



**REPORT TO THE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

AGENDA ITEM NO. VIA  
HPC MEETING: 06/27/16

June 27, 2016

FROM: DANIEL ZACK, AICP, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Development and Resource Management Dept.

APPROVED BY

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

BY: KARANA HATTERSLEY-DRAYTON, M.A.  
Historic Preservation Project Manager  
Secretary, Historic Preservation Commission

SUBJECT: REVIEW AND MAKE FINDINGS ON AN INITIAL APPLICATION FOR AN  
ARMENIAN TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT PURSUANT TO FMC 12-1610(b)  
and 12-1607(b).

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission review the attached map for the boundaries of a proposed Armenian Town Historic District and accept, modify or reject the draft map and approve, as appropriate, the Initial Application. Staff further requests that the Commission use tonight's meeting as an opportunity to respond to any questions from property owners who may attend this hearing.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At the May 23, 2016 meeting the Historic Preservation Commission adopted a motion requesting that staff, pursuant to FMC 12-1610(a) prepare an Initial Application for an Armenian Town Historic District. Staff is recommending a historic district which includes not only the six resources within the proposed District boundaries which are already designated on the Local Register ----including the Valley Lahvosh Bakery and Holy Trinity Apostolic Armenian Church---but also several working class cottages that currently are not listed, both north of State Route 41 and south of SR 41 along M Street.

**BACKGROUND**

By the First World War 10,000 Armenians had settled in Fresno, refugees from the genocide that occurred in Turkey and Armenia. A 60-block "Armenian Town" developed here between the two World Wars, due in part to the restrictive covenants that precluded settlement in other parts of the city. Although State Route 41 cut a swath through the heart of this community, numerous buildings, including the five houses restored by the RDA for the Armenian Town Project, the Valley Lahvosh Bakery, the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church (1914) and several other early cottages and business buildings are extant.

Staff, the Commission and members of the community have long discussed the value of an Armenian Town Historic District which would include many of these resources, some of which are already designated, others as yet not designated and thus not protected. Several examples of early working class housing are located south of State Route 41 and were

evaluated as eligible for a proposed historic district in the CLG and City-funded South Van Ness Industrial District Historic Survey.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City's Historic Preservation Ordinance (FMC 12-1600 et seq) provides for the designation of both individual properties as well as Local Historic Districts. Local Historic Districts may be contiguous, as with Fresno's Wilson Island Historic District, or thematic and non-contiguous (FMC 12-1603(s) as for example in the proposed bungalow court or hitching post Districts. Designated neighborhood historic districts provide for protection of the character-defining features of the District, compatible infill through design and building permit review, use of the more flexible California Historical Building Code as well as some perks through the City's Zoning Ordinance. Most importantly, historic districts add to a sense of place and community pride and usually lead to enhanced property values. Designated non-residential buildings may also qualify for federal tax credits.

Parenthetically, a property's inclusion within a Local Register District does not require that the property owner restore the home or commercial business to an earlier "historic" period, only that the façade of the building retain its character-defining features. Likewise interior improvements such as upgrades to a kitchen or laundry room are encouraged and not precluded.

**Initial Application for a Local Register Historic District:** The Initial Application for a Local Historic District (FMC 12-1610) includes a map indicating the proposed District Boundaries and a statement of how the proposed Historic District meets the designation criteria outlined in FMC 12-1607(b). Pursuant to this section of the Ordinance a "Local Historic District" must be consented to by the majority of the property owners within the District, fifty percent of the resources must be fifty years or older and the District must be found by the Commission and the City Council to meet one or more criteria for significance FMC 12-1607(b).

There are 17 resources within the proposed Armenian Town Historic District. One parcel (537 M Street) includes a National and Local Register property, the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church, as well as two newer ancillary buildings. Currently for the purposes of this application this parcel is considered one resource. The parcel located at the southwest corner of M Street and Santa Clara (APN: 468-223-20T, the site of the former City Fire Department headquarters) is now the location of six resources from the Armenian Town Project. Of the six, 2 houses and the Schmidt summer kitchen are already designated on the Local Register. The other three homes on this parcel have been treated as historical resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as part of the Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted in 2002 for this project. However, they are not individually listed on the Local Register and are therefore not identified as historic resources in the City's building permit database. Two other buildings within the proposed District are also already listed on the Local Register: The Valley Lahvosh Bakery located at 502 M Street and the Neverman Home, 309 M Street.

The remaining 8 parcels are located south of State Route 41 and include 6 early 20<sup>th</sup> century cottages and two vacant parcels. The homes are all associated with early residents of Armenian Town and were previously evaluated as eligible for a potential Armenian Town Historic District in the South Van Ness Industrial District Survey.

It should be noted that one parcel located at 2350 Ventura Street was recommended by members of the community for inclusion in the District. However, although the building houses the Armenian Cultural Center the building itself has been altered significantly in the past and is now being further “improved” with a concomitant loss of integrity. The suggestion that this building was the site of the Asbarez Armenian Daily Newspaper, and thus of great social significance in the history of this community, appears to be unfounded.

Letters with individual survey forms, a copy of the proposed District Map and the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance were sent to fifteen property owners on 14 June 2016 (Exhibit B). The property owners of the two vacant parcels were notified separately on 17 June 2016. All property owners were invited to tonight's hearing. Of these seventeen properties all fifteen (minus the vacant parcels) are at least fifty years or older. As of June 16, 2016, 53% of the property owners have consented to being included within the District. It is anticipated that other property owners will also give formal consent.

The proposed District includes some of the best extant properties associated with Fresno's Armenian Town, including a church, a commercial bakery and numerous working class houses. The non-contiguous District appears to be significant under the following criteria (12-1607(b)):

- 1) It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural heritage;
- 2) It is identified with a person or group that contributed significantly to the culture and development of the city;
- 3) It embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

## CONCLUSION

Should the Commission find that the requirements of the Initial Application have been met, a Formal Application will be prepared for a future meeting. This application will include a District Record, individual survey forms for each resource and a historic context for the proposed District.

**Attachments:** Exhibit A -- Map of Proposed Armenian Town Historic District.  
Exhibit B – Sample letter to property owner from Karana Hattersley-Drayton  
14 June 2016.  
Exhibit C - FMC 12-1603, 1607 and 12-1610 (Historic Districts).





Proposed  
Armenian  
Town  
Historic  
District  
  
2015  
aerial



**Development and Resource Management Department**

2600 Fresno Street, Third Floor, Room 3065  
Fresno, California 93721-3604  
(559) 621-8003, FAX (559) 498-1012

Jennifer K. Clark AICP  
Director

**June 14, 2016**

[Property owner]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Your property located at \_\_\_\_ M Street lies within Fresno's historic "Armenian Town." As you know, between the two World Wars this 60-block neighborhood of residences, churches and businesses was occupied almost exclusively by Armenians, many of whom had come to Fresno to escape persecution. Many of these buildings were removed when State Route 41 was completed through the area.

The City's Historic Preservation Commission has asked staff to prepare an Initial Application for an Armenian Town Historic District in order to both honor and protect extant resources that are associated with this important period of Fresno's history. The draft boundary (as attached) would include several properties which are already designated on the Local Register of Historic Resources. The District would also include several working class cottages, such as your property, which is currently not designated. These residences reflect the typical housing of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and this community.

Properties within a designated historic district have both benefits as well as constraints. The property owner may use the California Historical Building Code, a more flexible way to meet health and safety and the property is exempt from Title 24 and the Cool Roof standard. Zoning benefits such as exemptions from property development standards also apply. On occasion there are funds available for historic properties and commercial historic properties may apply for Federal tax credits. A constraint is that if designated the building is considered an important resource in Fresno's history and the façade is protected from major changes through permit and design review. Interior changes or even additions to a rear of a building, however, are acceptable and encouraged (people need to live and work in historic buildings!).

The Historic Preservation Commission will consider the Initial Application and proposed boundary for an Armenian Historic District on **Monday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 6 PM here at City Hall, 2600 Fresno Street, Conference Room A (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)**. I will send you an agenda once it is posted. Please join us and/or call me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.  
Historic Preservation Project Manager  
City of Fresno  
(559) 621-8520

Attachments: Historic survey form, draft District boundary and copy of Historic Preservation Ordinance.

(p) "Interior Architectural Features" shall mean the interior architectural elements and fixtures that have special historical, architectural, cultural or aesthetic interest or values and have been designated as such by the Council pursuant to the provisions of this article.

(q) "Landscaping" shall mean natural and cultural resources including vegetation, natural features, structures, objects, roads or waterways, designed, shaped or modified by human activity. Such landscaping is either recognized as individually significant or identified within a nomination as significant in reference to the primary resource; and has been designated as such by the Council pursuant to the provisions of this article.

(r) "Local Register of Historic Resources" shall mean the inventory of buildings, structures, objects, sites and districts designated by the Council as Historic Resources or Historic Districts pursuant to the provisions of this article.

(s) "Local Historic District" (LHD) shall mean any finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or any geographically definable area which possesses a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. The Local Historic District must be significant as well as identifiable and it must meet Local Register Criteria for listing on that Register.

(t) "National Register of Historic Places" shall mean the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, engineering and culture as authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

(u) "National Register Historic District" (NRD) shall mean any finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or any geographically definable area which possesses a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. The National Register Historic District must be significant as well as identifiable and it must meet National Register Criteria for listing on that Register.

(v) "Non-contributor" shall mean any building, structure, object or site that does not contribute the significance of the Historic District in which it is located.

(w) "Object" shall mean any construction that is primarily artistic in nature or is relatively small in scale and simply constructed. Although an object may be, by nature or design, movable, it is associated with a specific site or environment, such as fountain or boundary marker.

(x) "Preservation" shall mean the act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity and material of an historic property. It may include initial stabilization work, where necessary, as well as ongoing maintenance of the historic building materials.

(y) "Reconstruction" shall mean the act or process of reproducing by new construction the exact form and detail of a vanished building, structure or object, or a part thereof, as it appeared at a specified period of time.

(z) "Regulated Permits" shall mean any permit issued for any work on an Historic Resource or within any Historic District.

(aa) "Rehabilitation" shall mean the act or process of making a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural or architectural values.



**SEC. 12-1607. - DESIGNATION CRITERIA.**

(a) **HISTORIC RESOURCES:** Any building, structure, object or site may be designated as an Historic Resource if it is found by the Commission and Council to meet the following criteria:

(1) It has been in existence more than fifty years and it possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

(i) It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

(ii) It is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

(iii) It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values; or

(iv) It has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

(2) It has been in existence less than fifty years, it meets the criteria of subdivision (1) of subsection (a) of this section and is of exceptional importance within the appropriate historical context, local, state or national.

(b) **LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS:** Any finite group of resources (buildings, structures, objects or sites) may be designated as a Local Historic District if it meets the definition set forth in Section 12-1602(s) of this article, its designation is consented to by the majority of the property owners within the Local Historic District, at least fifty percent of the resources within the proposed Local Historic District are fifty years of age or older, and it is found by the Commission and Council to meet one or more of the following criteria:

(1) It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural heritage, or

(2) It is identified with a person or group that contributed significantly to the culture and development of the city, or

(3) It embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or

(4) Structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or way of life important to the city, or

(5) The area is related to a designated historic resource or district in such a way that its preservation is essential to the integrity of the designated resource or Local Historic District, or

(6) The area has potential for yielding information of archaeological interest.

(c) **NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS:** The nomination of any finite group of resources (buildings, structures, objects or sites), including any Local Historic District, to the National Register of Historic Places as a National Register Historic District may be recommended under this article if it meets the definition set forth in Section 12-1602(u) of this article, meets the

(1) The Commission shall review all materials prepared and submitted and only members of the Commission who have physically visited and seen the proposed property may vote on the designation recommendation.

(2) At the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission shall recommend to the Council approval, disapproval or modification of the proposal for designation and make findings in support of that recommendation; or the Commission may continue the hearing.

(3) An affirmative roll call vote of a majority of the authorized membership of the Commission is required for a recommendation to the City Council.

(4) Within ten (10) days of the final Commission action, the Secretary shall send a copy of the recommendation, findings and all submitted materials to the City Clerk. The City Clerk shall place on the agenda of the Council the Commission's recommendation for Council consideration. The owner of the property shall thereafter be given notice of the time and place of the Council hearing at least ten days prior to the hearing date, together with a copy of the Commission's recommendation, findings and submitted materials to the Council. (Added Ord. 99-50, §§ 1, 2, 9-9-99)

#### **SEC. 12-1610. - LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS.**

(a) Requests for Designation: Designation of a Local Historic District may be initiated by the Council, the Commission, or property owners within the proposed District and shall consist of an initial, preliminary submission and, if recommended by the Commission, a subsequent, formal submission.

(b) Initial Application: The initial application shall be filed with the Specialist using the form(s) approved by the Secretary and shall include the following information:

(1) Proposed District Boundaries.

(2) A Statement of how the proposed Local Historic District meets the Designation Criteria of Section 12-1607(b) of this article.

The initial application shall be the subject of a staff report and will be scheduled for a determination by the Commission as to whether the initial application should proceed to a formal application. If the Commission so recommends, a formal application shall be developed and submitted for Commission consideration at a future meeting. If the Commission does not so recommend, no further action shall be taken with respect to the proposed Local Historic District.

(c) Formal Application: The formal application for Local Historic District designation consideration must be consented to by a majority of the property owners within the proposed district. For purposes of determining whether a majority of property owners have consented, each property owner is entitled to one vote. Owners of more than one property within the proposed district are entitled to one vote per property and multiple owners of a single property are collectively entitled to one vote. The formal application shall be filed with the Specialist using the form(s) approved by the Secretary and shall include the following information:

(1) A clearly defined and explained boundary for the proposed district shown on an Assessor's Map or Maps.