

AGENDA ITEM: Ic

HPO File no. 091003

SITE NAME: Immanuel Lutheran Church

SITE LOCATION: 1448 Cortlandt Street AKA 306 E. 15th St – Houston Heights Historic District East

Owner: Immanuel Lutheran church

Applicant: Same

Time Frame	Date Accepted	90-day Waiver
	October-5-2009	Jan-3-2010

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 1,2,3,4, and 19-24 block 159 Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The half block site includes the original historic church building as well as several modern buildings which serve various church related functions. The building on the site which is the subject of the certificate of appropriateness is the historic 1932 cast stone and brick church.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:

The owner and applicant requests approval of a certificate of appropriateness for the following work:

- Demolition of the original 1932 church building;

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

At the time of the Houston Heights Historic District East survey, the historic church building constructed in 1932 was classified as "Contributing". The historic church building was constructed in 1932 in the Gothic Revival style. According to Architectural Historian Stephen Fox's description of this historic church building from the Houston Architectural Guide published in 1990 "This small church raised on a high basement, exhibits the hard edged planar interpretation of gothic architecture characteristic of the 1920's and '30's. It is handsomely finished and detailed...."

The property is contained within the boundary of the Houston Heights Historic District East. The Historic District is contained within the boundaries of Houston Heights, which was designated as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) on June 22, 1983 by the National Park Service. Houston Heights was designated as a MRA because it was at one time an independent municipality of less than 50,000 inhabitants (1896-1918), a requirement of the designation, and the area also contains a large number of buildings that have been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, another requirement. On April 10, 1991 in conjunction with the Houston Heights Centennial Celebration that year, Houston City Council designated the entire Houston Heights Subdivision as Houston Heights Historic District of the City of Houston (Resolution No. 91-15). The resolution proclaimed Houston Heights as "one of the first planned communities in the State of Texas ... the largest intact historic district in the city tangible evidence of Houston's architectural and historical legacy an area with great potential for enhancement and revitalization as a point of interest in the city." While that designation granted no powers or conferred no rights or privileges associated with the designation, it was the second of such resolutions passed by City Council to recognize neighborhoods in Houston for their historical and architectural significance to the city. The resolution designating Houston Heights had also been recommended to City Council by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) at the request of the Houston Heights Association (HHA). The action taken by City Council was also warranted as Houston Heights had been honored previously in 1988 when the Houston Heights Urban Main Street Project on West 19th Street was established by the Texas Historical Commission and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The program successfully achieved economic development and at the same time preserved the historic buildings which enhanced the success and made it unique. The Texas Historical Commission approved a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark (Subject Marker) for Houston Heights which was dedicated during the Centennial Celebration in 1991. Many other sites and buildings in Houston Heights have been designated as Recorded Texas Historical Landmarks as well. After the passage of the city's Historic Preservation

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Ordinance in 1995 by City Council, many buildings have been designated also as City of Houston Landmarks and Protected Landmarks.

Houston Heights was so well planned from its inception by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891, and as the result, it became very attractive to investors, and Houston Heights grew rapidly and eventually was incorporated as a city in 1896. It flourished as a distinct municipality until 1918 when the residents, by vote, agreed to be annexed to the City of Houston. The reason that the citizens of Houston Heights voted for the annexation to Houston was primarily to guarantee a broader tax base with which to support their public schools. Houston Heights voted "dry" in 1912, guaranteeing that alcohol may not be sold – an extremely unique ordinance adopted by Houston Heights and continuously enforced by the City of Houston. Houston Heights grew rapidly in the 20th century, but continued to maintain its unique identity, which was reflected in its original planning. Today the area still maintains the feeling of a distinctive, self contained “small town” with its predominantly small 19th century, one-story cottages and larger, two-story Victorian-era homes, and numerous early 20th century bungalow style buildings. It also boasts a thriving business district on 19th Street (now predominantly antique shops, retail and restaurants) and a large industrial district west of the business section. The neighborhood also contains the original city hall of Houston Heights (also the fire station and jail). Also located there are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, fraternal halls and schools.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR DEMOLITION:

Sec. 33-247. Same--Demolition of landmark, protected landmark, contributing structure, potentially contributing structure or within archaeological site.

(a) The issuance of a certificate of appropriateness for the demolition of a landmark, a contributing structure or a potentially contributing structure, or for demolition of a building, structure or object on or in an archaeological site shall be subject to the establishment by the applicant of an unreasonable economic hardship or the establishment of an unusual and compelling circumstance.

(1) Determination of an unreasonable economic hardship shall be based upon the following criteria:

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

(a) That the property is incapable of earning a reasonable return, without regard to whether the return is the most profitable return, including without limitation, whether the costs of maintenance or improvement of the property exceed its fair market value;

(b) That the property cannot be adapted for any other use, whether by the current owner, by a purchaser or by a lessee, that would result in a reasonable return; and **The historic building has been owned and maintained by the congregation since its construction in 1932. The building served as the original church sanctuary until it was replaced by a modern church building in 1961 located on an adjacent parcel at 1447 Arlington. The existing church building is a substantial well built building which could be used to house other church related activities or which could be sold to a party willing to restore the building. There are several examples of converted former church buildings in Houston which have been successfully adapted for secular uses. Among the local examples are the former church building at 1402 Harvard which was converted to a residence, the church building at 1658 Westheimer which was converted to a restaurant, a former church building located at 1404 Allston Street which has been converted to offices, and the former church building located at 1919 Decatur in the Old Sixth Ward which was converted to an architecture and design firm studio.**

(c) That efforts to find a purchaser or lessee interested in acquiring the property and preserving it have failed. **There have been no efforts to sell the property to a purchaser who would restore the building. The building has been owned by the same congregation since its construction in 1932. In the mid 1990’s an offer to purchase the building to restore it was tendered to**

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representatives from the congregation, but the offer was not accepted. It is unknown if there have been subsequent attempts to purchase the building.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Denial of the certificate of appropriateness as requested by the applicant.

**Site Location Map
Not to Scale**



Photo of Immanuel Lutheran Church

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