



Department: Community Development
Cost Center: 4003
For Agenda of: 4/21/2025
Placement: Consent
Estimated Time: N/A

FROM: Timmi Tway, Community Development Director
Prepared By: Eva Wynn, Assistant Planner

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF APPLICATION TO DESIGNATE 571 PISMO STREET AS A HISTORIC LANDMARK

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a draft resolution entitled “Resolution by the City Council of the City of San Luis Obispo, California, designating the Property Located at 571 Pismo Street as a Landmark Historic Resource, called the George and Cordelia McCabe House (Application No. HIST-0944-2025),” as recommended by the Cultural Heritage Committee.

POLICY CONTEXT

The recommended action on this item is supported by historical preservation policies in Section 3.0 (Cultural Heritage) of the [Conservation and Open Space Element](#) of the City’s General Plan, including COSE Policy 3.3.1, *Historic preservation* which provides that significant historic and architectural resources should be identified, preserved and rehabilitated. The recommended action is consistent with procedures and standards for listing of historic resources provided in the City’s [Historic Preservation Ordinance](#) §14.01.

DISCUSSION

Background

The property owners of 571 Pismo St, represented by James Papp, have requested that the property at 571 Pismo Street be designated as a Landmark in the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources (previously called Master List¹ Resource), as the George and Cordelia McCabe House. The property is currently a listed Local Register Resource (previously called Contributing¹). The applicant has provided an evaluation of the property and its eligibility for Landmark status (Attachment B), prepared by James Papp, PhD, Historian and Architectural Historian.

¹ Master List and Contributing List Resources – The Historic Preservation Ordinance (§14.01) was updated by Council [Ordinance No. 1753](#) (2025 Series) which included changes to naming conventions for Historic Resources. The updated ordinance was introduced [December 2, 2025](#) and adopted [January 13, 2026](#) (effective February 13, 2026).



Figure 1 - McCabe House circa 2025



Figure 2 - McCabe House circa 1895 or 1896

571 Pismo Street is located within the Old Town Historic District between two Landmarks, the Patton House at 1407 Nipomo St and the Biddle House at 559 Pismo St. The Old Town Historic District was created to encompass one of the oldest residential neighborhoods and most of the development was done around the turn of the 20th century. The high concentration of 100-year-old or older residences establishes predominant architectural and visual character of the District, with many examples of High Victorian architecture, such as Queen Anne, Italianate, Stick and Gothic Revival influences, along with more modest structures with simpler styles including Neo-classic Row House, Folk Victorian, and Craftsman Bungalow ([Historic Preservation Program Guidelines](#) § 5.2.1).

The residence at 571 Pismo was built in or prior to 1891, as evidenced by the December 1891 Sanborn Map of San Luis Obispo (Attachment B, pp 6.). George and Cordelia McCabe owned the house until 1902 when the property was transferred to S. T. Coiner from whom it changed hands several times in the 20th century. The residence was built in the Eastlake style and the property is currently on the City's Inventory of Historic Resources, the property was listed as a Contributing Resource in 1983 and is now recognized as a Local Register Resource under the updated [Historic Preservation Ordinance](#) (HPO), adopted in 2026. The submitted application (Attachment B) expands on the architectural style of the residence and how it was influenced over the years. The response to staff's questions (Attachment C) further elaborates why the resource embodies Eastlake architecture, opposed to Colonial/Queen Anne, and discusses how the remaining original features enable the structure to communicate its significance. The notable features that communicate the style of the residence include the single-story double bay-front Eastlake cottage with sitting porch and the pierced column portico. The application describes both features as rare, and potentially the last example of pierced columns on the Central Coast, or even in the state. The original design of the residence is traceable to a photo from 1895 or 1896 (Figure 2).

A Landmark resource, defined in the HPO § 14.01.020.28, is the "highest level of individual local designation and may be applied to a historic resource that has been found significant at the local, state, or national level." In order to be eligible for designation, a

Landmark shall be at least fifty years old, demonstrate significance under at least one of the criteria outlined in §14.01.060, and retain a high degree of integrity. The designation is reserved to those properties that are of the greatest importance at the local, regional, state, or national levels.

Pursuant to §14.01.070 of the City's HPO, the City Council, with a recommendation from the CHC, shall take an action on the application to designate or not designate the property as a Landmark.

Evaluation of Eligibility

In the City of San Luis Obispo, historic resources must meet at least one criterion set forth in §14.01.060 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance to be eligible for inclusion on the Inventory of Historic Resources and retain a sufficient or high level of integrity, depending on the designation type as Local Register or Landmark. The significance criteria in §14.01.060 include Events, Persons, Architecture, and Information Potential.

Architecture. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect or design professional of merit or possesses high artistic values.

The historic evaluation describes that the McCabe House meets the architectural criterion as a unique example of a late 19th century double-bay-front Eastlake cottage with a sitting porch framed by pierced columns of extreme rarity. Distinct characteristics include the character defining Eastlake square bays, including “the five sash windows on each, the panels below and above the windows, and the vertical edge-molding of each bay,” and porch between the bays (pg. 53). The pierced-column portico is described as a rare and delicate feature, which is rarely retained on surviving buildings (Attachment B, pg. 47).

Information Potential: It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

The evaluation states that “the pierced columns on the McCabe House are likely the last used on the Central Coast and possibly California, are exceedingly rare or possibly unique examples of capital-free Eastlake pierced columns and are likely to yield information important in architectural history” (Attachment B, pg. 46). The form is described as the “last use of the pierced-column portico in the region (pg. 2).

The request to list the property at 571 Pismo St as a Landmark is based on the architectural criterion of designation and asserts that the pierced columns are likely to yield information important in architectural history. The application indicates the property is not significant for its association with Events, or Persons. Based on the property's current designation as a Local Register Resource and supported by the submitted application, the subject property meets at least one criterion set forth in §14.01.060 of the HPO.

Evaluation of Integrity

Architectural or historical integrity is “the ability of a historic resource to convey its significance, typically evidenced by the retention of attributes that existed during a resource’s period of significance and including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association” (§14.01.020 (26)). To be designated a historic Landmark, the resource must retain a high degree of integrity to convey its significance and be of the greatest importance at the local, regional, state, or national level.

The submitted evaluation provides a detailed analysis of integrity, identifying the features that enable the structure to retain and communicate its historic significance. The evaluation explains that the removal or replacement of some character defining features, such as the change to the roof line and removal of some façade detailing, are a loss to the residence but do not inhibit the structure from communicating its significance and architectural style. The evaluation concludes that the residence retains a degree of integrity necessary to communicate its significance, evidenced by the retention of character-defining features such as the Eastlake façade, rare pierced columns, and square bay windows.

Conclusion

The submitted application requests the property’s inclusion in the Inventory as a Landmark for its embodiment of a rare double-bay-fronted Eastlake cottage with pierced column portico. The evaluation provides important background on the property and confirms the property’s eligibility for listing under the significance criteria in §14.01.060. The evaluation affirms the property qualifies for individual listing under the HPO, as updated in 2026, and provides evidence supporting the request to elevate the property’s status to Landmark.

Previous Council or Advisory Body Action

On February 23, 2026, the Cultural Heritage Committee (CHC) considered this request and, by a vote of 4-2 (one seat is vacant), recommended that the City Council designate the property as a Landmark in the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources. The recommendation is based on the findings that the McCabe House is significant because of its distinct architecture and potential to yield information important to the architectural history of the city; and retains a high level of integrity to communicate its significance as a rare, local example of a single-story double bay-front Eastlake cottage with sitting porch and the pierced column portico. For these reasons, the McCabe House is of the greatest importance in the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources. During deliberation, Committee Member Blakely brought up concerns regarding the level of integrity and expressed that the alteration to roofline and loss of façade features limit the property’s ability to meet the integrity standard for a Landmark resource under the HPO. The majority of committee members expressed that the essential elements to communicate the property’s significance are retained to the level required for the Landmark designation, and rarity of those elements (i.e. pierced columns, original windows, window bays, etc.) further justify

elevating the property’s historic designation to Landmark. The motion to recommend City Council approve the Landmark request was passed on a 4-2 vote (Committee Chair Tischler and Members Ashbaugh, Arrona, and Gray voting yes; Members Blakely and Simon voting no).

Public Engagement

Public notice of this hearing has been provided to owners and occupants of property near the subject site, and published in a widely circulated local newspaper, and hearing agendas for this meeting have been posted at City Hall, consistent with adopted notification procedures. Public notice was also previously provided for the Cultural Heritage Committee meeting of February 23, 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Inclusion of the subject properties on the City’s Inventory of Historic Resources does not have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment and so is covered by the general rule described in Section 15061 (b) (3) of the CEQA Guidelines.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted: No

Budget Year: 2025-26

Funding Identified: No

Fiscal Analysis:

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
General Fund	\$	\$	\$	\$
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other:				
Total	\$	\$	\$	\$

Adding the property to the Inventory of Historic Resources will have no fiscal impacts. Historic designation of property itself has no bearing on City fiscal resources. As a Landmark, however, the property would be eligible for historic preservation incentives under the Mills Act through property tax credits. Any subsequent request to enter into a Mills Act Contract with the City would be considered under separate application. A separate fiscal analysis would be reviewed by the City Council should any of the properties be proposed for participation in the Mills Act Program.

ALTERNATIVES

1. ***Decline to designate the property as a Landmark in the Inventory of Historic Resources.*** This decision would require Council to adopt a resolution with the findings that the property is not considered to be sufficiently important or does not retain a high degree of integrity, to justify elevating the property to Landmark status. If the property is not elevated to Landmark status, the property would remain in the Inventory as a Local Register Resource.
2. ***Continue consideration of the request for additional information or discussion.*** This alternative would allow the City Council to request additional information to aid in determining whether the property should be designated as a Landmark.

ATTACHMENTS

- A - Draft Resolution designating 571 Pismo St as a Landmark in the City's Inventory of Historic Resources
- B - Historic Resource Evaluation, The McCabe House at 571 Pismo St (James Papp, PhD)
- C - Response to Staff's Questions (James Papp, PhD)