Historic Preservation Board Report

Date: September 01, 2026

To: Historic Preservation Board

Through: Marc Heirshberg, Assistant City Manager

From: Nana Appiah, Development Services Director
Mary Kopaskie-Brown, Planning Director
Rachel Phillips, Assistant Planning Director
Matthew Kriegl, Historic Preservation Officer
Meghan Eaton, City Archaeologist

Subject: Mesa Zoning Ordinance text amendments (Historic Preservation Procedures)- Proposed amendments to Mesa City Code Title 11, Chapters 23, 44, 66, 74, and 87 . **(Citywide)**

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Board provide a recommendation that the City Council adopt the proposed Mesa Zoning Ordinance text amendments (Historic Preservation Procedures).

Purpose

Over time, City staff, the Historic Preservation Board, preservation professionals, and the development community have identified opportunities to improve the organization, clarity, and usability of Mesa's Historic Preservation regulations. These discussions emphasized the need to reduce redundancy, improve consistency, simplify regulatory language, and create a more intuitive framework for applicants, property owners, and decision-makers while continuing to protect the City's historic and archaeological resources.

The proposed text amendments reflect these efforts by consolidating related historic preservation provisions into a single Historic Preservation Overlay chapter, reorganizing regulations into a more logical format, and eliminating repetitive or outdated language. As part of this effort, similar resource types, including buildings, structures, objects, sites, archaeological resources, and districts have been consolidated under common terminology where appropriate, reducing unnecessary repetition while maintaining the intent and applicability of the regulations.

The amendments also clarify existing procedures and review standards, improve efficiency, and align the ordinance with current historic preservation best practices. Collectively, these changes will support the clear and efficient administration of the Historic Preservation regulations, enhance

communication with applicants and property owners, and ensure the City's regulations continue to effectively preserve and protect Mesa's historic resources.

Staff is recommending amendments to Mesa City Code Title 11 (Zoning Ordinance), Chapters 23, 44, 66, 74, and 87 of to reorganize and modernize the City's Historic Preservation Procedures. The proposed text amendments are attached to this report as Exhibit 1 – Chapter 74, Historic Preservation Ordinance and Exhibit 2 – Adoption by reference, Chapter 74: Historic Preservation Procedures. Specifically, the proposed text amendments, will in pertinent part:

1. Consolidate the City's Historic Preservation regulations.

2. Create consistent Historic Preservation procedures to ensure objective standards and consistent, predictable outcomes.

3. Improve the review of Historic Preservation projects.

4. Strengthen protections for Historically Designated Signs.

5. Create a new section for Archaeological Resources.

6. Provide definitions for previously undefined terms.

7. Reformat Historic Preservation Board authority and duties.

Discussion

1. **Consolidate the City's Historic Preservation regulations.**

   The City's Historic Preservation regulations are currently located in multiple chapters throughout the Mesa Zoning Ordinance (MZO), requiring applicants, property owners, staff, and the public to navigate several sections of the MZO to understand related Historic Preservation requirements. Historic District and Historic Landmark procedures are currently located in Chapter 74, Historic Preservation Overlay regulations are contained in Chapter 23, Historic Sign regulations are located in Chapter 44, and related provisions are dispersed throughout other chapters of the MZO.

   To improve usability and administration, staff proposes repealing Chapters 23, 44, and the existing Chapter 74 and replacing them with a new comprehensive Chapter 74, titled "Historic Preservation Procedures." The new chapter consolidates the City's Historic Preservation regulations into a single location, improving organization, eliminating redundancy, and creating a more cohesive framework for administering the City's Historic Preservation program.

   The consolidated chapter includes procedures for the Mesa Historic Property Register, Historic Preservation Overlay, Certificates of Appropriateness, Historically Designated Signs, Archaeological Resources, and Appeals. This reorganization simplifies navigation of the Ordinance while maintaining the overall intent of the City's Historic Preservation regulations.

2. **Improve the clarity and usability of Historic Preservation procedures.**

   The proposed amendments clarify existing procedures and review standards, streamline the organization of the regulations, and improve the overall usability of the City's Historic Preservation program. The changes are intended to make the regulations easier to understand and administer for applicants, property owners, staff, and the Historic Preservation Board.

   The amendments consolidate the existing Historic District and Historic Landmark Overlays into a single Historic Preservation Overlay, creating one zoning designation for all locally designated Historic Resources. This change simplifies administration, reduces confusion associated with multiple historic overlay classifications, and provides a more consistent regulatory framework without altering the intent of the existing regulations.

   The Mesa Historic Property Register (MHPR) section has also been revised to clearly identify all locally designated Historic Resources subject to the Historic Preservation Overlay, while the Supplemental Inventory List is proposed to include Historic Resources that have been determined eligible for the MHPR but not yet formally designated.

   To further the designation criteria for Historic Resources have been updated to align with nationally recognized historic preservation standards. Staff recommends Historic Resources be evaluated consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's framework. These revisions create a more transparent and predictable designation process.

3. **Improve the review of Historic Preservation projects.**

   The proposed amendments reorganize and clarify the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) process to improve efficiency, consistency, and ease of administration.

   The revised procedures clarify when a COA is required, identify activities that qualify as ordinary maintenance and are exempt from review, clarify application requirements, establish review timelines, and coordinate the COA process with building permit issuance. The amendments further clarify that review decisions are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines, and the MZO.

   The proposed amendments also establish an expedited review process for emergency repairs by allowing a COA to be issued concurrently with the associated building permit when immediate repairs are necessary. Additionally, the amendments strengthen the "Duty to Maintain" requirement. This provision requires designated properties to be maintained and discourages demolition through neglect.

4. **Strengthen protections for Historically Designated Signs.**

   The proposed amendments repeal the existing Historic Sign regulations contained in Chapter 44 and incorporate them into the new Chapter 74 as an updated “Historically Designated Signs” section.

   The revised section clarifies the procedures for the designation, restoration, maintenance, modification, and revocation of Historically Designated Signs. The amendments revise the Mesa Historic Sign Register with updated eligibility criteria, application and review procedures,

restoration and maintenance requirements, and procedures for future modifications and revocation of designation.

5. **Create a new section for Archaeological Resources.**

   The proposed amendments establish a new Archaeological Resources section within Chapter 74 to recognize the importance of the Mesa's archaeological past and cultural heritage.

   The new section requires that development comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws governing the protection of cultural resources. For private development, it is the responsibility of the developer to consult with the City Archaeologist, State Historic Preservation Office, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, and other qualified professionals.

   Prior to excavating on land owned or controlled by the City, the developer shall consult with the City Archaeologist who may conduct an archaeological assessment to determine whether the property contains protected cultural materials governed by applicable local, state, or federal laws and regulations.

6. **Provide definitions for previously undefined terms.**

   The proposed amendments modify Chapter 87 by adding a new category of definitions titled “Historic Preservation Related Definitions.” These terms are currently used throughout the Zoning Ordinance but have never been formally defined. All the other definitions in Chapter 87 shall remain the same. New definitions include:

   CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS: An official document issued by the City of Mesa confirming that proposed work on a Historic Resource is compatible with the historic character of the Historic Preservation Overlay. The certificate authorizes the specified work to proceed and permits the issuance of any required construction permit(s) related to the approved scope of work.

   HISTORIC DISTRICT: A collection of Historic Resources which possess a significant concentration, linkage, continuity or are united historically or aesthetically by a plan or physical development and is designated with a Historic Preservation Overlay.

   HISTORIC LANDMARK: Any Historic Resource that is an exceptional example of the historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic, or artistic heritage of the city and is designated with a Historic Preservation Overlay.

   HISTORIC PRESERVATION OVERLAY: A zoning designation that is used in conjunction with an underlying base zoning district and includes regulations for a Historic Landmark or Historic District to preserve the historical significance of Historic Resources.

   HISTORIC RESOURCE: Collectively, the building(s), structure(s), object(s), site(s), archaeological resource(s), and district(s), that together, retain historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance within the corporate limits of the city.

   HISTORICALLY DESIGNATED SIGN: A sign that meets the criteria for establishment outlined in Section 11-74-5(D) of the Zoning Ordinance and has been approved by the Historic Preservation Board.

STATE OF DISREPAIR: The deterioration of any significant exterior feature on a Historic Resource in a Historic Preservation Overlay which would have a detrimental effect on the distinctive character of the Historic Resource itself or that of the district.

7. **Reformat Historic Preservation Board authority and duties.**

   The proposed amendments revise Section 11-66-4 to reformat the organization and operation of the Historic Preservation Board. The revisions confirm that the section specifically governs the Historic Preservation Board, designates the Historic Preservation Officer (or designee) as Secretary to the Board, and clarify that a minimum of four members constitutes a quorum for conducting official business.

   These amendments are administrative in nature and improve the clarity of the Board's procedures without substantially changing the Board's existing authority or responsibilities.

Citizen Participation

Historic Preservation Board (Introduction) - August 1, 2023
Staff presented the initial draft of the proposed Historic Preservation Text Amendments to the Historic Preservation Board for discussion and public input.

Community Outreach Meeting - August 24, 2023
The public was invited to attend a community outreach meeting to review and discuss the proposed Historic Preservation Text Amendments and Historic Preservation Design Guidelines.

Staff received comments from attendees, many of which related to the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines or other related issues rather than the proposed text amendments.

Historic Preservation Board – September 5, 2023
The Historic Preservation Board gave a recommendation of approval to the City Council with the following changes: 1) Define State of Disrepair; 2) Remove “Historic District” language from 11-74-4(F) 1; 3) Add to the code related to Stay of Demolition, on the time frame “if parties agree to extend;” 4) Stay of Demolition for 1 year based on the importance of neighborhoods and history for existing Historic Districts and 180 days for the supplemental list.

While staff continued to edit the document based on Board feedback, it was ultimately never sent to the Planning & Zoning Board for their review and recommendation to City Council.

Historic Preservation Board (Introduction) - July 7, 2026
Staff presented a revised draft of the Historic Preservation Text Amendments to the Historic Preservation Board for review and public comment.

Discussion focused primarily on the administration of the Supplemental Inventory List, archaeological resource provisions, and coordination with preservation partners, including the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Mesa Preservation Foundation.

The Board's comments and recommendations were considered and incorporated, as appropriate, into the proposed Historic Preservation Procedures text amendments.

Community Outreach Meeting - July 21, 2026

A second community outreach meeting was held to present the revised Historic Preservation Ordinance Text Amendments and Historic Preservation Design Guidelines. The general assessment of the amendments by the attendees was positive. There was appreciation that the code amendments were mostly focused on clarification and reorganization rather than adding additional content. There was a question about where the extended delay for demolitions came from – which was the Historic Preservation Board and SHPO along with some neighbors – and how the extended time would allow for more alternative options – which would be in coordination with the HPB. Overall, the neighbors seemed pleased with the amendments and there was no opposition to the proposed changes.

Planning & Zoning Board (Study Session) - July 22, 2026

Staff presented the proposed text amendments at the July 22, 2026, Planning & Zoning Board Study Session. There was a question about the extended demolition procedure and how that was proposed, to which staff responded it was a request from the Historic Preservation Board and members of the public.

One member of the public attended and did not provide comments on the proposed text amendments. Board comments and questions have been addressed by staff.

Additional Outreach and Coordination

In addition to these public meetings, staff consulted with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), Gila River Indian Community THPO, and the Mesa Preservation Foundation during the development of the proposed text amendments.

Information regarding the proposed text amendments has also been made available on the City's website to provide additional opportunities for public review and comment. No comments have been received by staff.

Implementation

Staff recommends the ordinance approving the proposed text amendments become effective 30 days from the date of City Council approval.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Chapter 74: Historic Preservation Procedures Text Amendments (Draft)
Exhibit 2 – Historic Preservation Ordinance (Draft)