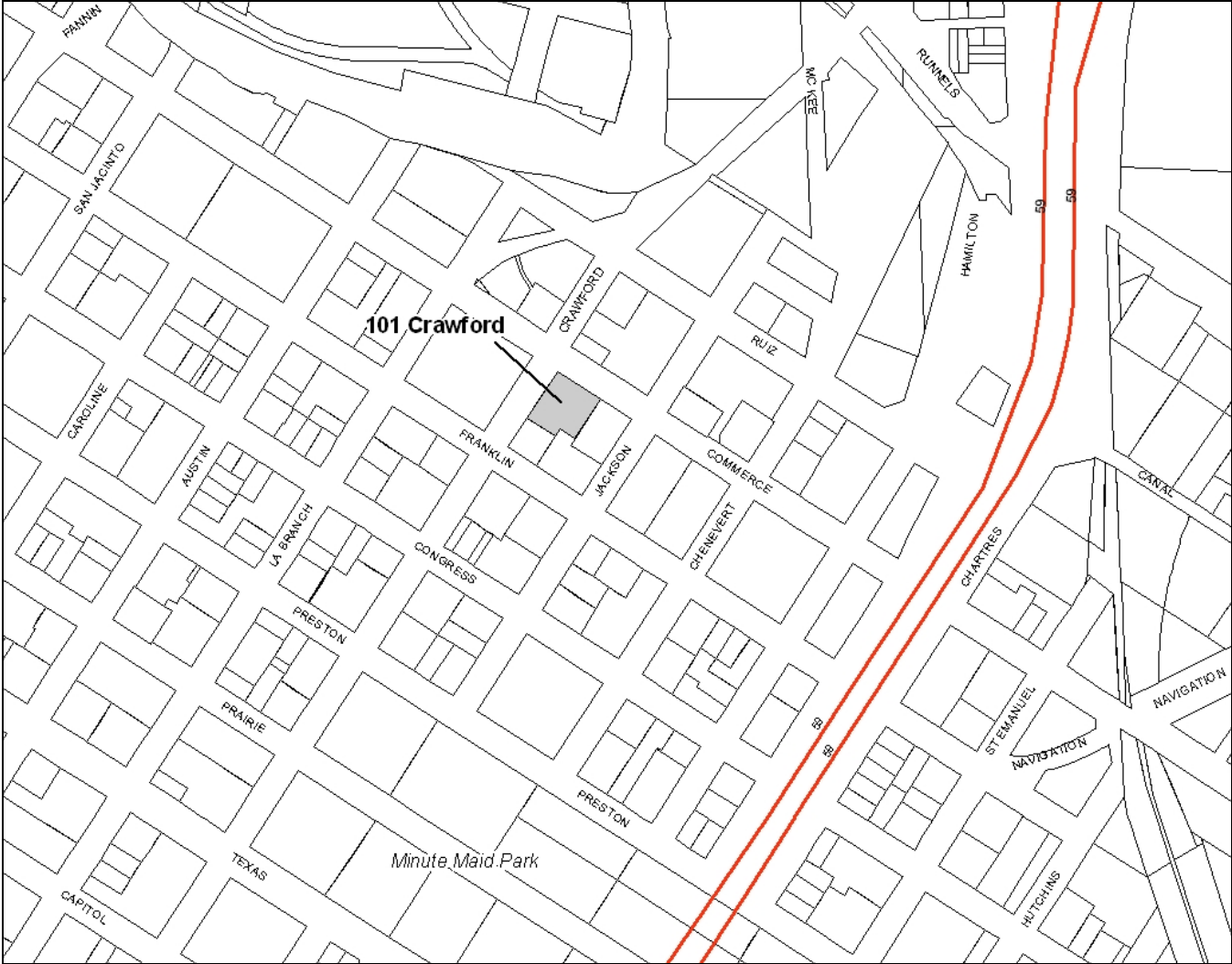
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ELLER WAGON WORKS-PITTSBURGH PLATE GLASS BUILDING
101 CRAWFORD STREET



SITE LOCATION MAP
ELLER WAGON WORKS-PITTSBURGH PLATE GLASS BUILDING
101 CRAWFORD STREET
NOT TO SCALE



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1924 SANBORN INSURANCE COMPANY MAP

