

Reapplication for 18-Inch Retaining Wall at 314 W Summit: Addressing Soil Stabilization, Water Conservation, and Historical Integrity

Dear Committee Members of the Historic Design and Review Committee,

I've been a resident at 314 W Summit for over seven years and have always appreciated the charm of Monte Vista. However, recent years have brought significant climate changes that have adversely affected our front yard, particularly the Asian Jasmine bed. With increased freezes, extreme droughts, and soaring temperatures, the condition of the yard has become unsustainable.

The purpose of the retaining wall is to stabilize the soil and eliminate the slope, thus improving moisture retention. I initially requested a 30-inch wall to fully address the slope and alleviate yard maintenance issues. The plan was to construct the wall using a concrete foundation for durability and support, and cinderblock with a brick façade. During the interior renovation of our home, we preserved the original bricks from a removed wall and incorporated them into the façade, preserving the historical integrity of the property.

Despite my efforts, my initial application for a 30-inch retaining wall was denied by HDRC. A follow-up application for an 8-inch wall was submitted and accepted.

We removed the existing plants and placed new rose bushes with drip irrigation. The wall foundation was installed, and the first blocks and bricks were set.

While under construction, my wife and I were traveling and were not present for the final stages of the wall construction. Upon returning in the early hours of July 8th, we did not have a chance to review the status of the wall. However, I was contacted on July 9th by HDRC design review team staff regarding the height of the wall. I contacted my contractor, who confirmed that the wall is now 18 inches in height.

He explained that at 8 inches, the wall was unable to contain the soil. The slope of the land was too great, and the soil was constantly eroding into the sidewalk. There is a greater than 2.5-foot differentiation between the sidewalk and the lawn in addition to the grading of the street.

I communicated this to HDRC immediately upon gathering the information and receiving the email. The response was a stop order, and work has been discontinued.

I am resubmitting an application to allow for the 18 inches that have been constructed. This construction not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of our property and neighborhood but also contributes to water conservation efforts in our community. I believe, and my contractor agrees, that 8 inches would not suffice to retain the soil and would lead to constant soil erosion onto the sidewalk.

By utilizing brick from our home, we are adhering to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards by conserving existing historic materials while retaining the historic character of the property. In keeping with general principles for site elements, we are complementing the home by matching existing brick landscaping.

It is worth noting that there is support from our surrounding neighbors and an existing 24-inch wall directly across the street. Additionally, there are several walls of similar height or greater less than two blocks from our home. During our HDRC meeting, it was argued that there was only one other property on our street with a retaining wall, but just one block north on King's Street or one block south on Agarita Street, there are several.

Furthermore, the current height of 18 inches is still a large reduction from the initial request of 30 inches and retains a slope from the interior wall to the level of the lawn. We are attempting to work with the Historic & Design Review Committee to both accomplish water conservation and enhance the neighborhood. This reduced wall height will achieve soil and moisture retention while maintaining a slope to adhere to the description of Monte Vista's sloping front yards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grant Garbo". The signature is stylized with a large initial "G" and a cursive "Garbo".

Grant Garbo