



City of Santa Barbara
Planning Division

Memorandum

DATE: May 6, 2020

TO: Historic Landmarks Commission
Architectural Board of Review

FROM: Planning Division
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SUBJECT: Draft Objective Design Standards for Processing of Streamlined Housing Projects

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide context and background for the attached draft Objective Design Standards for Processing of Streamlined Housing Projects (Design Standards, Attachment 1). These draft Design Standards are to be reviewed by Historic Landmarks Commission on May 13 and the Architectural Board of Review on May 18. The Design Standards will be revised based on input from the design boards and will be considered by City Council for adoption.

SB 35

In 2018, multiple new housing bills came into effect, including Senate Bill 35 (SB 35). Among other things, SB 35 provides for a streamlined, ministerial approval process for qualifying multi-unit and mixed-use development, subject to certain conditions and consistent with objective zoning and design review standards (Attachment 2 Government Code Section 65913.4). The legislation defines “objective standards” as standards that involve no personal or subjective judgement by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion. “Applicable objective design review standards” are further defined as standards published and adopted by ordinance or resolution by a local jurisdiction before submission of a development application, and are broadly applicable to development within the jurisdiction.

WORK GROUP

In late 2018, the City initiated a work effort to draft Objective Design Standards, Zoning Ordinance (Title 30) amendments, and applicant handouts in response to SB 35. In February 2019, staff presented an overview of this effort to the HLC and ABR and requested appointments to a Work Group to focus on drafting Objective Design

Standards. Staff also met with members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Advocacy Group to explain the approach and scope.

Staff with assistance from the Work Group (comprised of two members each of the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), the Architectural Board of Review (ABR), and the Planning Commission) prepared draft Design Standards to be considered for adoption by City Council. These Design Standards would apply to eligible streamlined housing projects as specified in SB 35.

From March 2019 through January 2020, the Work Group held 12 meetings. Early on it was apparent that this project needed to focus on a design style that could be “broadly applicable to development within the jurisdiction”. As such, the El Pueblo Viejo (EPV) Landmark District Guidelines, and specifically the Spanish Colonial Revival style, was selected as the initial template for drafting design standards. Staff and the Work Group acknowledge that future work efforts should include expanding the template of objective design standards to work with a broader range of architectural styles commonly used in Santa Barbara.

The reasons for choosing the Spanish Colonial Revival style as the objective design template include:

- **The SB 35 legislation allows use of a specific architectural style:** objective design review can include use of specific material or styles, so long as the elements of the style are clearly defined.
- **EPV Guidelines includes clearly defined style elements:** staff and the Work Group agreed that the EPV Guidelines are relatively focused and straightforward enough to be modified to objective standards.
- **Spanish Colonial Revival is a well-known and loved architectural style in Santa Barbara:** as best articulated by David Gebhard, “This reliance upon simplicity of volumes and surfaces accounts not only for the initial success of the Spanish Colonial Revival in Santa Barbara during the 1920s, but it also explains why this historic interpretation was able to weather the ins and outs of architectural fashion, from the 1930s to the present.”¹ The Spanish Colonial Revival style’s iconic form and detailing can integrate harmoniously with existing buildings designed in similar traditional styles, encouraging compatibility with existing architecture.
- **The Spanish Colonial Revival style has multiple benefits:** the style evolved from forms developed under a similar Mediterranean climate, resulting in simple, weather-protecting, energy-efficient building techniques that respond to the natural environment. This style is pedestrian-oriented and human-scaled, and uses quality materials and finishes, consistent with the City’s urban design, historic, and aesthetic goals. Finally, there are many excellent local examples of the style to be

¹ Conrad and Nelson, Santa Barbara A Guide to El Pueblo Viejo, 1986.

used as guides to assist in the creative continuation of architectural design and scale and ensure Santa Barbara preserves its reputation as one of the nation's most attractive cities.

DRAFT OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

With the focus described above, staff amended the existing EPV Design Guidelines, which are mostly subjective, into objective design standards for review and input from the Work Group. An administrative draft of the Design Standards was completed in late November and provided to the AIA Advocacy Group for a courtesy review in December 2019, followed by two joint Work Group/AIA meetings. The early review and coordination between the AIA Advocacy Group, staff, and the Work Group was constructive.

In March 2020, the draft Design Standards were posted for public review with comments requested by April 30. Due to meeting delays caused by the Covid-19 crisis, the public review time was extended and staff took the opportunity to further amend the draft in response to some of the public comments received up to the end of April, including a number of comments from the AIA Advocacy Group.

The draft Design Standards are intended to strike a balance between accommodating a streamlined review process with no discretionary design review and continuing the exemplary architectural heritage of our City. Furthermore, use of design standards provides certainty in the project review process, with fewer reviews enabling a cost-efficient process for the applicant at the onset, while use of high-quality materials saves money in long-term building maintenance.

The Design Standards, which focus on the look and feel of a development when viewed from the street, are comprised of the following major elements:

Introduction: describes the use of SB 35 and intent of the design standards.

Parking Location and Design: addresses surface parking and parking structures, with the intent of reducing the visibility of automobiles and enhancing the pedestrian experience.

Building Massing and Articulation: requires incorporation of techniques to minimize perceived building scale.

Landscaping, Outdoor Lighting, Building Equipment and Service Areas: supplements existing objective standards to provide design criteria consistent with the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style.

Roof Design: ensures roofs are consistent with the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style.

Character Defining Features: requires a courtyard, paseo, and/or arches on buildings with ten or more units, consistent with the architectural style.

Building Details: covers materials, colors, and other exterior features of a building.

Optional Architectural Elements: provides standards for optional features, such as awnings, staircases, and trellises.

NEXT STEPS

Following the design board hearings, draft will be revised as appropriate based on Historic Landmarks Commission and Architectural Board of Review comments and public input. Subsequent steps include a Planning Commission hearing to recommend adoption of Title 30 amendments to City Council, followed by Ordinance Committee review and recommendation. City Council will review and adopt the final Design Standards and Title 30 amendments. The final Design Standards will be formulated into a checklist for use by applicants and staff and staff will post a companion online library of reference photos.

Attachments:

1. Draft Objective Design Standards for Processing of Streamlined Housing Projects
2. Government Code 65913.4