



# City of Placerville

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Development Services Department

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## MEMORANDUM

Date: October 22, 2024

To: Placerville City Council – Mayor Neau, Vice Mayor Clerici, Councilmembers Gotberg, Saragosa and Yarbrough

From: Placerville Planning Commission

Subject: Advice to City Council Per City of Placerville Resolution 7896

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Dear Esteemed Members of the City Council:

The members of the Placerville Planning Commission submit this memo for your consideration per direction under City of Placerville Resolution No. 7896, Sec 12(G), which states that the Planning Commission, in its role as the Historic Advisory Committee, has the duty to: *“Advise City Council and City boards and commissions as necessary on historic preservation issues.”*

### **Background**

On September 5, 2023, then-Chair Michael Frenn requested the formation of a Special Committee to the Planning Commission as a follow-up to the Historic Preservation Workshop (August 29, 2023) for the purpose of preparing a list of priorities, proposals and goals to present to the City Council. Mr. Frenn appointed Commissioners Ryan Carter and Kirk Smith to the Special Committee. The Planning Commission gave unanimous approval to the formation of the committee.

On March 14, 2024, the Special Committee submitted a memo to the Planning Commission titled “Suggested Priorities of the Planning Commission in its role as the Historic Advisory Committee.” This memo has been discussed by the Planning Commission on several occasions and was updated by the Special Committee in September of this year.

In addition to discussing the summary presented by the Special Committee, the Planning Commission has over the past several years reviewed many applications for projects in the Historical Districts of the City. The advice and priorities described herein are therefore based on practical experience as well as the work of the Special Committee.

### **Advice to City Council**

The recommendations presented below include both aspirational, long-term projects as well as projects that can be completed in a shorter time frame. We recognize that not all the recommendations can be completed at once, however we believe that the recommendations can and should be addressed within a reasonable time frame.

Recommendation 1: Improve Community Knowledge of the Historic Districts. Clear, concise information about the Historic Districts and the responsibilities of property owners in the Historic Districts should be posted on the City's website and be easily accessed. Knowledge of the Districts could be further improved with:

- a. Informational flyers sent to property owners in the Districts.
- b. Signage installed at the entryways to each District informing the residents and general public about the location and boundary.
- c. The City could also conduct informational workshops or Town Hall meetings to disseminate information and to engage the public on issues regarding the Districts and to receive feedback and identify points of confusion regarding the Districts in order to help resolve conflicts.

Recommendation 2: Review Historic District Inventory and Update as Needed. The requirement to maintain the inventory of historic resources is listed as a duty of the Planning Commission in Section 12(D) of Res. 7896. A review of the historic district property list has not been completed since 1981. We recommend:

- a. Devoting resources to documenting properties within the Historic Districts as to their current condition to establish a baseline for future comparison. This update should include street-view photos.
- b. Reviewing the Inventory to ensure that all significant properties are included and that the history of each is included to fullest extent possible to capture the "life story" of these resources. Structures that are non-contributors to the historic district should also be identified when updating the inventory.

Updating the Inventory and documenting current conditions will ensure that applications for modifications to structures are evaluated fairly. It will provide an opportunity to engage the community on the issue of historic preservation. In addition to staff time, this work would require engaging specialist(s) to help evaluate and ensure the quality of the update; however, knowledgeable volunteers could be enrolled to assist in this project.

Recommendation 3: Consider Revising the Current, or Adopting a New, Historic District Ordinance. The standard for evaluation of projects for Historical Buildings in the City is defined by City Code 10-4-10 (B) as The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation And Guidelines For Rehabilitating Historic Buildings" (SOI Standards). It has been our experience that strict application of the SOI Standards does not routinely align with the needs of Placerville residents nor with the need to preserve the integrity of the Districts and is therefore not an adequate

fit to our local conditions. Therefore, the members of the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council consider doing one of the following:

- a. Revise the existing ordinance to memorialize or otherwise codify what variances from the SOI Standards are allowed and how such variances can be approved by the Planning Commission. Furthermore, under the existing ordinance the districts are defined by physical boundaries only. It is standard practice to clearly state the time frame of significance of buildings with a historic district and to identify contributing and non-contributing buildings within a district.
- b. Draft a new ordinance to preserve historical buildings in Placerville which not only addresses the elements lacking in the current ordinance and which also clearly defines the priorities for historic preservation, addresses design standards, and addresses current wildfire safety requirements, and energy conservation requirements for habitable structures.

This is a long-term project that will require staff time for preparation, time for public review, in addition to the time and effort required of the members of the City Council. Nonetheless, an updated or new ordinance will serve our community well by establishing clearer guidelines for property owners and will assist the Planning Commission in issuing transparent and well-substantiated approvals for Historic District projects.

Recommendation 4: Systematic Examination of the Current Standard For Review. The Special Committee was unable to determine if the Planning Commission had recently undertaken "...systematic examination the city's historic preservation requirements that utilizes the strict Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties..." (SOI) and proposed that this be the first priority of the Planning Commission. This is an achievable recommendation that can and should be done in a relatively short-term time frame. There are numerous resources about the SOI standards available at nominal cost. We recommend that the City establish a small budget for this continuing education project.

### **Summary**

In our opinion, these efforts will result in improved preservation efforts, as well as focused and defensible decisions regarding changes in the Historic Districts. It is not our intention to request an undue burden the City or City staff. Rather, we feel that completing the tasks described here will help simplify decision-making and will allow us to better protect the history of the City and combine that with the needs of its modern residents.

The members of the Planning Commission look forward to continuing our work to preserve the historic districts in our City and also look forward to hearing the response from the City Council.