Texas Historical Commission staff (BB), 7/20/2007, ck/dku 7/28/7, rev 8/13/07
27" x 42" Official Texas Historical Marker with post
Travis County (Job #07TV01) *Subject AD, BF (Atlas* 13974*) UTM: 14 620023E 3348739N*
Location: Austin, 800 W Cesar Chavez St

SEAHOLM POWER PLANT

THIS COMPLEX IS AN INDUSTRIAL AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARK IN AUSTIN. ELECTRIC POWER ARRIVED IN THE TEXAS CAPITAL IN 1895, AFTER THE COLORADO RIVER WAS FIRST DAMMED TO GENERATE ELECTRICITY. THE CITY OF AUSTIN HAS OWNED ITS OWN GENERATION AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM EVER SINCE, A RARITY AMONG LARGE CITIES.

A GROWING POPULATION AND POST-WORLD WAR II DEMAND FOR NEW APPLIANCES AND AIR CONDITIONING INCREASED THE NEED FOR ELECTRICITY. IN 1948, THE CITY OF AUSTIN COMMISSIONED A NEW POWER GENERATION PLANT TO BE BUILT HERE, JUST WEST OF THE EXISTING SITE. DESIGNED BY THE NATIONALLY KNOWN KANSAS CITY ENGINEERING FIRM OF BURNS & McDONNELL, THE COMPLEX DEVELOPED IN TWO PHASES IN 1950 AND 1955. THE MASSIVE PLANT INCLUDED A GENERATOR BUILDING, WHICH INITIALLY HOUSED TWO HYDROGEN-COOLED TURBINE GENERATORS BUT WAS DESIGNED TO EXPAND TO FIVE AS DEMAND INCREASED; OUTDOOR BOILERS; AN OIL HEATING PLANT; A DEMINERALIZATION BUILDING; AND A WATER INTAKE STRUCTURE. THE BUILDINGS REFLECT THE ART MODERNE STYLE, WITH SITE-CAST STRUCTURAL CONCRETE, SCORED CONCRETE PANEL CLADDING, METAL DIVIDED-LIGHT WINDOWS AND GLASS BLOCKS. THE TURBINE GENERATOR BUILDING INCLUDES DISTINCTIVE ILLUMINATED MODERNE GRAPHICS IN ITS SIGNAGE. THE BUILDINGS ARE SOLID CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION, ALTHOUGH OTHER POWER PLANTS BUILT BY BURNS & McDONNELL UP TO THAT TIME HAD UTILIZED STRUCTURAL STEEL.

ON JUNE 2, 1960, THE CITY OF AUSTIN POSTHUMOUSLY DEDICATED “POWER PLANT NO. 2” TO WALTER E. SEAHOLM (1897-1956), WHO SERVED THE CITY OF AUSTIN FOR 35 YEARS, INCLUDING STINTS AS CITY MANAGER AND DIRECTOR OF UTILITIES. SEAHOLM POWER PLANT REMAINED AN ACTIVE PART OF THE CITY’S POWER GENERATION SYSTEM UNTIL 1989.

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK – 2007

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS:
2007 Official Texas Historical Marker
Sponsorship Application Form

Valid November 15, 2006 to January 2, 2007 only

This form constitutes a public request for the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to consider approval of an Official Texas Historical Marker for the topic noted in this application. The THC will review the request and make its determination based on rules and procedures of the program. Filing of the application for sponsorship is for the purpose of providing basic information to be used in the evaluation process. The final determination of eligibility and therefore approval for a state marker will be made by the THC. This form is to be used for subject marker requests only. Please see separate forms for either Historic Texas Cemeteries or Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks.

Proposed marker topic (Official title will be determined by the THC):Seaholm Power Plant

County: **Travis``**

Town (nearest county town on state highway map): **Austin**

Street address of marker site or directions from town noted above: **The Southwestern edge of downtown Austin, bounded by Caesar Chavez Street, West Avenue, Nueces Street and a rail line**

NOTE: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers must be placed at the structure being marked.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark markers definition: Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) markers are awarded to structures deemed worthy of preservation for their historical associations and architectural significance. RTHL is a legal designation and comes with a measure of protection; it is the highest honor the state can bestow on a historic structure, and the designation is required for this type of marker. The RTHL designation becomes effective upon approval by the THC. Official Texas Historical Markers signify the RTHL designation; designation comes only through application to and approval by the THC and must include public display of an Official Texas Historical Marker. Owners of RTHL-designated structures must give the THC 60 days written notice before any alterations are made to the exterior of the structure. RTHL status is a permanent designation and is not to be removed from the property in the event of a transfer of ownership. Only the THC can remove the designation or recall the marker. The marker must remain with the structure and may not be removed or displayed elsewhere until or unless the THC gives express approval in writing for such action. Once designated as RTHL, properties are subject to provisions of Texas Government Code, Section 442.006(f).

Criteria:

1. **Age:** Structures eligible for the RTHL designation and marker must be at least 50 years old.
2. **Historical significance:** Architectural significance alone is not enough to qualify a structure for the RTHL designation. It must have an equally significant historical association, and that association can come from an event that occurred at the site; through individuals who owned or lived on the property; or, in the case of bridges, industrial plants, schoolhouses and other non-residential properties, through documented significance to the larger community.

THC use only
Job _____; NR/C+ _____; IR _____; Prev _____

3. **Architectural significance:** Structures deemed architecturally significant are outstanding examples of architectural history, either through design, materials, structural type or construction methods. In all cases, eligible architectural properties must display integrity, that is, the structure should be in a good state of repair, maintain its appearance from its period of significance and be considered an exemplary model of preservation. Architectural significance is often best determined by the relevance of the property to broader contexts, including geography. Any changes over the years should be compatible with original design and reflect compliance with accepted preservation practices, e.g., the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.*
4. **Good state of repair:** Structures not considered by the THC to be in a good state of repair—i.e., restored—are ineligible for RTHL designation. The THC reserves the sole right to make that determination relative to eligibility for RTHL markers.

Special considerations for RTHL marker applications: If a structure has been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under either Criterion A or B **and** Criterion C (Architecture), the historical text compiled as part of the National Register nomination process may be submitted as part of the marker process, provided it includes the required reference notes and other documentation. Acceptance of the National Register information for the purposes of the marker process will be up to the sole determination of the THC. Listing in the NRHP does not guarantee approval for an RTHL marker. See the THC web site at http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigs/madnrcrit.html for National Register criteria.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Any individual, group or CHC may apply to the THC to request an Official Texas Historical Marker for what it deems a worthy topic. Only complete marker application packets that contain all the required elements can be accepted or processed by the THC. For RTHL markers, the required elements are: sponsorship application form; narrative history; documentation; online map (see details below); site plan; floorplan; historic photograph and current photographs clearly showing each side of the structure.

- Completed application packets must be duly reviewed, verified and approved by the county historical commission in the county in which the marker will be placed.
- The sponsorship application form, narrative history and documentation must be in the form of Microsoft Word or Word-compatible documents and submitted via email attachments to the THC by no later than January 2, 2007.
- Required font style and type size are a Times variant and 12-point.
- Narrative histories must be typed in a double-spaced format and include separate sections on context, overview and significance.
- The narrative history must include documentation in the form of reference notes, which can be either footnotes or endnotes. Documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary.
- Applications for RTHL markers must include a current city or county map through TopoZone.com that clearly denotes the proposed marker location. Instructions for using TopoZone.com are available on the THC web site.
- Immediately upon notification of the successful preliminary review of required elements by the THC, a non-refundable application fee of $100 is required. The fee shall be submitted to the THC within ten working days of application receipt notification.

APPROVAL BY COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The duly appointed marker representative (chair or marker chair) noted below for the CHC will be the sole contact to the THC for this marker application. To ensure accuracy, consistency and efficiency, all information to and from the THC relative to the application will be via direct communication with the CHC representative. All other inquiries (calls, emails, letters) to the THC will be referred to the CHC

representative for response. By filling out the information below and filing the application with the THC, the CHC representative is providing the THC with notice that the application and documentation have been reviewed and verified by the CHC and that the material meets all current requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program.

As chair or duly appointed marker chair, I certify the following:

☒ Representatives of the CHC have met with the potential marker sponsor and discussed the program policies as outlined on the THC web site.

☒ Representatives have conveyed information on the RTHL designation, including legal restrictions, to the property owner.

☒ Representatives of the CHC have reviewed the history and documentation for accuracy and made additional notes as necessary.

☒ It is the determination of the CHC that the structure, history and documentation meet the THC criteria for eligibility.

CHC comments or concerns about this application, if any: Sponsor wishes to have the National Register application narrative for the Seaholm Power Plant, currently on file at Texas Historical Commission, be used as the resource information for this historical marker.

Name of CHC contact (chair or marker chair): **Barry Hutcheson, Chair**

Mailing address: **5803 Burrough Drive** City, zip: **Austin 78745**

Email address (required): **bhutch1965@aol.com**

Daytime phone (with area code): **512-892-4938**

PERMISSION OF PROPERTY OWNER FOR MARKER PLACEMENT

Property owner: **City of Austin**

Address: **P.O. Box 1088** City, state, zip: **Austin, TX. 78767** Phone: **(512) 974-7099**

Legal Description of the property (metes and bounds, lot and block, etc.): **The Southwestern edge of downtown Austin, bounded by Caesar Chavez Street, West Avenue, Nueces Street and a rail line**

Upon receipt of the application, the THC will provide the owner with a letter that outlines the legal responsibility of ownership under the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark statute. The letter must be signed by the owner and returned to the THC before the evaluation can be completed.

NOTE: The property owner will not receive other copies of general correspondence from the THC. All procedural correspondence (notice of receipt, requests for additional information, inscriptions, shipping notices, etc.)—with the exception of payment notices—will be sent via email to the CHC representative, who is encouraged to share the information with all interested parties as necessary. Given the large volume of applications processed annually and the need for centralized communication, all inquiries about applications in process will be referred to the CHC for response. The CHC is the sole liaison to the THC on all marker application matters. The THC will, however, provide regular updates to the CHC via the Internet, email or listserv on the progress of all applications.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

Prospective sponsors please note the following:

- Payment must be received in full within 45 days of the official approval notice and must be accompanied by the THC payment form. The THC is unable to process partial payments or to delay payment due to processing procedures of the sponsor. Applications not paid in the time frame required may, at the sole discretion of the THC, be cancelled or postponed.
- Payment relates to sponsorship of the marker in partnership with the THC, which provides the match for program costs.
- Payment does not constitute ownership of a marker; Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and other Official Texas Historical Markers are the property of the State of Texas.
- If, at any time during the marker process, sponsorship is withdrawn, a refund can be processed, but the THC will retain the application fee of $100.
- The Official Texas Historical Marker Program provides no means of recognizing sponsors through marker text, incising or supplemental plaques.

Marker sponsor (may be individual or organization): **City of Austin**

Contact person (if applicable): **Louis Lindsey**

Mailing address: **P.O. Box 1088** City, zip: **Austin, TX., 78767**

Email address (required): **louis.lindsey@ci.austin.tx.us** Phone: (512) 974-7099

SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS
In order to facilitate delivery of the marker, neither post office box numbers nor rural route numbers can be accepted. To avoid additional shipping charges or time delays, use a business street address (open 8 a.m.—5 p.m., Monday—Friday).

Name: **Louis Lindsey**

Street address: **505 Barton Springs Road, Suite 900** City, zip: **Austin, TX., 78704**

Daytime phone (required): **(512) 974-7099** Email (required): **louis.lindsey@ci.austin.tx.us**

TYPE AND SIZE OF RECORDED TEXAS HISTORIC LANDMARK MARKERS
As part of its review process, the THC will determine the appropriate size marker and provide options, if any, for the approved topic based on its own review criteria, including, but not exclusive of, historical significance, replication of information in other THC markers, relevance to the statewide preservation plan and the amount of available documented information provided in the application narrative. In making its determination, however, the THC will also take into account the preference of the CHC, as noted below.

The sponsor/CHC prefer the following size marker:
☒ 27” x 42” RTHL marker with post ($1500)
☐ 27” X 42” RTHL marker without post* ($1500)
☐ 18” x 28” RTHL marker with post ($1000)
☐ 18” x 28” RTHL marker without post* ($1000)
☐ RTHL medallion and 16” x 12” plaque with post ($750)
☐ RTHL medallion and 16” x 12” plaque without post* ($750)

*For an RTHL marker without post, indicate to what surface material it will be mounted:

☐ wood
☐ masonry
☐ metal
☐ other (specify)

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION (via email required)
When the CHC has determined that the application packet is complete, that the history has been verified and that the application meets the requirements of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the required elements only should be forwarded to the THC via email at the following address: markerapplication@thc.state.tx.us.

- The CHC or marker chair should send an e-mail containing the following attachments:
  - This application form
  - The subject history (narrative and footnotes)
  - A TopoZone.com map of the proposed marker location
  - Photographs (may be sent as attachments or by separate mail; digital photos are acceptable)
  - Site plan (may be sent as attachment or by separate mail; if sent separately, it must be on letter size paper)
  - Floor plans (may be sent as attachment or by separate mail; if sent separately, plans must be on letter size paper)
- Follow these steps to attach the files:
  - Most email services have the "Attach" or "Attachment" command under the "File" menu or in an email toolbar.
  - Select the file for attachment
- Send the email including the attachments, with all requirements met.

RECORDS RETENTION BY CHC: The CHC must retain both the hard copies of the application as well as an online version, at least for the duration of the marker process. The THC is not responsible for lost applications, for incomplete applications or for applications not properly filed according to the program requirements. For additional information about any aspect of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, visit the Markers page on the THC web site (http://www.thc.state.tx.us/markerdesigs/madmark.html).

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Seaholm Plant
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 800 West Cesar Chavez Street **NOT FOR PUBLICATION:** N/A
CITY OR TOWN: Austin **VICINITY:** N/A
STATE: Texas **CODE:** TX **COUNTY:** Travis **CODE:** 453 **ZIP CODE:** 78703

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this _x_nomination ___request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _x_meets ____does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___nationally ___statewide _x_locally. (___See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official — Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___meets ___does not meet the National Register criteria.
(___See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
____ entered in the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.		
____ determined eligible for the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.		
____ determined not eligible for the National Register		
____ removed from the National Register		
____ other (explain): _____		

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public-local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Structure

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	0	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	3	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	3	0 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: energy facility

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

MATERIALS:		
	FOUNDATION	CONCRETE
	WALLS	CONCRETE
	ROOF	CONCRETE/ASPHALT
	OTHER	METAL: aluminum, GLASS BLOCK, GLASS

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-20).

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

___ **A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
___ **B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
_X_ **C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
___ **D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: ENGINEERING

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1950-1955

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1950, 1955

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Burns & McDonnell (engineer)

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-21 through 8-29).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-30).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_ previously listed in the National Register
_ previously determined eligible by the National Register
_ designated a National Historic Landmark
_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

x State historic preservation office *(Texas Historical Commission)*
_ Other state agency
_ Federal agency
_ Local government
_ University
_ Other -- Specify Repository:

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: 8.3 acres

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	620040	3348780

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Lots 1-8, Original City Block 186, Lots 1-8, Original City Block 187, and 3.16 acres of Raymonds Plateau, Austin, Travis County, Texas.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION The boundaries include all lots historically associated with the structures.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Sasha Berghausen

ORGANIZATION: The University of Texas at Austin, School of Architecture **DATE:** May 2000

STREET & NUMBER: 809 East 31st Street **TELEPHONE:** (512) 478-1134

CITY OR TOWN: Austin **STATE**: TX **ZIP CODE:** 78705

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see continuation sheet 7-6)

PHOTOGRAPHS (see photos)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Austin Energy, City of Austin (Contact=Rose San Miguel, Project Manager, Technical Support Services)

STREET & NUMBER: 721 Barton Springs Road **TELEPHONE:** 512/322-6218

CITY OR TOWN: Austin **STATE:** TX **ZIP CODE:** 78704

Summary

Seaholm Plant, a city-owned power generation plant built of site-cast concrete in two phases in 1950 and 1955, sits on the north bank of Austin's Town Lake on the western edge of downtown. All three contributing buildings on the site—the Turbine Generator Building, the Water Intake Structure, and the Oil Heating Plant—have rectangular floor plans and massing. Each building is decorated in Art Deco style and the Turbine Generator Building is adorned with signs written in a Moderne font. Few changes have been made to any of the buildings and they retain a high degree of integrity in their location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

The Turbine Generator Building (Photo 1) sits atop a gently sloping grass hill overlooking Town Lake to the south (Figure 7-6). To the east is Shoal Creek and a new, large outdoor electric substation that provides power to downtown Austin. To the west is a steel and masonry railroad bridge carrying tracks that sweep across the north edge of the site, which is bounded by West Third Street. West Cesar Chavez (formerly 1st) Street traverses the southern edge of the site, running parallel to the south facade of the Turbine Generator Building and separating it from the Water Intake Structure (Photo 2), which is perched at the lake's edge amidst Live Oak trees on City of Austin park property (Figure 7-7). The Turbine Generator Building looms above on a grass hill to the north, across West Cesar Chavez Street. The lack of adjacent buildings makes it difficult to assess the scale of both these immense structures and permits views of both from many locations in Austin; the Turbine Generator Building and the Water Intake Structure figure prominently in the cityscape. To the north of the Turbine Generator Building, sitting in an expanse of recently poured asphalt, is the much smaller Oil Heating Plant (Photo 3).

Turbine Generator Building

The Turbine Generator Building is a large enclosure originally made of four rectangular masses. The Turbine Room is an immense, undivided space 100 feet wide, 270 feet long, and 50 feet high. To the north and south are smaller rectangular appendages not quite as long or as tall as the Turbine Room, and the smallest of all spaces is a one-story rectangular volume on the east end (Figure 7-8). To the west is a low addition that represents one of the few changes to the original 1950s structure (Figure 7-9).

The principal (south) facade of the Turbine Generator Building (Photo 1) is situated close to the entry drive off West Cesar Chavez Street, behind a broad, sliding chain-link fence monitored by a small guard booth. The entries into the two-tiered generator building are within rectangular portals at the east and west ends of the nearly symmetrical facade. The only asymmetrical elements are two rectangular enclosures at grade,

IMAGE: Map.jpg

City of Austin Map. Seaholm Plant is represented by the black dot. North is up.

IMAGE: Site.jpg

Site Plan. North is to the left. The three shaded buildings (north to south) represent the Oil Heating Plant, Turbine Generator Building, and Water Intake Structure.[1]

[1] From original ink on linen drawing by Burns & McDonnell in Austin Energy's drawing collection.

IMAGE: Frontobl.jpg

Phase One Construction. Oblique view (historic, c. 1950) of south (principal) and east elevations, camera looking northwest.[2]

[2] PICA 26694, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

IMAGE: 1st.jpg

1st Floor, Turbine Generator Building. North is to the left.[3]

[3] Courtesy of Roy F. Weston, Inc.

located at the middle and west ends of the building, that appear to be large planters but are actually openings for the ventilation intake vents below grade in the basement. These intake enclosures are as high as the water-table, which is made of smooth concrete with a beveled upper edge, and forms the base of both the Turbine Generator Building and the Oil Heating Plant. The water-table is only broken at doors, or where the boilers penetrate the Turbine Generator Building on the north side, and serves to unify both buildings.

Each southern entry leads into the office block at the south of the Turbine Generator Building through double-leaf aluminum frame doors with a four-light transom above, inset within a rubbed concrete portal. To either side of each door are terra cotta planters (added later) atop large concrete pedestals that abut either side of the protruding entry stairs, which are divided by three steel handrails (also added later). Covering each entry door is a flat awning faced in aluminum. Above the west entry, Moderne aluminum letters at the front edge of the awning spell “Light,” while the east entry says “Power” (Photo 4). Above each awning is a nine-over-ten textured glass block light, upon which aluminum script reads “City of Austin” and displays a stylized, inverted lighting bolt symbolizing the building’s power generating function. On the east entry is a metal plaque from the 1960 ceremony dedicating the plant to Walter E. Seaholm.

Although just the east entry was built first as part of the 1950 construction (Figure 7-8), the 1955 addition blends almost seamlessly with the older structure so that the entire building reads as one coherent whole (Photo 5). The facade is unified by concrete construction that was poured against form work to which narrow wooden battens were nailed, resulting in a scoring pattern that is used to decorate all elevations of every building and to lend unity to the entire plant. The scoring pattern also breaks the elevations into small square “panels” of four by four feet. The integrity of the squares is not violated anywhere except at corners and where the two phases of construction meet. The square panels march unbroken across the top of each elevation, and pairs of panels run vertically down the building, alternating with window openings of similar width.

All first floor windows on the principal facade are two-over-seven, divided light aluminum windows with two operable awnings, separated by a broad aluminum mullion. The second floor windows are similar, but only contain two-over-six lights with just one operable awning. The first floor windows sit on the water-table with no sill, but the second floor windows have cast stone sills. Between the first and second floor windows are concrete spandrels panels formed against fluted form work. Above the second story windows, the panelized wall construction resumes, but the region above each second floor window is recessed two inches.

The top of the principal facade terminates after two stories with a horizontal parapet, capped by a cast stone coping that hides the flat roof beyond. North of the principal facade the building rises again the equivalent of one more story, forming the exterior wall of the Turbine Room. This wall contains a number of clerestory windows that help light the Turbine Room, but the windows are obscured from the exterior at close-range by the protruding office block. Although the clerestory windows, which also continue around the east and north elevations, are also aluminum divided light windows, they are each framed by a one inch projection of smooth concrete, and the scored panels above are not recessed. The Turbine Room elevation also terminates in a parapet and a cast stone coping that obscures on all sides a very shallow gabled roof that runs east-west.

Topping the Turbine Generator Building is an 80-foot aluminum microwave tower that was presumably used to control electronic switching at substations.[4]

The east elevation has remained unaltered since its construction in 1950 (Photo 6) and continues the same scored and fluted concrete vocabulary seen on the principal facade. Where the office block adjoins the Turbine Room, the building increases in height a distance equivalent to one story, although the Turbine Room is not subdivided into floors (Figure 7-12). In the upper, northern corner of the office block there is a small square scupper lined with copper flashing. Such overflow scuppers are visible around the buildings, but most drainage is achieved through internal roof drains.

The eastern elevation introduces several window variations. The eastern side of the office block contains three divided light windows in each punched opening on the first and second floors. Much of the east wall of the Turbine Room also contains divided light windows, but the entire grouping of windows is surrounded by a projected, one-inch cast stone frame that emanates from the water-table. The smaller windows over the east face of the Men's Locker Room and Laboratory are separated by fluted concrete panels, but the fluting is horizontal rather than vertical. Lastly, there is a matrix of 18 textured glass block windows set within a raised cast stone frame.

The north face of the Turbine Generator building is dominated by the five large boilers and stacks (Photo 7). Defunct railroad tracks pass to the east of the boilers and enter the Turbine Room through a rolling steel door; it was here that the giant steam turbines were delivered in pieces by train. Above the rolling door are windows at the second and third story levels configured just as they are on the front, although the second story window is only four lights tall to accommodate the rolling door below. There is a puzzling ghost in the concrete panels surrounding this window suggesting a previously different window configuration, but the original, as-built drawings depict the current configuration.

Clerestory windows march along the top of the Turbine Room, interrupted by the elevator penthouse, but the boilers obscure all of this. The four most eastern boilers, serving generators #5 through #8 (the old plant contained #1 through #4) are identical in appearance, although the stacks for boilers #7 and #8, added five years later, are taller and thinner than the two original stacks serving the two generators housed in the 1950 portion of the Turbine Room. Each stack is on an octagonal concrete pad north and center of its associated boiler, connected to the boiler via large rectangular ducts of constantly varying cross-section. Each boiler is clad in a cubic mass of corrugated, embossed aluminum that was recently installed as part of the decontamination of the plant. The boilers were originally clad in asbestos insulation contained within a woven wire mesh, plaster, and canvass, all of which was painted a light color.[5] When the asbestos was removed, the mesh was replaced with the aluminum, representing the most significant destruction of Seaholm's integrity.

Above and around each boiler is a steel superstructure, valves, ladders, stairs, catwalks, and great lengths of piping that give the boilers a nautical appearance. The concrete walls of the Turbine Generator Building are often penetrated by the pipes through holes that are much larger in diameter than the pipes. Before

[4] "Seaholm Sparks Short Circuiting," *Austin American-Statesman* (1 October 1954).
[5] Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.

IMAGE: Tgbssect.jpg

North-South Section, Turbine Generator Building. Note the three levels and the undifferentiated volume of the Turbine Room.[6]

[6] From original ink on linen drawing by Burns & McDonnell in Austin Energy's drawing collection.

the asbestos pipe insulation was removed, however, these holes provided just the clearance required. Between the boilers are double-leaf metal man doors at grade and two-over-six windows above, both of which are obscured by the boilers. The ground between the boilers contains pipe trenches covered with removable concrete slabs. Between boilers #7 and #8 is a Gun House made of concrete block that was installed later and used to maintain the fuel injectors ("guns") for the boilers.

The most western boiler, attached to generator #9, is altogether different in appearance and operation from the other four. Boilers #5 through #8 are mounted on the ground and expanded upward as they got hot. The boiler faces, which contain the boiler controls, breach the north wall of the Turbine Generator Building, entering through large openings in the concrete wall. Boiler #9, however, is a "hanging" boiler, expanding downwards as it got hot during operation. It is therefore much taller than the other boilers, with a much more pronounced steel superstructure that rises above the Turbine Generator Building, holding the boiler above a hole at grade through which it hangs into the mezzanine level. This hole is not visible from the exterior, however, because Boiler #9 is perched upon a two-story concrete block structure that was part of the original construction, despite its different vocabulary.

Although Boiler #9 lacks the same cubic corrugated aluminum shape of the other boilers, it nonetheless contains large ducts made of matching corrugated aluminum. The attached flue stack is larger in diameter than all the others and matches the height of stacks #7 and #8, although it is set farther north than all the other stacks, which are aligned east-west, so it often appears to be a different height (Photo 7).

To the west of boiler #9 is a low addition mated to the western face of the Turbine Room that was completed in 1972. Like the original Turbine Generator Building, the addition is made of scored concrete, although the scoring divides the faces of the addition into much larger panels than the smaller squares on the rest of the building. Between the addition and the concrete block base for Boiler #9 to the east is a concrete block infill containing a double-leaf man door and capped with a shed roof, the only visible roof structure on the entire building. The infill was completed in 1987 and necessitated the removal of two windows at Boiler #9's base.

The western elevation of the Turbine Generator Building is the face that defines the power plant to many Austinites (Figure 7-14), for it looms prominently above busy Lamar Boulevard. The low concrete 1972 addition cannot be seen from afar, but the stacks, boilers, and profile of the west end are easily noticed rising above the railroad tracks. The western face is free of windows and presents a generous expanse of scored concrete. High upon the Turbine Room face are Moderne letters spelling "City of Austin Power Plant," which are illuminated red at night.

Entry into the Turbine Generator Building through either set of aluminum Deco style doors on the south facade leads to a double-height stair lobby detailed more elaborately than the rest of the functionally direct power plant. On the floor is a medallion made of vinyl composition tile (VCT) that says "City of Austin" in a ring around a large star. A red tile base surrounds the perimeter of the stair lobby. An aluminum stringer course matching the edge of the awning outside clads the stair, and the stair rail is made of extruded aluminum of

IMAGE: Backobl.jpg

Oblique view (historic, c. 1955) of Turbine Generator Building's north and west elevations, camera looking southeast. Note that installation of Boiler #9 and its stack is incomplete.[7]

[7] PICA 20172, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

rectangular cross-section. The stairs have a landing above the aluminum entry doors, situated just below the back side of the glass block light and aluminum text. During the day the stair lobby is bathed in filtered sun Light, and at night the stair lobby fluorescent lights are left on to silhouette the aluminum text with white light while the text is simultaneously back-lit with red to compliment the signage on the west face of the Turbine Room. In the western entry is a plaque listing the city council members and mayor at the time of the second phase of construction.

The stair lobbies enter directly into the cavernous Turbine Room floor through a set of steel full-light doors with transoms above that mimic the aluminum entry doors. The Turbine Room is an impressive volume of undivided space (Photo 8). On the bare concrete floor (which was previously tiled with VCT) are the five huge steam turbines, which appear as massive mounds of blue-gray metal that rise out of the floor from below. The Turbine Room is generously lit with natural light from the clerestory windows as well as the windows on the east elevation. Three large square openings cut into the floor between the generators provide views into the mezzanine and basement levels below (Figures 7-16 and 7-17), which contain a maze of pipes, valves, metal stairs, and grates.

Engaged rectangular piers rise two stories above the generators at a regular interval, supporting the crane runway above for the still operational, 75-ton beam crane. At the building seam the pier is double-width. Topping each pier is a concrete roof beam supporting the concrete and built-up roof. There is only a single-wide beam atop the double pier at the construction joint, however. A central concrete spine runs down the center of the ceiling at the gable peak, helping to make the ceiling appear like the ribbing of a boat hull. Along the south face of the Turbine Room at the second floor are a series of glass windows that permit the offices above, including the control room with an extensive array of panels and gauges, a view of the Turbine Room floor below.

The Turbine Generator Building possesses a high degree of historical integrity (compare Photos 1 and 5, Photo 6 and Figure 7-8, and Photo 7 and Figure 7-14). Most of the windows are intact; only a handful have muntins that have been compromised by the installation of ventilation louvers or window air-conditioning units. Several windows have been covered on the exterior with storm windows and several others have been tinted with gold film.

The 1972 addition on the west end of the Turbine Room has obscured some of the original western elevation, but it has not destroyed the original building fabric. The original overhead door and man door on the southern edge of the Turbine Room's west elevation still remain, they have just been encapsulated within the addition.

Water Intake Structure

The Water Intake Structure is located across West Cesar Chavez Street to the south of the Turbine Generator Building, and it protrudes into the water of Town Lake (Photo 2). Its construction system and design vocabulary, both inside and out, are extremely similar to the Turbine Generator Building. Also like the Turbine

IMAGE: Mezz.jpg

Mezzanine Plan, Turbine Generator Building. North is to the left.[8]

[8] Courtesy of Roy F. Weston, Inc.

IMAGE: Base.jpg

Basement Plan, Turbine Generator Building. North is to the left.[9]

[9] Courtesy of Roy F. Weston, Inc.

Generator Building, the Water Intake Structure was built in two phases in 1950 and 1955. Since each generator has two water intakes, the original 1950 Water Intake Structure contains only four sluice gates (two each for generators #5 and #6). With the addition of generators #7 through #9, the Water Intake Structure was extended to the west to accommodate six more sluice gates and pump gear.

Entry into the Water Intake Structure is gained through a man door behind a small concrete wing wall on the north elevation. To the east of the man door is a rolling steel door and window. There are six more windows to the west of the man door, and all windows on every facade have a panel of corrugated concrete above and a pre-cast concrete sill below. Much of the north elevation is obscured by large Live Oak trees, which have matured since construction was completed, and also by a newly erected (non-contributing) outbuilding for the nearby municipal water treatment plant.

The east and west elevations of the water intake structure are similar. Both have three, two-over-seven divided light windows set within slightly indented vertical bands that span from the ground (or water) to the parapet. The east and west elevations maintain the same scored concrete vocabulary, but unlike the north and south elevations, the east and west are not divided into squares; instead they are only divided horizontally. A steep metal stair on the west elevation leads to a concrete walk just above the water on the south side. Public access to the stair is precluded by a fence and barbed wire.

The south elevation rises two stories above the water (Photo 2). At the water level are operable sluice gates nestled below the concrete walk. Above each of the ten gates are one-story-high rectangular indentations. The two phases of construction are apparent in a double-wide wall separating the indentations for pumps #6 and #7. Down the center of each indentation runs a metal rod, held in place by two metal bearings, from the floor above that opens the sluice gates. Above each rectangular indentation is a two-over-seven divided light window. Like the east and west faces, these windows are placed within a vertical indentation running from the parapet topped with a pre-cast concrete coping, above, to the rectangular indentations below.

To the east of Seaholm's Water Intake Structure is a small, four-bay building very similar in detailing to the Seaholm Water Intake Structure, but this water intake structure for the Green Water Treatment Plant has much narrower bays. Although this structure never served Seaholm Plant, it is effectively part of the Seaholm Water Intake Structure, sharing a concrete retaining wall with the east face of the Seaholm Water Intake Structure, which is obscured by the currently operating Green Water Treatment Plant intake structure.

The interior of the Water Intake Structure shares similarities with the Turbine Room of the Turbine Generator Building. It too is an undivided rectangular volume with engaged rectangular piers that hold up rails for a 5 ton beam crane (Figure 7-19). The two phases of construction are more evident, however: at the construction joint there are two piers side-by-side, accompanied by a crack in the floor and side-by-side roof beams above. The floor is also breached by rectangular openings leading to two sump pits containing the water pumps. The sump pits do not extend the full-length of the Water Intake Structure, but are interrupted by the concrete wall between the two phases of construction.

As cooling water for the steam condenser was drawn into the Water Intake Structure, it passed through traveling screens that removed debris from the lake water. The screens, linked in a belt like a bicycle chain,

IMAGE: Wissect.jpg

North-South Section, Water Intake Structure.[10]

[10] From original ink on linen drawing by Burns & McDonnell in Austin Energy's drawing collection.

were moved by the drive mechanisms located above on the south side of the main floor. Each of these ten large drive mechanisms obscures the light filtering into the Water Intake Structure from the southern windows. After passing through the water screens the water was pumped to the Turbine Generator Building through 42-inch diameter pipes (#9 had 54-inch pipes) by the massive pumps at the bottom of the sump pits. After cooling the steam that spun the turbines, the water was discharged into Shoal Creek.

The integrity of the Water Intake Structure is high. No external integrity has been compromised; the only major alterations are the replacement of the four traveling water screens for generators #5 and #6 with newer units.

Oil Heating Plant

Isolated in a sea of recently poured asphalt to the north of the Turbine Generator Building is the Oil Heating Plant, made of the same scored concrete and smooth water-table construction as the Turbine Generator Building (Photo 3). The east and west faces have no doors or fenestration. The south elevation is symmetrical, with a five-light steel man door on-center and two casement windows to either side, all of which are located within a raised rectangular concrete frame originating at the water-table. Two black handrails frame the door, preventing a fall into the deep stair well that cuts into the earth along the south face of the pump house; entry through the south door is actually via a concrete bridge that spans the stair. The north face has what was once a symmetrical composition arranged around a centered, square chimney that rises above the parapet. On the east side of the chimney is a double leaf metal door. Each leaf has a large light divided into four vertically and an inset square panel with louvers below. On the opposite (west) side of the chimney is another set of doors, the eastern one of which matches the set on the east side of the chimney. The western door of this pair was destroyed—the only loss of integrity in the small structure—and has been replaced with a flat panel steel door that is too short, so there is a metal “transom” panel above. Both sets of doors are bracketed by casement windows that are the same as on the front.

Summary

Seaholm Plant, designed by the nationally recognized Kansas City, Missouri, engineering firm of Burns & McDonnell, was built in two phases in 1950 and 1955. Originally referred to as "Power Plant No. 2" in the 1949 construction documents, Seaholm Plant was dedicated posthumously on June 2, 1960, to Walter E. Seaholm, a prominent figure in the administration of Austin's municipal utilities from the 1920s until the mid-1950s. Seaholm Plant is a wonderful example of Burns & McDonnell's Art Deco style, sharing many design elements with their other municipal waterworks and powerhouses of the 1930s through 1950s. As was common with Burns & McDonnell designs, great attention was paid to the massing, scaling, and detailing of Seaholm, but it was unique in its solid concrete construction; all prior Burns & McDonnell plants were clad in brick even if they had a concrete structural frame (and most were steel). Seaholm is nominated on the local level under National Register Criterion "C" as an engineering work embodying "distinctive characteristics of a type" and possessing "high artistic value."

Electric power arrived in Austin in 1893, and the city has owned its own generation and distribution system ever since.[11] In 1927, however, municipal ownership of the power plant was jeopardized when Texas Power and Light Company (TP+L) made a bid to purchase Austin's municipal utility, claiming they could operate it more cheaply than the city. Walter E. Seaholm, working as Superintendent of the Electric Department (1922-1933), proved the TP+L engineers wrong by demonstrating more economical operation of the plant than the engineers thought possible, thus ending TP+L's bid to purchase the municipal utility.[12] The dedication plaque on Seaholm's east entry acknowledges Walter E. Seaholm's important role in the "preservation of this city's ownership of its electrical system…."

At the time Burns & McDonnell was commissioned to design Seaholm Plant, Walter E. Seaholm was serving as Austin's Director of Utilities (1945-1950), and during the second phase he was the City Manager (1950-1955). He had also served the city as the Director of Utilities from 1934 until 1942 and stepped up as the Acting City Manager from 1942 until 1945 while Guiton Morgan (appointed) was called to duty in World War II. In addition to Walter E. Seaholm's 1927 stand against TP+L, he also deserves recognition for his ingenuity during the Colorado River flood in June, 1935, which knocked out the city's power and drinking water. He obtained power by patching into TP+L's system and also established an emergency drinking water pump.[13]

Walter E. Seaholm graduated from The University of Texas at Austin in 1920 with an electrical engineering degree after World War I interrupted his studies. He had two sisters and was married, but had no children. Seaholm was extremely active in the community, not only as an appointed city official, but also as the

[11] "Municipal Power Plant Serves Double Purpose," *Austin American-Statesman* (29 January 1958).
[12] "Seaholm Previously Victorious," *Austin American-Statesman* (26 January 1955).
[13] "Power Man Seaholm Never Blew a Fuse," *Austin American-Statesman* (25 April 1948).

President of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers, Ex-Students Association of UT, Kiwanis Club, and Child and Family Services. In 1953 he was recognized as "Engineer of the Year" by the Texas Society of Professional Engineers, Travis Chapter, and named "Mr. Front Page of the Year" by the *Austin-American Statesman*. His tenure serving the city ended in 1955, not long before his death, when a 3-2 vote in City Council ousted him as City Manager. At the time of his death on December 22, 1956, Walter E. Seaholm was living in Austin at 1601 Palma Plaza;14 his house still exists and appears to retain a high degree of integrity, appropriate for nomination under Criterion "B."

In 1948, when Seaholm was commissioned, Austin was a town of nearly 132,000 people. World War II and post-war shortages meant the city had not upgraded its infrastructure since 1940 when its population was just 87,930.[15] Not only did a larger population mean greater demand for electricity, but so too did lifestyle changes. Many American families had purchased televisions, and although television sets did not draw much electric current, families were sold on electrical amenities advertised on television—such as dishwashers and washing machines—that did. Air conditioning, which also represented a large current draw, was also being widely installed.[16] In addition to meeting Austin's increased demand for electricity, the new Seaholm Plant also served as the home of the entire municipal electric department.

Despite the fact that Burns & McDonnell were not local engineers, it was logical that Austin turned to the Kansas City firm for the design of its new plant. Founded in 1898, Burns & McDonnell had positioned themselves by 1948 as the foremost national experts on municipal power plant design.[17] Co-founder Robert E. McDonnell was a prolific contributor to trade journals, writing articles that championed public ownership of utilities. He believed municipal ownership was the only way of ensuring quality electrical service over profits, thus earning the reputation as the nemesis of privately held electric companies. McDonnell served as a Congressional advisor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt,18 and also advocated municipal utilities as an effective revenue generator for cities; indeed, Seaholm made Austin money—so much so that city leaders were often tempted to raid Seaholm's expansion funds for contributions to the General Fund.[19]

Although Burns & McDonnell got off to a slow start in 1898, by their 25th anniversary in 1923 they had designed 232 water works, 115 sewer systems, and 87 lighting plants. By their 50th anniversary in 1948, the same year Burns & McDonnell was hired by Austin to design Seaholm, Burns & McDonnell had billed a total of $664 Million. Their focus on water and sewage plants shifted in favor of power plants; by 1948 over 50% of their revenues had been generated by lighting and power plant design. Burns & McDonnell had completed projects in 854 American cities and 45 states in its first 50 years and continues to thrive today. Still operating out of its Kansas City headquarters, Burns & McDonnell now has international offices and has diversified to offer architectural and consulting services as well as engineering expertise. In addition to water, sewer, and

14 1953 City Directory, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.
15 Reference Desk, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.
16 Jack Cashill, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, 1998.
17 Ibid.
18 Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
19 "Full Text of Seaholm's Last Address to Council," *Austin American-Statesman* (10 February 1955).

power plants, their completed work includes airport terminals, hangars, and runways, roads, parking facilities, warehouses, bridges, dams, power distribution systems, and chemical processing plants.[20]

Part of Burns & McDonnell's pre-World War II success can be attributed to the 1936 passage of the Rural Electrification Act, initially passed by Congress to subsidize construction of power distribution systems to rural areas, such as Texas' Hill Country, and later interpreted to support governmental assistance in the construction of power generation facilities. No assistance would be provided to private holding companies, however. The government only subsidized municipal or cooperative utilities through the formation of the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). With an extensive portfolio of municipal work and a founder who espoused public ownership, Burns & McDonnell was poised to garner many of the municipal contracts for new electrical work nation-wide following formation of the REA.

Burns & McDonnell's Seaholm Plant, with both a site-cast concrete structural and cladding system, is unusual. All other pre-1950 Burns & McDonnell powerhouse and waterworks projects documented in their 100th anniversary commemorative history, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, are of masonry construction. Only one other, a brick-clad powerhouse in Wallingford, Connecticut, was partially made of concrete: it has a concrete structural frame.[21] Constructing a powerhouse with a daunting array of plumbing entirely of site-cast concrete made accounting for every pipe breech in the concrete floors, walls, and roofs imperative. If a structural steel frame with masonry cladding were used instead, the architects at Burns & McDonnell only needed to check the shop drawings for conflicts between piping and the steel; brick masons could then simply brick around pipes as they clad the frame.[22] Seaholm's exclusive use of concrete, however, made for the most elaborate set of shop drawings ever seen by one of Burns & McDonnell's civil engineers.[23] A former mechanical engineer and an architect for Burns & McDonnell claim that Seaholm used a concrete frame because war shortages associated with the aftermath of World War II and the coming of the Korean War resulted in long delays for structural steel orders.[24] It is less clear, however, why Burns & McDonnell specified concrete cladding. There is some speculation that political interests in Austin drove the decision, or perhaps the use of concrete was associated with another large-scale civic project at the time, like dam construction.

Seaholm is also a plant type, the semi-outdoor type, which was only popular in temperate climates, particularly the south.[25] With its boilers outside, exposed to weather, and its generators housed within a building, Seaholm is representative of a powerhouse type that compromised ease of boiler maintenance in favor of cost savings, avoiding a covering for the massive boilers. Not many years after Seaholm was constructed, powerhouse construction became characterized by either completely outdoor boilers and generators, such as

[20] Jack Cashill, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, 1998.
21 Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
22 Ethel S. Wonderly, personal interview, 20 May 2000.
23 Ibid.
24 Ethel S. Wonderly, personal interview, 20 May 2000, and Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
25 Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.

Austin's Decker Creek Plant (1977), also designed by Burns & McDonnell, or enclosed powerhouses clad only in corrugated metal panels. Either way, opportunities for the kind of detailing present in Seaholm were lost.

The raison d'être for Seaholm was to house five Westinghouse hydrogen-cooled turbine generators. Phase one was designed to house only two 20 megawatt generators, #5 and #6, to augment the 24 megawatt output by generators #1 through #4 housed in the old powerhouse immediately to the east. Before completion of the first phase, however, plans were made for expansion, indicated by the temporary masonry infill in the west wall shown in the as-built drawings. The expansion in phase two originally housed only #7 and #8, two additional 20 megawatt generators, but included space for the addition of a larger, 40 megawatt unit. Walter E. Seaholm was particularly proud of the cost-savings incurred by planning ahead for the addition of Unit #9.[26] It was not unusual for a city's load profile to double every 7 to 10 years. Typically the extra capacity was accommodated by simply doubling the generator output at some point. In Austin's case, they jumped from 20 megawatt units to a 40 megawatt generator. Once generators got bigger than approximately 25 megawatts, the larger boilers required (like #9) became more efficient if they were "hung," expanding downward when hot rather than upward, like the ground-mounted boilers #5-#8.[27]

Seaholm was built with ash pits under Boilers #5 and #6, although they were never used because #5 and #6 were never fired with coal.28 The Oil Pump House and four underground tanks were also built to permit Seaholm to be run on No. 6 crude oil, but it was fired primarily on natural gas. Accommodating the ability to burn three types of fuel was typical, for the REA required all subsidized plants to be designed with flexibility.[29] The Texas REA-funded plants in San Miguel and the Brazos Electric Cooperative's Miller Plant were the first to convince the REA to relax the restriction that boilers be suitable for conversion to coal firing.[30] In short, there was nothing at all remarkable about Seaholm's power generating technology, but the sheer scale of its boilers and generators is still awesome.

What is noteworthy about Seaholm Plant is its architectural design. Although a "power plant" would suggest an unadorned, functionally-direct design, Seaholm is thoughtfully scaled and detailed. The form work for much of Seaholm's exterior walls was constructed using wood battens nailed to plywood such that the large concrete exterior walls have a scored pattern of 4-foot by 4-foot panels. This panelized system indicates the designers gave careful consideration to proportioning the elevations of Seaholm, breaking down the immense scale of the large powerhouse into a rational composition of elements more closely related to human scale. While these panels retain the imprint of the wood grain from the plywood form work, other regions of Seaholm utilize smooth corrugated surfaces (for the spandrel panels), or flat rubbed concrete (for the entry surrounds), portraying a joyful manipulation of the material by the designers.

Burns & McDonnell's work displays a certain level of consistency, beginning with the Art Deco styled Cincinnati waterworks plant built in 1938 (Figure 8-26), that carries through to Seaholm. Cincinnati established

26 "Full Text of Seaholm's Last Address to Council," *Austin American-Statesman* (10 February 1955).
27 Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. According to Harold Wonderly (as reported by Ethel S. Wonderly), however, Seaholm was *not* a REA project.
30 Ibid.

the precedents seen on Seaholm of rectangular massing culminating in parapets capped with concrete coping. At its base, the water-table is also concrete, and its face sits forward of the building's brick exterior. To either side of the celebrated entry "portal" (which is quite similar to the entry on the 1932 Fort Collins, Colorado, power plant) are fluted concrete spandrel panels.

Lakeside Station, located in Springfield, Illinois, and built in several phases in the 1930s through 1950s establishes a vocabulary for expansion also observed in the two phases of Seaholm (Figure 8-27). The original phase became subsumed in a larger building that created a unified composition of two entries located within celebrated "portals" on either side of a symmetrical facade. Lakeside also has recessed, vertical bands of windows and is labeled with Moderne style supergraphics. Such stylized graphics, a remarkable feature of Seaholm, seem to have been a Burns & McDonnell specialty. Two brochures prepared by Burns & McDonnell, one in the early 1940s and a second in 1948 are both labeled with Moderne text (Figure 8-28). Supergrahpic signage on Burns & McDonnell plants can be observed as early as 1938 in McPherson, Kansas (Figure 8-28), or 1937 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Illuminated supergraphics for dramatic night-time lighting appear in 1937 in Kansas City and in the 1950s in Sibley, Missouri. But only Seaholm seems to have merged all three concepts together: Moderne supergraphic text that is dramatically illuminated, both on the west elevation and above each entry in the principal facade. In fact, Seaholm appears to be the culmination of all previous Burns & McDonnell powerhouse and waterworks designs, synthesizing all elements, including the use of glass block windows in addition to the other elements listed above, that are characteristically Art Deco. Seaholm is arguably the only Burns & McDonnell plant in which a merging of all the critical Art Deco design elements have been synthesized into a single building.

The architectural drawings of Seaholm list the initials of the designers and detailers responsible for the design of the powerhouse. The principal designer for the first phase is indicated as Ralph M. Mitchel (R.M.M), who was the Chief Architect of Burns & McDonnell. He was assisted by detailer Ethel Sklar (E.S.), a woman who was a registered architect working for an engineering firm in the late 1940s, certainly unusual for her time. Ms. Sklar (now Mrs. Wonderly) thinks she was responsible for the sign designs and recalls that a subcontractor by the name of Kansas City Ornamental Iron (she thinks) did all sign subcontracting for Burns & McDonnell.[31] Harry A. Lind (H.A.L.) also completed further detailing. All of the design for the expansion of the Turbine Generator Building in phase two is credited to Keith Edwards (K.E.), who became the Chief Architect of the Power Division.[32] Expansion of the Water Intake Structure was designed by Andy A. Zahner (A.A.Z.), who later became the chief HVAC engineer after returning to school for his engineering degree. Leo D. Boswell assisted Zahner in the design. Two detailers are also listed: Jack Avery (J.A.) and the unidentified R.R.F.

[31] Ethel S. Wonderly, personal interview, 20 May 2000.
[32] Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.

IMAGE: Cinci.jpg

1938 Burns & McDonnell Water Treatment Plant, Cincinnati, Ohio. This plan established much of the vocabulary observed on Seaholm.[33]

[33] Jack Cashill, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, 1998.

IMAGE: Lake1.jpg

Phase One (1930s), Lakeside Station, Springfield, IL.[34]

IMAGE: Lakesi2.jpg

Phase Two (1950s), Lakeside Station, Springfield, IL. This expansion has much in common with Seaholm.[35]

[34] Jack Cashill, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, 1998.
[35] Ibid.

IMAGE: Brochure.jpg
1940s Burns & McDonnell Promotional Brochure. Note the Moderne-style font, similar to Seaholm's signs.[36]

IMAGE: Super.jpg

1937 McPherson, Kansas, Plant with Supergraphics.[37]

36 Jack Cashill, *A Century of Excellence: Burns & McDonnell*, 1998.
37 Ibid.

Seaholm Plant retains a high degree of integrity in its location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling. Its original site remains relatively unmolested; the old power plant that was to the east was demolished in the early 1960s and an outdoor electric substation erected in its place. Large Live Oak trees have grown up to the north of the Water Intake Structure on the fill between the Turbine Generator Building and the Water Intake Structure, but there have been no new buildings constructed that obscure the view of either. The original design of Seaholm has been remarkably preserved. The only addition attached to the original building is the truck loading dock and offices on the west, designed in 1972 by Simpson Associates, Inc. Although mated to the Turbine Generator Building, the original roll-up and man door are still visible inside; the building fabric does not appear to have been destroyed, but simply encapsulated. In 1987 Parshall and Associates designed the small concrete block infill between the loading dock addition and Boiler #9, removing two windows from the original concrete block base supporting Boiler #9. Much of the original material still exists, although asbestos abatement has removed all of the pipe insulation that made the pipes larger, filling the breaches in the exterior walls more completely. Most significantly, the wire mesh, plaster, and canvass that originally covered the asbestos insulation wrapping the boilers has been removed and replaced with corrugated aluminum covers.[38] The workmanship remains intact, including the Moderne aluminum signage on the west and south elevations. All elements combine to preserve the feeling of Seaholm.

Seaholm Plant last put power on the grid in 1989 when it had no longer become profitable to operate. Running the plant reportedly cost more than the city could charge for the electricity Seaholm could produce. It could no longer compete with the much larger, more efficient Decker and Holly Plants.[39] In addition, Seaholm was contaminated with PCB, mercury, lead, asbestos, and cadmium, which will require a 10 month remediation effort by Eagle Construction and Environmental Services, Inc., that will cost $3,250,645.[40] In many cases it is difficult to separate remediation activities from demolition; as a result, Seaholm's interior will soon be stripped of all its machinery and power generating equipment.

Preservation of Seaholm Plant is imperative because it embodies a collection of finely crafted construction details that exemplify the height of Art Deco design by the nationally recognized engineering firm Burns & McDonnell. Situated at the periphery of Austin's CBD in the middle of the popular hike and bike recreation area around Town Lake, Seaholm is not a piece of necessary, but unattractive, infrastructure that is so often relegated to the outskirts of town. Instead it is a carefully detailed participant in the cityscape; one of the local news channels uses an image of Seaholm in its nightly introduction that shows a montage of images that define Austin. But Seaholm's prominent location jeopardizes its integrity. Many groups are vying for the decommissioned plant, seeking various uses for the Turbine Generator Building and the Water Intake Structure, including a science and technology museum, a restaurant, a state aquarium, or a mass transit hub. Whatever adaptive use Seaholm assumes, it is essential that its historic fabric not be compromised.

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[38] Dave Ege, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
[39] Harold Reynolds, personal interview, 27 March 2000.
[40] Rose San Miguel, personal interview, 11 May 2000.

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"City's New Power Generating Plant to be Opened to the Public Sunday." *Austin American-Statesman*, 3 May 1956.

Ege, Dave. Burns & McDonnell. Personal telephone interview. 27 March 2000. Mr. Ege was an engineer for Burns & McDonnell when the first phase of Seaholm was designed. Although he is retired, he remains active with the firm at its headquarters and provided significant advice on technical issues pertaining to Seaholm and powerhouses in general.

"Engineering Society to Honor Walter Seaholm with Dinner." *Austin American-Statesman*, 24 February 1953.

"Freelance." *Austin American-Statesman*, 11 February 1955.

"Full Text of Seaholm's Last Address to Council." *Austin American-Statesman*, 10 February 1955.

McComas, Mike. Burns & McDonnell. Personal telephone interview, 23 March 2000. Mr. McComas is an engineer with Burns & McDonnell's St. Louis office and is presently the most senior engineer (non-retired) in the Energy Division.

Minutes, City of Austin City Council, September through November, 1948, pg. 1055. Although the *Minutes* could be a potentially useful source listing when the city accepted Seaholm, as well as contract prices and contractors, they are difficult to use because they are not indexed.

Minutes, City of Austin City Council, October through December, 1954, pp. 798-799.

Municipal, vol. 4, nos. 16-17 (December 1956-January 1957).

"Municipal Power Plant Serves Double Purpose." *Austin American-Statesman*, 29 January 1958.

Operating and Maintenance Instructions, Combustion Engineering-Superheater, Inc., February 21, 1952. Austin Energy has many of the operating manuals, which list specifications for Seaholm's equipment, in its corporate library.

"Power Man Seaholm Never Blew A Fuse." *Austin American-Statesman*, 25 April 1948.

Reynolds, Harold L. ,Jr. Fire & Emergency Specialist, Austin Energy. Personal interview, 27 January 2000. Mr. Reynolds is the only Austin Energy employee currently on-site daily at Seaholm and is responsible for leading tours of the plant.

San Miguel, Rose. Project Manager, Technical Services, Austin Energy. Personal interview, 11 May 2000. Ms. San Miguel is responsible for overseeing the decontamination and remediation of Seaholm prior to its rehabilitation.

"Seaholm Episode." *Austin American-Statesman*, 14 January 1955.

"Seaholm Previously Victorious." *Austin American-Statesman*, 26 January 1955.

"Seaholm Selected." *Austin American-Statesman*, 14 April 1942.

"Seaholm Sparks Short Circuiting." *Austin American-Statesman*, 1 October 1954.

"Shortage of Engineers Emphasized at Dinner Honoring Walter Seaholm." *Austin American-Statesman*, 25 February 1953.

Wonderly, Ethel S. Personal telephone interview. 27 March 2000. Mrs. Wonderly (formerly Ethel Sklar) was a registered architect working as a Designer for Burns & McDonnell from 1943 through 1976. She is listed as a "Detailer" on the original drawings of Seaholm, Phase One, and provided many of her personal memories of working on the plant in a tape-recorded phone interview that has become part UT Austin's Alexander Architectural

Archives (along with an outline transcription of the conversation). Her husband, Harold Wonderly, was a Civil Engineer who joined Burns & McDonnell in 1953. He was also able to provide some details about Seaholm's construction through Mrs. Wonderly.

Archival Material

Original ink on linen as-built architectural drawings for "Power Plant No. 2, City of Austin, Texas." In the possession of Austin Energy, 721 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas.

Original ink on linen as-built architectural drawings for "Addition—Power Plant No. 2, City of Austin, Texas." In the possession of Austin Energy, 721 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas.

Biography File: Walter E. Seaholm. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Austin File: AF—Public Utilities—Electric Utility Department. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

Historic Photo file of Seaholm. Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

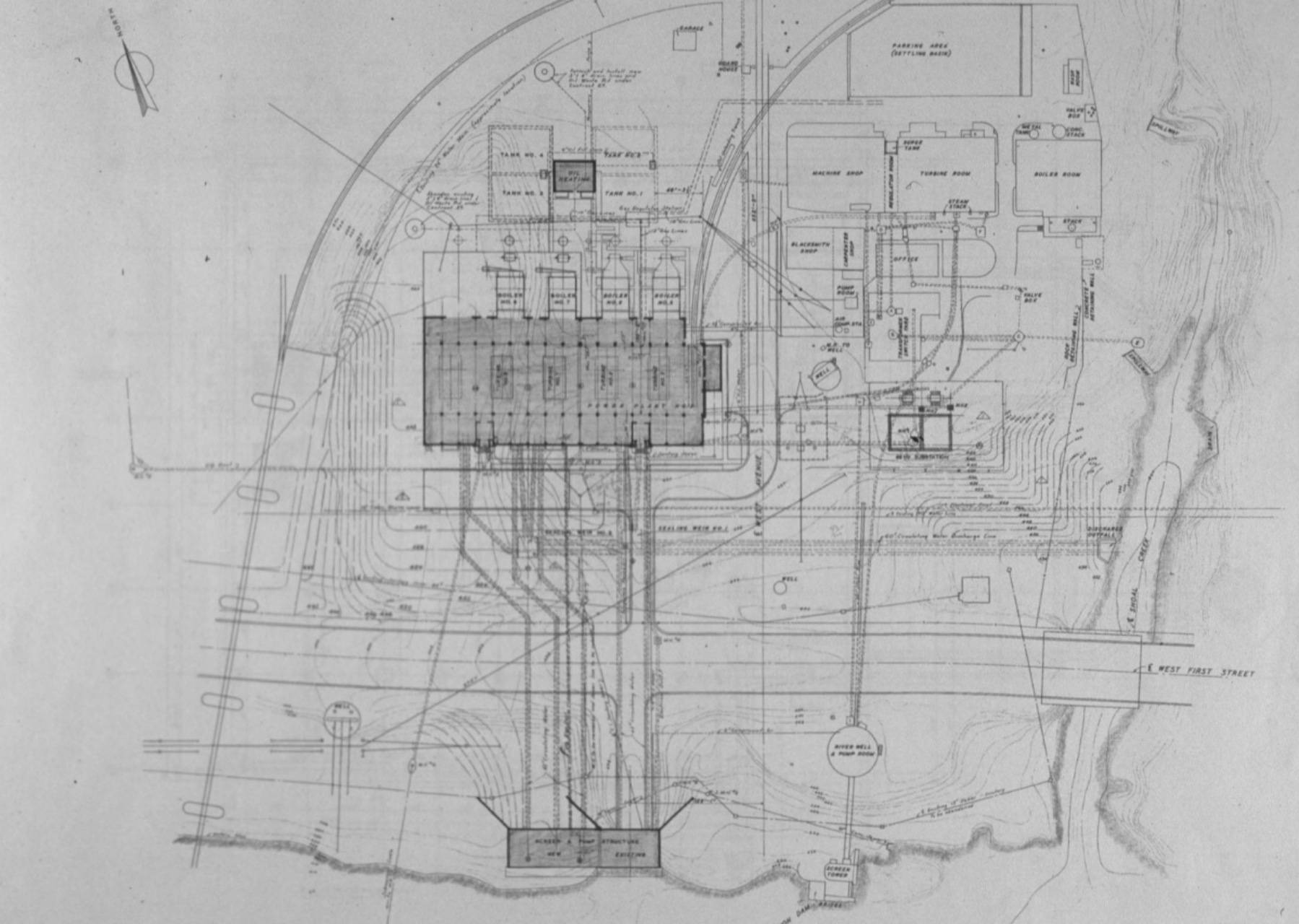
PHOTO INVENTORY

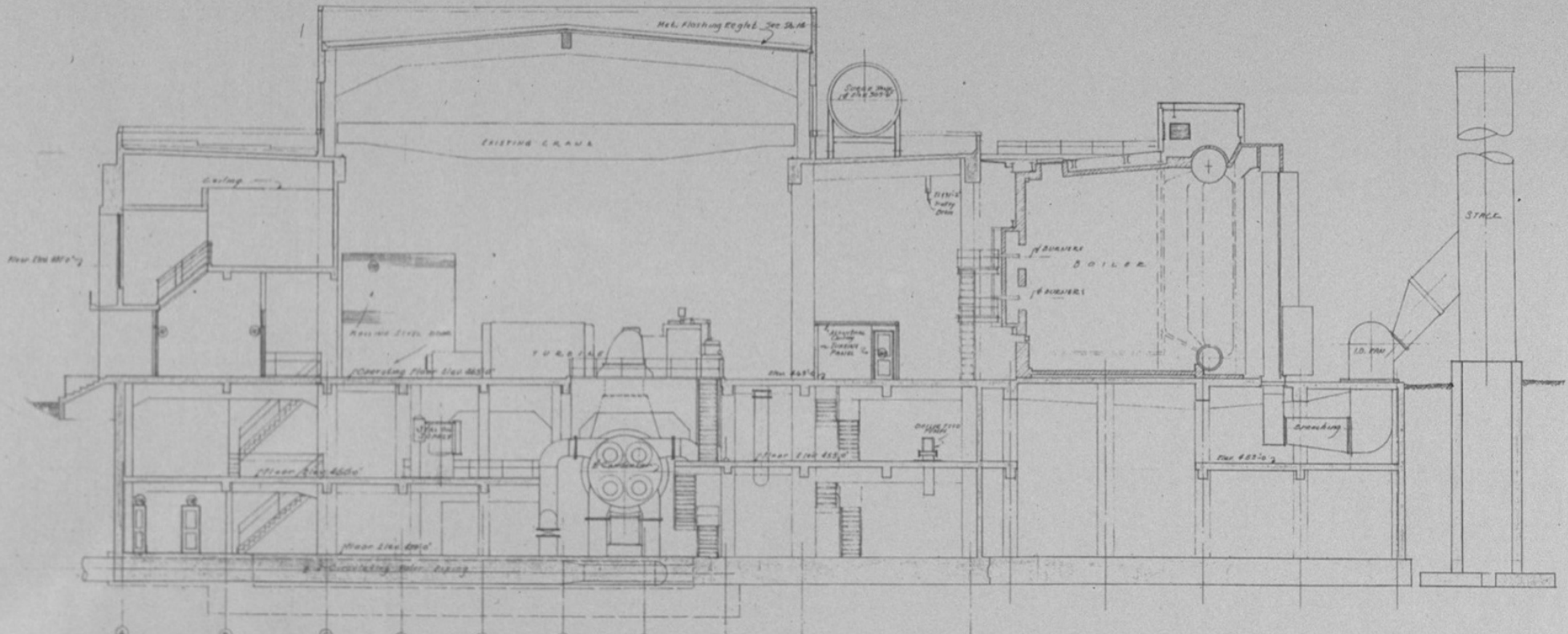
SEAHOLM PLANT
800 WEST CESAR CHAVEZ STREET
AUSTIN, TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS
SASHA BERGHAUSEN—PHOTOGRAPHER (EXCEPT AS NOTED)
APRIL 2000 (EXCEPT AS NOTED)
ORIGINAL NEGATIVES ON FILE WITH THE TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION (EXCEPT AS NOTED)

PHOTO 1 – Turbine Generator Building, principal façade (south elevation), camera facing north
PHOTO 2 – Water Intake Structure, south elevation, camera facing north from across Town Lake
PHOTO 3 – Oil Heating Plant, south elevation, camera facing north
PHOTO 4 – Turbine Generator Building, detail of eastern entry into principal elevation, camera facing north
PHOTO 5 – Historic photo (unknown photographer), c. 1955, PICA 20128, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library
PHOTO 6 – Turbine Generator Building, oblique view of north and west elevations, camera facing southeast
PHOTO 7 – Turbine Generator Building, oblique view of south and east elevations, camera facing northwest
PHOTO 8 – Turbine Generator Building, Turbine Room interior, camera at west end looking east

The link for the Topozone map showing the proposed marker location is included below:

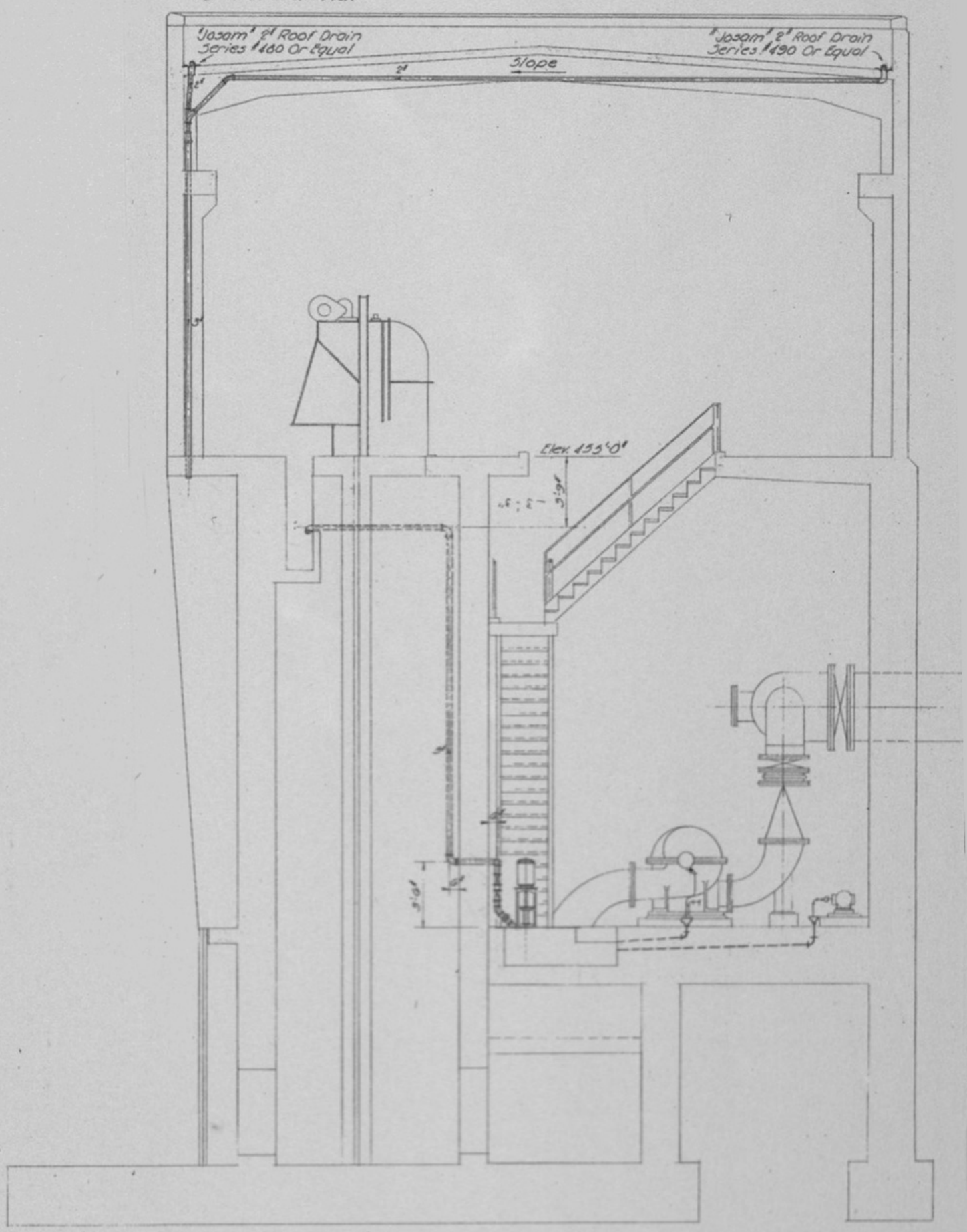
http://www.topozone.com/map.asp?lat=30.26568&lon=-97.75252&s=25&u=4&datum=nad27&layer=DRG


PARKING AREA (SETTLING BASIN)
GARAGE
MACHINE SHOP
TURBINE ROOM
BOILER ROOM
BLACKSMITH SHOP
CARPENTER SHOP
OFFICE
PUMP ROOM
TANK NO. 4
TANK NO. 3
TANK NO. 2
TANK NO. 1
OIL HEATING
BOILER NO. 6
BOILER NO. 7
BOILER NO. 8
BOILER NO. 9
PENSTOCK
SETTLING WEIR NO. 2
SETTLING WEIR NO. 1
E. WEST AVENUE
E. WEST FIRST STREET
DISCHARGE OUTFALL
E. ENSIGN CREEK
RIVER WELL & PUMP ROOM
SCREEN & PUMP STRUCTURE
NEW
EXISTING
SCREEN TOWER
WELL



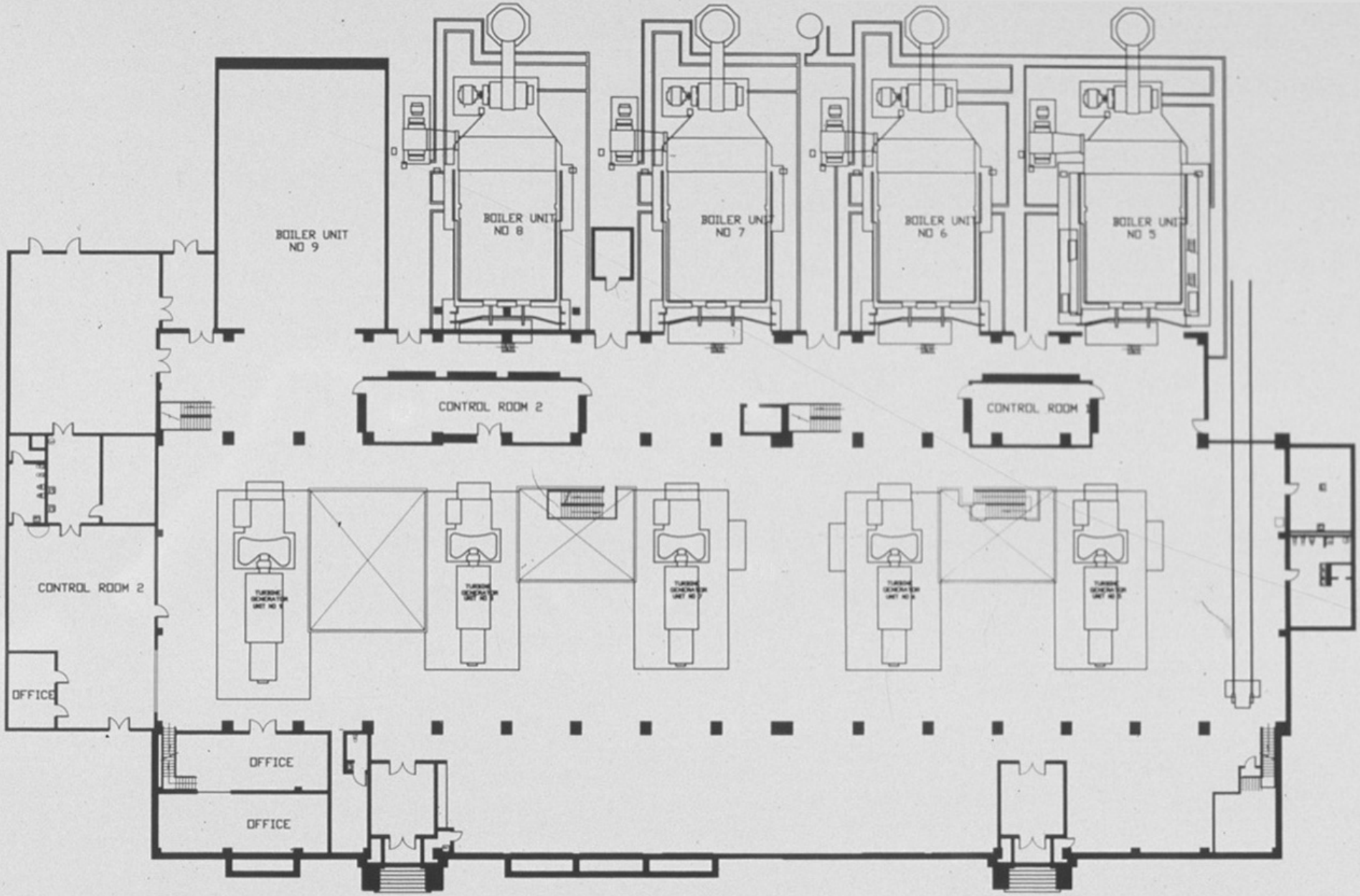
SECTION A-10

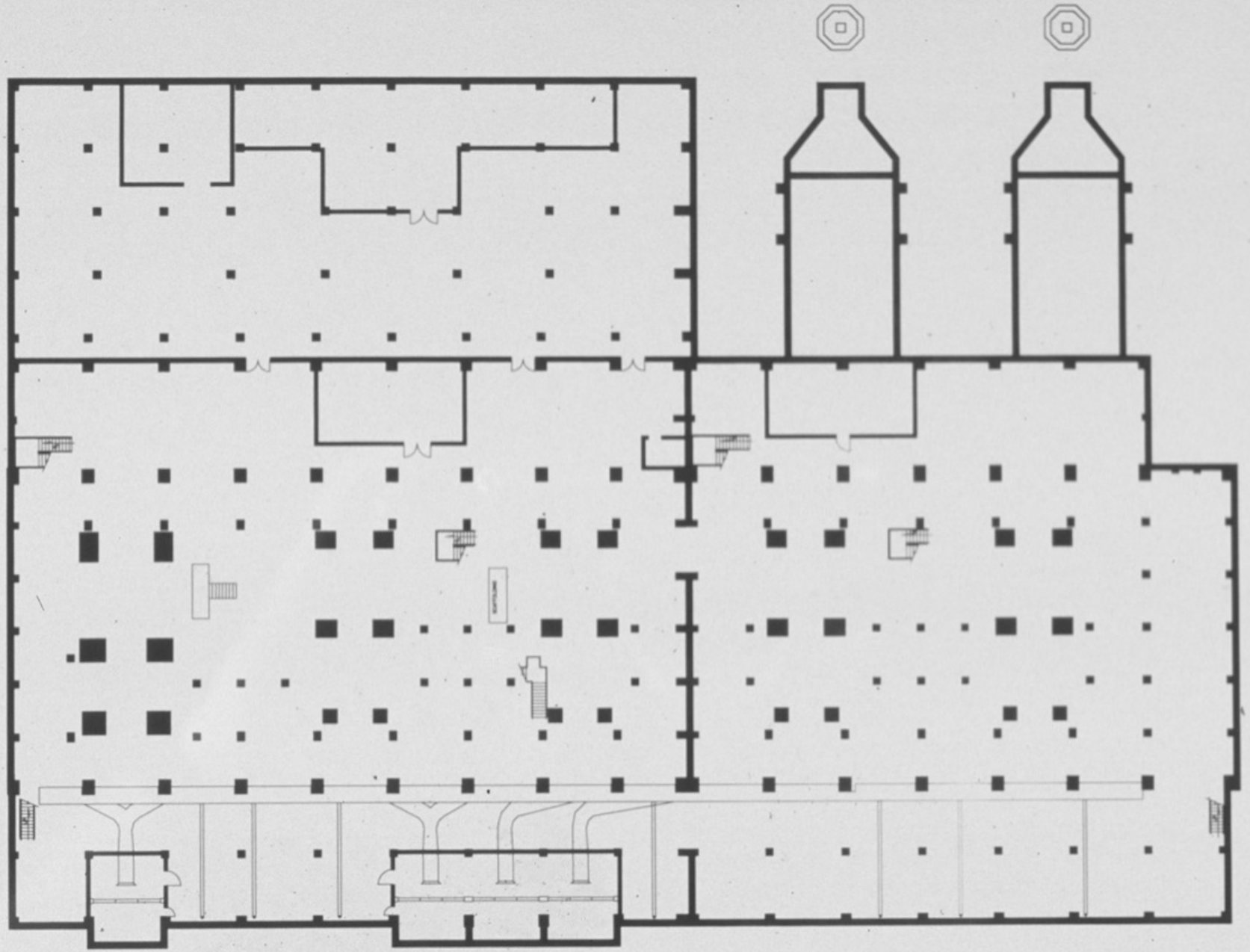
Scale 1/2" = 1'-0"

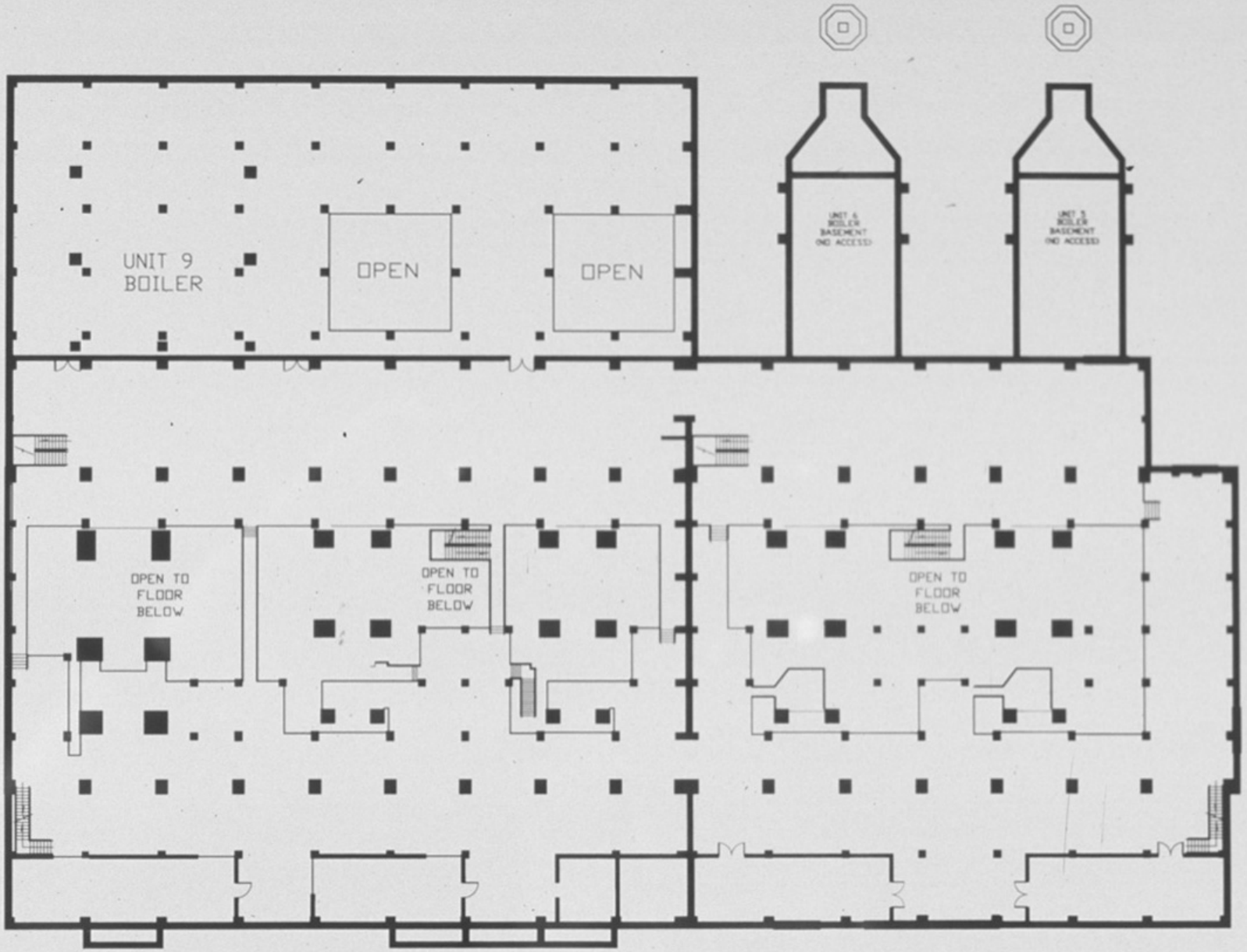


SECTION A-A

Scale: 1/4"=1'-0"


BOILER UNIT NO 9
BOILER UNIT NO 8
BOILER UNIT NO 7
BOILER UNIT NO 6
BOILER UNIT NO 5
CONTROL ROOM 2
CONTROL ROOM 1
CONTROL ROOM 2
OFFICE
OFFICE
OFFICE




UNIT 9
BOILER
OPEN
OPEN
UNIT 6
BOILER
BASEMENT
(NO ACCESS)
UNIT 5
BOILER
BASEMENT
(NO ACCESS)
OPEN TO
FLOOR
BELOW
OPEN TO
FLOOR
BELOW
OPEN TO
FLOOR
BELOW

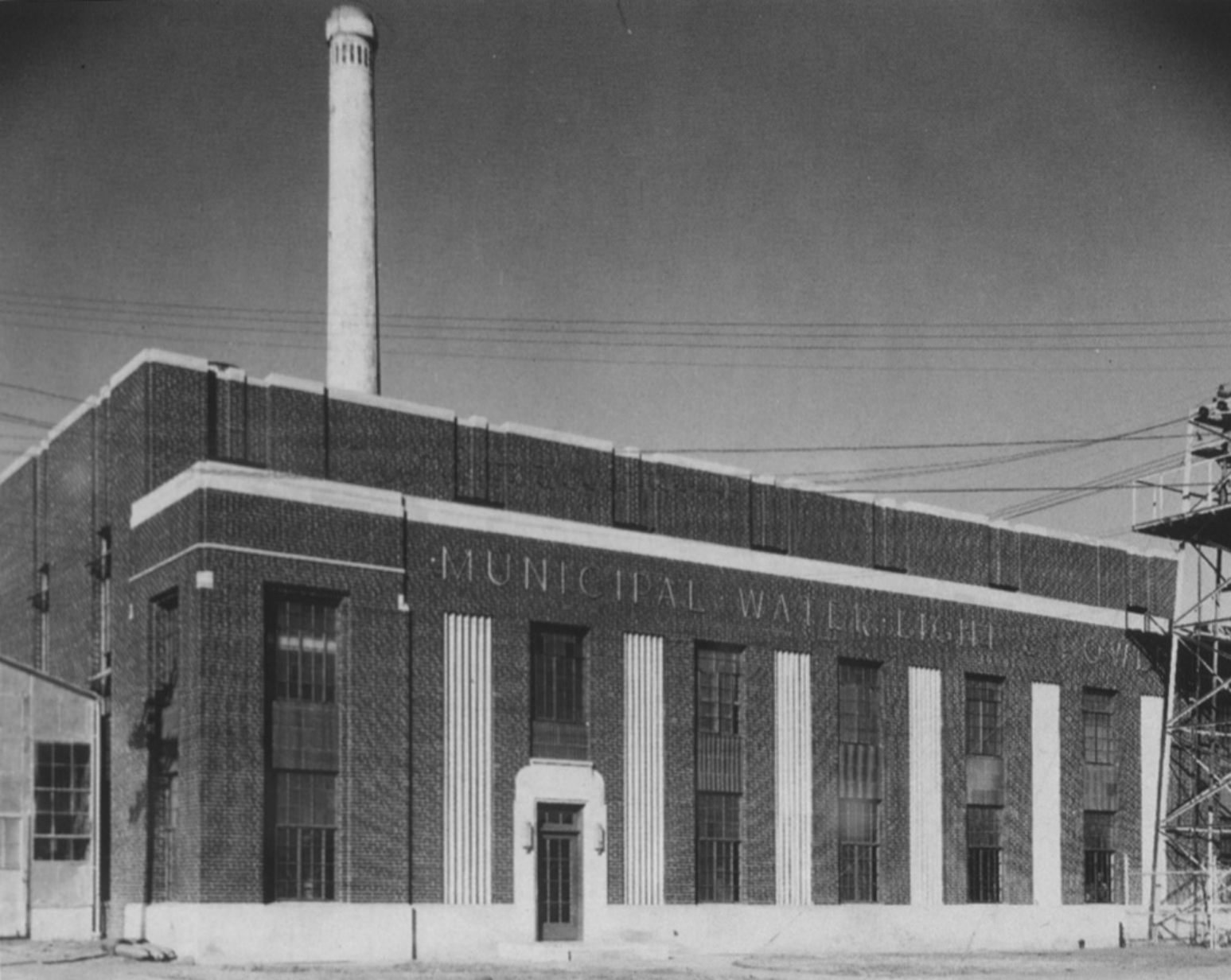
University
of
Texas
Main Bldg
Union
Ransom Center
Perry Castañeda Library
Texas Mem Museum
LBJ Lib
Performing Arts Cen
Memorial Stadium
Bellmont Hall
Swimming Center
Frank Erwin Center
Disch Falk Field
Oakwood Cemetery
State Capitol
Brackenridge
Waterloo Park
Pease District Park
House Park
Duncan Park
Renaissance Market
Enfield
Lamar
Blvd
MLK
Guadalupe
San Jacinto
Congress
Lavaca
Colorado
Brazos
Trinity
Neches
Red River
Red
Chavez
Cesar
Riverside
Lamar Beach
Butler Shores
Auditorium Shores
Shoal Beach
Williams Field
Trinity Oak
Oakwood
Greenbelt
Rd
24th
26th
12th
15th
5th
11th
2nd
Hemphill Park
Graham Pl
Wooldridge
Winsted
Hardouin
Salado
Nueces
Rio
San Antonio
Whitis
University
Speedway
Robert Dedman Dr
St
Av


CITY OF AUSTIN
POWER PLANT

DESIGN FOR POWER

BURNS & McDONNELL


CITY WATER LIGHT AND POWER


MUNICIPAL WATER LIGHT