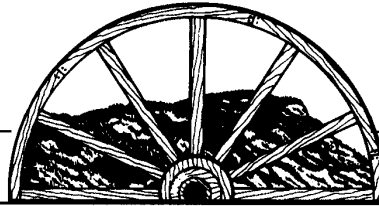


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## **2021 CLG Grant Narrative**

### **La Grande Downtown Historic District Standards Update**

In 1999, the City of La Grande established its downtown Commercial Historic District. As part of the listing of the Historic District, the City hired an outside consultant to create an inventory of the District's buildings and a Historic District Guidelines document for the District. In 2009, the City renamed and slightly modified the guidelines document and readopted it as Historic District "Standards". The purpose of this adoption was to change the guidelines from an advisory document that encouraged historic preservation to become standards with regulatory power. However, the document was still written from a guidelines approach and includes "may" or "should" statements meant to encourage a specific standard or outcome, but in some cases it is unclear what is actually required.

Since 2009, the City has used this Standards document to review modifications to properties in the Historic District. The City has experienced a number of situations where the Standards do not offer clear or specific direction. This lack of clarity has been confusing and frustrating for property owners, City planning staff, and volunteers serving on the City's Landmarks Advisory Commission.

La Grande's Commercial Historic District includes 57 Historic Contributing resources, 20 Historic Non-Contributing resources, and 15 Non-Contributing resources. Under the current Standards, modifications to all properties are treated the same whether the resource is contributing or not. This lack of distinction in the Standards between contributing and non-contributing resources creates further confusion among downtown property owners, who do not see why a 1974 bank or a 2011 medical office building is held to the same historic modification requirements as a National Register property.

Though La Grande is working to be a leader in preservation for Eastern Oregon, the east side of the state continues to have a lack of preservation design resources, architects, and contractors familiar with preservation practices. Property owners in La Grande by default pursue a design/build approach with local contractors, and the current standards do not adequately prepare owners or contractors to plan building modifications for City review.

Finally, the District has changed over the past 20 years of its existence. Because the Standards document does not provide clear direction and does not reflect evolution in the District over the past 20 years, the institutional memory of City staff and Landmarks commissioners becomes the prime approach to project review. Relying on memory, rather than clear standards, creates inconsistent implementation and inequity in the review process.

This application proposes to use CLG grant funding for an update of the City's Historic District Standards. The City's Landmarks Advisory Commission has established the following goals for the Standards update project:

1. The new Standards document should provide clarity to both the process and preservation requirements. The result should be a Standards document that is more clear, not more cumbersome, and creates a more predictable outcome for applicants going through the Landmarks review process.
2. The update of the Standards should be a public process that requests engagement and input from Historic District stakeholders, including but not limited to property owners, businesses, contractors, and preservation/history advocates.
3. The new Standards document should include a distinction between a) National Register and Historic Contributing resources; 2) Historic Non-Contributing resources; and 3) Non-Contributing resources.
4. The new Standards document should be in accordance with Secretary of the Interior preservation standards to preserve the integrity of the District and allow for property owners to participate in preservation grant and incentive programs.

The City proposes to use the CLG grant funds to hire an outside consultant to assist in improving and rewriting Standards and to facilitate the public process. The consultant would ideally be an unbiased, neutral party experienced in historic preservation, standards updates, with strong public engagement and facilitator skills and an understanding of the needs of rural communities.

On February 1, 2021, the La Grande City Council and the Landmarks Advisory Commission met in a joint work session to discuss this project and grant application. The City Council was supportive of applying for the CLG grant for this project, see attached City Council Resolution 4800, Series 2021. If this grant funding is received, the Planning Department will submit a funding match request in May 2021 for the 2021-2022 fiscal year budget for review and approval by the City Council.

The Standards update project would commence following budget approval by the City Council in June 2021, effective July 2, 2021. Public engagement meetings would take place during Fall 2021; we hope by then COVID-19 restrictions will be loosened and allow for in-person meetings. City staff and Landmarks commissioners would be responsible for outreach to potential stakeholders for inclusion in the public process.

The consultant's scope of work would be as follows:

**Task 1: Kick-off – Late summer 2021. (\$1000)**

1. Review current standards and goals for update project.
2. Virtual meeting with City staff and Landmarks Advisory Commission to discuss current standards and process deficiencies.

**Task 2: Public Engagement - Fall 2021. (\$10,000)**

1. Meeting 1 – In-person in La Grande
  - a. Consultant to prepare material for and facilitate meeting.
  - b. Communicate goals, timeline, and process of update project to stakeholders.

- c. Provide an introduction to the La Grande Commercial Historic District – architectural styles, period of significance, contributing vs. non-contributing definitions, etc.
  - d. Provide an introduction to Secretary of the Interior preservation standards and priorities.
  - e. Prepare and circulate a survey on perceived deficiencies in current standards.
- 2. Meeting 2 – In-person in La Grande
  - a. Consultant to prepare material for and facilitate meeting.
  - b. Discuss survey results and Gather additional feedback on deficiencies in current standards and ideas for improvement
  - c. Discuss changes to District over the past 20 years since the District was established
  - d. Discuss community priorities for Historic District
- 3. Meeting 3 – In person in La Grande (or virtual if budget is limited)
  - a. Consultant to prepare material for and facilitate meeting.
  - b. Review draft recommendations for changes to Standards document and discuss feedback

**Task 3: Draft of new Standards document – Winter 2021/2022. (\$4,000)**

- 1. Rewrite standards to provide clarity to requirements. Eliminate hold-over language from being “guidelines” and make the standards more definitive as requirements.
- 2. Include distinction in approach between a) National Register and Historic Contributing resources; 2) Historic Non-Contributing resources; and 3) Non-Contributing resources.
- 3. Incorporate public process feedback into Standards document.

**Task 4: Standards document review and finalization – Spring 2022. (\$5,000)**

- 1. Provide draft of revised Standards document to City staff and Landmarks Advisory Commission for review and comment.
- 2. Virtual meeting with City staff and Landmarks Advisory Commission to review questions/comments.
- 3. Update draft document based upon City staff and Landmarks commissioner comments.
- 4. Virtual meeting with City Council to present recommendation for revised Standards document.
- 5. Update and finalize Standards document as needed based upon City Council comments.