

The Bossier City Municipal Building (1926) is a two story brick institutional building incorporating city offices, an auditorium/council chamber, a jail and a fire station. The building has a romantic and evocative style that partakes of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, although the effect is heavily dependent upon accent features rather than overall design. Despite some admittedly significant alterations over the years, the building retains the bulk of its original exterior character and would be easily recognizable to someone from the historic period. Hence it conveys its identity and historical significance as a “coming of age” for Bossier City.

The Municipal Building’s Italian flavor can be seen in its villa-like asymmetrical massing under a low, broadly overhanging roof (originally clay tile) with widely spaced extended brackets. The asymmetry is minimal, but nonetheless convincing when seen from a three-quarter view. Massing takes the form of a large, low-pitch, gable-fronted main block with a one story projection on the east side and a two story projection containing the staircase on the west side. At the rear is a flat roofed fire station wing. The one story addition spanning the western elevation of the main block, behind the staircase “tower,” dates from the historic period. Its brickwork and windows are identical to the original construction.

A series of great round arch windows on the second story facade and side elevations light what was originally the council chamber. Five of these windows span the façade. Above them, in the low gable, is a cast stone tablet with classical details identifying the building as “Municipal Building.” The tablet is flanked by fasces (symbols of Roman justice). At the center of the first floor is a slightly protruding entrance pavilion with a round arch opening. The most richly detailed section of the building, the pavilion is accented with multiple cast stone scroll volutes and capped by an ornamental Baroque-style cartouche. The general Italian feel of the building is enhanced by the tapestry brickwork, which is laid up in Flemish bond with varying tones of beige, brown, tan and ochre. The overall effect is mottled honey color stone.

The building retains all of its original multi-pane metal windows. The most prominent are the large round arch windows previously mentioned. Other windows are square head and appear singly in a variety of sizes. Many are casement windows.

Most of the alterations to the Bossier City Municipal Building stem from its 1980s conversion into a home for the Bossier Arts Council. The interior is almost completely modern in character, including finishes and the floorplan. Individual city offices in the ground floor front have all been taken out to yield a large single gallery space. The upstairs council chamber originally featured an open trusswork ceiling with wood-encased steel members designed to resemble the ceiling of an Early Christian church. This treatment is most likely intact above the celotex ceiling of what is now a modern auditorium. Behind the auditorium some of the original jail cells are still intact. The floorplan of the rear fire station section survives (i.e., one large room) as do the old doors (which have been sealed off on the inside).

Modern alterations to the exterior (within the last twenty years) are as follows:

- 1) An extension, in dark tinted glass, was made to the entrance vestibule and a handicapped access ramp with a low brick wall was built to access said entrance. The low brick wall of the ramp is part of an overall reconfiguration of the entrance steps from a single flight to two flights with a contemporary sculpture between.
- 2) Within the last few months the clay tile roof was replaced with a metal product which was intended to replicate the look of the original. Regrettably, such is not the case. The “tiles” are too low in profile and too wide, producing a flatter look. Also, clay tile roofs have a muted tone, while the present roof is bright in tone.
- 3) A one story room added to the rear of the fire station c.1940 to provide sleeping accommodations has been removed.

Assessment of Integrity:

The foregoing alterations are admittedly notable. However, the building still retains the vast majority of its original character-defining features on the exterior, and there is no question that someone from the historic period would recognize the old municipal building. Hence the building meets the integrity litmus test for properties nominated under historical significance.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1926
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Architects: Jones, Roessle, Olschner & Wiener
CRITERION:

The Bossier City Municipal Building is locally significant in the area of politics/government because its erection in 1926 marked a “coming of age” of municipal government.

Bossier City and its larger neighbor just across the Red River, Shreveport, trace their beginnings to the 1830s. But unlike Shreveport, Bossier remained a small village into the early years of the twentieth century. It was incorporated as a village in 1907, and as late as 1910 still had a population of only 775. That number had not grown much by the 1920 census, which reported 1,094 citizens. But in the 1920s the population almost quadrupled, as oil and natural gas significantly boosted the agriculture-based economy.

Both cities, Shreveport and Bossier City, saw unprecedented growth in the “Roaring Twenties” due largely to a major oil boom in the region. The first successful oil well was completed in Caddo Parish (Shreveport) in 1906, and in Bossier Parish, in 1909. The principal field in Bossier was the Bellevue Oil Field, where production started in 1921 at 6,000 barrels a day. A huge refinery with accompanying tank farm occupied a 225 acre parcel of land on the edge of Bossier City. By 1925 the refinery capacity exceeded 25,000 barrels per day.

It is within this context that a new municipal building for Bossier was conceived. It was a major element in an overall pattern of municipal improvements as the community grew at such a rapid pace in the 1920s (water system, road paving, etc.). The community incorporated as a village in 1907 had by the 1920s been accorded town status. The old town hall, a modest one-story structure of wood frame construction, was to be replaced with a large and impressive brick building of which every citizen could be proud. The fact that a fire had consumed much of the downtown in May 1925 undoubtedly fueled interest in a more “substantial” home for city services.

The \$50,000 building was funded via a bond issue approved by voters in a special election held on March 30, 1926, and on November 13, 1926 the cornerstone was laid amid great fanfare and boosterism, including an opening parade. The front page news story in *The Bossier Banner* observed that “several hundred” citizens were in attendance. The same paper reported that for the May 1927 dedication the auditorium was filled before the opening number on the program and “scores were turned away.” Speakers waxed eloquent about the “phenomenal” growth of Bossier in recent years and cited accompanying improvements such as “a modern fire system,” street paving, a quarter of a million dollars in school improvements (although done at the parish level), and the new municipal hall.

In summary, within the context of a still small community (4,000 by 1930), the new municipal building must have seemed quite magnificent and a symbol of great progress and growth. And other than a school, it is the only substantial building left in Bossier to reveal the oil boom-driven prosperity of the Roaring Twenties. With the notable exception of the French-style Barksdale Air Force Base (1930s), Bossier City has a largely modern character.

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