

HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION

June 07, 2023

HDRC CASE NO: 2023-180
ADDRESS: 1931 N IH 35
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: NCB 1277 BLK 6 LOT S 111.22 FT OF 20
ZONING: R-5
CITY COUNCIL DIST.: 2
DISTRICT: Government Hill Historic District
APPLICANT: John Williams/GRACELAND GROUP LLC
OWNER: John Williams/GRACELAND GROUP LLC
TYPE OF WORK: Xeriscaping
APPLICATION RECEIVED: May 03, 2023
60-DAY REVIEW: July 02, 2023
CASE MANAGER: Jessica Anderson

REQUEST:

The applicant requests a Certificate of Appropriateness for approval to replace the existing lawn with gravel and rock mulch.

APPLICABLE CITATIONS:

Historic Design Guidelines, Chapter 5, Guidelines for Site Elements

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 Xeriscaping 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.

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

- i. *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.

- ii. *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.

FINDINGS:

- a. The property at 1931 N IH 35 is one-story contemporary residence with Colonial Revival influence built c 1984. The front and side elevations are clad in brick, with wood siding on the rear. The hipped roof is clad in composition shingle, and windows have metal frames. The front inset porch features three round columns. The property contributes to the Government Hill Historic District.
- b. VIOLATION: On March 14, 2023, staff received a citizen report that the applicant removed all grass onsite. Staff reached out to the property owner to notify him the work was completed without a Certificate of Appropriateness, and the owner submitted an application to xeriscape the yard on March 15, 2023. Staff determined the application incomplete. On May 3, 2023, staff received a citizen report that the yard was covered in gravel, and staff notified the property owner in writing via email that the request may be eligible for administrative approval if the property owner provided an updated site plan showing intent to reintroduce at least 50% greenery to the yard, but the case would otherwise go to the Historic and Design Review Commission for review of the existing yard conditions. Staff has not received a response, and thus scheduled the request for HDRC review.
- vi. XERISCAPING: The applicant requests to remove all grass and xeriscape the yard using river rock along the perimeter of the house with crushed shadow stone in the remainder of the yard. Historic Design Guidelines for Site Elements 3.A.ii says historic lawn areas should never be reduced by more than 50%. The applicant stated in his request language that an appropriate percentage of planters will be added to the yard as well, but did not provide a landscaping plan showing intent to reintroduce at least 50% greenery. Staff finds the request generally appropriate, but that the applicant should submit an updated landscaping plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff does not recommend approval of the request to replace the existing lawn with gravel and rock mulch, based on finding c. Staff recommends that the applicant submits a landscaping plan that includes at least 50% greenery, which would be eligible for administrative approval.

City of San Antonio One Stop



January 27, 2023



















