

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Bethel Baptist Church Building

OWNER: Bethel Baptist Church

APPLICANT: Bethel Baptist Church

LOCATION: 801 Andrews Street

30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: April-20-98

AGENDA ITEM: Iz

PC MEETING DATE: May-21-98

HPO FILE NO.: 98L072

DATE ACCEPTED: Mar-26-98

HAHC HEARING DATE: May-21-98

SITE INFORMATION

Lots 1&2, Block 47, Baker Addition, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a three-story, buff brick building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Bethel Baptist Church Building is located in the Fourth Ward, one block east of the Freedman's Town Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 17, 1985 (Reference No. 85000186). The building was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on November 24, 1997. The building's oversized arched entryway highlights the principal facade and is the building's most notable feature. It was built in 1923 in the Gothic Revival style.

The building is one block west of I-45 which is the divider between the neighborhood and downtown. Bethel Baptist Church is one of the larger buildings in the Fourth Ward, which is mainly made up of 1 - and 2 - story wood frame residential buildings. The majority of the building types are shotguns and pyramidal roofed houses with Victorian details. There are also some commercial and institutional wood and brick buildings.

Bethel Baptist Church is home to one of Houston's most significant and prominent African-American congregations. The church is the second and last one organized by the Reverend John (Jack) Henry Yates, an early leader of Houston's African-American community. Bethel Church Building was constructed in two units. Reverend J.R. Burdett, the sixth pastor, led the congregation in building unit one. Unit one consisted of only one-story with double wooden doors in a recessed entry. This appears to be the first stage of the original design by John L. Blount that was constructed in 1923. Brick corbeling along the parapet denoted the flat roof and is still visible in the present church. Unit two completed the principal decorative facade and added the remaining stories. The second designer and builder, James M. Thomas, added the buff "scratch" brick facing to the principal facade and the remaining building. James M. Thomas became Houston's most active architect for African American congregations. He designed over 55 churches in his lifetime. Though completed between 1949 and 1950, the building appears largely as designed in the 1920's and retains the influences of Gothic Revival with some Modern/Art Deco influences as well. Bethel Baptist Church is one of the most distinctive mid 20th century churches in Houston and is associated with the city's most active African-American architects for churches in the 20th century. (The above information was extracted from The National Register of Historic Places Application.)

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

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**

- (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;

The Bethel Baptist Church Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion “C” which includes “**distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction.**”

- (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.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION:

At a public hearing on May 21, 1998, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission determined that the application complied with criteria found in the Houston Preservation Ordinance, and recommended that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the HAHC and forward it to City Council for the designation of the Bethel Baptist Church Building a Landmark of the City of Houston.

PUBLIC COMMENT: One

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of the Bethel Baptist Church Building as a landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the criteria of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

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SITE MAP

Bethel Baptist Church Building

801 Andrew Street

NOT TO SCALE