

**STAFF REPORT
HISTORIC AND CULTURAL LANDMARKS COMMISSION
CITY OF FORT WORTH, TEXAS**

DATES: May 8, 2023

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 9/ **FUTURE COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 9

GENERAL INFORMATION

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| REQUEST | Recommendation for Designation as Historic and Cultural (HC) Landmark |
| APPLICANT/AGENT | John Williams Oil Gas High Rise LLC/ Peter Ketter Sandvick Architects |
| LOCATION | 309 W. 7 th Street |
| ZONING/ USE (S) | Downtown Overlay H/DD |
| NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION | Individual |

REQUEST

Applicant requests a recommendation to City Council to consider upgrading the designation of the property located at 309 W. 7th Street from Demolition Delay (DD) to a Historical and Cultural Landmark (HC).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Oil & Gas Building, constructed in 1952, is prominently located in the heart of downtown Fort Worth at 309 W. 7th Street. West 7th Street is an important downtown corridor lined with buildings significant to the city's commercial, financial, and social history. Jesse H. Jones, a Houston financier and developer, was responsible for the construction of four buildings that helped transform the street into a "canyon" filled with skyscrapers—the Oil & Gas Building among them. The Stanolind Oil and Gas Company and its successor were its primary occupant through the period of significance. Houstonians Robert J. Cummins, engineer, and J. Russ Baty, architect, designed the 16-story building. It was built by prominent local contractor Butcher & Sweeney. It is significant as an excellent example of an early post-World War II Modernist high-rise commercial building. This is demonstrated through an emphasis on its structure and volume, its two-part vertical block composition, and smooth unadorned curtain walls. Its external form identifies its function as an office building.

The property was designated Demolition Delay in June 1998.

APPLICABLE CITY OF FORT WORTH ZONING ORINANCE PROVISIONS

4.401 Historic Preservation Overlay Districts

(c) Identification and Designation of Cultural Resources

3. Eligibility for Designation

a. Eligibility for HC and HC District designations.

1. *Individual Property.* An individual property may be designation as HC if it meets the following qualifications:

- i. Two or more of the criteria for significance; and
- ii. The necessary criteria for assessing integrity

Criteria for Historic Significance

2. Is an important example of a particular architectural type or specimen or embodies elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship that represent a significant architectural innovation in Fort Worth.

3. Has been identified as the work of an important architect or master builder whose individual work has contributed to the development of Fort Worth.

4. Has been identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Fort Worth, State of Texas or the United States.

5. Bears a significant relationship to other distinctive buildings, structures, sites, objects or areas, either as an important collection of properties of architectural style, or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to a plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif.

EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

In regards to Criterion 2, the property at 309 W. 7th Street is significant as an example of the early Modern architectural style; excluding the lower two floors. This building is also representative of the transition to more simplified building surfaces, while still featuring materials typical of the previous decades, such as brick and terracotta.

In regards to Criterion 3, the building at 309 W. 7th St is associated with the architect, J. Russ Baty, the engineer Robert J Cummins, and the local general contracting firm, Butcher & Sweeny. Butcher & Sweeny are associated with other significant Fort Worth buildings such as the Arlington Heights Senior High School (1937), Charles E. Nash elementary School (1927), and the Jennings Avenue Underpass (1931).

In regards to Criterion 4, the building at 309 W. 7th Street is associated with the Houstonian developer, Jesse H. Jones (1874-1956). He was the largest developer in Houston and was responsible for a significant portion of Pre-World War I buildings within the downtown area. Jones also invested in various buildings across the United States, including Fort Worth, Dallas, Houston, New York City, and Memphis. He specifically financed four buildings in W. 7th Street, including the Electric Building at 410 W. 7th Street across the street, Fair Building at 307 W. 7th Street next door.

In regards to Criterion 5, the building at 309 W. 7th Street contributes significantly to the canyon-like West 7th Street corridor. These historic buildings within the immediate vicinity of the Oil and Gas Building are The Fair Building at 307 W. 7th Street (1930), The Fort Worth Club Building at 306 W. 7th Street (1926), The Neil P Anderson Building 411 at W. 7th Street (1921), the original Star Telegram Building at 400 W. 7th Street (1920), and The Electric Building at 410 W. 7th Street (1927).

EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. The designation of a property must not only be shown to have significance under Zoning Ordinance, but it also must have integrity. Within the concept of integrity for example, the National Park Service criteria recognizes seven aspects that define integrity.

Seven Aspects of Integrity

1. **Location.**
2. **Design.**
3. **Setting.**
4. **Materials.**
5. **Workmanship**
6. **Feeling.**
7. **Association.**

In relation to the Seven Aspects of Integrity:

1. The structure is still in its original **location** from when it was constructed in 1952.
2. The exterior **design** of the structure is still intact and identifiable.
3. The structure's original **setting** remains fairly intact; several of the current neighboring buildings existed at the time of the subject building's construction.
4. The property's original **materials** appear intact on the exterior including the brick walls, the metal 1/1 and 2/2 windows, and the terracotta details between the windows. The original two-story base was significantly altered in 1984, however the remaining 14 floors still retain their original features.
5. The property still displays the physical evidence of **workmanship** from the 1950s, such as the decorative terracotta spandrels and the metal windows.
6. The property still retains its **feeling** as a post-World War II modernist office building.
7. The property also retains its **association** because it is still used as an office building and it is surrounded by other historically relevant high-rise buildings that define the W 7th Street corridor.

FINDINGS / RECOMMENDATIONS

Eligibility for Designation

The structure meets the following City of Fort Worth criteria for historic designation:

Criterion 2: Is an important example of a particular architectural type or specimen or embodies elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship that represent a significant architectural innovation in Fort Worth.

Criterion 3: Has been identified as the work of an important architect or master builder whose individual work has contributed to the development of Fort Worth.

Criterion 4: Has been identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Fort Worth, State of Texas or the United States.

Criterion 5: Bears a significant relationship to other distinctive buildings, structures, sites, objects or areas, either as an important collection of properties of architectural style, or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to a plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif.

Integrity

Based on the evidence still extant at the property, the property at 309 W. 7th St sufficiently retains all aspects of integrity including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Summary

Staff have found evidence that the property meets 4 of the 8 Criteria for Designation. The property also retains most of its original integrity and the identity for which it is significant. This is consistent with the requirements of the ordinance for Historic and Cultural properties.

Therefore, staff recommends the following motion:

That the HCLC recommend that City Council consider designating the property at 309 W. 7th Street as Historic and Cultural (HC) and that the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* be used when evaluating any proposed future change to the property.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS



Fig. 1 – Current location and zoning of 309 W 7th St. Also located in Downtown Urban Overlay District.

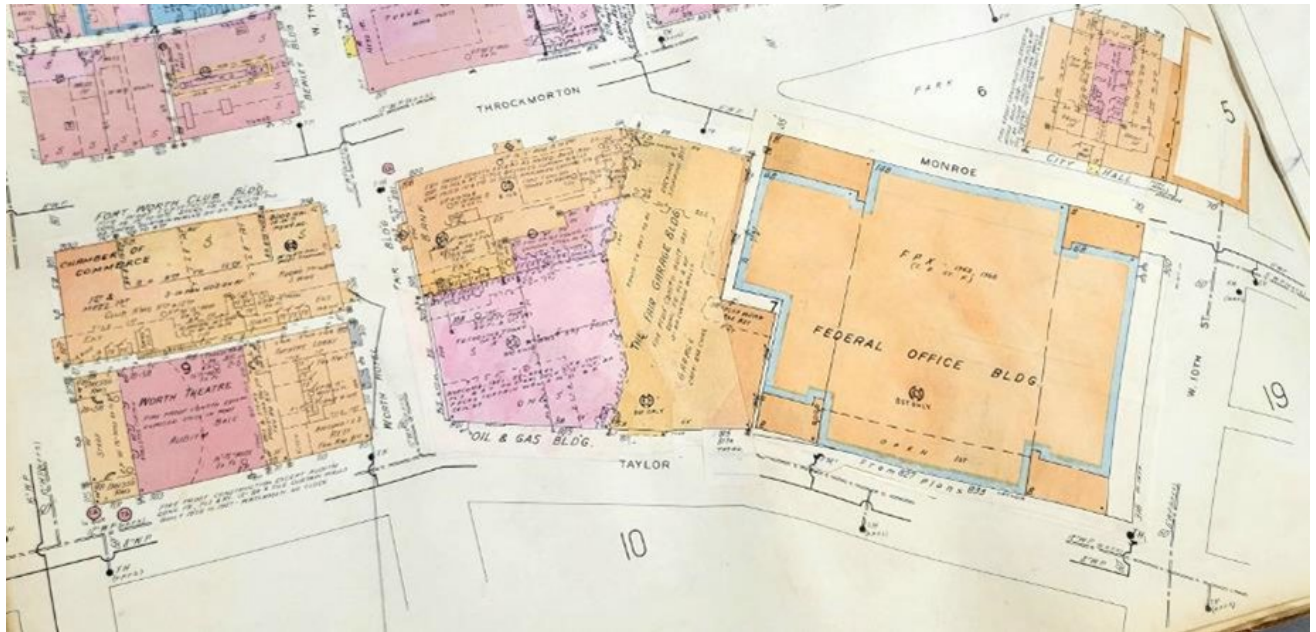


Fig. 2 –1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, updated c. 1965, Fort Worth, TX. Volume 1, Sheet 4. Provided by applicant.



Fig. 3 –W. 7th Street Corridor Historic Buildings (Provided by Applicant)

1. First National Bank Building, 1961
2. Electric Building, 1927-1929, NR 1995
3. Fort Worth Star-Telegram Building (Historic), 1920, 1940-1970
4. Fort Worth Club, 1926, 1953-1955
5. First National Bank Building, 1910, 1926, NR 2009
6. Farmers & Mechanics National Bank, 1921, NR 2012
7. Hotel Texas, 1920-1921, 1961, 1979-1981, NR 1979
8. Fort Worth National Bank Building, 1952, NR 2022
9. W. T. Waggoner Building, 1919-1920, 1984-1985, NR 1979
10. & 10A Fair Building* (1930) and Fair Parking Garage (1951), NR 2020 (jointly)
11. Oil & Gas Building, 1952
12. Neil P. Anderson Building, 1921, NR 1978

NR: Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

*Fair Building is now known as the Star-Telegram Building



Fig. 5 –View of North Elevation from W. 7th Street (Provided by Applicant).



Fig. 6 – View of North and West Elevation from 7th Street (Provided by Applicant).



Fig. 7 – Oblique from South and West Elevations from Taylor Street (Provided by Applicant).



Fig. 8 – View of Base from the intersection of Taylor Street and W. 7th Street (Provided by Applicant).



Fig. 9 – View of Original Metal Windows and Terracotta Spandrels (Provided by Applicant).



Fig 10. – View of First Floor Lobby (unoriginal) (Provided by Applicant).



Fig. 11 – View of Original Wainscoting (Provided by Applicant).