

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME:City National Bank Building
(aka Texas American Building)

Fredericks Building

OWNER:Mr. Firouz D. Memarzadeh, 921 Main L.L.C.

APPLICANT:Mr. James D. Drake

LOCATION:921 Main Street, Main Street/Market Square
Historic District

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:May-19-96

AGENDA ITEM:IIIc

MEETING DATE:Jun-20-96

HPO FILE NO.:96L006

DATE ACCEPTED:May-06-96

HEARING DATE:Jun-20-96

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1, 2 and 6 and Tracts 12A and 13, Block 137, SSBB, City of Houston. The City National Bank Building is located on the northeast corner of Main Street and McKinney. The building, located in the downtown business district of Houston, is 24 stories tall.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The City National Bank Building, now known as the Texas American Building, was the first tall office building constructed in downtown Houston after World War II. It was designed by Alfred C. Finn, one of Houston's premier architects. The building was planned as early as 1939 according to architectural renderings bearing that date. Because construction was delayed by the war, the building was not begun until 1946. Construction was completed in 1947 and the grand opening of the bank was held on October 13, 1947. An entire supplement to the HOUSTON POST, dated Sunday, October 12, 1947 was devoted to the opening of this building because of its monumental construction and architectural beauty. Known as the "Builder of Houston," he designed such projects as the Gulf Building, the San Jacinto Monument, the Sam Houston Coliseum, Sakowitz Brothers Store, Bankers Mortgage Building, State National Bank Building, the Commerce Building extension, U of H Ezekiel W. Cullen Administration Building, Lamar Hotel, Lowe's Theatre, Metropolitan Theatre and the Shrine Crippled Children's Hospital.

The design of the building looks back to the late 1920's with its stepped massing, its vertically-channeled window bays, and its odd L-shaped plan, which makes the most of a very narrow Main Street frontage. As stodgy as it must have appeared at the time of its completion, the building exercises a strong positive influence on its surroundings today. Its determined profile, its piers of tan brick (a Southwestern standard from the 1920's through the 1950's), and dark red-striped spandrels stand out against the slick, monochrome, reflective surfaces of the buildings that is now seen against. Judge James A. Elkins was the president of the bank at the time of the construction of the building. The merger of the City National Bank and the First National Bank in 1956 set in motion plans for a new building that would over-shadow Finn's building both architecturally and literally.

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

There have been no structural changes or modifications of any consequence since the construction of the building although the name "The City National Bank" etched at third floor level above the entrances has been removed. During the lobby renovation in 1991, the original sculptured ceiling relief and marble floors were left untouched thus preserving the post-war interior appearance.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of the City National Bank Building (aka Texas American Building) as a landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the applicable criteria of Section 33-224.

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

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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.

