

**HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION**  
**DEMOLITION AND RELOCATION PERMITS**  
**JUNE 28, 2021**  
**GF-2021-085651; DA-2021-094730**  
**AUSTIN CENTRAL FIRE STATION #1**  
**401 E. 5<sup>TH</sup> ST.**

## **PROPOSAL**

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Construct an addition to a 1938 fire station, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places; and perform additional repairs and modifications to accommodate ongoing use.

## **PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS**

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- 1) Remove existing exterior stairs and service entrances on the rear of the fire station. Construct a 515-square foot addition with a new accessible entrance facing the parking lot. The addition consists of a two-story volume, clad in white stucco and punctuated by a vertical opening with a partial-height window system, and a slightly recessed one-story entrance, with glazing beneath a band of gray stucco. At the side of the second-story portion, above the entrance, is a flat-roofed, suspended awning over a rooftop terrace.
- 2) Increase the height of both shorter vehicle bay doors on the street-facing elevations to accommodate modern vehicle sizes. This will require removal of the distinctive brick banding at the top of the door openings.
- 3) Install new steel casement windows consistent with the originals in general design and configuration.
- 4) Clean and repair brick; repair rusted steel lintels; and replace deteriorated plaster at soffits in-kind. Cleaning will be accomplished with low-pressure water and a gentle cleaning agent, tested first in an inconspicuous area. Deteriorated mortar will be repointed match existing.
- 5) Update building signage to reflect current use as a fire and EMS station.
- 6) Include a location at the addition for an outdoor sculpture to be commissioned through the Art in Public Places program.

## **ARCHITECTURE**

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Per the National Register nomination, the Austin Central Fire Station is a 2-story brick building with ‘streamline moderne’ characteristics. The most prominent feature of the building is its symmetrical massing, with identical 2-story wings that extend north and west from each side of the curved entrance at the corner of E. 5<sup>th</sup> and Trinity streets. The majority of the building is finished with light buff/sand rough face brick. Ornamentation consists of manipulated brick coursings, with darker tan bricks recessed in horizontal rows to suggest streamlining at various points throughout the facade. All roofs on the building are flat and several are used as terraces, establishing the station's affinity to International Modernism.

The north wing of the building includes a 1-story addition, originally housing the administration offices for the department. Constructed in 1962 (outside of the period of significance for the nomination), this addition is constructed of similar materials. It is characterized by a series of four recessed bays between vertical brick fins.

The original overhead doors for the garage bays and steel casement windows were replaced in 1983.

## **RESEARCH**

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Per the National Register nomination, Austin's Central Fire Station (#1) was designed in 1938 by the firm of Kreisle and Brooks as part of the federal Public Works Administration (PWA) program. The design of the fire station illustrates the Streamlined Moderne style, seen in several Austin municipal buildings of the period. It is an excellent example of the city's emphasis on modern construction and style and symbolizes the desire to perpetuate Austin's dramatic growth and create the image of a progressive, modern city. The building is listed under criteria A in the area of Community Planning and Development and criteria C in the area of Architecture, both at the local level of significance.

Though not noted in the nomination, the 1962 annex was designed by architect Eugene Wukasch, known primarily for his ecclesiastical and residential designs and for his involvement in historic preservation.

## **STANDARDS FOR REVIEW**

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The City of Austin's Historic Design Standards (March 2021) are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and are used to evaluate projects at potential historic landmarks. The following standards apply to the proposed project:

### Repair and alterations

*1.3 When historic material must be replaced due to damage or deterioration, replacement materials should look the same, perform reliably within the existing construction, and, in most cases, be made of the same material.*

Plaster at the soffits of the decorative brick balconies on each façade has failed and will be replaced in-kind.

*4.3 When repointing a masonry wall, use replacement mortar that matches the historic mortar in composition, joint profile, and color.*

*4.4 When cleaning masonry, use gentle techniques that do not damage the wall.*

Masonry specifications indicate gentle cleaning methods, to be tested in an inconspicuous area before work proceeds. Repointing will likewise involve testing of mechanical removal to ensure it can be performed without damage. Staff has not yet reviewed specifications for the mortar but understands the intent is to match existing.

*5.1 Repair, rather than replace, historic windows, doors, and screens; and their trim, surrounds, sidelights, transoms, and shutters, unless they are deteriorated beyond the point of stabilization or restoration. Retain windows if 50% or more of the wood or metal sash members are intact.*

*5.3 If historic windows must be replaced, match the size and details of the existing window, including configuration, profile, and finish. Take into account elements such as frames, sashes, muntins, sills, heads, moldings, surrounds, hardware, and shutters.*

*5.3 (a) If a window [had] divided lites, replacement windows must have true divided lites or simulated divided lites with dimensional muntins placed on the outside of the glass and corresponding spacers of an appropriate color, material, and thickness on the inside of the glass, so that the window appears to have true divided lites.*

*Additional standards for historic landmarks: 5.15 Do not replace historic windows; repair them except in cases of extreme damage or deterioration. Replace in-kind if necessary.*

The steel casement windows in the 1938 portion of the building were replaced in 1983 with windows that do not match the original design or operation. The project proposes to replace these windows with new energy-efficient windows that will be compatible with the character of the building and will approximate the appearance of the historic windows. The design team is currently researching manufacturers and revising elevation drawings in comparison with historic photographs of the building. While many of the original windows consisted of a four-light transom above paired four-light casements, other window sizes and configurations exist. Particularly of note is that the casement windows along the curved portico at the street corner did not have divided lights.

While the submitted elevations show replacement of original windows in the 1962 addition, other measures to improve their energy efficiency are currently under exploration.

### Commercial additions

*1.1 Locate additions at the rear and sides of historic buildings to minimize visual impact.*

*1.3 Minimize the loss of historic fabric by connecting additions to the existing building through the most noninvasive location and methods.*

The addition is at the back of the building at an inside corner formed by the original footprint and 1962 addition. This allows for the creation of an accessible entrance adjacent to parking, in a location where the addition does not detract from the architecturally significant street-facing elevations. Construction of the addition will not entail removal of an appreciable amount of historic masonry.

*2.1 Locate additions at the rear and sides of historic buildings to minimize visual impact.*

*2.2 Design the addition to appear subordinate to the historic building.*

*2.3 Minimize the appearance of the addition from the primary street(s). The historic building's overall shape as viewed from the opposite side of the primary street must appear relatively unaltered.*

The addition is restrained both in terms of its modest footprint and its height, which matches the tallest parapet of the historic building. It appears subordinate to the historic building and will not be highly visible from either E. 5<sup>th</sup> or Trinity streets.

*3.1 Design proportions and patterns such as window-to-wall area ratios, floor-to-floor heights, fenestration patterns, and bay divisions to be compatible with the historic building.*

*3.2 Take cues for design elements and patterns from the historic building.*

*3.3 Do not replicate the design or details of the existing building to a degree that the addition might be mistaken as historic.*

*3.4 No particular architectural style is required for addition design. Designs in both traditional and contemporary styles can successfully achieve compatibility and differentiation with historic buildings.*

The addition is restrained and modern in its design. It does not seek to mimic the materials or Streamline Moderne detailing

of the historic building but rather takes more subtle cues, including its strongly geometric massing and banding implied by scoring of the stucco. The planar wall surface and prominent vertical window/balcony of the two-story portion of the addition are reminiscent of the articulation at the vehicle bays of the original building and the recessed windows of the 1962 addition. Further, this window and the glazed entryway allow the historic rear wall to remain visible from the exterior.

*3.5 The historic primary entrance must remain the most prominent.*

Functionally, the new entrance may become the main building entrance due to its proximity to parking and accessible design. However, it is architecturally understated and will not detract from the prominence of the historic corner entrance.

*4.1 Design the roof form and slope of the addition to complement the roof on the historic building.*

*4.3 Minimize the visibility of the roof.*

The flat roof of the addition is not visible. It matches the roof form of the historic building and 1962 addition.

*5.1 If an addition will be visible from the pedestrian level, including from the opposite side of the primary street, use exterior wall, window, and door materials that are compatible with those on the historic building in scale, proportion, material, finish, and texture.*

The materials and fenestration of the addition are in deliberate contrast with the historic building but are compatible in character. The windows of the addition resemble those of the 1962 addition.

*7.1 Design and locate rooftop patio structures to be subordinate to the historic building; minimize visibility from the street.*

*7.4 Set back rooftop patio structures, railings, lighting, and mechanical equipment from the front wall a distance equal to 15' or half the width of the front wall, whichever is greater.*

*7.5 Use a visually light railing that does not distract from the historic building.*

Rooftop terraces are described in the National Register nomination as part of the original use of the building. The new element in this design is a shade structure along the side wall of the addition. This is an unobtrusive element from the rear and is unlikely to be visible from the street-facing elevations. An existing pipe railing is present along a portion of the parapet on E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street; this will be modified for code compliance.

*Institutional buildings*

*1.1 Ensure that the building's historic character is preserved through careful repair and maintenance of historic materials.*

*1.2 Additions to an institutional building may not be appropriate.*

*1.3 Locate additions to be subordinate to the historic building, keeping in mind that all sides of an institutional building may be significant.*

The project will meet these additional standards for institutional buildings, as described above. The addition is specifically designed to avoid alteration of the two street-facing elevations, for which the building is architecturally significant.

The proposed project meets the applicable standards and will not compromise the building's listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Replacement of the windows offers an opportunity to recapture an important aspect of the building's historic appearance.

## **STAFF COMMENTS**

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*Designation Criteria—Historic Landmark*

- 1) The 1938 building and 1962 addition are more than 50 years old.
- 2) The building retains high integrity.
- 3) The building is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places and thus meets the criteria for designation as a historic landmark (LDC §25-2-352).

## **COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

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The applicant provided a briefing to the Commission on December 14, 2020. Commissioners acknowledged that an expansion of the vehicle bay height is necessary programmatically but recommended looking at a band or other articulation at the top of the enlarged overhead doors to recapture the effect of the brick patterning.

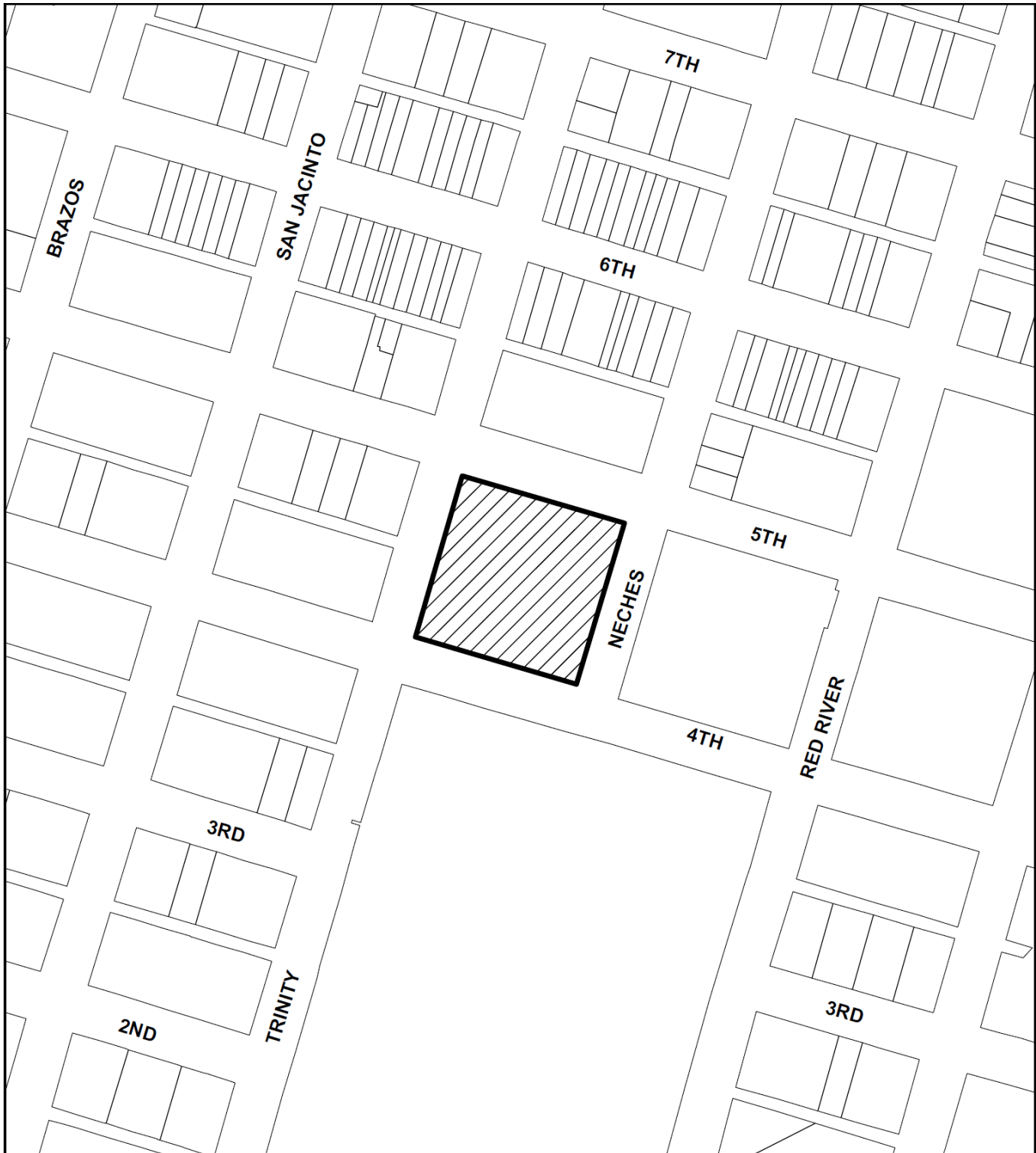
The architect has looked into this recommendation and does not feel that a decorative garage door is an appropriate substitute for the removed fabric. Although this loss is clear, the preference is to maintain the clean lines of the original design.




## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

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Approve the project; delegate responsibility to staff to review technical details, including mortar specifications and the design of replacement windows, as plans are further developed prior to release of the permit.

## LOCATION MAP



-  SUBJECT TRACT
-  PENDING CASE
-  ZONING BOUNDARY

1" = 208'

## NOTIFICATIONS

CASE#: GF 21-085651  
LOCATION: 401 E 5TH STREET

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## PROPERTY INFORMATION

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### *Photos*



*Historic images of Fire Station #1, before and after construction of the 1962 addition. Provided by applicant.*



*Rear (south) elevation of the fire station where the addition will be constructed, photograph provided by applicant, 2020.*