

**To:** Members of Dublin City Council

**From:** Matt Earman, Director of Parks and Recreation  
Jennifer M. Rauch, AICP, Director of Planning  
Chase J. Ridge, AICP Candidate, Planner I

**Date:** September 9, 2020

**Re:** South High Street Stone Walls – ARB Informal Review

## **Background**

On January 17, 2020, the Community Development Committee (CDC) of Council reviewed plans for improvements along S. High Street in Historic Dublin. The Committee expressed interest in extending an existing stone wall along the west side of S. High Street to the south, as part of the S. High Street streetscape improvement project. The Committee was supportive of exploring the expansion of stone walls, with the intention of providing additional seating opportunities, as well as landscape opportunities throughout the corridor. The Committee also expressed an interest in studying additional sites where new walls could be located along the street.

An update regarding the Committee's discussion was provided to City Council on February 10, 2020. Following that, members of the CDC visited the area along S. High Street with Parks and Recreation, Forestry, and Engineering staff to assess the area and the proposed improvements, which included modifications to trees and landscape along the street.

On July 27, 2020, the Parks and Recreation Department presented City Council with an update on the progress of the S. High Street improvements, which included the overall streetscape improvement plan with proposed landscape material and stone walls. City Council affirmed staff's recommendation to proceed with the improvements, and requested that the Architectural Review Board (ARB) review the proposal and provide informal feedback.

Most recently, on August 26, 2020, the ARB provided informal review and feedback on the design of the proposed stone walls. A summary of the discussion is provided below.

## **ARB Summary**

Planning and Parks and Recreation staff provided an overview of the project to the Architectural Review Board, which included the replacement of trees recently removed and the installation of new stone walls along the South High Street corridor between Bridge Street and John Wright Lane. The initial phase focused on the west side of the street, where most of the street trees were removed due to power line interference. The proposal walls in this initial phase will only be where the existing sidewalk is higher than S. High Street. The purpose of the walls is to retain the existing sidewalk at its current level while allowing the trees to access the soil under the pavement. These walls will also provide a seat wall along the street for people to utilize. The future phase would be replace other trees that are declining along the east side of South High and install additional stone seat walls and decorative columns to match the style and character of existing traditional Historic District stone work.

The Board provided informal review and feedback on the proposed stone wall design and locations. The members were supportive of the overall goal to enhance the South High Street streetscape. The ARB

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expressed support to address the west side of South High Street and provide a level and consistent tree lawn, while also retaining the existing grade of the sidewalks and creating seating for pedestrians.

The Board members shared reservations about the installation of a traditional stone wall design in the proposed location, as stone walls did not historically exist in the proposed locations. Specifically, there were concerns that the installation of stone walls would create a false sense of history. The members also shared concerns that the stone walls would detract from the historic fabric of the District, and become a dominant feature along South High Street, drawing attention away from the streetscape character created by the existing buildings. The Board noted the difference in design approach and purpose served by the walls on the west and east sides of the street. On the west side of the street, the walls are primarily for retaining, which the Board members recognized was necessary to support the new tree plantings, but concerns were shared about the necessity of the installation of the wall on the east side of the street as tree replacement could be accommodated in the existing tree lawn.

Board members were generally concerned about the safety of the proposed walls. Several Board members expressed concern with the lack of a rail or barrier, which may allow a pedestrian to fall from the sidewalk down to the tree lawn below. Concerns about the cap of the wall, which will lie a few inches above the sidewalk, were also expressed. Several Board members saw this as a tripping hazard. There was also concern that the new design was not conducive to navigating strollers, wheelchairs, or other mobility devices through the busy corridor.

Overall, the Board expressed their desire for a design that is as consistent as possible given the change of grade, is safe for pedestrians of all abilities, avoids a false sense of history, and does not dominate the streetscape.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends City Council provide direction on how to proceed with the location and design of the stone walls proposed along South High Street.