

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Weingarten House
OWNER: Darryl Schroeder 2011 Family Trust
APPLICANT: David Bucek
LOCATION: 4000 South MacGregor Way – Riverside Terrace

AGENDA ITEM: C
HPO FILE NO.: 15L304
DATE ACCEPTED: Jan-19-2015
HAHC HEARING DATE: Feb-26-2015

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 4 & 5 & Tract 3B Block 60, Riverside Terrace Section 12, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story brick clad French Eclectic style single-family residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Weingarten House, designed by architect Joseph Finger for the family of grocery chain magnate Joe Weingarten, is both architecturally and historically significant. Joe Weingarten (1884-1967) was successively the founder, president, and chairman of the board of J. Weingarten, Inc., a grocery retailing firm. By the mid-sixties, Weingarten's had 63 stores in three states, most of them on the Gulf Coast.

In the 1930s, wealthy Jewish families excluded from River Oaks built homes in Riverside Terrace to rival those of River Oaks. Completed in 1939, the Weingarten House is a large gracefully designed 1930s French manorial-style suburban chateau.¹ It combines asymmetric massing with detail borrowed from eighteenth century French architecture. Situated on a beautifully landscaped estate overlooking the MacGregor Parkway, which joins Hermann Park with MacGregor Park, the Weingarten House was the grandest house to be built in the southern section of Riverside Terrace.²

Architect Joseph Finger (1887-1953) was best known for his exuberant modernistic designs, which reflected "balanced elegance and structural integrity." As the city's foremost Jewish architect from the 1910s through the 1940s, Finger designed many Jewish institutional buildings, as well as buildings for individual Jewish clients. Although known primarily for his large institutional, industrial, and commercial projects, such as Temple Beth Israel, the Houston Turn-Verein, and Houston's City Hall, Finger designed a number of large houses in Riverside Terrace, Boulevard Oaks and River Oaks during his forty year career.

The Weingarten House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Landmark designation of Section 33-224 of the Houston Historic Preservation Ordinance.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Joe Weingarten

The Weingarten House was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Joe Weingarten. Joe Weingarten (1884-1967) was successively the founder, president and chairman of the board of J. Weingarten, Inc., a

¹ Fox, Stephen, *AIA Houston Architectural Guide*, Third ed. (Houston: American Institute of Architects, 2012, p. 289).

² House for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Weingarten, (*Houston Architectural Survey*, Volume Two, 1980, P. 495).

CITY OF HOUSTON

grocery retailing firm. Weingarten was born in Galicia, Poland, but came to Texas at an early age with his parents Mr. and Mrs. Harris Weingarten in the late 1880s.⁴ He was educated in Richmond and Houston, Texas, public schools and in 1902 began a grocery store in downtown Houston with his father. Weingarten was later joined in business by his two brothers, Abe and Sol. During the 1920s Weingarten, Inc. began a program of suburban expansion, and Joseph Finger was retained to design all their new stores. Joe Weingarten is “generally credited with revolutionizing the self-serve supermarket concept in the nation.” He “pioneered the idea of a store with groceries, produce, meat department, delicatessen, bakery, drugs, cigars and candy, all under the same roof.” When his competitors were thinking of building a 4000 to 5000 square foot store, Weingarten was thinking in terms of 30,000 to 40,000 square feet. Weingarten’s, whose slogan was “Better food for less,” appealed to both rich and poor alike.⁵ By the mid-sixties, Weingarten’s had 63 stores in three states, most of them on the Gulf Coast.

Joe Weingarten and his wife, Malvina Kessler, resided at 4000 MacGregor until the mid-1960s. Until 1968, it was occupied by their son, Bernard Weingarten. The second owners were Mr. and Mrs. George Lavninghousez. In 2012, the Weingarten House was purchased by Darryl and Lori Schroeder.

Joseph Finger

The Weingarten House was designed by Joseph Finger (1887-1953). Joseph Finger was an Austrian immigrant who came to the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. He was born March 7, 1887, in Bielitz, Austria, and received his early training at the Royal Institute of Technology in Vienna, Austria. He came to the United States in 1905 and served as a junior draftsman for several architectural firms in New Orleans before coming to Houston. After working with the firm of C.D. Hill and Company, he became a junior partner in the Green and Finger firm in Houston in 1912. He practiced briefly with Lewis Sterling Green and then with James Ruskin Bailey until 1919.⁶ From 1920 to 1923 Finger practiced with Lamar Q. Cato. From 1923 to 1944, during the time period the Weingarten House was designed and built, Finger practiced under his own name. From 1944 until his death, Finger was in partnership with George W. Rustay.

Although known primarily for his large institutional, industrial, and commercial projects, such as Temple Beth Israel, the Houston Turn-Verein, and Houston’s City Hall, Finger designed a number of large houses in Riverside Terrace, Boulevard Oaks and River Oaks, during his forty year career. In the Riverside Terrace area, these included the McCall house, the Graves house, and the West house north of Braes Bayou, and the Turner and Battlestein house south of the bayou. The year that construction began on the Weingarten House, Finger completed a large house nearby for Joe’s brother Abe. At the time the Joe Weingarten House was built, Finger’s chief designer was Roy W. Leibsle.⁷ Additionally, according to a landscape plan, dated May 10, 1937, found in the study of the Weingarten House, the gardens were designed by Herbert Skogland, Landscape architect & Engineer of Houston.⁸

⁴ “Connally will speak – Dinner to honor Joe Weingarten,” *Houston, Post*, March 20, 1966.

⁵ Zarko Franks, “Weingarten borrowed for dream, now store sales top \$164 million,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 7, 1965.

⁶ Obit, “Joseph Finger, Architect, Dies at 65,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 6, 1953.

⁷ House for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Weingarten, (*Houston Architectural Survey*, Volume Two, 1980, P. 495-497).

⁸ Landscape Development Plan for Mrs. And Mrs. Joe Weingarten, Herbert Skogland Landscape Architect & Engineer Houston, Texas, September 19, 1937.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Finger was best known for his exuberant modernistic designs, which reflected “balanced elegance and structural integrity.”⁹ He was responsible for the American National Insurance Company Building in Galveston (1913, demolished); the Ricou-Brewster Building in Shreveport, Louisiana (1924, with Seymour Van Os); the DeGeorge (1913), Plaza (1925), Ben Milam (1925), Auditorium (1926), and Texas State hotels in Houston (1929); the Vaughn Hotel, Port Arthur (1929); the Charlton Hotel, Lake Charles, Louisiana (1929); and the McCartney Hotel, Texarkana (1930). Finger also designed retail stores for Everitt-Buelow (1926, altered), Levy's (1930, altered), and Battelstein's (1923, 1936, 1950) in Houston, and numerous auto showrooms in Houston during the 1920s. He was architect of the Model Laundry, Galveston (ca. 1913); and the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company (1917), Texas Packing Company (1924), H. M. Tennison Manufacturing Company (1925), and Truscon Steel Company (1941) buildings in Houston.

As the city's foremost Jewish architect from the 1910s through the 1940s, Finger designed many Jewish institutional buildings, as well as buildings for individual Jewish clients. Among these were Congregation Beth Israel Temple (1925), Congregation Beth Israel Mausoleum (1935), and Congregation Beth Yeshurun Synagogue (1949), as well as the Concordia Club (1915, demolished) and the Wolff Memorial Home (1930, demolished).

During the 1930s Finger was responsible for such major public buildings as the Montgomery County Courthouse, Conroe (1935, alteration); Jefferson Davis Hospital (1937, with Alfred C. Finn); Houston City Hall (1939); and the Houston Municipal Airport Terminal and Hangar (1940). These included the Art Deco-style Houston Turn-Verein (1929, demolished), the A. C. Burton Company auto showroom (1929, demolished), and the Barker Brothers Studio (1930). Finger's office produced the Clarke and Courts printing plant (1936) and the Carnation Company creamery (1946-47, demolished) in the streamlined modernistic style.

Finger's public buildings of the 1930s and 1940s were also designed in the modernistic style. Among the prominent clients for whom Finger designed multiple buildings, for both personal and business use, were the industrialist Henry M. Tennison, the confectioner W. H. Irvin, the merchant Philip Battelstein and his sons, the grocer Joseph Weingarten and his brothers, and the oil operator James M. West and his sons and business associates.

Finger married Gertrude Levy of Houston on June 18, 1913. They were the parents of one son, Joseph Seifter Finger, a landscape architect and golf course designer. Finger was a member of the American Institute of Architects. He was also a member of Congregation Beth Israel, the Independent Order of B'nai Brith, the Houston Turn-Verein, the Westwood Country Club, Chamber of Commerce, and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Joseph Finger died on February 6, 1953, in Houston. He is buried in Beth Israel Mausoleum in Beth Israel Cemetery, Houston.

According to Stephen Fox, additional Joseph Finger works include:

- J. A. Platt House, 3311 Del Monte at River Oaks Boulevard.
- J. M. West, Jr., House, 1909 River Oaks Boulevard (demolished).
- Cohen Building, 2935-2925 Main Street (1925).
- Citizens State Bank Building (now Rockefellers), 3620 Washington Avenue (1925).

⁹ Jeffrey S. Kelly, “Finger on the pulse of the times – Immigrant guided Houston’s architectural course for more than two decades,” *Houston Post*, July 4, 1987, P 1E&2E.

- Lancaster Hotel (then Auditorium Hotel), 701 Texas Avenue (1926).
- Joseph Finger duplex, 120 Portland (1926).
- W.H. Irvin Home, 431 Bay Ridge Road (1928).
- Texas State Hotel, 720 Fannin Street (1929).
- Jim West country home, 3303 NASA Road 1 (1929).
- 2221 Rosedale Avenue (1929).
- Stephen F. Austin High School 1700 Dumble Street (1937) (with Briscoe, Sullivan and Sam Dixon, Jr.).
- 3612 Parkwood Drive (1938).
- Weingarten Home, 4000 South McGregor Way (1939).
- Parker Bros. & Co. Building, 5303 Navigation Boulevard (1939).
- Kelley Manufacturing Co. Building, Japhet Street (1939).
- 3615 Parkwood Drive (1940).
- Republic Steel Corporation Building, 501 North Greenwood Street (1941).

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Weingarten House is an adaptation of French manorial detail. The house faces north toward South MacGregor Way at MacGregor Parkway. The property occupies lots 4 and 5 in section 12 of Riverside Terrace, and includes a large, heavily landscaped site cut through on the west by a deep ravine. The floor plan is derived from a central rectangular block from which bays project on the north and south and from which a long wing extends on the east. The house is two stories tall and includes an attic. The exterior walls are constructed with brick veneer with wood framing. The exterior brickwork includes brick surrounds, brick string courses beneath sills of second story windows and brick corbelling at eaves. The roof composition includes a steeply pitched hipped roof over the main volume, with projecting bays at the east wing. Dormer windows provide natural daylight in the attic spaces. The roofs were originally clad with wood shingles, which still exist under the current aluminum roof shingles.

The principal entrance is composed of a segmented arched alcove on the north elevation of the central block, below the balconied and shuttered set of French doors. To the east projects a three-sided stair tower. The windows are composed of French doors on the ground floor of the east wing and casements above and in large segmentally arched opening to the west of the principal entrance. Two large windows, on the front façade, located midway between first and second floor levels articulate the presence of the principal and service stairs. Most windows are shuttered, but fixed.¹⁰ The Weingarten Home also featured automatic gas heat.¹¹

The Weingarten house was designed in 1937 and built in 1938-1939. Joseph Finger was the architect and James A. Roberts was the general contractor. The landscape architect was Herbert Skogland of Houston.

Since the late 1960s, few signs of maintenance are evident, apart from the currently installed aluminum shake roof, laid over the previously installed wood shake roofing. Significant deterioration has occurred to the lower wood framing, steel windows and brick veneer. Most of this damage has occurred as a result of improper flashing around the window openings, which allowed water into the brick veneer wall

¹⁰ House for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Weingarten, (*Houston Architectural Survey*, Volume Two, 1980, P. 494)

¹¹ "Weingarten Home has Automatic Gas Heat", (*Houston Post*, April 9, 1939).

CITY OF HOUSTON

cavity. Because no brick weeps were provided in the masonry veneer and the balloon framed wall framing is supported on the same 12” wide concrete foundation wall, without an offset, water accumulated inside the wall cavity.

Because the lower wood framing was repeatedly wet, significant wood rot occurred and the lower wood structure became inundated with termites. As a result, the 4x6 wood sills disintegrated, and the wall framing fell, severing the rusted brick ties, and the entire brick veneer requires re-attachment in most areas. Because the wall framing was balloon framed, and attached to the floor joists, a foundation company was recently able to raise the floor joist and the corresponding wood wall framing to re-insert new 4x6 treated wood sills as a repair. Extensive repairs are still required to correct the remaining conditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fox, Stephen, *AIA Houston Architectural Guide*, Third ed. (Houston: American Institute of Architects, 2012, p. 289)

House for Mr. and Mrs. Joe Weingarten, *Houston Architectural Survey*, Volume Two, 1980, P. 495-497)

Obit, “Joseph Finger, Architect, Dies at 65,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 6, 1953.

Landscape Development Plan for Mrs. And Mrs. Joe Weingarten, Herbert Skogland Landscape Architect & Engineer Houston, Texas, September 19, 1937.

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Zarko Franks, “Weingarten borrowed for dream, now store sales top \$164 million.” *Houston Chronicle*, November 7, 1965.

“Weingarten Home has Automatic Gas Heat,” *Houston Post*, April 9, 1939.

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

CITY OF HOUSTON

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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 | NA | | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| <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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. | | | |

AND

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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)). | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Weingarten House at 4000 South MacGregor Way.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Weingarten House at 4000 South MacGregor Way.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

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EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY



Current photo: North (front) Elevation

CITY OF HOUSTON

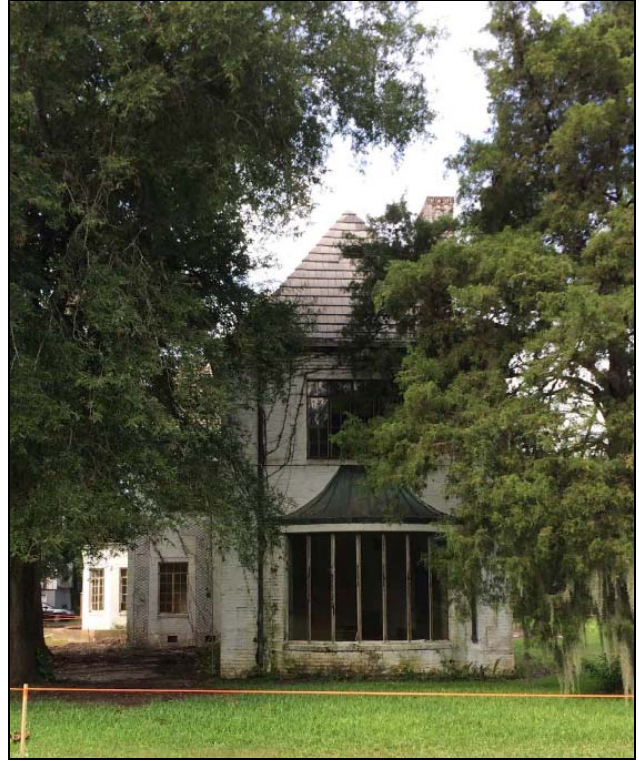
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Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY



West Elevation



East Elevation

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

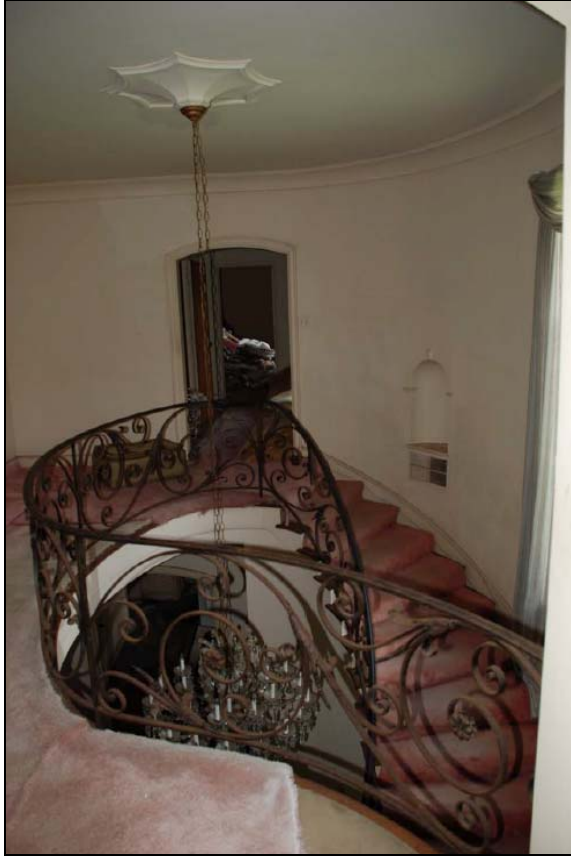
Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY



South (rear) Elevation

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY



Interior Stairs (Second Floor)



Interior Stairs (First Floor)

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS (CONTINUED)
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY

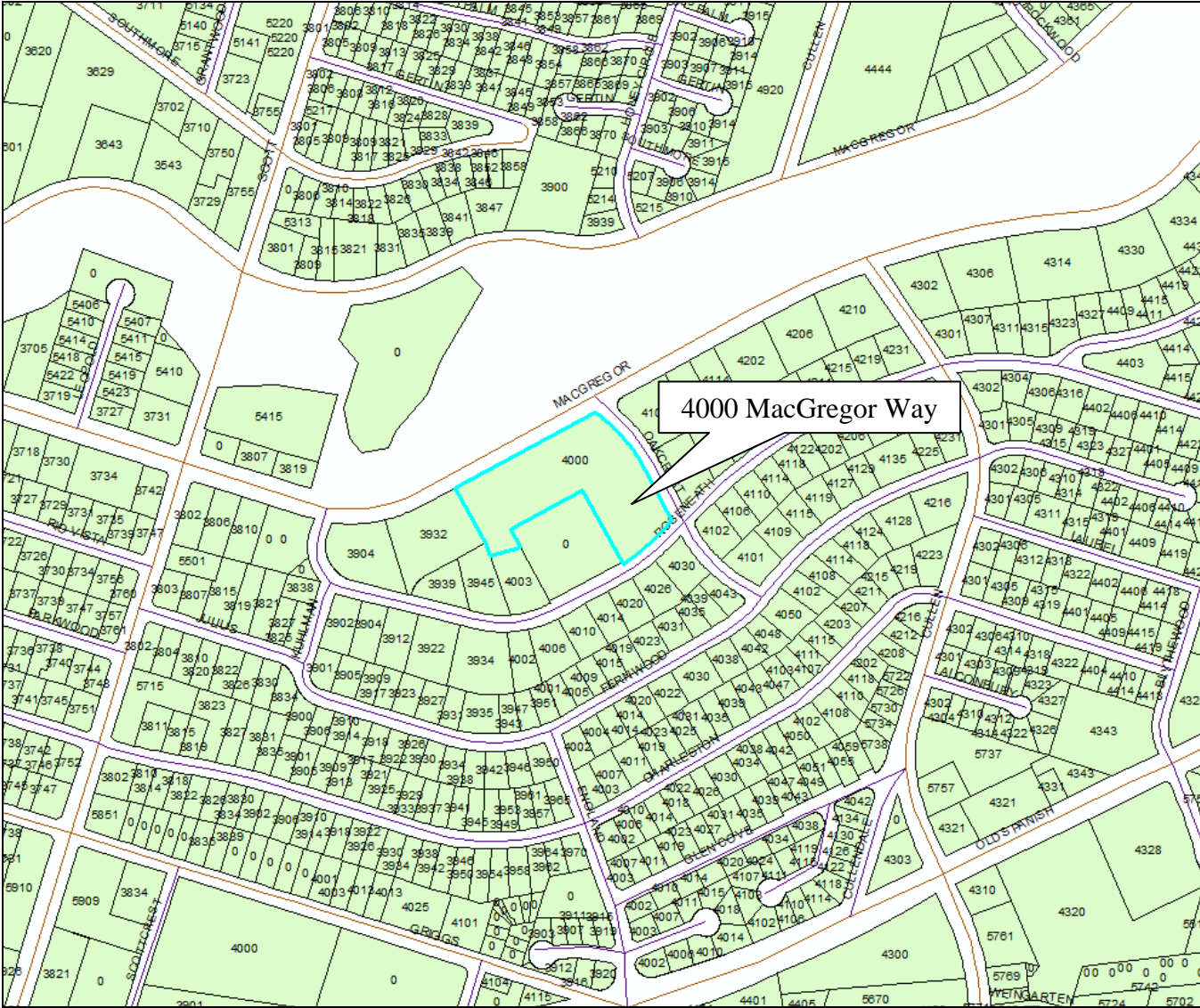


CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B SITE MAP THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE 4000 MACGREGOR WAY

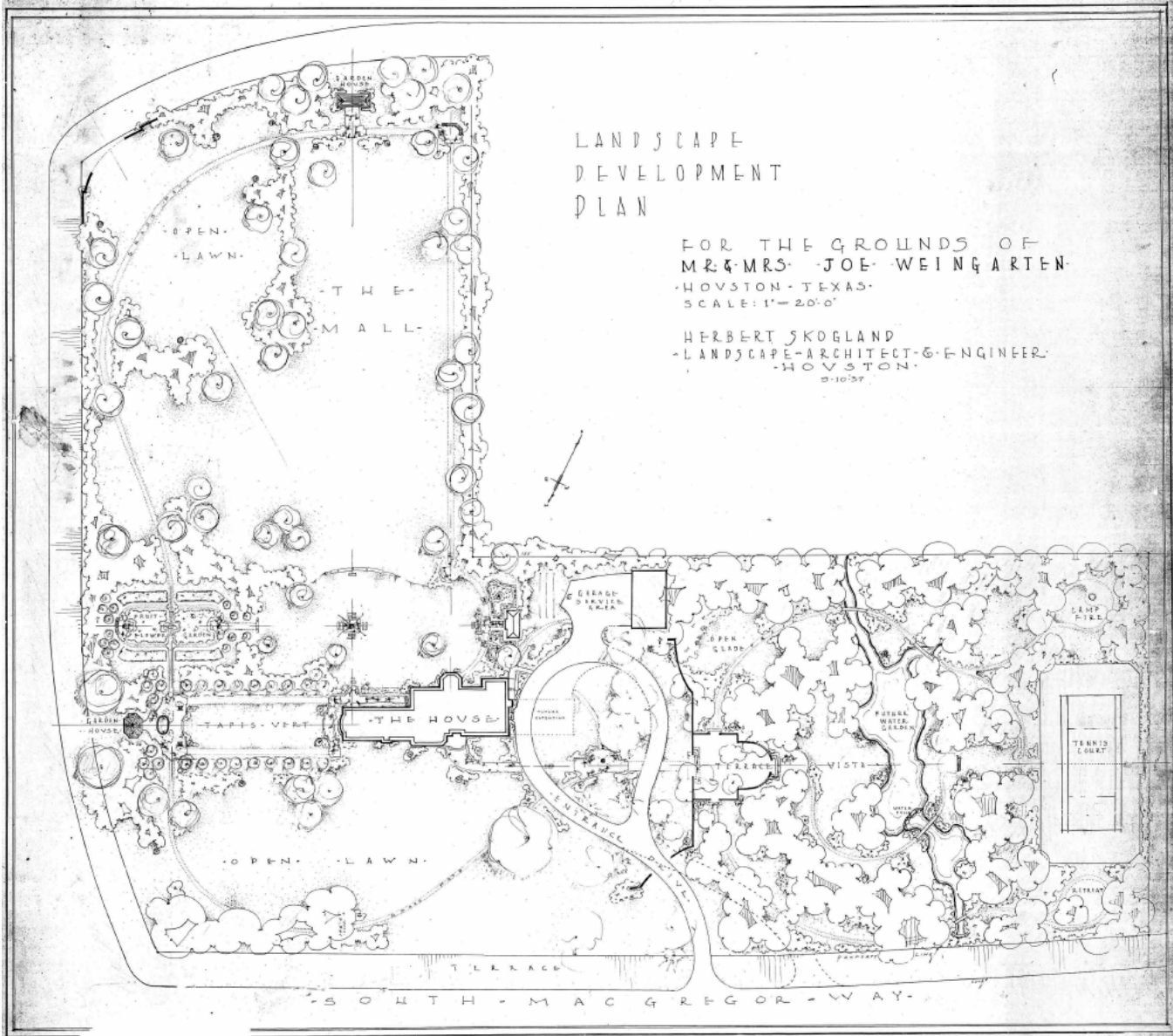


CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

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EXHIBIT D
ORIGINAL LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT PLAN
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT D
ELEVATION DRAWING
THE WEINGARTEN HOUSE
4000 MACGREGOR WAY

