



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

21 June 2020

APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF ZONING, RINCONCITO DE ESPERANZA HISTORIC DISTRICT

Summary

The Office of Historic Preservation is requesting a change in zoning for three parcels addressed 812 S Colorado, 816 S Colorado, and 1024 El Paso to include a new Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District (H). The district will include three properties.

OHP staff recommends approval.

Case Comments

OHP received statements of support from the Conservation Society of San Antonio; J. Gilberto Quezada; Jose Angel Siller; Donna Guerra; Teri Castillo; Beatrice Moreno; Normal Elia Cantu; Michelle Tremillo; Raul Martinez, Ph.D.; David Mercado Gonzales; Xavier Sanchez; Isabel and Enrique Sanchez; Leticia Sanchez Retamozo; Rachel Delgado; Richard Joseph Aguilar; Elvira E. Leal; Antonia Casteneda; and Patti Radle.

Case History

June 3, 2020 – Historic & Design Review Commission recommends approval

May 27, 2020 – 51% threshold met; 100% owner support

May 20, 2020 – OHP informational meeting as part of HDRC hearing

April 28, 2020 – OHP received an application submitted by a property owner within the boundary

Applicable Citations

Note: UDC Section 35-607 (a) states that historic districts shall consist of at least two or more structures that meet at least three of the designation criteria. The proposed Westfort Historic District meets criteria 1, 3, 9, and 11. All properties within the proposed boundary are found to be contributing.

UDC Section 35-607 – Sec. 35-607. - Designation Criteria for Historic Districts and Landmarks:

- a. Process for Considering Designation of Historic Districts and Landmarks. Historic districts and landmarks shall be evaluated for designation using the criteria listed in subsection (b) and the criteria applied to evaluate properties for inclusion in the National Register. In order to be eligible for historic landmark designation, properties shall meet at least three (3) of the criteria listed. Historic districts shall consist of at least two (2) or more structures within a legally defined boundary that meet at least three (3) of the criteria. Additionally, all designated landmarks and districts shall demonstrate clear delineation of the legal boundaries of such designated resources.
- b. Criteria for Evaluation.
 1. Its value as a visible or archeological reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event;
 3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation;
 9. Its character as a geographically definable area possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of historically, architecturally or culturally significant sites, buildings, objects or structures united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development;

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11. 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.

Findings of Fact

- a. The request for historic district designation was submitted by the property owner of all three parcels contained within the proposed boundary on April 28, 2020.
- b. **SUMMARY:** The proposed district contains 11 small structures on three adjacent lots at 812 S Colorado St, 816 S Colorado St, and 1024 El Paso St. The Rinconcito is a visible reminder of an earlier era when working-class families built multiple small homes on a single lot in order to make ends meet. The majority of the structures at the Rinconcito date from the turn of the century to the 1930s, with one concrete block addition dating to the late 1950s and one compressed earth block structure built in 2017 to represent the history of adobe in San Antonio. All of the lots at the Rinconcito de Esperanza are owned by the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center. UDC Section 35-607 (a) states that historic districts must meet at least three of the designation criteria. The proposed Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District meets criteria 1, 3, 9, and 11. All structures included in the proposed boundary are contributing.
- c. **BACKGROUND:** The applicant requests approval for historic district designation for the Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District and a recommendation for approval to the Zoning Commission and to the City Council for historic zoning designation. The proposed district will include three parcels on the east side of S Colorado Street between El Paso and Guadalupe streets. On May 18, 2020, OHP mailed notification of an information meeting, required by the UDC and held May 20, 2020, as part of the meeting of the Historic and Design Review Commission to present the review process and answer any questions property owners had. On May 27, 2020, staff of the Office of Historic Preservation received and verified 3 return notices or 100% of property owners within the proposed boundary that are in support of designation. In accordance with the UDC, staff has forwarded the application to HDRC for review.
- d. **SITE CONTEXT:** The Rinconcito de Esperanza (Little Corner of Hope) Historic District consists of 11 structures on three adjacent lots at 812, 816, and the former 820 S. Colorado Street (now 1024 El Paso St) in San Antonio's historically majority working class Mexican American Westside neighborhood. Representative of the once dense massing prevalent on the Westside, the extant lots formerly included 808, 812, 816, 818, 820, 822, and 824 S. Colorado Street. The majority of the structures at the Rinconcito date from the turn of the century to the 1930s, with one concrete block addition dating to the late 1950s and one compressed earth block structure built in 2017 to represent the history of adobe in San Antonio. The property at 812 S Colorado is designated as a local landmark.
- e. **HISTORIC CONTEXT:** The northern most lot consists of seven small residential structures including a shotgun house and the Green House, a folk Victorian residential home dating to approximately 1906, and which has retained its original foot print since construction. At 816 sits the Casa de Cuentos, a folk Victorian house that dates to the 1920s. It has served as a home and as a small business, including Torres Grocery (1938–48) and three different dry cleaners (1951–63). In 1994, Emilia Sánchez owned the house and was known for taking care of the poor of the neighborhood. Community members called the house La Casa de Misericordia. The Esperanza Peace & Justice Center, a social justice and arts organization, purchased the house in 2001 and has since operated the Casa de Cuentos as a community gathering space. Behind Casa de Cuentos is the Casita. At only 200 square feet, this 1920s Casita is an example of a typical poor Westside

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family's home during that era. The casita remains without a bathroom both to preserve the earlier layout and serve as a reminder of the how many Westside families lived in the past. The former 820 (now combined with 816) is home to Ruben's Ice House. This structure began with the southern wooden half of the building, which dates to the 1930s. It was transformed from a home to the M & E Grocery Store (named for Manuel and Elida Reyes) around 1950. About 1959, owner Mr. Reyes added the concrete block addition where he operated Ruben's Ice House (named after his son), a longtime community gathering space that closed in 1987. The newest structure at the Rinconcito is the MujerArtes Adobe Studio. This "green" compressed earth block (adobe) structure, the first to be built in the Westside in a century, was completed in 2017. The building is a long rectangle that sits along the eastern edge of the combined 816 & 820 lots.

- f. **ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT:** The Rinconcito is a visible reminder of an earlier era when working-class families built multiple small homes on a single lot in order to make ends meet. While just twenty years ago this massing could be seen all along the 800 block of S. Colorado, today vacant lots surround the Rinconcito.
- g. **EVALUATION:** As referenced in the applicable citations, the Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District meets UDC criteria [35-607 (b)1], [35-607 (b)3], [35-607 (b)9], and [35-607 (b)11] for a finding of historic significance in the process of seeking designation as a local historic district. In order to be an eligible historic district, at least two properties must meet at least three of the criteria; Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District meets four.
 1. **Its value as a visible or archeological reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event;** as a group of residential structures embodying characteristics of a variety of architectural styles and vernacular forms that would have been common to the surrounding neighborhood but have since been demolished.
 3. **Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation;** as a home to Westside businesses and community organizations that have served the neighborhood since the 1920s, including the Reyes family who operated a grocery store and later an ice house here for over fifty years.
 9. **Its character as a geographically definable area possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of historically, architecturally or culturally significant sites, buildings, objects or structures united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development;** the historic district consists of three adjacent lots where the remaining structures retain their historic footprints. The dense massing is representative of the historic development pattern when working class families built multiple small homes on a single lot in order to make ends meet.
 11. **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;** the Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District is home to both structures and institutions that perform essential work toward preserving the intangible cultural heritage of the Westside community in which it is embedded.
- h. If the HDRC concurs that the proposed district meets criteria and is eligible for designation and recommends the historic district designation for the Rinconcito de Esperanza Historic District, then their recommendation shall be submitted to the Zoning Commission. Once the Zoning Commission makes their recommendation, it will be submitted to the City Council. The City Council shall review and shall approve or deny the proposed historic district.

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- i. Per UDC Sec. 35-453, once the HDRC makes a recommendation for designation, property owners shall follow the Historic and Design Review Process before permits can be issued, until a final resolution from City Council. Written approval (a Certificate of Appropriateness) must be obtained for any exterior work.
- j. Historic districts possess cultural and historical value and contribute to the overall quality and character of the City. The City offers a tax incentive for all residential properties occupied by the property owner at the time of the designation. The incentive is a 20% tax exemption on City taxes for 10 years provided the owner remains in the property.
- k. The City also offers a Substantial Rehabilitation tax incentive. After substantial rehabilitation of a historic property, the property owners may choose one of two tax incentives, including having the city property taxes frozen for 10 years at the pre-rehabilitation value, or paying no city property taxes for the first five years, and for the next five years, city property taxes are assessed at the value that is 50% of the post-rehabilitation assessed value

ATTACHMENTS

Proposed boundary map

HDRC recommendation

OHP staff recommendation to HDRC and published exhibits

Statements of support