



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

May 21, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

The following are summary minutes of the Historic Preservation Committee Meeting held May 21, 2025, in room 2007B, City Hall, 700 N. Main Street, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Jerry Wallace, Chair
Ernie Campos
Dr. Paul John Deason
Jeffrey Shepherd

STAFF PRESENT: Caitlin Beesley, Historic Preservation Specialist
Chris Faivre, Director Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: DeAngelo Nieves, DAVHPC
Yvonne De La O Jasso, DAVHPC
Arthur Barela, DAVHPC
Rob Kracht
Ben Kracht
Trinidad Jasso, Jr, DAVHPC
Triano Jasso, DAVHPC
Cassie McClure, CLC Councilor

1. CALL TO ORDER (6:01)

Meeting called to order at 6:01.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES -

2.1 April 16, 2025 HPC Minutes

Motion to approve by Ernie Campos; seconded by Paul Deason. Motion passed unanimously.

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

3.1 Honoring Historic Preservation in Doña Ana County

Chair Wallace stated City Councilor McClure presented the chair with a proclamation honoring May as Historic Preservation Month. This is the 20th anniversary of the designation of Historic Preservation Month. He hopes that we do not need just a month to honor historic preservation, and hopes

1 we are doing it like every month and every day. He hopes next year when
2 they go in front of City Council they can celebrate something, rather than
3 just discussions. He discussed with Caitlin Beesley recently on projects to
4 collaborate on with other historic preservation projects in the community.
5

6 In honoring Historic Preservation Month Chair Wallace wanted to think
7 outside the box. He asked a variety of people to come and present and a
8 few are in attendance. He also invited members from Tortugas Pueblo, and
9 also to talk about preservation of landscapes. Also need to discuss the
10 disconnect between Tortugas Pueblo and Tortugas Mountain, as NMSU is
11 now in between the two. In the next year also discuss what landscapes
12 mean in Las Cruces. He mentioned there are community parks that seem
13 abandoned and forgotten, i.e., Valley Drive across from Sonic, next to
14 Tractor Supply. What do the community parks mean as far as
15 understanding landscapes? The Tigua people had their first cacique were
16 in Mesquite District. Also think about preserving this and the landscape is
17 how they used the landscape, particularly their dancing area. Possible
18 promote festivities in the Mesquite district with original Hispanic there but
19 also with the Native Americans and their ceremonies, processions. There
20 is a history when the Tigua were residing in the historic district area and the
21 catholic church.
22

23 Chair Wallace wants the committee to think "outside the box" when thinking
24 about preservation. He has invited Doña Ana Village Historic Preservation
25 Committee (DAVHPC) to present tonight.
26

27 **Doña Ana Village Historic Preservation Committee**

28

29 DeAngelo Nieves of the DAVHPC introduced himself and others from the
30 committee that are in attendance. Their committee started to help save the
31 historic church which dates from 1844. In 1950-60 the church officials were
32 wanting to condemn it, and build a new church. By 1981 the church was
33 officially condemned and moved church services out of the building.
34 Several older community members fought hard to save the church. And the
35 battle went on for a couple of decades. In 1984 the church got onto the
36 National Register of Historic Places which helped save the church. He
37 joined the committee in the early '90s. The church had been white plastered
38 in the last 1800s. In early 1900s cement plaster was applied. January 25,
39 1844 the prefect El Paso del Norte Antonio Rey came to Doña Ana. He
40 chose the site for the plaza, chose the site for the church. Original settlers
41 were given their lots from him. The church was built in phases. The oldest
42 picture of the church from 1909 was shown. A new priest came and in 1910-
43 19 huge remodeling on the church was done. Various pictures throughout
44 the early 1900s were shown. Cement was added throughout the years for
45 the cracking. The brick coping was added on the top over the years. The
46 buttresses are structural. There was a document from the early 1850s

1 where an American merchant was coming through he said they were
2 knocking down the back wall of the church and extending the church into
3 some existing buildings. During the restoration they discovered that and
4 removed everything. The buttresses were needed because the walls just
5 abut each other but are not locked in. The walls were in bad shape due to
6 the concrete as that did not help the adobes at all. The adobes were
7 massive and hard to work with. During the restoration in the 1990s they
8 added some footings. Funds were acquired to do a summer youth training
9 program to help. The top layer of the bell tower, the first two sections are
10 poured reinforced concrete. The top section was soft brick and heavily
11 deteriorated due to the cement plaster as well. There was some discussion
12 one time that Trost and Trost had something to do with the bell tower as it
13 is believed to be one of the earliest reinforced concrete structures in
14 southern New Mexico. The bell tower does lean to the right, and in the
15 1960s there was thought that all the structural issues with the church were
16 caused by the bell tower so the arch was built as a buttress. The interior
17 was redone too with removal of the drop ceilings to expose the original vigas
18 and latrías. During the restoration University of Arizona came and took core
19 samples of the pine vigas and dated them to 1860. There are cottonwood
20 and pine vigas in the church.

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22 Other nearby buildings were also looked at for demolition but those were
23 saved using capital outlay funds to purchase the buildings. Those are also
24 being restored. The Doña Ana Plaza size was chosen in 1844 and
25 supposed to be surrounded by government buildings, the church, and
26 church buildings, although that never really happened. Doña Ana was
27 settled in 1843, and had a rough start. During the restoration they did begin
28 the plaza area. Discussion on lime kilns, creating lime for brick work, etc.
29 They do not know how the church got ownership of the plaza because it
30 was supposed to be community property and no one was supposed to have
31 ownership. Pictures of the plaza shown, and also the dedication. Plaza
32 was finished in about 2007. They have their own Dias de Los Muertos
33 tradition. Although the state did get some money to do work on the plaza,
34 they have been working with private grants. In 2022 received a \$36,000 T-
35 Mobile grant to buy benches and trashcans. Doña Ana County was asked
36 if the community could go for the grant which was granted, but then upon
37 trying to install the benches, the County said no. Gabe Vasquez stepped
38 up for them and the benches and trashcans were installed. They continue
39 to make improvements in the plaza. Visitor center complex has three
40 different buildings and one served as a general store in late 1880s to 1930s
41 and had a steam powered flour mill. They supplied Ft. Seldon. Various
42 buildings were shown and history given. Paul Deason stated that in 2009
43 there was plan as being on the Camino Real, community in action. Also at
44 the end of a street is a potters field that has been retained. Ernie Campos
45 stated there is a connection between Doña Ana and the Mesquite Historical
46 District. He suggested sharing the presentation on YouTube.

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2 A question was asked if there ever was a building survey of Doña Ana. It
3 was done in the mid-1990s. DeAngelo Nieves stated just before COVID
4 they were working with UNM school of architecture, and are trying to get
5 that going again. Historical American Building Survey was mentioned.
6 Slide show continued of the various buildings. The county worked on the
7 pink buildings and they now have a lot of maintenance issues, not restoring
8 properly, not removing cement and concrete. National Park Service came
9 and a did a presentation on the footprints found at White Sands. They hold
10 fieldtrips for local students, teach the history of Doña Ana. Part of the
11 fieldtrip they do an art project. Wertheim Building is currently being
12 restored. Their current project is the Historic Doña Ana cemetery. They
13 are trying to raise funds to get fencing. Discussion and history of various
14 people interred at the cemetery. The cemetery is owned by the Roman
15 Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces. Chair Wallace is also on the Doña Ana
16 County Historical Society and they have funded several different cemetery
17 projects. The oldest burial in the cemetery dates from 1849. In 2017 there
18 was a big cleanup. Centennial high school volunteered as well as some
19 military veterans. Mary Jane Garcia started the DAVHPC and was an active
20 member throughout.

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22 Ernie Campos stated he is working to get a historical preservationist at the
23 county. DeAngelo Nieves stated they have had all types problems with the
24 county, tearing down historic properties. Paul Deason stated the house
25 across from the De La O, and they were trying to get money to brace the
26 roof and do walls. That house has been shored up. Paul Deason
27 repeatedly mentioned the National Parks Service, and also Bureau of Land
28 Management. DeAngelo Nieves stated they are still trying to work with
29 those groups. There was mention of extortion in some of the purchases of
30 buildings and property within Doña Ana Village. Chair Wallace asked in the
31 Village itself, are most of the properties still owned by members of Doña
32 Ana Village? DeAngelo Nieves stated for the most part yes. DAVHPC
33 meets the second Saturday, about 10:00 a.m. at the De La O Visitors Center
34 and is open to the public. Chair Wallace hopes DAVHPC will come every
35 year about this time to update the HPC.

36 37 **Murals**

38
39 Chair Wallace next discussed the murals project that he has been a part of
40 since 2014. It was a public history project. He divided the City up into
41 neighborhoods and then they went into each neighborhood and
42 documented all the murals, then started a database, and then created the
43 Murals of Las Cruces website. In 2023 he received a Mellon Grant and he
44 documented the murals of El Paso. This year doing the murals of Ciudad
45 Juarez. They are not interpreting the murals. They want to create a
46 community digital archive of the murals. Some murals are long lasting,

1 other not. In Las Cruces, a lot of the murals document the relationship with
2 the landscape. Currently there are about 750 murals as part of the project.
3 He did a project in El Paso and some of the murals have a lifespan of three
4 to six months. The muralists are using public art as a way to open
5 conversations about concerns they have in their own communities, along
6 the way that they're thinking about their own identity and relationships with
7 one another. He tried to partner with the City but were told they were not
8 interested because Saba and some of the history. The City has since eased
9 that. They have also started doing oral histories of the muralists. This is
10 going to be ongoing. This has all been done by students. He liked the
11 dumpster series. He requests in thinking about preservation think
12 dynamically about what preservation means.
13

14 Ernie Campos asked about the disagreement between the property owner
15 and an artist and the permit. And how does that work in getting a mural
16 painted on a wall or building. Chair Wallace stated it is well documented in
17 the Las Cruces Sun News. Saba painted the mural in the middle of the
18 night, so that started the controversy, particularly who owned the property,
19 who was leasing the property, and permission. The community is the
20 decision maker in the murals and their content, in particular property
21 owners. Chair Wallace stated they did a hashtag called "put a mural on it."
22 Recommended to the community walls that might be used for murals.
23 Partnered with muralists in 2015-2017 to teach the community how to paint
24 murals. They did have a meeting in 2017 with one side of the table stating
25 these are criminals and the other was people stating this is our art. Chair
26 Wallace states that art is so subjective, i.e., his favorite buildings are the El
27 Paso Electric building and Ikard's furniture.
28

29 Chair Wallace hopes to bring in other people, groups of people to challenge
30 their ideas about preservation. What are other communities around here
31 doing? Caitlin Beesley stated she is sorry that Quality of Life Director and
32 Public Art Coordinator couldn't attend to add to the conversation. From a
33 preservation perspective murals encourage people, the community, to view
34 cities as dynamic with change and fluctuation. Paul Deason mentioned that
35 the mural on the back of the theater downtown only needs \$6,000 to repair
36 it, and no one can come up with that amount.
37

38 Caitlin Beesley stated she is happy to be here. She interviewed in
39 November for the position. She has lived in Santa Fe. She has usually
40 worked with the National Park Service. But wants the community
41 interaction. She really likes abode. Adobe represents how important all
42 building maintenance is. She is here to listen and to learn. Paul Deason
43 mentioned he left books with Larry Nichols. There is a nationwide group
44 called Vernacular Architecture Forum and they are very interested in
45 buildings, building materials, construction techniques that spring up out of
46 necessity not of a specific style.

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4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

5. STAFF AND COMMISSION COMMENTS

Ernie Campos invited Mr. Benjamin Kracht, PhD, from Oklahoma. He works with Mr. Kracht's son. Mr. Kracht has written three books about the Kiowa. And he came to see the meeting and hopefully become a committee member.

6. ADJOURNMENT (7:55)

Motion to approve by Paul Deason; seconded by Ernie Campos. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairperson