

**STAFF REPORT**

**TO:** Historic Preservation Advisory Board

**FROM:** Guy R. Giersch, Historic Preservation Officer

**THROUGH:** Mark Doty, Assistant Director of Planning

**SUBJECT:** Conduct a Public Hearing to Consider/Discuss/Act on the Request by Pat Dowell for Approval of a Historic Marker for the House Located at 700 West Virginia Street.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff is recommending approval of a historic marker for 700 West Virginia Street.

**PRIORITY RATING:** The property is listed as a high priority building according to the 2015 Update of the Historic Resource Survey. A high priority building contributes significantly to local history or broader historical patterns; is an outstanding or unique example of architecture, engineering or crafted design; retains a significant portion of its original character and contextual integrity; meets in some cases, criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and/or is eligible for a Texas Historical Marker. The house is a contributing building as part of McKinney's National Register Residential Historic District.

**ITEM SUMMARY:** On October 31, 2019 the applicant submitted the necessary documentation to apply for a City of McKinney historic marker for the house located at 700 West Virginia Street known as the Willis R. Dowell House that was modified by W.J. Higgins in 1913.

The purpose of the Historic Marker Program is to encourage owners of historic properties to become actively involved in the preservation of McKinney's historic past through the recognition of historic events, people, and architecture. The applicant has submitted a written narrative relating the history of the various families that have owned the property or resided at 700 West Virginia Street and the role they played in McKinney's history.

The Willis R. Dowell House was remodeled circa 1913 and modified again in 1920, assuming the Sanborn maps are correct. Based on the Sanborn maps the first house to occupy the site indicates an irregular floor plan which appears to be a Folk Victorian constructed circa 1902. The circa 1913 remodel is an example of the local vernacular building style using Prairie style influences such as wrap around porches on two sides of the house, deep eaves, low pitched hip roofs,

and large one-over-one double-hung windows that is indicative of the Prairie style.

The house is a single story wood frame house constructed on a pier and beam foundation. The house is covered with wood, lap siding. The porch is supported by large square columns and the porches are battered. Originally the house was addressed on North Bradley Street. Today it is addressed off of Virginia.

### **HISTORICAL FIGURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE HOUSE:**

#### **Dowell Family Background:**

- In 1856 Francis Dowell, wife, three sons and a nephew moved to McKinney in 1856. Eldest son J.P. Dowell started a farm implement company which later became the J.P. Dowell Hardware. Willis and Francis, Jr. worked the family farm and nephew Jonathan, fought in the Civil War for the Confederacy. He eventually took up farming after the war.
- In 1870 Willis Dowell married Susan Thomas. They had 11 children.
- In 1906, when Willis was 54 years old, their farmhouse was destroyed in a fire. The family moved to town and lived in a three-room farm house located at the corner of Virginia and Bradley. Willis was a mason and member of the St. John's Lodge #51 Of McKinney. He was a successful farmer and stockman.
- In 1914 the house on Bradley and Louisiana was deeded to James P. Dowell.
- Jim Dowell, son of Willis R. Dowell became an agent of a Galveston-based cotton firm in 1914 in McKinney. A year later the Dowell firm lost a load of cotton being sent to a buyer in England when the load was sunk by a German U-boat that torpedoed the Lusitania. The loss almost bankrupted the Dowell Brother's cotton company.
- Jim P Dowell's cotton office was located on Tennessee Street above where "Me & Mrs. Jones" is now located. James married Christelle Oneal married James Paterson Dowell in 1923. She was active in the Jeanne d'arc Club, a literary social organization. They moved to the Bradley street house in 1936. Jim died in 1953 and Christelle in 1979.
- Jim P and Christelle had a son James Patterson Dowell Jr. in 1924. He became an electrical engineer. Jim Pat married Patsy Dowell in 1972 and they eventually moved to the 700 West Virginia home in 1979. Jim Pat passed away in 1998 and Patsy Dowell continues to live in the West Virginia home.

**ASSESSMENT:** Staff believes that the applicant has met all of the requirements to obtain a Historic Marker under the Historic Neighborhood Improvement Zone Program (Ordinance 2015-12-105). Therefore, Staff is recommending approval of a Historic Marker for 700 West Virginia Street.

Under Ordinance 2015-12-105, if the HPAB approves the Marker, the applicant will be responsible for purchasing and displaying the Historic Marker.

Also, under Ordinance 2015-12-105, if the Historic Preservation Advisory Board approves the Marker, the applicant may make application for a Level 1 tax exemption (100% exemption of the City's ad valorem taxes for a period of 7 years) providing the building has architectural integrity and has been properly rehabilitated/restored and maintained. The building must have a residential use in order to qualify for the tax exemption.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- HNIZ Application HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Staff Report HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Supporting Documentation HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Narrative History HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Sanborn's and Surveys HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Current Photos HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Current Floorplan HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Higgins Builder HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia
- Historic Photos HP2019-0021 700 W Virginia