## General Public Comment

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<th>Name of Sender</th>
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<td>1. Susan Chamberlin</td>
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<td>2. Bob Cunningham</td>
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January 11, 2022

TO: City of Santa Barbara Historic Landmarks Commission
P.O. Box 1990
Santa Barbara CA 93102-1990

FROM: Susan Chamberlin
Landscape Historian, M.A. & Landscape Architect (CA #2001)
P.O. Box 3864
Santa Barbara CA 93130

RE: January 19, 2022 Agenda—Plaza De la Guerra, 20 East De la Guerra Street

It is frankly surprising that the proposed demolition and remodel of the historic, cultural landscape Plaza De la Guerra has progressed to this point. Has Brad Hess of the City or the HLC considered CEQA regarding the plans before you? Cultural landscapes have been part of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties since 1992.

Along with Casa De la Guerra, the Plaza is included in the documentation for California Historical Landmark #307 (where it is called “De la Guerra Plaza”) according to the California Office of Historic Preservation’s Jay Correia. There is also a plaque on a boulder in the Plaza with this name that was placed in 1950 and is therefore considered historic as well. The boulder with the plaque is not on the proposed plans by RRM Design Group, and the palm trees (correctly identified by them as historic) are removed from the Plaza. Their entire design can only be described as contemporary.

Whether its original design was intentional or not, the Plaza as it appears today is nearly a century old, and it functions well. As you will see in the enclosed article, there is a plan by City Engineer Geo. D. Morrison archived at UCSB’s Architecture and Design Collection, which shows the layout of the paved loop road around the plaza essentially as it is now. Clearly visible on the plan that is archived is the notation that it was approved by the City Council on July 17, 1924. Grass appears in early photos of the plaza and in the 1926 book, New Santa Barbara.

Removing parking from the plaza will impact El Paseo shops and tasting rooms and make it more difficult for lower income people to do business at City Hall and the News-Press. Eliminating grass from the plaza and replacing it with hardscape will increase the City’s carbon footprint. The proposed trees in planters will need perpetual irrigation due to their limited root zones.

I am in favor of: updating the utility corridor if it includes reclaimed water for irrigating the lawn; temporary coffee kiosks; restrooms. I urge you to reject the rest of the proposed Plaza plans.

(signed) Susan Chamberlin

PRESERVATION WATCH

By Susan Chamberlin and Paulina Conn

(Initiated by popular request, Preservation Watch informs Pearl Chase Society members of community projects that may disturb historical structures and features, explains community preservation efforts, and lists opportunities for public input for those concerned with a particular issue.)

De la Guerra Plaza

A remodel of De la Guerra Plaza is being considered by the Historic Landmarks Commission (referred to by the De la Guerra Plaza Revitalization Advisory Committee and City Public Works Department), despite the fact that plans archived at UCSB's Architecture and Design Collection include one from 1924 approved by the City Council that shows the design of the paved loop road by City Engineer Geo. D. Morrison around the Plaza more or less as it exists now.

This cultural landscape is therefore nearly a century old, easily within the threshold of 50 years for historic resources. Post-Hazeltine did not include this 1924 plan in their 2008 Historic Structures Sites Report for the Plaza for reasons that are not clear.

There is grass in the Plaza today just as there was long ago. Grass is visible in historic photos including one that appeared on page 17 in the 1926 book, *New Santa Barbara*. The publication was issued by the Plants and Planning Committee of the Community Arts Association. (See photo below)

De la Guerra Plaza and Casa de la Guerra are both considered in the documentation for California Historical Landmark #307, according to Jay Correia, Supervisor, Cultural Resources Programs Registration, California Office of Historic Preservation. The plaque, "DE LA GUERRA PLAZA 1850-1950" mounted on a boulder at the edge of the Plaza in 1950 is also historic, and few plaques from this era survive according to Correia.

For more information about this remodeling plan, access the De la Guerra Plaza Revitalization Advisory Committee page.

1924 Design: Lutah Maria Riggs papers, Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum; University of California, Santa Barbara.
Hi Mary,

Will you please forward this public comment to HLC and post next time the item comes up on the agenda?

Nicole Hernandez  
*Project Planner, Architectural Historian*  
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SantaBarbaraCA.gov

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As part of the City’s recent response to COVID-19, the Community Development and Public Works offices at 630 Garden Street have temporarily suspended in-person services. Online application submittal and permitting and virtual counter services continue to be available. The self-service lobby area is also open daily for your various pick up and drop off needs. Please visit our websites for additional information.

Community Development: SantaBarbaraCA.gov/CommunityDevelopment | Public Works: SantaBarbaraCA.gov/PublicWorks
Public Counter Apt. Scheduling Tool: SantaBarbaraCA.gov/CounterCheckIn

Good afternoon,

I would be grateful if you could forward these comments regarding the proposed design for Plaza De la Guerra to the Historic Landmarks Commission in advance of the next scheduled review of the project.

Thank you,

BC  
Bob Cunningham, ASLA  
ARCADIA STUDIO landscape architecture - 805 962 9055 ex 32
Regarding Plaza De la Guerra

I have been licensed as a landscape architect since 1970, and have practiced in Santa Barbara since 1974. I have been involved in hundreds of development projects, institutional, public and commercial. I watched the Historic Landmarks Commission meeting of January 19, and wish to thank the Commissioners for their commentary on the proposed development of Plaza De la Guerra. I would like to offer my own thoughts on the design:

I will begin by stating that in my opinion, the historic nature of the Plaza should be preserved. It is an integral piece of Santa Barbara’s architectural and landscape history. The additions proposed are unnecessary, dilute the pure simplicity of the site, and for the most part serve no essential purpose.

Rather than repeat what the Landmarks Commissioners nearly unanimously expressed, I will try to elaborate only where I believe it is necessary for emphasis, and I will add my professional opinions where I feel they may advance the City’s purpose of remedying difficult conditions.

- The Arcade – Instead of building a structure that has been pointed out to be disruptive and disrespectful of the Plaza’s historic context, I suggest leaving the existing landscape. If the Parks Division’s Staff believes the plantings can be improved, a design for selectively renovating and or replacing within the context of traditional Spanish Colonial Revival should be proposed.

- The Stage – If a permanent stage for occasional events is determined to be essential to the site, even after decades of working with temporary structures has sufficed, this element should be integrated in a manner that serves the purpose without interrupting the flow along the sidewalk. I believe that if the pavement is to be raised to match the level of the turf, and vehicular traffic is eliminated from the Plaza, a temporary stage could easily be erected over the pavement at the southern end, much larger than the stages we’ve had in the past.

- Splash Pad – Beyond the well-stated point that a children’s play space is not warranted in the Plaza, the ongoing expense of operation and maintenance should be considered. Any enterprising vandal could easily find ways to stuff materials into the water spouts that our Parks maintenance staff would need to clean out, repeatedly.

- Restrooms – Restrooms near the Plaza would benefit the public. I would endorse Commissioner Lenvik’s notion of locating restrooms in the public parking lot east of the Plaza. Locating them where currently proposed, the restrooms would improperly intrude into Storke Placita, unnecessarily constricting the desirable open access to the Plaza. If the pump room for the splash pad is omitted from the building, the restroom can be smaller.

- City Hall Frontage – This feature received somewhat favorable commentary by the Commission, but I would counter that (1) it is NOT part of Plaza De la Guerra, and (2) it is not needed for the stated purposes. However, with parking removed from the Plaza and restricted on De la Guerra Street, there will be an increased need for visitors to access the building from
the Anacapa side. Therefore, a pedestrian path from the De la Guerra sidewalk to the staircase would make sense. The rest of the proposed improvements are of questionable value: Replacing the existing hedge with a sandstone wall would not result in a more-inviting entrance, but would simply add cost to the project; replacing the lawn with pavement makes little sense when a low water-using groundcover such as Kurapia™ could serve the same purpose without changing the nature of the space; adding benches to provide a space for “quiet contemplation” in close proximity of the busy traffic of Anacapa Street (and with no shade on a sunny side of the building) is not justification; and finally, there are many, more appropriate, locations on public property around town to provide a landscape demonstration garden.

- **The Lawn** - The simplest, most respectful, and least expensive way to develop the Plaza to achieve accessibility would be to raise the roadway with an acceptably traditional pavement and completely replace the lawn with a deep-profile athletic field-type of turf. Sports fields all over the country are built to withstand intense use. They are constructed with special soil media over subsurface drainage systems, and when necessary, they are replenished with fresh sod. If the Parks Division’s operating budget were set up to include such annual servicing, the Plaza’s lawn would very likely be out of service no more than two weeks out of the year. In conjunction with this schedule of service, the use of the lawn should include NO vehicle or temporary structures on the grass, but located in the pavement during events. It is no wonder the existing lawn suffers so badly after Fiesta. The ground has been compacted annually, and its “replenishment” consists of not much more than overseeding it and letting it rest. Money saved by eliminating most of the built structures and pavement could be devoted to properly renovating the lawn in the appropriate manner.

- **Landscaping** – The historical Plaza has been a sunny place from the beginning. While shade is desirable, this element should be limited to planting of “street trees” lining the pavement, not located within the historical panel of grass. Historical records should inform the designers regarding appropriate landscape features other than the lawn. If they are shown to be of historical value, the palms should remain. Transplanting the California Fan palm is risky and expensive. If the palm has historical value, it should be documented, but replaced with a matching pair of palms, placed in their original locations.

Ultimately, this project should be simplified to the bare minimum needed to allow it to continue in its service the community has enjoyed for so many decades.