

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

INDIANAPOLIS FIRE DEPARTMENT STATION No. 18

HA-45 (IFD#18)
3136 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

A PART OF THE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOR MARION COUNTY, INDIANA

Adopted by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission

Adopted by the Metropolitan Development Commission

Prepared By:

Staff of the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
1842 City-County Building
200 East Washington Street
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Owner.....	4
II.	Historic & Architectural Design Analysis.....	4
	Construction Information.....	4
	Physical Description	4
III.	Historic Area Delineation & legal Description.....	6
IV.	Statement of Significance	6
V.	Preservation Objectives	7
VI.	Preservation Criteria	7
VII.	Identification and Designation of Historic Area.....	8
VIII.	Maps and Photographs.....	8

Indianapolis Fire Department Station No. 18

Historic Area Preservation Plan

I. OWNER¹

The City of Indianapolis
200 E. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204



II. HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN ANALYSIS

Construction Information

- Date of original design, construction, or origin: Brick fire station, 1936
- Architectural Firm: Pierre & Wright Architects (Edward D. Pierre and George Caleb Wright)
- Engineer: Rotz Engineering Co.
- Contractor: E. W. Hauser Co.

Physical Description

Constructed in 1936, Fire Station No. 18 is a one-story concrete and brick masonry building built in the Art Moderne style. The building is centered on a central bay, the central apparatus room, which is comprised of two fire engine bays with overhead garage doors that face southwest onto W. Washington Street. The footprint is roughly rectangular and measures approximately 62-feet by 68-feet. Fire Station No. 18's straight lines are interrupted only at the southeast corner, where a half-circle convex wall defines the southeast edge of the building.

The fire station sits on a cement block foundation and a partially excavated basement. Concrete block basement walls give way to reddish-brown brick exterior walls that are embellished with stone and concrete coping on the southwestern elevation. Original elevation drawings and historical photographs show that the stone and concrete coping originally extended around all four elevations; much of the coping has either been removed or fallen off the building. Exterior brick is laid in a running bond with soldier courses above window openings on the east and west elevations. A water table approximately 18-inches in height runs around the entire building. A flat roof accentuates the horizontal lines of the building and the Art Moderne style of the fire station. Windows on all elevations are characterized by brick row locked sills and brick lintels.

¹ From the records of the Marion County Assessor's Office on March 17, 2024

The primary elevation—the southwestern elevation—is dominated by the central apparatus room doors, which are flanked by engaged cylindrical concrete columns. A field of brick above the overhead garage doors once terminated in stone coping and emphasizes the central volume of the Apparatus Room. The brick field also emphasizes the northern mass of the fire hose tower and the 45-foot boiler room flue. Cast letters spelling “FIRE STATION NO.18” were originally affixed to this field. Like much of the coping, these letters have since been removed or lost from the building. The southwestern elevation has three bays, including the central apparatus room. The western bay is identifiable from the exterior by a large window opening. Original elevations called for a double-casement window for this bay. The center bay includes the two overhead garage doors for the central apparatus room. The eastern bay includes a man door and space where an identifying tablet was once set just to the left of the door. The southwestern elevation terminates on the eastern edge at a circular wall which has a total of three window openings; only a portion of one of these windows is visible in the southwestern elevation.

The southeastern elevation, beginning at the circular wall at the southern edge, also has four bays. They are marked by the three window openings in the circular wall, one small round window opening, three large rectangular window openings, and a small rectangular window at the northern edge. The original elevation drawings called for casement windows in the circular wall with three-lite transoms above the casement windows. These windows were not curved, but rather sat at an angle within the curve of the sill and wall. The drawings also called for four awning windows in each large rectangular window and a single awning window in the northern window opening. A soldier course aligned with the concrete coping on the circular wall defines the tops of the window openings on the southeastern elevation and runs the length of most of that side; the base of the course is measured at 7-feet, 9 ½-inches from the floor line.

The northeastern elevation is the least embellished elevation. A soldier course aligning with the one on the southeastern elevation runs the length of this elevation. Four window openings are found in the center of the elevation. The windows are the same dimensions as the awning windows found on the southeastern elevation. What was once the exterior concrete stairway that accessed the basement is centered beneath the four window openings; this stairway has since been filled in.

The northwestern elevation is very similar to the southeastern elevation. There are four bays on this elevation, characterized by a small awning window on the northern edge, a series of three large window openings and a man door, and a single window on the southern edge. The same water table, brick soldier course, and coping embellishments characterize this elevation.

As with the exterior design, the design of the fire station focuses on the central apparatus room. Except for one private office on the northeastern side of the building, all of the interior rooms open onto the central apparatus room. Two bedrooms intended to house six beds are located on the northeastern and southwestern sides of the building. A living room is located in the southeast bay characterized by the circular wall, immediately opposite the dining room. The private office is access through the living room and the kitchen is accessed from the dining room. The entire length of the northwestern bay was reserved for a locker room and bathrooms. The basement

floor plan is even simpler. Comprising less than half the footprint of the building, the basement housed only the boiler room, coal room, workshop area, and the base of the hose tower.

At present, most of the fire station, including the concrete driveways and sidewalks, suffer in almost all areas from lack of proper maintenance and water infiltration. However, the exterior masonry is in fair condition in its present state. (executive summary, 1)

III. HISTORIC AREA DELINEATION & LEGAL DESCRIPTION

The subject property is comprised of one parcel of land known as “the historic area” which is the entirety of parcel 9022999.

IV. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fire Station No. 18 is significant for its architecture. It is notable both as one of Indianapolis’s few public Streamline Art Moderne buildings and as a precedent setting Pierre & Wright design. Further, Fire Station No. 18 is one of many architecturally significant fire stations within Indianapolis which span the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and exemplifies 1930s fire station design. The station was rated “Contributing” in the Center Township, Marion County Interim Report in 1991, which identifies this site as retaining sufficient integrity and significance to be eligible for listing in the National Register.

Constructed in 1936, Fire Station No. 18 was the first of three fire stations designed by Pierre & Wright and built for the City of Indianapolis. Fire Station No. 18 was undertaken by Pierre & Wright in the middle of the influential firm’s nineteen-year life and is a fine example of the kind of impactful design the firm was known for. Following Fire Station No. 18, came Fire Station No. 1 (1938; razed 1993) and Fire Station No. 17 (1941; extant), both designed by Pierre & Wright. The designs of both Fire Station No. 1 and Fire Station No. 17 evolved from Pierre & Wright’s design of Fire Station No. 18, which was hailed as a “model of efficiency” and “modern appearance” when the station opened in December 1936.²

The 1936 haydite concrete slab and brick fire-proof Station No. 18 replaced a two-story, one-bay, brick station that served the west side of Indianapolis from 1896 until the 1930s. This older design exemplifies the nation’s dominate nineteenth- and early twentieth-century typology of fire stations, particularly the station’s four-story alarm bell tower. In contrast, Pierre and Wright’s Fire Station No. 18’s relatively low profile of the building and its streamlined design creates a more modest character that harmonizes with the landscape surrounding the station. There is a nod, however, towards the past typology in the form of the penthouse and chimney located at the rear of the apparatus bay. Rather than including a large bell tower, Pierre and Wright included a

² American Builder and the Building Age (magazine) “Modern Fire Station for Indianapolis” (June, 1936, v. 59), 100.

hose drying tower reportedly to be the design of Indianapolis Fire Chief Fred C. Kennedy. This design required only two men to operate, rather than the four needed for older models.³

While two-story fire stations relied on the use of a fire pole for expedient response times, Pierre & Wright's new one-story design incorporated efficiency through the central positioning of the central apparatus room. The station's kitchen, dining room, two dormitories, lockers and bathing facilities all have direct entrance to the central apparatus bay where the fire engine was stored. This allowed for rapid response from those at Station No. 18 and was more conducive to housing modern firefighting equipment, notably automotive engines.

In an assessment conducted by the Indianapolis Fire Department in 1950, the department found its stock of stations to be unsuitable to meet the needs of Indianapolis in the mid-century. Eighteen stations were designed for horse-drawn engines and pumpers; the average station age was forty years; and changes in population growth necessitated new or relocated stations in the north and east areas of the city. A new master plan, released by 1951, called for new stations which all used slight variations on Pierre & Wright's design at Station No. 18 and ranged from one- to three-bay iterations.⁴

Fire Station No. 18 remained an active fire house from 1936 until it was decommissioned in 1994. The station has sat vacant since its decommissioning. Its almost sixty years of service is a testament to the durable, efficient design of Pierre & Wright.

V. PRESERVATION OBJECTIVES

1. Fire Station No. 18, its exterior features of the site, and architectural and historic character thereof shall be preserved as a significant resource of Indianapolis-Marion County.
2. Accommodate the adaptive reuse of Fire Station No. 18 to facilitate the preservation of the site as a significant resource of Indianapolis-Marion County.
3. Encourage installation of interpretive signage that highlights the historic area's significance.

VI. PRESERVATION CRITERIA

- A. Any development, construction, reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation, or alteration of the subject exterior structure or site shall be appropriate to the property's historical and architectural values and significance.

³ "Fire Station 18: Condition Assessment," September 2018, Ratio Architects, Inc., 9, 11.

⁴ "Fire Station 18," 13-14.

- B. Any exterior development, construction, reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation, or alteration of the subject or its site shall be visually compatible and appropriate in function, general design, arrangement, color, texture, and material to the design and character of the subject.
- C. The IHPC shall use the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (36 CFR Part 36) and IHPC Policies and Procedures to determine appropriateness when it reviews and makes decisions regarding development, construction, preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, alteration, and demolition in the historic area.

VII. IDENTIFICATION AND DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC AREA

Fire Station No. 18 is hereby identified and designated as an Indianapolis Historic Landmark.

This plan has been prepared in accordance with the State Statute IC 36-7-11.1, which establishes and empowers the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission. After the approval of this plan by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission and its adoption by the Metropolitan Development Commission as part of the Marion County Comprehensive Plan, the provisions and requirements of IC 36-7-11.1 and this plan apply to all property and structures within the designated area.

VIII. MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: Current Aerial Photograph from GIS



Figure 2: 1962 Aerial Photograph; Firehouse outlined in red



Figure 3: DMD Staff Photograph, 2019



Figure 4: Historic Photograph; main façade



Figure 5: Historic Photograph; East Facade