



---

CITY OF TEMPE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting Date: 07/12/2023  
Agenda Item: 6

---

## Memorandum

To: Historic Preservation Commission

From: Zachary J. Lechner, Historic Preservation Officer (ex. 8870, zachary\_lechner@tempe.gov)

Date: July 5, 2023

Subject: Agenda Item #6, Request for resolution approving HPC Chair Woodson and Vice Chair Fackler's letter to Mayor and Council

---

HPC Chair Kyle Woodson and Vice Chair Dave Fackler have drafted a letter to Tempe Mayor Corey Woods and City Council in support of preserving the Watson's Flowers Building, a Historic Eligible (for the Tempe Historic Property Register) and National Register of Historic Places-eligible property, located at 2525 East Apache Boulevard. At this time, the Tempe Coalition for Affordable Housing owns the property. The Tempe Community Action Agency has expressed an interest in purchasing and developing the property. At the July meeting, Commissioners will be invited to provide feedback on the letter and then decide whether to approve a resolution in support of the letter being sent to the Mayor and Council.

Sample Resolution: "I motion for approval of a resolution in support of sending Chair Woodson and Vice Chair Fackler's letter recommending preservation of the Watson's Flowers Building to the Mayor and Council [*with the stated revisions*].

July 3, 2023

Dear Mayor Woods and City Council Members:

On behalf of the Tempe Historic Preservation Commission, as Chair, I am writing to express our deep concern with the future disposition of the Watson's Flower Shop property (APN 134-35-034C) located at 2525 Apache Boulevard. The property is one of six parcels that are planned for an affordable housing development (City of Tempe Project No. 6700128). In particular, we are concerned with the planned demolition of the core portion of the historic Watson's Flower Shop building in conjunction with Project No. 6700128.

The core portion of Watson's Flower Shop is a circa 1920 adobe building recognized by the City of Tempe Historic Preservation Office and Historic Preservation Commission as "significant for its historic association with transportation and tourism and as an example of relatively rare adobe commercial construction and the Art Moderne style" (see <https://www.tempe.gov/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/334/20780?npage=5>). The Historic Preservation Commission classified the property as Historic Eligible in 2001. As noted below, the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office determined it to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 2023.

The Commission is aware that discussions about the disposition of the Watson's Flower Shop building have been occurring for well over a year among the Mayor's office, Council, City staff and the project proponent. A year ago, the Commission was advised informally that the City was seeking ways to preserve the historic core of the building. In addition, because the affordable housing project is utilizing federal funds and therefore must adhere to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the City of Tempe Historic Preservation Office has been diligently conducting the appropriate consultation steps as required by Section 106. However, the first time that City staff formally engaged with the Commission about this matter was during the Commission meeting of October 12, 2022. At that meeting, City staff presented the development plans for the Watson's Flower Shop site and indicated that the Watson's Flower Shop building would be demolished, and that the City was considering a plan to commemorate the soon-to-be demolished building. The Commissioners were all deeply concerned that this was the first time that City had engaged with the Commission about this topic, and that the City had already decided to demolish the building without input from the Commission. The Commissioners strongly encouraged City staff to conduct further study of the building to determine if preservation of the building is a viable alternative to demolition.

To that end, as part of the ongoing Section 106 consultation for the affordable housing project, and under the terms of a Programmatic Agreement between the City and the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office, a historic building inventory recently was completed by Vinson Studio (Jones and Vinson 2023\*) for the Watson's Flower Shop building. Archival research has shown that the operation of the Watson's Flowers business had remained in the same family since the mid-1930s. Inventory of the buildings showed that Watson's Flowers (Building 1a)—although compromised by periodic vernacular alterations, inconsistent maintenance, and the removal of significant associated features, including the 1955 sign—does retain sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (see map below of

Building 1). As such, the main building of Watson’s Flowers (Building 1a) was recommended as individually eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion A (event) for its role in the historic context associated with Commerce on the Bankhead Highway/US 80 (ca. 1921–1975) and/or Postwar Urban and Commercial Development in Tempe (1945–1975). The undertaking (proposed demolition of this building) would have an adverse effect on the historic property. The outbuildings (Buildings 1b–1c) were recommended as not eligible for inclusion in the NRHP and therefore a finding of no adverse effect to a historic property was recommended for these buildings.

The City Historic Preservation Office reviewed the report and found the document to be adequate and meeting both federal and state guidelines and standards. Further, the City Historic Preservation Office agreed with the recommendations for additional mitigation in the form of Level II documentation per Historic American Building Survey (HABS) standards as required by the Programmatic Agreement.

Although such HABS-level mitigation would satisfy federal and state guidelines for resolving the adverse effect to the building, the Commission strongly urges you to consider an alternative choice to demolishing the main building of Watson’s Flowers (Building 1a). We believe this building presents a unique opportunity for the City to support an adaptive reuse option in the context of the affordable housing project for this parcel. In fact, the preservation option is reinforced by several City planning documents:

- Apache Character Area Plan (<https://www.tempe.gov/home/showdocument?id=38578>)
  - The second point of the Apache Character Area plan framework references the significance of the area’s history to the character area: *Apache Boulevard is one of the most authentic, unique, and diverse areas of Tempe. As the light rail corridor continues to grow and evolve, maintaining this palpable authenticity will be central to the identity and vitality of this area.*
  - The Apache Boulevard corridor was a significant historic highway (old US 80) and many of the original buildings reflected this function, calling attention via unique building design to highway goers. Few of the buildings from this important period in Tempe’s history are extant.
  - The very first principle of the Apache Character Area is Historic Preservation and it specifically states, “Promote the preservation of certain existing buildings, structures, and flood-irrigated neighborhoods of post-war subdivisions which express the best of our past. Showcase Tempe’s history. Connections to the past are key to informing Placemaking.” Other principles of the Apache Character Area also reference historic preservation including 100-year Buildings and Adaptive Reuse (#6) and Neighborhood Identity: Authentic Character (#15). Watsons is even featured in the Apache Area Architecture and Design component of the Apache Character Area guide. Preserving the Watsons Flowers building would provide an example of putting these principles into practice, contributing to the history of this important midcentury transportation corridor, and allowing for retention of placemaking characteristics of the historical Apache Boulevard area.

- General Plan 2040  
<https://www.tempe.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/86155/637395866769170000>
  - Although historic preservation elements within GP 2040 are largely found within the Land Use and Development chapter, historic preservation is referenced in many components of the plan, including the Economic Development chapter (place making and encouraging urban development near hubs), Conservation chapter (green building), and the Openspace, Recreation, and Cultural Amenities chapter (preserving existing open and recreational spaces related to historic properties).

*Land Use and Development (LU5 and LU 7)*

LU5

Provide land use and transportation integrated planning, design, and development that reinforces and enhances the character of the entire community.

*Strategies:*

4. Utilize planning tools to develop geographically unique plans and direct land use decisions within the City, including the Historic Preservation Plan

LU7

Encourage preservation of significant historic and archeological resources

*Strategies:*

7. Encourage preservation in cultural resource areas through maintenance of culturally significant features of the built environment and design
8. Discourage incompatible design in cultural resource areas

*Historic Preservation Element (HP 1–4)*

HP1

Identify, preserve, and protect significant historic properties and archaeological sites

*Strategies:*

1. Utilize the input of the Historic Preservation Commission and the public participation process to identify, preserve, and protect significant properties
3. Review proposals that may impact designated and potentially eligible historic properties, including nearby development that might visually impact a historic property

HP2

Identify those districts for designation and preservation.

*Strategies:*

1. Continue the process for historic property identification, interpretation, documentation, designation, registration, review of impacts, and public participation
2. Identify, inventory, and assess historic buildings, structures, districts, and archaeological sites to provide property use options. Use this information to set preservation priorities and promote the identification and classification of properties that are eligible for historic designation. Recommend appropriate properties, districts, and sites to the Development Review Commission for designation and listing in the Tempe Historic Property Register (THPR)
3. Compile historic information about properties and character of Tempe to assist in identifying sites worthy of preservation and inform current and future development

### HP3

Foster economic vitality through preservation and adaptive rehabilitation of historic properties that contribute to the character of the community

#### *Strategies:*

1. Increase awareness of Tempe history and historic properties among students, residents, visitors, and businesses for the promotion of historic preservation
4. Provide opportunities for access, use, and interpretation of historic structures while retaining historic integrity

### HP4

Integrate historic preservation planning with boards, commissions, neighborhood, and redevelopment planning efforts to protect and enhance community heritage and complement city redevelopment and revitalization efforts

#### *Strategies:*

Advise city officials on all matters pertaining to historic structures, properties, or sites

- Historic Preservation Plan

(<https://www.tempe.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/92621/637921968206130000>)

- There are several goals and priorities in the newly adopted Historic Preservation Plan that relate to the Watsons situation. Here are a few that are directly relevant:

*I. Public Outreach and Support*

1. Work with City agencies and public advocacy organizations to inform the general public about the economic and cultural benefits of historic preservation and designation (THPR and NRHP).

*II. Inter-Department Coordination*

1. Work with other City departments to identify and assess direct and indirect impacts to potential cultural resources in the course of City projects, including the following:
    - a. Future studies relating to the expansion of the Valley Metro Light Rail and/or Tempe Streetcar
    - b. Parks and Recreation project planning
    - c. City projects in Character Areas
  6. When possible, link historic preservation efforts to major City of Tempe and Tempe City Council priorities, including the Quality of Life priority, which focuses on “enhancing the quality of life for all Tempe residents and workers through investment in neighborhoods, parks, the arts, human services, and city amenities, with an emphasis on equity and diversity.”
  8. Promote General Plan goals and Character Area Plan goals, as well as other City priorities that support and intersect with historic preservation.
- The Historic Preservation Plan includes other discussions about promoting Historic Preservation and encouraging private property owners to list their properties on the local register. If the City cannot do that for one of their own projects, it does not set a very good precedent to encourage private property owners to do the same.

In sum, we strongly urge the City to consider an alternative option to demolishing the historic Watson’s Flower Shop building. This is an iconic building in Tempe’s history, as well as to the region and for visitors. The preservation of the core contributing elements of the Watsons building would only take up a small proportion of the overall parcel and this would not

significantly impede the redevelopment project. Importantly, we observe that the opportunities to protect our cultural resources and local heritage will become increasingly scarce as the City grows and matures into its next stages. The preservation of this building presents an excellent opportunity to save one of Tempe's remaining iconic historic buildings. The Commission would be happy to engage in further discussions about this with you.

Sincerely,

Tempe Historic Preservation Commission

M. Kyle Woodson, Chair

Dave Fackler, Vice Chair

\*Vinson, Marc C., and Thomas Jones, (2023), *Historic Building Documentation of Watson's Flowers*. Vinson Studio Project No. 2023.01, PaleoWest / Commonwealth Heritage Group Project No. 21-002:HDOC/AZ-0138. Tempe and Phoenix, Arizona.



Aerial photograph showing components of Watson's Flower Shop Building 1.