

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Third Church of Christ, Scientist Building
OWNER: Festa a Uno Ltd. Partnership
APPLICANT: Deborah Keyser
LOCATION: 2021 Binz Street, Houston, Texas, 77004

AGENDA ITEM: D
HPO FILE No.: HP2022_0205
DATE ACCEPTED: Aug. 29, 2022
HAHC HEARING: Oct. 20, 2022

SITE INFORMATION

Track 93, northwest corner of Almeda Road and Binz Street on a parcel of land from the Joseph Christy Survey, A212, and including a portion of Lots 4 and 5 of Calumet Lawn Addition, Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is the former Third Church of Christ, Scientist, which has been repurposed as The Parador special events facility. The building is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and City of Houston Landmark. The owners are requesting the local designation be upgraded to City of Houston Protected Landmark status.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The former Third Church of Christ, Scientist, is a superbly maintained Mediterranean-Byzantine style building displaying a distinctly California amalgamation of Northern Italian and Byzantine detailing. The church, which was completed in 1928, is one of the last surviving examples of the eclectic Mediterranean-inspired buildings that once lined Almeda Road and South Main Street, the principal routes south from downtown Houston. Elaborate Mediterranean-style structures were used to lend importance and civic character to the newer Almeda Road corridor. The building was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and a City of Houston Landmark in 1999.

The former Third Church of Christ, Scientist, is an outstanding example of ecclesiastical architecture and one of the last remaining examples of the Mediterranean-inspired styles that were popular in Houston during the late 1920s. The building has been well maintained and retains most of its original architectural detailing.

The owners of property are seeking to upgrade the building's landmark designation to protected landmark status. The building meets criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 for landmark designation and criteria 1 and 4 for protected landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*THIRD CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST*

Third Church of Christ, Scientist, was organized in May 1922 by a group of members from First Church of Christ, Scientist. The new building was needed to relieve crowded conditions at First Church. The land for the new church was purchased on February 16, 1928, and construction began on April 13 of that year.

Church members selected the architectural firm of Jonas & Tabor to design the new building. Thomas T. Hopper Company constructed the church at a cost of \$50,000. Jonas & Tabor had formed their partnership in 1923. J. Rodney Tabor, a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was the firm's designer. Tabor also designed Sidney J. Lanier Junior High School (1926, now Bob Lanier Middle School) at 2600 Woodhead Street in the Montrose area.

A lengthy article in the *Houston Post* in September 1928 described the church in great detail. The new building contained features that were unusual for the period, such as an electric refrigerating machine to furnish cool

water for the saffron-colored drinking fountains. The article also described the landscaping, which featured desert plants such as cactus, yucca and sago palms.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Mediterranean-Byzantine style building has masonry bearing walls surfaced with stucco and painted a soft pink. The wide overhanging open eaves have exposed decorative rough-hewn rafter tails. All wood trim is painted dark brown. The variegated red clay tile roof covering, manufactured by Ludowici, is of the straight barrel mission style and regularly laid. The primary façade of the five-sided building faces diagonally to the intersection of Almeda Road and Binz Street. The large octagonal tower, topped with a small octagonal cupola, contains the 35-foot high domed ceiling of the main sanctuary. Two perpendicular, single-story wings embrace a curving five bay entry arcade with low-pitched tile roof and half-round copper gutters. The wings have low-pitched, hipped, tile roofs. Windows in the wings are narrow steel and beveled clear glass with arched transoms. Each side of the octagonal tower has a clerestory triple window with a Byzantine arch motif with pale amber lights. Each side of the small octagonal cupola has one small arched opening with wooden louvers, which originally helped vent heat from the auditorium.

At the main entrance, three pairs of planked doors beneath arched glass fanlights lead from the front porch to the Indian tile-floored vestibule. The vestibule has three pairs of leather covered metal-studded doors that lead directly into the vast domed auditorium. The dome is lighted by recessed lighting housed in a decorative large-scale cove that wraps the interior of the dome. Walls are plaster above a continuous stained oak wainscot, which is detailed with recessed arched plaster panels. From the vestibule, the floor sweeps down to the orator's platform. The focal wall behind the platform is detailed with a large triple arch with decorative wood panel inserts surrounding a door leading to the reading rooms. An oversized casing surrounds the triple arch and is bordered with a continuous blue stencil design. Above the arch, decorative cast tile vents separate the auditorium from the organ loft. The auditorium wings, which extend from either side of the domed room, have ceilings of multiple oak-hewn beams.

The decorative bronze hardware and large strapped hinges on the entry doors exhibit Mission-style influence as does the hardware throughout the building. The custom designed iron light fixtures include a large lantern with mission bells, imported iron pendant lanterns in the entry, elaborately detailed sconces in the auditorium, and amber glazed reading light fixtures in the sunrooms. All of the original light fixtures and hardware remain in the building.

The one-story Sunday School wing extends to the west of the octagonal tower facing Binz Street. The stucco finish is heavier than the original, indicating that the Sunday School wing was a later addition. Additionally, in 1953, the Sunday school room was enlarged to double its size. The Sunday School's flat roof is behind steeply pitched clay tile parapets between solid stucco-clad parapet corners. A secondary entry porch faces south to Binz Street. The porch's arcade is composed of one large central arch flanked by two smaller arches. The porch shelters a single pair of entry doors flanked by multi-light beveled glass windows.

The rear façade includes an arcade extending along the north wall of the auditorium that leads to two small sunrooms (formerly reading rooms). The stucco finished sunrooms have wood and beveled glass windows and doors on three sides and were designed to feel like residential sun parlors of the period. The larger of the two sunrooms features built-in wooden bookcases with leaded glass doors.

Two small outbuildings are located in the northwest corner of the property. The smaller of the two was built at the time of the church and has a small addition built at the same time as the Sunday School expansion. The stucco finish on the small addition and the larger outbuilding matches the stucco on the Sunday School addition. The roof of the larger outbuilding matches the roof design of the later Sunday School addition.

RESTORATION HISTORY

The Church has had only one owner, and until placed on the market 1996, was continuously used for church services. The main façade is virtually unchanged except for the expansion of the Sunday School room, which is compatible to the original structure through the use of similar materials and architectural style. The building retains its original lighting fixtures and hardware. Air conditioning was installed in an unobtrusive way. Both the interior and exterior are in excellent condition.

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
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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.

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)).

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S	NA		S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
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- (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;

CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

(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 Texas Historic Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMEND TO CITY COUNCIL THE DESIGNATION OF THE THIRD CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST BUILDING AS A PROTECTED LANDMARK

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTO

THIRD CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST BUILDING
2021 BINZ STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77004



PHOTO BY JIM PARSONS, PRESERVATION HOUSTON

EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

THIRD CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST BUILDING
2021 BINZ STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 77004

