

HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

May 06, 2015

Agenda Item No: 1

HDRC CASE NO: 2014-374
COMMON NAME: Witte Museum / Reptile Garden
ADDRESS: 3801 BROADWAY
ZONING: R6 HS RIO-1
CITY COUNCIL DIST.: 2
LANDMARK: Brackenridge Park
APPLICANT: Trey Dawson/Pape Dawson Engineers
OWNER: Witte Museum
TYPE OF WORK: Design Development of Acequia Garden
REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting conceptual approval to develop the Acequia Garden at the Witte Museum to include interpretive features for a 1719 Spanish Colonial dam associated with the Acequia Madre as well as 20th Century Reptile Garden structures to be retained per the HDRC action on February 18, 2015. The applicant is seeking conceptual approval of the Acequia Garden improvements as replacement plans for the Reptile Gardens structures to be removed in order to gain clearance for site grading and construction activities related to the Phase II expansion of the Witte.

APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

UDC Sec. 35-642. – New Construction of Buildings and Facilities

(a) Site and Setting

(4) Historically significant aspects of the site shall be identified and if possible incorporated into the site design. Historic relationships between buildings, such as plazas or open spaces, boulevards or axial relationships should be maintained.

UDC Sec. 35-614. - Demolition.

Demolition of a historic landmark constitutes an irreplaceable loss to the quality and character of the City of San Antonio. Accordingly, these procedures provide criteria to prevent unnecessary damage to the quality and character of the city's historic districts and character while, at the same time, balancing these interests against the property rights of landowners.

(a) Applicability. The provisions of this section apply to any application for demolition of a historic landmark (including those previously designated as historic exceptional or historic significant) or a historic district.

(3) Property Located in Historic District and Contributing to District Although Not Designated a Landmark. No certificate shall be issued for property located in a historic district and contributing to the district although not designated a landmark unless the applicant demonstrates clear and convincing evidence supporting an unreasonable economic hardship on the applicant if the application for a certificate is disapproved. When an applicant fails to prove unreasonable economic hardship in such cases, the applicant may provide additional information regarding loss of significance as provided in subsection (c)(3) in order to receive a certificate for demolition of the property.

(c) Loss of Significance. When an applicant fails to prove unreasonable economic hardship the applicant may provide to the historic and design review commission additional information which may show a loss of significance in regards to the subject of the application in order to receive historic and design review commission recommendation of approval of the demolition.

If, based on the evidence presented, the historic and design review commission finds that the structure or property is no longer historically, culturally, architecturally or archeologically significant it may make a recommendation for approval of the demolition. In making this determination, the historic and design review commission must find that the owner has established by a preponderance of the evidence that the structure or property has undergone significant and irreversible changes which have caused it to lose the historic, cultural, architectural or archeological significance, qualities or features which qualified the structure or property for such designation. Additionally, the historic and design review commission

must find that such changes were not caused either directly or indirectly by the owner, and were not due to intentional or negligent destruction or a lack of maintenance rising to the level of a demolition by neglect.

The historic and design review commission shall not consider or be persuaded to find loss of significance based on the presentation of circumstances or items that are not unique to the property in question (i.e. the current economic climate).

For property located within a historic district, the historic and design review commission shall be guided in its decision by balancing the contribution of the property to the character of the historic district with the special merit of the proposed replacement project.

(d) Documentation and Strategy.

(1) Applicants that have received a recommendation for a certificate shall document buildings, objects, sites or structures which are intended to be demolished with 35mm slides or prints, preferably in black and white, and supply a set of slides or prints to the historic preservation officer.

(2) Applicants shall also prepare for the historic preservation officer a salvage strategy for reuse of building materials deemed valuable by the historic preservation officer for other preservation and restoration activities.

(3) Applicants that have received an approval of a certificate regarding demolition shall be permitted to receive a demolition permit without additional commission action on demolition, following the commission's recommendation of a certificate for new construction. Permits for demolition and construction shall be issued simultaneously if requirements of [section 35-609](#), new construction, are met, and the property owner provides financial proof of his ability to complete the project.

(4) When the commission recommends approval of a certificate for buildings, objects, sites, structures designated as landmarks, or structures in historic districts, permits shall not be issued until all plans for the site have received approval from all appropriate city boards, commissions, departments and agencies. Permits for parking lots shall not be issued, nor shall an applicant be allowed to operate a parking lot on such property, unless such parking lot plan was approved as a replacement element for the demolished object or structure.

(e) Issuance of Permit. When the commission recommends approval of a certificate regarding demolition of buildings, objects, sites, or structures in historic districts or historic landmarks, permits shall not be issued until all plans for the site have received approval from all appropriate city boards, commissions, departments and agencies. Once the replacement plans are approved a fee shall be assessed for the demolition based on the approved replacement plan square footage. The fee must be paid in full prior to issuance of any permits and shall be deposited into an account as directed by the historic preservation officer for the benefit, rehabilitation or acquisition of local historic resources. Fees shall be as follows and are in addition to any fees charged by planning and development services:

0—2,500 square feet = \$2,000.00

2,501—10,000 square feet = \$5,000.00

10,001—25,000 square feet = \$10,000.00

25,001—50,000 square feet = \$20,000.00

Over 50,000 square feet = \$30,000.00

FINDINGS:

- a. The site's connection to the Acequia Madre is an important historic element which will be interpreted in the proposed landscaping improvements. This is consistent with UDC Section 35-642(a)(4).
- b. The submitted site plan shows the retention of the Reptile Garden entry gates, adjacent stone walls, and "snake house" viewing platforms. This is consistent with the February 18 HDRC action and additionally preserves the viewing platforms in place.
- c. The applicant has provided documentation of the Reptile Garden consistent with UDC Section 35-614(d).
- d. While final plans for the Acequia Garden must be submitted to the HDRC for approval at a future date, a permit for site grading may be issued in order to allow for the Phase II expansion of the Witte. A demolition fee of \$2,000.00 shall apply.
- e. The applicant has fulfilled all requirements for archaeology outlined in the UDC.


RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends conceptual approval as submitted based on findings a through e.

CASE MANAGER:

Cory Edwards





N

3801 Broadway

Witte Museum Acequia Garden

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Witte Acequia Garden Design Narrative

The design of the Witte Acequia Garden supports the institution's educational narrative of the San Antonio River as the foundation for the establishment of the city and the region as well as the community's environmental education. The Acequia Garden's primary interpretive feature and narrative is the 1719 Spanish Colonial dam built to direct water to the Acequia Madre providing water to the surrounding agriculture, and to the Mission San Antonio de Valero (later known as the Alamo). The interpretation of the dam is supported by several important features: an interpretive sculpture tracing the path of the dam, the preservation of numerous centuries old cypress trees and numerous interpretive maps, images and text that convey the significance and history of the Spanish Colonial Dam and the Acequia Madre.

A secondary interpretive narrative within the Acequia Garden focuses on the Reptile Garden. The original Snakehouse, Stone Gate Posts and adjacent stone walls will be preserved in place or off site and reinstalled in their original location while a new interpretive panel will be incorporated to tell the story of the Reptile Garden. The original ornamental wrought iron gates have also been preserved and will be displayed in the future Reptile Garden Café where a myriad historic photographs will document the Reptile Garden, Alligator Garden and the roles each played in the history of the Witte Museum and the City of San Antonio.

In addition to the mission specific interpretive and educational priorities, the Acequia Garden must also facilitate public and private events which offer important revenue that contributes to the institution's financial success. These facilities will consist of colored stamped concrete, stone paving and generous turf areas where theater or banquet style seating, occasionally covered by tents, can accommodate large outdoor gatherings and events.



