Historic Preservation Board Report

Date: September 01, 2026

To: Historic Preservation Board

Through: Marc Heirshberg, Assistant City Manager

From: Nana Appiah, Development Services Director
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Subject: Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines **(Citywide)**

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Board provides a recommendation that the City Council adopt the Updated Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines with the additional Mesa historical context and Heritage Neighborhood language that will be added to Chapter 7 and Appendix E.

Purpose

In 1996, the City published *Historic Homes of Mesa: An Architectural and Preservation Guide* to provide guidance for the preservation, rehabilitation, and maintenance of historic properties. The guide was updated in 2001 and has since served as a valuable resource for property owners, design professionals, City staff, and the Historic Preservation Board. Since that time, however, Mesa's Historic Preservation Program has grown substantially. When the guide was updated in 2001, Mesa had four locally designated historic districts. Today, the city is home to eight locally designated historic districts, numerous historic landmarks, and a broader range of historic resources requiring thoughtful stewardship.

As Mesa's historic preservation program has evolved, City staff, the Historic Preservation Board, preservation professionals, property owners, and the development community identified opportunities to update the guide to improve its organization, clarity, usability, accessibility, and content to reflect current historic preservation practices and the full breadth of Mesa's historic resources.

The proposed Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines ("Updated Guidelines") were developed in conjunction with, and are intended to complement, the proposed historic preservation text amendments to the MZO. The Updated Guidelines provide practical, user-friendly guidance for property owners, architects, contractors, designers, City staff, and the Historic Preservation Board by organizing information around common project types and providing a consistent framework for evaluating preservation projects.

The Updated Guidelines also modernize the document by transitioning from a scanned hard-copy publication to a searchable digital document featuring keyword searches, internal navigation, hyperlinks, and updated photography. These improvements significantly enhance accessibility while making the document easier to use during project planning and review.

Together, the proposed historic preservation text amendments to the MZO and the Updated Guidelines modernize Mesa's Historic Preservation Program by improving clarity, organization, and usability of its preservation standards and guidance while continuing to promote the preservation of historic resources, compatible new construction, and high-quality design that respects the character and integrity of the city's historic districts and landmarks.

Summary of the Design Guidelines

The Updated Guidelines are organized into seven chapters and five appendices that together provide comprehensive guidance for preservation planning and project review, as further described below. Specifically, the Updated Guidelines:

1. Introduce the purpose, organization, and use of the Design Guidelines.
2. Clarify the Certificate of Appropriateness review process.
3. Provide guidance for preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic resources.
4. Establish design guidance for additions to historic buildings.
5. Provide compatibility guidance for new construction within historic districts.
6. Establish guidance for historic signage.
7. Document Mesa's historic and architectural context.
8. Include appendices containing information on the City's preservation program, review standards, character-defining features, historic context, and details on Mesa's Heritage Neighborhoods.

Chapter 1: Introduce the purpose, organization, and use of the Design Guidelines.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines, including their purpose, intended users, relationship to the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and guidance on how the document should be used throughout the planning and design process. The chapter is intended to help applicants understand both the preservation review process and the role the Guidelines play in evaluating proposed projects.

Chapter 2: Certificate of Appropriateness review process.

Chapter 2 explains the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) process by identifying when a COA is required, when work is exempt from review, and how applications are processed. The chapter further explains that COAs apply only to locally designated historic resources listed on the Mesa Historic Property Register and historically designated signs and also introduces the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation*, which serve as the foundation for

preservation decisions in Mesa. Presenting this information in one location improves provides applicants with a clearer understanding of the review process.

Chapter 3: Preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic resources.

Chapter 3 serves as the primary design guidance chapter for work involving existing historic buildings. The chapter emphasizes preservation best practices, including repairing rather than replacing historic materials whenever feasible, and guidance for common building components such as windows, doors, roofs, porches, paint, landscaping, and other character-defining features.

Rather than prescribing a single design solution, the chapter provides practical recommendations that help preserve the historic character and integrity of Mesa's historic resources.

Chapter 4: Design guidance for additions to historic buildings.

Chapter 4 provides guidance for additions to historic buildings with an emphasis on compatibility and preservation of the original structure. The chapter addresses the placement, size, scale, massing, materials, and design of additions while encouraging contemporary design that remains subordinate to the historic building and preserves its character-defining features.

Chapter 5: Compatibility guidance for new construction within historic districts.

Chapter 5 provides guidance for new construction within Mesa's historic districts. The emphasis is on compatibility rather than replication, recognizing that new buildings should respect the surrounding historic context through appropriate scale, massing, setbacks, materials, and overall design without requiring imitation of historic architectural styles. The chapter also provides guidance for accessory buildings, accessory dwelling units, fencing, walls, mechanical equipment, and solar systems.

Chapter 6: Historic signage.

Chapter 6 provides guidance for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic signage as well as the installation of new signage on historic buildings. The chapter addresses methods for preserving existing historic signs while providing recommendations for compatible new signage that supports business visibility and contributes to the historic character of commercial districts and individual landmarks.

Chapter 7: Mesa's Historic & Architectural Context.

Chapter 7 serves as a visual reference identifying the common residential building types and architectural styles found throughout Mesa. The chapter includes photographs and descriptions of locally designated historic resources to help property owners, applicants, and the public better understand the architectural characteristics that contribute to the significance of Mesa's historic districts and landmarks.

The Updated Guidelines include five appendices that supplement the guidance contained throughout the document.

Appendix A – The City of Mesa Historic Preservation Program

Provides an overview of Mesa's Historic Preservation Program, including the City's preservation tools, historic districts, historic landmarks, Heritage Neighborhood Recognition Program, and the importance of historic preservation within the community.

Appendix B – Certificate of Appropriateness Review Standards

Includes the review standards used during the Certificate of Appropriateness review process, providing applicants with a transparent understanding of how preservation projects are evaluated.

Appendix C – Character-Defining Features

Introduces one of the most significant additions to the Updated Guidelines by identifying and explaining character-defining features commonly found on historic properties. Understanding these features helps property owners make informed decisions that preserve the historic significance of their buildings while accommodating appropriate improvements.

Appendix D – Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks

Provides additional historic context for Mesa's locally designated historic districts and historic landmarks, including descriptions of their historical significance, architectural characteristics, and defining features.

Appendix E – Heritage Neighborhoods

Provides an overview of Mesa's Heritage Neighborhood Recognition Program and summarizes the history and significance of the City's designated Heritage Neighborhoods. The appendix distinguishes Heritage Neighborhood recognition from local historic district designation while highlighting the important role these neighborhoods play in preserving Mesa's community history.

Citizen Participation

Preservation Historic Preservation Board (Introduction) - August 1, 2023

Staff presented an initial draft of the proposed updated Historic Preservation Design Guidelines 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 Design Guidelines or other related issues rather than the proposed text amendments. These comments included: consistency in references, the need for additional cultural context, the inclusion of the Heritage Neighborhoods, more about Midcentury Modern architectural style, and informational about materials.

Staff has since addressed these comments and incorporated them into the document.

Historic Preservation Board – September 5, 2023

Staff presented the draft Historic Preservation Design Guidelines to the Board. The Board had several questions regarding their purpose and intention. There were questions about historic events versus historic structures, and that the history and historic events are considered at time of designation, so those events are already captured. There were also questions about what the focus of the Design Guidelines are, which staff clarified as locally designated landmarks or properties withing districts, although all historic property owners are encouraged to use the guidelines. The Board ultimately voted to continue the item to the October 3 meeting so that the Board could communicate with staff and brig specific ideas to the next meeting.

Historic Preservation Board – October 3, 2023

During a presentation by staff, it was discussed that it would be difficult to see the final document because it was planned to go to City Council on November 6, and the Historic Preservation Board would not meet again until after that date. Staff was hoping to get the Board's recommendation to move forward based on the changes presented. The Board members felt the staff did a great job and recommended it move forward to Council with the changes that were presented. It was mentioned that these guidelines that may be adjusted later and worked through as things continue to evolve. The Board voted to recommend approval of the Design Guidelines to the City Council.

Historic Preservation Board – November 1, 2023

Staff presented the proposed Historic Preservation Design Guidelines to the Planning & Zoning Board and recommended that the item be continued to a date uncertain. It was approved by the Planning & Zoning Board to continue the item.

Historic Preservation Board (Introduction) - May 5, 2026

Staff presented the draft Historic Preservation Design Guidelines to the Historic Preservation Board for review and public comment.

The Board provided extensive comments regarding the organization, clarity, and usability of the document, with discussion focusing on simplifying technical language, improving guidance for property owners, expanding references to historic landmarks and districts, incorporating additional historic context, clarifying preservation guidance for windows, fences, mechanical equipment, and signage, and including references to the original 2001 Design Guidelines and other supporting resources. Board members also suggested additional photographs, captions, architectural terminology, and information related to archaeology and historic preservation incentives.

Overall, the Board expressed strong support for the document and noted that, with the recommended revisions, it would serve as a valuable educational resource and improve the preservation review process.

Staff incorporated the Board's comments and recommendations into subsequent revisions of the proposed design guidelines.

Historic Preservation Board (Study Session) - July 7, 2026

Following revisions to the draft Historic Preservation Design Guidelines, staff presented the Updated Guidelines to the Historic Preservation Board for additional review and public comment

One member of the public was in attendance and discussed the current guidelines being incorporated into the revised guidelines.

Board discussion focused on the purpose of the update, coordination with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and other stakeholders, the community outreach process, clarification of historic landmarks and character-defining features, building code considerations, and opportunities to further improve the document's accessibility and educational value. The Board also expressed that the design guidelines would have benefited many previous preservation projects by providing clearer expectations for applicants and encouraging voluntary compliance.

Community Outreach Meeting - July 21, 2026

A second community outreach meeting was held to present the revised historic preservation text amendments and the Updated Guidelines.

The general assessment of the document by the attendees was positive. Questions about how to use the document, additions, and new construction were raised. Specific project questions regarding materials, roofs, and windows were also discussed. Other comments simply complimented the organization and simplification of the document. There was no opposition to the changes.

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

Staff presented the proposed updated Historic Preservation Design Guidelines at a Planning & Zoning Board study session. The response from the Board was positive overall, with a question about THPO coordination. Although these were informally presented to the THPOs, staff will reach out for more formal comments from the THPOs.

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

Additional Outreach and Coordination

In addition to these public meetings, staff coordinated extensively with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Mesa Preservation Foundation throughout the development of the proposed design guidelines.

Staff is also currently coordinating with the SRPMIC THPO and the GRIC THPO regarding Mesa’s cultural setting and historic development context and the Heritage Neighborhoods.

Information regarding the proposed Updated Guidelines have also been made available on the City's website to provide additional opportunities for public review and comment.

Implementation

Staff recommends the resolution adopting the proposed Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines (Updated Guidelines) become effective 30 days from the date of City Council approval.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Mesa Historic Preservation Design Guidelines (Updated Guidelines)