

## 3 HISTORIC PRESERVATION

As the oldest Central Valley city south of Stockton, Visalia hosts an impressive collection of historic sites and structures, including four that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Numerous distinctive architectural styles are present in Visalia, concentrated in the city's historic core; particularly notable examples are recorded in the city's local registry.

A plan for historic preservation can contribute to the cultural, economic and physical well-being of the community. Older structures add physical diversity and interest to the community, and historic settings contribute to its small town character. Historic structures often contain materials and craftsmanship that cannot easily be duplicated.

Important social and cultural benefits can be realized through historic preservation as well. Preservation of historic structures provides a tangible link with the past, thus providing a key to understanding our heritage and identity. At the same time, it reinforces pride in the community and neighborhood.

Preservation also makes sense from an economic viewpoint. Restoration and rehabilitation make property more valuable, and stimulate additional property improvements in a neighborhood. Evidence of investment in the older portions of the city can result in increasing the availability of private financing. A positive, self-supporting cycle is created, with additional benefits of higher retail sales, commercial rents, and tax revenues.

The Historic Preservation Element features a summary of Visalia's historic resources and its existing historic district. It presents the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, and identifies other complementary programs, as well as factors that may have the effect of discouraging historic preservation. The Element presents a set of objectives and policies that reflect recommendations of the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, as confirmed by the General Plan Update Review Committee (GPURC).

### 3.1 VISALIA'S HISTORIC RESOURCES

#### Historical Development

Visalia was settled in 1852, and incorporated as a city in 1874. In its early years the City was a supply center for nearby gold mining operations, and had an agricultural economy based on livestock. The construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad through the Valley in 1872 triggered a shift in the agricultural economy from cattle toward field crops. The next major economic change was brought about by the availability of irrigation water, resulting in the conversion of large grain fields to small farms, where citrus, grapes, olives, and deciduous fruits were raised. These crops are a mainstay of the region's economy today.

The Tulare County Farm Bureau was established in 1916, with its original office in an adobe structure on East Oak Street. The Farm Bureau was early to introduce the experimental concept of marketing hogs at



*Policies in this element help ensure that Visalia's unique historic resources will be preserved for generations to come.*

auction, holding its first sale in Visalia in 1918. Livestock remained an important part of the region's economy, as attested by the Visalia Livestock Yards, which in 1940 became the first center for modern livestock auctioning in the Central Valley.<sup>1</sup>

Industry and transportation also influenced Visalia's historical development in profound ways. The 1890s saw the production and transmission of hydro-electric power from the Kaweah River and its first use in homes and factories. In 1897, the Valley Railroad (soon to become the Santa Fe) opened a main line to Visalia. Shortly thereafter the first automobiles were introduced, and road building became a major concern. Highway 99 and the rail lines today act as transport lines for the highest-value agricultural region in the country, as well as a growing urban region and industrial economy.

1 Caudill, Brad. "History of the Farm Bureau Stockyards." 2005-2006.

## Historic Sites and Structures

Four structures and sites in Visalia are currently on the National Register of Historic Places, as shown on **Table 3-1**. The National Register of Historic Places is an inventory of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant on a national, State, or local level in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. These sites are also listed on the California Register of Historic Resources, and any impacts to them must be considered as part of environmental review.

### Local Register of Historic Structures

The City maintains a Local Register of Historic Structures, identified in a process led by the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. The Local Register, most recently updated in 2007, features approximately 340 buildings, shown on **Figure 3-1**. The first survey of historic resources was done in advance of the City's first Historic Preservation Element and Historic Preservation Ordinance, both adopted in 1979.

**Table 3-1: Sites Listed on the National Register of Historic Places**

<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Period of Significance</i>	<i>Description</i>
Bank of Italy Building	128 East Main Street	1900-1924 1925-1949	Bank/Commercial building; Classical Revival architectural style
Hyde House	500 South Court Street	1875-1899	Single family dwelling; Tudor Revival architectural style
The Pioneer (statue)	27000 South Mooney Boulevard, in Mooney Grove Park	1900-1924	Original sculpture destroyed in earthquake; stand remains
U.S. Post Office, Visalia Town Center Station	111 West Acequia Street	1925-1949	Government building; Art Deco/Beaux Arts architectural style

Source: National Park Service, 2010

The Local Register classifies significant historical structures in three categories. *Exceptional* structures or sites are those having preeminent historical, cultural, architectural, archaeological, or aesthetic significance, considered candidates for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Second, *focus* structures or sites have significant value, of good to excellent quality, and should be considered for local recognition and protection. Third, *background* structures or sites are those that may not be historically significant or unique in and of themselves, but contribute positively as a group to the “visual fabric” of Visalia.

## Architectural Styles and Historic Areas

### Predominant Architectural Styles

Each of the historic structures identified in the Local Register is identified according to its style. Prominent architectural styles found in Visalia include:

- Queen Anne/Eastlake (ca. 1870-1900): a variation on the Victorian theme, featuring light, decorative ornamentation of porches, windows and roof eaves together with massive railings, balusters and porch posts. The most characteristic feature is the presence of a corner tower or turret.
- Colonial Revival (ca. 1890-1915): a simpler style than the Victorian, featuring a symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors, large entry porches, columns, pediments, and window shutters. Exteriors are most often composed of clapboard or brick, covered by a gabled or hip roof.

- Mission Style (ca. 1890-1920): featuring plain plaster or stucco walls and low-pitched, red-tiled roofs, often including parapets, towers, or curvilinear gables.
- Spanish Colonial Revival (ca. 1915-1941): similar to the Mission Style, but more decorative and featured, with balconies, arcades and various-sized windows, French doors, terraces and pergolas.
- Bungalow (ca. 1890-1940): a style of one-story house, common in California cities, with a broad, gabled roof that overhangs a front porch. Beams and other structural members are often exposed, and dormer or “eyebrow” windows may punctuate the roofline.

### Historic Groupings and Areas

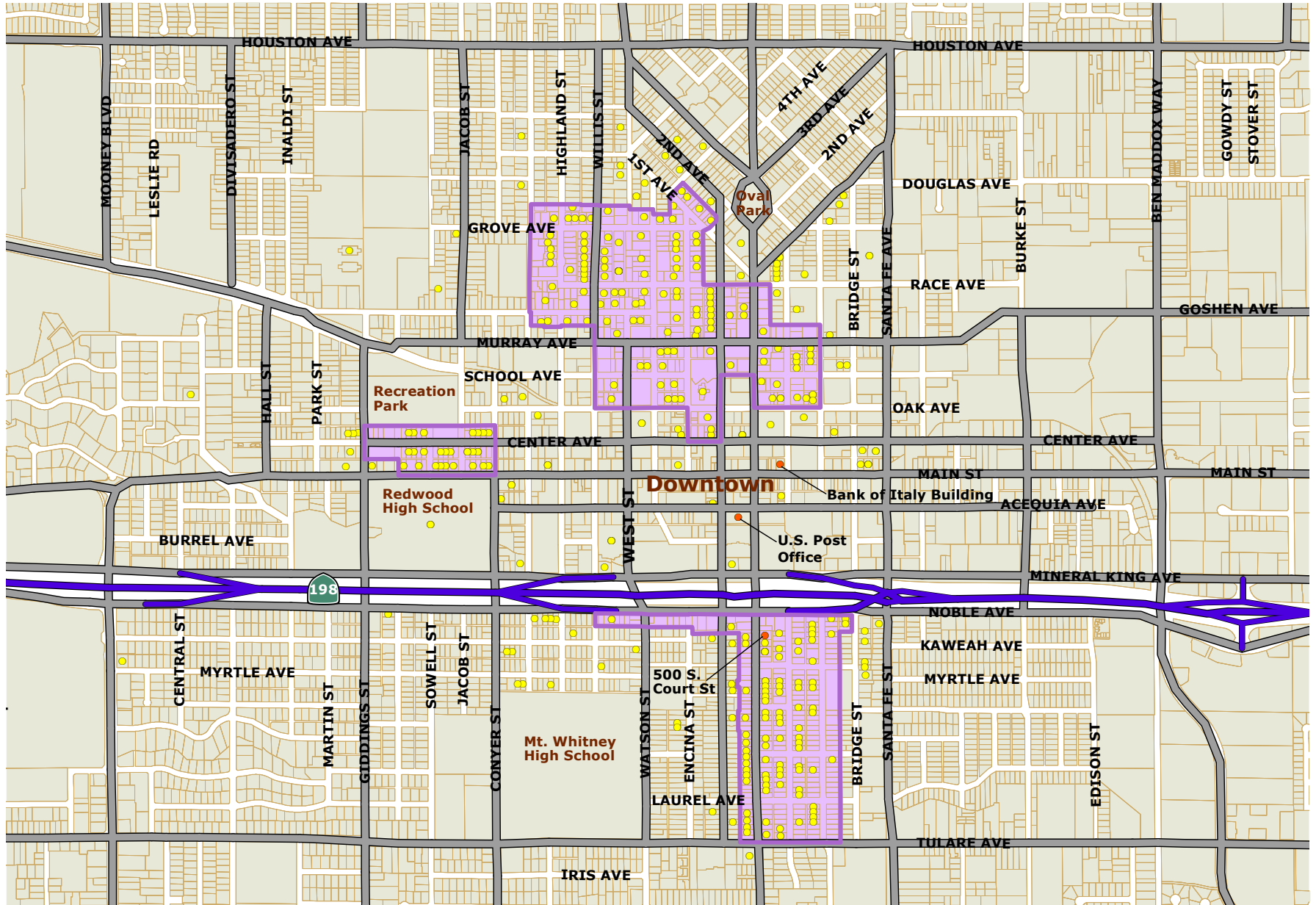
Visalia has several distinct groupings of historic structures. Victorian groupings are identified along the 500 block of North Locust Street, the 600 block of North Church Street, and the 600 block of North Encina Street. Groupings of bungalows are found on the 700 block of North Willis Street, the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of South Locust Street, and the twelve blocks bordered by Conyer Street, Noble Avenue, Watson Street, and Mt. Whitney High School. It is important to recognize the unique qualities of these historic groupings so that compatibility and consistency can be maintained. Other areas contain a concentration of historic buildings, in a variety of styles. Downtown Visalia presents a special case, as a district that has changed dynamically with the times, but also contains some viable historic structures.



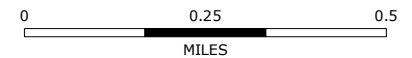
*Visalia features distinct groupings of Victorian and Bungalow houses, as well as historic buildings downtown and intermixed in core area neighborhoods. The Historic Preservation Ordinance provides a way to maintain these resources.*

**Figure 3-1: Historic Resources in Visalia**

- Sites or Structures on Local Registry
- Sites also Listed on National Register of Historic Places and State Register of Historic Resources
- Historic District Overlay



Source: City of Visalia, 2010; Tulare County, 2010; Dyett & Bhatia, 2012.





### Historic District

The initial historic survey area was bounded by Houston Avenue to the north, Santa Fe Street to the east, Tulare Avenue to the south, and Giddings Street to the west, comprising the original townsite and early subdivisions of Visalia. Based on the results of the survey, a smaller Historic District was defined. This District, in three discrete sections to the north, south, and west of Downtown, is formalized as the Historic District Overlay.

New development proposed within its boundaries must be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee according to criteria established in the Historic Preservation Ordinance. **Figure 3-1** outlines the current Historic District Overlay and shows the location of sites on the City’s local registry.

### Historic Preservation Ordinance

The Historic Preservation Ordinance, adopted in 1979 and updated in 2001, established the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC). The Committee is responsible for periodically updating the Local Register, nominating properties to the State and Federal Registers, and reviewing planning actions related to historic structures or in the Historic District.

The Ordinance provides criteria on which the HPAC is expected to base its recommendations concerning development proposals in the Historic District. These criteria concern building height and scale; building spacing; the directional expression of front elevations; and the relationship of proposed materials, textures, architectural details, and roof shape, to those of surrounding buildings. The Committee may recommend that new development or changes to exist-

ing structures in the Historic District be excepted from normal setback, parking, landscaping, or other requirements in order to maintain the overall historic character of the area.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance also allows the City to deny demolition permits for buildings listed as “exceptional” on the Local Register, and to apply a six-month moratorium on demolition for other historically-listed structures, during which time alternatives are to be sought. In general, owners are encouraged to maintain historic structures and make every reasonable effort to find compatible uses for them.

### Office Conversion Zone

Visalia’s zoning code also includes a district intended to facilitate the preservation of older houses in areas where commercial use is now more viable by providing more flexibility of use. Uses such as medical offices which tend to bring a significant number of visitors are discouraged, to minimize parking and traffic impacts in older neighborhoods. The zone is applied only to certain blocks adjacent to Downtown.

## 3.2 RELATIONSHIP TO LAND USE, COMMUNITY DESIGN, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Historic Preservation Element seeks to preserve historic structures, maintain historic residential areas as cohesive units, enhance property values in older areas, and better connect the City with its cultural heritage. These goals must be pursued alongside other goals in the General Plan. The interactions between historic preservation and other goals are briefly outlined here.



*Preservation of some historic homes and buildings has been made possible with conversion to a new commercial or office use.*



*The Land Use Element features policies that will work in tandem with Historic Preservation policies to support Downtown vitality, intact historic neighborhoods, and preservation and reuse of historic buildings.*

## Land Use

The current land use pattern in the core area is a reminder that many of Visalia’s historic structures are now in a context characterized by a mixture of land uses and building types from different periods. This has resulted both from the continued development of Downtown and periods of disinvestment in older neighborhoods.

The General Plan must accommodate expected population growth, and sustain Visalia’s role as the commercial and industrial center for the region. It aims to maintain downtown as the vital center of the region and to provide incentives for infill development. In other words, important General Plan goals support investment in the core, but also potentially put development pressure on historic structures and historic neighborhoods.

The Land Use Element features policies that will work in tandem with Historic Preservation policies to support Downtown vitality, intact historic neighborhoods, and preservation and reuse of historic buildings. These policies include:

- Preserve established and distinctive neighborhoods... by maintaining appropriate zoning and development standards to achieve land use compatibility in terms of height, massing and other characteristics; providing design guidelines for high-quality new development; supporting housing rehabilitation programs; and other means.
- Provide adequate area for office developments in areas where they can be effectively integrated into surrounding areas and/or where they can provide close-in employment opportunities.

- Ensure the continued viability of Visalia’s existing commercial areas and enable the conversion of older or historic houses to office uses, where appropriate.
- Provide incentives for infill development of opportunity sites and adaptive reuse and restoration of existing buildings in Downtown and East Downtown.
- Promote the development and implementation of special districts and master plan areas to preserve and enhance Downtown and East Downtown the Core Area. Ongoing efforts include the Medical District Master Plan, and historic preservation district.

## Community Design

Visalia has a vibrant and attractive downtown, with neighborhoods around it largely intact with older and in some cases historic housing stock. This relationship between downtown and core neighborhoods helps to create a healthy urban structure and a positive image for the City. The General Plan reinforces these positive qualities, while enhancing the connections and guiding streetscape improvements along key corridors. Policies include:

- Create an overall urban form centered on a vital downtown and a higher-density core, surrounded by viable residential neighborhoods with walkable, mixed-use neighborhood centers.
- Maintain and enhance Visalia’s physical diversity, visual qualities and small-town characteristics.
- Provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity between Downtown and the historic districts located both north and south of Highway 198 through construction of ADA-accessible sidewalks and entry signage.

- Plan and develop a transportation system for Visalia that contributes to community livability, recognizes and respects community characteristics, and minimizes negative impacts on adjacent land uses.

### Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include sites, structures, or any other physical evidence associated with human activity considered important to be culturally important. This includes archaeological resources and contemporary Native American resources in addition to the historic resources that are the subject of this chapter. Impacts of development on cultural resources of all kinds must be avoided to the greatest extent possible, as described by policies in Chapter 6: Open Space and Conservation.

### 3.3 THE CITY'S ROLE AND TOOLS FOR PRESERVATION

The City of Visalia aims to assure that the City's history is preserved in its physical fabric. Successful historic preservation is carried out by local government, property owners, and the larger community, in tandem. It is the City's responsibility to administer land use and design controls, and to do so effectively and fairly. The City also has a role in providing information and technical assistance to homeowners and community groups. Community groups may be best suited to activities including surveying historic resources, leading walking tours, and organizing neighborhood clean-up. Private homeowners and businesses will play the most important role, by making smart investments that help the City remain connected with its history. Three categories of "tools

for preservation" are summarized below, emphasizing the City's role following the General Plan. These are followed by the General Plan's objectives and policies.

#### Certified Local Government

The California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) designates "certified local governments" In becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG,) a City agrees to use National Register and California Register criteria to designate historic sites. OHP reviews and comments on local preservation programs, but neither the State nor Federal governments have any regulatory authority over local historic preservation. Cities are able to take advantage of technical assistance, and are assured of more streamlined environmental review. Most importantly, CLGs are eligible to compete for State grants provided by the National Park Service. Grants may cover such basic work as updating the survey of historic resources or the Historic Preservation Ordinance or preparing an application for National Register listing. Following General Plan policy, the City will consider pursuing certification.

#### Identifying and Preserving Resources

As described above, the City's framework for preserving historic sites and structures is based on a survey of historic resources, the creation of an Historic Overlay District, and the administration of an Historic Preservation Ordinance. The Ordinance intends to discourage demolition or moving of historic structures; encourage preservation and adaptation of historic buildings by granting exceptions to other Code requirements; and ensure that new development in historic neighborhoods is designed in such a way that it is compatible with the historic context.





Property owners may use federal Historic tax credits or property tax abatement under the State's Mills Act program to help restore an historic house. (Top)

The City aims to maintain historic residential areas as healthy, cohesive neighborhood units. (Bottom)

The General Plan reaffirms the City's commitment to periodically updating its survey of historic resources and using the Historic Preservation review process to protect historic structures and usher in "good" new development. Policies also provide guidance for updating the Ordinance to incorporate additional strategies. The Plan also calls for the City's Planned Office Conversion District to be expanded to facilitate conversion of residential structures in locations that are now better suited for office uses.

### Objectives

- H-O-1** Assure the recognition of the City's history through the preservation of historic sites, structures and featuring zoning overlay designation and discretionary review procedures for the Historic District.
- H-O-2** Maintain historic residential areas as healthy, cohesive neighborhood units, and assure consistency of appearance within the historic area through conservation plans and historic preservation guidelines.
- H-O-3** Support efforts to use the Local Register of Historic Structures and the Historic District to identify and promote community history through the use of walking tours and other public outreach.
- H-O-4** Promote the maintenance and identification of historic resources in the community as key components of tourism and increased economic diversity for the City.

- H-O-5** Promote the benefits of historic property ownership through programs such as tax incentives, available grants and loans, including but not limited to Federal Tax credits and similar programs for properties within the Historic District or on the Local Register of Historic Structures.

### Policies

- H-P-1** Pursue becoming a Certified Local Government in order to take advantage of grants, loans and other historic preservation programs.

*Under the National Historic Preservation Act, the Certified Local Government Program would allow Visalia to integrate its historic preservation efforts with those of the statewide historic preservation process and to be eligible, on a competitive basis, for special matching grants.*

- H-P-2** Update the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance to include criteria for streamlining the process for issuing building permits for minor repairs and alterations as designated by the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee. Include, as appropriate, preservation incentives, such as use of the California Historic Building Code, where appropriate, and other available incentives.

*The sidebar on the next page highlights topics to be addressed in this update. These reflect "best practices" in historic preservation statewide and will enable the program to be tailored to the City's goals and needs. Details would be*



*worked out during Plan implementation with an open, public planning process.*

- H-P-3** Expand the Historic Planned Office Conversion zone to preserve historically significant structures and facilitate office conversion in locations suited to commercial use and where a functional connection can be made between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods with minimal parking impacts to the adjacent non-converted properties.

*The Planned Office Conversion zone has been applied in some but not all of the areas identified as appropriate in the current General Plan. The proposed update is to allow for an expanded use of the zone to cover additional areas where good housing stock is at some risk and where office conversion would be appropriate. The policy does not call for the City to provide specific boundaries; instead it allows for the consideration of any appropriate areas where properties may be added to the Local Register and/or the Historic District to retain the historical character of individual sites and the streetscape while transitioning from residential to office or related uses. During the rezoning process, the potential for parking impacts to adjacent non-converted properties needs to be recognized as one of the key potential conflicts between the office conversion area and adjacent non-converted residences, and performance standards and/or conditions of approval should be imposed to mitigate potential impacts.*

- H-P-4** Continue to ensure that proposed new development within any Historic District or on any properties listed on the Local Register of Historic Structures is compatible with its surroundings, using criteria of height and scale; spacing of buildings; materials and textures; street walls; landscaping; and other elements which contribute to the historical neighborhood character.

- H-P-5** Continue to facilitate the conversion of older structures to new uses, with minimal alterations to building or site appearance, by providing exceptions to zoning and building code requirements for structures on the Local Register of Historic Structures and within the Historic District, where such exceptions shall contribute to and enhance the historic character of the area.

- H-P-6** Use any available funding sources to provide low-interest loans for the rehabilitation and restoration of structures listed on the Local Register of Historic Structures or located within the Historic District.

- H-P-7** Continue to use the Historic Preservation Ordinance development review process to protect structures listed on the Local Register of Historic Structures or located within the Historic District.

*The Historic Preservation Ordinance allows the City to place a moratorium of up to six months on proposed demolition or moving permit to allow time for alternatives to be explored, and*



*Visalia will continue to facilitate the conversion of older structures to new uses by providing certain exceptions to zoning and building code requirements.*

## UPDATING VISALIA'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT ORDINANCE

The following options will be considered during the update of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance.

- **Expanding Responsibilities of Historic Preservation Advisory Commission** to include:
  - Recommending to the Planning Commission and City Council the designation of landmarks and historic districts determined to be appropriate for historic preservation.
  - Reviewing and commenting upon public and private land use proposals, affecting designated or nominated historic and cultural resources.
- **Enabling Use of Preservation Easements** on the facades of buildings designated as historic resources or Landmarks to be acquired by the City or nonprofit group through purchase or donation pursuant to Civil Code section 815.
- **Enabling Use of the State Historical Building Code** for the rehabilitation, preservation, restoration or relocation of structures designated as historic resources. Such work on designated cultural resources shall be subject to the provisions of the California State Historical Building Code rather than the Uniform Building Code.
- **Using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards** for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, but allowing them to be modified on a case-by-case base.
- **Supporting Financial Incentives for Property Owner Participation** and endorsing the Mills Act, (Government Code §50280 et seq.) as a viable means of providing property owners such incentive.
- **Providing for Economic Hardship** by allowing the Planning Commission, after receiving a recommendation from the HPAC, to grant a use permit for a waiver of the land use regulations in a Historic District when such a waiver is necessary to permit the preservation or restoration of an historic or architecturally significant building, structure or site, consistent with the purposes of the ordinance, the applicable historic district conservation plan, and the General Plan.

*to deny such permits for Local Register structures classified as “exceptional.” Structures so listed on the Local Register shall not be torn down until all alternative solutions have been exhausted.*

**H-P-8** Support the work of the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, whose responsibilities include:

- Offering assistance in the form of information and referral to applicants who are developing restoration projects, and providing information on available grants and loans for restoration and rehabilitation of historic structures;
- Identifying and recognizing all historic areas, sites, structures, and features by placing them on the local register and providing technical assistance with registration in the national Register of Historic Places and inclusion in the California Inventory of Historic Resources;
- Initiating efforts to educate the public to the significance of historic areas, sites and structures and the cultural and social events associated with them.
- Facilitate the recognition of all structures, sites and features within the Historic District or on the Local Register of Historic Structures, along with significant historical landmarks or areas which are not contained within a District or Register where significant

community history is represented. The owners of historic property shall be encouraged to display their plaques for public information;

- Pursuing support of the creation of a revolving loan fund for historic rehabilitation to be financed through public and private contributions with efforts to encourage banks to provide loans for the acquisition or rehabilitation of historic properties.

**H-P-9** Periodically survey historic resources and nominate historically and/or architecturally significant sites, structures, and neighborhoods to the Local Register of Historic Structures and/or Historic District, State of California Inventory of Historic Resources, National Register of Historic Places to ensure they are protected.

**H-P-10** Regularly review the Local Register of Historic Structures to ensure that properties are appropriately listed.

**H-P-11** Collaborate with Tulare County Historical Society and other civic organizations on appropriate monuments which publicize historic sites.

**H-P-12** Establish criteria for historic street sign name blades in Historic Districts and at Gateways to historic areas.



*Periodically survey historic resources, and nominate significant sites, structures, and neighborhoods to be historic.*

**H-P-13** Identify, survey and establish new additions to the Historic District and Local Register of Historic Structures.

**H-P-14** As needed, but no less than every 10 years, review and update the Historic Element and related implementing ordinances.

- The City's last comprehensive survey was completed for the 1979 Historic Preservation Ordinance. Many properties may be considered of historic value that were not reviewed at that time.