



City of Santa Barbara  
Public Works Department

## Memorandum

**DATE:** June 14, 2023  
**TO:** Historic Landmarks Commissioners  
**VIA:** Email  
**FROM:** Brad Hess, Principal Project Manager  
City of Santa Barbara  
**SUBJECT: Project Summary - De La Guerra Plaza Revitalization Project**

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Historic Landmarks Commissioners,

In advance of the next hearing on June 21, 2023, to discuss and review the De La Guerra Plaza Revitalization Project (Project). The team and I would like to do our best to explain and describe the process for this Project thus far, the sources and criteria for the basis of design, the Project's multiple design features, and how and why each came to be included in the proposed design. This Memorandum is not a quick summary, rather a reference document for you, as the team presents the latest iteration of our Concept Plan in preparation for submitting our formal Planning Application.

### **Project History/Background:**

The space has gone through many design concepts and ideas, really since the 1920's, but in the 80's, 90's, and into the early 2000's, various architects and artists put forward real ideas and plans that culminated in 2011 with a project that was supported with redevelopment agency (RDA) funding. That was when the last Historic Structures/Site Report (HSSR) was prepared by Post-Hazeltine. The RDA was dissolved in 2012, along with its funding, and this was one of many projects that was cancelled.

The Plaza is a unique place, surrounded by historic buildings, and the Plaza itself is considered historic. However, while the Plaza is considered historic, the non-historic elements that could be removed or altered are the concrete, the asphalt, the non-historic plantings, the curbs and the lawn (Post-Hazeltine). Therefore, there is precedence for making changes and Post-Hazeltine has advised the design team as to what changes are deemed appropriate for the space given its past. As such, there are ample opportunities to have a Plaza that is timeless in design, facilitates activity and community benefit, and brings significance and relevance back to the public square. As Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Plaza, Council member Kristen Sneddon said at the last Joint Meeting with the Advisory Committee in April 2022, "What's really important is that we have a commitment to move this project forward. We don't want to have a failed project where all of this has gone into this effort and the public still does not have a revitalized Plaza." This sentiment for forward progress was echoed recently by Commissioner Butler on Josh Molina's podcast when he said, "We need to get this thing done; move it forward and let's move to what looks more like a European plaza."

This Project got its most recent start as a result of the Santa Barbara Police Station Project and the potential relocation of the Saturday Farmers' Market to the Plaza. While the Saturday market won't be located at the Plaza, the initial design concept of bringing the entire area up to curb level from building to building provided the basis of design, and in January of 2019, the Project was established. In March of 2019, Staff and the Design Team held a public outreach event at Casa De La Guerra and received incredible input from the 150+ people that attended. That information was also used as the basis of design and was presented to City Council. The De La Guerra Plaza Revitalization Project Advisory Committee was then formed with a unique setup – 2 members from City Council, Planning Commission, HLC, and Parks & Recreation Commission, and the Executive Director for the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation. This unique membership was formed in order to have all the major Commissions and Council represented to ensure input was provided from these respective groups. This proved to be effective and efficient for the Project. The first meeting of the Advisory Committee was in November of 2019 and the Committee met 17 times over 4 years on this Project.

#### **Site History of the Plaza:**

The site history of the Plaza has multiple variables of use, history, experience and architecture, and these are all inter-connected at various levels. The Executive Director of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, Dr. Anne Petersen, wrote a thorough and interesting paper on the Plaza's history. The link to Anne's report is [HERE](#). Additionally, Post-Hazeltine wrote a Memorandum specifically discussing the grass and the changes made within the Plaza over time. This Memo can be found [HERE](#). Lastly, the Historic Structures and Site Report (HSSR) was written in 2011 and once the project has a planning application number (PLN) as a result of a formal submittal, the HSSR will be updated.

#### **Public Input/Stakeholders:**

As referenced above, the initial public outreach was on March 9, 2019, at Casa De La Guerra. Subsequent to that event, Staff and the design team, in conjunction with the Advisory Committee, have had substantial interaction with the public, with multiple commissions, committees, City Council, public interest groups, private groups, business owners, and individuals to better understand the desires of the community, hearing about different concepts to consider at the Plaza, and to hear concerns and fears from those who don't want the space to change or will be impacted by the construction of the Project. Through all of this, it's important to note that the concept design was not formed in a vacuum by Staff and thrust on the public, but rather it has been through a thorough and steady process over four years of meetings, updates, discussions, presentations, phone calls, and community feedback that have helped form the concept design. The Advisory Committee was tasked by City Council to help guide this process, help guide the design effort, and to evaluate each concept to ensure it meets the criteria of the purpose statement for the Plaza.

The Project has a website that provides the Project history, documentation, and an opportunity to be updated on public meetings and updates. With the exception of the first 3 meetings that were held in City Hall, all the public meetings are available online.

#### **Design Features:**

##### **Pedestrian Only Plaza:**

In one of the first meetings held by the Advisory Committee it was unanimously supported to change the Plaza from an oval drive and parking area to a pedestrian only space. This original design decision has had lasting positive ramifications to the overall design and has allowed the design team

to consider the many ways in which a larger flat space could facilitate activity and foster more events in the Plaza. By changing it to be pedestrian only, the Plaza is more in keeping with plazas around the world that are, in most part, for pedestrians to enjoy, gather and be a community together. It was a decision made by the Advisory Committee knowing that the existing parking spaces would be displaced to the surrounding areas and the multiple parking structures within one block of the Plaza have capacity to absorb the additional cars.

STATUS: This design feature was supported by HLC on April 22, 2022

**Tree Wells – Seating/Landscaping:**

Because having shade at the Plaza was one of the design criteria, the question wasn't whether trees would be a part of the design but rather where they should be located. Through many iterations it was decided that the proposed locations of the trees would be to the outside of the Plaza to activate that space, provide an interior that could be used for larger events without obstruction, and would provide raised seating surrounding the trees for pedestrians enjoying a meal, a conversation, or some respite. The tree wells were originally situated in a more formal, linear fashion but again, after much discussion, the more random placement of the tree wells allows for unique views and perspectives throughout the space, especially along the back of the businesses and restaurants that face State Street. Additionally, locating the tree wells and trees toward the outside of the Plaza allows the views of the historic buildings surrounding the Plaza to be seen without obstruction. The majority of the trees will be fruitless olive trees with some pink trumpet trees interspersed (shown in the rendering below).



STATUS: This design feature was supported by HLC on April 22, 2022

**Public Restrooms:**

Santa Barbara is in need of public restrooms. The existing public restrooms at Canon Perdido and State Street are less than ideal in design and are very challenging to keep clean, to keep the space safe, and they're not welcoming to those visiting our City. With the anchor tenants of Macy's and Nordstrom leaving Paseo Nuevo, this further reduces the restrooms available to the public downtown. It is with this understanding that the Advisory Committee felt strongly that as we want more people to

use the Plaza, we also need to provide restrooms that will be used by those in the Plaza, as well as those coming from State Street. The Advisory Committee analyzed multiple locations to meet the criteria, taking into consideration the safety of the location, queuing location, utility connections, accessibility and convenience, and strongly felt the proposed location in Storke Placita is the best location to meet the needs of the community. The restrooms proposed will be as follows: 3 unisex restrooms (1 will be ADA accessible) that will be self-cleaning. Self-cleaning means that when the restroom is available, one individual can enter, take care of their business within a set amount of time, and once they leave, the restroom locks itself, cleans and sanitizes itself, and then opens back up for the next user. The timing of the cleaning and the operational details of the system are fully programmable. This process reduces many negative issues encountered in these types of public uses while only increasing the time (and slight inconvenience) between users by a little bit.



Proposed location of Public Restrooms in Storke Placita.

Again, this feature meets the high standards laid out for the Plaza while satisfying the desired intent for public restrooms in a safe and clean environment.

STATUS: This design feature and proposed location were supported by HLC on April 22, 2022.

### **Trash / Recycling / Food Scraps:**

For many years the traffic loop in the Plaza has functioned more like the “back of house” for the businesses that face State Street. This is evident in multiple ways, but the most pronounced would be the way in which trash, recycling, and food scrap storage and pick up are handled. The bins are stored at the businesses but many times per week they are taken out to the curb and put at the edge of the business for pick up from Marborg. The white scalloped walls are scarred as a result, and this only adds to the overall deterioration of the aesthetics and cleanliness of the Plaza. However, it’s also of paramount importance that the handling of trash, recycling, and food scraps be handled appropriately, safely, equitably, and strategically. The consolidation of these into an enclosure for the surrounding businesses makes the most sense.



The proposed solution to this issue is the installation of two (2) underground trash enclosures: one within Storke Placita and the other within De La Guerra Street near State Street. The concept is to have three receptacles above ground for trash, recycling and food scraps respectively. They will be clearly marked to avoid confusion and they will be for the businesses in the immediate vicinity surrounding the Plaza. Those authorized to use them will be issued an access card (fob) that will unlock the receptacle above ground allowing them to open the receptacle, drop in their trash, recycling, or food scraps bag into the shoot that drops it directly into a 4 yard bin underground. The bins are situated on a hydraulic platform that can be raised up for removal and emptying by Marborg. Once emptied the platform lowers back down to be flush with the ground. Note that this system is intended for nearby businesses – standard litter bins will be installed around the Plaza for normal daily use by the public.

There are multiple issues that will need to be addressed as part of this proposed solution that relate to operations, schedule, cost to users, etc. However, the many positive aspects of this proposal far outweigh the anticipated challenges. This design eliminates any ADA design issues, allows two consolidated areas for the businesses to access, provides an exceptional and low-profile solution to a major issue, and could be a new standard for many applications throughout the City once proven successful.



This solution meets the high standard set for the Plaza in efficiency, space utilization, aesthetics, Accessibility concerns, and operations/maintenance. This is an exciting aspect of the overall Project.

STATUS: This design feature and proposed locations were supported by HLC on April 22, 2022

### **No Grass:**

This has been one of the more contentious issues with the design, as many have voiced support for keeping the grass within the Plaza. With the intention of supporting more use, more flexibility for use, more programming of the space, cost savings, and easier maintenance, the Advisory Committee, with support from every department within the City, agreed that it does not make sense to have grass in the design.

The following is the policy and other reasoning as to why grass is not included in the design:

- The City's ***Landscape Standards for Water Conservation*** require that the landscaped area of non-residential projects shall be designed without the use of decorative turf and with 100% water wise plants. The only exceptions would be for active recreation, such as sports fields.
- The City's ***Municipal Green Building Policy*** states that new and renovated City facilities will be designed without the use of decorative turf unless approved for recreational purposes.
- ***Water Wise Landscaping***, that does not include decorative turf, is supported by the ***Guidelines for the El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District*** and the ***Historic Resource Design Guidelines***.
- Recycled water is not in the area, the closest being a water main near SBHS (3,370 linear feet) and the projected cost would exceed \$800,000 to bring recycled water to the Plaza.
- Grass requires water, maintenance and time to regrow after major events, such as Fiesta (~3 months). The time to regrow grass restricts the use of this space, which goes against one of the primary goals for this space – increased activity and use.
- Based on the above, **City Administration, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Community Development** will not support grass (aka decorative turf) in the proposed design.
- Not having grass was unanimously agreed to by the Advisory Committee.

In addition to the official policy rationale above, there are also additional practical reasons for removing the grass. Firstly, it is not an ADA compliant surface and limits accessibility. Secondly, it is impractical to maintain grass to a reasonable standard considering the heavy wear it endures from events. Repair from events like Fiesta requires the closure of the space for up to 12 weeks, which defeats the purpose of the space.



Existing Condition



Rendering of Plan from the South at Storke Placita

STATUS: The removal of grass from the Plaza was supported by HLC on April 22, 2022.

**Water Feature / Bubbler Fountain:**

This feature was introduced fairly early on in the design process as a cooling feature for the space that would attract young families, provide visual interest, create a pleasant white noise, improve the ambiance, and provide another means to activate the Plaza during quieter times of the day/week. Mistakenly, this was introduced as a “Splash Pad”, which is usually found in a park or a children’s playground, and often times has high fountain-like streams of water that could be both an eye-sore and a health concern. The bubbler fountain is a low-profile feature that will be beautifully done within the space of the Chumash mosaic. It will have a water circulation system that will comply with all DHS standards and won’t introduce a situation in which individuals could bathe and compromise the water. Additionally, the filter system that is part of the design, and located in the pump room adjacent to the Public Restrooms, will clean the water prior to it being put back into the public arena.

There have been concerns about the operation of this feature interfering with events and creating a conflict with another use of the space. The reality is that this feature will be turned off more than it will be turned on, and it will be completely programmable such that it will not interfere with scheduled events. The goal is to use this feature to enhance the ambiance and cool the space during warm to hot days, and to draw people to the Plaza.





Bubbler Fountain

STATUS: This design feature was supported by HLC on April 22, 2022.

### **Storm Water Management:**

In April of 2019, Earth Systems conducted a percolation test and an infiltration test in the Plaza to test for vertical and horizontal infiltration. Borings were done at 3' and 9' below grade and their conclusions were, "Neither test result met the recommended minimum value for infiltration systems of 0.5 inches per hour per the TGM (Technical Guide Manual for Stormwater Quality Control Measures). Hence, the project site is not suitable for on-site stormwater infiltration at the tested depths." With dense clay soil down to approximately 20 feet, the report goes on to say that "Based on the exploration and testing described herein it does not appear the stormwater infiltration is feasible at this site." With this information it became clear that using permeable pavers or other permeable materials would not benefit the project, and if used would be solely for aesthetics. The storm water will be directed over the surface to cisterns, or drywells, and the goal is to use this collected water for the landscaping at the Plaza. There are several key factors to making this happen and those will continue to be explored and resolved as the design progresses. However, one thing is clear is that the surface materials will need to handle the storm water on the surface and not rely on permeability to accommodate the water.

STATUS: This topic and resulting design features were supported by HLC on April 22, 2022

### **Utilities:**

There are a remarkable number of utilities within the Plaza space, including within the "grass" area and under the street, that need to be accommodated and coordinated to meet the long-term goals of the Plaza. There are water mains that will be replaced as part of this Project that will continue to provide connections to businesses, and to the relocated fire hydrant. These water main connection points need special attention to anticipate any future breaks, and to mitigate the potential consequences of such a break. The City's Water Distribution team within Public Works has helped with the proposed design. Additionally, there are natural gas lines, electrical runs, sewer lines, fiber runs, and extra conduit that will be available for future technological needs, that all need to be



accommodated. Because De La Guerra Street is the primary area for these utilities, the proposed surface material for the majority of this space between State Street and Anacapa Street will be brick. As also referenced in the Surface Materials section below, the goal is to collocate the utilities within a single trench that will be located under the band of brick surface material. This will allow any failure of utilities to be accessed under the brick, repaired, and then the brick can be put back in place with the aesthetic beauty retained.



With the utilities coordinated into the same area and accessible in the future when there are breaks or failures, this coordination effort meets the long-term goals of the Project and for the community.

STATUS: This topic and resulting design features were supported by HLC on April 22, 2022. The only outstanding issue relating to the brick is the pattern. This topic and the examples of patterns will be addressed at the June 21<sup>st</sup> meeting in the presentation.

#### **Surface Materials:**

This is one of the more critical elements of the Plaza design because the materials need to endure over time, need to remain relevant to the many uses anticipated within the Plaza, they need to be historically appropriate to compliment the historic buildings surrounding the Plaza, and they need to stay beautiful. As such, the plan is to use stone materials for the majority of the spaces within the Plaza proper. The three materials will be sandstone (grouted), brick and thick flagstone.



Stone to emulate  
Street in Spain



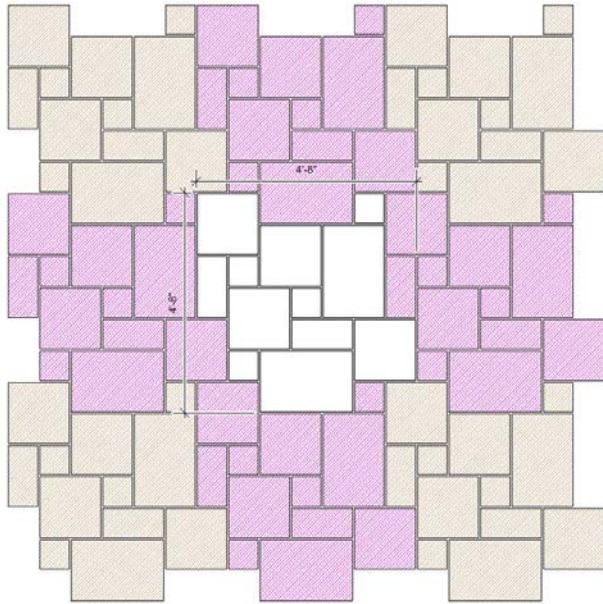
Flagstone



Clay Brick

### **Sandstone:**

The “Street of Spain” is the connecting paseo (alley) that runs from De La Guerra Street along the East side of Casa De La Guerra up into El Paseo and is made up of grouted sandstone. This is a traditional look utilizing the natural local resources of sandstone for paving. The Advisory Committee, the Design Team, and the surface materials subcommittee were unanimous in proposing the extension of this look into the Plaza and carrying it through in front of City Hall, in front of the News Press building and then down Storke Placita to State Street. It will be grouted Sandstone in a traditional pattern and will meet ADA requirements.



Traditional Pattern



Street of Spain – looking toward Plaza

**Brick:**

One of the reasons the hard surfaces (concrete/asphalt) within the Plaza look terrible right now is that over time the utilities underground have failed and have needed to be repaired. This will always be the case, but in order to mitigate the negative impacts of failed utilities underground, we will consolidate the utilities under an un-grouted brick so that when something breaks, it can be accessed under the brick, repaired, and then the brick can be put back in place with the aesthetic beauty retained. The proposed brick will be a darker, red-brown brick called Pueblo Flash that will be a complimentary color to the stones surrounding it and will be readily available for long-term viability. Another location of brick will be De La Guerra Street where the majority of the utilities exist. For the parking area off of Anacapa Street, in order to mitigate the impact of cars on the brick and to better delineate the parking spaces, a darker brick is proposed that will provide contrast to the Pueblo Flash brick color and hide the tire marks and stains normally found in parking spaces.





Locations of Utilities in Consolidated Trench

**Flagstone:**

The last stone proposed is Flagstone and will be located in the middle sections of the Plaza. It will be to the interior of the band of brick and will be made up of larger, square flagstone pieces set at a 45-degree angle. We are proposing the flagstone be surrounded by a banding made of sandstones within grout, but that will be determined formally through the design process. The flagstone proposed is Oklahoma Flagstone and will be approximately 2.5" - 3" thick, cut in squares measuring approximately 30" x 30". The grouted sandstone banding proposed would be approximately 8"-10" wide. Oklahoma Flagstone offers a range of colors, depending on the source. The orange and red



colors within some of the Oklahoma Flagstone will be avoided and those with browns and beiges will be selected.



Oklahoma Flagstone



Santa Barbara Sandstone – Proposed banding material

The Sandstone and Flagstone elements will be installed in a permanent fashion with a reinforced concrete pad foundation for stability and longevity. The brick is intended to be “temporary” in that it can be brought up and put back down, depending on the need. Therefore, it will not be grouted. The above proposed surface materials meet the goals for the Plaza and will result in an incredibly functional and beautiful space for Santa Barbara.

STATUS: The palette of this design feature was supported by HLC on April 22, 2022.

**Lighting/Safety:**

Ann Kale & Associates has many examples throughout the City of Santa Barbara of beautiful and incredibly successful projects. Ann provided a lighting plan at one of the earlier iterations of the Plaza design and it became apparent that her services would be best served if she waited until the design was near completion to provide another plan. The project design to be submitted with the Planning Application will include a lighting plan for the Plaza, including a lighting plan for the proposed landscape plan for the front of City Hall.

**Building at Edge of Parking Lot:**

As one considers the many plazas throughout the world, there are several consistent features that are clear. One of them is the enclosed nature of the space, usually because of being surrounded by buildings, cafes, or other uses that add life to the space and provide that sense of enclosure. This desirable sense of enclosure currently breaks down between the City Hall building and the News Press building, where landscaping attempts to hide the City Hall parking lot. The proposed structure will provide an edge to the Plaza in that space, it will provide an area of interest with a permanent stage with a beautiful backdrop, and it will provide a utilitarian use of an electrical room, storage, and a flexible space for the City that will be used to increase interaction with the community and those in the Plaza. The addition of a building in this location will re-establish the edge that was historically there with other buildings that have been demolished.

STATUS: The design for this structure is still in progress and the Commission will see the most recent proposal on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

**City Hall Front Landscaping:**

The Landscape Plan in front of City Hall needs to accomplish several things, in addition to it being beautiful, appropriate, and compliant with Santa Barbara's EPV guidelines. The plan will re-introduce the community to the front of City Hall, since the majority of people assume the Plaza side of the building is the front. The plan will provide a strong connection with Anacapa Street and to the extension of the Plaza down De La Guerra Street. The plan will provide a water-wise example garden for the community that includes native plants, draught tolerant plants, and a rock garden for the downspouts from the building. The plan will include the relocation of the flag poles that are on the north end of the grassy area in the Plaza. This symbol of civic life is best placed in a prominent spot at the front of the building. Lastly, the space will include the relocated Washingtonia Palm Tree from the Plaza's grassy area, one of the two original trees planted, to extend its life and honor the role in history it has played.

STATUS: The Commission has seen several iterations of this space and will have the opportunity to review and comment on the most recent proposal on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Public Art:**

As a public project it will be important to have art within this public space. The Advisory Committee for the Plaza articulated the spaces in which artistic expression is appropriate and outlined the general parameters for the art. A new Art Subcommittee was then formed and is working through the process for how to implement the art. The theme has been decided for the art: Earth, Water, Fire & Air. There will be a call for Art and a process of evaluating the qualifications of the artists interested in submitting. Additionally, under the oversight of the Art Subcommittee, there will be a process for

selecting the artists, the fabricators, the art itself, and how it will need to be installed. This process is ongoing and will run concurrently to the overall design as it progresses.

With the process being as open as possible to local artists and teams of artists, this aspect of the Plaza and bringing the art community together to add to the beauty of the Project meets the high standards for the Revitalization Project.

STATUS: The concepts of small medallions inlaid into the surface materials drawing people into the Plaza where larger medallions will be located, along with the art integrated into the seating areas, have generally been approved. The materials and details of the art will be made a part of the Planning Application.

**Archaeology:**

In 2011 a Phase 1 environmental study for archaeology was conducted by Applied Earthworks and it was determined that the Plaza is a prime area for archaeological materials and artifacts, and therefore, a Phase 2 study should be conducted to determine the level of significance. In 2020 Applied Earthworks conducted the Phase 2 study and it was confirmed that this space is, in fact, an area of significance for archaeological materials. As such, a Phase 3 work plan will be put together by Applied Earthworks based on a depth of excavation plan provided by RRM Design. This work plan will outline the process for the Phase 3 work, the goals, the areas of excavation and the approximate timing. It will also outline the monitoring that will be needed during construction. The goal of this work is to ensure that the materials that are within the to-be-excavated areas can be found and collected in advance of construction so that the project can proceed as quickly as possible to reduce the impact to the neighboring businesses and so that the Santa Barbara community can enjoy the revitalized Plaza as soon as possible. Although the work plan is nearly complete, we cannot submit it to HLC for review until such time as the design is ready to be submitted to the City under a Planning Application.

**Next Steps:**

The next steps in this project will be through the City's review process. The intention is to submit a Planning Application as soon as possible with the understanding that there are several reports and studies that need to be completed to better inform the design, with an emphasis on how to handle the storm water. HLC will continue to review the progress of the design, will review the archaeology phase 3 work plan, and will review the updated Historic Sites/Structures Report. The Environmental Determination will then be made for the Project followed by HLC Project Design Approval and then Final Approval, prior to submitting the project for a building permit. Taking all the requirements ahead, it is estimated the start of construction would be sometime in the year 2025, but there are too many unknown variables to estimate the timing with any accuracy.