

## HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

December 20, 2023

**HDRC CASE NO:** 2023-445  
**ADDRESS:** 128 W FRENCH PLACE  
**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** NCB 1885 BLK LOT N IRR 143.57 FT A5  
**ZONING:** R-4, H  
**CITY COUNCIL DIST.:** 1  
**DISTRICT:** Monte Vista Historic District  
**APPLICANT:** Laura Pommer  
**OWNER:** Laura Pommer  
**TYPE OF WORK:** Front driveway installation, curb cut installation, fence installation, rear privacy fence installation, hardscaping  
  
**APPLICATION RECEIVED:** October 30, 2023  
**60-DAY REVIEW:** December 29, 2023  
**CASE MANAGER:** Claudia Espinosa

### REQUEST:

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

1. Install a 4-foot-tall wood front yard fence.
2. Install an 18-foot-wide concrete driveway apron.
3. Install a 12-foot-wide crushed granite driveway on the east side of the property.
4. Install a 648 sf, parking pad on the east side of the property
5. Install a 440 sf brick patio to the front entryway.

### APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

*Historic Design Guidelines, Chapter 5, Guidelines for Site Elements*

#### 1. Topography

##### A. TOPOGRAPHIC FEATURES

- 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.
- 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.
- 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

- Preserve*—Retain historic fences and walls.
- 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.
- 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 128 W French Pl is a single-family residence constructed in the Folk Victorian style circa 1900 and makes its first appearance on the 1904 Sanborn map. The home features wood siding, four-over-four wood windows, and a standing seam metal roof. The property is contributing to the Monte Vista Historic District.
- b. FRONT YARD FENCE INSTALLATION – The applicant is requesting to install a four-foot-tall wooden picket front yard fence, with a pedestrian gate located in line with the front entry. The Guidelines for Site Elements note that new fences and walls should appear similar to those used historically within the district in terms of their scale, transparency, and character. Guideline 2.B.ii. for Site Elements states that applicants should 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. The Monte Vista Historic District does not usually have front yard fences. However, at this location, there is not a strong context for traditional open lawns, and front yard fencing and walls are located on adjacent properties. Staff finds this request acceptable given this context.
- c. CURB CUT INSTALLATION – The applicant proposes to introduce one new concrete driveway apron to the property facing W. French Pl (north), measuring 18-ft-wide. Historic Design Guidelines for Site Elements 5.B.ii states to maintain the width and configuration of original curb cuts when replacing historic driveways. Avoid introducing new curb cuts where not historically found. Staff finds that the property owner should utilize the existing curb cut on Howard St (west).
- d. DRIVEWAY INSTALLATION – The applicant is requesting to remove the existing front walkway and install a 12-foot-wide crushed granite driveway on the east side of the lot. Guideline 5.B.i and ii for Site Elements states that historic driveway configurations, such as ribbon drives, should be retained and repaired in place and to 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. Additionally, the applicant should maintain the width and configuration of original curb cuts when replacing historic driveways. Avoid introducing new curb cuts where not historically found. Staff finds that a rear driveway utilizing the existing curb cut on Howard Street would be most appropriate and should not exceed 10' in width.
- e. HARDSCAPING (PARKING PAD) – The applicant is requesting to install a 648-square-foot decomposed granite parking pad on the east side of the property. Guideline 3.B.i. for Site Elements states do not introduce large pavers, asphalt, or other impervious surfaces where they were not historically located. If used, small planting should be incorporated into the design. Guideline 7.A.2. for Site Elements states that off-street parking areas should not be added within the front yard setback as to not disrupt the continuity of the streetscape. Staff finds the crushed granite parking pad installation inconsistent with the Guidelines.
- f. HARDSCAPING (PATIO) - The applicant is requesting to install a 440-sf brick patio to the front entryway. Guideline 3.B.i. for Site Elements states do not introduce large pavers, asphalt, or other impervious surfaces where they were not historically located. If used, small planting should be incorporated into the design. Staff finds the installation of the brick patio generally conforms to Guidelines.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Item 1, staff recommends approval of the installation of a 4-foot-tall wooden fence to the front yard, based on finding b with the following stipulation:



- i. That the final construction height of the approved pedestrian gates and fencing may not exceed the maximum height of 4 feet as approved by the HDRC at any portion of the fence. Additionally, the pedestrian gates and fencing must be permitted and meet the development standards outlined in UDC Section 35-514.

Item 2, staff does not recommend approval of the installation of concrete driveway apron, based on finding d. Staff recommends that the property owner utilize the existing curb cut on Howard St (west). If the HDRC is compelled to approve the new curb cut request, the new curb cut should not exceed 12' in width.

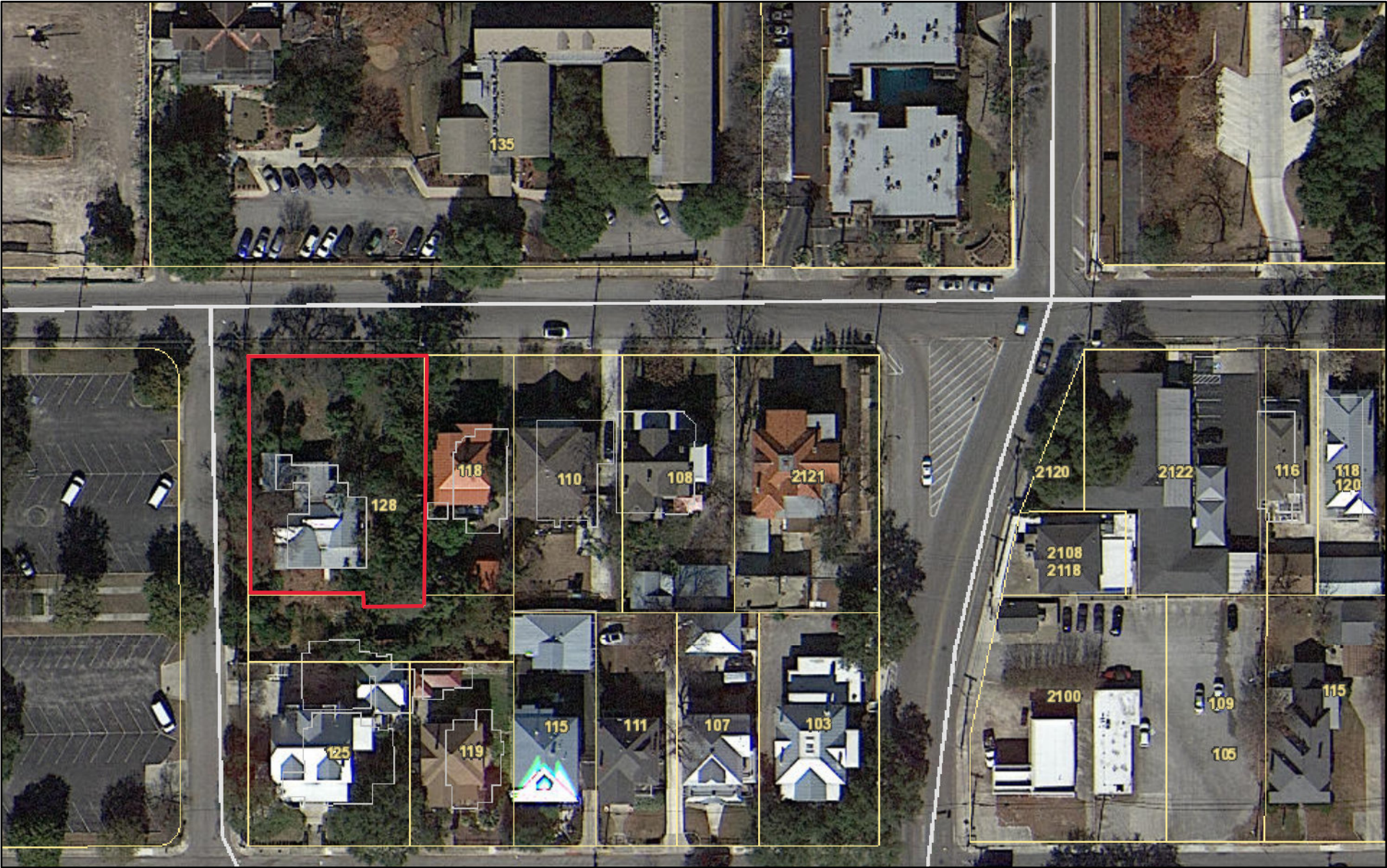
Item 3, staff recommends approval of the installation of a crushed granite driveway, based on finding e with the following stipulations:

- i. That the applicant installs a rear driveway utilizing the existing curb cut on Howard Street and that the new driveway is oriented parallel to W. French Pl, south of the primary structure.
- ii. That new driveway should not exceed 10' in width. The applicant is required to submit an updated measured site plan to staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

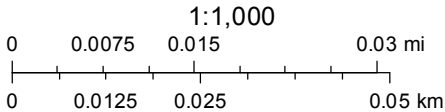
Item 4, staff does not recommend approval of the installation of a 648 sf, parking pad based on finding f.

Item 5, staff recommends approval of the installation a 440-sf brick patio to the front entryway based on finding g.

City of San Antonio One Stop



December 14, 2023











NO  
PARKING  
ANYTIME  
TOW AWAY ZONE  
→





















  
**TOWING ENFORCED**  
24 HRS A DAY - 7 DAYS A WEEK  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES  
EMPLOYEES & VISITORS  
PARKING ONLY  
NO STUDENT PARKING  
ALLOWED AT ANYTIME  
UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES WILL BE TOWED  
AT OWNER'S OR OPERATOR'S EXPENSE  
**210-590-6200**  
**BEXAR TOWING**





NO PARKING  
IN THIS  
BLOCK





NO PARKING  
THIS SIDE  
IN THIS  
BLOCK  
TOW AWAY ZONE



128 W French Pl.  
Proposed Landscaping, Hardscaping and  
Carport Master Plan

Laura Pommer–Homeowner  
3038179181

# Narrative

My home at 128 W French Pl., San Antonio TX, in the historic Monte Vista neighborhood has seen significant improvements, in accordance with historic regulations, over the past several years.

Despite the improvements to the original structures of the home, the landscaping and yard and associated parking/storage areas (which currently do not exist), have been neglected and are in need of improvement.

This neglect has resulted in a property that does not appear preserved in a manner acceptable with the history of the neighborhood.

The front facade of the home was moved from Ashby to W. French in the late 1880's, and no effort has been made to make the current front of the home more welcoming or "front"-like. A driveway with parking and a 4' picket fence would be ideal and would make the home more inviting and in line with the welcoming nature of the neighborhood.

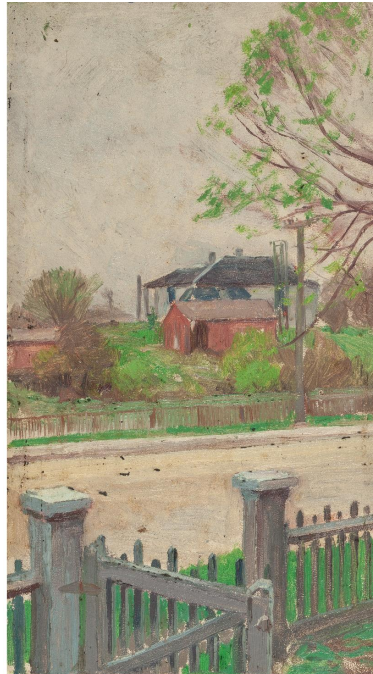
I would like to make improvements to the yard, including a new front drive, a carport, and a historically appropriate fence surrounding the front of the property, as there was during its original ownership by Mr. Julian Onderdonk and his family.

# Further Support for Front Yard Fence

Not one, but two, paintings document the presence of some sort of picket fence around the property. One painting was by Julian Onderdonk himself.

Despite the desired “open” nature of the Monte Vista neighborhood, a picket fence would, in fact, be accurate to the history of the home itself, as the first home in Monte Vista.

The first painting documents the view of the old Chandler Estate, which is now a part of the Christ Episcopal church on W French Pl.



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

This painting, by Julian Onderdonk, shows a similar fence along the same portion of Howard and W. French Pl, apparently facing north toward Chandler Estate



# Additional Materials

In addition to the historic nature of the proposed front yard fence, there is also an element of safety at hand to support both a privacy fence along Howard Street and the picket fence along W. French Pl and a portion of Howard St.

I experienced an attempted break in on August 26th, 2023, which I reported to the police. The exposure of the side and front of the property, along with its location closer to the non-residential part of Monte Vista, makes it a potential target for break-ins.

Due to the proximity to the Catholic Charities, there is also a significant parking problem on the street. As such, there have been NUMEROUS times that people have parked ON my front yard, have used the yard for resting, or have walked right across the yard.

11/21/2023



# Narrative

My home at 128 W French Pl., San Antonio TX, was once the home of Julian Onderdonk, and is considered to be the oldest standing house in the Monte Vista neighborhood. The house has seen significant improvements over the years, most of which were in consideration of retaining its historical significance.

Despite the improvements to the original structure of the home, the landscaping and yard have been neglected and it is not clear from the street where the main entrance to the house is, or how to get to it. Note that the front facade of the home was moved from Ashby to W. French in the late 1880's. No effort has been made to make the current front of the home appear to be the main entrance.

The result is a property that does not present itself in a manner acceptable with the history of the property, or the neighborhood.

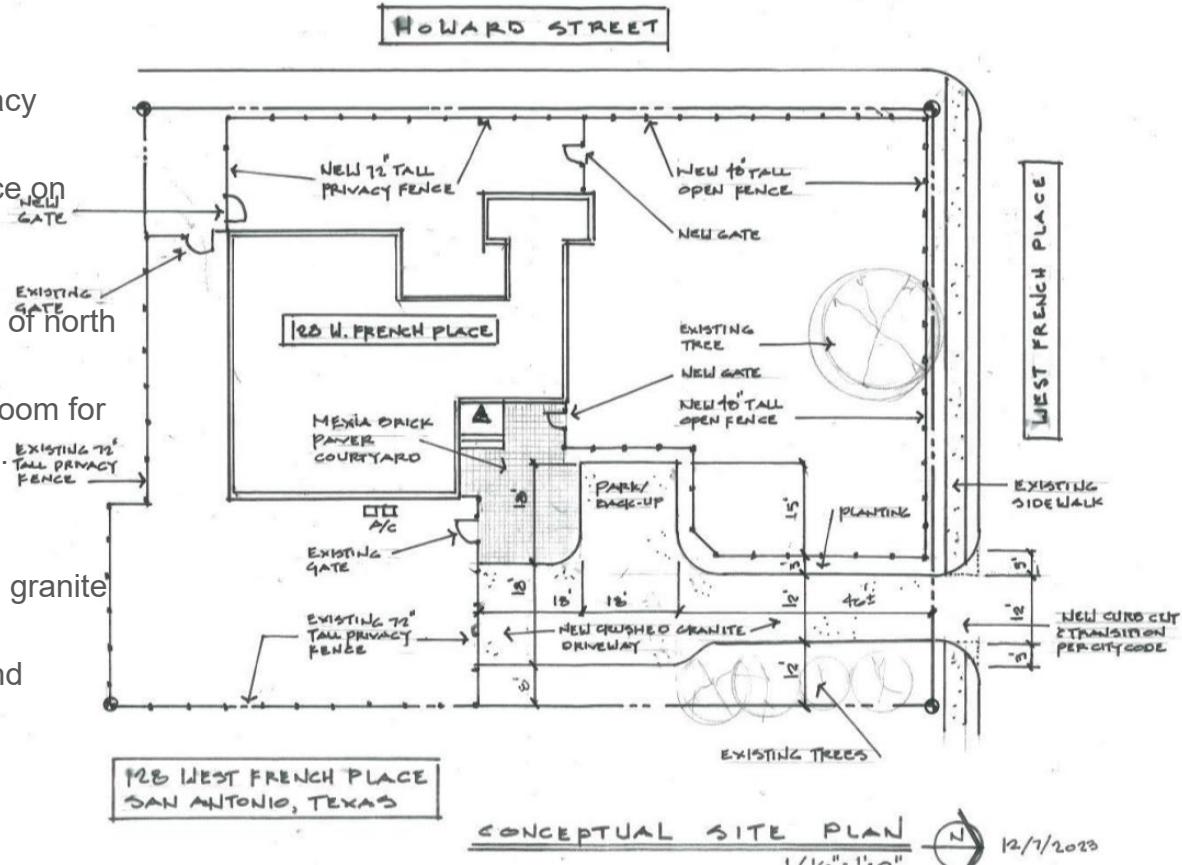
The proposed driveway with parking near the front entry of the house and the 4' picket fence defining the front yard are intended to make the home and its grounds more attractive in line with the neighborhood, and to lead a visitor to the main entrance of the house. Based on paintings presented on slide 4, a fence did exist around the lot during its original ownership by Robert and Julian Onderdonk and their families.

In addition, I plan to bury the utility lines to the house and add a privacy fence along the west side of the house which is currently exposed to a large faith based immigrant processing center that presents a security risk to the occupants of the house.

# Revised Site Plan: As of 12/8/2023

### Planned Improvements:

- 4 ft picket fence around front yard, 6 ft privacy fence along Howard St.
  - Driveway from West French to existing fence on east side of the house.
    - Curb cut ~18 ft wide at street
    - Reducing to 12 ft driveway width inside of north lot line.
    - Parking area: 2 18'x18' pads, to allow room for turn around to exit the property forward.
  - Hardscape:
    - Driveway apron: Concrete
    - Driveway & parking area: Decomposed granite
    - Patio near house entry: Mexia Brick
  - Utility lines from street to house underground
- Note: Previous planned carport removed.*



# Example of Front Yard Fence

Proposed 4 Foot Picket Fence:

- Surrounds front yard.
- Provides visual “see through” effect



# Additional Considerations: Fence and Driveway

## Fence:

In addition to the historic nature of the proposed front yard fence, there is also a safety issue that supports both a privacy fence along Howard Street and the picket fence along W. French Pl and a portion of Howard St.

I experienced an attempted break in on August 26th, 2023, which I reported to the police. The exposure of the side and front of the property, along with its location closer to the non-residential part of Monte Vista, makes it a potential target for break-ins.

Due to the proximity to the Catholic Charities which is located on the west side of Howard Street, there is a significant parking problem on the street. As such, there have been NUMEROUS times that people have parked ON my front yard, have used the yard for resting, or have walked or driven right across the yard.

## Driveway:

The driveway is 12 feet wide with a space to turn around at the house. The width is to accommodate possible emergency vehicles, or other vehicles required for delivery or property maintenance. Most are 8 to 8 ½ feet wide. The width of the driveway allows more flexibility for vehicles of this type to get closer to the house without damaging the landscaping.

Access to the front entrance to the house is currently a significant distance from parking. The entrance to the house is ~88 feet from the street. There is no parking allowed along the side of West French Place or Howard Street that is adjacent to the property.

The turn around area is a safety consideration by allowing a vehicle to enter and exit the property moving forward vs. backward improving driver visibility.