

PLAZA DE LA GUERRA INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS DESIGN INTENT STATEMENT

Purpose: To guide the design of the council-directed infrastructure improvements

History/Style

Plaza de la Guerra was a gift to the people of Santa Barbara from the de la Guerra family. It was designated a public square and promenade in 1853 and was intended to follow the "European" model of a plaza as an urban refuge where the community could gather for events and socializing.

"As the city grew, Santa Barbarans began to take an interest in the city's image and the need to create a special identity for it, periodically considering plans for the De la Guerra plot, and proposals to make it a 'proper' plaza."

In the 1920s, civic leaders imagined a comprehensive vision of a "City in Spain." First publicly proposed in February 1922, the idea was centered around the restoration of Plaza de la Guerra as an open public space and the creation of a new commercial quarter (*El Paseo*) behind the historic Casa de la Guerra, located on the north side of De la Guerra Street.

The Spanish Eclectic styled City Hall building was completed in 1924 and anchors the easterly side of the Plaza. The City Hall parking lot overlays the former site of the historic Harmer Adobe. The Harmer Adobe, also known as the Yorba-Abadie Adobe was built in 1826, damaged in the 1925 earthquake and eventually razed in the 1940s to provide more automobile parking.

At the southerly end of the Plaza stands the Santa Barbara News-Press building, designed in 1922 by George Washington Smith in Spanish Colonial Revival style. The tower element on the eastern end of the building was added in 1951.

Prominent on the Plaza's westerly side is the Spanish Colonial Revival styled "La Placita" Building designed in 1925 with distinctive first story arches which complement those of the City Hall. The third floor was added in the 1980s.

Old City Hall, which stood in the center of the parcel, was demolished in 1924 and the resulting plaza has remained open space since. The two palm trees planted in 1910 at the rear of the former city hall remain to mark the location. Renamed from City Hall Plaza to Plaza de la Guerra after the family who originally deeded the space to the citizens of Santa Barbara, the plaza almost immediately became home to Old Spanish Days Fiesta celebrations and other social community events.

Information sourced from:

Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation. Plaza de la Guerra Reconsidered Exhibition and Symposium. 1st ed. Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002.

Objectives

To implement project components as directed by City Council for conceptual design of infrastructure improvements (see separate document).

Accessibility

A safe, functionally improved, and aesthetic connection between Storke Placita, the Plaza and Casa de la Guerra is desired. Pedestrians¹ should experience an inviting and fluid movement through the area. The design should increase accessibility and ease of use for all persons, including those with disabilities. Distinctive materials and special crosswalk treatments may be used to enhance perception of the connection between the Placita, Plaza and Casa de la Guerra.

Pedestrian Amenities

Park benches, trash/recycling receptacles, bike racks, and newspaper cabinets should echo the designs populating State Street. Lighting should be designed in an appropriate functional and aesthetic form, and should reinforce a pedestrian scale.

Utilities

Upgraded electrical service should be relocated and distributed in a manner that is safe, secure, and convenient for use during special events (e.g. Fiesta, concerts, bazaars, etc), and of sufficient capacity for all Plaza uses. Utilities should be treated in a manner that minimizes the visual presence. Trash and recycling dumpsters need to be integrated into the design in a manner that is aesthetically acceptable, yet is functionally appropriate for tenants and collection.

Loop Road and Parking

The interface between the roadway and the lawn and other pedestrian areas should be designed to function in a safe manner both for vehicles and pedestrians during large community events. Eliminating tripping hazards and providing a greater comprehensive area for use in community festivals is important. Roadway vehicle circulation and parking also remain essential considerations and should prevent or reasonably minimize opportunities for errant vehicles to roll onto the Plaza lawn. Removable or retractable bollards should be considered for traffic control at the vehicle entrance and exit to the Plaza. .

Landscaping

A comprehensive and sustainable landscaping plan should extend from Storke Placita through the Plaza - including City Hall and City Hall parking lot frontage. An unobstructed view of the Plaza from De la Guerra Street should be a feature derived from removal of the agapanthus at the northerly end of the park.

Budget and Implementation

Improvements should be conceived as being implemented in phases over a multi-year period.

¹ The term "pedestrian", where used in this document, should be construed to include all persons with disabilities, and is intended to distinguish these users of the Plaza from vehicles.