

Avenue A Project Description:

The Avenue A Redevelopment Project is a thoughtfully planned infill development along the edges of the Pearl District and is intended to strengthen the district's historic urban character through the introduction of a series of pedestrian-scaled retail buildings, enhanced public spaces, and improved connections throughout Pearl. The project will add approximately 85,000 square feet of retail, restaurant, and commercial space distributed across ten one- and two-story buildings along Avenue A between Grayson Street and Mueller Street. The project replaces surface parking lots and underutilized structures with active, street-oriented buildings that are appropriately designed to accommodate today's retailers while staying true to the guiding principles at Pearl: architectural design that is inspired by Pearl's original structures, human-scaled, and built with timeless materials consistent with the materiality of Pearl.

A portion of the project involves the demolition of the existing Garage Building located at 250 E. Grayson Street. Known at Pearl as the "Garage Building," the facility was erected in 1939 to support utilitarian vehicle maintenance and service functions after horsedrawn beer transportation became obsolete. While Pearl and Oxbow Development Group prioritize the preservation of historic structures on the Pearl campus, as evidenced by the revitalization of the Brewhouse Building (now Hotel Emma), the Admin Building (former home of Cured), the Stable Building (now Stable Hall), among others, the Garage Building's current configuration presents substantial constraints in supporting the type of active, pedestrian-oriented environment envisioned for this prominent gateway location.

The Garage Building has been vacant since 2013, not counting a few non-profit organizations who occupied the building essentially rent-free from 2018-2021. Several attempts have been made to revitalize the building using the existing improvements, some of which have been previously presented to HDRC, but such projects ultimately proved to be infeasible, with maximum achievable rents being insufficient to justify the required renovation costs.

Unfortunately, the building has several flaws that make adaptive reuse physically challenging and as a result, financially infeasible:

- 1) The building was not designed as a public-facing structure. It opens to Emma Koehler Blvd and essentially has its back turned to Grayson and Avenue A, which results in nearly a full block of solid brick façade and an elevated foundation with no opportunity for interaction with the public. The site is not desirable to retailers because the storefront doors face Stable Hall's back-of-house area, with limited exposure and less than ideal access. The original windows are small and sit up high

off the ground. Opening up the façade of the building to allow for storefronts or entries along Avenue A or Grayson could not be done without significantly altering the exterior of the building.

- 2) Opening up the building with storefronts or entries along Avenue A or Grayson is further complicated by the topography of the site. The site is high on the south side and slopes downward to the north. Vehicular access is on the south side of the building at grade (where beer trucks previously entered behind the Stable), resulting in a slab that is at least three feet out of the ground on the north side. Since the building is situated so close to the curb, there is not sufficient room to allow for stairs or ramps to make the raised floor accessible from street level.



Figure 1. View of the Garage Building from the northeast corner shows elevated slab and lack of permeability and connection to passersby. Configuration of the building close to curb does not allow for pedestrian connections to building (stairs and ramps are not physically possible).

- 3) The building sits close to the curb resulting in narrow sidewalks that are not currently code compliant. Not only is the width below current City standards, but there are also obstructions in the sidewalk along Grayson that inhibit accessibility on the northern edge of the building. Additionally, the current configuration does not allow for a generous pedestrian experience or any meaningful shade.



Figure 2. North Side of Garage Building shows slab is 3-4 feet above sidewalk level, complicating efforts to connect sidewalk to FFE. Sidewalk is 4'9" wide on the level portion. The added sidewalk on the right is greater than a 2% cross-slope and is not code compliant.



Figure 3. Cross slope of 5% on additional sidewalk is not ADA compliant.



Figure 4. Obstructions in sidewalk create pinch points as sidewalk narrows to 3'10" width.



Figure 5. Sidewalk provides less than 6 feet of width for pedestrian travel, not including existing signage. Current configuration also does not provide any shade.

- 4) Finally, the existing improvements totaling roughly 25,000 square feet have another series of complications on the interiors that also make the building unappealing to retailers. First of all, the column spacing and limited access points at grade (currently only on the southern edge of the building) prohibit the building from being functionally demised. The ceilings are also low, and combined with the lack of

natural light, create a cavernous environment; again, not one that is attractive for merchants.

The proposed development has been designed to respect and reinforce the established character of Pearl rather than replicate historic structures. Consistent with Pearl's long-standing preservation philosophy, the project seeks to create new buildings that are clearly contemporary yet informed by the scale, materials, rhythm, and craftsmanship of the historic environment. The design team at Alamo Architects, in collaboration with Don B. McDonald Architects, has drawn inspiration from San Antonio's historic commercial buildings and the brick detailing that is a prominent element of Pearl's vocabulary – arches, corbeling, staggered and extruded brick facades - to design new buildings that feel rooted in and compatible with Pearl's architectural past. Additionally, it is Pearl's intention to salvage as much material from the building as possible (brick, stone date stamp, clay coping, windows, skylights and iron downspouts) for reuse at the proposed retail development and its surroundings.

The redevelopment introduces a series of smaller building volumes in place of the existing Garage Building, creating multiple storefronts, increased transparency, and a significantly more active and porous street edge. This approach improves the pedestrian experience by introducing a finer grain of development, additional entrances, and a greater diversity of tenant spaces capable of supporting a number of retailers, restaurants, and experiential businesses. Beyond the footprint of the Garage Building, the project also includes additional retail buildings along Avenue A and smaller "jewel box" structures near Stable Hall, further strengthening the corridor as a walkable commercial shopping district (as depicted on the site plan).

The site planning and architectural concepts are consistent with the principles that guide development throughout the RIO-2 Area and Pearl. The project prioritizes active ground-floor uses, pedestrian-oriented design, human-scaled architecture, meaningful street frontage, activated corners, and strong visual connections between destinations. Buildings are organized to frame public spaces, create comfortable walking environments, and encourage activity throughout the day. The landscaped space in front of Stable Hall will be enhanced to create a more defined outdoor lounge space, and the courtyard between the new buildings on the Garage Building site will create another outdoor room to be enjoyed by Pearl guests. The project strengthens an important north-south pedestrian spine while reinforcing connections between Grayson Street, Pearl Parkway, Stable Hall, and other key destinations within the neighborhood.

Landscape and public realm improvements are equally important components of the project. New shade trees, generous sidewalks, enhanced landscaping, gathering areas,

and high-quality paving will create a comfortable and engaging public environment. These improvements continue Pearl's established pattern of investing in walkability, public space, and placemaking while creating a setting that responds to San Antonio's climate, enhancing pedestrian comfort, increasing shade coverage, and strengthening the public realm throughout Pearl.

The site occupies one of the most visible and strategically important corners at Pearl, at the intersection of Grayson Street and Avenue A, and serves as a gateway to Pearl from the north. Unfortunately, the Garage Building's orientation, proximity to the roadway, and raised finish floor elevation limit opportunities for pedestrian permeability, storefront activation, and the creation of publicly accessible gathering spaces. Redevelopment of the site allows a single large unusable structure to be replaced with a collection of finer-grained buildings that more closely reflect the historic development pattern found throughout San Antonio's traditional commercial corridors, where incremental growth produced multiple storefronts, varied building forms, and a rich pedestrian experience. Breaking the mass into a series of smaller buildings also allows for gradual elevation changes across multiple buildings, resulting in a finished floor along Grayson that communicates with the sidewalk and allows for retail programming at this key corner location. This ability to have the site function as a retail property unlocks the potential for the building to be financial feasible, resulting in the activation of this urban corner and providing the room necessary to create a beautiful, shaded, pedestrian-friendly experience along Avenue A.

The proposed demolition and redevelopment should therefore be viewed not as the removal of a historic structure in isolation, but as part of a broader preservation strategy that has guided the evolution of Pearl for more than two decades. That strategy has successfully preserved and restored the district's most significant historic structures while allowing carefully considered new construction to occupy sites that can better serve the district's contemporary needs. The Avenue A Project continues this approach by replacing a utilitarian service building with a collection of contextually responsive structures that expand opportunities for public engagement, strengthen the pedestrian experience, enhance economic vitality, and further the long-term preservation of Pearl as one of San Antonio's most successful historic adaptive reuse districts.