



City of Santa Barbara
Planning Division

Memorandum

MEETING DATE: July 7, 2021

TO: Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC)

FROM: Nicole Hernandez, City Urban Historian

SUBJECT: Staff Evaluation of proposed reconstruction of sandstone wall

ADDRESS: 630 Chapala Street

PROJECT: Relocation of sandstone wall on the same parcel:

- Although there is no historic building on the site, there is a six-course, ashlar cut, sandstone wall running perpendicular to West Ortega Street. All the historic, ashlar cut sandstone walls in Santa Barbara are on the Historic Resources Inventory as they are character defining, unique, high quality elements of our streetscapes. The project proposes to relocate the minimally visible wall on the same parcel, using the same sandstone, to be perpendicular to Chapala Street



View of six course, ashlar cut wall from West Ortega Street facing west.

Significance: The six-course, ashlar cut wall running perpendicular to the sidewalk on West Ortega Street is significant to Santa Barbara. The local sandstone walls are a feature that gives the region unique distinction while offering a surprising and pleasing bit of artistry. Walls usually require far less engineering compared to bridges, so they offer more opportunity for stonemasons to express themselves and their artistry in the selection, carving, and setting of stones. Use of masonry for construction in the Santa Barbara area dates back to the time the Spanish arrived. Since it was necessary to travel some distance into the woods to obtain lumber, but rocks were found scattered on the ground, stone became the preferred building material. The tradition of building with local sandstone continued in Santa Barbara County through the 19th century and early 20th century. This method of construction was often chosen because local brown sandstone was readily available and easily transformed from round or shapeless boulders into symmetrical smooth faced stone for building purposes.

A local stonemason explained in July of 1883, “When a quantity of it is wanted, a blast of powder is drilled into the heart of one of the large boulders and exploded and a number of square edged building stones are produced” (Santa Barbara News-Press July 1883). Many residences, walls, bridges, and commercial structures were constructed out of local sandstone during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Immediately after World War I, Santa Barbara began a concerted effort to revamp its visual image. During this time, city planners carefully monitored all construction of any new structure to make sure it was consistent with the master plan that was based on Spanish Colonial Revival/Mediterranean streetscape mode

The use of a traditional building material, sandstone, in the construction of the walls built during this period was in line with Santa Barbara’s planning and design efforts. In the years from 1870 to 1940, when Santa Barbara was quickly evolving into a vibrant, growing city, the period witnessed an extraordinary explosion of stone construction made possible by the abundant supply of sandstone, cadre of expert masons, and financing by private citizens. This period provided an atmosphere conducive to the building of public and private spaces of all kinds, walls, bridges, gardens, and an assortment of other stone works and encouraged some exceptional expressions of the mason’s art. Among the most apparent expressions of the beauty in stone that give the region such distinction are the stone walls (Santa Barbara Conservancy).

Evaluation: This memo prepared by the Architectural Historian evaluates the proposed project on the historic resource by determining if the project follows the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The purpose of this staff evaluation is to assist the Historic Landmarks Commission, in the review of a project when no Historic Structures/Sites Report (HSSR) has been prepared and in order to guide applicants and Commissioners appropriately towards avoiding or lessening project impacts.

Compliance With the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships.

The relocated wall will still be used as a historic wall with the original, ashlar cut sandstone so that it will retain its distinctive ashlar cut material and features. Although it will be relocated on the same parcel from its existing location, it will still be a wall running perpendicular to the street and it will retain its spatial relationship within El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District as it will still be an original, ashlar cut, sandstone wall so that the project meets Standard 1.



2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

The only historic feature on the site is the ashlar cut wall that will be relocated on the parcel to run perpendicular to Chapala Street and will remain visible to all northbound traffic and pedestrians. The wall's distinctive spatial relationship is that it runs perpendicular to the street along an alley rather than parallel to the street with more visual impact. The perpendicular relationship will remain as it will be perpendicular to Chapala Street. Because the wall relocation will not remove of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize the property, the project meets Standard 2.



3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.

The relocation of the sandstone wall on the same parcel will reuse the existing sandstone walls and to reconstruct the distinctive wall to match the existing.

No conjectural features are proposed for the sandstone wall.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

No changes to the sandstone wall have acquired significance in their own right.

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

The project is preserving and retaining the distinctive ashlar cut, sandstone wall that will be relocated on the same parcel to run perpendicular from the Chapala Street side of the property. The existing sandstone will be carefully disassembled and re-assembled on the new location using mortar and joints to match original.

6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

Not applicable to this project.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

All work proposed will be use the gentlest means possible to ensure no damage to historic sandstone. Applicant will submit mortar formula and sample to City architectural historian for approval.

8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

This Standard is not applicable to this wall relocation.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

The relocation on the same parcel on the Chapala Street side of the proposed new building will not destroy the historic wall. The location will change from West Ortega Street to Chapala Street on the same parcel, but the wall will still run perpendicular to the street and re-use the historic materials to match the existing wall so that the distinctive wall that characterizes the property will remain.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

If the new proposed building were removed, the essential form and integrity of the sandstone wall and the environment would be unimpaired.

ARCHITCTURAL HISTORIAN SUMMARY COMMENTS. No Historic Structures/Sites Report is necessary at this time as the proposed alterations do not have a negative impact on the ashlar cut, sandstone wall which will be relocated on the same parcel running perpendicular to Chapala Street. The relocation will use the existing, original sandstone that will be re-assembled to match the existing six-course wall. The relocation meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The project may therefore qualify for a categorical exemption with a less than significant impact to the resource, if the HLC agrees with the above evaluation and conclusions. Should the project significantly change, a Historic Structures/Sites Report may be required.

Works Cited:

Santa Barbara Conservancy. *Images of America, Stone Architecture in Santa Barbara*. Arcadia Publishing, 2009.