



Staff Report

Meeting Date: September 13, 2021

Planner: Andrea Mimnaugh, Senior Planner

APPLICATION SUMMARY:

Project Name: Downtown Historic District

Case Number: HP21-0003

Application Type: Historic District

Location: Main Street and Alamo Avenue

Applicant: City of Littleton

Project Description: Designation of a historic district for properties on Main Street and Alamo Avenue

PROCESS:

Per Section 4-6-11 of the Littleton City Code, a public hearing for a historic landmark designation application shall be referred to the historical preservation board (HPB) for a public hearing. Following the public hearing the HPB shall make a recommendation to the city council for its consideration. City council shall hold a public hearing on the proposed designation. Council shall, by ordinance, approve, modify and approve, or disapprove the proposed designation.

Downtown Historic District Historic Designation Application Public Hearing Schedule

- **September 13, 2021** Public hearing with recommendation to city council by historical preservation board
- October 5, 2021** First reading by city council
- October 26, 2021** Public hearing with decision by city council

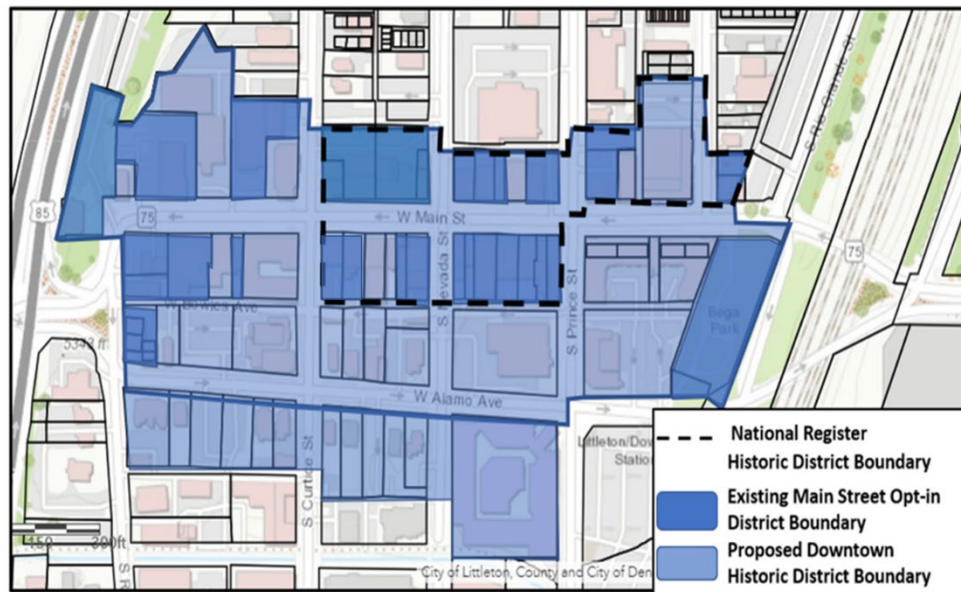
BACKGROUND

On August 3, 2021, city council directed staff to move forward on an application for an all-inclusive Downtown Historic District. This district would replace the existing opt-in Main Street Historic District. Below is a summary of the city's historic district efforts and actions

on historic districts in Downtown Littleton since 1998:

- 1998** National Register District on Main Street approved by National Parks Service
- 2003** Application for a Downtown Historic District withdrawn from consideration
- 2005** Application for an opt-in Main Street Historic District approved by city council
- 2021** Current application for an all-inclusive Downtown Historic District for Main Street and Alamo Avenue

Map of existing and proposed historic districts in Downtown Littleton:



Outreach, Actions and Discussions on the City-initiated Downtown Historic District Application:

During their August 4, 2020 study session, city council directed staff to explore an all-inclusive Downtown Historic District to ensure that significant historic resources in Downtown's core would be preserved. Over the following 12 months, the following actions and discussions occurred:

- Actions and Discussions – HPB Study Sessions, August 2020 – June 2021:
Between August 2020 and June 2021, HPB assisted with research and analysis on the buildings within the proposed district needed to develop the application. Discussion and recommendations to staff occurred during 7 study sessions.
- Engagement Process – Ongoing:
Outreach efforts to property owners within the proposed boundary continue by staff and include the following:
 - Ongoing outreach to property owners with phone calls and in person meetings – a list of comments from property owners is included in the attachments to this report.

- Creation of a Downtown Historic District [webpage](#)
- Packet of information on the proposed Downtown Historic District mailed to all property owners in the district
- Evening gathering at Town Hall for property owners
- Preference ballot for property owners to indicate their support for district designation. Results are shown below:
- Articles in the printed and online Littleton Report

Results of Preference Ballot

- 53 ballots mailed – 22 ballots returned
- 14 not supportive
- 8 supportive

- City Council Direction on Next Steps – Study Session, August 3, 2021:

At their August 3rd, 2021 study session, the majority of city council members were in favor of moving forward with the application and directed staff to submit the Downtown Historic District application for processing. In their discussion, council members made the following comments in favor of moving forward at this time:

- The application is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan
- An all-inclusive district has been discussed for many years and now is the time
- The existing Main Street opt-in district establishes different zoning regulations among property owners – all property owners should play by the same rules
- An all-inclusive district will help create a sense of place
- Downtown owners deserve consistency and clear process
- There are significant financial and economic benefits of historic districts
- Concern for future of Alamo Avenue – buildings could be lost through redevelopment if not protected by a historic district
- People are drawn to Littleton because of our historic downtown
- Historic structures have a unique character and an all-inclusive district is a way to protect Littleton’s “crown jewel.”

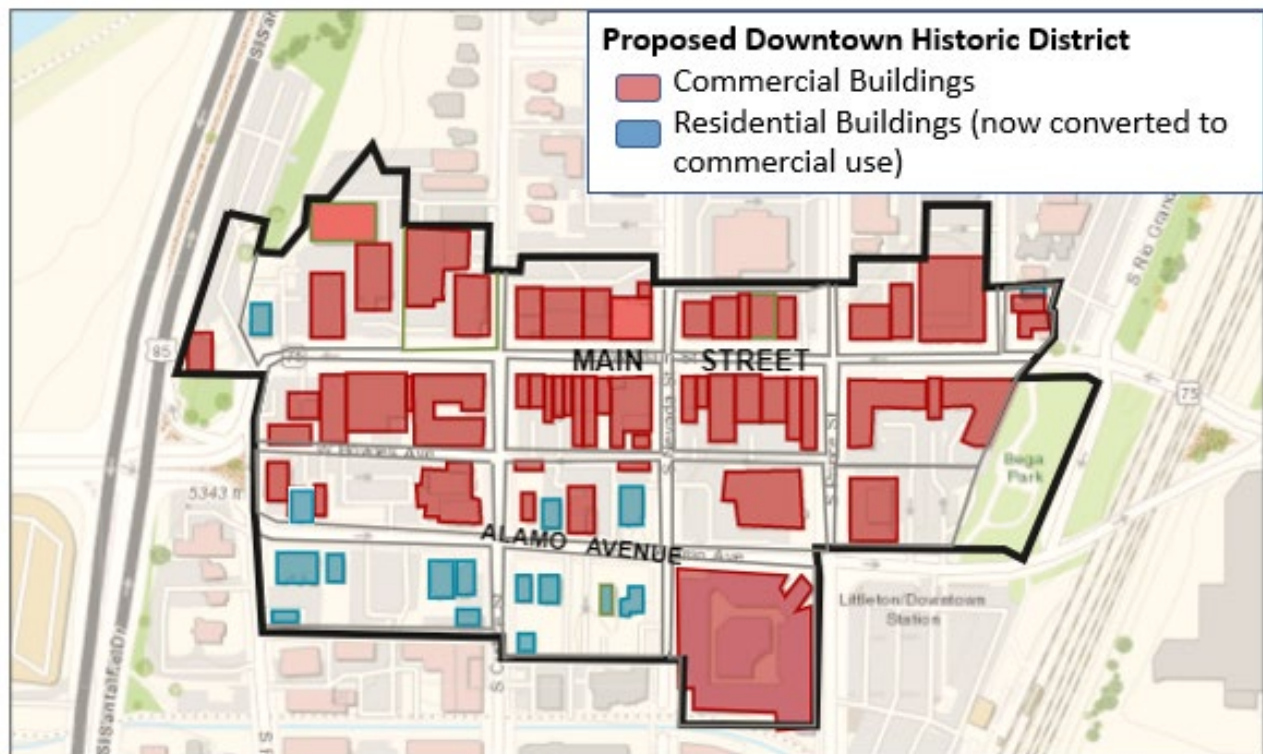
Comments not in favor of moving forward included the following:

- Hold on the application until lodging tax is in place to help fund an expanded grant program
- Property owners were not part of Envision Littleton. There is not enough incentive and property owners are saying “no” to the district.

APPLICATION SUMMARY:

The proposed Downtown Littleton Historic District at the commercial core of Littleton’s Downtown neighborhood and is inclusive of 82 structures, 69 of which are considered historically significant structures that shaped the city over a period of 105 years, from 1870 to 1975. Properties within the district include those on Main Street and Alamo Avenue, and those on the blocks of Prince, Nevada, Curtice and Rapp streets between Main Street and

Alamo Avenue. The map below depicts the proposed boundary.



Application Details:

Number of properties	82 structures on 71 properties
Period of historic significance	1870 - 1975
Number of contributing properties	69
Number of non-contributing properties	13

Description of the Proposed District:

The Downtown Historic District is a four-block concentration of significant and historic commercial, civic and residential buildings located along Main Street and Alamo Avenue that encompasses the heart of the city's historic downtown. The district is aligned on a generally east-west axis through the center of the historic 1872 Littleton Townsite. The buildings within the district are generally one-to-two stories in height and display a variety of architectural influences that reflect Littleton's transformation from an agricultural settlement in the 1860's to the city it is today.

Main Street serves as the primary location for commercial development within the district. Structures reflect commercial development from the 1900's to the present. Though architectural styles are varied, the collection of buildings is generally characterized as having street-level storefronts with upper-story office and residential uses. The core of this sub-area within the district is located on the blocks of Main Street between S. Prince Street and S.

Curtice Street.

On Main Street's western-most block, a different character exists: the historic structures reflect development that was auto-oriented, including a gas station (Skelly Service Station at 2609 W. Main Street), and an auto-repair facility (Bradford Autobody at 2659 W. Main Street). Bradford Autobody is set back from the street, allowing for customer parking at the front of the lot. This block also includes the district's most recently completed building: a prominent 3-story brick structure for street-level retail and upper-story office use (The Mayfield Building at 2679 W. Main Street). Main Street's four blocks are terminated on each end with two of the city's most historically significant structures: the Carnegie Library, on the west end, and the Arapahoe County Courthouse on the east end. Note that the Court house is not located within the boundary of the proposed district, however, it is a designated historic landmark.

In contrast, Alamo Avenue is characterized by a mixture of residential and commercial structures. Originally, Alamo Avenue was lined with single family, detached homes that were set back on the lot with front lawns and street trees. As the town expanded, some homes gave way to commercial buildings, including the Post Office at 5753 S. Prince Street, the Elks Club at 5749 S. Curtice Street, and the Littleton National Bank at 5734 S. Prince Street.

The grouping of buildings on Main Street and Alamo Avenue includes one of the highest concentrations of historic structures within the city. Many building facades within the district have retained their original, historic design, and several facades have a new design that reflects a later period of history. Downtown Littleton has retained much of its historic character. Today, with a population of nearly 50,000, Downtown Littleton holds many pieces of its past representing a living history of its growth and development.

ANALYSIS:

Per section 4-6-11(D) of the Littleton City Code, the historical preservation board shall make a recommendation of approval, modification and approval, or disapproval of the proposal to city council based on the following criteria for designation of historic districts.

Per section 4-6-11(B): Designation Without Owner's Consent, the board shall consider whether the proposed district has overwhelming historic importance to the entire community in addition to meeting a minimum of three of the criteria listed in Section 4-6-8. Staff has reviewed the criteria applicable to this application and outlines those as follows:

4-6-8(A)10: Exemplifies cultural, political, economic or social heritage of the community

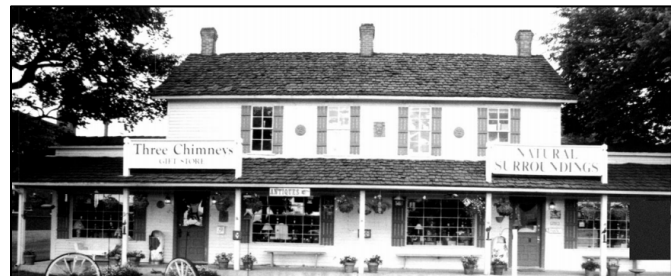
Main Street and Alamo Avenue served as the center of economic and social life in Littleton from its days as an agricultural settlement in the 1870's to the mid-1950's. The pattern of growth, arrangement of buildings and architectural variety that exists today exemplifies the city's heritage as an agricultural settlement that expanded into a town and eventually became a city.

Littleton's Early Years – an agricultural settlement that served the needs of area farmers

Richard Little arrived in present day Littleton in 1861 to supervise construction of a ditch for area farmers. Anticipating growth in the area, Little recorded the town plat on land he had purchased, and he co-founded the Rough and Ready Mill (destroyed by fire in 1959). Around the same time, a cluster of businesses were established in wood-framed structures east of the mill to serve the needs of the farming community. Two remaining structures from this early era of Littleton economic activity include:

The J. D. Hill General Store: located at 5728 S. Rapp Street and built in 1872, the J. D. General Store was the community's first general store and was an important stop for travelers in the area as it was one of few locations for area residents to stock up on necessities. The building also housed churches, Littleton's first post office, and town government.

The Creamery Building: located at 2675 W. Alamo Street, the Creamery was built in 1884, was the center of the community's dairy industry; farmers could bring their milk to be processed and shipped to Denver as either cream or butter. Together, these early businesses served as a hub for expanding agricultural industry in the area. Both the Creamery and the J. D. Hill General store feature lap siding and pitched roofs and represent typical architectural styles of their time.

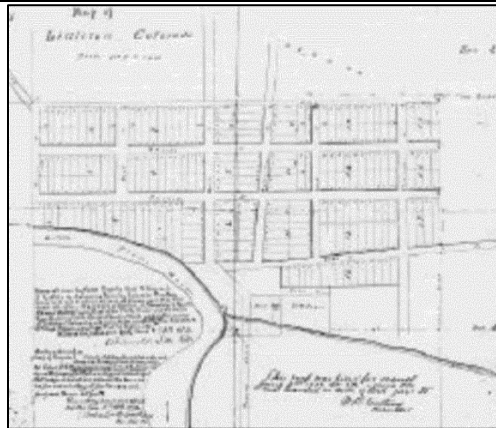


The Creamery Building (left) and the J.D. Hill General Store (right)

By 1888, Littleton consisted of at least 30 homes, and as more homesteaders arrived in the region, Littleton became the center of economic and social life for a large area extending many miles beyond the southern and eastern borders of town.

Growth of a Town – Littleton's Expanding Economy

Two developments in 1872 helped to spur further development: the arrival of Rio Grande Railroad, providing the means to transport the area's agricultural goods, and the recordation of the town plat, a blueprint for future growth. The Littleton town plat envisioned compact development on a centrally-located Main Street, with circumjacent lots intended for residential development. Expansion took off in the early 1900's.



Original Plat of Littleton, 1872

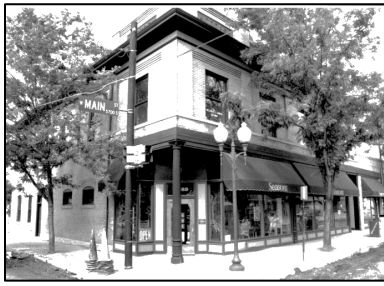
The evolution of Downtown Littleton during this era reflects the changing economic basis of the community. Railroad and agricultural workers moved to Littleton for employment opportunities. Following the completion of the Arapahoe County Courthouse in 1907, government workers also moved to town to take positions both at the courthouse and in county offices located on Main Street.

As a result of the influx of new residents, businesses opened to serve their needs. Banks, grocery, meat and hardware stores, and saloons were common up and down Main Street. On Alamo Avenue and in adjacent neighborhoods, homes began to fill both sides of the street. The following structures exemplify this era of development:

The Coors Building: one of the important businesses during this period includes and the Coors building, located at 2489 W. Main Street. Erected about 1905 by Adolph Coors of the Colorado family of brew masters. It is believed there were originally five stores on the ground floor including a plumbing and hardware business and The Arapahoe Bar, a saloon that sold Coors beer. Upstairs were the offices of the "Littleton Club." Later, the building housed a dentist and a real estate/insurance business. This two-story brick building with a flat roof is a well-preserved example of the Twentieth Century Commercial architectural style.

The First National Bank: another business from this era is the First National Bank. When the bank first opened for business, it occupied the main floor. The second floor was rented out to the Fraternal Order of the Knights of Pythias. The bank grew to be the largest in Littleton.

The Post Office: new businesses and new residents demanded a greater need for postal services. Until 1921, Littleton's post office had no permanent home and had occupied many locations in Downtown Littleton since postal services were first established in the 1870's. The city was finally granted federal funds for a new, dedicated building to meet the demand. The Post Office was constructed on the northwest corner of W. Alamo Avenue and S. Nevada Street. Five homes fronting on Alamo Avenue were demolished to make way for the new facility. Built in the Colonial Revival style, its front façade has remained intact. In 2019, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.



The Coors Building (left); the First National Bank Building (middle) and the Littleton Post Office (right)

Downtown remained Littleton's vibrant commercial heart in the years after World War II. During this time, several building owners remodeled their front facades using modern and more contemporary materials. An example from the Modern Era is the Henri's Jewelers Building that was remodeled to feature Carrera glass and newer style of brick. In the 1970's, the Harry Post Building was remodeled to reflect common design elements and materials of its day: a mansard roof and a stucco exterior.



Examples of remodeled storefronts in the postwar era: Henri's Jewelers, built c. 1900 (left); and the Harry Post Building, built in 1911 (right).

Historic government Buildings in Downtown: Littleton's Political Heritage

Littleton's commercial storefronts included more than shops and restaurants. Main Street was also home to government buildings. When Littleton became the Arapahoe County seat in 1902, administrative offices were located in the Lilley Building (2329 W. Main Street) until the completion of Arapahoe County Courthouse (2069 W. Littleton Boulevard).

In 1919, Littleton voters approved a bond issue for a government building to serve as the city hall. Within a year, a building to be known as Town Hall was completed on Main Street. Built in the Italian Renaissance style, it is striking for its decorative terra cotta cladding and pointed arched windows at the upper level. At the street level, the design consists of three large inset entrances with multi-light doors. In addition to serving as the Town's offices, the building housed the city's fire station, and the doors were designed to accommodate access for the fire trucks. Town Hall is one of the finest structures within the proposed district and was recognized by a national planning publication as the "finest town hall for a small American town." Town Hall served as Littleton's city hall for 59 years, before the current city building was erected several blocks away on W. Berry Avenue.



Town Hall, built in 1921, where local government offices and the fire station were located until 1979.

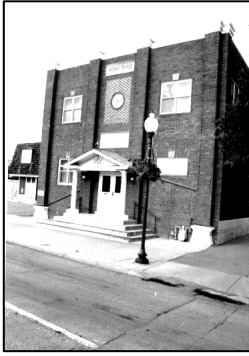
Littleton's Social Institutions

As the city's population increased, so did the desire for community services and social institutions. Organizations such as the Women's Club and fraternal lodges were established early on. Some of these organizations went on to establish a greater presence through increased membership and the need to build their own facility. The following structures exemplify the social heritage of Littleton:

Carnegie Library: The drive for a public library in Littleton began in the 1890's, with support from the Littleton volunteer firemen and the Women's Club. In 1915, the citizens of Littleton voted to issue bonds to purchase land to construct a Carnegie Library. The building was completed in 1918. Located at 2707 W. Main Street, it serves as a view terminus for the west end of Main Street. It sits at one of the most visually prominent locations within Downtown and is a well-known feature within the community. The style reflects the Italian Renaissance Revival/Beaux Arts style through its hipped roof, arched entrance and window, columns, and symmetrical façade. The building served as a library for nearly 50 years before the current library was constructed adjacent to Kettering Park.

Masonic Lodge: after renting space in the J.D. Hill General Store over a period of time, the Masons built a building in the Classical Revival style on the adjacent lot, at 5718 S. Rapp Street in 1921. Known as The Littleton Weston Masonic Lodge, it continues to serve the community 100 years later.

B.P.O. Elks Club: at the northwest corner of Alamo Avenue and Curtice Street, another fraternal lodge, the Littleton Elks Club, was built in 1949. The architectural style is Modernistic. The construction of this building, like the construction of the Littleton Post Office, necessitated demolition of homes.



Weston Masonic Lodge, built in 1902 (left); B.P.O. Elks Club, built 1949 (middle); Carnegie Library, built 1918 (right)

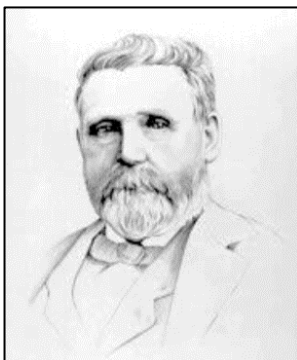
Littleton's Mix of Uses that Convey Downtown's Historic Development

Downtown Littleton today includes a significant number of historic buildings that exemplify the historic growth of the community between 1870 and 1975. The commercial buildings constructed along Main Street and Alamo Avenue are at the heart of Downtown Littleton because they contain a mix of uses that together exemplify the social, political, and economic center of Littleton. With a total of 69 contributing buildings within the proposed boundary, there is no other location within the city that includes a concentration of significant historic resources that exemplify Littleton's heritage like those in Downtown Littleton.

The proposed historic district appears to meet this criterion.

4-6-8(A)11: Exemplifies an association with a notable person or the work of a notable person

The original townsite is associated with the founder of Littleton, Richard Little, and the proposed district includes buildings and sites associated with him, including his home, located at 5777 S. Rapp Street and the J. D. Hill General Store, located steps away from his home. He was also involved in the founding of Littleton's first mill, the Rough and Ready Mill, that served the agricultural community for decades. It was destroyed by fire in 1957. Richard Little was also known as a primary benefactor to the town, having donated lots for churches and a schoolhouse.



Portrait of Richard Little, date unknown (left); Rough and Ready Mill, date of photo unknown (middle); farmland surrounding Littleton, 1890 (right)

The proposed historic district meets this criterion.

4-6-8(A)14: Enhances sense of identity of the community

Downtown is the heart of the City of Littleton. The designation of the Downtown Historic District would preserve the unique sense of place, that inter-mixing of commercial, office, civic and residential uses from which an agricultural settlement grew to a town and then to a city. The community strongly identifies with this image and the heritage that remains in the downtown core. Indeed, Downtown is the location of community events, such as Western Welcome Week and the Littleton Criterium. It is Littleton's premier pedestrian-friendly environment, and includes the city's largest collection of distinctive historic structures. Downtown Littleton draws a substantial and diverse segment of the community from inside and outside the city limits.

The proposed historic district meets this criterion.

4-6-8(A)15: Is an established and familiar natural setting or visual feature of the community.

Downtown Littleton, with Main Street and Alamo Avenue at its core, is an established part of the community that visually represents the economic and emotional center of Littleton.

The proposed historic district appears to meet this criterion.

4-6-11(B)1(a): Whether the property or the district has overwhelming historic importance to the entire community. The term "overwhelming significance" shall, for the purposes of this section, mean that the property or district:

- (1) Possesses such unusual or uncommon significance that the structure's or district's potential demolition or major alteration would diminish the character and sense of place in the community of Littleton;**
- (2) Possesses superior or outstanding examples of the architectural, social or geographic historic significance criteria outline in the standards and criteria. The term "superior" shall mean excellence of its kind and the term "outstanding" shall mean marked by eminence and distinction.**

The proposed district meets this criterion in that it encompasses the core of the original townsite and includes buildings representative of European settlers that made their home in the area and those that made their home in Littleton over the next 105 years. The building which housed the original meeting place for elected officials, a grocery and the post office; a small building associated with the town's original economic engine of agriculture; the Carnegie Library building; a United States Post Office building built with Works Progress Administration funds; and numerous examples of retail shop buildings from several eras of the community's economic and social history. The significance of this group of buildings is in the relationships created by the mix of residential, public and commercial structures. This inter-mixing of uses reflects the organic growth of a town as it responded to the different economic drivers that spurred its development over time. This physical mix is what defines small towns across the country and is what creates local history, landmarks, and legends. That special sense of place and community is born from these remnants and reminders of a town's past. These relationships still exist in many small towns. While Littleton is no longer

a small town in size, with a population near 50,000, its downtown still holds many pieces of small town living in its past and represents a true “living history” of the growth and development of what is now a city. Potential demolition or alteration of structures with significant historic importance within the district would have a detrimental impact on the integrity of the district and may impact the ability of the remaining structures to convey the history of the community.

The proposed historic district appears to meet the criterion for “overwhelming significance.”

Section 4-6-8(B): Additional Criteria for Historic Districts

Noncontributing elements will be evaluated for their magnitude of impact by considering their size, scale, design, location, and/or information potential.

Period of Significance

In section 4-6-3 of the municipal code, period of historic significance is defined as “the span of time in which a group of properties within a proposed or existing historic district attained the significance for which they meet the historic district criteria.”

The proposed period of significance for the Downtown Littleton historic district is 1890 – 1975. This period reflects the growth of Littleton from an agricultural settlement to the completion of the Littleton National Bank (5734 S. Prince Street), a building recently identified as highly significant in the 2018 survey of Commercial Modernism in the Greater West Littleton Boulevard Corridor. The period of significance is strongly associated with the criteria addressed in this report and the 1997 historic context document for Downtown Littleton (to review these reference documents, click the links in the reference section of this staff report).

Noncontributing Buildings and their impact

Contributing buildings within a historic district are those that were built during the period of significance and have retained their integrity and contributes to the historic character of the district. noncontributing buildings are all of the remaining structures within the boundary of the district.

Out of the 82 structures within the district, 69 (or 84%) are contributing and 13 (16%) are noncontributing. Overall, the district is remarkably intact. Most of the noncontributing buildings were built outside of the period of significance, such as the Mayfield Building, located at 2679 W. Main Street, and the Tavern Littleton, located at 2589 W. Main Street. Both buildings received a certificate of appropriateness, because the property is within the existing Main Street opt-in boundary.

Another noncontributor is the residential duplex at 2626 W. Alamo Avenue. In the 2000’s, the structure’s front façade underwent a significant remodel that eliminated the original design and historic fabric. Although this structure was built in the 1920’s, during the period of historic significance, it no longer meets the criteria for a contributing building. However, due to its relatively small size and position on the lot, which is set back from the street, similarly to other nearby residential structures, the new façade does not have a significant impact on the overall historic character of Alamo Avenue.

Other noncontributors to consider are the two structures that make up Main Street Apartments. Located at 2340 and 2360 W. Main Street, they front onto the easternmost

block of Main Street. They were built c. 2002. Due to their size – 3 story buildings that occupy nearly the entire block face - they have a significant visual impact to the block on which they are located. The inclusion of them in the district is appropriate in that the buildings have storefronts with recessed entrances at the street level, and 2 stories of residential units located above. Materials include brick and stucco. These design elements, typical along Main Street, help to lessen their visual impact. They do not significantly detract from the historic character of the district. Inclusion of this block face within the boundary of the Downtown Historic District is appropriate.

Noncontributors in the district are few, and have little impact on the historic character of the historic district.



The Mayfield Building, built in 2018 (upper left); The Main Street Apartments, built c. 2002, the original look of the residential duplex (lower left); and the current look of the residential duplex (converted to offices)

District Boundaries will be defined by visual changes, historic documentation of different associations of patterns of development, or evidence of changes in site type or site density as established through testing or survey.

The proposed Downtown Historic District boundary represents an intact and cohesive area of Downtown Littleton that has the highest concentration of historic structures within Downtown Littleton. The area within the boundary includes a mix of commercial uses that reflects the growth and development of a downtown. These findings are based on results of the 1997 Historic Buildings Survey (see link in References section of this staff report) with an update completed by HPB members in 2020. The proposed boundary map is included on page 4 of this staff report.

4-6-9(D) Features of the district to be preserved

Structures within the district shall be preserved according to the criteria for maintenance and alteration of designated historic structures included in the Littleton City Code.

4-6-11(A)3(a) The proposed designation's relationship to the comprehensive plan

The Downtown Historic District is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, including the following goals:

Goal S&D 1: A downtown that continues to serve the entire community as a civic, historic, cultural, and economic focal point.

Goal HART 2: Continued protection and promotion of Littleton's heritage, especially where it is tangibly visible in historic architecture, designated districts and landmarks, and distinct neighborhoods and buildings.

PROPERTY OWNER OUTREACH AND PUBLIC NOTICE

Prior to submittal of the application, staff reached out to property owners through an engagement process from May through July, 2021. Outreach continues with property owners and through articles in the printed and online Littleton Report. The details are provided in the background section of this staff report.

Notice of the public hearing was given according to section 4-6-22 of the Municipal Code and included the following:

- Written notice to property owners within the district boundary and to property owners with properties that are adjacent to the proposed district.
- Posting of signs at the entrances to the proposed district
- Publication on the city website and physical posting at the established public hearing posting locations within city facilities.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

In staff's opinion, the proposed district complies Sections 4-6-8, 4-6-9 and 4-6-11 of the Littleton City Code. Staff recommends approval of Resolution 07-2021.