

City of Santa Fe, New Mexico

memo

DATE: January 27, 2026

TO: Historic Districts Review Board Members

VIA: Heather Lamboy, Planning & Land Use Department Director #LL
Maggie Moore, Assistant Land Use Director *MRM*
Gary Moquino, Historic Preservation Division Manager GM

FROM: Lani McCulley, Senior Planner, Historic Preservation Division *LJM*

2025-011724-HDRB, 210 Don Gaspar Ave., Downtown & Eastside Historic District, Significant, Martinez Architecture Studio, agent for Heritage Hotels and Resorts Inc., owner, proposes to relocate a door on a primary façade and extend a stair landing. An exception is requested to 14-5.2 (D)(5)(a) to alter a primary facade.

REFERENCE ATTACHMENTS (Sequentially):

CITY SUBMITTALS

District Standards & yard wall
& fence standards.

Historic Inventory Form

Zoning Review Sheet

Other: [previous case documents]

APPLICANT SUBMITTALS

Proposal Letter

Site Plan/Floor Plan

Elevations

Photographs

Other: [exception criteria]

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff finds that the exception criteria have been met and recommends approval of the exception to section 14-5.2(D)(5)(a) to alter the openings on a primary façade. Staff also recommends approval of the other elements of the application as they comply with 14-5.2(D) General Design Standards for all Historic Districts, and 14-5.2(E) Downtown and Eastside Historic District Design Standards.

BACKGROUND & SUMMARY:

Streetscape:

The building abuts three street frontages: Don Gaspar Avenue, West Water Street, and Ortiz Street. Don Gaspar Avenue is a commercial hub with two to three-story buildings fronting the sidewalk and a parking lot directly across from the hotel. Building styles vary on the Don Gaspar streetscape, and a City-run parking lot is located across the street. Water Street is similar, consisting of predominantly two- and three-story buildings, but also has several single-story buildings. Except for the Hotel St. Francis and the building to its north. The buildings along Ortiz Street are single-story.



Figure 2: Hotel St. Francis Main Entrance

Site Description:

The commercial Mission Revival Style structure located at 210 Don Gaspar is listed as significant to the Downtown and Eastside Historic District. All elevations are considered primary on significant buildings. The property was originally the De Vargas Hotel and is currently the Hotel Saint Francis. The De Vargas Hotel was constructed in 1924, but buildings were known to have existed in this location as early as 1890.

The building is characterized by its unusual triangular footprint. The Mission Revival-style building has arches at the patio and terrace entrances, as well as over some windows. It also holds wrought iron elements and clay tile detailing on a stucco exterior. The windows on the third floor have a continuous concrete sill. The second-floor openings are recessed squares with individual concrete balconies with wrought iron railings along Don Gaspar Avenue and Water Street, and concrete sills on the other elevations. The ground floor windows have arched awnings in blue at the restaurant on the northeastern section and brown awnings at the hotel on the southeast section. All windows are wood and are trimmed in a combination of blue and white or both. There is a long

patio at the entrance with a brown wainscot under white, and an enclosed courtyard patio at the northwest corner. The courtyard is enclosed with an 8'-0" high yard wall with windows that have iron bars, wood doors, and is topped with a clay tile roof. The building's stucco is painted beige.

The 1984 Historic Building Inventory form notes that the first floor of the hotel was thought to have existed by 1883, when it was the National Hotel. A second story was added between 1902 and 1908. The 1995 Historic Building Inventory notes that a remodel and restoration of the property took place in the mid-1980s, and some doors were replaced, and that some changes occurred to the storefront on the north side of the building. More recent remodeling from 2008, which was approved by the HDRB, included a new window opening on the north and west dining courtyard, alteration of the arched gate at the courtyard for functionality, and addition of clay roof tiles on the west elevation of the hotel.

PREVIOUS CASE SUMMARIES:

ARC:

No archaeological clearance has been issued for the property.

HDRB:

A remodel at the property was approved under case H-18-115 to construct a 16' high 132 sq. ft. addition, an 11' high 320 sq. ft. trellis, and a 72" high yard wall, install windows and doors, handrails and steps, and fireplace flues. Three exceptions were approved: to section 14-5.2(D)(9) to exceed the maximum allowable height, to section 14-5.2(D)(2)(c) construct an addition on a primary elevation, and to Section 14-5.2(D)(1)(a) to remove historic material.

A remodel at the property was denied under case H-17-029 to remove a second story window on the west above the courtyard and replace it with an arch, exceptions to section 14-5.2(D)(5)(b) and section 14-5.2(D)(5)(a)(i) for removing historic material and alter architectural feature were denied, relocate the French doors on the second-story patio by setting them back 6'0" from current location to expand the patio space, match stucco color and other finish details were also denied.

A remodel at the property was approved under case H-08-112 to replace a door with a niche, infill three windows with three doors, replace wooden fence with a stucco yard wall, remodel the dining courtyard with changes in opening locations and dimensions and creating new openings where they did not exist in the courtyard wall, and construct a water feature and corner fireplace with an exception to section 14-5.2(D)(5) to alter primary facades.

A remodel to replace the roof with Spanish clay tiles was approved under case H-96-191.

A remodel to the Water Street Restaurant entrance with a new entry way and door was approved under case H-92-038.

A six-million-dollar renovation for both the interior and exterior of the structure was approved in 1985 and included enlarging some window and door openings, replacing some doors, and changing the storefront on the north side of the building. This project is not on file in the Historic Preservation Division.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

Painting was approved under case 2025-009840-ADMIN in 2025.

Patio improvements and exterior lighting were approved under case 2023-006881-ADMIN in 2023.

There were minor changes to case H-18-115 that were approved under case 2020-001952-ADMIN in 2020.

There were several approvals in 2016, including wall and fence alterations and the replacement of fabric awnings.

The restoration of the door location on the north was approved in 1997.

The replacement of asphalt shingles on the roof was approved in 1994.

APPLICANT’S REQUEST:

The applicant proposes the following exterior alterations:

- 1) Relocate a pedestrian door on the south ground floor level of the hotel.
- 2) Extend the landing at the doorway.
- 3) Install railing at the landing.
- 4) Stucco repair to match the existing stucco.



Figure 3: Area of Work on South Elevation

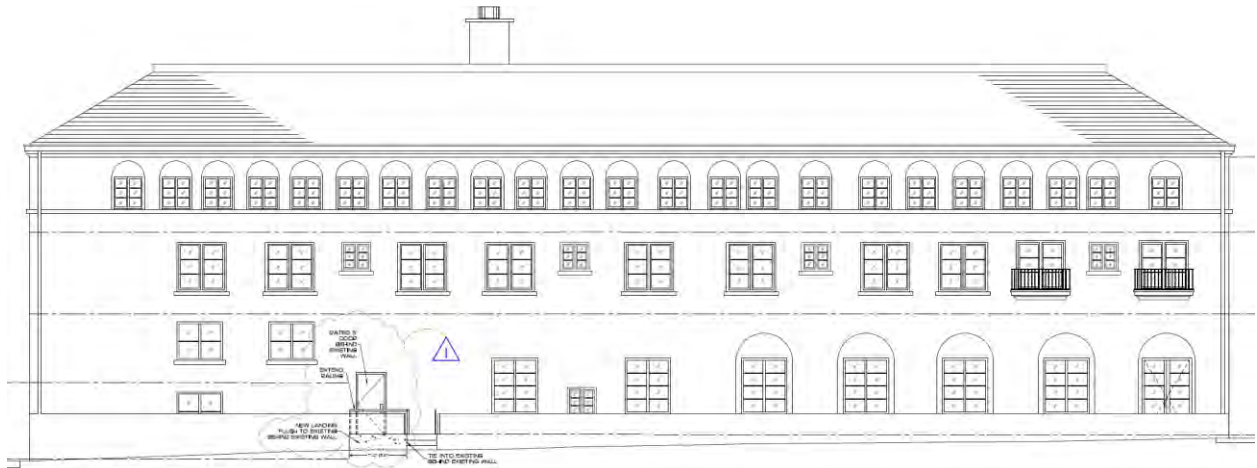


Figure 4: Proposed Elevation

EXCEPTION CRITERIA AND RESPONSES:

Exception to 14-5.2(D)(5)(a): The applicant requests an exception to close an existing opening and create a new opening on the primary façade of a significant structure.

(i) *Do not damage the character of the district*

Applicant Response: The existing non-historic fire door is on the south façade, which faces the hotel's parking lot, and is minimally visible from Ortiz Street and Don Gaspar Avenue. The new door would be of the same size and would match the existing door to the extent feasible as to material and color. The new fire door would be partially screened by an existing wall separating the first-floor pedestrian walkway from the parking lot. The only perceivable difference between the existing and proposed conditions would be that the fire door would be at a slightly different location and would be partially screened by the existing wall, and the fire door would be less visible than in the existing condition. The overall visual setting would remain – a hotel with a fire door on the south façade.

Given that the existing fire door and opening are non-historic, that the door is minimally visible from off-site and the new fire door would match the existing fire door, it would not be reasonable to conclude that closing the existing opening and creating a new opening on the south façade +/- 6' from the existing fire door would damage the character of the district.

Staff Response: Staff finds that this criterion is met. The door is being moved a minimal amount, still matches the alignment and layout of windows and doors, and will still meet egress requirements for the building and provide for more accessible rooms to be available in the hotel.

(ii) *Are required to prevent a hardship to the applicant or an injury to the public welfare*

Applicant Response: The hotel is nearing 100 years of existence, and the rooms require renovation. The ADA, which was adopted long after construction of the hotel, requires that five rooms include ADA-compliant bathrooms, which necessitates expansion of the bathroom square footage. Given the layout of the existing rooms and existing constraints, including piping, the non-rectangular shape of some rooms, window location, and the existence of a step into some of the bathrooms, to meet the ADA requirements and access requirements to the hotel, an adjustment of the existing fire door on the south façade is necessary.

Not relocating the fire door by +/- 6' or making a different room/bathroom ADA compliant would, in some cases, be infeasible due to the existing constraints and in other cases would increase the extent of necessary modifications, or result in loss of a room. Either result would be a hardship for the applicant, and loss of a room would also constitute an injury to the public welfare by reducing the hotel's ability to accommodate guests in the downtown Business Commercial District and would reduce the amount of Lodger's Tax received by the City.

Staff Response: Staff finds that this criterion is met. The door relocation is to accommodate an interior ADA accessible restroom as required for ADA-accessible rooms. The relocation will still access the same hall and is a minimal relocation of only a few feet.

(iii) *Strengthen the unique heterogeneous character of the City by providing a full range of design options to ensure that residents can continue to reside within the historic districts*

Applicant Response: The architect considered a range of design options for the existing 3-story hotel to accommodate the required additional four ADA-compliant bathrooms, including modification of other hotel rooms to be ADA-compliant. The ground floor of the hotel was originally a restaurant and was converted to hotel rooms in the 1980's, and there is greater flexibility to accommodate the requirement on the ground floor, where three of the five ADA-compliant bathrooms are proposed to be located.

Many of the existing rooms have sinks outside the bathrooms and within the rooms. The ADA requires that the sinks be located within the bathrooms. Additional constraints of existing piping, windows, and walls, and the non-rectangular shape of some existing rooms, all constitute further constraints, which render modification of other rooms to meet the ADA requirements either infeasible or would result in a greater extent of modifications. After substantial analysis and design effort, the architect concluded that the proposed renovation of the first floor room on the south façade to meet ADA requirements, necessitating relocation of the existing non-historic metal fire door +/- 6' to the west, would be the most feasible and minimally invasive design option that would accomplish the objectives of the room renovation effort while complying with the ADA requirements in light of the existing constraints present in the almost century old hotel.

Staff Response: Staff find that this criterion is met. The applicant discussed other means of creating ADA-compliant rooms and restrooms. The other options would have created more impactful changes to the exterior of the structure.

RELEVANT CODE CITATIONS:

14-5.2 HISTORIC DISTRICTS

(A) General Provisions

(1) General Purpose

In order to promote the economic, cultural, and general welfare of the people of the *city* and to ensure the harmonious, orderly and efficient growth and *development* of the *city*, it is deemed essential by the *governing body* that the qualities relating to the history of Santa Fe, and a harmonious outward appearance, which preserve *property* values and attract tourists and residents alike, be preserved, some of these qualities being:

- (a) The continued existence and *preservation* of historical areas and *buildings*;
 - (b) The continued construction of *buildings* in the historic styles; and
 - (c) A general harmony as to style, form, color, height, proportion, texture, and material between *buildings* of historic design and those of more modern design.
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- (b) Changes to *structures* that have acquired historic *significance* in their own right shall be retained and preserved, recognizing that most *structures* change over time;
 - (c) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a *structure* be preserved; and
 - (d) New additions and related or adjacent new construction be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the original form and integrity of the historic *property* and its environment would be unimpaired.

(C) Regulation of Significant and Contributing Structures in the Historic Districts

(1) Purpose and Intent

It is intended that:

- (a) Each structure to be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as the addition of conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- (b) Changes to structures that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved, recognizing that most structures change over time;
- (c) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a structure be preserved; and
- (d) New additions and related or adjacent new construction be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the original form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

(D) General Design Standards for All H Districts

In any review of proposed additions or alterations to *structures* that have been declared significant or contributing in any historic district or a *landmark* in any part of the *city*, the following standards shall be met:

(1) General

- (a) The status of a significant, contributing, or *landmark structure* shall be retained and preserved. If a proposed alteration will cause a *structure* to lose its significant, contributing, or *landmark* status, the *application* shall be denied. The removal of historic materials or alteration of architectural features and spaces that embody the status shall be prohibited.
- (b) If a proposed alteration or new construction will cause an adjacent *structure* to lose its significant, contributing, or *landmark* status, the *application* may be denied.

(5) Windows, Doors, and Other Architectural Features

- (a) For all facades of significant and *landmark structures* and for the primary facades of contributing *structures*:
 - (i) Historic windows shall be repaired or restored wherever possible. Historic windows that cannot be repaired or restored shall be duplicated in the size, style, and material of the original. Thermal double pane glass may be used. No opening shall be widened or narrowed.
 - (ii) No new opening shall be made where one presently does not exist unless historic documentation supports its prior existence.
 - (iii) No existing opening shall be closed.
- (b) For all façades of significant, contributing, and *landmark structures*, architectural features, finishes, and details other than doors and windows shall be repaired rather than replaced. In the event *replacement* is necessary, the use of new material may be approved. The new material shall match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. *Replacement* or duplication of missing features shall be substantiated by documentation, physical, or pictorial evidence.

(E) Downtown and Eastside Design Standards

The *governing body* recognizes that a style of architecture has evolved within the *city* from the year 1600 to the present characterized by construction with *adobe*, hereafter called "old Santa Fe style", and that another style has evolved, hereafter called "recent Santa Fe style", which is a *development* from, and an elaboration of the old Santa Fe style, with different materials and frequently with added decorations.

(1) Old Santa Fe Style

Old Santa Fe style, characterized by construction with *adobe*, is defined as including the so-called "pueblo" or "pueblo-Spanish" or "Spanish-Indian" and "territorial" styles and is more specifically described as follows:

- (a) With rare exception, *buildings* are of one *story*, few have three stories, and the characteristic effect is that the *buildings* are long and low. Roofs are flat with a slight *slope* and surrounded on at least three sides by a firewall of the same color and material as the *walls* or of brick. Roofs are never carried out beyond the line of the *walls* except to cover an enclosed *portal* or *porch* formed by setting back a portion of the *wall* or to form an exterior *portal*, the outer edge of the roof being supported by wooden columns. Two-story construction is more common in the territorial than in other sub-styles, and is preferably accompanied by a balcony at the level of the floor of the second *story*. Façades are flat, varied by inset *portales*, exterior *portales*, projecting vigas or roof beams, canales or water-spouts, flanking buttresses and wooden lintels, architraves and cornices, which, as well as doors, are frequently carved, and the carving may be picked out with bright colors. Arches are almost never used except for nonfunctional arches, often slightly ogive, over gateways in freestanding *walls*;
 - (b) All exterior *walls* of a *building* are painted alike. The colors range from a light earth color to a dark earth color. The exception to this rule is the protected space under *portales*, or in church-derived designs, inset panels in a *wall* under the roof, in which case the roof overhangs the panel. These spaces may be painted white or a contrasting color or have mural decorations.
 - (c) Solid *wall* space is always greater in any façade than window and door space combined. Single panes of glass larger than thirty (30) inches in any dimension are not permissible except as otherwise provided in this section;
 - (d) The rule as to flat roofs shall not be construed to prevent the construction of skylights or installation of air conditioning devices, or any other necessary roof *structures*, but such *structures* other than chimneys, flues, vents and aerials, shall be so placed as to be concealed by the firewall from the view of anyone standing in the *street* on which the *building* fronts;
 - (e) True old Santa Fe style *buildings* are made of *adobe* with mud plaster finish. Construction with masonry blocks, bricks, or other materials with which the *adobe* effect can be simulated is permissible, provided that the exterior *walls* are not less than eight (8) inches thick and that geometrically straight façade lines are avoided. Mud plaster or hard plaster simulating *adobe*, laid on smoothly, is required; and
 - (f) It is characteristic of old Santa Fe style commercial *buildings* to place a *portal* so that it covers the entire sidewalk, the columns being set at the curb line.
- (2) Recent Santa Fe Style

Recent Santa Fe style intends to achieve harmony with historic *buildings* by *retention* of a similarity of materials, color, proportion, and general detail. The dominating effect is to be that of *adobe* construction, prescribed as follows:

- (a) No *building* shall be over two stories in height in any façade unless the façade shall include projecting or recessed *portales*, *setbacks*, or other design elements.
- (b) The combined door and window area in any *publicly visible* façade shall not exceed forty percent of the total area of the façade except for doors or windows located

under a *portal*. No door or window in a *publicly visible* façade shall be located nearer than three (3) feet from the corner of the façade;

- (c) No cantilevers shall be permitted except over projecting vigas, beams, or wood corbels, or as part of the roof *treatment* described below;
- (d) No less than eighty percent of the surface area of any *publicly visible* façade shall be *adobe* finish or stucco simulating *adobe* finish. The balance of the *publicly visible* façade, except as above, may be of natural stone, wood, brick, tile, terra cotta, or other material, subject to approval as hereinafter provided for *building permits*;
- (e) The *publicly visible* façade of any *building* and of any adjoining *walls* shall, except as otherwise provided, be of one color, which color shall simulate a light earth or dark earth color, matte or dull finish, and of relatively smooth texture. Façade surfaces under *portales* may be of contrasting or complementary colors. Windows, doors, and *portals* on *publicly visible* portions of the *building* and *walls* shall be of one of the old Santa Fe styles, except that *buildings* with *portals* may have larger plate glass areas for windows under *portals* only. Deep window recesses are characteristic, and
- (f) Flat roofs shall have not more than thirty (30) inches overhang.