**PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

**LANDMARK NAME:** Freedmen’s Town Historic Rental Initiative Houses  
**AGENDA ITEM:** C.2

**OWNER:** Houston Housing Authority  
**HPO FILE NO:** 16PL135-16PL156

**APPLICANT:** Houston Housing Authority  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** 06-15-2016

**LOCATION:** Freedmen’s Town - Fourth Ward  
**HAHC HEARING:** 07-28-2016

**SITE INFORMATION:** 22 properties located in a four-square block area bound by Genesee, Robin, Bailey, and Ruthven Streets within the Freedmen’s Town Historic District. For detailed site information and location, see Exhibit A and Exhibit B.

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

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

The Houston Housing Authority’s 22 Freedmen’s Town Historic Rental Initiative Houses are located in the Freedmen’s Town section of the Fourth Ward, one of Houston’s oldest and most historic African American neighborhoods. The fledgling rural neighborhood was established by freed slaves after Emancipation in 1865 and by the 1930s Freedmen’s Town was a thriving and self-contained community. The architecture of Freedmen’s Town was characterized by one and two-story frame buildings densely packed together with minimal setbacks.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the neighborhood was crippled by its inability to expand geographically. San Felipe Courts, a “whites-only” public housing complex, eliminated land available to African Americans and the construction of Interstate 45 severed the ward’s connection to downtown. Coupled with the suburban flight of African Americans to other neighborhoods in the city, these changes resulted in the slow decline of the neighborhood, which was undermined further by lack of capital investment and urban renewal plans in the 1980s and 1990s.

The redevelopment of Allen Parkway Village in the 1990s sparked community activism with a focus on preservation and affordable housing in Fourth Ward. The redevelopment project included funds to acquire and renovate existing housing stock in Freedmen’s Town. As part of the Historic Rental Initiative, the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) renovated 27 historic houses and built 13 new in-fill housing units in a four-square block area the HHA had acquired. The 22 historic houses still owned by the HHA are the subject of this designation. Between 1985 (when Freedmen’s Town was listed in the National Register) and 2011, over 300 historic buildings were lost to modern development, a destructive pattern that has continued in the last five years. This great loss of historic fabric makes the preservation of these 22 houses even more important to the neighborhood.

The Houston Housing Authority’s 22 Freedmen’s Town Historic Rental Initiative Houses are visual reminders of the vernacular development and African American heritage of Fourth Ward. Each house is listed as “Contributing” in the Freedmen’s Town National Register District and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for Protected Landmark designation.
**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE**

_Early Settlement_

African American Houstonians often refer to Freedmen’s Town, or Fourth Ward, as the “mother-ward” because the origins of many African American churches, organizations, schools, and business are rooted there. Fourth Ward was one of four wards established by a City Charter in 1839. These wards, eventually numbering six, were originally established as political subdivisions. While this means of political delineation was abandoned in the early 1900s, the term “ward” today remains a geographic identifier for inner Houston neighborhoods. The earliest concentrations of African American settlements were on the fringes of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards. These wards provided a prime location for settlement because of their proximity to San Felipe Road (now W. Dallas) which provided a direct link between Houston and the Brazos River Plantations to the West. Commerce was enhanced in the late nineteenth-century by streetcar lines. One line moved west from downtown along San Felipe Road (now W. Dallas) and Robin Street to the city limit at Genesee Street. Another line followed Andrews Street to present day Wilson Street, where it turned north to join the Robin Street line. Remnants of these lines are still extant beneath more recent paving, and are clearly visible between the early twentieth-century bricks on Andrews and Wilson Streets.

Throughout early settlement, churches served as centers of spiritual, educational, social, and political life. Antioch Baptist Church, founded in 1866 by Reverend Henry “Jack” Yates (a former slave) is one of the oldest churches in the neighborhood. Reverend Yates was a powerful influence on the political, social, and cultural life of African Americans in Houston. The reverend was also instrumental in making Fourth Ward a center of African American education, allowing the Freedmen’s Bureau to establish a school at Antioch. He even played a prominent role in the founding of Houston Baptist Academy in Third Ward, as well as the founding of Bethel Baptist Church.

_Twentieth-Century Growth and Decline_

By the turn of the century, Freedmen’s Town was a thriving African American community and was the primary location for services offered by African American professionals. In 1910, a group of black physicians established Union Hospital, Houston’s first black hospital, on Andrews Street near San Felipe Road (now W. Dallas). Union Hospital was the predecessor of Houston Negro Hospital founded in 1923. By 1915, all but one of the black doctors and dentists in Houston, as well as 75 percent of the black lawyers, had offices in the Fourth Ward. Freedmen’s Town was also the location of the first African American high school in the city. Originally called Houston Colored High School, the school was later renamed to Booker T. Washington High School and remained the only African American high school in Houston until the mid-1920s. Booker T. Washington High School also housed the Carnegie Colored Library, built with funds secured from the Carnegie Corporation in 1913. Ernest O. Smith, principal of Booker T. Washington High School, was also a founder of Pilgrim Congregational Church in the Third Ward and later became the principal of Phyllis Wheatley High School in the Fifth Ward (the third high school built for African American students).
Church congregations continued to multiply, with 1925 Sanborn maps showing seven churches located in Fourth Ward: St. James Methodist Episcopal Church (now St. James United Methodist Church), Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, Mt. Carmel Colored Church (burned in 2009), Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, Christian Church, Tabernacle Church, and Pilgrim Congregational Church. Many of these congregations are still worshipping today.

By the 1930s, Freedmen's Town had its own commercial district, library, schools, professional baseball field, and numerous churches. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, the neighborhood was crippled by its inability to expand geographically. The onset of the Great Depression drastically reduced the rate of construction within the ward itself, and the construction of San Felipe Courts, a “whites-only” public housing complex, eliminated land available to African Americans. The construction of Interstate 45 severed the ward’s connection to downtown and Antioch Baptist Church. The new physical development coupled with the suburban flight of African Americans to other neighborhoods in the city, resulted in the slow decline of the once bustling neighborhood.

Fourth Ward Vernacular Architecture

The architecture of Freedmen’s Town was characterized by one and two-story frame buildings densely packed together with minimal setbacks. Most of the residences were small, one-story frame residences, with few two-story wood frame structures scattered throughout the easternmost blocks. Houses were built into long monotonous rows of tenements, duplexes, and shotguns. Shotgun houses were commonly used as infill between larger buildings or in the center of blocks. Most historic houses in the Fourth Ward appear to have been erected between 1890 and 1935, though exact dates of construction remain unknown. The first three decades of the twentieth-century were a time of rapid physical development, with the neighborhood consolidating and taking on its historic form. Between 1910 and 1930, the African American population in the ward grew from 6,366 to 11,502, despite the lack of available land area in the ward. The direct result was an increasing concentration of residents and housing. Many of these residences were raised as low to medium-cost speculative rental houses or apartments for African Americans, as evident in 1930 census records indicating that only 15 percent of black families owned their property at any one time.

Few frame cottages appear to have survived, but period maps indicate that a substantial number of somewhat larger T-plan and L-plan houses existed. These houses where characterized by their unique floorplans, as well as their asymmetrically placed porches, which were sometimes decorated with turned wood posts, jig-sawn trim, or dog-tooth gingerbread. In 1985, the National Register nomination noted the “remarkable homogeneity among the structures in the district,” deriving in large part from their singleness of purpose. Within the confines of the district, 93 percent of the buildings (530 out of 567) were identified as “Contributing.”

Modern Development and Community Preservation

Lack of capital investment and urban renewal plans of the 1980s and 1990s jeopardized the future and undermined the viability of the Fourth Ward as prosperous African American neighborhood. Plans to demolish and redevelop Allen Parkway Village began to take shape as early as the 1970s, but the economic decline of the mid-1980s delayed those plans. Allen Parkway Village was eventually redeveloped beginning in 1996. Several of the original buildings were torn down and wood frame townhouse style units were built on the property (now called Historic Oaks of Allen Parkway Village). The remaining historic buildings were rehabilitated and are still in use. The
redevelopment effort, funded in part with federal HOPE VI grant money from the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), reduced the number of units from 1,000 to 500. This initiative also involved the construction of 100-unit Victory Place Apartments on the corner of Cleveland and Wilson. The project also adopted a Historic Rental Initiative that rehabilitated 40 single and two-family properties, 22 of which are the subject of this designation.

The redevelopment of Allen Parkway Village sparked community activism with a focus on preservation and affordable housing in Fourth Ward. In June 1999, Houston’s City Council created the Fourth Ward Redevelopment Authority (FWRA), a non-profit local government corporation that administers the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Number Fourteen. FWRA programs support the development of affordable housing, the redevelopment of educational and park facilities, and support economic opportunity within the neighborhood. The FWRA also manages the Federal Reserve Bank’s pre-paid $15 million tax bill from the construction of its building in 2005. The FWRA is also a sponsor of the Fourth Ward Livable Centers Initiative, a project of the Houston-Galveston Area Council. The initiative includes plans oriented to improving access to the Fourth Ward neighborhood via enhanced public transportation, preserving the historic brick streets (Andrews and Wilson), creating a greenway on Matthews Street, and a placement of way-finding signs that guide individuals to historic sites.

The protections that are afforded with City of Houston Protected Landmark designation are greatly needed in this area, and are welcomed by the community. The Freedmen’s Town Historic Association is actively involved in the neighborhood’s preservation activities, including the Rutherford B.H Yates Museum. Their community activism spearheaded preservation efforts in the late 1970s, and culminated in the listing of Freedmen’s Town in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. In April 2005, seven Freedmen’s Town churches joined together to form the Freedmen’s Town Coalition of Pastoral Leaders. The coalition focusses on progressive leadership in matters of civic concern, and has also adopted the preservation of Freedmen’s Town as one of its missions. By 2011, over 300 historic buildings were lost to modern development, a pattern that has continued in the last five years.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

HOPE VI grant money from the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) included funds to acquire and renovate existing housing stock in Freedmen’s Town. In 1999, MCCM Architects was retained by the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) to substantially renovate 27 existing houses and design 13 new in-fill housing units in a four-square block area the HHA had acquired. The subject houses of this designation were all renovated and are now used in the Houston Housing Authority’s Historic Rental Initiative (established in 2003). The 22 houses feature many of the same architectural characteristics: pier and beam foundation, full or half-width porches, drop siding, wood windows, wood construction, and minimal setbacks. The MCCM Architects map for the project (see Exhibit B) indicated that several of the HHA properties were “relocated.” Further research and conversations with the architect revealed that “relocated” meant shifted on the lot in order to repair foundations and create uniform setbacks. For property photos and expanded architectural descriptions, see Exhibit C. For Sanborn maps of the four-square block area, see Exhibit D.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
“Coalition of Pastoral Leaders – Freedmen’s Town Houston.”
http://www.isocracytx.net/cpl/cplindex.html.

*Houston Chronicle*

Houston Housing Authority. “Housing Communities: Historic Rental Initiative.”


*New York Times*

Texas Historical Commission.


Texas State Historical Association. “The Handbook of Texas Online.”

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 Historic Preservation Office, 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:

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<td>Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-224(a):</td>
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<td>(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;</td>
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<td>(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;</td>
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<td>(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;</td>
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<td>(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;</td>
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<td>(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;</td>
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<td>(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;</td>
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<td>(7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;</td>
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<td>(8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.</td>
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<td>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).</td>
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OR
The property was built 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


HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Houston Housing Authority’s 22 Freedmen’s Town Historic Rental Initiative Houses.
# Exhibit A
HOUSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY PROTECTED LANDMARKS

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EXHIBIT B
SITE LOCATION MAP
(COURTESY OF MCCM ARCHITECTS)

LEGEND

- Structures to be Renovated
- Relocated Structures to be Renovated
- New Structures
1500 Andrews

1500 Andrews is a Greek revival one-story house with Queen Anne influences and a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 540 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood posts. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in cementitious siding. The property was renovated in 1999 and again in 2002. 1500 Andrews is not extant in the 1951 Sanborn map; however, similarities in style and construction indicate that the house was built within the period of significance and later relocated to the current lot.

1501 Andrews

1501 Andrews is a one-story Craftsman bungalow with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 1,036 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has
1502 ANDREWS

1502 Andrews is a Greek revival one-story house with Queen Anne influences and a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 540 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood columns. The residence has a shotgun floor plan and is clad in cementitious siding. The property was renovated in 2002 and again in 2004. 1500 Andrews is not extant in its current architectural form in the 1951 Sanborn map; however, similarities in style and construction indicate that the house was built within the period of significance and later relocated to the current lot.

1503 ANDREWS

1503 Andrews is a one-story Craftsman house with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 1,036 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and
an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a bungalow floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999 and again in 2004.

1504 Andrews

1504 Andrews is a one-story Craftsman house with a hipped roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 560 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood columns. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 2002. 1504 Andrews is not extant in the 1951 Sanborn map; however, similarities in style and construction indicate that the house was built within the period of significance and later relocated to the current lot.

1505 Andrews

1505 Andrews is a one-story Craftsman house with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 1,036 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and
an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a bungalow floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999 and again in 2004.

1505-A Andrews

1505-A Andrews is a one-story Craftsman house with a hipped roof built ca. 1925. It is approximately 762 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a bungalow floorplan and is clad in clapboard siding. The property was renovated in 1999 and again in 2004.

1507 Andrews

1507 Andrews is a one-story Craftsman house with a hipped roof built ca. 1907. It is approximately 560 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 4/4 wood sash windows and an
inset full-width porch with turned wood columns. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1509 ANDREWS

1509 Andrews (A & B) is a two-story Craftsman duplex with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 1,740 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with a brick pier and tapered box support on the first level, and a turned wood post on the second level. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1517 ANDREWS

1517 Andrews (A & B) is a one-story Craftsman duplex with a gable roof built ca. 1925. It is approximately 1,288 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with brick piers topped with replacement Arts and Crafts
style supports. The residence has a duplex floorplan and is clad in cementitious siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1518 Andrews

1518 Andrews is a two-story Colonial revival duplex with Craftsman influence built ca. 1930. The residence features a forward facing gable with a hipped roof. It is approximately 1,816 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers on the first level and turned wood posts on the second level. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 2002.

1603 Andrews

1603 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage built ca. 1925. The residence features a forward facing gable with hipped roof. It is approximately 743 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and a wrap-around porch with turned wood posts. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.
1604 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage with a gable roof built ca. 1925. It is approximately 616 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood posts. The porch features new spindlework and jig-sawn trim. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1606 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage with a gable roof built ca. 1925. It is approximately 616 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood posts. The porch features new spindlework and jig-sawn trim. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.
1607 Andrews

1607 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage built ca. 1925. The residence features a forward facing gable with a hipped roof. It is approximately 934 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with turned wood posts. The residence has an “L” floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1608 Andrews

1608 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage with a gable roof built ca. 1925. It is approximately 616 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset full-width porch with turned wood posts. The porch features new spindlework and jig-sawn trim. The residence has a rectangular floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.
1609 Andrews

1609 Andrews is a one-story Queen Anne cottage built ca. 1925. The residence features a forward facing gable with a hipped roof. It is approximately 902 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with turned wood posts. The residence has an “L” floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1309 Gillette

1309 Gillette is a one-story Craftsman house with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 792 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.
1310 Gillette

1310 Gillette is a one-story bungalow with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 460 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with turned wood posts. The residence has a bungalow floorplan and is clad in drop siding.

1313 Gillette

1313 Gillette is a one-story Craftsman house with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 792 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.
1315 GILLETTE

1315 Gillette is a one-story Craftsman house with a gable roof built ca. 1930. It is approximately 792 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 1/1 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with brick piers and tapered box supports. The residence has a shotgun floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.

1602 RUTHVEN

1602 Ruthven is a one-story Queen Anne cottage built ca. 1907. The house has a hipped roof with a front-facing gable. It is approximately 616 square feet with a pier and beam foundation. The residence has 2/2 wood sash windows and an inset half-width porch with turned wood posts. The residence has an “L” floorplan and is clad in drop siding. The property was renovated in 1999.