

## Selected Events in the History of Historic Preservation in Boulder City

Committee member Davenport has compiled a list of ordinances, plans and resolutions that have been taken by the City Council and others over the past 37 years regarding historic preservation. This list is included in the meeting packet. There are 25 different actions listed and, with the exception of the 2000 Chapter 11-27 which was repealed in 2005, none of these actions have mandated that the Historic Preservation Committee must approve any modifications to historic buildings or construction of new buildings within the Boulder City Historic District.

Hopefully this is about to change and I thought it might be useful to sort of set the stage by reviewing some of the significant events that have influenced historic preservation efforts in the past.

### 1982

On May 25, 1982, the City Council authorized city staff to make application for a grant to have a survey completed that would catalog the city's historic buildings. The goal of the survey was to establish an historic district within the city and have it nominated for listing to the National Register of Historic Places. The impetus for this effort originated from the citizens of the city and was supported by a petition with 1140 signatures in favor of the survey and was endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce and the Boulder City Historical Association.

On August 24, 1982 the City Council approved entering into a "funding agreement with the State to pay the consultant, Janus & Associates, for the City's historic resources survey..." Local donations of \$4,333 provided 30% of the funds to pay Janus and 70% was funded by the State. The City contributed nothing. The Janus report was completed and on June 11, 1983 the City Council accepted it.

Janus & Associates identified 514 buildings or structures within what they defined as the boundaries of the Boulder City Historic District. Of the 514 buildings 247 were classified as having original architectural integrity and were, therefore, classified as contributing to the overall character of the District; one hundred seventy-six (176) were judged to have modifications that were reversible and were also classified as contributing; sixty-eight (68) were considered to have irretrievable modifications and were therefore classified as noncontributing. So, in 1983, 82% of the buildings included in Boulder City's Historic District were classified by the Janus group as contributing to the architectural integrity of the District.

### 1983

In July of 1983 the Janus Report was submitted to the National Park Service and on August 19, 1983 the Boulder City Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Apparently, not much thought was given to the preservation of these properties because it wasn't until the 1990s that any serious effort was made by the City to address the need for preserving historic buildings within the Historic District.

### 1990

In September of 1990 the City Council received a report prepared by UNLV's Center for Business and Economic Research detailing the results of a study designed to gather opinions from the residents of the city concerning "attributes of the city". Two thousand (2,000) questionnaires were mailed and 505 responses were returned. Although historic preservation was not specifically listed as an "attribute," the number one desirable attribute was the "appearance" of the city.

### 1991

In June of 1991 the Community Development Department of Boulder City published the 1991 Boulder City Master Plan. "The goals contained in this Master Plan were, in part, derived from certain stated *Community Values* from the 1990 community survey by UNLV's Center for Business and Economic Research." Goal number 2 of this Plan was to "consider the historic, cultural, and aesthetic, relationships in the planning of the community." Included under this goal were:

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- OBJECTIVE 2.2 Encourage public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect the City's historic and archeological resources.
  - POLICY 2.2.1 Support the development of a historical preservation plan and ordinance.
  - POLICY 2.2.2 Encourage retention, *preservation* [highlight in original] and re-use of buildings of historic value.

### 1996

In February of 1996 the City Council created a Historic District Preservation Plan Study Committee with the passage of Resolution No. 2681. It is worth noting that this committee, over a period of nearly 24 months met in regular session 33 times, held 4 special meetings, 2 committee workshops, 6 community workshops and conducted other activities such as Cable TV programs, Outreach efforts, Surveys, door-to-door campaigns and in-home meetings. During its existence, 19 individuals served on the committee.

### 1998

In April of 1998 the Plan Study Committee published a Historic District Preservation Plan Summary Report. The stated "...purpose of this report is to provide a bridge between the goals that were set in 1991 and ordinances that will be produced at a later date." This report presented detailed recommendations for a program of historic preservation that included, among many others:

- study applying for Certified Local Government status,
- passage of an Historic District Preservation Ordinance which would include a Cultural Resources Committee
- empowerment of the Cultural Resource Committee (CRC) "to Review construction, conditional use, variance or demolition permit requests prior to submission to City officials..."
- issue Certificates of Appropriateness.

On May 20, 1998, by passage of Planning Commission Resolution No. 793, the Planning Commission accepted the Historic District Preservation Plan Summary Report and recommended that the City Council "direct staff to draft ordinance regulations" implementing the recommendations.

### 1998-99

The City contracted Mrs. Kris Darnell, a "historic consultant" who created a draft ordinance based on the work of the Preservation Plan Study Committee, public input and "comments from local and State officials. This draft ordinance was considered by the Planning Commission on March 3, 1999 and the City Council on September 20, 1999.

### 2000

On February 22, 2000 the City Council approved Bill No. 1231 which created Ordinance No. 1103 and established a new Chapter 11-27 of the Boulder City Code. This new code was essentially the ordinance drafted by Mrs. Darnell.

It is worth noting that during the discussion of this Bill "Mayor Ferraro said the City has been able to maintain its identity because of its historical heritage, and this identity is extremely valuable. If the City does not maintain its historical value and recognize what it has, then all will be lost. This is our treasure, and it must be protected."

The Historic Preservation code that was adopted in 2000 would most likely have insured that historic buildings in the Historic District would maintain their architectural integrity into the future.

In November of 2000 the City adopted a new Strategic Plan. Goal No. 5 of this plan was titled Small Town Character and History. The Goal contained a number of Strategic Objectives; among them was No. 2: Ensure that future development within the City adheres to a design promoting the image of a small town; and, No. 4: Public and private entities within the community should maintain and expand their efforts to protect the historical and architectural resources in the community.

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### 2003

On December 3, 2003, the Boulder City Planning Commission adopted MPA-03-017 (An Entirely New Master Plan); on December 9, 2003, the City Council adopted the same Plan. (This plan was revised in 2015). Chapter 11 of this Plan was titled: Historic Preservation, and it contained several Policies. Among them was HP 1: Protect Historic Resources, which called for “encouraging the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, providing improvement assistance to property owners”; and “taking the necessary steps to appoint a Cultural Resources Commission” and “the city should also consider the establishment of guidelines for historic properties to address exterior alterations of contributing properties and all new construction within the existing Historic District and any future historic overlays.”

There were several other Policies that detailed specific actions that could be taken to promote historic preservation but I think you should be getting the sense of Deja Vu by now. There’s more to come.

### 2005

On January 23, 2005, during their regularly scheduled meeting, City Council held a discussion regarding the Historic Preservation Code. It was noted in the packet material that “...for unknown reasons, the City did not create the Cultural Resource Commission...nor any of the other provisions of the ordinance. To date [January 2005], the Community Development Department has not actively proceeded to implement the provisions of this ordinance.”

At the January 23rd meeting the Council unanimously approved Bill No. 1395 which repealed ordinance 1103 and thereby deleted the Boulder City Historic Preservation code.

### 2006

Boulder City was without an Historic Preservation code until July 19, 2006 when a new Chapter 11-27 was created by the City Council when it approved Bill No. 1464 on June 27, 2006.

Bill No. 1464 was passed over strong objections from various sources because it was felt by many that the ordinance did not provide any protection to historic structures other than appealing to owners to maintain the historic character of their properties. City Manager Vikki G. Mayes stated “...from a City staff viewpoint, the historic district was seen as a huge asset and was very valuable to Boulder City. She said the proposed ordinance could not fix 30 years of ineffective preservation efforts.”

On September 19, 2006 the newly created Boulder City Historic Preservation Committee held its first meeting.

### 2009-2011

Beginning in April of 2009 and continuing through August of 2011, the Historic Preservation Committee developed, and the City Council adopted, guidelines for preserving features of historic buildings within the Historic District. In the cover sheet for each of these guidelines it was stressed that none of the guidelines were mandatory. In some instances, issuance of a building permit might be delayed but noncompliance with any of the guidelines would not result in the refusal of a building permit.

### 2010

In 2010 a Strategic Plan titled Envision 2020 was adopted (it was modified in 2012). One of the goals stated in this plan was titled “Brand and Image” defined in part as valuing “our small town character and history.” The action steps defined to accomplish this goal included: Amending the Master Plan to “emphasize retention of historic elements of the community”; amending zoning ordinances to “include guidance or regulations to protect historic elements of the community”; amending zoning ordinances to “incorporate design standards for new development” that “includes building facade appearance, parking lot appearance and layout, landscaping, lighting, desired design elements, etc.” None of these action steps were completed.

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### 2015

A proposal to demolish the historic Boulder City Hospital was submitted to the Historic Preservation Committee on June 24, 2015. During the meeting it was noted that “there were no regulations that would prohibit the demolition of a building within the historic district absent the use of federal funds or permits...the City’s ordinance does not prohibit demolition, but does require that the City document the structure and allow for recommendation by the Historic Preservation Committee, but that recommendation cannot prohibit demolition.”

The hospital was eventually demolished but the negative reaction to the demolition by many members of the community resulted in a movement to strengthen the historic preservation ordinances. The demolition of the hospital highlighted the fact that the City’s historic preservation codes had no ability to prevent a property owner from doing whatever they wanted to an historic building. Without some mandatory guidelines regarding maintaining the historic character of properties within the Historic District it became obvious that the City could ultimately lose much of its historic character.

### 2018

During the spring and summer of 2018 a survey designed by the Historic Preservation Committee was conducted to assess the opinions of the citizens of Boulder City regarding historic preservation. The survey contained 20 statements and the respondents were asked to rate each statement as either agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

Eight hundred sixty-six residents responded. Over 90 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “Residents of Boulder City value the distinct historic character, heritage, and identity their community provides that sets it apart from other communities in the region.” All of the statements relating to the value of historic preservation except one received responses of agree or strongly agree of near or above 80 percent.

The only negative response was to the statement: “City government is doing a good job in balancing historic preservation goals with other development related goals.” Only 29 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

### 2019

In February of 2019 a new Strategic Plan, 2020 to 2025, was adopted. Goal D of that Plan was: Promote Historic Preservation. Several “strategies” were developed to accomplish that goal. Among them was Strategy No. 2: Develop an Historic Preservation Plan and Strategy No. 4: Amend existing codes to achieve historic preservation goals. This plan is currently in effect and is being implemented.

On July 9, 2019, City Council adopted Resolution No. 6963 approving an agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for Certified Local Government (CLG) designation.

In order to maintain CLG status the City agreed to a number of conditions. Among them is a requirement “to pass and implement a local ordinance consistent with 36 CFR 61.6, Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) Chapters 278, 383 and 384, and other applicable federal and state regulations and guidelines pertaining to historic preservation, and as clarified in the Handbook.” Additionally, the City is “to maintain an adequate and qualified historic preservation commission established by State and local law as required in the Handbook.”

### 2020

The Nevada Preservation Foundation was contracted by the City to “help the community develop” a Historic Preservation Plan, and in March they held the first of what was to be a series of community meetings to collect public input for the Plan. Covid-19 has interrupted that process.

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On August 26, 2020, NorthWind Resource Consulting, who had been contracted by the City to update the Janus Associates 1983 survey of properties in the Boulder City Historic District, reported that of the 515 buildings inventoried, 295 (57%) were classified as being non-contributing to the historic character of the Boulder City Historic District. This report is currently being evaluated by SHPO and will be finalized after their review.

On October 13, 2020, the City Council approved Resolution 7167 which established the Historic Preservation Ordinance Ad Hoc Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to evaluate possible changes to the City Code, Title 11. On October 27, 2020 the Council appointed four members to the Committee. Their first meeting is being held tonight.

So, this not so brief history of Historic Preservation should point out the fact that the City's record regarding preservation of the City's historic character is a pretty dismal one. I sincerely hope that the actions of this Committee and the present City Council going forward will create an Historic Preservation code that will arrest the degradation of historic buildings within the District. Creation of a defensible and acceptable code will not be easy but the rewards for doing so will be great.