

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Leonel J. Castillo Community Center

OWNERS: Harris County Precinct 2

APPLICANTS: Jorge Bustamante and Samantha de Leon

LOCATION: 2101 South Street – Near Northside

AGENDA ITEM: A

HPO FILE NO.: HP2022_0235

DATE ACCEPTED: 9/20/22

HAHC HEARING: 10/20/22

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot # TR 2A & 4A ABST 1 J AUSTIN, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. 2101 South Street is a one-story stucco building built c. 1920. The site includes a community center and education center, as well as a parking lot sitting on a hill overlooking White Oak Bayou.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Leonel J. Castillo Community Center (LJCCC), formerly known as Robert E. Lee Elementary, was built between 1919 and 1921. It was designed in a Spanish mission revival style by Alfred J. Finn, a prominent architect known for designing the San Jacinto Monument. The LJCCC is important for its historical, architectural, and cultural significance. Built by Houston Independent School District, the Fifth Ward school became part of the huelga school movement in the 1970s. The school closed in 2002 and remained vacant for a decade until it was bought by Harris County Precinct 2 to be historically renovated and converted into a community center. The LJCCC is recommended for Protected Landmark designation due to its historical, architectural, and cultural significance. The Leonel J. Castillo Community Center at 2101 South Street meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 of Sec. 33-224 for Landmark Designation and Criteria 1, 2, and 3 of Sec. 33-229 for Protected Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Community Center

The Leonel J. Castillo Community Center, formerly Robert E. Lee Elementary, is a c. 1921 one-story stucco building originally designed in a Spanish mission revival style by Alfred C. Finn. The famed Houston architect is most known for the San Jacinto Monument in Baytown, as well as the Jefferson Davis Hospital and Sam Houston Coliseum in Houston. The school was designed in 1919, built in 1920, and opened in 1921. The school served the Near Northside community as an elementary school for about fifty years.

By the 1970s, Robert E. Lee Elementary became a part of Houston's history when it had converted into a huelga school – a “strike” school of 3,000 to 4,500 students who boycotted against Houston Independent School District (HISD) and their plans of integration of Mexican American students. Mexican students, who were technically classified as white, were integrated with Black students, thereby intentionally leaving out white schools from integration. The Mexican community was appalled and formed the Mexican American Education Council. Leonel J. Castillo, a community organizer and activist, represented the group and the huelga school movement. The school continued to operate until 2002, when Ketelsen Elementary opened and absorbed most of the students. The school remained out-of-use, and experienced significant damage during Hurricane Ike in 2008.

By 2011, HISD decided to sell the building to Harris County, who planned to convert the abandoned building into a community center for the Precinct 2 neighborhood. Architectural firm PGAL conducted the estimated \$5 million dollar renovation and kept most of the original building in place. The original front and side masonry walls were saved, as well as historic walls; although the original entry portico was unsalvageable, along with columns, the parapet cartouche, and capitols. Using laser scanning and historic design, PGAL was able to recreate the entry portico and the other elements to almost exact historic locations.

The building is representative of the resilience of the Near Northside district—the building has been a pillar of stability and refuge for many Hispanic children since its huelga days in the 1970s. Even with the renovation, the LJCCC has remained an institution dedicated to education and giving back to the community. The namesake of the building itself, Leonel J. Castillo, is a reminder of commitment of public service and community engagement. Castillo founded the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Chicano Family Center and Houston International University, and served on numerous boards. Today, the LJCCC has expanded into an early learning academy and

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY*The Architect*

The Leonel J. Castillo Community Center is one-story stucco building originally designed in a Spanish mission revival style by Alfred C. Finn. Known for the San Jacinto Monument in Baytown, Finn designed a number of commercial buildings across Houston and throughout Texas, such as the Gulf Building, the Jefferson Davis Hospital and Sam Houston Coliseum. Finn also enjoyed a long partnership with real estate entrepreneur and builder Jesse H. Jones, with Finn supervising construction over Rice Hotel and designing the Rusk Building.

Renovations

Robert E. Lee Elementary school closed in 2002 with the opening of Ketelsen Elementary, where it remained vacant for ten years. The school suffered heavy storm damage from Hurricane Ike in 2008 and was subsequently bought by Harris County in 2011 in hopes of converting the vacant school into a community center. Architectural firm PGAL oversaw the \$2.3 million dollar renovation, dedicated to preserving the building's architectural and historical significance.

The original front and side masonry walls were saved, as well as historic walls; although the original entry portico was unsalvageable, along with columns, the parapet cartouche, and capitols. Original doors and walls were unable to be saved as well. Intending on retaining and restoring the LJCCC's historic design, PGAL was able to recreate the entry portico and the other elements to almost exact historic locations using laser scanning and historic design. The community center also boasts public art and collaborations with Houston Arts Alliance, such as the Mega Molcajete sculpture by artist Jesus Medel Cantu.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Meeks, Flori. “Near Northside sees past as key to progress.” *The Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX). October 18, 2012.

Mindiola, Tatcho. “Castillo, Leonel Jabier (1939-2013).” Texas State Historical Association. February 11, 2016. Last updated April 21, 2021.

Ramos, Raul. “From Robert E. Lee to Leonel J. Castillo: A Transformation on the Bayou.” Rice Design Alliance. November 14, 2013. Accessed October 2, 2022.
<https://www.ricedesignalliance.org/from-robert-e-lee-to-leonel-j-castillo-a-transformation-on-the-bayou>.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by [Planner Name], Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, 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 | NA | S - satisfies | D - does not satisfy | NA - not applicable |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------|---------------------|
| <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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"/> | (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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" 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"/> | (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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; | | |
| <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. | | |

AND

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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)).

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S **NA**

S - satisfies **D - does not satisfy** **NA - not applicable**

- (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;
- (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;
- (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or
- (4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Leonel J. Castillo Community Center at 2101 South Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Leonel J. Castillo Community Center at 2101 South Street.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

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EXHIBIT A

PHOTO

LEONEL J. CASTILLO COMMUNITY CENTER
2101 SOUTH STREET



LEONEL J. CASTILLO COMMUNITY CENTER

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

LEONEL J. CASTILLO COMMUNITY CENTER
2101 SOUTH STREET

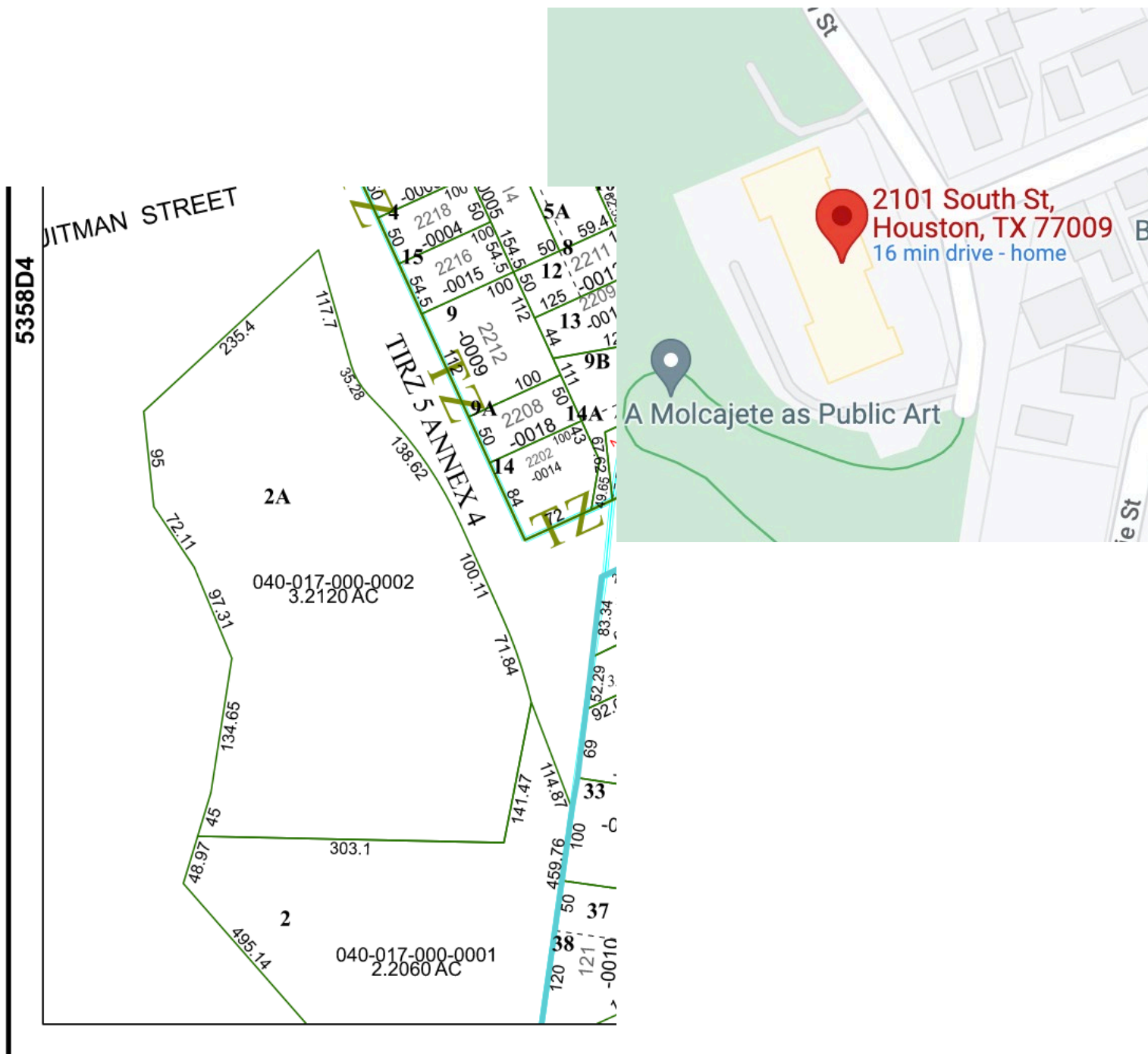
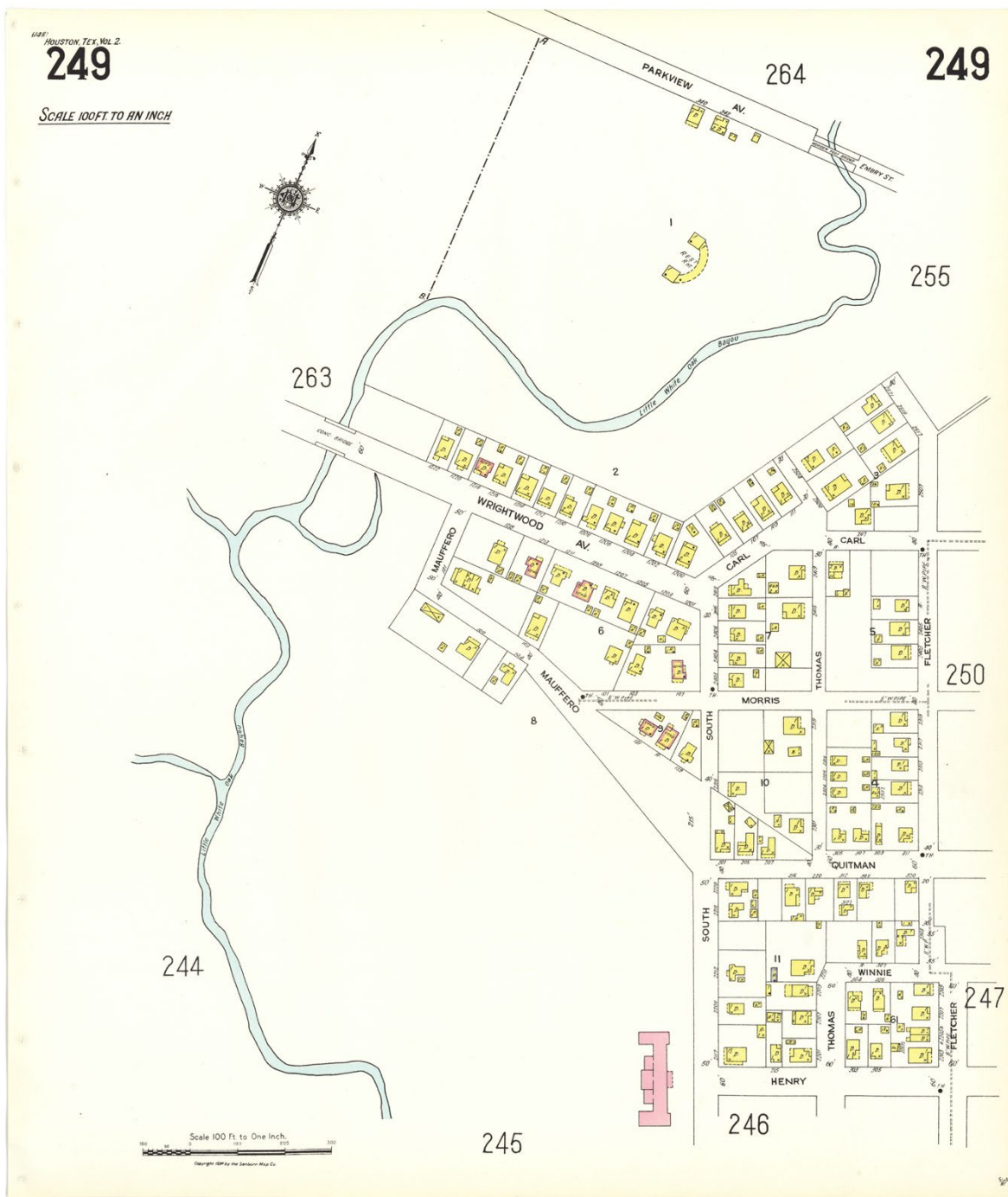


EXHIBIT C
SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP
LEONEL J. CASTILLO COMMUNITY CENTER
2101 SOUTH STREET



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

EXHIBIT D HISTORIC PHOTOS

LEONEL J. CASTILLO COMMUNITY CENTER
2101 SOUTH STREET

