

REGULAR MEETING OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMISSION OF THE TOWN OF FLORENCE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2025, AT 6:00 PM, IN THE TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, LOCATED AT 775 N. MAIN STREET, FLORENCE, ARIZONA.

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Knight called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm

ROLL CALL:

Present: Knight, Olgin, Reid, Sullivan, Cathemer, West, and Butterworth

Absent: None

Council Liaison Neal Was Present

Staff Present: Andrew Birkelbach and Maricella Benitez

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

CALL TO THE PUBLIC/COMMISSION RESPONSE:

Call to the Public for public comment on issues within the jurisdiction of the Historic District Advisory Commission. Individual Commission members may respond to criticisms made, may ask staff to review a matter raised or may ask that a matter be put on a future agenda. However, members of the Commission shall not discuss or take action on any matter during an open call to the public unless the matters are properly noticed for discussion and legal action.

Chair Knight opened the call to the public. Seeing nobody wishing to speak, she closed the call to the public.

DISCUSSION/APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL of the meeting minutes for the regular meeting conducted on February 26, 2024.

The minutes mentioned the Planning and Zoning Commission in the Call to the Public section. This error was amended to say, "Historic District Advisory Commission." No other changes were suggested.

On motion by Commissioner Sullivan, seconded by Commissioner Reid, and carried 7-0, to approve as amended the regular meeting minutes of February 26, 2025.

NEW BUSINESS:

- A. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION** of the Design Review process for historic properties within the Town of Florence Historic District.

Maricella Benitez, Senior Planner, began by outlining the fundamental structure of the Commission, highlighting that it is composed of seven council-appointed members, including at least two who must own historic properties and two who may reside outside the jurisdiction. The Commission's primary responsibility is to review all building and demolition permit applications for properties located within the historic district. This includes any proposed modifications, additions, or new constructions that could affect the integrity and character of historic properties. These reviews must occur within a thirty-day window, which can sometimes necessitate special meetings to ensure compliance with the timeline and prevent automatic favorable outcomes due to missed deadlines.

Once an application is submitted, staff will review for compliance with the Development Code and the Historic Design Guidelines. Staff then prepares a report for the commission, which evaluates the proposal during public meetings. The commission can approve the application, approve it with conditions, or deny it. If denied, the applicant has the option to appeal to the Town Council. Applications that are approved by the Commission proceed through the standard building permit review process, involving additional staff departments like fire and building safety. Ideally, all required documentation and departmental feedback are gathered before the application reaches the Commission.

Ms. Benitez elaborated on the scope of the historic district, noting that it encompasses over 200 historic buildings within the designated boundary. While properties outside the district can also be historic, Commission involvement there is advisory rather than regulatory, and owners are warned that altering such properties may strip them of their historic designation and related benefits. The review process is divided between formal commission reviews and administrative reviews by staff. Administrative reviews apply to minor work that doesn't require a building permit, like repairs or signage updates, and to emergency repairs or demolitions intended to protect public health and safety.

Commission members are reminded to evaluate applications based on design and contextual criteria found in the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines and the Town Code. For example, when reviewing the replacement of an awning, the material, shape, and alignment with adjacent structures are all considered to maintain visual continuity and historical character.

An example was provided to help illustrate how Commissioners should evaluate submissions. The case involved a previously proposed restaurant and entertainment venue called the Old Florence Tap House on Main Street. The site is currently vacant, and the proposed construction included new architectural features such as brick facades, swinging doors, hanging lights, and awnings—all designed to evoke and complement the historic downtown aesthetic.

While reviewing the site plan and elevations, commissioners raised practical questions about ADA compliance, parking, trash placement, and visual consistency. These questions led to a broader discussion about the importance of detailed visual and narrative submissions in helping the commission properly evaluate how well a project aligns with the design guidelines.

It was also emphasized that while the guidelines are comprehensive, they use "should" rather than "shall," which gives the Commission some flexibility to interpret and adapt guidelines to the

unique circumstances of a project. However, all applications must strictly comply with the Town's Development Code.

The proposal appeared to be an extension of the neighboring Ponderosa building, but Ms. Benitez clarified that it was a separate structure. Attaching a new building to an old one is permissible, but it requires an agreement between property owners due to zero lot lines in the area. Commissioners raised questions about how such a connection would work in practice and sought clarity on the proposal's layout.

Design considerations centered around historic compatibility, particularly in terms of space usage, egress, and entertainment-related planning. The proposal includes architectural elements that aim to blend new construction with the surrounding historic character, similar to previous developments like the nearby Circle K and a local bank on Main Street. The bank was highlighted as an example of successful collaboration between developers and the commission to create a new building that matched the existing aesthetic without mimicking it.

Some concerns were raised about certain design elements, including the use of garage doors. While these doors are typically discouraged in other historic districts due to their association with auto service businesses, there are no specific prohibitions in the Town's Development Code. Commissioners noted that the garage doors would need to meet building and fire code requirements, particularly regarding safety glass. There was also a conversation about the proposed building's height, with questions about whether it would be significantly taller than its neighbors. Some commissioners expressed confusion about the structure's exact relationship to the Ponderosa building.

The Commissioners asked about the parking requirements. Parking is not required in the Downtown Commercial zone. Commissioners noted that the design places entertainment uses away from Main Street, utilizing surrounding buildings to buffer noise while maintaining a welcoming layout. This was seen as an effective way to address both functionality and community impact.

A notable concern was the placement of the trash receptacle. Positioned too close to the kitchen area, the trash setup raised potential issues with odor and grease traps. The adjacent sidewalk might also be damaged by trash collection vehicles, affecting pedestrian access. Commissioners were encouraged to look for these kinds of logistical issues in future submittals.

Guidance for evaluating such proposals can be found in specific sections of the Town's Design Guidelines. Page 5-1 outlines criteria for commercial infill, including zoning, setbacks, fencing materials, and roof types. For signage, page 6-1 offers rules on lettering, colors, and placement. In this proposal, some font styles might not meet the preferred legibility standards.

Historic markers were also briefly discussed. Though initially placed by the town, these markers become the property of the building owners. Owners are allowed to remove or relocate them as long as they remain visible and ideally stay on the property or building.

Vice-Chair Olgin inquired about the vintage iron carriage proposed for installation near the wall of the building. This feature was supported by the Commission, with a recommendation to fence it off to prevent people from trying to climb it. Unfortunately, although the project was approved, it fell through and has not returned for further review. The proposal served as a good example of how the Commission might handle future proposals within the historic district. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the presentation, noting that it helped refocus their understanding of the design review process and their role within it.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

A. Training with SHPO update

Representatives from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) will attend the next commission meeting on April 30th. They will present information about the Residential State Property Tax (SPT) program and the Historic Tax Credit program. This upcoming session will be open to the public to encourage broader community learning and engagement.

B. Historic Preservation Conference 2025

The group discussed attendance at the upcoming historic preservation conference. While some members expressed interest, others deferred to newer participants, encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunity. One member mentioned a scheduling conflict due to school events but hoped to receive materials or attend virtually if possible. It was noted that virtual participation may not be available, though presentation materials might be shared after the event. The conference is scheduled for May 14–17, and registration is now open. Participants were asked to confirm their attendance and duration by emailing Ms. Benitez. There is limited funding available, so not everyone may be able to attend. The Commission emphasized the importance of encouraging new members, Council members, and Town staff to attend, as the experience provides valuable perspective. Final decisions are pending, and Ms. Benitez will coordinate details.

C. Upcoming Projects

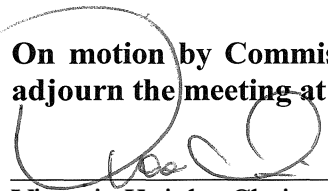
Upcoming projects include continued work on the facades at 220 and 230 N. Main Street, a possible demolition permit for the Station Coffee House to remove a deteriorating metal awning in the rear, while keeping the remaining structure intact. Additionally, some new sign permits may be reviewed soon.

CALL TO THE COMMISSION-CURRENT EVENTS ONLY:

During the Commission's event updates, it was noted that there has been no recent word on the canal marker. The bronze company received the notice to proceed about a month ago, and staff plans to follow up with them. The order was placed. The meeting concluded with appreciation for upcoming work and anticipation for the SHPO presentation at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

On motion by Commissioner West, seconded by Commissioner Reid, and carried 7-0, to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 pm.


Victoria Knight, Chair


Date 4/30/25