



## Historic Preservation Review City Hall - 1711 Miner Street, Idaho Springs, CO 80452 Agenda

Tuesday, August 19, 2025

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Video from Meetings are viewable on the City's Website.

You must join the Zoom Meeting  
(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88123857147>)  
to participate in a meeting remotely.

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1. **Call to Order (6:00 P.M.)**
2. **Work Session Items**
  - a. Two-Block Historic District Buffer and Related Items
  - b. Historic Resources Element - Idaho Springs Comprehensive Plan Update
  - c. Potential Budget Requests
3. **Adjourn**

### **In-person and remote meeting public attendance and participation instructions:**

#### **Participation**

- To provide scheduled public comment, either in person or remotely, please fill out and return the Public Comment Form on the City's website. All requests must be submitted to the City Clerk ([cityclerk@idahospringsco.com](mailto:cityclerk@idahospringsco.com)) by 12 p.m. (Noon) the Thursday before the scheduled meeting.
- To provide unscheduled public comment, please join the Zoom Meeting, identify yourself with your full first and last name, and use the "Raise Hand" feature to indicate your desire to speak.

#### **General Guidelines**

- Each public comment, whether scheduled or unscheduled, is limited to three (3) minutes.
- Council typically does not provide feedback during public comment sessions.
- If you would like to provide materials for Council to review along with your Comment, please sign up for Scheduled Public Comment and provide those materials to the City Clerk by the Thursday Deadline.



TO: Historic Preservation Review Commission  
FROM: Dylan Graves, Community Development Planner  
SUBJECT: Two-Block Radius Buffer of Historic District and Design Guidelines Outside HD  
MEETING DATE: August 19, 2025

**BACKGROUND**

Section 21-205 of the Idaho Springs Municipal Code (ISMC) intends to establish the historic setting of the city of Idaho Springs as an important design consideration when reviewing proposed development around the city. It seeks compatibility between existing structures and proposed additions to the community.

Section 21-205(A)(2) creates a commercial downtown buffer for development, encouraging development within a two-block radius of the historic downtown to be complementary to the historic district. This section states:

*“Beginning at 17th Avenue and extending west to 13th Avenue, the Idaho Springs Historic Commercial District is the centerpiece of the community. Chapter 22: Historic Preservation applies to this area and other locally designated or listed on the State Register of Historic Properties or National Register of Historic Places. New developments within a two-block radius of the outside boundary of the District should build upon and support the architectural features of the District itself. Use of Historic District building materials, architectural styles and designs based upon historic City sites are strongly encouraged.”*

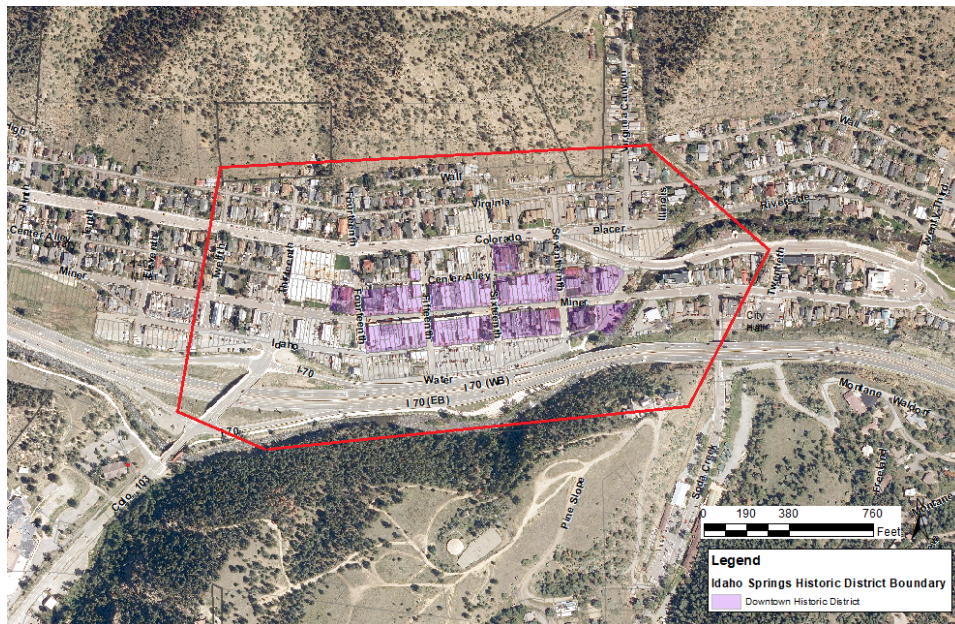
At the June HPRC meeting, we discussed how to clarify the two-block buffer to clearly delineate the properties located within the buffer zone. We also discussed how to strengthen the city’s ability to require architectural standards that conform to and complement the historic district. This report seeks to continue that discussion, soliciting feedback from HPRC on how best to proceed.

Note that in Section 22-3 of the ISMC, the Historic District is defined specifically as:

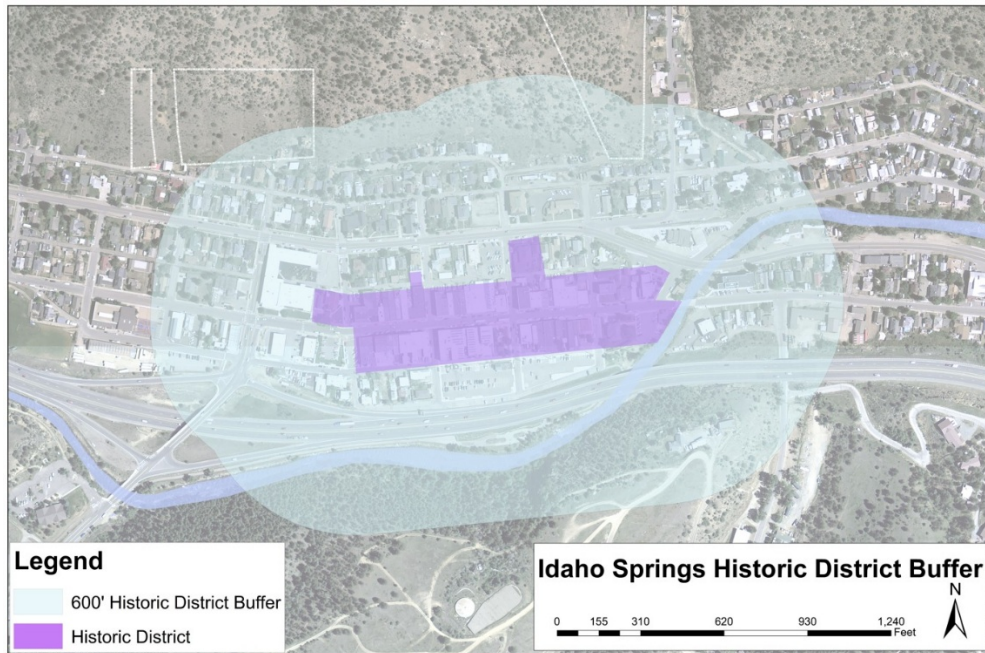
*All of Blocks 7, 8, 15, 16, 20, 22, 25, 28 and 33; the West 1 foot of Lot 9, all of Lots 10, 11 and 12, Block 9; and the South 40 feet of Lots 1 and 2, Block 17; all within the City of Idaho Springs, County of Clear Creek, Colorado.*

**1. Two-Block Historic District Buffer**

After the June meeting, staff created a new two-block buffer map, using the idea that a “typical” city block in Idaho Springs is about 250’-300’ to build a two-block buffer around the Historic District:



This is based off the 600' buffer, shown below:



Do we want to officially identify properties that fall within the buffer? If so, I will need to work with the city’s attorneys to figure out how best to do this and can report back.

Based on the current language in Chapter 21 of the ISMC, any properties within the red lines should build upon and support the architectural features of the district itself.

The use of “should” is key, as the city’s attorneys have said the following:

*“Insofar as enforceability, any standard that is “encouraged” is clearly not mandatory. Other design directives are expressed a little stronger, as “should” – these are more than suggestions; I think it’s fair to call those requirements.”*

Changing a should to a shall is not as easy as a simple code amendment. Per the city’s attorney:

*“Merely modifying the buffer area to clarify its reach can be done fairly easily. It can be an Ordinance. Like any Ordinance amending Chapter 21, one hearing on the Ordinance is required – at PC or CC, either body is fine.*

*Edits that: (1) impose a new zoning overlay district upon specific properties; and/or (2) change “encouraged” development standards to mandatory ones – are effectively rezonings. Unless the City is responding to a legislative mandate or implementing a Plan (Comp Plan, the East End Plan, Historic Design Guidelines, etc.), rezoning without owner consent/owner petition is difficult.”*

The rest of this report considers ways to improve the buffer and ensure that developments within the buffer are reviewed so that the intent of the buffer is realized, while keeping in mind the fact that the city would have a difficult time implementing overlay zones or changing encouraged standards to mandatory standards.

## 2. Review and Enforcement of Buffer Requirements

The ISMC does not require applicants and developers of properties within the two-block buffer to come to the HPRC for review, only properties within the Historic District or at a designated historic site. This puts the burden on the Planning Commission and/or City Council to consider whether the proposed development meets Section 21-205 standards for the commercial downtown.

Staff have thought about a few ways to address this, discussed below, but welcome other ideas. These ideas have not been fully vetted by the city's attorneys, so more work is needed regarding implementation feasibility.

- Creation of buffer zone design guidelines

Similar to a transition character area overlay that we discussed in June (and is discussed in more detail below), a potential idea to better regulate the two-block buffer would be to create a separate buffer zone design guidelines document that would provide guidance to property owners within the buffer zone.

While this would not be a regulatory document but instead a guidance document, this could be a beneficial way to encourage development that complements the district without requiring the creation of overlay zoning districts. City staff is working on guidelines and toolkits for developers already, so creating a "buffer zone" or "historic character" toolkit could be added to the scope of this ongoing work.

Whether these guidelines are adopted as an official "plan" or are merely guidelines that the city distributes to potential applicants would be a request for direction.

- Make HPRC a formal referral agency for Final Development Plans (FDPs) required in the two-block buffer

An FDP is required for any project in the R-3, R-M, C-1, C-2, C-3, I-1, L-I or HD Zone Districts for new buildings, expansions/additions of more than twenty percent (20%) of the gross floor area of existing structures, or for any new development proposed in a PD Zone District.

During the FDP review, there is a two-week referral period where the application is referred to relevant agencies and departments for comments. Staff believe that adding the HPRC as a referral agency for any application within the buffer zone would be a good way to get comments to the developers and applicants early in the application process. Since the referral period is only two weeks, the review period would not necessarily coincide with an HPRC meeting.

Staff do not believe that this would require any code amendments and instead there could be a simple internal policy that any buffer project be referred to the HPRC in some fashion.

If the HPRC thinks this is a good idea, staff request direction on how to best handle this referral, i.e. should this be referred to all HPRC members for review, to the Chair and Vice Chair, or via some other fashion?

- Requirements for pre-application meetings with HPRC

Currently, all development applications require a pre-application meeting with city staff to go over applicable review procedures, requirements and standards, and provide information pertinent to the application and the geographical area affected by the application. There is no requirement that applicants meet with any individual board or commission, though the HPRC has recommended that anyone applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) come to a meeting to have an informal work session ahead of formal review and action.

The city could consider a requirement that any project within the historic district or the buffer zone come to the HPRC for a pre-application meeting as a first step to get feedback before it is reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council.

### **3. Strengthening of Historic Design Guideline Standards to Section 21-220 (Multifamily and Commercial Architecture)**

Section 21-220 of the ISMC sets design standards for multifamily and commercial architecture. The intent is to encourage the development of multi-family residential units that will reflect the historic character of development in the City, create viable residential neighborhoods and bring creative and sustainable developments to the community.

Section A contemplates multifamily development, including roofs (roof materials, roof shapes, etc.); architectural elements like overhangs, recesses, projections, shadow lines, reveals, etc.; garages and carports; orientation of buildings; and other key elements that can impact overall design for multifamily residential development. Section B discusses commercial and industrial development citywide.

This section may be worth reviewing to see if any updates are desirable to address the Commission’s goals for the two-block buffer (and city as a whole). Although the intent of Section 21-220(A) is to encourage development that reflects the historic character of development in the city, staff are unsure if the standards are sufficient today to ensure that existing historic character is protected.

#### **4. Transitional or Buffer Overlay Zoning District**

Another way to control development standards adjacent to the historic district would be to create an overlay district zone that requires certain design features to be built. The city could establish guidelines for construction to ensure compatibility with the historic district. The city would create a transitional overlay that contains one or more different areas that are subject to stronger standards than areas outside of the transition/buffer zone. This was done in 2018 when the East End Overlay District was established in Idaho Springs.

Each character area could have its own set of design standards for development applications to allow for context-sensitive solutions. Goals could be to buffer the edge of the Historic District and to establish and enhance a sense of neighborhood identity. The benefit of this program is that the city could shape development within individual character areas to more specifically promote certain types of harmonious development. We would essentially have to engage in a rezoning of properties within the buffer and very clearly create districts that are subject to the overlays.

This strategy would essentially amount to a “rezoning” of property within the transition areas and as a result, the city’s attorneys have said that it would require buy-in and coordination with owners of property within the proposed transition areas. The city could not simply designate someone’s property as a transition zone unilaterally. So, this would be a much more detailed process than establishing a distance-based buffer that takes the place of the two-block radius buffer.

The final concern that the city’s attorneys have is that if the “encouraged” buffer zone standards are changed to mandatory standards, has the city just effectively expanded the historic without going through the proper process to do so? Like zoning (*generally speaking*), historic designation cannot be done without landowner consent.

This seemed like an idea that the HPRC liked, so staff thought it was worth talking about again. However, the limitations associated with a policy like this might mean that this is a longer-term goal (perhaps something to be added to the Comprehensive Plan?).

#### **WHAT DO OTHER CITIES DO?**

Georgetown, CO: Georgetown has broken its city up into four design areas or districts that have distinct areas that take into consideration the level, type and intensity of existing development; the compatibility of associating various types, designs, placement and compatibility of structures; and the functional interrelationships of various land use types. For example, they have their historic district area, with a “millsite area” that acts as a buffer between the historic district and other, more contemporary areas. This millsite area is functionally a buffer zone, but is a codified area that requires compliance with design guidelines. They require design review in all four design areas and have a commission that reviews applications.

Central City, CO: The entire city is in its historic district.

Breckenridge, CO; Littleton, CO: They have adopted overlay zoning to regulate areas buffering the historic district.

Denver, CO: They have conservation overlay zoning districts that apply to neighborhoods around historic districts that guide scale/massing and character-compatible new construction; they also have easements and incentives that are used to prevent inappropriate changes and support maintenance and restoration over redevelopment through voluntary property protections.

**Request for Direction:** Where should we go from here? What does HPRC think is the best way to move forward with the two-block buffer zone to ensure that the goals associated with this buffer continue to be met?

## CHAPTER 10: HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

The following are the existing objectives and strategies for historic resources from the existing 2017 Comprehensive Plan. The intent of tonight's work session is to consider whether these objectives and strategies should remain in the updated Plan, whether new strategies are needed to address the objectives, and whether any new objectives should be created.

### **Existing Objective: Continue to protect & preserve the historic resources of the Idaho Springs area.**

#### Existing Strategies:

- a. Explore how to increase participation in the HPRC and reduce duplication of services. Consider retaining the services of an architect or preservationist to educate and make recommendations to the HPRC.
- b. Ensure the building permit review process requires HPRC review prior to application of building permits and not following building permit approval.
- c. Work with the State or other potential entities toward available grants to complete a City-wide survey of historic properties.
- d. Continue to work with the Historic Society of Idaho Springs and its leadership committee to preserve, protect and improve the historic resources of the community.
- e. Maintain the integrity of the Idaho Springs 1041 Regulations and the associated 1041 Impact Area.

#### Staff Analysis

Staff believe that the overall objective is still valid, but most of the strategies have already been achieved or can be expanded upon. Staff believe that strategies a., b., and e. are largely accomplished and likely no longer relevant or needed in the Comprehensive Plan. The city has made substantial progress in promoting and empowering the HPRC and that the city can now focus on implementation strategies and bigger picture goals instead of basic goals focused on establishing infrastructure around preservation work. Strategy c. was addressed through the 2022 Historic Resources Survey, but staff believe this work should continue to survey more properties and work towards additional residential property designations in the city. The objective seems worthy of maintaining with updated strategies, since the city should continue to protect and preserve historic resources.

### **Existing Objective: Promote the benefits of historic preservation.**

#### Existing Strategies:

- a. Identify and promote incentives for local property owners to assist with preservation efforts.
- b. Create and distribute handouts and a website which clearly explain the benefits and the process for obtaining tax credits and grants associated with renovation, preservation and upkeep of historic properties.

- c. Prepare content on cultural resources through multiple media sources (website, podcasts, road markers, etc.).
- d. Develop preservation tourism opportunities that help increase the economic viability of the historic resources of the community.
- e. Coordinate with the Historical Society of Idaho Springs, the HPRC and History Colorado to educate decision makers and the public in regard to the benefits and impacts of historic preservation.

### Staff Analysis

Staff believe that this objective should be kept in the updated Plan. While some work has been done at creating incentives, educational handouts/toolkits, and preservation tourism, these strategies can be better implemented going forward and staff believe more work can be done to better support local property owners with historic properties.

#### Potential New Strategies within the Objective:

- Work with the state and other potential entities to create an incentive program for architecturally compatible design and/or rehabilitation projects that take into account the city's Design Guidelines.
- Work on potential ways to incentivize compatible design, such as density bonuses or other incentives

### **Survey and Community Meeting Takeaways:**

Historic preservation, neighborhood character, and local charm have been key themes that regularly came up during community meetings, one-on-one discussions with local residents, and through survey responses.

#### Survey takeaways:

We asked respondents what they like best about Idaho Springs. This was a question that allowed multiple responses. Nearly 70% of respondents listed "historic character" as one of the things about Idaho Springs they liked best; nearly 80% listed "small town feel" as one of the things they liked best. This shows that residents and visitors highly value the existing character of Idaho Springs, of which history is a large component.

We asked respondents how important historic preservation is in shaping the future of Idaho Springs. 65% said it was very important and another ~30% said it was somewhat important. That means over 90% of respondents think that historic preservation is important going forward.

We followed up on that question with a question on what aspects of Idaho Springs' history should be most protected and preserved. The top three responses were:

- Historic buildings and architecture
- Historic downtown character
- Mining history and heritage sites

When we asked respondents whether they thought Idaho Springs was doing enough to preserve its historic character, less than 50% believed that the city was doing enough. Over 30% indicated that they were unsure. This appears to show that more preservation resources

and educational materials are needed to better inform the public about preservation and more work is needed on advertising and promoting the city's preservation efforts. When we asked respondents how they felt about future growth in Idaho Springs, nearly 70% of respondents thought that growth should be carefully managed to balance development with preserving the city's small-town feel. When asked about what concerns respondents about growth, the top response was traffic congestion but the second most common response was the loss of small-town charm.

Finally, we asked respondents to give us up to three words that best describe Idaho Springs. The top three responses were: historic, quaint, and charming.

Given these results, it seems clear that the community wants to see more preservation and may be open to policies and programs that seek to preserve existing community character. From residents specifically, charm and character were top of mind. With that in mind, city staff have compiled an initial brainstormed list of potential new objectives for the Historic Resources Element of the Plan. There are additionally eight preservation priorities recommended in the 2022 Historic Resources Survey Plan. Staff wonder whether adding these eight objectives might be an easy way to improve the Historic Resources Element.

### **Potential New Objectives and Strategies:**

These are potential objectives or strategies that staff identified based on previous discussions with the community and HPRC.

- Prioritize implementation of the survey and related preservation priorities adopted as part of the 2022 Historic Resources Survey Plan.
- Explore opportunities to increase the number of residential homes designed as historic sites within the city, through both one-off designations and through the creation of residential historic districts.
  - Work on the creation of materials that can assist property owners in assessing whether designation would be beneficial to them, including process guidelines, toolkits explaining tax credits, sample/template residential historic district documents, etc.
- Promote increased visitation and activation of city-owned historic sites and facilities to highlight the city's resources within the historic district and citywide.
  - Collaboration between the city and the Historic Society on educational tours (self-led or guided), scavenger hunts, and other opportunities to bring residents and visitors to the city's various historic sites and facilities.
  - Creation of wayfinding and signage plans specific to historic resources that can help highlight different areas and resources within the city
- Balance growth and economic development with historic preservation to ensure that future growth does not come at the expense of historic character, historic resources, or historic sites and facilities.
  - Consider a code audit to determine regulations and requirements that can be strengthened to ensure that historic resources are considered as part of all development applications.
- Promote new developments and redevelopments outside the historic district that complement and build upon existing historic character through the creation of stronger architectural guidelines for single-family, multifamily, and commercial development