



# *DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE*

## AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA DATE: AUGUST 19, 2015  
TO: Chair McCormack and Members of the Design Review Committee  
THRU: Leslie Aranda Roseberry, Planning Manager  
FROM: Marissa Moshier, Associate Planner - Historic Preservation  
SUBJECT: **DRC No. 4810-15 – St. John’s Lutheran Church Ramp**

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### **SUMMARY**

The applicant proposes to remove an existing ramp and construct a new ramp on the south side of St. John’s Lutheran Church to provide access to the sanctuary in compliance with the California Building Code and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The proposed ramp replaces a non-historic ramp in the same location. St. John’s Lutheran Church is separately listed in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) and is a contributor to the Old Towne Historic District (Historic District).

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION – FINAL DETERMINATION**

Staff recommends that the DRC approve the proposed project, subject to conditions of approval contained in the staff report and any conditions that the DRC determines appropriate to support the required findings.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Applicant: Darryl Cartozian, HCA, Inc.  
Owner: St. John’s Lutheran Church  
Property Location: 185 S. Center Street  
General Plan Designation: P-I (Public Institution)  
Zoning Classification: P-I (SP) – St. John’s Specific Plan  
Existing Development: 8,324 SF church, constructed in 1913-14 and separately listed in the National Register of Historic Places  
Property Size: 11,700 SF church parcel within 39,640 SF church and school campus  
Associated Applications: None  
Previous DRC Review: None

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

No Public Notice was required for this project.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

**Categorical Exemption:** The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per State CEQA Guidelines 15331 (Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation) because the project is in conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Secretary's Standards)* and the Old Towne Design Standards. The project is limited to construction of a ramp on the exterior of the building in conformance with California Building Code Chapter 11 requirements for accessibility. In conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*, the proposed ramp replaces an existing non-historic ramp and retains historic building features to the greatest extent feasible. The proposed design and materials are compatible with the historic building. There is no environmental public review required for a Categorical Exemption.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant proposes to construct a new switchback ramp on the south elevation of the church to replace an existing straight ramp. The major project components include:

- The ramp will have a gray concrete finish to match the existing ramp, sidewalks and other stairs on the building.
- The existing exterior door and threshold will remain and will be protected in place during construction.
- The existing historic half wall at the stair will remain and will be protected in place.
- The steel pipe handrails will have a black enamel finish and will match the existing handrails on the building exterior.

## **EXISTING SITE**

The existing site is developed with a Gothic Revival style church that was constructed in 1913-14 and is separately listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The church is part of the larger St. John's campus which contains multiple historic buildings, including the Parsonage at 171 South Center, Walker Hall at 184 South Shaffer and the School at 515 East Almond Avenue, all of which are contributors to the Old Towne Historic District.

## **EXISTING AREA CONTEXT**

The church is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of E. Almond Avenue and S. Center Street. It is surrounded by the St. John's campus to the north and east, single family residences to the south, and the Orange Civic Center to the west.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Orange Municipal Code (OMC) Section 17.10.070 establishes the general criteria the DRC should use when reviewing the project. This section states the following:

The project shall have an internally consistent, integrated design theme, which is reflected in the following elements:

1. **Architectural Features.**
  - a. The architectural features shall reflect a similar design style or period.
  - b. Creative building elements and identifying features should be used to create a high quality project with visual interest and an architectural style.
2. **Landscape.**
  - a. The type, size and location of landscape materials shall support the project's overall design concept.
  - b. Landscaping shall not obstruct visibility of required addressing, nor shall it obstruct the vision of motorists or pedestrians in proximity to the site.
  - c. Landscape areas shall be provided in and around parking lots to break up the appearance of large expanses of hardscape.
3. **Signage.** All signage shall be compatible with the building(s) design, scale, colors, materials and lighting.
4. **Secondary Functional and Accessory Features.** Trash receptacles, storage and loading areas, transformers and mechanical equipment shall be screened in a manner, which is architecturally compatible with the principal building(s).

## **ANALYSIS/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES**

### **Issue 1: Compatibility of New Ramp**

When St. John's Lutheran Church was constructed in 1913-14, the entrance to the sanctuary on the south side of the building was served by a stair. The landing at the door and the stair were surrounded by a concrete half wall, matching the base of the building. Based on historic photographs, sometime prior to 1984, a ramp with a metal handrail was added to the existing stair on the south side of the building. One section of the concrete half wall was removed at that time. This work was completed before the building was designated in the National Register in 1991. This ramp appears to have been reconstructed in the same location at least once since 1991. Although the ramp may have been constructed in compliance with building codes at the time, the existing ramp does not meet current California Building Code requirements in the following areas:

- The ramp slope varies between 10 and 11 percent, exceeding the allowed maximum of 8.33 percent.
- The slope of the ramp landing exceeds the allowed maximum of 2 percent at the exterior door.
- The ramp landing does not meet minimum landing size at the exterior door.

- The handrails do not meet the required height and length at the railing extension beyond the ramp and stairs.

St. John's Lutheran Church is currently in the process of completing a major rehabilitation of the historic church, which includes exterior repairs, structural upgrades and accessibility improvements. As part of this scope of work, the applicant is required to review the existing access to the building and to bring accessible improvements into compliance with the California Building Code and federal ADA standards. Planning and Building staff worked with the applicant to review several alternative ramp designs, including engaging a Certified Access Specialist (CAsp) consultant to review potential options. Staff also reviewed the alternative minimum standards for exterior ramps included in California Historical Building Code (CHBC) Section 8-603.6. The existing ramp slope exceeds the allowed alternatives to the standard slope included in the CHBC and cannot be retained.

One option that staff and the applicant considered was to replace the existing straight ramp with a new longer straight ramp. In order to correct the slope at the upper landing, correct the slope of the ramp run and provide a level landing at grade, the new straight ramp would need to be too long to fit within the available distance between the exterior door and the wall of the church tower. The greater slope exceeds both the standard allowed slope under the California Building Code and the alternative standards provided in the CHBC. Because a new straight ramp would exceed the requirements for maximum slope within the available distance, it was determined not to be a viable option for providing access to the building.

Staff also considered the option of constructing a new ramp at the entrance on the north side of the church. In this location, the ramp would be on an interior side elevation and would be less visible from the street. However, the north entrance appears to retain its original historic configuration and materials, with a stair surrounded by a short half wall, matching the concrete base of the building. Constructing a new ramp in this location would require removal of one section of the historic wall. The ramp on the north side of the building would also be less functional for the way that the congregation uses the site. The ramp would encroach on the courtyard area between the church and the parsonage that is regularly used as a gathering space for the congregation. In the church interior, wheelchair accessible seating is provided on the south side at the front of the church. Placing a ramp on the north side of the building requires a longer path of travel from the ramp through the sanctuary to the accessible seating.

The Old Towne Design Standards are silent on guidance related to providing accessible entrances to historic buildings. National Park Service (NPS) Preservation Brief 32, "Making Historic Properties Accessible," provides guidance on interpreting the *Secretary's Standards* for building accessibility (Attachment 5). Preservation Brief 32 includes the following recommendations related to ramps:

- Ramps should be located at public entrances used by everyone wherever possible, preferably where there is minimal change in grade.

- Accessibility modifications should be in scale with the historic property, visually compatible, and whenever possible, reversible.
- Ramps should be located to minimize the loss of historic features at the connection points and should preserve the overall historic setting and character of the property.
- Railings should be simple in design and distinguishable from other historic features.

In conformance with NPS guidance, the ramp is located at a public entrance that is used by members of the congregation and visitors. Although it is not the primary entrance, it is a prominent public entrance with a smaller change in grade than the main entrance on Center Street. By placing the new ramp in the same location as an existing ramp, the removal of historic features is minimized. The existing historic door, threshold and half wall at the stair will be preserved. In this location, the ramp will be reversible and will result in the least impact to historic features and materials. The proposed ramp uses design elements and materials that are compatible with the historic features of the building. The proposed natural concrete finish is used similarly on the sidewalks, stairs and walkways around the building. The simple pipe railings are minimal in design and similar to other railings at building entrances. Staff recommends that the DRC find that the proposed ramp is compatible with the historic church and is in conformance with the *Secretary's Standards* and the Old Towne Design Standards.

### **ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

None.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND REQUIRED FINDINGS**

The courts define a "Finding" as a conclusion which describes the method of analysis decision makers utilize to make the final decision. A decision making body "makes a Finding," or draws a conclusion, through identifying evidence in the record (i.e., testimony, reports, environmental documents, etc.) and should not contain unsupported statements. The statements which support the Findings bridge the gap between the raw data and the ultimate decision, thereby showing the rational decision making process that took place. The "Findings" are, in essence, the ultimate conclusions which must be reached in order to approve (or recommend approval of) a project. The same holds true if denying a project; the decision making body must detail why it cannot make the Findings.

The Findings are applied as appropriate to each project. Based on the following Findings and statements in support of such Findings, staff recommends the DRC approve the project with conditions.

1. *In the Old Towne Historic District, the proposed work conforms to the prescriptive standards and design criteria referenced and/or recommended by the DRC or other reviewing body for the project (OMC 17.10.070.F.1).*

The proposed project is in conformance with the Old Towne Design Standards, which are the prescriptive design criteria for projects within the Old Towne Historic District. The scale, design and materials of the new ramp are compatible with the historic buildings on

the property and with the surrounding streetscape. The design incorporates features and materials that are consistent with the architectural style and character of the historic church. The proposed location of the ramp replaces an existing non-historic ramp and retains the historic relationship between the entrance on the south side of the building and the sidewalk. The proposed project does not adversely affect the historic building or the Historic District.

2. *In any National Register Historic District, the proposed work complies with the Secretary of the Interior's standards and guidelines (OMC 17.10.07.F.2).*

Projects found to be in conformance with the Old Towne Design Standards are generally considered to be in conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*. In conformance with Standard 1, the placement of the new ramp in the location of an existing ramp requires minimal change to character-defining features of the building and the site. In conformance with Standards 2 and 5, the new ramp retains and preserves the building's historic features, including the exterior door, threshold, and concrete half wall. The materials and features that characterize the property, including the historic entrances, brick, and concrete base will not be removed. In conformance with Standards 9 and 10, the new ramp is compatible with the mass, size, scale and architectural features of the historic church, and is differentiated from the historic building through simple materials and design elements. The proposed project is in conformance with the *Secretary's Standards*.

3. *The project design upholds community aesthetics through the use of an internally consistent, integrated design theme and is consistent with all adopted specific plans, applicable design standards, and their required findings (OMC 17.10.07.F.3).*

Projects located with the Old Towne Historic District must comply with the Old Towne Design Standards and *Secretary's Standards* (as applicable). As described above, the proposed work conforms with these design standards.

4. *For infill residential development, as specified in the City of Orange Infill Residential Design Guidelines, the new structure(s) or addition are compatible with the scale, massing, orientation, and articulation of the surrounding development and will preserve or enhance existing neighborhood character (OMC 17.10.07.F.4).*

This project does not involve residential infill development. The *City of Orange Infill Residential Design Guidelines* do not apply, and this finding does not apply.

## **CONDITIONS**

The approval of this project is subject to the following conditions:

1. All construction shall conform in substance and be maintained in general conformance with plans and exhibits labeled Attachment 5 in the staff report (date stamped received August 4, 2015), including modifications required by the conditions of approval, and as recommended for approval by the Design Review Committee.

2. The applicant agrees to indemnify, hold harmless, and defend the City, its officers, agents and employees from any and all liability or claims that may be brought against the City arising out of its approval of this permit, save and except that caused by the City's active negligence.
3. Except as otherwise provided herein, this project is approved as a precise plan. After any application has been approved, if changes are proposed regarding the location or alteration of any structure, a changed plan may be submitted to the Community Development Director for approval. If the Community Development Director determines that the proposed change complies with the provisions and the spirit and intent of the approval action, and that the action would have been the same for the changed plan as for the approved plot plan, the Community Development Director may approve the changed plan without requiring a new public meeting.
4. Prior to the issuance of building permits, the applicant shall pay all applicable development fees including but not limited to: City sewer connection, Orange County Sanitation District Connection Fee, Transportation System Improvement Program, Fire Facility, Police Facility, Park Acquisition, Sanitation District, and School District, as required.
5. Construction permits shall be obtained for all construction work, as required by the City of Orange, Community Development Department's Building Division and Public Works Grading Division. Failure to obtain the required building permits will be cause for revocation of this permit.
6. All structures shall comply with the requirements of Municipal Code – Chapter 15.52 (Building Security Standards), which relates to hardware, doors, windows, lighting, etc. (Ord. 7-79). Approved structural drawings shall include sections of the security code that apply. Specifications, details, or security notes may be used to convey the compliance.
7. The final approved conditions of approval shall be reprinted on the first or second page of the construction documents when submitting to the Building Department for the plan check process.
8. If not utilized, project approval expires twenty-four months from the approval date. Extensions of time may be granted in accordance with OMC Section 17.08.060. The Planning entitlements expire unless Building Permits are pulled within 2 years of the original approval.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Vicinity Map
2. Survey Forms for 185 S. Center Street
3. National Register of Historic Places Designation Form for 185 S. Center Street
4. National Park Service, Preservation Brief 32, "Making Historic Properties Accessible"
5. Plans (date stamped August 4, 2015)

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