Architectural Significance and Preservation Treatment Zones

Statement of Significance

The historic Hall of Waters Building, located along the Fishing River in Downtown Excelsior Springs, Missouri, is a significant Art Deco building, with notable Mayan and Aztec design influences. The building was constructed by the City of Excelsior Springs as a Public Works Administration (PWA) project and remains as one of the most significant examples of Art Deco architecture in the State of Missouri.

The Hall of Waters site is significant geologically, commercially and medically, as the site of the first historic spring (Siloam Spring). The building itself is significant, "as the most ambitious project to have been undertaken by the Federal Public Works Administration in Missouri," costing $1,000,000 when it was constructed. The combined building and site represents an exceptional example of a health spa resort and is "notable and possibly unique in its outstanding Art Deco-Depression Modern style influenced by Mayan water imagery."[1]


Fig. 16 & 17 Left: Carved limestone detail. Right: Carved limestone and metal screen at main entrance on west elevation. (SRJA 2012)

The Hall of Waters is in overall fair condition, with some portions of the building in good condition and other portions of the building in poor condition. These specific conditions and areas of concern are discussed throughout the report. Though the building conditions vary and the Hall of Waters and its site have suffered from floods, site reconstruction and change of use; the building retains a majority of its original Art Deco architectural features and historic integrity. Even though the use of medicinal spring water has waned, the historic Hall of Waters continues to provide tourism and interpretative opportunities. The building provides an ideal environment to learn about the historic and economic importance of the mineral waters and about the development of Excelsior Springs. No other building or structure in Excelsior Springs provides better evidence of this remarkable history better than the historic Hall of Waters.

[1] Hall of Waters (Siloam Park and Springs) National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Prepared by Patti Banks, Community Development Director, Excelsior Springs Historic Preservation Commission, March 29, 1983.

Site and Building Architectural Description

The Hall of Waters building is an Art Deco design with an asymmetrical 'T' shaped floor plan. The top of the 'T' faces north and extends in the east/west direction, while the leg of the 'T' reaches south towards the Fishing River. The Hall of Waters was constructed on the site of the existing historic Siloam Spring which was situated in a large city park along the river. Therefore, the site was previously terraced and the grade changes were significant as the ground sloped from the north and west down, towards the Fishing River to the south. In order to address the site grade challenges, the building was not built on the site, but rather into the site in order to accommodate the varied topography. The building and site is accessed through a series of ramps, a sunken courtyard to the north, and stone and concrete stairs and walkways. The building is surrounded with various stone and concrete retaining walls, all constructed in order to creatively address the challenging site grading.

The exterior of the building essentially has two primary facades represented by the north and the west elevations. The north elevation facing Broadway originally served as the primary building entrance. The building is set away from Broadway Street, a significant street within Downtown Excelsior Springs. This distance served its purpose well when the building was originally utilized as a health spa. But once the City Hall was moved into the building, it seemed too distant from the main street as it was a long walk for many people with disabilities or those who needed quick access to the building. Therefore, in the 1990s, land directly west of the Hall of Waters was acquired by the City. Several buildings were demolished and a new circle drive with parking was constructed, allowing closer and more convenient access to the building by the general public. In 2011, a new ramp was installed along the west terrace in order to allow ADA accessibility to the building from the circle drive.

The exterior of the building is constructed of a combination three major materials: random coursed ashlar with pitched face limestone, dressed and carved limestone details, and exposed concrete. Windows and doors are a combination of historic steel and modern aluminum units. The roofs are flat and are designed to have many levels. An impressive boiler stack tower projects over sixty feet above the Hall of Waters building and is constructed of random coursed ashlar limestone with pitched face, dressed limestone, glass block units and copper trim. The tower is one of the most visible landmarks in the city.

The varied topography of the site permits direct access into the building at several floors from the exterior. The building consist of the following floors: basement, ground floor, ground floor mezzanine, first floor, second floor and a penthouse. The building is accessed through a series of stairs, ramps and terraces. The main (first) floor is accessed by the surrounding raised terraces on the north and west sides of the building. The ground floor is accessible all around the east and south elevations of the building, but is below grade on a portion of the north and west elevations. The ground floor mezzanine is located directly above the ground floor and is visible on all sides of the building, except for a portion of the north and west elevations, where it is obscured by the north and west exterior terraces. The ground floor mezzanine is accessible from the exterior through doors located under these raised north and west terraces. The first floor is the primary floor and is accessed through vestibule entries from the exterior by the north and west terraces. The subterranean north terrace well pump room is buried below the sunken north courtyard and is indistinguishable as to its location from the exterior of the building. The voluminous room below this courtyard contains the original Siloam Spring which yields ferro-manganese water. The well is still present in this location and the foundations of the historic Siloam Pavilion and the Sulpho Saline structures can be seen along the north, west and south basement walls.

There is one other known mineral water well on the site located just east of the building in a small pump house. The original name of this well is unknown at this time. Another pump house is built into the retaining wall and appears to be on the site just north of the parking lot. More research should be undertaken in order to verify the history of these structures.

Fig. 18 View of pump house building located on the east of the building. (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 19 View of a pump house building located to the north of the parking lot built into the retaining wall. (SRJA 2012)

Character Defining Features and Materials

The Hall of Waters building retains a vast amount of its original historic materials and features. These character defining features and materials are identified in this section and throughout the report, in order to determine those important architectural features and spaces which should be preserved and maintained during future rehabilitation work to the maximum extent possible. The loss of these original features would diminish or severely alter the historic integrity of the building or its individual spaces. These features include exterior elements of the building and the site, the interior floor plan and individual interior spaces, building components and finishes. These collective features lend themselves to define the character and the overall sense of place of the historic Hall of Waters building and site. Not only do these features provide significance to the building, but they also convey the high quality of craftsmanship, in design and in manufacturing (hand-made and machine made) materials that are indicators of the period in which the building was constructed. Guidance for identifying the architectural character of historic buildings like the Hall of Waters can be found in the National Park Service *Preservation Brief 17: Architectural Character – Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*. Future planning efforts and rehabilitation work should take great care to not remove, damage, obscure or irreversibly alter any of these important character-defining features of the building.

Site Character Defining Features

The site surrounding the Hall of Waters is just as important to the overall experience as the building itself. The site has several unique components which are original to its construction and were designed to accommodate the unique site topography and features. Site character defining features include, but are not limited to, the following items:

- Raised terraces with stone walls
- Stone ramp to the north of the building
- Sunken north courtyard
- Stone site walls and concrete steps
- Change of grade – varied topography
- Exterior well pump house to the east of the Hall and pump house to the north of the parking lot
- Mature trees on the east and southern portions of the site
- Ample space with large front setback
- Rolling topography

Fig. 20 North Sunken Courtyard (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 21 Site Stone Walls at North Ramp (SRJA 2012)

Exterior Building Character Defining Features

The historic Hall of Waters building embodies the Art Deco design ideals so prevalent in the 1930's. Exterior character defining features include, but are not limited to, the following items:

Overall Form

- The horizontal massing of the building with many levels
- Linear design of the several levels of surrounding terraces
- Multiple levels of flat roofs
- Tall tower (an important city landmark) – lit at night
- Rhythm of window openings, varies in each section of the building
- Hierarchy of the stone walls on the primary sections of the building versus the more secondary concrete walls on the east and penthouse portions of the building. The hierarchy of materials on the main section of the building with cut stone panels surrounding the main entrances on the north and west elevations with pitch-faced stone on the remainder of the walls.

Building Materials

- Pitch-faced ashlar laid stone walls
- Cut limestone walls
- Exposed concrete walls on east portion of the building
- Carved stone panels and building units reflecting the Mayan influence
- Two-story decorative metal grillwork at the entrances
- Original steel windows at the north and west entrances with textured glass
- Two-story decorative steel window and door openings at the Hall of Springs
- Original steel windows in service portions of the building with textured glass
- Stone tower embellished with the vertical glass blocks and highlighted by decorative copper flashing and sheet metal work
- Original architectural copper and stained glass post lights flanking the steps at both the north and west terraces
- Cut stone balustrade systems at raised terraces
- Mosaic tiles on exterior walls
- Skylight

Fig. 22 Carved Stone Detail (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 23 Architectural Entry Light (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 24 Tower Detail (SRJA 2012)

Interior Character Defining Features

While the exterior of the Hall of Waters is the most prominent aspect of the building to the general public, the interior is exceptionally important, conveying the historic Mayan-influenced design. The interior of the Hall of Waters building contains numerous original spaces and character defining features, which together convey the overall sense of historic integrity. Many of these features would be considered to be one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable or extremely expensive to replicate today.

Character defining features and materials include the following items:

Materials

- Plaster walls
- Terrazzo floors and stairs
- Handmade Art Deco tiles with Mayan and Aztec influences
- Unique metal and glass light fixtures
- Water bar
- Fountain in Hall of Springs
- Metal ventilation grilles and registers
- Radiators
- Decorative metalwork (including panels in Entrance Foyer and at elevator door frames and door panels)
- Wood doors
- Wood trim, millwork and built-ins
- Glazed wall tiles in pool, restrooms and spa areas
- Spa plumbing fixtures and treatment equipment
- Pool tiles
- Metal railings at Entrance Hall, Mezzanines and stairs
- Glass block partitions
- Signage
- Decorative painting (remnants)
- Brass entrance doors
- Skylight and recessed light fixture in Entrance Foyer
- Earthy color scheme

Spaces

- Original floor plan configurations including volumes of unique spaces
- Hall of Springs
- Entrance Foyer and main hallways
- Pool space and mezzanine
- Spas
- Locker Rooms (portions)
- Therapy Treatment Pool (Ground Floor)
- Interior stairs
- Pool Check Room
- Elevator location (elevator interior has been remodeled)
- Second floor chamber spaces
- North Well Pump Room below courtyard

Fig. 25 Metal Panel and Railing (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 26 Historic Light (SRJA 2012)

Fig. 27 Fountain in Hall of Springs (SRJA 2012)

Historic Integrity and Preservation Treatment Zones

The Hall of Waters building has retained a vast majority of its historic integrity. Due to the significance of the structure and the site, it is prudent to evaluate the overall building as well as the individual spaces and features within the building. As preservationists, we recommend assigning a specific preservation treatment recommendation to each of these areas. Treatment recommendations provide guidance not only for this report but also for future planning efforts. Through identification of specific treatment zones, the goal is to identify the important features before any work is done to the building, in order to mitigate or minimize future destruction of the historic fabric.

Fig. 28 View of the First Floor lobby looking south to the Hall of Springs. (SRJA 2012)

Summary of Treatment Zones

The identification of the possible treatment zones is based upon the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. These treatments are: preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

For the purposes of this report, the treatment selected for the site and building will be 'Rehabilitation'. The site and building have been divided into different zones in order to understand and identify the level of historic significance and integrity of individual spaces. These zones are identified on the following Treatment Zone Diagrams (Figures 29 through 35) and are colored accordingly.

The basement floor level, which originally contained the sub-basement boiler pit and mechanical equipment and storage, is all considered to be tertiary space. The only exception to this treatment is the basement entrance stair, which is visible from the exterior of the building along the north exterior wall. This stair is considered to be of secondary importance.

The ground floor contains the two-story indoor pool and adjacent space. This area projects to the south of the main building and is surrounded by windows on three sides. The pool and the main circulation corridor to the pool are considered to be primary spaces. The locker rooms and support spaces are considered to be secondary. Much of the ground floor is considered to be tertiary, as a number of changes to the original historic fabric have been made in these areas. For instance, the original bottling facility now accommodates indoor parking, the boiler room and ancillary mechanical spaces. Many employees use this level to access parking lot at the rear of the building. The original well pump room located under the north courtyard and the smaller therapy pool are also considered to be primary spaces, but of less importance than the larger main pool space, so they are identified as a Rehabilitation Zone rather than a Preservation Zone.

The ground floor mezzanine level is directly above the first floor. This level contains the mezzanine which surrounds and overlooks three sides of the indoor pool. The mezzanine and circulation to the mezzanine are all considered to be primary spaces. There are also original locker rooms, the pool check-in desk, original spa spaces and city offices located on this level. Some interior modifications have occurred in several spaces and therefore, there is a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary spaces. Access to the spaces below the upper entrance terraces is also at this level. This was once open circulation which was able to be accessed by the general public, but this space had been in-filled and is now considered to be secondary.

The first floor serves as the primary entrance into the building for use by the general public. The voluminous entrance hall and the Hall of Springs are hugely significant spaces and retain a large amount of original historic finishes. These are considered to be primary spaces. The west portion of the first floor contains city offices with only some of the original floor plan remaining. The east portion of the first floor contains restrooms (in-filled in the original sun porch), city offices and the original women's spa. These rooms are all secondary spaces.

The second floor contains a mezzanine overlooking the entrance lobby. The City Council Chambers are on located on the east side of the floor and the Circuit Court is located on the west side. A majority of the second floor is considered to be comprised of primary spaces, though only the mezzanine space is specifically identified as a Preservation Zone.

The upper levels contain the tower, elevator penthouse and mechanical access spaces. The tower is considered to be a significant feature of the overall building.

The roofs are considered to be primary spaces, in that their flat designs are a component of the original Art Deco design.

Preservation Treatment Zone 1 - Orange
Primary spaces are considered to be of the most historically significant in terms of retention of original materials, features and rooms. The primary spaces in the Hall of Waters are those spaces which are memorable, containing large volumes of space, important circulation features, original materials, original decorative lighting and decorative architectural features as they retain their original historic qualities. Preservation and possible restoration treatment approaches may be considered for these very significant spaces. Great care shall be taken in these spaces to preserve existing historic fabric.

Rehabilitation Zone 2 - Yellow
These spaces are also considered to be primary spaces and are important to the overall historic integrity of the building, possessing many original features and materials, but with an understanding that some changes may need to be made in order for the future rehabilitation and contemporary use of the building. Rehabilitation offers slightly more flexibility during future work in terms of options for possible alternate uses, for repair of historic materials and for installation of new equipment. Careful inventory of the original historic features should be recorded in order to retain as much of the fabric during rehabilitation as possible.

Rehabilitation Zone 3 - Green
Secondary spaces are identified throughout the building which are more utilitarian or may have had some minor modifications to their original layout or finishes. These spaces may include back corridors, offices, restrooms, locker rooms and storage areas. These spaces are not as important as the primary spaces found in Zones 1 and 2. Therefore, there is more opportunity for change of use or treatment of historic materials during rehabilitation and planning efforts. Accordingly, proposed changes should be sympathetic to the remaining historic fabric and layout.

Rehabilitation Zone 4 - Blue
Tertiary spaces are those identified throughout the building which are service-oriented or have had major alterations since the original construction of the Hall of Waters. These spaces have the most leeway when proposing work or when planning for different uses.

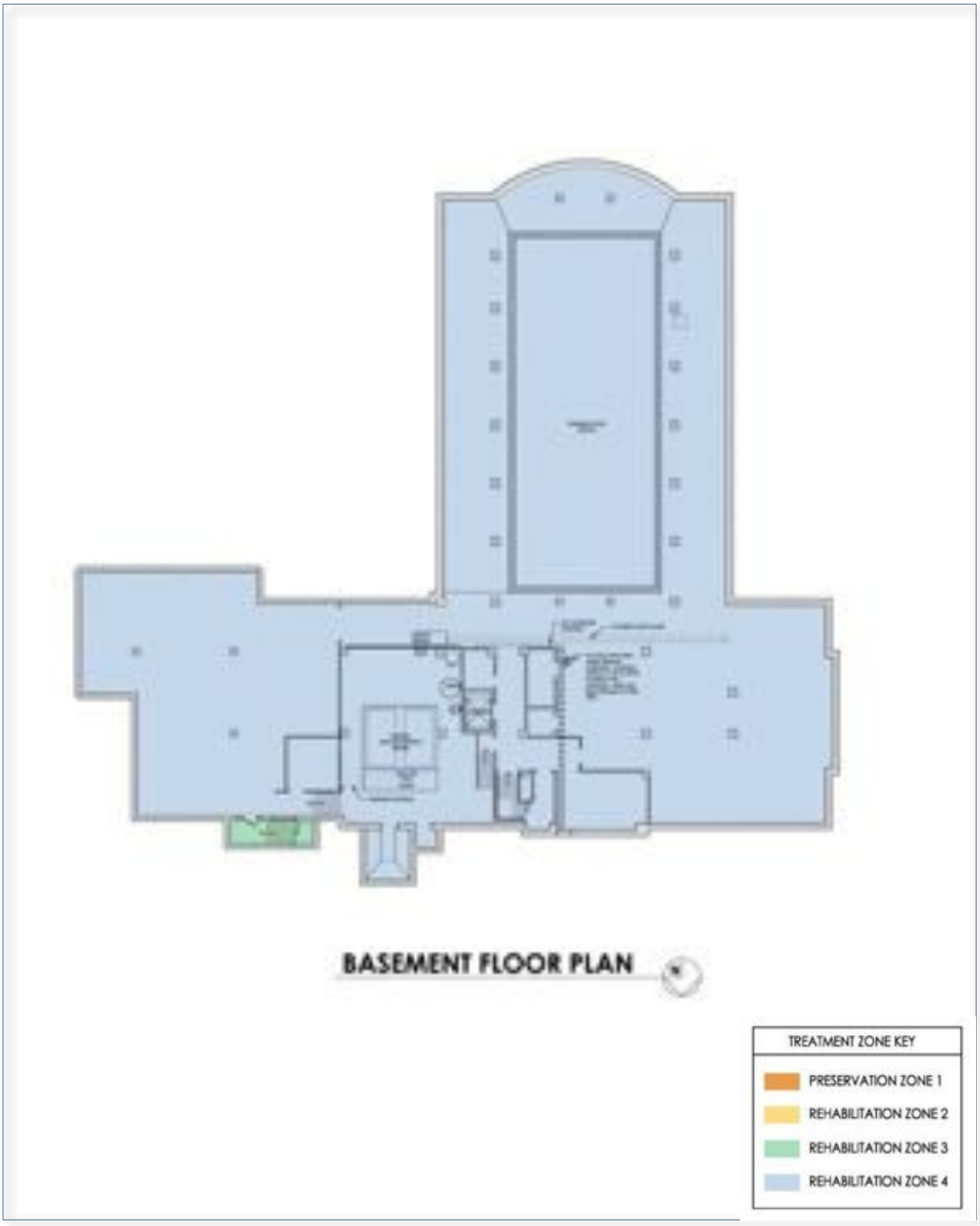

Fig. 29 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Basement Floor Plan (SRJA 2013)

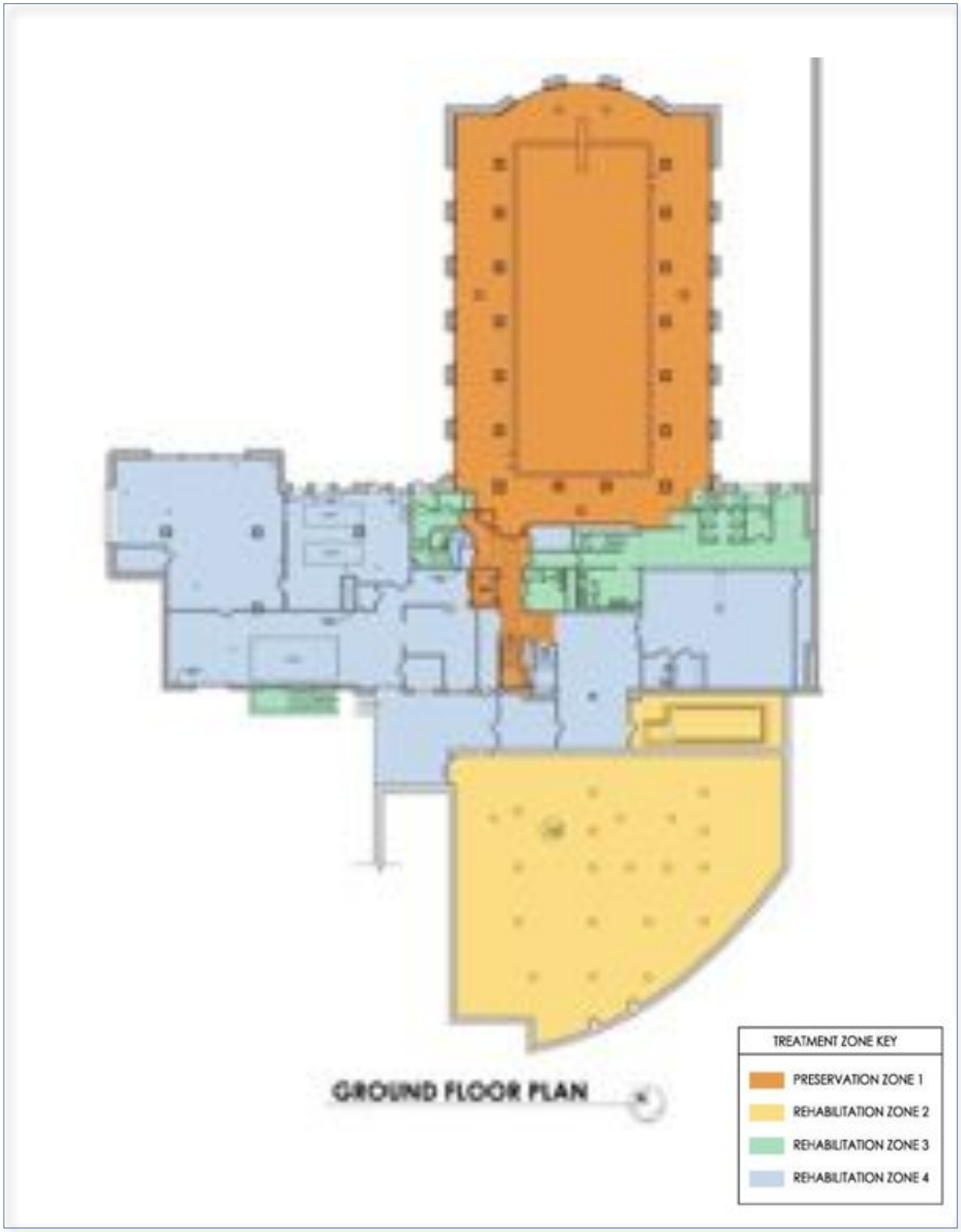

Fig. 30 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Ground Floor Plan (SRJA 2013)

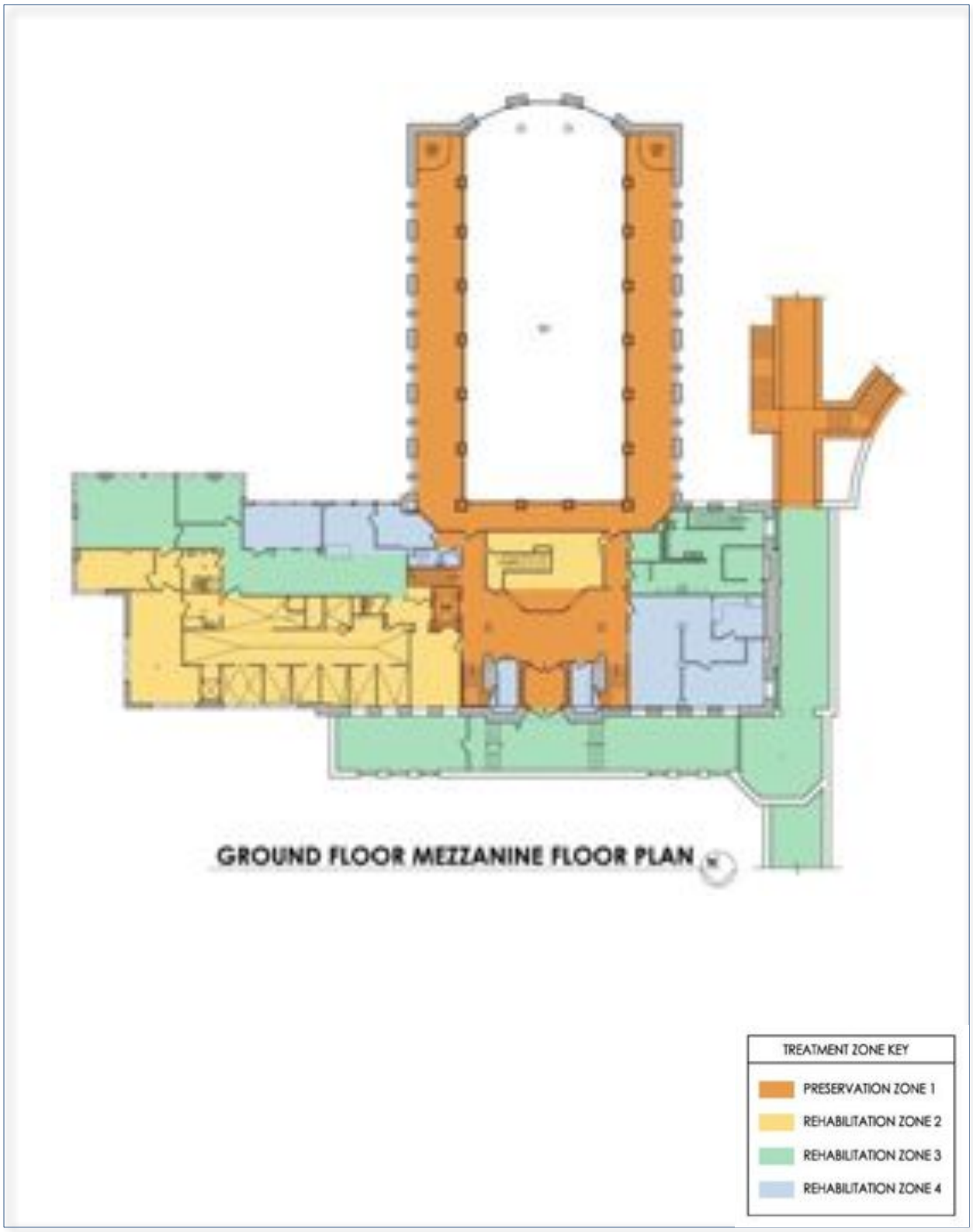

Fig. 31 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Ground Floor Mezzanine Plan (SRJA 2013

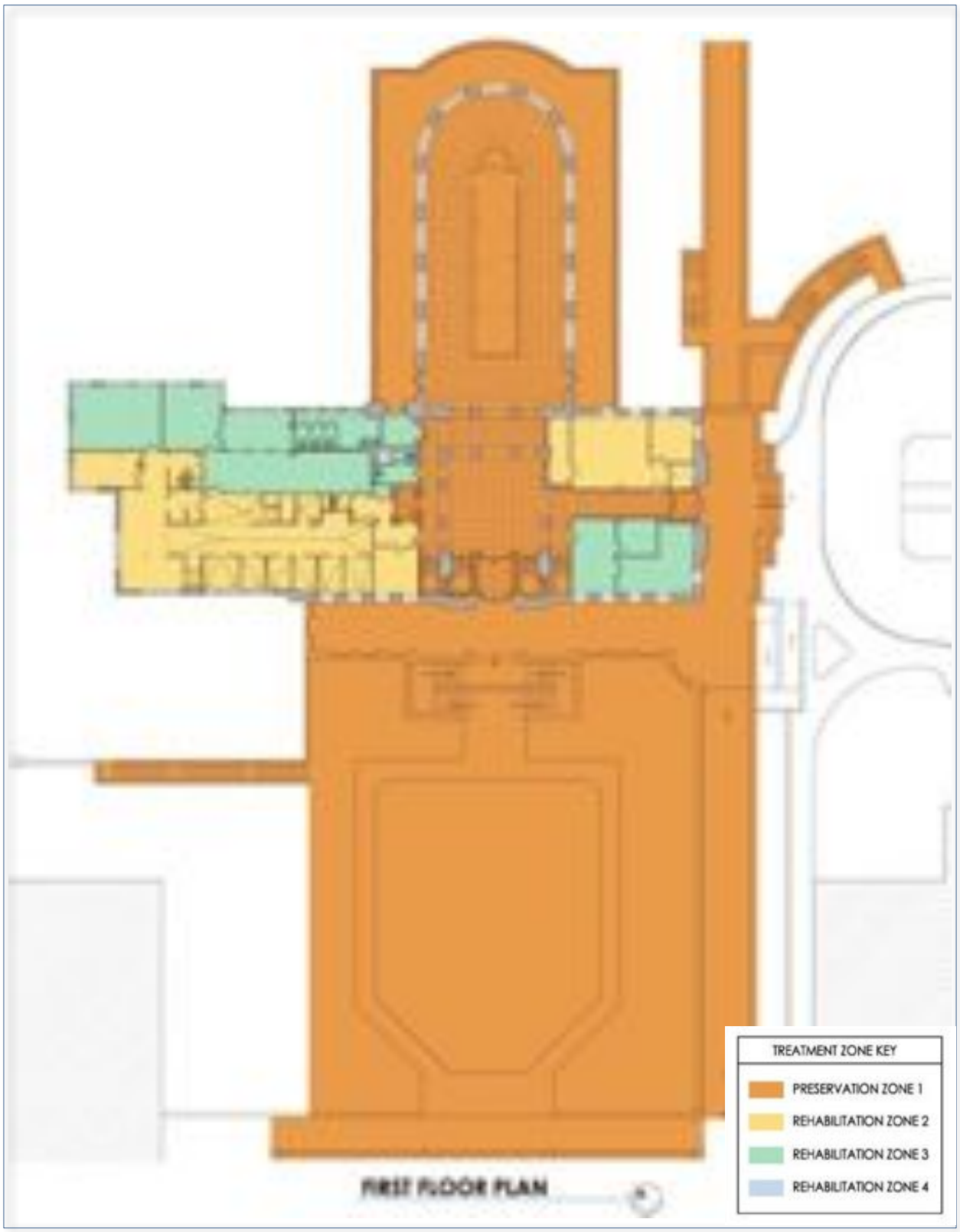

Fig. 32 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – First Floor Plan (SRJA 2013)

Fig. 33 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Second Floor Plan (SRJA 2013)

Fig. 34 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Penthouse Floor Plan (SRJA 2013)

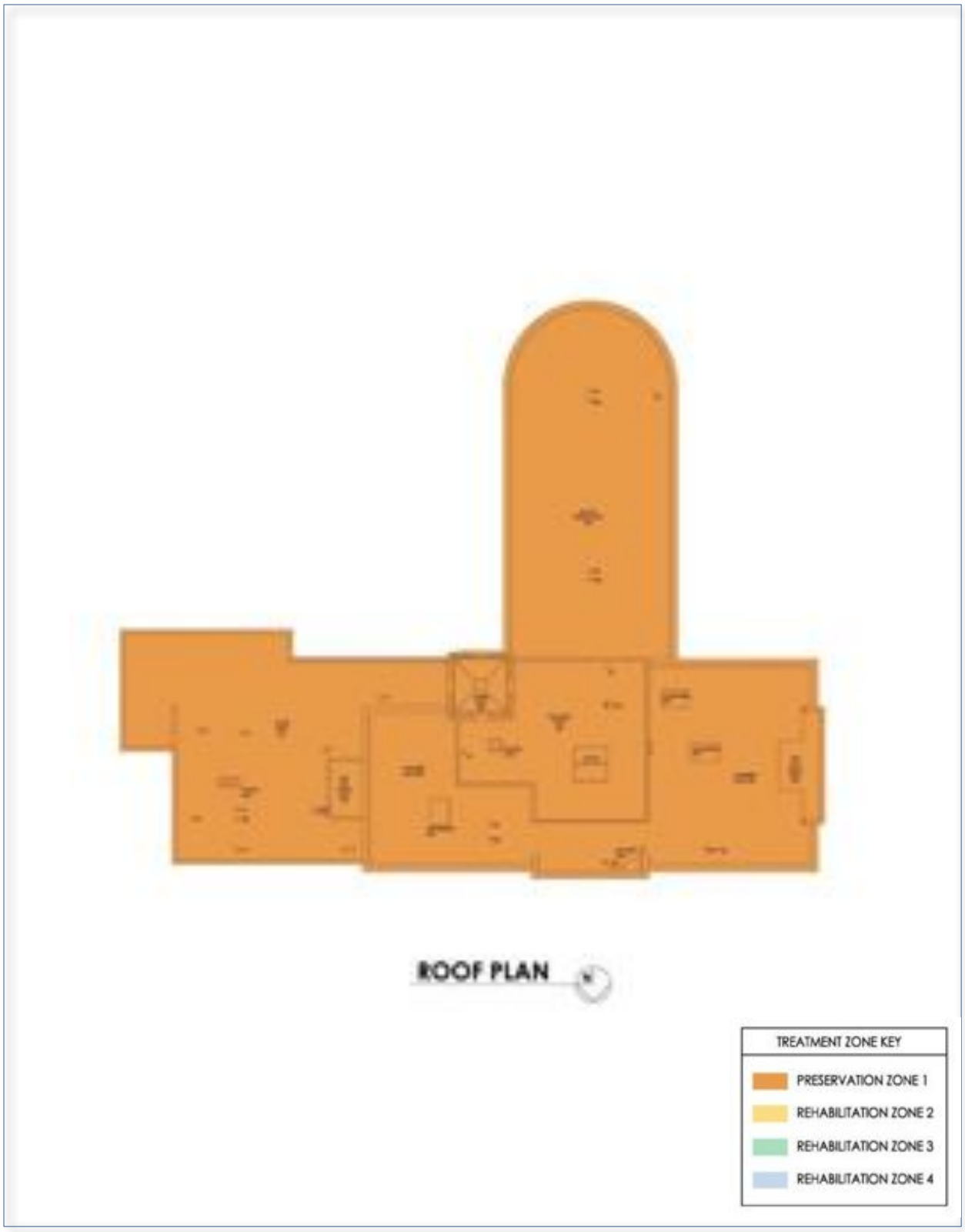

Fig. 35 Preservation Treatment Zone Diagram – Roof Plan (SRJA 2013)