City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: **HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL** **DATE: MAY 6, 2025**

FROM: **COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT** **WARD: ALL**

SUBJECT: **REVISION OF THE CITY'S HISTORIC DISTRICT SIGN PROGRAM, ALLOCATION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST FUND FOR PROJECTS, AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND COMMITTEE**

ISSUE:

Approval of the revised Historic District Sign Program and allocation of funding from the Historic Preservation Trust Fund for the Historic District and Spanish Town Road sign programs, Landmark Plaques program, and a Historic District survey. Direction to dissolve the Historic Preservation Fund Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Approve the revised Historic District Sign Program as discussed in the staff report;

2. With at least five affirmative votes, authorize the Chief Financial Officer, or designee, to record a supplemental appropriation in the amount of $135,292 in the Grants & Restricted Programs Fund, Historical District Sign Program expenditure account, offset by funds to be transferred from the Interest Bearing Special Deposits Fund, Historical Preservation Trust, for the purposes of the Historic District and Spanish Town Road sign programs, Landmark Plaques program, and to complete a historic district survey; and

3. Approve the preparation of Title 20 code text amendment and ordinance to remove Section 20.30.030 (Historic Preservation Fund) from the Riverside Municipal Code by staff.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

Section 20.30.030 of Title 20 of the Riverside Municipal Code, establishes the Historic Preservation Fund as:

A. A Historic Preservation Fund Program is hereby established to provide funding for the conservation, preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of cultural resources consistent with the purposes of this chapter.

B. The Historic Preservation Fund is hereby established to provide funds for Historic

Preservation projects within the City of Riverside.

1. The funds shall be used solely for the conservation, preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historical resources as provided in this section.

2. The Financial Administrator of the Historic Preservation Fund shall be the Community & Economic Development Director, or designee.

3. All monies designated by the City of Riverside for this program shall be deposited in the fund, held and administered by the City's Finance Department. Separate accounts may be established within the fund according to origin or intended purpose.

4. In addition to any public moneys appropriated expressly for the fund, the Program Administrator may apply for grants, gifts, donations, or other financial support, from private sources, pursuant to City policies.

Authorized projects are listed in Section 20.30.030(D), as follows:

D. *Authorized projects*. Grants are available for the following types of projects:

1. *Development projects*. These are projects that involve the preservation, restoration, or exterior rehabilitation of a historic property.

2. Acquisition of transferrable development rights (TDRs), conservation easements, and façade easements for the purposes of historic preservation.

3. *Planning projects*. These are projects that identify, document and record historic resources according to applicable local, state and federal standards, and/or contribute to the development of the City's historic context, and/or contribute to the development of a conservation or preservation plan.

4. *Interpretive projects*. These are projects that create interpretive media to educate the public on Riverside's history and/or cultural resources. For example, landmark plaques and/or Historic District signage and other appropriate means of sharing interpretive information.

5. *Designation applications*. These are projects that prepare designation applications for state and/or national register designation.

6. All funds must be spent as represented in the application. Spending funds except as authorized shall be considered fraud or theft and may be criminally prosecuted.

Section 20.30.030(G) grants City Council the authority to grant funds and modify the Historic Preservation Fund as follows:

G. The City Council shall have the power to review, modify, approve, disapprove, or otherwise consider all program and Committee actions or decisions, by appeal or on its own motion.

BACKGROUND:

Historic District Sign Program

On March 18, 1997, the City Council approved a citywide Community and Historic District Sign Program to identify City’s Historic District. Signs were installed within the public right-of-way on

streets within each district to mark the boundary of the district. Over time, some signs have gone missing or deteriorated beyond recognition.

Concerns have been raised over the years regarding the perceived lack of awareness of historic district properties. One potential solution to address this issue is updating the Historic District Sign Program to increase signage throughout the districts, rather than only marking the boundaries which can easily be missed.

Historic Preservation Trust Fund

In April 2013, the City Council established the Historic Preservation Trust Fund Program (HPTF) and the Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC) by amending Title 20 (Cultural Resources) of the Riverside Municipal Code. The HPTF was initially funded with $500,000 from the General Fund and later $100,000 from the sale of the former Marcy Library property and $70,000 from the sale of the Farm House Motel were added.

Since the first grant cycle April 13, 2015, 45 projects have been approved in four bi-annual grant cycles. Thirty-three projects were for rehabilitating residential structures, including 31 historic single-family residences and two historic multi-family apartment building. One project was for rehabilitating a historic commercial building. These types of projects generally included roof replacements, repainting of buildings, electrical systems repair or replacement, repairs related to exterior siding and stucco, historic windows, porches, foundation stabilization, rain gutter installation or repair, and plumbing.

Other recipients of HPTF grants include the Riverside Art Museum, the Riverside Metropolitan Museum, the City's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department and the City's Public Works Department. Projects have included Wood Streets monument signs, concrete pergolas on Mission Inn Avenue, historic public street features, historic waterfall, historic windows, foundation stabilization, and production of 1,000 Landmark Legacy books.

In April 2018, the HPFC began exploring ways to make the Program more sustainable. Following the update to the Governmental Affairs Committee in May 2018, staff was directed to identify potential sources of funding for the HPTF and ways to administer the Program.

On July 16, 2019, staff presented a report to the City Council outlining potential funding sources for the HPTF. The recommendations to City Council included:

1. General Fund Allocation
2. Historic Site Code Enforcement Fines
3. Percentage of Sales of Historic Properties
4. Donations/Sponsorships/Grants
5. Fundraising & Crowd Sourcing
6. Mitigation Banking

City Council provided direction as follows:

- General Fund could not be considered as potential funding source.
- Historic Site Code Enforcement Fines and a Percentage of Sales of Historic Properties could be used as a funding source on a case-by-case basis.
- Grants and Fundraising could be used as a funding source if undertaken by nonprofit organizations on behalf of the City.
- Mitigation Banking could be considered as a funding source if assessed as part of privately funded studies.

On May 10, 2023, as part of the 2023/24 Fiscal Year Proposed Budget Amendments, the City Council considered transferring the balance of the HPTF to the Old Riverside Foundation to administer a historic preservation grant program. However, the transfer was not approved, as the Council expressed interest in exploring alternative uses for the funds or allowing other nonprofit organizations to apply for grant program administration. Since that meeting, Cultural Heritage Board members, City Council members, and Staff have considered other potential uses for the funds, including funding a revised Historic District Sign program. The following discussion provides an outline of potential uses for the fund allocation, unless otherwise directed.

DISCUSSION:

Historic Preservation Fund Project Allocation

The current balance of the HPTF is $135,292. Below are the recommended funding allocations for City Council consideration:

Project	Project Activities	Estimated Cost
Historic District Signs	Installation of new historic district signs in all thirteen districts	$55,968
Spanish Town Road Signs	Installation of commemorative signs along North Orange Street	$3,075
Sign Maintenance & Contingency	Funds for future maintenance and contingencies (approx. 25% of total cost) for Historic District and Spanish Town Road Signs	$15,957
Landmark Plaques	Purchase and issuance of 18 pending plaques for Historic Landmarks and funding for 10 years (2 plaques/year)	$35,000
Historic District Survey	Funding for the completion of a historic district designation survey.	Remaining Balance ~$25,292
Total available HPTF for allocation		$135,292

Sign Programs: At the request of Council Member Falcone, the Planning Division and Public Works departments have worked to update the Historic District Sign Program. The proposed plan will place historic district signs atop existing street intersection signs within each district rather than just at the boundary; thereby improving identification and properties within the district. As part of this update, existing historic district signs will be removed. Some street name signs may need replacement to accommodate the new signs, and certain poles may require relocation to meet current standards.

The City's marketing and historic preservation worked together to develop sign designs representing the four main architectural periods found in the City's historic districts: 1) Victorian, 2) Arts & Crafts, 3) Eclectic Revival, and 4) Mid-Century. These designs capture the distinct characteristics of each era while allowing flexibility in selecting appropriate signage. On January 15, 2025, the Cultural Heritage Board reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed designs during a workshop.

Due to its size, downtown location, and status as one of the City's first historic districts, the Heritage Square Historic District will be the first to receive the updated signage. Production and installation are expected to take approximately 150 days. Upon approval of the updated program, Planning and Public Works staff will develop a priority list for installing signs in the remaining districts.

The updated signage program will enhance the identification of historic districts, allowing residents and visitors to easily recognize historically designated areas. Additionally, the new signage aims to foster neighborhood pride within the City's historic districts.

In addition to installing historic district signs, it is recommended that the HPTF cover the cost of commemorative signs along North Orange Street between Columbia Avenue and Center Street, recognizing its ceremonial designation as Spanish Town Road, approved by City Council on July 20, 2021. The estimated costs are $55,968 for district signage and $3,075 for Spanish Town Road signs. Including contingencies and maintenance, the total recommended allocation for the sign programs is $75,000.

Landmark Plaques: Until 2018, the City provided two landmark plaques a year, on average, to newly landmarked properties. Through previous budget cuts the City was no longer able to provide plaques to property owners, and some owners have opted to purchase the plaques directly at a cost of $875. Currently, eighteen properties have not received a plaque, totaling $15,750. To reinstate the program, funding is proposed for these pending plaques and an additional 20 plaques over the next 10 years, at two per year, totaling approximately $33,250. With a contingency for rising costs, it is recommended that $35,000 be allocated to landmark plaques.

Historic District Survey: In recent years there has been interest in designating a Mid-Century era historic district. As part of the designation process a historic context statement and survey would need to be completed. There are approximately nine potential historic districts were identified by the Modernism Historic Context and Survey. Additionally, a historic context statement was previous completed for the Grand Avenue Bluff (Cliffside Drive to Bandini at Tower Road). In total, approximately ten Mid-century era potential districts already having a historic context statement but still needing a survey. The cost of a historic district survey is estimated at approximately $25,000 - 30,000. It is recommended that City Council consider allocating the remaining balance the HPTF, approximately $25,292, to be used for a historic district survey for the next historic district designation nomination. Additional funding may be needed depending on the size of the district and staff will seek additional funding including grants, as needed.

Historic Preservation Fund Committee

With the potential full depletion of the Historic Preservation Trust Fund, the Historic Preservation Fund Committee is no longer required for its intended purpose. The committee is established by Title 20 of the Riverside Municipal Code to oversee and allocate grant funding for preservation efforts. Since no funds remain to be distributed, a code amendment is required to formally dissolve the committee. Per Section 20.45.010 of the Riverside Municipal Code, the City Council has the authority to initiate such an amendment via minute order.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to the Envision Riverside 2025 City Council Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well-Being (Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide).

This item aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust –** The Historic District Sign Program and associated projects are developed through a transparent process that allows for community input and engagement.

2. **Equity** – Enhancing historic district signage and providing landmark plaques ensures that all neighborhoods have access to resources that recognize and celebrate their historical significance.

3. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The initiative utilizes existing funds within the HPTF, ensuring financial prudence without requiring new General Fund allocations.

4. **Innovation** – The program integrates modern design practices and community-driven research to create signage that authentically represents Riverside's architectural heritage.

5. **Sustainability and Resiliency** – By preserving and promoting the City's historic districts, the program fosters a long-term commitment to cultural heritage and neighborhood identity.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The total fiscal impact of this action is $135,292. Upon Council approval a supplemental appropriation in the amount of $135,292 will be recorded in the Grants & Restricted Programs Fund, Historical District Sign Program, expenditure account number 9930200-440309, with funds from the Interest Bearing Special Deposits Fund, Historical Preservation Trust account number 0000721-225467. The allocations support historic district signage, landmark plaques, and preservation initiatives, ensuring effective use of designated resources without requiring additional General Fund contributions.

Prepared by:	Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Approved by:	Jennifer A. Lilley, Community & Economic Development Director
Certified as to availability of funds:	Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Approved by:	Mike Futrell, City Manager
Approved as to form:	Jack Liu, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. City Council Staff Report – March 18, 1997
2. City Council Minutes – March 18, 1997
3. City Council Staff Report – July 16. 2019
4. City Council Minutes – July 16. 2019
5. Finance Performance and Budget Committee Staff Report – May 10, 2023
6. Finance Performance and Budget Committee Minutes – May 10, 2023
7. Current and Proposed Historic District Sign Program
8. Cultural Heritage Board Staff Report – January 15, 2025

9. Cultural Heritage Board Minutes – January 15, 2025
10. Historic District Sign Cost Estimate
11. Presentation