

## HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

March 16, 2016

Agenda Item No: 20

**HDRC CASE NO:** 2016-068  
**COMMON NAME:** Basila Frocks  
**ADDRESS:** 500 N Zarzamora  
**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** NCB 2820 BLK 4 LOT 5&6  
**ZONING:** C2  
**CITY COUNCIL DIST.:** 5  
**APPLICANT:** Office of Historic Preservation  
**OWNER:** Jeff Banka/The Overland Group  
**TYPE OF WORK:** Finding of Historic Significance  
**REQUEST:**

The applicant is requesting a finding of historic significance for the Basila Frocks Building at 500 N Zarzamora.

### APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

*UDC Section 35-607 – Designation Criteria for Historic Districts and Landmarks*

**Its value as a visible or archeological reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event; [35-607(b)1]** For its prominent visibility in a community with few structures of its size and era and for its distinct values of socio-economic and cultural heritage to the community in which it exists.

**Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation; [35-607(b)3]** For its connection to the Basila family who contributed to the economic and social development of San Antonio, to various musicians and social organizations, and to the architectural firm of Phelps & Dewees.

**Its identification as the work of a master builder, designer, architect, or landscape architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the community, county, state, or nation; [35-607(b)4]** As the work of architectural firm Phelps & Dewees who designed several of San Antonio's legacy landmarks including Alamo Stadium and the Travis Building.

**Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials; [35-607(b)5]** As an example of a daylight factory, a type of building which benefitted from reinforced concrete construction introduced in the early 20th century, allowing broad expanses and window walls making for safer and healthier working conditions for factory workers.

**Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature; [35-607(b)7]** For its prominent presence along N. Zarzamora and W. Martin, a historically and culturally significant corridor.

**Its historical, architectural, or cultural integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship; [35-607(b)8]** For its distinctive corner location, durability of materials such as structural clay tile, and its daylight factory design with Italianate influences.

**It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States; [35-607(b)11]** For its contribution to the economic heritage of San Antonio as the "Garment Capitol of the South" in the 1930s, for its reflection of the cultural heritage of seamstress workforce, and for its later contribution to San Antonio's music industry.

**It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif; [35-607(b)13]** For its relationship to other factories in San Antonio's historic core, linking them to San Antonio's prosperity of the Roaring 20s.

**It represents a resource, whether natural or man-made, which greatly contributes to the character or image of a defined neighborhood or community area; [35-607(b)15]** As a reminder of the confluence of cultures and social heritage of San Antonio's Westside.

## **FINDINGS:**

- a. The structure at 500 N Zarzamora was built in 1929 for the Basila Frocks Company as indicated by newspaper accounts and city permit records. The first floor was divided to accommodate multiple storefronts while the second floor was open for use as clothing manufacturing facility. The Basila Frocks Company operated here until 1936, when bankruptcy forced the sale of the building. However, the Basilas bought the property back a few months later and by 1941 they had reorganized their business and began operating the Basila Novelty Company, producing items like bows and buckles. First floor tenants included the Quong Sheu Grocery, a public health center, Gale Variety and Hardware, several garment manufacturing firms, and Templo Agua Viva, among many others. The Basilas sold the building to Noe P. Salinas in 1965, who opened Don Quixote Club and later Mexican Restaurant with his brother Perry Salinas. Perry Salinas, a well-known vocalist, performed here with the Don Duran Combo, as did the Ralph Duran Quintet, Lola Beltran of HemisFair fame, and Eva Flores, a Cuban ballad singer. The second floor housed organizations like the Manuel Alvarado VFW Post #9186 which hosted wrestling matches and meetings, and LULAC Council #646 which rented the large space as a ballroom and event venue.
- b. Prominent local architectural firm Phelps and Dewees designed the Basila Frocks Building. Other distinctive projects include Alamo Stadium, the Travis Building, and a number of local public school buildings. Established in 1919, the firm is known today as Garza | Bomberger and Associates and is one of the oldest continually operating firms in the state.
- c. The Basila Frocks Building was constructed as a two-story brick and reinforced concrete structure, maximizing its prominent corner location with an L-shaped design. Decorative details were minimal, limited to some masonry accents between the first and second floors and along the parapet, which is capped with barrel tiles. A canopy sheltered the sidewalk at one time, topped with transom windows to allow light into the first floor interiors. Typical to the daylight factory style popular at the time of its construction, the second floor featured enormous windows to allow sun and fresh air to permeate the workspace. While the street-facing façades featured a brick veneer, terracotta tiles with some evidence of plaster covered the remainder of the building. The one story building on the eastern end of the structure was added c. 1947-1948 and originally housed the Pozos Café.
- d. Nicholas Basila, born in Syria in 1877, married Marie Georges Coupsi in 1903. The couple immigrated to the US from Canada in 1905 and arrived in San Antonio in 1914. Nicholas purchased the US Kimono Manufacturing Company in 1914 and within a short time adapted to market forces by shifting the entire operation to producing ready-to-wear women's dresses. The outfit outgrew its first location at 333 Guilbeau in 1926 and moved to the 500 block of W Commerce. Nicholas's nephew, Basil, lived with Nicholas and Marie beginning in 1918 and returned to San Antonio in 1926 after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in Business Administration. By 1928, the Basilas were planning for their next move, this time to the Westside. Marie Basila was remarkably well-educated, attributable to her childhood as the daughter of a diplomat, and she taught Arabic for the International Institute of the Young Women's Christian Association. She was involved in numerous local civic and charitable organizations, including the San Antonio Conservation Society.
- e. The property was identified as an important resource in the Westside Cultural Resources survey initiative in 2011. Written comments from community members about the site's significance included the following:
  - “Provided jobs for women in the growing westside”
  - “My mom's job there helped my parents build their house”
  - “Significant to women's & labor history.”

Staff produced the report entitled *A Stitch in Time*, highlighting the cultural history of the Basila Frocks Building. This structure plays an important role as a visible anchor to the community due to its size and corner location on a prominent commercial corridor. It reflects the social values of the community through its labor history as a manufacturing firm that offered employment for female garment workers. Later tenants represented the cultural arts and traditions of the Latino community that was growing around the building on the Westside, including music venues, gathering spaces, artisans, restaurants, and service-oriented businesses. Its multiple uses reflect its character as a place exemplifying change and adaptation over time.

- f. As referenced in the applicable citations, the Basila Frocks Building meets UDC criterion [35-607(b)1], [35-607(b)3], [35-607(b)4], [35-607(b)5], [35-607(b)7], [35-607(b)8], [35-607(b)11], [35-607(b)13], and [35-607(b)15] for a finding of historic significances in the process of seeking designation as a local historic landmark. In order to be eligible for landmark designation, a property must meet at least three of the criteria; the Basila

Frocks Building meets nine.

- g. Historic landmarks possess cultural and historical value and contribute to the overall quality and character of the City and its corridors. The City offers a tax incentive for the substantial rehabilitation of historic properties. If historic designation is approved, rehabilitation and restoration work may be eligible for this incentive. State and Federal tax incentives are also available for properties listed on the national Register of Historic Places and provide substantial relief for rehabilitation projects.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

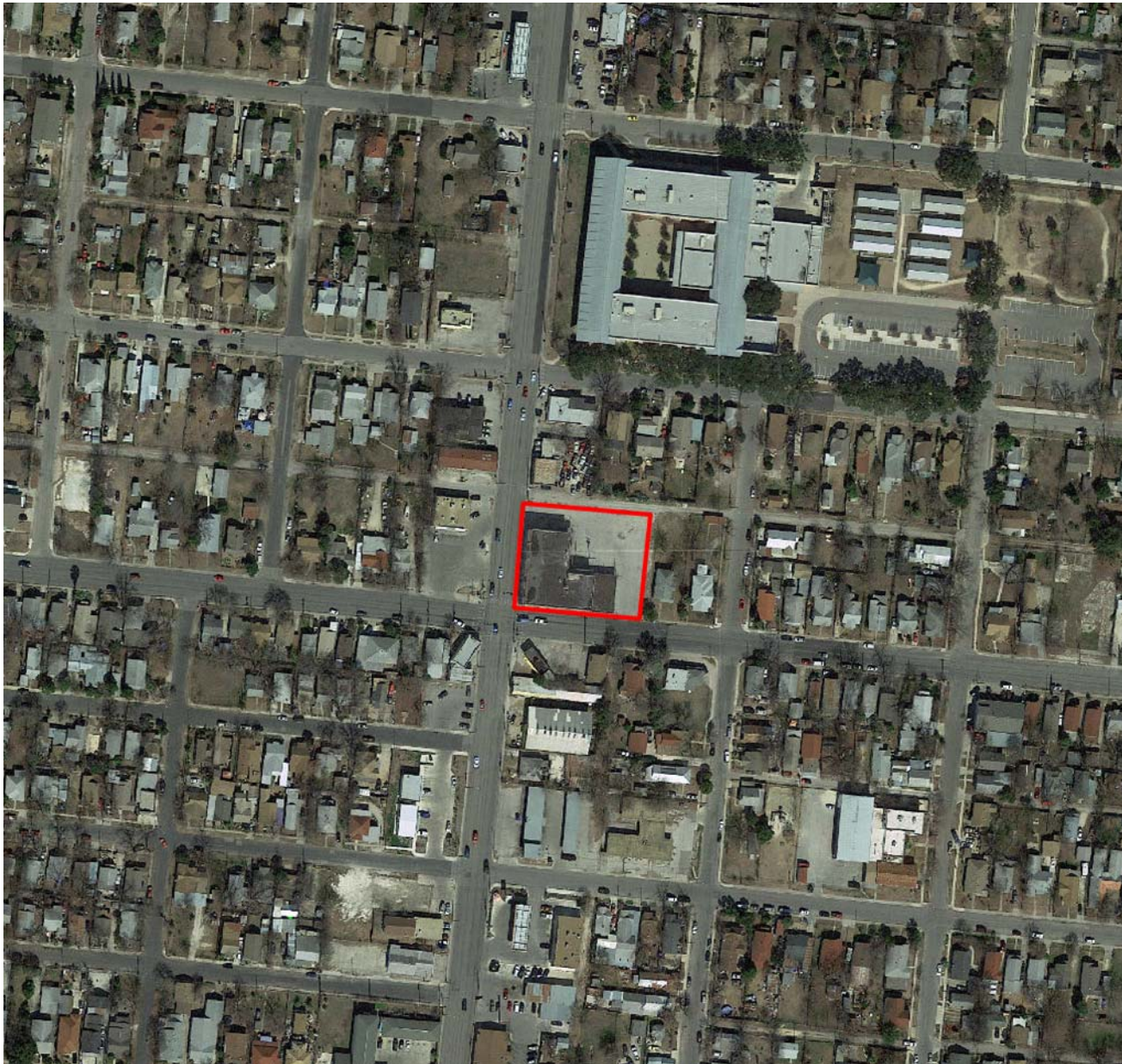
Staff recommends approval of a Finding of Historic Significance for the Basila Frocks Building at 500 N Zarzamora based on findings a through g.

**CASE MANAGER:**

Lauren Sage

**CASE COMMENT:**

The property owner has submitted an application for demolition of all structures on this property.



**500 N Zarzamora**

**Basila Frocks Building**

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Western and southern façades from southwest corner of Martin and Zarzamora



Southern façade





Rear of building



One story addition on eastern side, facing Martin

## **Statement of Significance**

Set on a key corner of a busy urban corridor on San Antonio's Westside, the Basila Frocks Building tells a story of greater San Antonio encompassing history, cultural and socio-economic heritage. The Basila Frock Company was owned by immigrants Nicholas and Marie Basila, who purchased the US Kimono Mfg. Company in 1914 and adapted their business to meet new demand for women's ready-to-wear dresses. In the midst of the City's rapid manufacturing growth of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Basila contracted with local architectural firm Phelps and Dewees to construct a large manufacturing facility in Prospect Hill after outgrowing two other local factories. The structure's design incorporated elements of the daylight factory style of industrial buildings popular in the 1920s, including reinforced concrete, expansive unobstructed spaces, and large windows. Factory operations took place on the second floor, while the first floor was subdivided for street level shops.

The company struggled financially through the Depression and finally declared bankruptcy in 1936. The Basilas sold the property but swiftly repurchased it, and by 1941 they had reorganized as the Basila Novelty Company. The business sold buckles and bows among other items and operated at this site until the mid-1950s. In 1965 Noe P. Salinas, brother of well-known vocalist Perry Salinas, purchased the building. Perry Salinas opened Don Quixote Club (which later expanded to include a Mexican Restaurant) on the first floor where he entertained guests and featured popular musical performers and groups like the Don Duran Combo and the Ralph Duran Quintet. LULAC Council #646 operated the Skyline Ballroom on the second floor from 1974 through 1989.

While more fragile materials such as glass and sidewalk canopy are damaged or absent, the original building is largely intact and maintains its historic integrity. Structural components and materials such as including reinforced concrete columns and beams, wire-striated brick, and clay tile have generally withstood deterioration, though water infiltration has caused some damage in the southeast corner. Several modifications to the original exterior, including the addition of arched windows over the original display windows and a grand stairway on the northern side, appear to be reversible. In the immediate area, there are no other extant industrial structures of this era or style.

The Basila Frocks Building's primary cultural significance lies in its reflection of San Antonio's multi-faceted identity and history. The building has served multiples uses over the years including night clubs, restaurants, ballrooms, housing, health services, and an Assemblies of God congregation. The association of people reflects the confluence of San Antonio's diverse and vibrant culture, from its architects, to its original immigrant owners, to performers like Perry Salinas and Ralph Duran, and to its tenants such as LULAC and the Quong Sheu Grocery store. As a cultural arts center featuring music, spirituality, culinary traditions, and entertainment, the Basila Frocks Building is uniquely situated in its ability to convey the heritage values of San Antonio. Additionally, as a key employer of garment workers, the building speaks to the important labor history that developed San Antonio into a prosperous city.





CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
**OFFICE OF HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION**

**Historic and Design Review Commission  
Demolition and Designation Committee**

DATE: March 8, 2016 HDRC Case# 2016-068

ADDRESS: 500 N Zarzamora Meeting Location: on site

APPLICANT: OHP

DDC Members present: Betty Feldman, Kent Brittain, Desiree Salmon

Staff present: Claudia Guerra, Jerry Bay

Others present: Ashley Farimond, Andres Peña

REQUEST: Finding of historic significance

**COMMENTS/CONCERNS:** Major structural issues - dry rot  
on 2nd floor. Plaster missing in rear, terra cotta tiles  
Road encroached on sidewalk, front canopy absent.  
Original L-shape, water damage from roof access and window exposure.  
Structural beam exposed in SE corner, mold + water damage evident.  
Some original features, inc. lettering, still present.  
Addition as separate parcel? Exterior windows enclosed in good  
shape, fire damage evident as well as water. Perimeter wall at  
windows allowed water into structure, silt/debris also between terra cotta +

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:** APPROVE ☐ DISAPPROVE ☐  
**APPROVE WITH COMMENTS/STIPULATIONS:**

brick  
causing  
bulging.

Committee Chair Signature (or representative)

Date