

**HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION
COMPLIANCE AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD
June 20, 2025**

HDRC CASE NO: 2025-149
ADDRESS: 251 BRAHAN BLVD
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: NCB 3856 BLK 2 LOT 24 & 25
ZONING: RM-4 CD, H
CITY COUNCIL DIST.: 2
DISTRICT: Westfort Historic District
APPLICANT: Damian Gonzales
OWNER: Damian Gonzales/GONZALES DAMIAN III
TYPE OF WORK: Front Landscaping, Plants, Hardscape, and Retaining Wall
APPLICATION RECEIVED: May 30, 2025
60-DAY REVIEW: July 29, 2025
CASE MANAGER: Adrian Gallegos
REQUEST:

The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness for approval to:

1. Modify the existing front landscape with the installation of plants and grass.
2. Install a stucco retaining wall as submitted in the updated drawings, spanning the south property line and not exceeding 3' at any point.
3. Install new concrete steps with a stucco retaining wall to the right of the central walkway.
4. Install pour-in-place concrete step pads between the left side of the property and central front walkway.
5. Install a non-continuous front walkway composed of pour-in-place concrete step pads with shadow stone gravel in between the pads.

APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

Historic Design Guidelines, Chapter 5, Guidelines for Site Elements

1. Topography

A. TOPOGRAPHIC FEATURES

- i. *Historic topography*—Avoid significantly altering the topography of a property (i.e., extensive grading). Do not alter character-defining features such as berms or sloped front lawns that help define the character of the public right-of-way. Maintain the established lawn to help prevent erosion. If turf is replaced over time, new plant materials in these areas should be low-growing and suitable for the prevention of erosion.
- ii. *New construction*—Match the historic topography of adjacent lots prevalent along the block face for new construction. Do not excavate raised lots to accommodate additional building height or an additional story for new construction.
- iii. *New elements*—Minimize changes in topography resulting from new elements, like driveways and walkways, through appropriate siting and design. New site elements should work with, rather than change, character-defining topography when possible.

2. Fences and Walls

A. HISTORIC FENCES AND WALLS

- i. *Preserve*—Retain historic fences and walls.
- ii. *Repair and replacement*—Replace only deteriorated sections that are beyond repair. Match replacement materials (including mortar) to the color, texture, size, profile, and finish of the original.
- iii. *Application of paint and cementitious coatings*—Do not paint historic masonry walls or cover them with stone facing or stucco or other cementitious coatings.

B. NEW FENCES AND WALLS

- i. *Design*—New fences and walls should appear similar to those used historically within the district in terms of their scale, transparency, and character. Design of fence should respond to the design and materials of the house or main structure.

ii. *Location*—Avoid installing a fence or wall in a location where one did not historically exist, particularly within the front yard. The appropriateness of a front yard fence or wall is dependent on conditions within a specific historic district. New front yard fences or wall should not be introduced within historic districts that have not historically had them.

iii. *Height*—Limit the height of new fences and walls within the front yard to a maximum of four feet. The appropriateness of a front yard fence is dependent on conditions within a specific historic district. New front yard fences should not be introduced within historic districts that have not historically had them. If a taller fence or wall existed historically, additional height may be considered. The height of a new retaining wall should not exceed the height of the slope it retains.

iv. *Prohibited materials*—Do not use exposed concrete masonry units (CMU), Keystone or similar interlocking retaining wall systems, concrete block, vinyl fencing, or chain link fencing.

v. *Appropriate materials*—Construct new fences or walls of materials similar to fence materials historically used in the district. Select materials that are similar in scale, texture, color, and form as those historically used in the district, and that are compatible with the main structure. Screening incompatible uses—Review alternative fence heights and materials for appropriateness where residential properties are adjacent to commercial or other potentially incompatible uses.

C. PRIVACY FENCES AND WALLS

i. *Relationship to front facade*—Set privacy fences back from the front façade of the building, rather than aligning them with the front façade of the structure to reduce their visual prominence.

ii. *Location* – Do not use privacy fences in front yards.

3. Landscape Design

A. PLANTINGS

i. *Historic Gardens*— Maintain front yard gardens when appropriate within a specific historic district.

ii. *Historic Lawns*—Do not fully remove and replace traditional lawn areas with impervious hardscape. Limit the removal of lawn areas to mulched planting beds or pervious hardscapes in locations where they would historically be found, such as along fences, walkways, or drives. Low-growing plantings should be used in historic lawn areas; invasive or large-scale species should be avoided. Historic lawn areas should never be reduced by more than 50%.

iii. *Native xeric plant materials*—Select native and/or xeric plants that thrive in local conditions and reduce watering usage. See UDC Appendix E: San Antonio Recommended Plant List—All Suited to Xeriscape Planting Methods, for a list of appropriate materials and planting methods. Select plant materials with a similar character, growth habit, and light requirements as those being replaced.

iv. *Plant palettes*—If a varied plant palette is used, incorporate species of taller heights, such informal elements should be restrained to small areas of the front yard or to the rear or side yard so as not to obstruct views of or otherwise distract from the historic structure.

v. *Maintenance*—Maintain existing landscape features. Do not introduce landscape elements that will obscure the historic structure or are located as to retain moisture on walls or foundations (e.g., dense foundation plantings or vines) or as to cause damage.

B. ROCKS OR HARDSCAPE

i. *Impervious surfaces* —Do not introduce large pavers, asphalt, or other impervious surfaces where they were not historically located.

ii. *Pervious and semi-pervious surfaces*—New pervious hardscapes should be limited to areas that are not highly visible, and should not be used as wholesale replacement for plantings. If used, small plantings should be incorporated into the design.

iii. *Rock mulch and gravel* - Do not use rock mulch or gravel as a wholesale replacement for lawn area. If used, plantings should be incorporated into the design.

C. MULCH

Organic mulch – Organic mulch should not be used as a wholesale replacement for plant material. Organic mulch with appropriate plantings should be incorporated in areas where appropriate such as beneath a tree canopy.

i. *Inorganic mulch* – Inorganic mulch should not be used in highly-visible areas and should never be used as a wholesale replacement for plant material. Inorganic mulch with appropriate plantings should be incorporated in areas where appropriate such as along a foundation wall where moisture retention is discouraged.

D. TREES

i. *Preservation*—Preserve and protect from damage existing mature trees and heritage trees. See UDC Section 35-523 (Tree Preservation) for specific requirements.

- ii. *New Trees* – Select new trees based on site conditions. Avoid planting new trees in locations that could potentially cause damage to a historic structure or other historic elements. Species selection and planting procedure should be done in accordance with guidance from the City Arborist.
- iii. *Maintenance* – Proper pruning encourages healthy growth and can extend the lifespan of trees. Avoid unnecessary or harmful pruning. A certified, licensed arborist is recommended for the pruning of mature trees and heritage trees.

4. Residential Streetscapes

A. PLANTING STRIPS

- i. *Street trees*—Protect and encourage healthy street trees in planting strips. Replace damaged or dead trees with trees of a similar species, size, and growth habit as recommended by the City Arborist.
- ii. *Lawns*— Maintain the use of traditional lawn in planting strips or low plantings where a consistent pattern has been retained along the block frontage. If mulch or gravel beds are used, low-growing plantings should be incorporated into the design.
- iii. *Alternative materials*—Do not introduce impervious hardscape, raised planting beds, or other materials into planting strips where they were not historically found.

B. PARKWAYS AND PLANTED MEDIANS

- i. *Historic plantings*—Maintain the park-like character of historic parkways and planted medians by preserving mature vegetation and retaining historic design elements. Replace damaged or dead plant materials with species of a like size, growth habit, and ornamental characteristics.
- ii. *Hardscape*—Do not introduce new pavers, concrete, or other hardscape materials into parkways and planted medians where they were not historically found.

C. STREET ELEMENTS

- i. *Site elements*—Preserve historic street lights, street markers, roundabouts, and other unique site elements found within the public right-of-way as street improvements and other public works projects are completed over time.
- ii. *Historic paving materials*—Retain historic paving materials, such as brick pavers or colored paving, within the public right-of-way and repair in place with like materials.

5. Sidewalks, Walkways, Driveways, and Curbing

A. SIDEWALKS AND WALKWAYS

- i. *Maintenance*—Repair minor cracking, settling, or jamming along sidewalks to prevent uneven surfaces. Retain and repair historic sidewalk and walkway paving materials—often brick or concrete—in place.
- ii. *Replacement materials*—Replace those portions of sidewalks or walkways that are deteriorated beyond repair. Every effort should be made to match existing sidewalk color and material.
- iii. *Width and alignment*— Follow the historic alignment, configuration, and width of sidewalks and walkways. Alter the historic width or alignment only where absolutely necessary to accommodate the preservation of a significant tree.
- iv. *Stamped concrete*—Preserve stamped street names, business insignias, or other historic elements of sidewalks and walkways when replacement is necessary.
- v. *ADA compliance*—Limit removal of historic sidewalk materials to the immediate intersection when ramps are added to address ADA requirements.

B. DRIVEWAYS

- i. *Driveway configuration*—Retain and repair in place historic driveway configurations, such as ribbon drives. Incorporate a similar driveway configuration—materials, width, and design—to that historically found on the site. Historic driveways are typically no wider than 10 feet. Pervious paving surfaces may be considered where replacement is necessary to increase stormwater infiltration.
- ii. *Curb cuts and ramps*—Maintain the width and configuration of original curb cuts when replacing historic driveways. Avoid introducing new curb cuts where not historically found.

C. CURBING

- i. *Historic curbing*—Retain historic curbing wherever possible. Historic curbing in San Antonio is typically constructed of concrete with a curved or angular profile.
- ii. *Replacement curbing*—Replace curbing in-kind when deteriorated beyond repair. Where in-kind replacement is not be feasible, use a comparable substitute that duplicates the color, texture, durability, and profile of the original. Retaining walls and curbing should not be added to the sidewalk design unless absolutely necessary.

FINDINGS:

- a. The primary structure at 251 Brahan Blvd. was built in 1916 in the Art Deco style featuring a mostly flat roof, geometric motifs used as decorative elements along the façade, and divided-light steel casement windows. The property is contributing to the Westfort Historic District.
- b. LANDSCAPING MODIFICATIONS – The applicant has proposed comprehensive landscaping modifications, including the installation of plants and grass as specified in the site plan. Guideline 3.A.ii for Site Elements states that traditional lawn areas should not be fully removed and replaced with impervious hardscape. Guideline 3.A.iii for Site Elements states that native and xeric plants should be selected that thrive in local conditions and reduce water usage. Additionally, Guideline 3.B.ii for Site Elements states that pervious landscapes should be limited to areas that are not highly visible and should not be used as a wholesale replacement for plantings. Staff finds the proposal consistent with the Guidelines.
- c. RETAINING WALL INSTALLATION – The applicant is requesting approval to install an approximately stucco retaining wall at the front of the property. In general, changes in topography and addition of wall elements should be consistent with the predominate historic pattern found within the district. The Westfort Historic District features a variety of unique wall and topographical changes. The Historic Design Guidelines for Site Elements 2.B.iii. further state that the height of a new retaining wall should not exceed the height of the slope it retains. Staff finds the low wall generally appropriate and does not exceed the height of the existing slope. Staff finds the installation of the retaining wall proposed by the applicant conforms to Guidelines.
- d. RIGHT AND LEFT HARDCAPE ADDITIONS – the applicant has proposed installing concrete steps with stucco retaining wall to the right of the central walkway as well as pour-in-place concrete step pads only between the left side of the property and central front walkway. Guideline 3.B.ii states that new pervious hardscapes should be limited to areas that are not highly visible, and should not be used as wholesale replacement for plantings. If used, small plantings should be incorporated into the design. Staff finds the installation of the right and left hardscape additions proposed by the applicant conform to Guidelines.
- e. FRONT WALKWAY MODIFICATIONS – The applicant has proposed to install a non-continuous walkway composed of pour-in-place concrete step pads with gravel in between the pads. The property currently features a continuous concrete walkway. Guideline 5.A.ii for Site Elements states that walkways that are deteriorated beyond repair should be replaced to match the existing walkway color and material. Additionally, the historic alignment, configuration, and width of walkways should be followed. Staff finds the installation of a non-continuous walkway composed of pour-in-place concrete step pads with gravel in between the pads does not conform to guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of items 1 through 4, based on findings a through d, with the following stipulations:

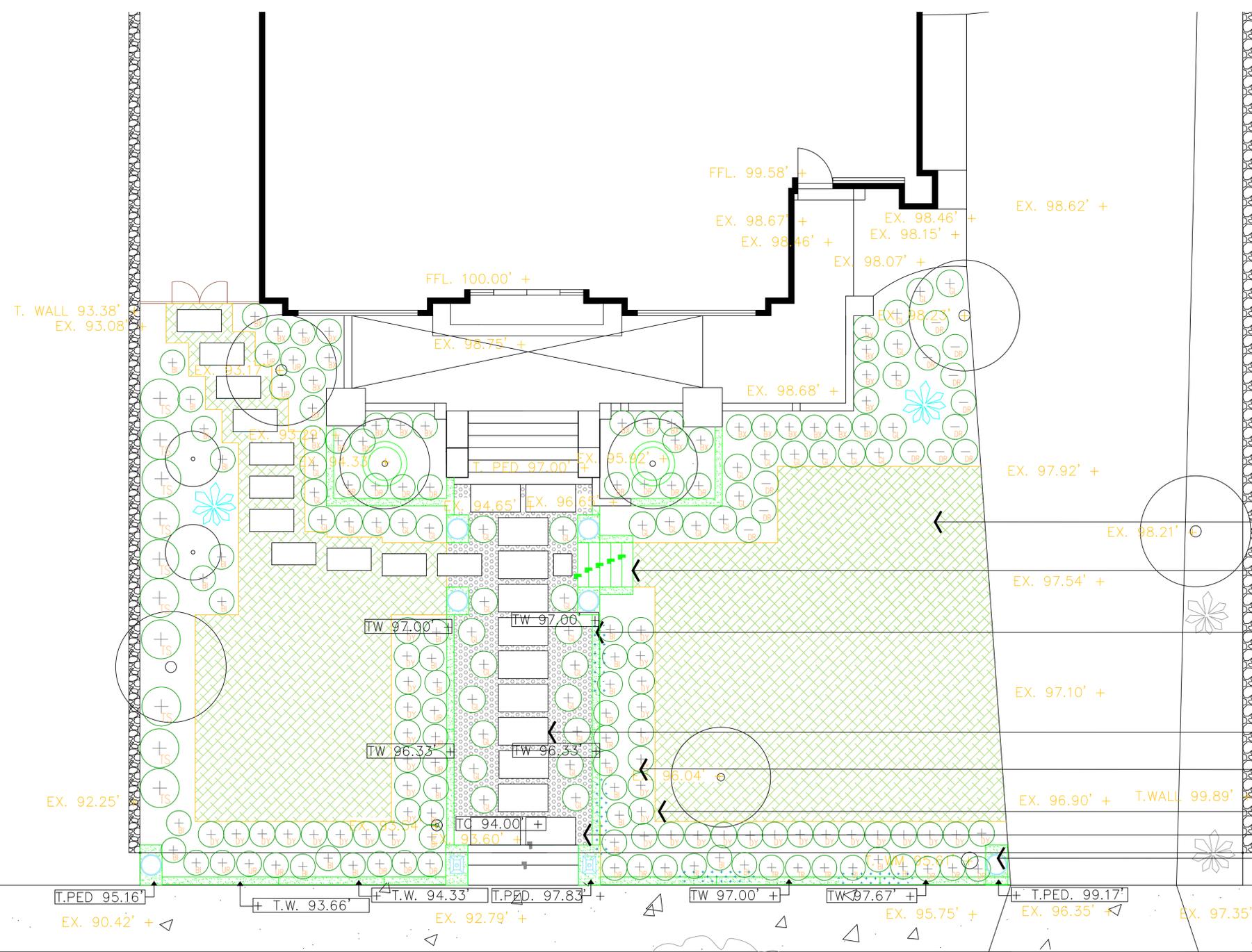
- i. The stucco retaining wall along the south property line match the height specified on the site plan, not to exceed 3' at any point.

Staff does not recommend approval of item 5 based on finding e. Staff recommends the existing solid front walkway be retained or repaired in kind.

EagleViewImage

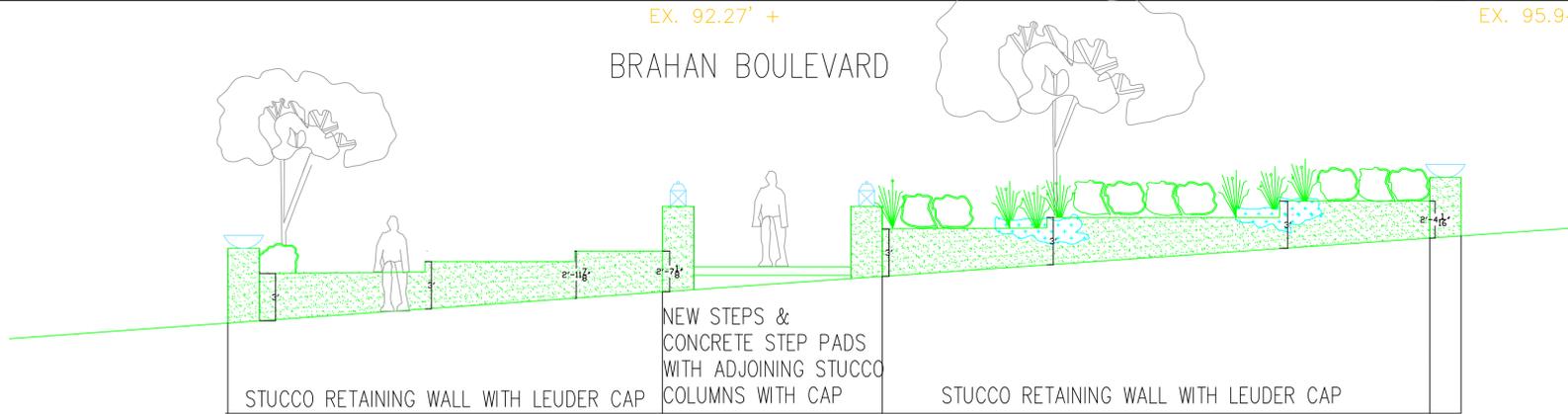
Captured: Mar 16, 2025





PLANT LEGEND:

-  AGAVE AMERICANA - 30 GALLON
-  TEXAS SAGE 'COMPACT' -15 GALLON
-  BOXWOOD - 5 GALLON
-  GIANT LIRIOPE - 5 GALLON
-  DWARF YAUPON HOLLY - 5 GALLON
-  BI-COLOR IRIS - 5 GALLON
-  DRIFT ROSE - 5 GALLON
-  UPRIGHT ROSEMARY - 5 GALLON
-  TRAILING ROSEMARY - 5 GALLON
-  SILVER PONY FOOT - 4" FLATS
-  NEW ZOYSIA SOD
-  NEW CONCRETE STEPS WITH STUCCO RETAINING WALL AND PEDESTALS
-  STUCCO WALL TO MATCH EXISTING WITH STONE LEUDER CAP - WALLS TO BE BACKFILLED WITH FABRIC AND GRAVEL FOR PROPER DRAINAGE AND WEEPHOLES INSTALLED AT BASE OF WALLS
-  POUR IN PLACE CONCRETE STEP PADS
-  NEW BED WITH 4-WAY SOIL MIX AND MULCH
-  NEW 10G STEEL EDGING
-  SMALL SHADOW STONE GRAVEL
-  NEW PEDESTALS TO MATCH FRONT EXISTING - LOW BOWLS ON 4 PEDESTALS AND LANTERNS ON TWO PEDESTALS AT STEPS AT SIDEWALK



PROPOSED FRONT LANDSCAPE PLAN

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

DELEON RESIDENCE

251 Brahan Boulevard, San Antonio, TX 78215

06.09.25

SERENITY LANDSCAPES, LLC





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Property of
City of San Antonio

N Pine St
Brahán Blvd



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