

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME:The Beaconsfield
OWNER:The Beaconsfield Multiple Condominium Assoc.
APPLICANT:Mr. Ferdinand Meyer V, Agent for The
Beaconsfield Multiple Condominium Association
LOCATION:1700 Main Street
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:September 8, 1996

AGENDA ITEM:IVb
MEETING DATE:Oct-10-96
HPO FILE NO.:96L010
DATE ACCEPTED:Sept-04-96
HEARING DATE:Oct-10-96

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 3, 4, and 5, Block 369, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is an 8 1/2-story, steel-frame and masonry brick high-rise apartment building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Beaconsfield, constructed in 1911, is perhaps the best preserved and earliest of the high-rise apartment buildings in Houston and one of a small number of such structures in the state. The building features abstractly rendered classical details on its exterior, and its interior is noteworthy for its floor plans and high-quality materials and detailing. The building represents the classical trends in American architecture at the beginning of the century, as its exterior massing and detailing derive from earlier historic styles.

It can truly be said that the apartment building, as known today, is one of the most purely American of architectural forms. The rapidly growing density of the northeastern cities at the end of the 19th-century made land for single family homes prohibitively expensive, and provided an impetus for apartment construction. Multiple-unit housing was not known in the U. S. prior to the 1880s, but it was after the completion of the Dakota Apartments in New York City (designed by Henry Hardenbergh) in 1887, that large-scale, multiple-unit apartment blocks appeared on the scene. By the turn-of-the-century, the fashion of apartment buildings had been successfully transplanted from the Northeast to the South, with many small-scale designs appearing in cities such as Jacksonville and New Orleans.

The spacious apartments within (now condominiums) were designed to attract tenants who might have previously considered purchasing a single family home. The survival of the Beaconsfield is revealed as noteworthy when one surveys the once-fashionable residential area in which it was built. This district is now populated with low-rise commercial buildings, parking lots and more recent high-rise office buildings and hotels.

The Beaconsfield was constructed in 1911 by the Lamb-Field Company, and the building was owned by the Lamb-McAshan Company, the principal partners of which were L. C. Lamb and S. E. McAshan. The design of the building is ascribed to two individuals: E. C. Lamb and Alonzo C. Pigg. Lamb, a primary investor in the property, is said to have designed the floor plans, while Pigg was responsible for the remainder of the design work. Pigg also designed the Houston Heights Fire Station, which was erected in 1915, and was actively involved in the oil business. The Beaconsfield was completed by the end of September 1911, and was almost fully rented by the time it opened.

The Beaconsfield is essentially rectangular in form, measuring approximately 110 by 45 feet. The east and west elevations are five and six bays wide, respectively, while the shorter north and south elevations are three bays width. The east elevation is the building's primary facade, and is divided into five distinct bays by means of changes in fenestration and by the slight recession of the wall planes of the second and fourth bays. This results in a ABCA scheme, with the central bay (C) being the largest of the five.

The building rises in four stages which are defined by horizontal moldings. The first stage contains the basement level, which is partially above ground, and the entrance lobby. This first level, faced with reddish-brown, pressed brick which has been painted a similar color, is capped by a simple, plaster string course. The second stage of the building includes the first and second apartment floors, and is faced with the same pressed brick used on the basement level, although here the brick is laid in a rusticated manner to simulate stonework. These bricks have been painted greenish gray. A wide entablature of white stone appears above the lintels of the second-floor windows, and is decorated by a series of triglyph blocks and a dentiled cornice. The third stage is the largest of the four, encompassing the third through the sixth apartment levels. From the third floor up, the building is faced with tan brick that has been painted with a clear sealer and retains its tan color. The sixth floor is capped by a side cement entablature similar in scale to that found between the second and third floors, although lacking the ornamentation of the lower band. The fourth stage includes the seventh and eighth floors, which are topped off by the building's main entablature. The cornice element is composed of a course of elongated dentils and a series of abstract triglyph blocks. The final element is the parapet, which achieves its greatest height and detail above the central bay of the entrance facade. At this point, the parapet arches over a plaque containing the letter "B" framed by foliate ornament. The parapet is replaced by a balustrade above the second and fourth bays of the east facade, and above the central bay of the north and south facades. The west elevation, architecturally the plainest of the four facades, is faced with brick that has been painted a tan color.

The main entrance is at street level in the center of the east (Main Street) elevation. The opening is formed by an exaggerated round arch which rises through the first floor of the facade. The arch is outlined on its intrados and extrados by molded bands. A giant keystone rises up to the sill line of the second-story windows. This archway is flanked by bulls-eye windows at the first-floor level. The entranceway itself consists of a pair of brass-framed, glass doors set beneath a handsome leaded-glass fanlight with the building's name spelled out in blue glass.

The windows are double-hung sashes with one-over-one lights with stark white plaster sills and lintels. Two windows are grouped under a double lintel on the first and fifth bays of the east elevation, while the four windows of the central bay are all grouped under a single continuous lintel. The first and third bays of the north and south elevations feature single windows with lintels. The second and third bays of the east facade and the central bays of the north and south facades were designed as solariums, with four window units spaced close together under one lintel. While the internal function of some of these solariums has been somewhat modified over the years, the external changes have been limited to the glazing of the windows.

On the rooftop, there is a small rectangular room containing mechanical equipment. Located on the southwest corner of the structure, this element is obscured from view below by the high parapet. The building's original fire escape is located in the center of the west elevation.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

In July 1977 the building was purchased by Don H. Hartmann who hired designer, Don Bolen, to take charge in the supervision of the conversion of the building into a modern condominium facility (January, 1978) with only minor changes to the exterior, including the painting and sealing of some of the exterior brick surfaces with colors similar to the original. Some wood windows have been replaced with aluminum window frames but none of the original openings have been reduced in size from the original.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of The Beaconsfield 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

- | S | D | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <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; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (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; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

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SITE LOCATION MAP
1700 MAIN STREET
NOT TO SCALE

