

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** City of Houston Fire Station No. 11  
(surplus site no longer used as a fire station)

**OWNER:** City of Houston, Texas

**APPLICANT:** City of Houston, Fire Department

**LOCATION:** 4520 Washington Avenue at Fowler

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** N/A

**AGENDA ITEM:** II

**P.C. MEETING DATE:** 03-02-06

**HPO FILE NO.:** 06PL18

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 2-13-06

**HAHC HEARING DATE:** 2-23-06

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 6 and Tract 7A, Block 56, Brunner Subdivision, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, historic fire station building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

Fire Station No. 11, built in 1937, is the only historic, Art Deco style fire station building remaining today in Houston, as well as one of the few remaining examples of civic architecture in Houston dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Originally a volunteer fire brigade organized in 1904 for the City of Brunner, Fire Station No. 11 has the distinction of being the first fire station of the City of Houston which had its roots in another town. In 1915 when Brunner was annexed by the City of Houston, the volunteer fire organization became part of the Houston Fire Department.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

According to the "History of the Houston Fire Department" by Max H. McRae, which is included on the Houston Fire Museum, Inc. website "Fire Station No. 11 was the first fire station in the Houston Fire Department that had its roots in another town. It was originally a volunteer fire station in the" City of Brunner, located "about three miles west of Houston out Washington Avenue. Although the fire station" building that existed at the time of the annexation "was not used by Houston, a lot near where the station stood was used to build Houston's Fire Station No. 11."

According to the Handbook of Texas and Harris County Deed Records, Brunner originally lay along the western boundary of the John Austin Survey, spanning from Buffalo Bayou northward to White Oak Bayou. It was traversed in an east-west direction by two major traffic arteries, the Houston and Texas Central Railroad and Washington Road. It was located about three miles west of the city limits of Houston. The area was platted in September, 1888. The addition contained 137 numbered blocks, being seven blocks wide by twenty blocks long, which was large by Houston real estate development standards in the 1880s. The area was named for Anton Brunner (1841-1930), a shoemaker, and his wife, Bertha Bethje Brunner, who originally settled in Houston in 1868. Apparently Brunner saved his money and invested in real estate, initially outside the city limits of Houston, which would become Brunner. He sold his shoe business and became involved only in real estate after 1892. The two central north – south streets in Brunner that were named after them are the only two streets today that no longer possess their original names, Brunner Avenue (now Shepherd Avenue) and Bethje Avenue (now North Durham).

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In 1894 the population was 200 and by 1895 it had its own post office and county elementary school, first called Brunner, then Alexander, the predecessor of Ben Milam Elementary School. In 1896 Brunner was incorporated as an independent municipality, the same year Houston Heights was incorporated. The development of Houston Heights by an eastern syndicate of investors, headed by Oscar Martin Carter, who also developed the Houston Electric Streetcar line for use by all Houstonians, enhanced also the attractiveness of Brunner, but competed with it at the same time. Brunner included newly developed subdivisions to the east, such as Koehler's First Addition, platted in 1894, and Magnolia Grove Addition, platted in 1895. Brunner ceased being a town in 1899, but in 1901 the Brunner School District was incorporated. However, the post office was discontinued in 1905, and thereafter the mail was delivered from Houston. In 1895 a Baptist college, a German school, and a public school were in operation in Brunner, and the town had two churches, a saloon, and a population of 500. As late as 1905 the population remained at 482. By 1908 Houston's Washington Avenue was the principal commercial thoroughfare of Brunner, with neighborhood convenience businesses and a few professional offices concentrated between Fowler and Sandman. By 1908-09 city directory listings indicate that the southern portion of Brunner, south of the H & T C line, was the most settled section of the area. By 1909 Brunner Water & Light Company was chartered to supply Brunner with public utilities. All of that growth, though it happened gradually, required protection from fire by a Volunteer Fire Department.

McRae continues in his history that "in 1894, William P. Seibert organized Seibert No. 10 in the Houston Volunteer Fire Department with a hose wagon. The company ordered a Clapp & Jones steamer, but the steamer did not arrive until after the fire department went fully paid in 1895. After the steamer arrived, Seibert took it to Brunner and organized a volunteer fire department. E. L. Fetzer was the assistant fire chief. F. J. Morton was foreman, F. W. Pitschman the assistant foreman, and John Donnelly the engineer. (John Donnelly was an original member of the paid Houston Fire Department assigned to Steamer No. 2 and who may have left the department. He showed up in 1897 as engineer of Brunner VFD, but was found driving Houston's Steamer No. 5 in 1900.) The 1897 city directory listed the Brunner fire station on Washington between Parker and Brunner." This location (4511 Washington) was one block to the west and on the opposite side of Washington compared to the present Fire Station No. 11 at 4520 Washington. The name for Brunner Avenue was changed to Shepherd Avenue after annexation according to the City of Houston Assessor's Block Book for Brunner Addition.

McRae continues in his history that "private cisterns and wells were all the town had for water, and Seibert attempted to raise money for fire cisterns. His effort failed, so he moved away and took the steamer with him. Continued growth of Brunner sparked a second attempt at fire protection. A fire company organized on June 23, 1904. The company had a hand pumper and a chemical wagon housed in a station built at Washington at Fowler. Charles Kampe was elected fire chief. This served as the township's fire protection for Brunner until 1913."

"Houston doubled its size in 1913 by annexing land around the city except on the northern border. Brunner was included in the expansion to the west. The volunteers of Brunner Volunteer Fire Department sold their apparatus for junk. The old Brunner fire station lay idle, because Houston did not need it at the time. The fire department had fire stations near the edge of the old city limits that it felt could respond satisfactorily the extra distance."

"It was not until 1915 that land was purchased for a fire station. It was on the northeast corner of Washington and Fowler (4520 Washington). The old Brunner volunteer fire station had been located on Washington between Parker and Brunner but on the south side of Washington. A new fire station was erected on the Washington lot by the City of Houston in 1915. McRae states that "it was a frame structure with a single stall in the center." The building was constructed in the Bungalow style which was a style of architecture popular for homes, and the fire station actually resembled a home. McRae continues "the new station became Fire Station

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No. 11. Station 11 opened with a chemical truck built at the motor repair shop in Houston's central station. It was the first vehicle built by the shop and was made from an old six-cylinder automobile. Cost to build was \$1,800. Master Mechanic Albert Roper supervised construction which took two months to complete. Helping with the project were: Dave Fisher; A. T. Zueck; O. L. Henning; Roper; Bert Cecil; and auto mechanic W. E. Hunt.”

“In 1917, a hose wagon was put at Station 11, according to a 1925 report of the National Board of Fire Underwriters (NBFU). It is not known whether the hose wagon supplemented or replaced the chemical engine. The NBFU report referred to the company as Hose 11 and did not list a chemical engine at the station. Only two chemical engines were listed in the report and both were at central station. Hose Wagon No. 11 had a 27 horsepower engine, but the manufacturer of the rig was not named. It carried 1,100 feet of 2-1/2-inch hose. The truck was a combination hose wagon with a 40-gallon chemical tank and 200 feet of 1-inch chemical hose. It carried one 20-foot extension ladder. Four men were assigned to the hose wagon on each shift.”

“Some time later, a pumper went in at Station 11. It was an American LaFrance pumper rated at 750 gpm. The pumper carried 1500 feet of 2-1/2-inch hose, a 12-foot roof ladder, and a 24-foot extension ladder. A 1930 NBFU report listed an in-service date of the pumper as 1917. In-service dates of the reports indicated when an apparatus was first placed at a fire station, so the pumper was probably moved from a downtown station. It was a custom of the fire department to put new apparatus downtown and move the older pumpers to outlying fire stations. Engine 11 was the oldest pumper in the fire department in the 1930 report, and it showed its age in the pump test by underwriters. The pumper could only deliver 79 percent of its rated capacity, whereas the other pumpers tested averaged 100 percent, one of which topped 105 percent.”

According to the Houston Post, November 1936, an article stated that the Fire Station Bid Date was set for Friday, November 27 which was the deadline for bids to be received for the new “\$12,000 fire station which is to replace the old frame building which has stood at 4520 Washington Avenue for the past 20 years” according to City Commissioner Frank L. Holton. Holton further stated that when the new mayor takes office (Mayor Oscar F. Holcombe had been defeated and replaced by Richard H. Fonville) in 1937, he was going to urge another new fire station to be built at W. Dallas and Rochow which would serve River Oaks and Montrose sections of Houston. He also stated that both would be financed by Bond funds on hand.

Old Fire Station No. 11 was razed in 1937, and a new fire station was constructed at the same site at 4520 Washington Avenue. The building, designed in the unique Art Deco style, appears to have been not only built but also designed by J. D. Bace Corporation. According to the Texas General Contractors Association (TGCA) Monthly Bulletin, the City of Houston issued a contract for the construction of the building in November, 1936 to J. D. Bace Corporation, Houston. The Houston City Directory of 1937-38 shows J. D. Bace Corporation with John D. Bace, President; William B. Marshall, Vice-President; and Mark Hopkins, Secretary-Treasurer. The Bace Corporation, Building Contractors, was located at 514 Sterling Building, Fannin and Texas. The contract was for the construction of a one-story, brick fire station measuring 34 feet by 40 feet at 4520 Washington Avenue in the amount of \$11,120. Apparently the contract was later amended to include the construction of a two-story, concrete fire station, although that amendment was not recorded in the TGCA bulletin or found in subsequent issues of the Houston Post. Fire Station No. 11 was constructed in the unusual Art Deco Style, not here to for used in the construction of Houston fire stations then or since. The building was constructed of reinforced concrete and features metal casement windows and a cantilevered awning which curves around the right side of the building to shade the pedestrian entrance.

Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Houston recently visited Fire Station. No. 11, now located at 460 T. C. Jester Street, and there on the inside hall wall is the preserved, original plaque for Fire Station No. 11, at 4520 Washington Avenue, which reads: “Fire Station No. 11 – Built by the City of Houston – 1937 – R. H. Fonville, Mayor – Commissioners: George B. Waters, Frank L. Holton, S. A. Starkey, Walter Pierson; Jasper

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H. Davidson, Fire Chief; J. M. Nagle, Director of Public Works; J. D. Bace Corporation – General Contractors.” According to the Firemen at the station, Scott Mallott restored this plaque and placed it here, and this plaque is only one of many that has been restored by Mallott.

McRae continues “in 1944, Engine 11 got a new 750 gpm American LaFrance pumper. Engine 11 was replaced with a new 750 gpm American LaFrance engine in 1952. The older American LaFrance went to Station 31. In 1967, Engine 11 got a new pumper. It was a 1000 gpm Ward LaFrance pumper with a separate high pressure pump for the red line and a 500-gallon booster tank. The old American LaFrance pumper was placed in reserve.”

“Fire Station No. 11 was closed down in 1991, and the men were transferred to other fire stations. There was no longer an Engine 11 until a new Fire Station No. 11 was constructed at 460 T. C. Jester and Larkin in 1995. Running out of Fire Station No. 11 today are Engine 11, Heavy Rescue 11, and a command van, evacuation boat and rescue boat.”

The other Fire Station buildings still extant in Houston, which have been designated as historic landmarks include: Fire Station No. 7 (1899), now the City of Houston Fire Museum at 2325 Milam Street (City of Houston Landmark/Protected Landmark; NR; RTHL); Fire Station No. 14 (1914) at 107 W 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Houston Heights (City of Houston Landmark/Protected Landmark; NR; RTHL); and Fire Station No. 3 (1903) (private ownership) at 1919 Houston Avenue (City of Houston Landmark); and Fire Station No. 6 (1903), at 1702 Washington Avenue (classified as “contributing” to the Old Sixth Ward National Register (NR) Historic District).

### RESTORATION HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION

Fire Station No. 11 at 4520 Washington Avenue has experienced only an alteration to the type of garage door, and the overall building remains in fair - good condition. The building has been classified as surplus by the City of Houston Fire Department which no longer needs the building as a fire department facility.

*The information and sources for this application were researched and compiled by Randy Pace, Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston, 713/837-7796 or [Randy.Pace@cityofhouston.net](mailto:Randy.Pace@cityofhouston.net).*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

City of Houston Fire Department website at <http://www.houstontx.gov/fire/aboutbfd/history.html>

Handbook of Texas Online, "BRUNNER, TX,"

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/BB/hrbrw.html>

Hooper, James E., “Houston Fire Department 1838-1988,” Taylor Publishing Company in cooperation with the Houston Fire Museum, Inc., 1988.

Houston City Directory, 1937-1938

Houston Post, Wednesday, November 18, 1936, Section 2, page 1, “Fire Station Bid Date Set for November 27”

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McRae, Max H. (former district chief), "History of Houston Fire Department," Houston Fire Museum, Inc. website at <http://www.maxmrae.com/pastFFs/index.htm>

Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletin, November, 1936, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston, Texas

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Protected Landmark.

- (a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b> |
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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.

OR

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- The property was constructed before 1905;

**OR**

- The property was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

**OR**

- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

### **NO PUBLIC COMMENTS – HAHC MEETING ON FEBRUARY 23, 2006**

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends Protected Landmark designation to City Council for City of Houston Fire Station No. 11 – 4520 Washington Avenue.

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends Protected Landmark designation to the Houston Planning Commission for City of Houston Fire Station No. 11 at 4520 Washington Avenue.

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Planning and Development Department

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SITE LOCATION MAP  
CITY OF HOUSTON FIRE STATION No. 11  
4520 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
NOT TO SCALE