

10-23-96 To City Council 10-23-96
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LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building
OWNER: Harris County
APPLICANT: Q Ratio Texas, Inc.
LOCATION: 301 Main Street, Main Street/Market Square
Historic District
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: May-19-96

AGENDA ITEM: I
PC MEETING DATE: SEPT-19-96
HPO FILE NO.: 96L004
DATE ACCEPTED: May-06-96
HAHC HEARING DATE: Jun-20-96

SITE INFORMATION

N 1/2 of Lot 10, part of Lot 11, Block 32, SSBB, City of Houston. The Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building is located at the southeast corner of Main Street and Congress. The narrow three-story building is of brick construction with stucco finish. The Main Street facade features a corner turret, arched upper-floor windows, molded brickwork, and thick, flat "constructive" ornament.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building is the only remaining example of a Queen Anne style, commercial building with corner turret. It is also one of the two surviving Houston works of George E. Dickey, one of Houston's most prominent Victoria-era architects. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 20, 1974, under criterion "C" (reference #74002074) and was designated as a contributing building to the Main Street/Market Square Historic District which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 18, 1983 (boundary expanded and approved on February 23, 1984). The District constitutes Houston's largest, most nearly intact accumulation of physical resources representing the city's civic and commercial past. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development which occurred between Reconstruction and the building and real estate boom of the 1920s, the half century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States. Connected with many of these buildings and places are the personalities and institutions which were instrumental in promoting the city's political and commercial advancement. The Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building was also designated by the Texas Historical Commission as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1974 (reference DC 74 R1576 B).

The original building on the site, reconstructed after a fire in 1876 by William Van Alstyne, was a series of three story brick buildings fronting 75 feet on Main Street. In 1882 the corner section of the building was purchased by J. J. Sweeney and E. L. Coombs, who owned a jewelry store on the corner of Main and Preston about a block away. Mr. Sweeney had come to Houston about 1870 and later joined Mr. Coombs as a partner in the loan and jewelry business. Mr. Gus Fredericks joined them as another partner in 1889 when they commissioned George E. Dickey, a prominent Houston architect, to remodel the old Van Alstyne Building where they had relocated their business in 1890. Mr. Coombs served as director of the Planters and Merchants Bank and the American Brewing Company. Together they bought the Gray's Opera House in 1885 and commissioned Eugene T. Heiner to erect a new five story opera house on Fannin Street in 1891. Sweeney and Coombs were among the largest real estate owners in Houston. They sold the Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building in 1891 to Eugene Pillot, a prominent business man, but continued to operate their business there until 1907. The building was owned by the Pillot family until 1941. It was later purchased by Harris County. Due to opposition over planned demolition, the county decided to save the historic building and use it for county offices and leased space.

The building is the only remaining example of a Queen Anne style commercial building with corner turret. The turret, the building's most distinguishing characteristic, features a decorative Eastlake ornamentation a diamond patterned, copper roof topped with wrought iron cresting. The turret connects two distinctly different facades; the original one facing Congress and the more decorative one facing Main Street. The double-door entrance is cut diagonally below the two-story corner of the turret. Stained-glass transoms, pilasters, string courses and decorative panels, moldings and friezes ornament the building with a Victorian-era exuberance.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

The Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building has changed little since it was redesigned in 1889 by George E. Dickey. Rehabilitated by Welton Becket & Associates in 1968, the building came close to being demolished in 1974 when the Harris County Commissioners Court decided to construct a new administration building on the site. After being persuaded otherwise, in 1978 Harris County constructed their Administration Building across the street. They hired Koetter, Tharp & Cowell, architects, to restore the exterior of the building to its 1894 appearance at a cost of \$130,000. The east and south walls, which were previously joined to other buildings, received a smooth stucco finish during the restoration. The interior of the building remains gutted and plans by the current tenant are to renovate the interior for use both as modern commercial, retail and office space.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on June 20, 1996, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria 1,4,5 and 6 found in Section 33-224 and recommended designation of the Sweeney, Coombs & Fredericks Building as a Landmark to the Planning Commission.

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 D NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|---|---------------|---|---------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) | Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (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; | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; | |

CITY OF HOUSTON

Planning Commission

Planning and Development Department

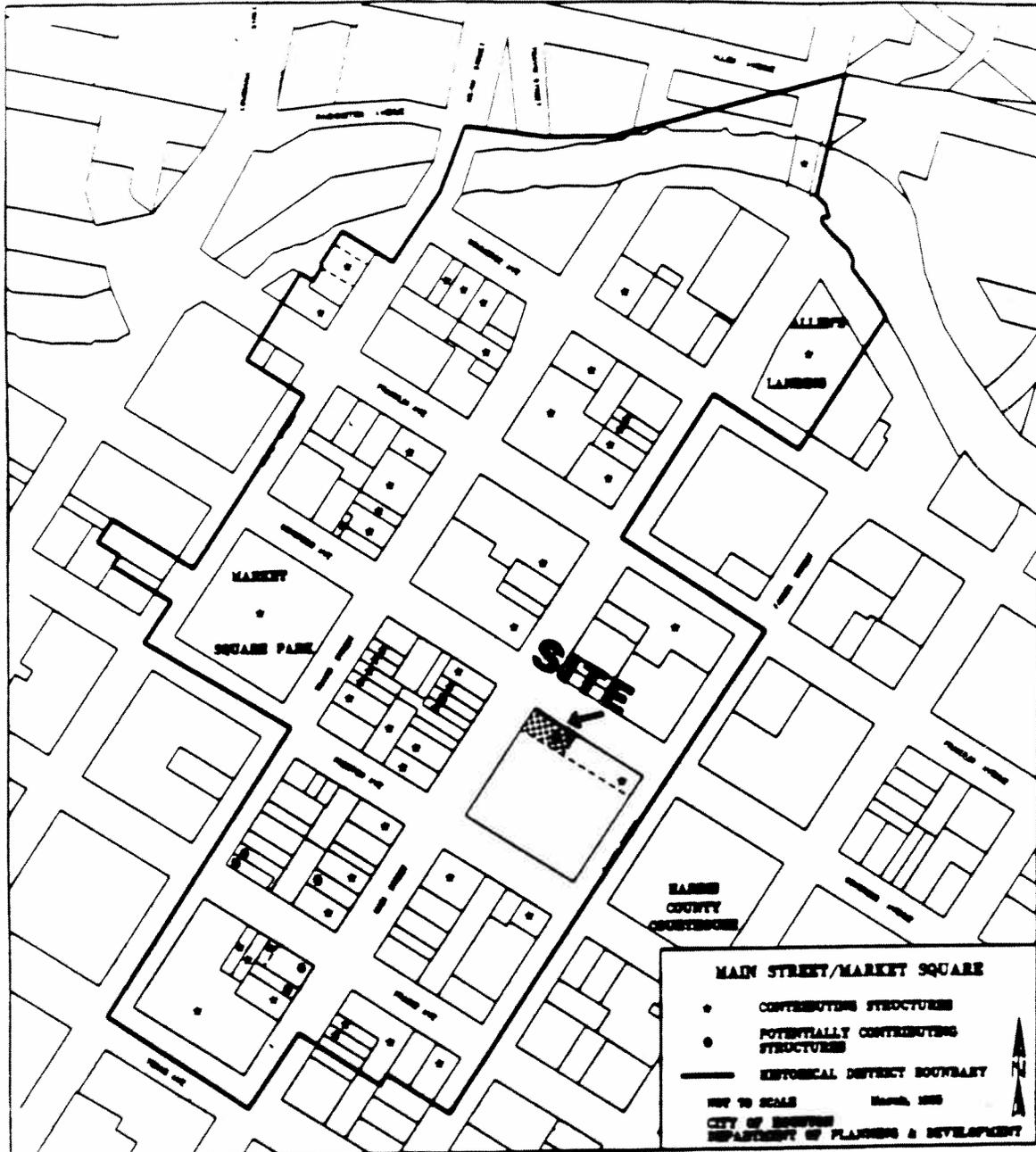
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

AGENDA ITEM: I

SWEENEY, COOMBS & FREDERICKS BUILDING

Site Location Map
301 Main Street
Not to Scale



LANDMARK DESIGNATION