

CITY OF FLAGSTAFF HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS
PZ-26-00176
15 E. Aspen Ave.

DATE: **October 14, 2026**
MEETING DATE: **October 21, 2026**
REPORT BY: **Lauren Clementino**

REQUEST

Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for a new mural location on the secondary façade of the Babbitt Building at 15 E. Aspen Ave.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for a new mural location on the secondary façade of the Babbitt Building at 15 E. Aspen Ave.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project proposes to add a new mural to the alley-facing secondary façade of the Babbitt Building at 15 E. Aspen Ave. (APN 100-20-015). The mural's proposed location would cover a fading Serta mattress advertisement (also referred to as a ghost sign) previously painted on the exterior brick wall at this location. The date of the Serta mattress advertisement is unknown – a 1982 photograph of the building depicts the advertisement in a newer condition. The mural would not extend beyond the previously painted area. This Certificate of Appropriateness application requests approval of a mural at this location. Mural concepts are included in the application packet, however, the final design and content is not included in this review and would be reviewed by the Beautification and Public Art Commission.

The building was constructed c. 1907-1911 and is located within the Downtown Historic Overlay Zone and subject to the Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff. It is also a contributing property to the Railroad Addition Historic District.

PAST DECISIONS AND OTHER REVIEWS

The applicant has also applied for a Beautification in Action Grant from the City of Flagstaff for this project. The grant application would be reviewed by the Beautification and Public Art Commission after the applicant has received a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project from the Heritage Preservation Commission. The Beautification and Public Art Commission would be responsible for reviewing and approving the mural content as well as the grant award.

INTENT

The purpose of the Downtown Overlay is laid out in Section 10-40.50.030 of the Zoning Code. The stated purpose is to “promote the preservation and unique character of all structures within the zone.” Properties within the Downtown Overlay are “subject to the Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff.” The Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff states: “The Historic Preservation Ordinance is designed to preserve and enhance the historic district. This ordinance requires a Certificate of Appropriateness (or

No Effect) be granted before any changes are made to the exterior appearance of properties within a designated historic district.”

The purpose of the Downtown Overlay is to review the appropriateness of proposed changes to historic buildings with guidance by the Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff: *“This handbook is included as a guide to the Commission in making consistent decisions on the appropriateness of proposed changes. Interpretation should be neither overly strict nor too permissive. In making its decisions, the Commission will consider the historic value of the building, its prominence and significance to the district, the state of physical deterioration, and the economic factors of repair, replacement, or renovation.”*

STAFF REVIEW

Scope of Work

The Certificate of Appropriateness is “appropriate if the proposed work alters a cultural resource but does so in such a way that is compatible with the historic or archaeological character of the resource and all major impacts are mitigated such that the work does not diminish, eliminate, or adversely affect the significance or integrity of the resource.” (Flagstaff Zoning Code 10-30.30.060.E).

Findings

“Prior to the granting of any required approvals or permits and prior to the commencement of any work on a landmark property or within a historic overlay zone, the Heritage Preservation Commission or the Historic Preservation Officer shall review all work proposed and approve or conditionally approve the work in the form of a certificate of no effect, certificate of appropriateness, or certificate of economic hardship” (Flagstaff Zoning Code 10-30.30.060 Development of a Landmark Property and Property within a Historic Overlay Zone).

The Flagstaff Zoning Code 10-30.30.060E states:

Criteria for Approval.

When approving a certification of appropriateness, the Heritage Preservation Commission shall find that:

- a. The proposed work is consistent with the purpose and intent of this division;*
- b. The proposed work is compatible with its context:*
 - (1) The appropriate context for a landmark or a historic property is the property itself and, to a much lesser extent, the surrounding properties and neighborhood;*
 - (2) The appropriate context of work in a historic overlay zone is the significant portions of the property itself, the surrounding properties, and the neighborhood;*
- c. The cultural resources associated with the proposed work have been sufficiently sought, identified and evaluated;*
- d. Major impacts on cultural resources are sufficiently mitigated; and*

e. The proposed work is consistent with applicable development standards and design guidelines. See also subsection (G) of this section, Development Standards and Guidelines.

Downtown Historic Overlay Design Guidelines

“The Downtown Overlay (DOZ) zone applies to areas of the City subject to the Downtown Historic Design Review Overlay District Guidelines and Design Standards and Guidelines with design review by the Heritage Preservation Commission for the development of properties located within the boundaries of the zone.” (Flagstaff Zoning Code 10-40.50.030 Overlay Zones).

The following Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff guidelines are most relevant this case. There are no guidelines specific to murals that are not in use as signs, and no guidelines that would apply to the content or design of the mural.

Special Design Guidelines for Historic Buildings

- H3. Avoid removing or altering any historic material or significant architectural features.
- H4. Maintain existing significant stylistic elements.

Rehabilitation Guidelines for All Existing Buildings

- R11. Leave brick unpainted if it was historically unpainted.

Basis of Report

The information in this summary report was derived from the application to the Heritage Preservation Commission, the Flagstaff Zoning Code, and the Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff.

Evaluation of Effects

Special Design Guidelines for Historic Buildings

- H3. Avoid removing or altering any historic material or significant architectural features.

The supplemental information for this guideline states that original materials and architectural details that contribute to the historic significance of the structure should be preserved whenever feasible. The proposed project is along a secondary façade and no character-defining architectural features will be removed or altered. The original brick in this location has already been painted and is thus already altered.

The age of the existing Serta mattress advertisement proposed to be painted over is unknown, although it is not original to the building and appears to date to the late-historic period (possibly 1960s or 70s based on the 1982 photograph included in the application packet). It is not a character-defining architectural feature of the building. It has deteriorated to the point that much of the advertisement’s paint has been removed from the brick by the elements.

- H4. Maintain existing significant stylistic elements.

The supplemental information for this guideline says to protect historic material with maintenance treatments such as rust removal, caulking, and re-painting. The applicant proposes to carefully prepare and prime the wall before painting and proposes the mural as a means of protecting the brick.

Rehabilitation Guidelines for All Existing Buildings

- R11. Leave brick unpainted if it was historically unpainted.

The mural is proposed to be painted over an existing painted area. Previously unpainted brick will remain unpainted in compliance with this guideline. Re-painting brick that has been previously painted is called out as a good building maintenance practice within the supplemental information for this design guideline.

COMMISSION OPTIONS

1. The Commission can approve the Certificate of Appropriateness;
2. The Commission can approve the Certificate of Appropriateness with additional conditions related to the standards and guidelines applicable to the case; or
3. The Commission can deny the application.

STAFF CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the Certificate of Appropriateness for a new mural location be approved. The proposed mural location meets the Design Handbook for Downtown Flagstaff guidelines and the findings required by the Zoning Code, and it is appropriate for the Commission to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness based on the findings.