CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission **Planning and Development Department**

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Isbell House
OWNER: Eric & Sandra Orzeck
APPLICANT: Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission
LOCATION: 639 Heights Blvd - Houston Heights MRA
HEARING NOTICE: Oct-13-06

AGENDA ITEM: III.n
HPO FILE NO.: 06L147
DATE ACCEPTED: N/A
HAHC HEARING DATE: Nov-16-06
P.C. MEETING DATE: Nov-30-06

SITE INFORMATION
Lots 3 & 4 and South 4 feet of Lot 2, Block 276, Houston Heights Subdivision (also shown as Lots 3 & 4 & Tract 2A, Block 276, Houston Heights Subdivision, on Harris County Appraisal District records), City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story, wood frame house.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:
The Isbell House was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 22, 1983. It is included within the boundaries of Houston Heights, which was designated as a Multiple Resource Area (MRA) by the National Register Program on June 22, 1983. Although the house is of an unusual design for the area, its principal significance is as the home of Robert Isbell, the fourth mayor of the Heights (1913-1914).

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:
This two-story frame house was constructed circa 1908 in an eclectic design with Bungalow influences. The gabled roof has a high-peaked separate gable on the front with a pair of windows on the second floor of the gable end. An inset porch wraps to the side. There are two single doors with transoms, and a brick chimney. On the second floor is a large finished room originally used for public meetings. An enclosed swimming pool is a more recent addition to the south side of the house.

The house is of an unusual design for the area, but its principal significance is as the home of Robert Isbell, the fourth mayor of the Heights (1913-1914). Isbell was an organizer of the South Texas Oilmen's Association, an officer in the Fidelity Cotton Oil and Fertilizer Company, and in 1914, he moved to Taft, Texas, as the manager of Taft Industries. His family returned to this house after his death in 1920.

Houston Heights was designated a MRA because it was at one time an independent municipality. Within its original boundaries are numerous historic buildings, many of which are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Houston Heights was developed by the Omaha and South Texas Land Company in 1891. It was incorporated as a city in 1896, and at that time, was the earliest and largest totally planned community in Texas. It flourished as a distinct municipality until the residents voted to be annexed by the City of Houston in 1918.

Today, the area still maintains the feeling of a distinctive, self-contained "small town" with its predominantly small 19th-century, one-story and 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 and restaurants) and a large industrial district west of the business section. Also located in the neighborhood are a number of historic churches, theatres, corner stores, private and public parks, municipal facilities, schools, the

Heights Branch Library, and the original Houston Heights City Hall and Fire Station building, both of which have been designated as Landmarks as well as Protected Landmarks of the City of Houston.

At the March 13, 1997 public hearing of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), the HAHC discussed the expiration of the two-year temporary designation of all landmarks that City Council had previously designated when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted on March 1, 1995. Since the designation had expired, the HAHC requested that the planning staff contact the owners of these landmarks to determine their interest in the HAHC initiating an application for permanent Landmark designation. Owners have been contacted on four occasions in the past and advised that the HAHC would initiate the designation of their buildings for them. Most recently, a letter from Mayor Bill White was sent certified on July 11, 2006 to each property owner of a National Register designated site in Houston Heights, once again encouraging the property owner to support the HAHC in initiating the designation of their historic building as a Landmark of the City of Houston. The letter asked that the property owner respond ONLY if they did not want the HAHC to initiate designation, and included a list of the benefits of designation. On August 24, 2006, the HAHC voted unanimously to initiate the designation of this building as a Landmark of the City of Houston, with the application for designation to be considered at the HAHC meeting on September 21, 2006.

The HAHC had previously instructed the planning staff that if any landmark had been designated by the National Register program (N.R.), as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL), a State Archaeological Site (SAL), or a temporary landmark of the City of Houston, then the application would be considered for permanent Landmark designation on that merit alone, because all of the required information has been filed to obtain status. Therefore, regarding the preparation of the application, HAHC agreed to consider the application with minimal information provided to them.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:
The building has not been altered inappropriately since the National Register designation and is maintained in a historic manner by the current owner.

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 - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

S	NA	
☑	☐	(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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission accept the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Isbell House at 639 Heights Blvd.

CITY OF HOUSTON

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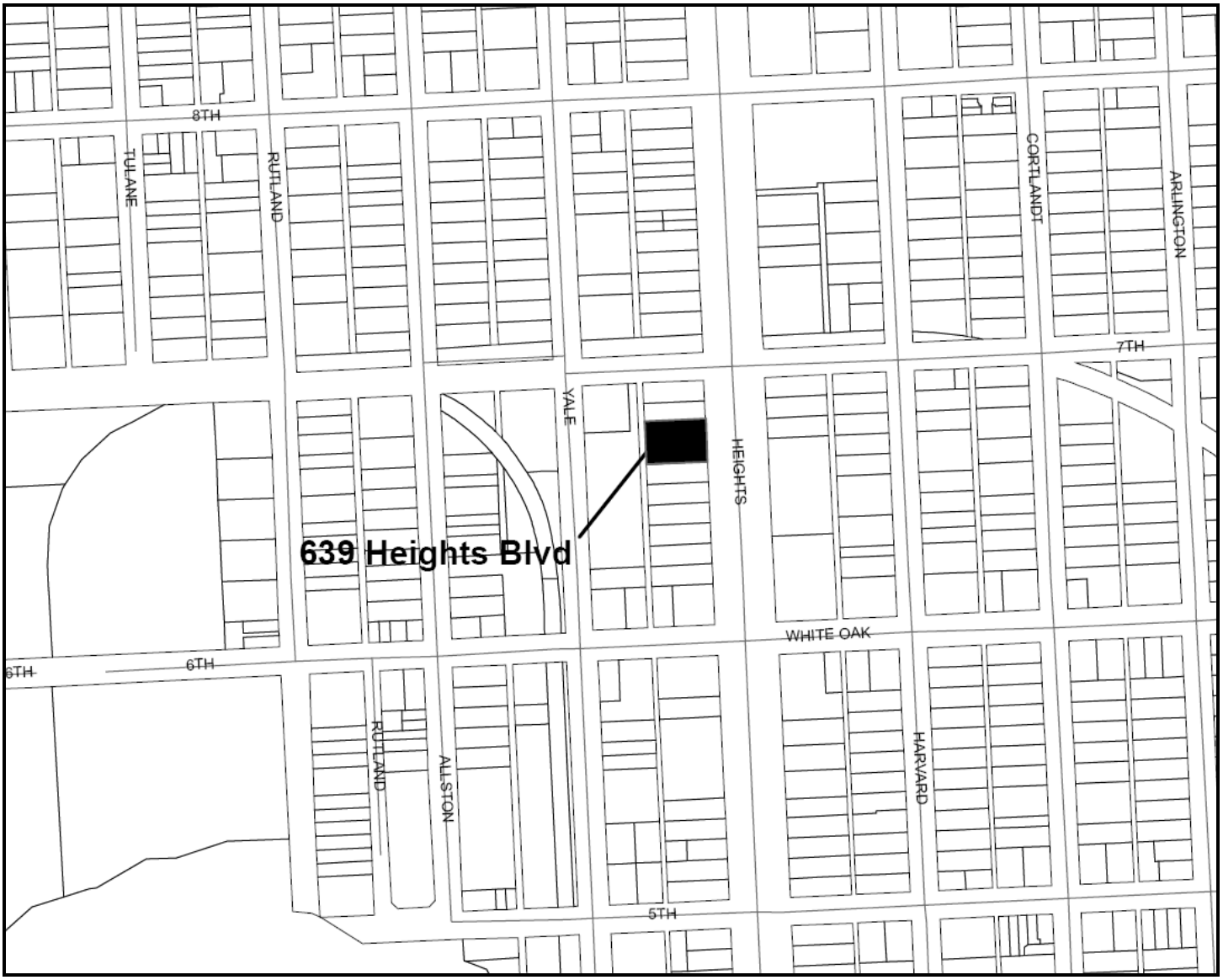
SITE LOCATION MAP
ISBELL HOUSE
639 HEIGHTS BLVD
NOT TO SCALE