

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Houston Heights Water Works  
**OWNER:** City of Houston  
**APPLICANT:** Same  
**LOCATION:** 449 W 19<sup>th</sup> Street – Houston Heights

**AGENDA ITEM:** D.3  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 15PL123  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Apr-4-2015  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** Apr-23-2015

**SITE INFORMATION** Lots 16 through 38, Tracts 13A, 14A, 15A, & 39A, Block 91, Houston Heights Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site contains a brick-clad concrete water reservoir built in 1928, a Pumping Building built in 1939, and a new Pumping Building built in 1949.

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

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Houston Heights Water Works at W 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Nicholson Street represents different periods in the history of the City's management of its water facilities from the late 1800s until present.

Established in 1892, Houston Heights was one of the earliest planned communities in Texas and Houston's first suburban community. The new town was designed with areas for residential, commercial and industrial activities. In 1892, the property at 19th and Nicholson Streets was selected for a new water pumping station because of its proximity to commercial, social, and industrial areas centered on 19th Street.

In 1893, the Houston Heights Electric Light and Water Works, as it was then known, became operational, and within a few years, a section of the property was developed into a community park. Over the years, new buildings were constructed and old buildings were removed, but the facility continued to provide water to the Houston Heights community for over 100 years.

The Houston Heights Water Works site contains three remaining historic structures that are the subject of this designation: a 1928 brick-clad concrete 750,000 gallon Water Reservoir with an unusual grass roof, which is listed in the National Register of Historical Places; an Art Deco-style Pumping Building built by the federal Work Project Administration in 1939; and a limestone-trimmed brick-clad Pumping Building built in 1949 in a modern industrial style.

The Houston Heights Water Works meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, and 5 for Protected Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

In 1887, the Omaha and South Texas Land Company, headed by Oscar Martin Carter, of Omaha, Nebraska, purchased land northwest of downtown Houston for a new town development. Daniel Denton Cooley was appointed trustee and given the responsibility of developing the tract. The development was named Houston Heights, and work began in 1892.

Houston Heights, appropriately named because of its higher elevation, was one of the earliest planned communities in Texas and Houston's first suburban community. Houston Heights was developed with attention to aesthetics with tree-lined boulevards and wide curbed avenues paved with shell. Daniel Cooley purchased a mule-drawn trolley system, which he converted to electrical power to ferry people

between Houston and Houston Heights. In order to attract people to the area, developers provided numerous amenities, including the new Water Works, with its Artesian well.

Within a few years, the 19th and Ashland Streets area became the center of commercial and social activity, with general merchandise stores, a saloon, and the Houston Heights Hotel. In 1892, this site was selected for the Houston Heights Electric Light and Water Works (the original name for the facility) because of its proximity to commercial, social, and industrial areas. The new electric trolley route ran along Heights Boulevard and 19th Street, in front of this site, then turned south at Railroad Street (Nicholson Street?) and looped back to Houston.

In 1893, the Houston Heights Electric Light and Water Works became operational. The facility included an impressive brick building with large arched windows, a deep artesian water well, and a 100 foot high iron water tank on the southwest corner of the property. By 1896, a portion of the Water Works site was developed into a community park. A summer theater, boasting a stage with electric foot lights, was located in the southeast corner of the property. The Houston Heights Hotel was in operation across Ashland Street. None of the original structures remain today.

Houston Heights was incorporated as a town in 1896. Between 1900 and 1910, the population of Houston Heights grew rapidly from 800 to 6000 residents. In 1918, the City of Houston annexed Houston Heights. Following the end of World War I, Houston experienced a boom period. It was during this period that the City of Houston constructed its first electric powered satellite water pumping stations. The annex of the Heights Pumping Station (as it was now called) was run by electricity since its construction in 1893.

By 1924, the original Houston Heights Electric Light and Water Works facility was demolished and replaced by tennis courts. A new water production facility was relocated to the northwest corner of the site. This new complex included a small Pumping Building, a 50,000 gallon concrete Settling Tank, and three on-site water wells. The remainder of the site continued to serve as a community park.

In 1928, a 750,000 gallon brick clad concrete Water Reservoir was constructed north of the Pumping Building. In 1939, the 1924 Pumping Building was demolished and a new Art Deco facility was constructed at the same location. This construction was funded by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era "Work Projects Administration," created to provide new jobs. In 1949, a larger Pumping Building was constructed to the south of the 1939 building. The 1939 Pumping Building became offices for City of Houston Water Production Department.

This plant has provided water for the residents of Houston Heights since 1893, and continued to operate in this same capacity until last year.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

Of the existing structures at the Houston Heights Water Works, the oldest is the 1928 brick clad concrete Water Reservoir, which is recorded in the National Register of Historical Places. The reservoir was constructed with the capacity to hold 750,000 gallons. The interior consists of reinforced concrete columns and beams. The roof is a concrete slab supported by concrete beams. Intermediate beams hold the perimeter concrete walls in place, aided by exposed reinforced concrete bands at the base and just below mid height. The exterior brick is non-structural veneer with corbeled brick patterns at the top of the walls and decorative brick panels at all four corners. A layer of earth is located over the roof slab.

During World War II, Water Department employees reportedly planted and maintained a “Victory Garden” on the roof.

The next oldest existing structure is the 1939 Pump Building. This is one of few examples of Art Deco architecture remaining in Houston. The building includes a steel frame structure, with interior clay tile walls, brick veneer exterior, and a style of steel windows which are no longer produced. Main features of the building are painted cast stone entrances and fascias with inset medallions at the top of the exterior walls. The original chain-operated crane hoist and rails are still in place and operational. The original steel doors and frames remain. This building was constructed as a Depression-era “Work Project Administration” project.

Constructed in 1949, the current Pump Building is the most recently constructed major building on site. This building is a typical example of the modern industrial style of that era, with clean straight lines, little ornamentation, large windows and open spaces. The building is trimmed with a rare grade of shell limestone. The roof drains are copper. Originally, the steel windows had tinted glass only on the bottom half, but in 1999, with the addition of air conditioning, tinted glass was installed throughout.

In 1996, the City of Houston recognized the historical significance of the Houston Heights Water Works (Heights Water Pumping Station), and made site improvements and repairs to the old Water Reservoir building.

*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 Department, 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:

**S NA**

**S - satisfies NA - not applicable**

Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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.

**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).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

**OR**

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- 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**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Houston Heights Water Works at 449 W 19<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **HAHC RECOMMENDATION**

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Houston Heights Water Works at 449 W 19<sup>th</sup> Street.

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## EXHIBIT A

### PHOTOS

HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS

449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET

### 1928 WATER RESERVOIR



**EXHIBIT A**

**PHOTOS**

HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS

449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET

**1939 PUMPING BUILDING**



## EXHIBIT A

### PHOTOS

HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS

449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET

### 1949 PUMPING BUILDING



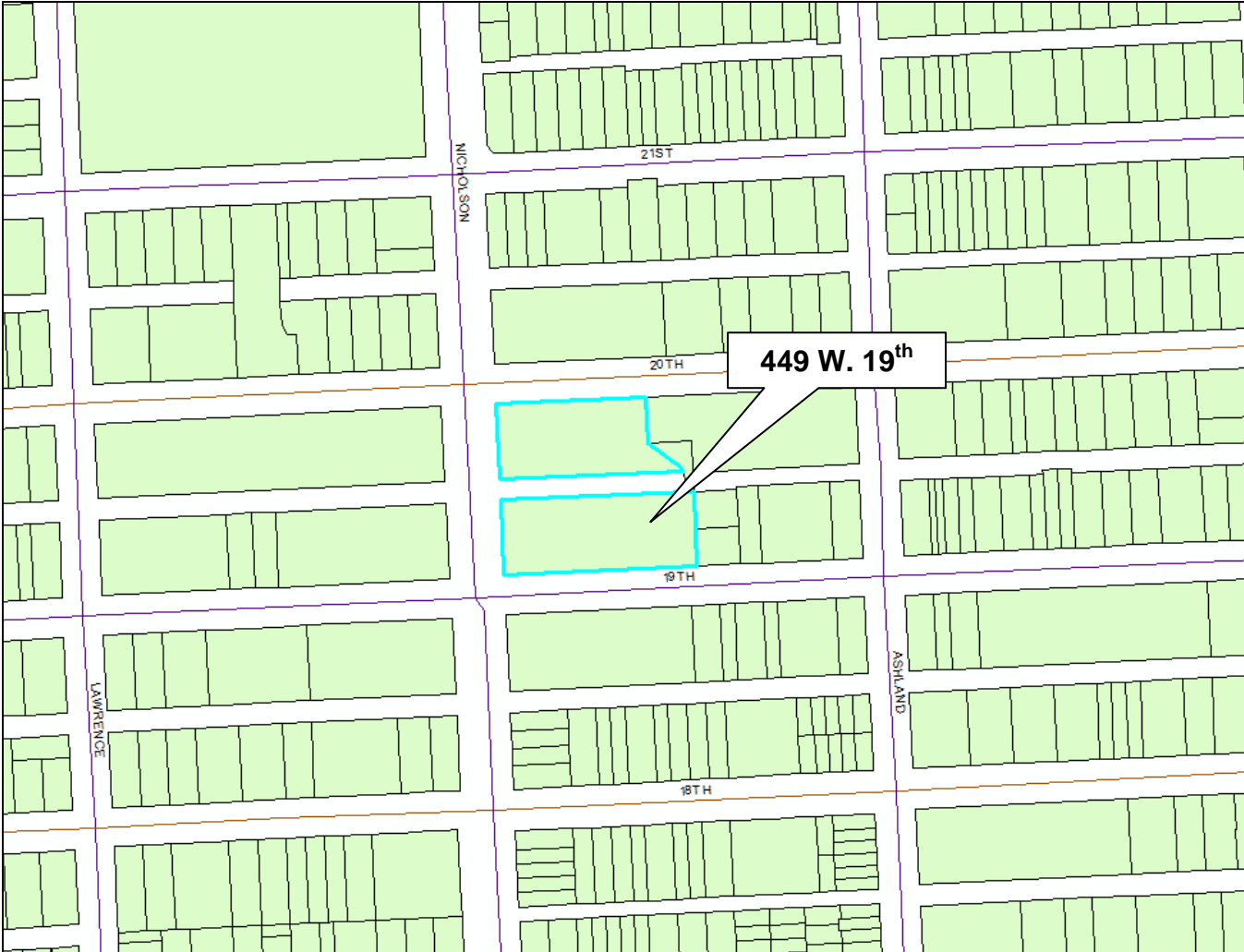


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**EXHIBIT B**  
**SITE MAP**  
HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS  
449 W 19TH STREET

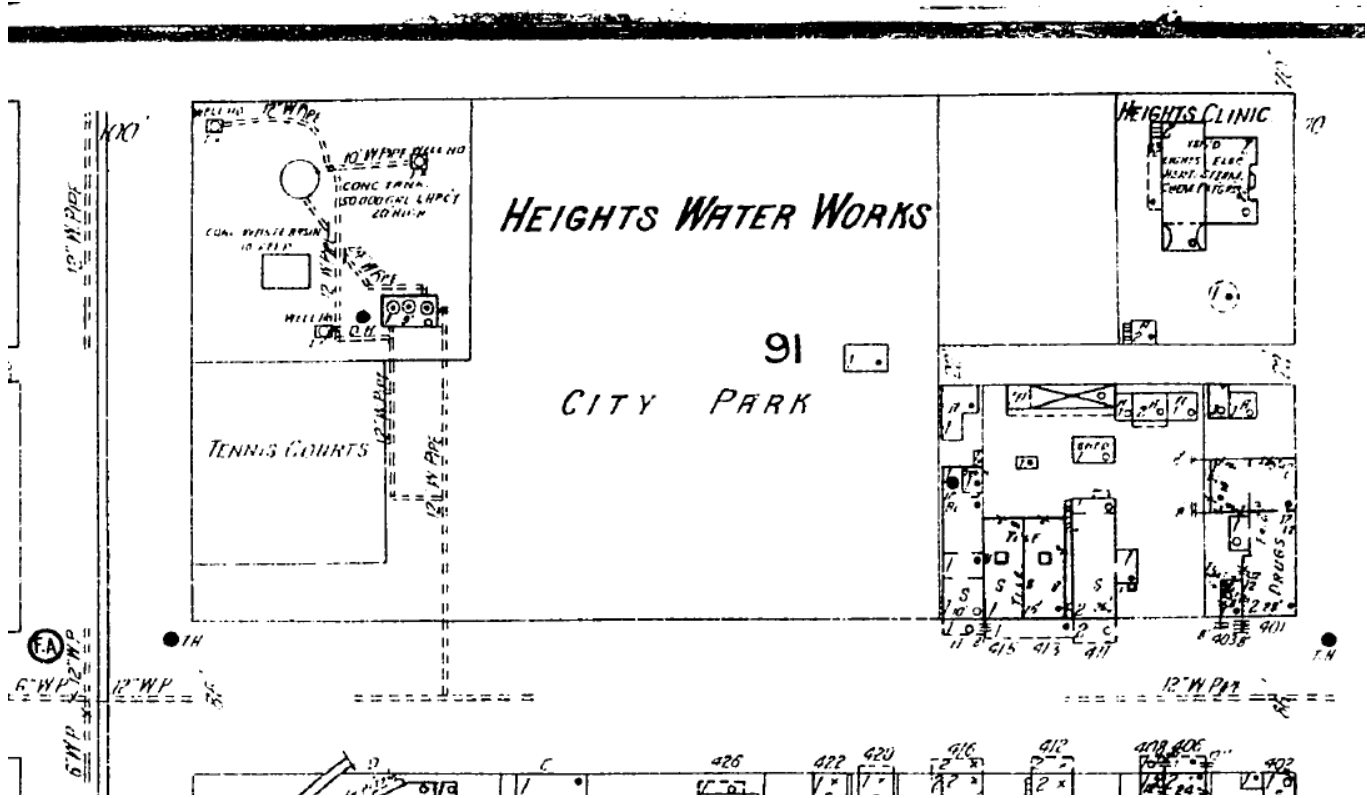


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EXHIBIT C  
SANBORN MAP, 1924  
HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS  
449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET

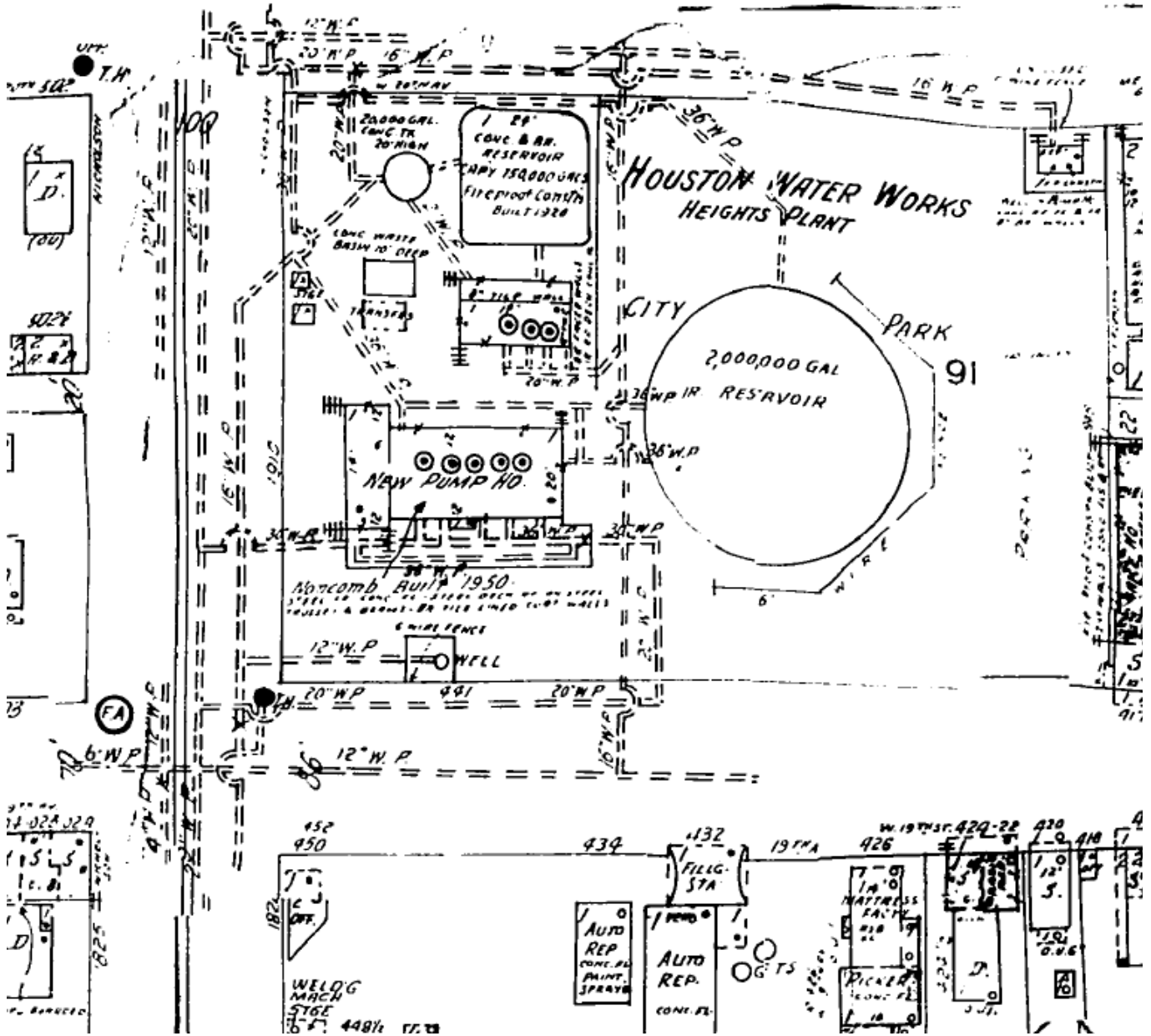


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## EXHIBIT C SANBORN MAP, 1924-1951 HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS 449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET



**EXHIBIT D**  
HOUSTON HEIGHTS WATER WORKS  
SITE LAYOUT  
449 W 19<sup>th</sup> STREET

