



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: MARCH 3, 2026

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: JENNIFER PAIGE, AICP, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION OF THE MESITA ROAD LANDMARK DISTRICT

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines Section 15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment) and that there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances;
2. Find that the proposed Mesita Road Landmark District as shown in Attachment A meets the criteria for designation as a landmark district, (Pasadena Municipal Code Section 17.62.040.G), specifically:
 - a. Within its boundaries, a minimum of 60 percent of the properties qualify as contributing; and
 - b. The grouping represents a significant and distinguishable entity of Citywide importance that is united historically by past events or aesthetically by plan or development and one or more of a defined historic, cultural, development and/or architectural context(s); and, therefore
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the Mesita Road Landmark District Overlay as shown in Attachment A.

BACKGROUND:

On June 24, 2025, Katja M. Guenther, on behalf of supporting property owners in the proposed landmark district, submitted an application for Eligibility Review of the designation of the Mesita Road Landmark District. The staff evaluated the district according to the landmark district designation criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and on September 2, 2025 issued a Notice of Decision that determined that the district meets the applicable criteria for approval. Prior to the decision being made, staff conducted a virtual informational meeting which was noticed to all property owners within the proposed district boundary, on August 27, 2025. The meeting was recorded and is available by request to anyone wishing to view it.

On December 31, 2025, Katja M. Guenther submitted an application for Formal Review of the designation of the Mesita Road Landmark District. Staff has reviewed the material submitted and confirmed that the district meets the applicable criteria for approval, as described below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LANDMARK DISTRICT:

Boundaries: The proposed boundaries of the district are limited to Mesita Road, which is a private road that services seven residences within the proposed district and extends to the rear property line of each property. Six of the homes are located on the west side of the street and one house is on the east side and all have frontages along the same street. The nearest streets are Calvert Road, which is located immediately south of the district boundary and Sierra Madre Villa Avenue, which is east of the district boundary (See Attachment A).

Construction Dates: All buildings in the district were built between 1949-1958, with most of the homes built in the early 1950's and one building was built in 1958. See Attachment B for construction dates of each specific property in the district.

Architects and Builders: The district represents a strong collection of architect-designed residences that, with one exception, were designed by architect Harold B. Zook. The houses were built by different contractors, including J. Shelton Gordon, Frederick J. Zimowski, E.A. Daniell Co., A.F. Bredthauer, R. Johnson, and Evald C. Moller. Frederick J. Zimowski constructed two of the seven houses in the proposed district.

Zoning: All of the properties within the proposed landmark district are zoned single-family residential (RS-4 HD).

General Plan: The General Plan Designation of all of the properties within the proposed landmark district is Low Density Residential.

ANALYSIS:

Pursuant to PMC Section 17.62.070.C, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)'s role in reviewing Landmark District Designations is to determine whether the Landmark District meets the criteria for designation as specified in PMC Section 17.62.040.G, which states that the criteria for designation of a Landmark District are as follows:

- a. Within its boundaries, a minimum of 60 percent of the properties qualify as contributing;

- b. A simple majority (51 %) of property owners support the designation at the time of designation by the City Council; and
- c. The grouping represents a significant and distinguishable entity of Citywide importance that is united historically by past events or aesthetically by plan or development...and represents one or more of a defined historic, cultural, development and/or architectural context(s) (e.g., 1991 Citywide historic context, as amended, historic context prepared in an intensive-level survey or historic context prepared specifically for the nominated landmark district.)...

The PMC also states that, the HPC shall apply the criteria above according to applicable National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Bulletins for evaluating historic properties, including the seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association (NRHP Bulletin #15: "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation"). In addition, the PMC states that when determining the boundaries of a landmark district, the HPC shall use the NRHP Bulletin #21: 'Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties.' Relevant excerpts from these NRHP Bulletins are included in Attachment F.

The analysis below is provided to substantiate the required criteria and NRHP Bulletins applicable to the designation of Landmark Districts as listed above.

Representation of Citywide Significance: The proposed district is significant because it contains a cohesive and contiguous collection of single-family residential buildings that are designed in the Mid-Century Modern and Modern Ranch architectural styles and represent the work of significant architect Harold B. Zook as identified in the historic context report "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past."

Unifying Characteristics of the District: The district represents the theme of architect-designed single family residential development, consisting of single-family Mid-Century Modern and Modern Ranch style houses with high integrity, most of which were designed by Harold B. Zook. These homes are distinguished by their high-style and site-specific designs that sit on large and relatively flat parcels with expansive front lawns. The mid-century modern style is characterized by geometric and simple forms, an absence of exterior decorations or ornamentation, flat or low slung pitched roofs and wide overhangs, large expanses of glass, and open floor plans that emphasize indoor-outdoor living. The Modern Ranch style is closely related to the California Ranch style, which was made popular by Cliff May in the 1930s, the architect who is widely credited with the style on the West Coast. The Ranch style became popular in Pasadena in the late 1940s. Similar to the mid-century modern style, the Modern Ranch is characterized by its low horizontal massing in a one-story configuration, sprawling L- or U-shaped plan, low-pitched hipped or gabled roof, plaster or natural wood exterior finish such as wood lap or board and batten siding, and floor plans that emphasize indoor-outdoor living. The Ranch style later influenced the emergence of the Modern Ranch style post-World War II which borrowed inspiration from the Modernist idiom and the architects of the Case Study houses. As such, making the distinction between Mid-century Modern and the Ranch/Modern Ranch house difficult to recognize. The district also represents historically significant development trends and building types built between 1935-1965 that were identified in a 2009 study of mid-twentieth century architecture. Furthermore, the district was determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in the 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past survey.

Boundary Justification: The proposed boundary encompasses a distinguishable grouping of intact Modern Ranch and mid-century modern style homes located along Mesita Road, which is a small private street that traverses in the north-south direction and identified by a brick monument sign with the name of the road “Mesita Road” at the entrance into the neighborhood from Sierra Madre Villa Avenue. Mesita Road is located at the top of a significant slope above the adjoining streets, including Sierra Madre Villa Avenue, New York Drive, and Calvert Road which physically separates the proposed district from the surrounding neighborhoods. Of the seven contiguous homes within the district, six were designed by Harold B. Zook.

Period of Significance: All properties within the proposed landmark district were constructed between 1949-1958. As such, staff determines the appropriate period of significance for the district to be 1949-1958.

Contributing Properties to the Landmark District: All seven buildings in the district were built between 1949 and 1958, during the period of significance, and exhibit high integrity on their street-facing elevations, with the exception of 1105 Mesita Road, which has undergone significant alterations, including construction of an attached garage through conversion of existing livable space and alteration to original window openings, window surrounds, and configurations from a previous window replacement project. As such, six out of seven of the properties are considered contributing, or 86%.

Generally, buildings that retain most of their original exterior features or historically significant alterations and represent the applicable historic context(s) are contributing to a landmark district. Minor exterior alterations, which may be reversed, typically do not render a building noncontributing. Buildings with two or more substantial alterations including openings with altered dimensions, exterior cladding/coating in a different material or finish, or modified roof form or material are typically noncontributing. Buildings built outside of the period of significance or that do not represent the general architectural character or historic context of the district are also noncontributing. In this case, all seven houses were built between 1949 and 1958 and represent the context of “Cultural Resources of the Recent Past.” Given the strong architectural cohesion of the Mid-century Modern and Modern Ranch architectural styles represented by all properties in the district, staff determines that six of the seven homes within the proposed landmark district be considered contributing to the district, while 1105 Mesita Road should be a non-contributor to the district.

Support from Property Owners: In the preliminary petition (Attachment C), 57% of the property owners have signified their support for district designation in writing (4 of the 7 properties in the district boundary), which exceeds the minimum 51% requirement. Signatures in support of the district designation by a majority of the property owners are not required until the public hearings with the Planning Commission and City Council. At this stage, the petition is preliminary. No formal opposition to the landmark district designation has been received as of the date of this report writing.

District Name: The district is entirely along Mesita Road; therefore, staff recommends that the name “Mesita Road Landmark District” be established to represent this unifying feature of the district. Alternatively, Harold Zook-Mesita Road Landmark District would also be an appropriate name, for its association with the architect and the street for which the homes are concentrated

on. Staff has not identified any other subdivisions, single owners or other unifying features from which to draw a district name.

RESULTS OF DESIGNATION:

Landmark District designation protects the historic and architectural character of a neighborhood by requiring submittal and review by the Historic Preservation Commission or Design & Historic Preservation staff of an application for Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior changes that are visible from the street. Demolitions, relocations and new construction are also reviewed in landmark districts. Reviews of alterations and demolitions of non-contributing structures are required, as well as of contributing structures; however, according to the guidelines, more changes are permitted on non-contributing structures because they have few, if any, features that need to be preserved.

Interim Procedures while Designation is Pending: The Zoning Code requires submittal of an application for Certificate of Appropriateness for any major projects, as defined in the Code, after the Historic Preservation Commission makes a positive recommendation on a proposed landmark district designation. Applications submitted and deemed complete prior to the Commission's action are not subject to these interim procedures. Applications submitted during this period would follow category one review procedures and could therefore be approved, approved with conditions or disapproved. Minor projects would not require this review unless and until the designation is approved by the City Council and a Zoning Map Amendment Ordinance becomes effective.

Guidelines: The *Design Guidelines for Historic Districts* apply to reviews of all projects in residential landmark and historic districts. These guidelines, developed with the participation of local residents, are an elaboration of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and have examples and illustrations targeting local conditions.

Incentives: If a property is designated as a contributing structure to a landmark district, it is eligible for additional incentives for preserving historic resources, including the use of the State Historical Building Code, reduction of building permits fees, and construction tax for certain projects, as well as eligibility for the Historic Property Contract Program (Mills Act) which provides a reduction of property taxes for performing specified maintenance and rehabilitation work.

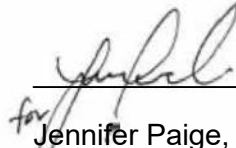
NEXT STEPS:

If the HPC recommends approval of the designation, the application will be scheduled for review by the Planning Commission (PC), which will be asked to make the required findings to amend the zoning map with a historic overlay district consistent with PMC Section 17.74.070.B and to certify the final petition for the proposed landmark district in accordance with PMC Section 17.62.070.D.3. Following the PC's review the recommendations from both commissions will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration at a public hearing.

CONCLUSION

Based on this analysis, the proposed Mesita Road Landmark District Designation meets all of the necessary criteria for approval. Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend that the City Council approve the proposed Landmark District Designation.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Map of Proposed District
- B. Inventory of Properties
- C. Preliminary Petition
- D. Building Description Blanks
- E. Photographs
- F. Excerpts from National Register Bulletins 15 & 21