



## CITY OF GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

### **AGENDA ITEM**

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Report: Review of Recommendations for Streamlining the Historic District Designation Process

1. Motion to approve recommendations related to streamlining the historic district designation process and initiate amendments to Glendale Municipal Code Section 30.25.030.

### **COUNCIL ACTION**

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**Item Type:** Public Hearing

**Approved for** October 25, 2022 **calendar**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recommends that City Council approve a series of recommendations prepared by Planning Division staff, as augmented by HPC, regarding the streamlining of the City's historic district designation process. The goal of these changes is to significantly reduce the amount of time between an initial district application and City Council's decision on the designation of a proposed historic district overlay zone.

### **COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

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#### **Balanced, Quality Housing**

One of the City's priorities is to maintain, preserve, and develop a balanced mix of housing opportunities. Historic districts help protect the character and desirability of Glendale's beautiful residential neighborhoods.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

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Community Development staff respectfully recommends that the City Council approve the recommendations related to streamlining the historic district designation process and initiate amendments to GMC 30.25.030 ("Procedure for Historic District Overlay Zone Designation and Expansion").

## **BACKGROUND**

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### **Summary**

On September 15, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) reviewed a series of recommendations presented by Planning Division staff, based on direction from City Council in 2021, to streamline the existing historic district designation process. HPC recommended some minor changes and clarifications and voted unanimously (5-0) to recommend that City Council approve the procedural revisions. The goal of these changes is to significantly reduce the amount of time between an initial district application and City Council's decision on a proposed historic district overlay zone.

The proposal is discussed in the Analysis section below and also shown graphically in a chart comparing the existing and proposed designation processes (Exhibit 1). An expanded analysis is included in the attached HPC staff report from the September 2022 hearing (Exhibit 2). The current designation process is detailed in Glendale Municipal Code Section 30.25.030 ("Procedure for Historic District Overlay Zone Designation and Expansion" - Exhibit 3). Based on Council's direction, staff will prepare code amendments containing all approved changes to the designation process and bring a proposed ordinance to revise GMC 30.25.030 to the Planning Commission for advisory review and to City Council for introduction and adoption.

### **Background**

In 2003, City Council established a process for identifying, designating, and regulating historic district overlay zones (Ordinance No. 5347). In 2004, significant changes were made to the entire Zoning Code (Glendale Municipal Code Title 30; Ordinance No. 5399), including moving most of the district-related code sections to Section 30.25 ("Historic Preservation Overlay Zone"), where they remain today. While individual properties could be listed in the Glendale Register of Historic Resources since 1997, there had been no mechanism to identify and protect significant groupings of buildings - in other words, historic districts - prior to 2003-04. The impetus to establish districts came from the community; specifically, home owners in what was called the Cumberland Heights neighborhood who were concerned about how the area was changing and lobbied for a means to maintain its historic character. Ultimately, an application for a historic district overlay zone was submitted under the new ordinance.

Unfortunately, the initial district ordinances failed to provide clarity regarding the designation process and how the City would regulate changes to properties within an area that was designated. For example, proponents for each new district were required to prepare a set of design guidelines specific to their district. This would have likely led to inconsistencies in design review between different districts. This, and other factors, produced uncertainty about how districts would actually work, leading the City to

recognize that significant changes were needed to establish a clear process that could be more broadly supported in the community.

The Cumberland Heights proponents withdrew their application pending a new district process. This came in 2006, when the City revised many of the earlier code sections, particularly Section 30.25 (“Historic District Overlay Zone”), to address the earlier shortcomings. In addition, the City commissioned Architectural Resources Group to produce a set of historic district guidelines, which later won an award from the Los Angeles Conservancy. The guidelines were intended for use in all future districts, rather than the initial model of having different sets of guidelines for each district. With significant community support, City Council approved the code revisions (Ordinance No. 5535) and the current framework for creating and regulating historic districts was established.

There are now nine designated districts in Glendale - Royal Boulevard (2008), Ard Eevin Highlands (2009), Cottage Grove (2009), Rossmoyne (2012), North Cumberland Heights (2012), Brockmont Park (2014), Niodrara Drive (2016), South Cumberland Heights (2022), and Casa Verdugo (2022). A tenth nomination, for the Bellehurst neighborhood, is in progress and the historic survey is underway. In addition, a nomination for a district encompassing a large portion of the Verdugo Woodlands neighborhood (Selvas de Verdugo) was recently submitted. Staff has also discussed a potential district south of the South Cumberland Heights Historic District with a proponent who has gathered support in the neighborhood and may submit a nomination at some time. Any streamlined process approved by Council will be implemented for the Selvas de Verdugo nomination and all those that follow.

While numerous revisions have been made to preservation-related sections of the Glendale Municipal Code (GMC) over the last ten years, the section that focuses on the actual process of designating districts (GMC 30.25.030) is the same today as what was approved in 2006 (see Exhibit 4). Based on the confusion and uncertainty generated during the City’s first districting attempt, a very cautious approach was taken when this section was written, with the approval process involving extensive community outreach, three HPC hearings, and two proponent-circulated petitions.

We now have over fifteen years of experience with designating districts and much of the fear and uncertainty that accompanied the first designations has dissipated. Despite this, the time it takes to process district applications has increased over the years. This is due to the inherently time-consuming designation process that is unchanged since 2006, along with staffing and workload issues over the years. While recent additions to Community Development Department (CDD) staff will help address the latter, City Council recognized that structural changes to the designation process itself should also take place, resulting in the current proposal.

## **ANALYSIS**

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The streamlining proposal presented below is not a radical re-envisioning of the current process. The goal is to maintain and enhance transparency and the level of public participation while also achieving time savings through the elimination or consolidation of several steps of the process. In addition, timeline goals for certain staff-level actions are proposed to help ensure efficient application processing. Finally, our experience with public meetings and processing district applications during the pandemic suggests concepts like hybrid public meetings and accepting electronic signatures on petitions will help further the City's streamlining goals.

The discussion below follows the steps of the current process, numbered to coordinate with the items in the left column of the Comparison Chart attached as Exhibit 1. The right column of the chart indicates the reduced number of proposed steps. For each step, the current process is summarized, followed by the HPC/Staff streamlining recommendation and a brief discussion. As noted above, the HPC staff report attached as Exhibit 2 provides a more detailed analysis.

### **1. Historic District Application**

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#### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change (with one minor adjustment)***

##### **Current Process**

- The application process is straightforward and has been successfully navigated by applicants without issue.
- Currently, applicants are expected to provide draft design guidelines for building types or styles not included in the current Historic District Design Guidelines. Staff believes it unrealistic to expect most applicants to provide this information and that, when required, it should be provided later in the process by the consultant conducting the district survey.

### **2. Staff Review and Recommendation**

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#### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change***

##### **Current Process**

- Staff review determines if an application is complete and provides an opportunity to work directly with applicants regarding issues such as boundary selection, assessment of properties' contributing status, and analysis of applicable designation criteria and thresholds.

- Review of information in the application is the basis for staff's recommendation to HPC regarding the potential eligibility of a proposed district.

### **3. 1<sup>st</sup> HPC Hearing: Preliminary Review**

### **4. 1<sup>st</sup> Community Meeting: Review of Proposed District**

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#### ***Streamlining Recommendation: Combine Meetings***

#### **Current Process**

- After an application is determined complete, two distinct but related steps occur:
  - 1) HPC holds a hearing to review the nomination and determine whether the proposed district merits further review. This item is agendaized but not otherwise publicly noticed; and
  - 2) if HPC votes to move the application forward, staff mails a notice of HPC's preliminary determination to all owners and occupants within the proposed boundary and a 500' radius. This notice also announces a community meeting at which staff provides information about the proposed district and answers questions from residents and owners.
- An affirmative HPC vote also authorizes district proponents to circulate a petition requesting that the City conduct a historic district survey.
- There has been limited attendance at community meetings over the years, with the majority of participants generally supporting the proposed district and many of those also attending the separate HPC meeting. The lack of public noticing for the HPC meeting, a strategic decision to avoid potential alterations to properties prior to HPC moving the designation process forward, no longer feels justified.

#### **Streamlined Process**

- A single televised Community Forum and Preliminary HPC Hearing is proposed. Combining these meetings will enhance the opportunity for public participation and allow for direct testimony (in-person, written, or by phone) with HPC rather than staff relaying what was heard at the community meeting. A video of the meeting will also be archived for later viewing by those unable to attend or watch it live.
- A notice of the Forum/Hearing will be mailed to all owners/occupants with the proposed boundary and within a 500-foot radius. The notice will provide links to information about the proposed district on the Planning Division website. HPC also recommends adding a QR code to the notice connecting to the same links.
- An HPC commissioner was concerned that members of the public might find speaking in a more formal "hearing" setting somewhat intimidating, leading to a less forthright discussion. To address this, HPC and staff resolved to have the first part

of the meeting function similarly to the former community meetings, with a staff presentation followed by public commentary and informal questions and answers. This “Community Forum” will be held immediately before the hearing, with no time limits on speakers. The formal hearing would follow, with HPC voting on whether to move the nomination forward and directing staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to historic survey consultants.

- Staff will mail a follow-up notice to all affected owners/occupants within approximately two weeks of the HPC determination, informing them of the decision and, if the process moves forward, that historic design guidelines for design review are in effect while the area is considered a “pending historic district.” This notice would also include information about how property owners could oppose establishment of a district.

## **5. First Petition Circulation: Request for Historic District Survey**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: Eliminate 1<sup>st</sup> Petition / HPC Option to Require***

#### **Current Process**

- The first petition contains signatures of property owners who request that the City conduct a survey to identify whether the area meets the criteria and thresholds for designation. District proponents circulate the petition, typically door-to-door, and provide information and answer questions. The owners of over 25% of the area’s properties must sign in order for the nomination to move forward. Proponents have 90 days from the date of the HPC hearing to submit the petition, with a potential of a 90-day extension being granted if necessary.
- Given the confusion in the early days of districting in Glendale, the first petition was probably important to give the City some assurance that investing in a district survey was warranted. Today, however, it is more of a *pro forma* requirement and adds an unnecessary step to the districting process.
- Proponents for all districts to date have easily met this requirement.

#### **Streamlined Process**

- Eliminating the petition will directly reduce the process timeline by several months.

#### **Optional Step**

- There may be situations when either HPC (at the 1<sup>st</sup> Hearing) or City Council (at the Survey Funding Hearing (Step 7, see below)) determine the 1<sup>st</sup> Petition is necessary (for example, if significant opposition to the district is raised and understanding the

level of neighborhood “buy-in” is desired). Either body can vote to require a petition be circulated to inform a decision to move forward with the designation process.

## **6. Request for Proposals (RFP) and Bidder Recommendation**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change / Add Timeline Goals***

#### **Current Process**

- To begin the survey process, once the first petition requirements are met, staff prepares an RFP that is issued to qualified historic consultants. It requests bids that describe the firm’s understanding of the proposed survey, along with a scope of work, project timeline, and budget proposal. A small group of Planning staff reviews the bids and selects a preferred consultant.

#### **Streamlined Process**

- No change is proposed for the basic RFP process. However, staff recognizes the opportunity to shorten the timeframe for this step and recommends two changes:
  - 1) working toward a 60-day timeline for issuance of an RFP after the 1<sup>st</sup> HPC hearing while taking into account the timelines of other departments involved in the review process; and
  - 2) establishing a 45-day goal for selection of the preferred bidder from the due date of the bids.
- If an existing district is proposed for expansion, an effort will be made to retain the original consultant to conduct the additional survey needed to determine if the expansion is historically appropriate and meets the designation criteria and thresholds. This would eliminate the need for issuing an RFP unless the original consultant is unavailable.

## **7. City Council Funding Authorization for District Survey**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change / Option to Require 1<sup>st</sup> Petition***

#### **Current Process**

- The need to retain consultants for historic district surveys fluctuates from year to year. Where one, or even two, surveys may begin within one calendar year, in others there are none. For this reason, surveys are not included as line items in the Community Development Department’s annual budget. They therefore need to be paid for through the General Fund, which requires authorization from City Council. This is generally a straightforward, though unavoidable, process.

### **Optional Step**

- Council may vote to restore the 1<sup>st</sup> Petition, which would show the level of support for conducting a district survey prior to authorizing funding, if it believes significant opposition to a proposed district has arisen or for any other reason. Otherwise, elimination of the 1<sup>st</sup> Petition is recommended as discussed in Step 5 above.

## **8. Draft Historic District Survey**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change / Add Timeline Goal***

#### **Current Process**

- Once the survey consultant is selected, staff writes a Professional Services Agreement and obtain necessary approvals. The contract is reviewed by the City Attorney and Finance before it can be approved and signed by the City Manager. Once the contract is signed by all parties, the consultant is expected to perform all work within the timeline specified in the contract.

#### **Streamlined Process**

- No change is proposed for the basic process. However, staff recognizes the opportunity to shorten the timeframe for writing the contract and recommends establishing a goal of a 45-day timeline between the date of City Council's authorization of funding and review by the City Attorney and Finance Department.

## **9. 2<sup>nd</sup> Community Meeting: Review of Draft Survey**

## **10. 2<sup>nd</sup> HPC Hearing: Review of Draft Survey and Petition Authorization**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: Combine Meetings***

#### **Current Process**

- The second community meeting and second HPC meeting are typically held in close succession and are noticed in the same mailing. The community meeting allows staff and the consultant to share the survey results with owners/occupants in the proposed district, including the property-specific information on the survey forms. The meeting also gives attendees the chance to ask questions and let the survey team know if there are any inaccuracies on the forms. The same things are done at the HPC meeting, often with many of the same community members in attendance. HPC's role is to provide comments and corrections regarding the draft survey that, along with relevant corrections proposed by community members, are incorporated into a final draft of the survey.
- If HPC finds the draft survey adequate, it also authorizes the proponents to circulate a petition requesting that the City designate the proposed historic district.

### **Streamlined Process**

- As with the first community meeting and HPC hearing, the material presented by staff and the consultant at the second meeting are largely identical. Attendance at the community meeting is generally limited and skews toward the district proponents and those in support. HPC/Staff believe that combining the two meetings will be a more efficient use of time and will also provide for greater transparency and participation due to the pandemic-driven changes to the public hearing process noted earlier.
- HPC/Staff also recommend that this be the final HPC meeting in the designation process unless the historic district survey requires significant revision or there is organized opposition to the district, which to-date only occurred with the first district designation (Royal Boulevard).
- At this point, the survey has identified whether the proposal meets all code requirements and the boundary has been finalized, providing HPC with the information it needs to determine whether it supports designation.
- If there are only minor survey corrections and HPC is comfortable with these being made by staff and the consultant, HPC could decide on a recommendation to Council at this hearing, along with authorizing proponents to circulate the petition requesting designation.

## **11. 2<sup>nd</sup> Petition Circulation: Request Designation of Historic District**

### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change / Minor Shift in Authority***

#### **Current Process**

- Proponents distribute a petition to property owners within the district boundary. This petition specifically requests that City Council vote to approve the historic district overlay zone and designate the proposed district. The owners of over 50% of the area's properties must sign in order for the nomination to move forward. Proponents have 180 days from the date of the HPC hearing to submit the petition, with a potential of a 180-day extension being granted by City Council if necessary.
- Staff believes that signature gathering by district proponents will remain the best way to reach the greatest number of owners and residents. In the past, dedicated neighborhood volunteers have carefully mapped their outreach efforts, enabling them to return multiple times to properties they hadn't heard from after their initial contact attempt. In addition, if Council decides to eliminate the first petition that is required under the current system, the neighbor-to-neighbor contact required for the petition process may humanize the proponents' effort. The most important aspect of

this step is that it ultimately gives City Council an objective view of the level of support for the district to inform its decision regarding designation.

### **Streamlined Process**

- HPC/Staff recommend that HPC, rather than City Council, decide on requests for a 180-day extension for submitting the petition.

## **12. Final Historic Resource Survey**

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### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change***

#### **Current Process**

- Staff works with the consultant to make any revisions to the draft survey required by HPC at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hearing. This step is straightforward and no changes are recommended.

## **13. 3<sup>rd</sup> HPC Hearing: Petition and Final Survey Review, Council Recommendation**

### ***Streamlining Recommendation: Eliminate 3<sup>rd</sup> HPC / Option to Require Hearing***

#### **Current Process**

- At the third, and final, HPC hearing, staff presents the Commission with the number of properties for which owners signed the petition and what percentage of the district this represents. In all cases to date, the over-50% threshold was exceeded, with the nine designated districts receiving an average support rate of 73%. Staff also updates HPC on any revisions made to the draft survey that allow it to become the final version. The Commission then votes on whether or not to recommend that City Council approve the historic district overlay zone.

#### **Streamlined Process**

- The third HPC meeting has felt rather unnecessary over the years and HPC/Staff recommend it be eliminated in most circumstances. If the required percentage of support is met and any revisions are made to the draft survey, HPC really has no option but to move the proposal forward to the Planning Commission and City Council. As discussed above, HPC will usually be able to issue its recommendation to Council at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hearing and indicate what survey revisions are required based on public testimony and its own review of the draft document. HPC has no role in reviewing petition signatures, which is done by staff. The final percentage of support will ultimately be conveyed to City Council, which, as the ultimate decision maker in the process, is really the body to which this number is most important.
- Similar to staff's recommendation regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> Petition, we recommend a provision be made for HPC to require a third hearing if, at the time of the second

hearing, substantial changes are required before the draft survey can be finalized or there is organized opposition to designation. In such a case, HPC would direct staff to schedule the third hearing after proponents submit a petition that meets or exceeds the required threshold of support.

#### **14. Planning Commission Review and Recommendation to Council**

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##### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change***

##### **Current Process**

- The Planning Commission (PC) must review all zone change applications, including those for historic district overlay zones, and make a recommendation to City Council on whether or not the zone change should be approved. PC is provided with an overview of the findings of the historic district survey and HPC's recommendation to help inform its deliberation. The PC's recommendation is included, along with that of HPC, in the staff report to Council for its final deliberation about a district designation and zone change.

#### **15. City Council Final Determination**

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##### ***Streamlining Recommendation: No Change***

##### **Current Process**

This is ultimately the most important step in the process but also one of the most straightforward. Staff provides Council with an overview of both the final survey and how the various designation criteria and thresholds have been met, along with the recommendations of HPC and the Planning Commission. Because a zone change is required to establish a historic district, a 4/5 majority Council vote is needed to approve the designation of a new historic district.

##### **STAKEHOLDERS/OUTREACH**

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Not applicable.

##### **FISCAL IMPACT**

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There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

##### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA/NEPA)**

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The project is exempt from CEQA review as a Class 8, "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment," exemption pursuant to Section 15208 of the State CEQA Guidelines because it provides for the enhancement and protection of historic resources.

## **CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE**

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This item is exempt from campaign disclosure requirements.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

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Alternative 1: Approve the recommended changes and direct staff to prepare amendments to GMC 30.25.030.

Alternative 2: The City Council may consider any other alternative not proposed by staff.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION**

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### **Prepared by:**

Jay Platt, Principal Planner

### **Approved by:**

Roubik R. Golanian, P.E., City Manager

## **EXHIBITS/ATTACHMENTS**

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Exhibit 1: Comparison Chart: Current and Proposed Designation Processes

Exhibit 2: HPC Staff Report regarding Streamlining the Historic District Designation Process (September 15, 2022)

Exhibit 3: GMC 30.25.030 (“Procedure for Historic District Overlay Zone Designation and Expansion”)