

ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

CASE NUMBER: C14H-02-0008

H.L.C. DATE: June 24, 2002

P.C. DATE: October 9, 2002; Nov. 13, 2002

AREA: 70,500 square foot tract (building approximately 11,625 square feet)

APPLICANT: City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission

AGENT: Transportation Planning and Sustainability Department

HISTORIC NAME: Municipal Airport Hangar

WATERSHED: Boggy Creek

ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE: Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, a.k.a. 4209 Airport Boulevard

ZONING FROM: AV

ZONING TO: AV-H

SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends zoning from AV, Aviation Services, to AV-H, Aviation Services-Historic based on historic landmark criteria (1), (2), (3), (6), (9), (12) and (13.)

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION:

The Historic Landmark Commission recommended zoning from AV, Aviation Services, to AV-H, Aviation Services-Historic based on historic landmark criteria (1), (2), (3), (6), (9), (12) and (13). Vote: 8-0.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: Postponed to November 13, 2002, by consent at the request of staff. Vote: 8-0-1 (Spelman off dais). Recommended by consent zoning from AV, Aviation Services, to AV-H, Aviation Services-Historic based on historic landmark criteria (1), (2), (3), (6), (9), (12) and (13). Vote: 6-0; Spelman, Ortiz and Casias absent.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:

The Historic Landmark Commission initiated historic zoning for the Austin Municipal Building as per a May 29, 2001, resolution. The item was brought to the Commission at the request of members of surrounding neighborhoods. The Texas Historical Commission has also completed a nomination form to list the property in the National Register of Historic Places, and this listing is currently in process.

Building is now slated to be preserved as part of the Robert Mueller Airport Redevelopment Plan - see attached excerpts from the plan. The building could potentially be incorporated into an office, public recreational space, concert/entertainment space, etc. The Robert Mueller Municipal Airport (RMMA) Plan Implementation Advisory Commission endorsed the preservation and reuse of the hangar at its August 27, 2002, meeting. Final field notes will be needed prior to third reading of City Council. Hazardous material abatement of the building was completed earlier in 2002.

CITY COUNCIL DATE: December 12, 2002

ACTION: Postponed to January 9, 2003 at staff request. Postponed to January 30, 2003 at staff request.

ORDINANCE READINGS: 1ST 2ND 3RD

ORDINANCE NUMBER:

CASE MANAGER: Steve Sadowsky

PHONE: 974-6454

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION:

Cherrywood Neighborhood Assn.
Austin Neighborhoods Council
Mueller Neighborhoods Coalition
Taking Action Inc.
PODER People Organized in Defense of Earth & Her Resources
Anberly Airport Assn.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

The house and site qualify for historic zoning based on the following City of Austin historic landmark criteria:

(1) Character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Austin, State of Texas or the United States.

The 1943 wooden arched hangar is the oldest and most significant structure surviving associated with the early development and use of the city's first Municipal Airport established in 1930.

(2) Recognition as a recorded Texas Historic Landmark, a National Historic Landmark, or entered into the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Register listing of the building was approved by the Texas Historical Commission's State Board of Review in 2001. The National Register listing is pending final approval of nomination to the National Park Service.

(3) Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

Built almost entirely of laminated wooden trusses due to shortage of materials during World War II, the structure survives as an outstanding and rare example of unusual labor-intensive construction techniques used to complete public infrastructure projects during World War II.

(6) Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on architectural, historical or cultural motif.

The hangar's historic relationship with the 1930 Municipal Airport is noteworthy.

(9) Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of the City, State or the United States.

Refer to (1) and (6) above. The hangar was later leased by Robert Ragsdale and Robert Browning, two important families who ran airport-related enterprises in Austin.

(12) A building or structure that because of its location has become of value to a neighborhood, community area, or the city, or

The building's preservation is important to provide a continuing physical link and reminder of the community's history and ties with the 1930 Municipal Airport.

(13) Value as an aspect of community sentiment of public pride.

The historic zoning for the hangar is supported by surrounding neighborhoods and the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport (RMMA) Plan Implementation Advisory Commission

ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT: Not applicable - publicly owned

APPRAISED VALUE: Not appraised

PRESENT USE: Vacant.

CONSTRUCTION/DESCRIPTION: Clear span arched wooden frame airplane hangar comprised of a series of laminated arched wooden trusses.

CONDITION: Good

PRESENT OWNERS

City of Austin

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

DATE BUILT: 1943

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: Several.

ORIGINAL OWNER(S): City of Austin is original building owner.

OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS:

NATIONAL REGISTER: Yes - in process.

RECORDED TEXAS LANDMARK: No

NATIONAL LANDMARK: No

LOCAL SURVEYS: No

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The Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar bears the names of two early pioneers in Austin aviation. Both Robert Ragsdale and Robert Browning helped establish commercial aviation services beginning in the 1930s and contributed valuable training skills to young pilots during World War II.

The history of the building began its period of significance on June 10, 1943. The property owner, the City of Austin, commissioned the construction of the hangar to accommodate the growing private aircraft usage at the municipal airport. With only a 1930s hangar at the site to shelter aircraft, the city in the early 1940s requested from the War Production Board permission to solicit bids for the construction of a new hangar. Based on plans and specifications submitted by city engineer J. E. Motheral, the War Production Board gave a preference rating to the city in August of 1942. In late 1942, the City of Austin accepted a bid from Jim Odom Construction Company to build a hangar for the municipal airport.

Limitations of materials during wartime affected not only the selection procedure for new buildings but also the design process. The Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar exemplifies this architectural characteristic unique to World War II construction. Through the innovative use of glue-laminated wooden trusses, the hangar embodies a rare early example of a building practice that only recently has seen widespread use in construction. Also, through its specific association with military flight training during the war and civilian training in an era of aviation growth after the war, the hangar represents broader patterns of events occurring throughout the country. For this reason, the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar represents a high level of national significance under National Register Criteria A and C.

In 1928 two other early pioneers in aviation, Max Bickler and Julian Baldwin, set out to locate a site for a new municipal airport. Chosen for its proximity to the already existing Austin Air Service air-field and its availability as a large tract of land, the city optioned the purchase of 145.58 acres of cotton fields owned by Mary Agnes Matthews, M. H. Matthews and wife, Margaret Matthews, George S. Matthews and Zula Matthews for the sum of \$26,520.75. The legal description of the land exists in the Joseph Burleson Survey No. 22 and Travis County records indicate that the Matthews family conveyed the deed to the city on October 26, 1928. At the same time, the city purchased from S. F. Nolan and Ida Nolen 45 acres of land adjoining the Matthews property and legally described in the J. C. Hamilton Survey. The cost of this land totaled \$7875.00. The city also optioned the purchase of an additional 150 acres from J. Bascom Giles and Effie Dean Giles legally described in the Thomas Hawkins Survey in Travis County, Texas.

Dedicated on October 14, 1930, the new airport name honored Robert Mueller, a city council member who died in 1926. Modest in its earliest form, a gravel runway led to the station located on the northeast side of the field. A metal hangar on the northeast side of the airport, similar in shape and size to the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar, predated the wooden structure and remains extant today. A small office building and gas pump surrounding the 1931 hangar comprised the remainder of the airport infrastructure along present 51st Street.

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Development continued throughout the 1930s, with the airport increasing to 340 acres in 1934 with the purchase of the Giles property. Through joint financial funds from the federal Works Progress Administration, the City continued improvements in lighting and runway surfaces. By the late 1930s, the increased weight of commercial planes necessitated a new runway surface that employed a crushed stone bed with an asphalt surface.

Commercial traffic from airlines like Braniff heralded a new era of growth for the airport. Also, the University of Texas began a pilot training program at the Austin campus in 1940 and utilized local airstrips for flight instruction. Initially consisting of civilian instruction, by 1942 the program became entirely a military flight preparation. Robert Ragsdale operated the flight training at the Municipal Airport and Robert Browning handled these duties at the University Airport. The tremendous growth of aviation in Austin prompted the city to increase the services available at Robert Mueller Airport.

A big boost in development came through the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics of the U. S. Department of Commerce. The regional manager of the Civil Aeronautics recommended the development of the municipal airport in the approximate amount of \$321,000.00. A board composed of Secretaries of War, Navy and Commerce approved the recommendation on October 9, 1940, contingent upon the city showing evidence of title to land for the new construction project. On February 6, 1941 acting City Manager Walter Seaholm authorized purchase of 100 acres from J. M. Patterson, Sr., Nye Patterson and "any and all interested parties". The legal description of the tracts known as block 1 and block 2 are in the Thomas Hawkins and J. C. Harrelson Surveys.

In 1942, officials relocated the Administrative Building to the west side of the airfield. City Council minutes from March 12, 1942 called for \$5000.00 in expenditures beyond the \$4000.00 already spent for the relocated Administrative Building. An Austin-American Statesman article dated April 17, 1943 references a request to the Civil Aeronautics Authority by acting city manager Walter Seaholm for a control tower. The tower, at an estimated cost of \$25,000, serviced the airport for the next 20 years.

Submitting the lowest of three competing bids in November 1942, contractor J. M. Odom won the construction contract with an estimate of \$19,987. In a follow up on June 10, 1943, the Austin-American Statesman indicated that work initially began in April of 1943. Under the supervision of the city's chief estimator Charles Morton, the wood building comprised a portion of the larger plan for improving the growing airport's infrastructure. Relocating the administrative building and terminal the prior year, city officials arranged the new orientation of the airport along the western edge of the site. The 1943 control tower occupied a location several hundred feet south of the terminal and the 1943 hangar placement occurred immediately southwest of the tower.

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Given the constraints of both public funds and limited material resources during World War II, the city decided to construct the hangar almost entirely of wood. In *World War II and the American Dream*, Robert Friedel discusses the "extraordinary building effort" created by the scarcity of materials and the unique military demands of wartime building. The book also contains print advertisements from the era showing innovative products that facilitated new building techniques. One print ad heralds a new resin glue, named Plaskon by Liberty-Owens-Ford Glass Company, capable of joining plywood sections and wood cap strips into arched I-beams. The engineer designing the Ragsdale-Browning hangar likely knew of the pre-fabricated I-beam trusses, but was unable to get the product either as a result of cost or availability. In Motheral's design, the building's large span trusses required a composite of wood leaves glued together to create the gentle arch of the building. Using 1" x 10" yellow pine boards, workmen fabricated the half-trusses on site using formwork set up under the shelter of a tent and then hoisted the members into place on the concrete abutments. Photo documentation shows the men bending dry pieces of wood over the formwork and the glue seeping out between the boards.

When finished, the dimensions of the hangar provided an appropriately scaled space for private planes and military trainers equivalent in size to the Piper Cub. Leased by the city to Robert Browning in the late 1940s for his business, Browning Aerial Service, the hangar proved to be a vital part of the private aircraft industry at Robert Mueller Airport. Browning Aerial Service appeared in the city directory as early as 1947, and the company continued using the hangar for its private aircraft business until the municipal airport closed in 1998.

The completion of the hangar in 1943 created a contextual relationship with the existing buildings that lasted into the 1960s. On May 27, 1961, the new airport terminal dedication changed the orientation of public access to the site. Over the next several years, city officials razed the 1942 terminal building and 1943 tower to provide room for newer structures. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the general association of the Browning hangar with its surroundings changed significantly.

After the war, aviation in Austin continued its rapid growth. Throughout the 1950s, city officials continued to expand the length and number of runways at the airport. An earlier push in the mid 1940s to secure private T -hangars reached fruition in the 1950s. By 1958, the metal hangars west of the Browning Aerial Service hangar were in place. Other buildings to the north appeared throughout the 1960s.

Today the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar remains frozen in time at the point when the airport closed, but the fact that the building's context is no longer associated with the airport infrastructure of the 1940s does not detract from its strong association with the site. The construction technique used to fabricate the hangar reinforces the importance of this building's location in both space and time. As such, the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar provides a point of historical reference for any future use of the municipal airport site. Current redevelopment plans for the airport include leaving the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service

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Hangar in its historical site. However, at least one high-ranking city official wants the hangar moved to the site of the new airport.

Given the significance of the building to the context of its site, the Ragsdale-Browning Aerial Service Hangar should be preserved as an architectural manifestation of World War II construction. The building stands as a symbol of Austin's participation in the growth of aviation throughout the twentieth-century and draws awareness within the community to the importance of this building in Austin aviation history. The hangar maintains a high level of integrity and is worthy of preservation based on Criteria C, since its presence embodies a distinctive method of construction. The property also possesses many characteristics of Criteria A, given its association with events in aviation history that are repeated throughout the country both during the war and in post war America.

C14H-02-0008
MUNICIPAL AIRPORT HANGAR
4209 AIRPORT BOULEVARD



LOOKING WEST AT EASTERN FACADE OF HANGAR WITH DOORS OPEN



VIEW OF MODERN ACCESSORY BUILDING AND HANGAR OFFICES ON NORTHERN FACADE

C14H-02-0008
MUNICIPAL AIRPORT HANGAR
4209 AIRPORT BOULEVARD



LOOKING EAST AT WESTERN FACADE (AIRPORT BOULEVARD FRONTING FACADE)



***OVERALL VIEW OF AIRPORT
BOULEVARD (WESTERN FACING)
FACADE***



VIEW OF SOUTHERN FACADE WITH WINGWALL

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MUNICIPAL AIRPORT HANGAR
4209 AIRPORT BOULEVARD



VIEW LOOKING WEST INTO THE HANGAR FROM THE AIRPORT



VIEWS OF WOOD LAMINATED ARCHES

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MUNICIPAL AIRPORT HANGAR
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VIEW OF INTERIOR WESTERN WALL AND WOOD LAMINATED ARCHES



INTERIOR VIEW



***CLOSE-UP VIEW OF INTERIOR
SHOWING ROOF SUPPORT SYSTEM***