

January 21, 2026

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SUBJECT: Screen Wall Repair/Replacement, Clairemont Mesa Boulevard, Tierrasanta

As the organization endorsed by the City of San Diego to represent the residents of Tierrasanta in issues of planning, safety, development, and other public matters, the Tierrasanta Community Council submits this correspondence to bring your attention to the unsightly, ever-deteriorating condition of and threat to the public safety of the screen wall on the north side of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard east of Santo Road in Tierrasanta; and to establish the actions the City of San Diego will ultimately take to eliminate this safety hazard.

Specifically, the masonry screen wall along the north right of way of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard extends from the west property line of De Portola Middle School, westerly to Santo Road, then north along the east right of way of Santo Road to Remora Street, a length of approximately 3810 lineal feet, and is generally referred to the Barbados Wall (wall).

The Barbados Wall has been in a steadily deteriorating condition for at least the past ten years, and currently includes many sections that are in a state of significant disrepair or decay, including leaning panels, cracked masonry, differential settlement, cracking of masonry units and mortar joints, masonry unit deterioration/erosion, masonry units separated from the foundation, and sections of the wall leaning against adjacent sandwiched panels, creating additional leaning and displacement. There are many locations where nearby roots, some of significant size, appear to be undermining or possibly uplifting the wall, possibly creating instability.

These conditions are a threat to the safety and welfare of local residents, abutting property owners, and anyone who may linger nearby, especially in the vicinity of De Portola Middle School, as students typically mill about, stand, or sit near the wall after school hours awaiting pickup by their parents. Public record demonstrates that the sudden, catastrophic failure of such screen walls is clearly possible, resulting in significant, near-fatal injury and liability.

The wall was initially constructed in the approximate time frame of 1971 to 1975, believed to be commensurate with public improvements as shown on City of San Diego drawings 14523-D, 14592-D, and other D-series; exists within a 16-foot wide Pedestrian Non-Motor Vehicular Easement granted to the City of San Diego via the dedication certificates on Sheet 1 of Record Maps 6791, 6898, and 6931, and is the responsibility of the City of San Diego as a public facility.

The wall was subsequently repaired or modified in approximately 1978 and 1991, possibly per 25478-D (there are inconsistencies and conflicts within the contract for W.O.119623 as to the actual D-sheet used for the 1991 project). Note that research at the City's Maps and Records office reveals several D-sheet plan sets relevant to this wall, however the aperture cards for those D-sheets are missing from City files, making a determination of the exact details, design, and construction of the various wall segments unknown at this time.

However, the design standards for such walls and many public improvements change very little over time. If for instance the wall were to be designed and constructed today, it likely would be consistent with City of San Diego Information Bulletin 222 (markup copy attached). Note that the height of the existing wall above the adjacent finish grade varies from 4'-8" to 5'-6". Considering that Bulletin 222 and common design practice requires a minimum of 12 inches of compacted fill placed over the footing/foundation of CMU (masonry) walls, the design criteria for a given height of wall above ground would be one additional foot, making all of these walls subject to the 6'-0" category in Bulletin 222.

Comparing that design standard with an on-site visual inspection, it is evident that the wall as constructed does not comply with the standard in the following respects:

- For a six foot design height, the standard requires 8 inch CMU units; the existing condition utilizes 6 inch CMU units (too skinny for the wall height).
- Many segments of the wall foundation appear to be at grade, therefore not meeting the 12 inch compacted backfill requirement, which can affect vertical alignment/plumb, stability, and prevents resistance to horizontal displacement of the footing.
- The existence of the required mortar key at the top of footing/bottom of the first masonry course is in question.
- The existing wall footing appears to be 1'-10" wide in many locations, wall centered, by measuring the width of the exposed top of footing in several locations, although that exposed "footing" may actually be a mow curb for the adjacent landscaping. However, the required footing width is 2'-6", wall centered. Given that the required width of CMU for a six foot wall is 8 inches, the existing footing appears to be too narrow, which can affect horizontal and vertical stability and resistance to sliding.
- The extreme leaning of some of the panels implies that the required vertical reinforcing (rebar) either may be non-existent or the initial construction may have used smaller bar sizes, or bar splice overlaps were too short, preventing full development of resistance to forces, resulting in leaning.
- There is question as to whether or not the CMU cells were filled solid with grout, as the extreme leaning of some panels would ostensibly be resisted by the grout fill (however, still possible depending on the reinforcing).
- In some panels, there is clearly differential settlement and cracking of some block layers and mortar joints, which implies that the required horizontal reinforcing may not be in place or splices are not properly lapped and tied.
- Leaning may also be a result of some adjacent private landowners filling against the wall, using it as a retaining structure for their back yard. In addition, numerous fences have been attached to or constructed on the wall. Screen walls are not designed as retaining structures, or as supports for fences above the design height, due to wind loads.

These appear to be flaws in the construction or inconsistencies with standard design, all of which would ultimately be evidenced by some failing element after more than 50 years in existence, which is where we are today.

These discrepancies could be verified or discarded by in place materials testing, taking core samples, and making limited excavations to determine exact physical conditions and dimensions. The bigger picture is that the Barbados Wall is clearly in very poor physical condition, subject to

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catastrophic failure, and an accident waiting to happen. The deteriorated condition needs to be addressed and rectified ASAP with a more robust wall design.

Accordingly, the Tierrasanta Community Council requests, short term, that the City address public safety via stabilizing the wall in its most critical locations, such as by fencing off from the public and/or installing temporary bracing, possibly via a counterfort batten and plank, or similar.

Long term, the Tierrasanta Community Council requests that the City consider removal and replacement of the entire wall, as dealing with only the existing deteriorated or dilapidated sections would leave in place a wall that will only need to be addressed similarly in the future.

Due to the threat to public safety that the wall now poses, and the uncertain nature and undefined time frame typically needed to complete a City public works project, it is imperative that the City make this a priority for resolution. Full design, bid, contracting, and construction could take up to five years to complete.

The Tierrasanta Community Council is eager to meet with representatives of the City of San Diego as soon as possible to view the wall conditions on site, and come to an understanding as to an expeditious path forward to remove and replace the wall as needed.

Please contact the Tierrasanta Community Council members noted below to arrange a time to meet in the field. We eagerly anticipate your response to this request.

Sincerely,

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Tierrasanta Community Council

Enclosure