



**CITY OF LITTLETON
HISTORIC DISTRICT LANDMARK DESIGNATION
APPLICATION**

Applicant: Littleton City Council

Contact: Jennifer Henninger, Community Development Director
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Proposed Historic District Name: Downtown Historic District

Location: All-inclusive District for properties fronting Main Street Alamo Avenue, and the side streets in between. Please refer to attached map.

Number of Properties: 82 historic resources on 71 properties

Contributing: 69

Non-Contributing: 13

Period of Significance: 1880 – 1975 (95 years)

District Description

The proposed Downtown Historic District consists of the area encompassing an area of significant historic commercial, civic and residential buildings on Main Street and Alamo Avenues, between Santa Fe Drive and the Railroad depression. Within the district boundary, buildings are primarily one- and two-stories in height, with the exception of three buildings, all located on the far ends of Main Street. Buildings along Main Street are primarily attached structures with storefront or garage door design at street level. Notable exceptions are along the north side of the 2600 block of Main Street, where several structures are set back with parking between the sidewalk and the front of the buildings. Alamo Avenue was originally a residential street. Homes along the street were varied in style, some constructed of wood, others of masonry. All were either one-or two story. There are eight remaining residential structures scattered along the 4-block area, with smaller scale commercial infill buildings, including the Littleton Post Office and three surface parking lots.

The proposed district reflects the building styles and development pattern of settlers of European descent that arrived in the area in the 1880's and together with later arrivals, advanced the town from an agricultural settlement to the city it is today. The earliest buildings were wood frame, clad with wood

siding, such as the J.D. General Store, located at 5728 S. Rapp Street. Within a decade, a new style of building, constructed of red brick, many with stone foundations and trim, were erected around the corner on Main Street. Many of these buildings have street-level storefronts or garage doors. A major grouping of buildings completed during this period filled in the north side of the 2500 block of West Main Street and provided the town with substantial, finely crafted commercial structures. The building's architectural themes were replicated in two subsequent buildings to the west. Like the Coors building, Lilley's buildings also had second story windows framed with molded brick. The district has other visually prominent buildings including Town Hall, the former fire station located at 2450 W. Main Street, constructed in 1920, with large arched entrances that originally accommodated the town's fire trucks. Designed by Jules J. BV. Benedict, the building is designed in the Italian Renaissance style. The J.D. Hill General Store, which sits at the west entrance to Downtown when approaching by vehicle from Santa Fe. This building is constructed of wood siding and has a slightly raised front porch. Two entrances at the front façade provide access to businesses. Commercial buildings continued to be built in the town in the 1920's, including a hardware store, now converted to restaurants and shops, that reflect the popular architectural elements of twentieth century commercial construction. The building has a flat roof, red brick walls with white brick trim, and three storefronts with large display windows stretching along Main Street. Following WWII, a two-story Art Moderne style doctors' office was constructed on Nevada Street, just off of Main Street. It has curved corners, panels of glass block, and buff brick. Several storefronts were modernized to reflect current retail design trends, including the 1908 brick building located on the south side of the 2300 block of Main Street storefront that was remodeled to include metal frame plate glass windows and incorporated corrugated fiberglass. Recent new construction in Downtown includes the addition of a two-story restaurant located at 2589 W. Main Street in 2010, and a three-story brick structure at 2679 W. Main Street completed in 2019. Both structures are designed to match the early 20th-century brick buildings along Main Street, albeit with contemporary elements.

The proposed district reflects what remains of Littleton's residential and commercial small town character and history. What is attractive about Downtown Littleton is the proximity of the industrial, residential and commercial properties to one another. 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. The sense of place and community is born from these remnants and reminders of a town's past. Littleton is now a city with a population of nearly 50,000, but its downtown still holds many pieces of its past and represents a true living history of its growth and development.

Historic Themes

Agricultural Heritage

From its earliest days as a settlement, Littleton was a rural, agricultural community, composed of a collection of small farm homesteads on either side of the South Platte River. Richard and Angeline Little were part of a handful of families who began farming in the area. As more people arrived to set up homesteads, a small community began to emerge, with all social and economic activity centered near the Little's property. The Littles built their English/Norman rhyolite stone house at 5777 S. Rapp Street on their property, near where Little and other local farmers would build the first Rough & Ready Flour Mill in 1867 and the adjacent grain elevator, the Columbine Mill, located at 5798 S. Rapp Street, in 1901.

The Littleton Creamery, located at 2675 W. Alamo, built in 1884, was the center of the community's dairy industry; farmers would bring their milk to be processed and shipped to Denver as either cream or butter. Between 1902-1904 the building also housed Littleton's first high school.

By 1888, Littleton boasted 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. In 1890, the city was formally incorporated, with the town board first meeting at Julius D. Hill's General Store, 5728 S. Rapp Street.

Residential Heritage

Within the Downtown District, residential development is represented along Alamo Avenue, and the few significant historic houses remaining that are in the scattered in the downtown area. The inter-mixing of residential with commercial and industrial uses is a typical land use pattern found prior to the rise of zoning regulations that called for the separation of uses based on health and safety issues. This mix of uses has been lost in many cities, as the demand for commercial space outweighs the usefulness of residential buildings. While many of the remaining residential buildings in the proposed Downtown Historic District are now used for commercial enterprises, they have retained original integrity. A good example is the Wherly Residence. It reflects dwelling construction of the early twentieth century in Littleton through its pyramidal hipped roof with over hanging eaves, prominent porch, and double-hung sash windows.

Commercial Heritage

Commercial development has been the most constant use over time in Downtown. Commercial development from 1890 through today is present in the district, primarily on Main Street. Included in the proposed Downtown District is the Littleton Main Street National Register Historic District. The National Register District recognized the historic and architectural integrity of a 3-block area along Main Street that includes Littleton Town Hall and Littleton's transportation corridors. The proposed Downtown Historic District extends to the west end of Main Street. As well, it reflects commercial building types that have occurred over time in response to new methods of retailing, new types of goods and services, or new means of transportation.

Downtown Littleton is the heart of Littleton and retains a nucleus of buildings that are distinctive representations of the different life cycles of the city. While each building has its own history, the combined collection tell the story of how Littleton came into being and grew over time. It is this evolutionary story, and maintaining the links to that story, that is of significance to the community.

Historic Significance Criteria – Littleton City Code, Section 4-6-6

The Downtown Historic Landmark District meets the following criteria for designation:

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

The proposed district encompasses the core of Richard Little's town plat. Some of the buildings constructed in Littleton's earliest days of European settlement and buildings constructed in the decades

that followed, remain. The area within the proposed district is the site of many events and decisions that shaped growth and development of Littleton. It was and remains the historic cultural, political, economic and social core of Littleton.

4-6-6-(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 just steps away from his home.

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

Downtown is 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 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 the city and out.

4-6-6(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 emotional center of Littleton.

Additional criteria

Because the application has not achieved support from a minimum of 50 percent of property owners, the criterion for designation without owner's consent must also be met.

4-6-9(B)1(a) Whether the property or 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, contains buildings representative of European settlers that made their home in the area, including the city founder, Richard Little's home; 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 original Carnegie Library building; a United States Post Office building built with Works Progress Administration funds; as well as 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 buildings. 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, with a population near 50,000, its downtown still holds many pieces of its past and represents a true "living history" of the growth and development of what is now a city.

The proposed historic district meets the "overwhelming significance" criterion of section 4-6-9(B)1(a).

Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan

The proposed Downtown Historic District meets the following goal of the City of Littleton Comprehensive Plan:

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

Bibliography

1. Simmons, R. Laurie and Thomas H., Front Range Research Associates. Historic Buildings Survey Littleton, Colorado 1997.
2. National Register of Historic Places Nomination. Littleton Main Street, 1998.
3. Field, Kimberly, and Fischer, Amy. Historic Themes of Downtown Littleton, 2021.

Boundary Map

See attached.

List of Contributing and Non-contributing Resources

See attached.