

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Sam Houston Hotel  
**OWNER:** Spire Historic Buildings, L. P.  
**APPLICANT:** Spire Realty Group, Inc.  
**LOCATION:** 1117 Prairie Avenue  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** April 19-2001

**AGENDA ITEM:** Ic  
**P.C.MEETING DATE:**06-14-01  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 01L96  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Mar-15-01  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:**05-24-01

### SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1 and 2, Block 46, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a ten-story, reinforced concrete, brick veneer hotel building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Sam Houston Hotel was constructed in 1924 and has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Sam Houston Hotel is one of the few remaining, representative examples of early high rise construction and hotel design in Houston. It was designed by the well-known, architectural firm of Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb. The hotel embodies the distinctive characteristics of high rise construction during the early twentieth century, as seen in the concrete frame and the attention to light and air, or "air-conditioning" that could be controlled by the individual patrons. The decorative cast stone and brick elements as well as the tripartite design (heavy base dominated by an expansive glass storefront, repetitive shaft and strong cornice) make the Sam Houston Hotel an excellent example of elements utilized in high rise construction at the time of its erection.

The Sam Houston Hotel also is significant in the area of community planning, development and social history. The building represents an important period of growth for downtown Houston, associated with rail travel and the "traveling salesman." The Sam Houston Hotel was built on "Hotel Row" when Houston experienced an episode of intensive growth and development. Continuing expansion of railroad connections, the discovery of oil and the construction of a deep-draught ship channel were factors in this development. The hotel is located east of the business district of Houston and only two blocks west of the old Union Train Station. The Sam Houston and other "Hotel Row" hotels, like the Ben Milam and the William Penn, were the result of the growth of downtown towards the east due to the increase in traffic between downtown and the train station.

The Sam Houston Hotel was named for General Sam Houston. Sam Houston, a famous Texan, played a very important role in the development of Texas and served as President of Texas as well as a Governor of Texas and Tennessee (the only man with the distinction of serving as governor of two different states). A portrait of Sam Houston graced the lobby for many years. The hotel was designed during a time of great growth in Houston. It was constructed for \$500,000 with an additional \$150,000 being spent on the site and another \$100,000 spent on furnishings. The hotel touted 200 rooms, each with its own bathroom and view. The hotel was designed with the most modern conveniences of that day. Excerpts from the October 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the 1924 *Houston Post-Dispatch* describe the hotel on the day of the opening ceremonies: "The Sam Houston hotel will be one of the best ventilated hotel structures in the State. Each door is being arranged with panels, which, with the ventilation in every hall, will afford a pleasant draft which may be regulated according to the desire of those who occupy rooms." It was placed on what is referred to as "Hotel Row," a row of hotels leading from the

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main train station to the heart of the city's downtown business district. The hotel's grand opening ceremony was quite an affair in Houston with more than 5,000 people turning out for the gala. Sam Houston's son, Colonel A. J. Houston, was the first man to register in the hotel's guest book.

The hotel's designer, the firm of Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick and Gottlieb, was founded in 1903 by Marshall R. Sanguinet and Carl G. Staats. Sanguinet, who was twelve years older than Staats, moved to Fort Worth in 1883 and practiced architecture there with a variety of partners until the turn of the century. Staats, a native New Yorker, moved to Texas in 1891 and worked for noted San Antonio architect, James Riely Gordon, until 1898 when he was hired by Sanguinet as a draftsman. Sanguinet and Staats headquartered in Fort Worth and rapidly developed one of the state's largest architectural practices. They produced buildings of all types from factories and large hotels to churches and schools. The firm is best known, however, for its contributions to the design of steel-framed skyscrapers. Almost every tall building constructed in Fort Worth before 1930, and for a time, the tallest structures in Beaumont, Houston, Midland, and San Antonio were designed by Sanguinet and Staats. The twenty-story Amicable Insurance Company Building in Waco, completed in 1911, was for a brief time the tallest building in the Southwest. Other prominent examples include the First National Bank Building, Houston (1905), the Flatiron Building, Fort Worth (1907), the Scarbrough Building, Austin (1910), the C. F. Carter Building, Houston (1919), the South Texas Building, San Antonio (1919), the Neil P. Anderson Building, Fort Worth (1920) and the Jackson Building, Jackson, Mississippi (1923). The firm designed in a variety of styles and forms that transformed the scale and style of the state's rapidly growing cities. In addition to large commercial buildings, Sanguinet and Staats also designed a number of large residences, especially on Pennsylvania Avenue in Fort Worth as well as houses in Courtland Place and Montrose.

Sanguinet and Staats was one of the first firms to use a large office team of architects, engineers, and other support people. The firm, which had branch offices in Dallas, Wichita Falls, San Antonio, Waco, and Houston was also among the first Texas architectural enterprises to have a statewide practice. In 1922 Wyatt C. Hedrick bought a partial interest in Sanguinet and Staats. The new practice was known as Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick, and the Houston branch operated as Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick, and Gottlieb, under the direction of R. D. Gottlieb, a limited partner. That arrangement lasted until 1926, when Sanguinet and Staats officially retired and sold their share of the firm to Hedrick. Thereafter, Hedrick continued the practice under his own name in Fort Worth and in limited partnerships in Houston and later Dallas.

The Sam Houston Hotel is located on the east side of downtown Houston at the corner of Prairie and San Jacinto. It occupies approximately 100' X 100' of the block. The ten-story hotel plus basement is constructed of reinforced concrete with a veneer of variegated brown brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern. The flat roof, which houses a water tank, mechanical room and elevator tower, is covered in modified bitumen. The main and most decorative facades of the hotel are the south and east ones. The historic storefront consisted of a series of plate glass windows and door openings with transom windows above for associated shops and lobby entrance. The second floor features windows that are topped with a chamfered arched cast stone panel of an urn surrounded by scrollwork, acanthus leaves and flora. Each window, with 4/1 lights, on this floor rests upon a cast stone sill course and is outlined by brick laid in a stack bond and a brick chamfered arch with a cast stone keystone and springers. A single row of soldier course (vertically laid running bond) bricks continues across the east and south facades linking each window. Above this course, the brick is laid in a subtle diamond pattern between the windows. The second and third floors are separated by a cast stone sill course. The windows on this floor and up to the ninth floor have cast stone sills and are outlined with brick laid so that the end is exposed, forming a frame around the window. The top or tenth floor windows rest upon another cast stone sill course. Brick laid in a double "X" pattern decorates the area between each window. This floor is topped with a cast stone frieze and cornice. The frieze is decorated with alternating urns, which echo the ones from the

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window panels and antefixes. The cornice contains a traditional egg and dart pattern. The parapet is subtly stepped and capped with cast stone. The original flagpole is still located on the southeast corner of the roof.

### RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The main alteration to the building is the storefront and removal of upper windows which exhibited 4/1 lights. Plans are to restore the original windows and storefront under the direction of the Texas Historical Commission as a Federal Tax Credit project. The applicant will also apply for a certificate of appropriateness from the HAHC.

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, 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 type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |               |                      |                     |
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- (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;
- (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.

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**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** NONE

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommends that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to City Council the landmark designation of the Sam Houston Hotel Building.

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SITE LOCATION MAP  
SAM HOUSTON HOTEL  
1117 PRAIRIE AVENUE  
NOT TO SCALE