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## **7.0 HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT**

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### **7.1 PURPOSE OF THE ELEMENT**

St. Helena is rich in historic resources dating from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. From its earliest days, the City has been a major commercial center for the developing agricultural countryside and a central shipping point for Napa Valley and eastern Napa County valleys. The late nineteenth century building boom saw numerous stone and brick commercial buildings constructed on Main Street and Railroad Avenue. On both sides of Main Street residences were built, especially on the west side along Oak, Spring, and Kearney Streets.

The City's historic resources were inventoried in 1978. A complete list of the inventoried resources and an overview of St. Helena's history are included in Appendix A. The 1978 inventory provides a complete data base for identifying the City's historic resources, the first step in developing a program of preservation policies and protective measures. This Historic Resources Element serves as a vehicle to focus the City's historic preservation efforts within the context of the General Plan. Although this element is not required by State law, the overwhelming number of historic resources in the City requires this element to be included in the City's planning process.

### **7.2 BENEFITS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

There are several benefits derived from historic preservation that accrue to both the private and public sectors of the community. They are generally grouped into cultural, economic, social and planning benefits.

#### **Cultural**

Just as a visit to an art or historical museum provides an historical and cultural backdrop and enrichment to our lives, historic buildings and their environment provide a context within which we can understand and appreciate the past and the generations that built our communities. We can learn from our past where and how our ancestors established businesses, churches, schools, residential neighborhoods and the other institutions that formed the hearth of our cities and towns.

We can relish the architectural design of older buildings and trace the development of an area through the evolution of different architectural styles. We can marvel at the workmanship and use of varying materials evident in older buildings. We can learn about the family and social life of past generations through the interior designs and furnishings of older buildings. We can appreciate the landscaping that provides the settings for the buildings.

All of these cultural factors contribute to what is so often called the "character" of St. Helena. The City's historic resources provide a strong element of the small town, rural character that this General Plan strives to protect. St. Helena's historic resources help

create an attachment to place. Residents can learn from their community. They can learn about its history and architecture; they can learn pride; they can learn delight; and they can learn to care for "their place."

### **Economic**

There are several direct and indirect economic benefits from historic preservation. Official historic resources can enjoy the direct economic benefits of less strict building codes, income tax credits, income tax deductions, and in some cases, reduced property taxes. A property owner may also increase the value of real property by protecting and enhancing the physical condition of a historic property.

- **Building Codes.** A qualified historic building may use the State Historic Building Code which recognizes the materials, dimensions and other characteristics unique to older buildings. Use of this code can lessen the cost of rehabilitation as compared to full compliance with the Uniform Building Code.
- **Income Tax Benefits.** Although not as attractive as before the 1986 Federal tax law changes, the 20% Investment Tax Credit is available (as of 1993) for National Register properties that are rehabilitated.
- **Income Tax Deductions.** A National Register property may generate an income tax deduction for the owner when a "preservation easement" is donated to a non-profit preservation organization or government agency. In Napa County, Napa County Landmarks accepts such easements.
- **Reduced Property Taxes.** Under some circumstances the local assessor will recognize a Preservation Easement that restricts the use of a historic property for purposes of reducing the assessed value.

The community will realize indirect economic benefits by increasing property taxes when properties are rehabilitated and values increase. A more subtle economic benefit is that from maintaining the character of the community through rehabilitation. Local pride in the historic downtown adds to the desire to shop and visit downtown. The downtown character also attracts visitors. Increased local- and visitor-serving business creates more sales tax revenue.

### **Social**

Historic buildings can provide social benefits by the use of older buildings for low and moderate income housing. Large historic homes are often subdivided to create multiple units while maintaining the exterior character. This also provides one method of increasing densities while not building on vacant land.

Preservation can also maintain or increase a healthy feeling residents have about their community. Reuse of existing buildings can assist in preserving agricultural land by absorbing some growth. Rehabilitation also reduces the needless waste of natural resources used for building materials.

**Planning**

The planning process benefits by reference to a community's character in downtown revitalization, residential neighborhood stability and open space preservation. The inventory documentation provides data for environmental review to help protect cultural resources and provides a stronger base for planning and informed decision-making. Planners can use the inventory to guide projects away from valuable cultural resources, incorporate them into a project or at least minimize negative impacts where cultural resources are unavoidably part of a project.

**7.3 HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY**

In 1978 Napa County Landmarks, a non-profit organization, completed a historic resources inventory of the City of St. Helena as part of a county-wide survey. This survey was conducted by a professional coordinator supervised by a City planner and an historic architect. Over 220 buildings and features such as stone bridges, parks and the Main Street electroliers were recorded on the Master List of the survey. Eighty-seven of these resources were researched and evaluated on State Inventory Forms as to National Register eligibility. All recorded features were mapped in one of three geographic districts. Figure 7-1 shows the boundaries of the three districts.

The results of the survey are presented below.

<u>Current use</u>	<u>Master List Only</u>	<u>Inventory Forms</u>	
		<u>In National Register</u>	<u>National Register Eligible</u>
Residential	111	0	30
Commercial/ Residential	15	4	19
Civic	3	2	3
Other	<u>4</u> 133	<u>3</u> 9	<u>4</u> 56

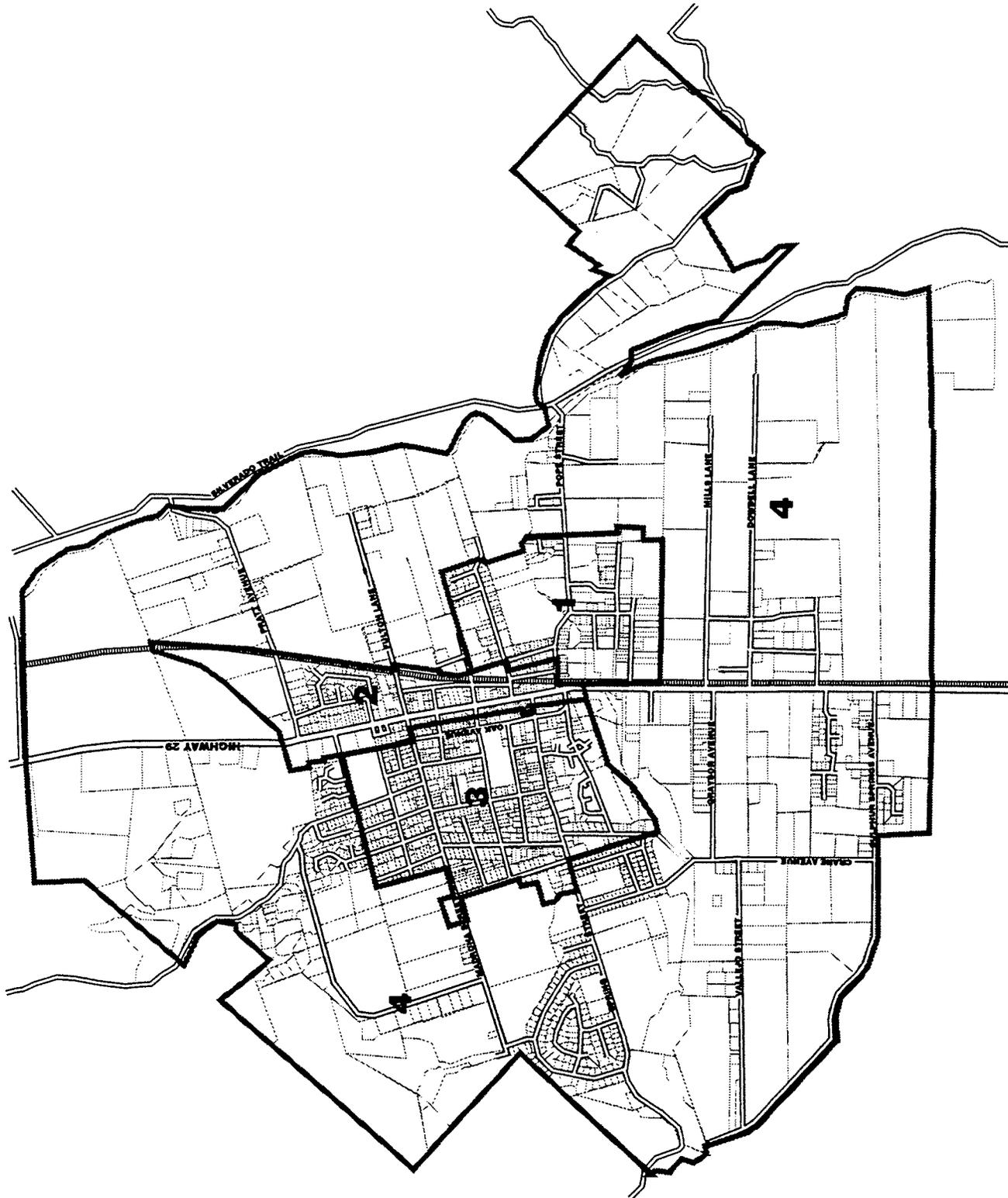
The 133 master list-only resources were not researched or evaluated for National Register eligibility. Of the 87 properties researched and entered on survey forms, 9 were already listed in the National Register, 56 are eligible and 22 are not eligible. It is likely that several individual master list resources and several groupings of master list resources may be eligible for the National Register with further research and analysis.

The location of the 220 identified resources is shown on the maps in Figures 7-2 through 7-4. The complete Master List, which includes all identified historic resources, is included in Appendix A.

## Historic Resource Districts

- 1 Charter Oak District
- 2 Main Street District
- 3 Adams Street District
- 4 Out - of - District

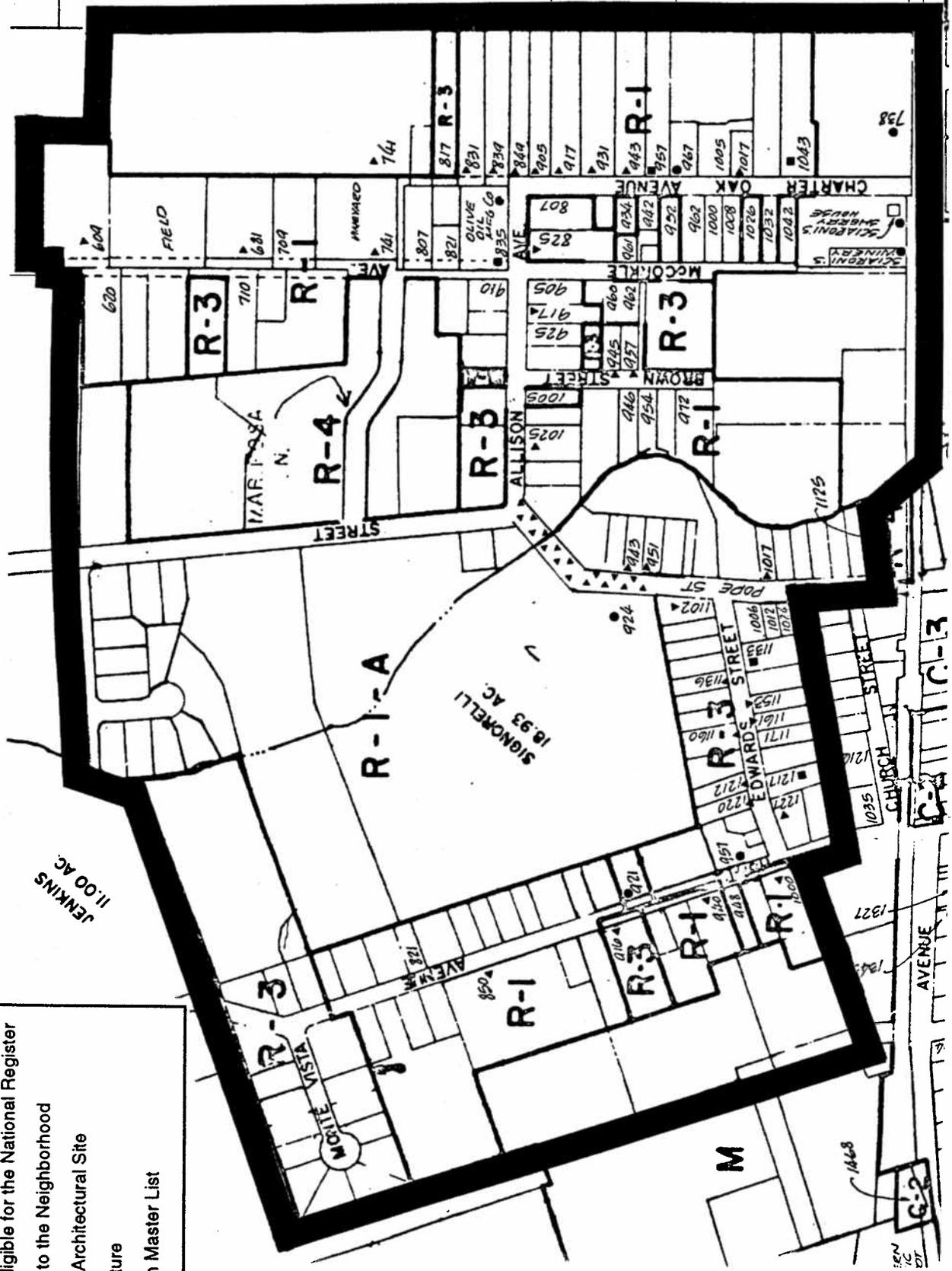
 Railroad



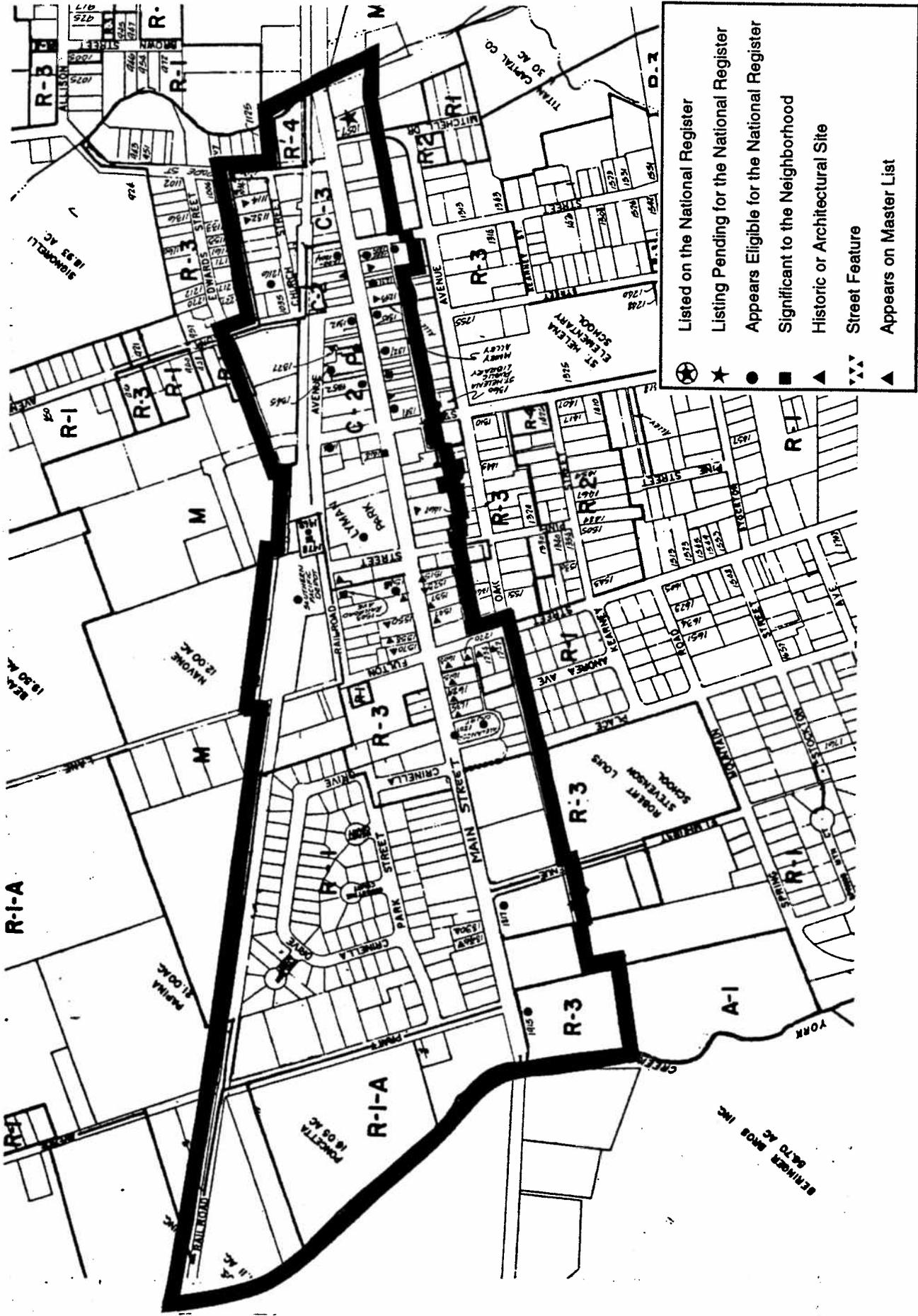
## St. Helena General Plan Update

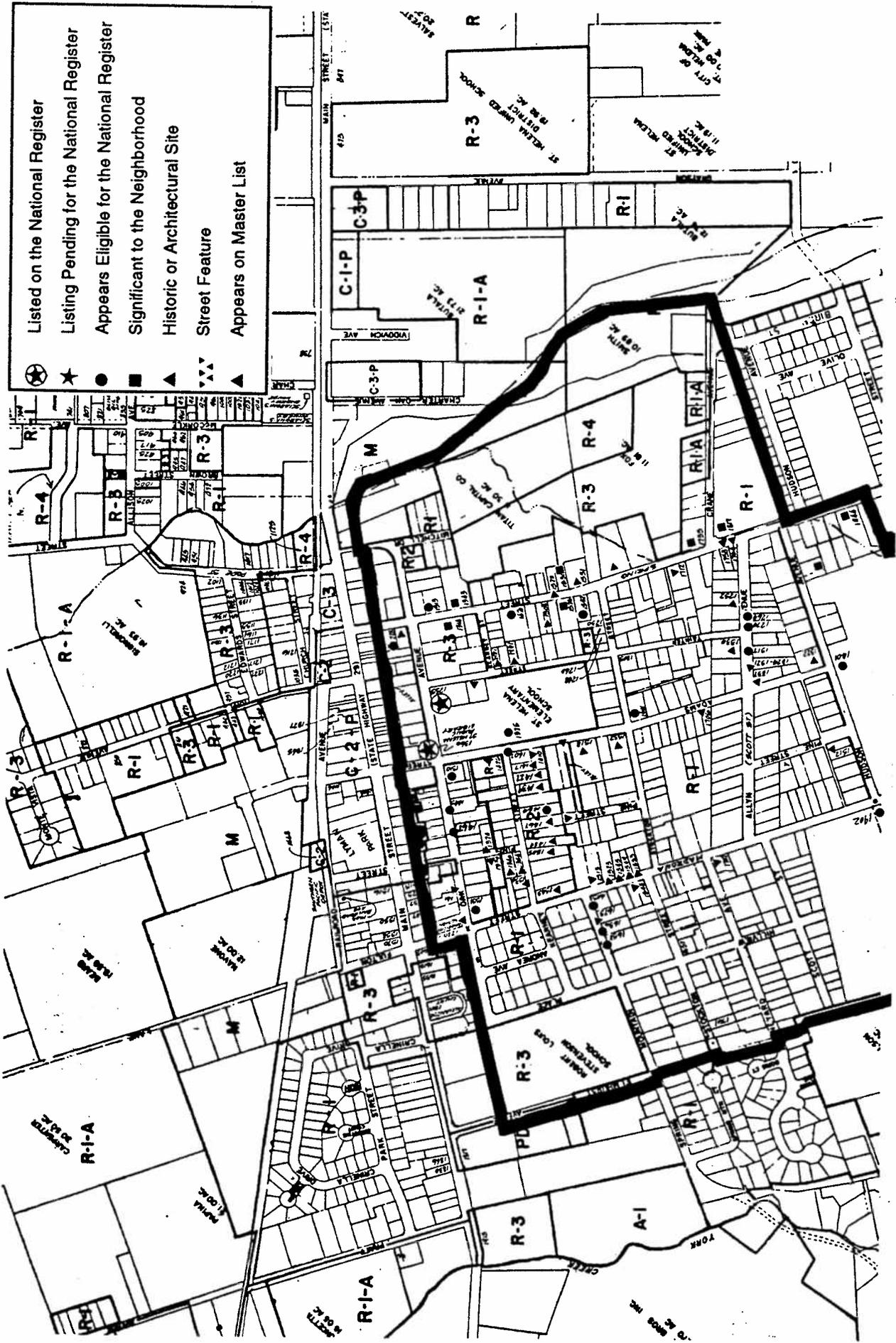


- ⊗ Listed on the National Register
- ★ Listing Pending for the National Register
- Appears Eligible for the National Register
- Significant to the Neighborhood
- ▲ Historic or Architectural Site
- ▼▼▼ Street Feature
- ▲ Appears on Master List



**St. Helena**  
**General Plan Update**  
**Historic Resources - Charter Oak District**  
 Wallace Roberts & Todd  
 Figure 7 - 2





#### 7.4 HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUES

The central preservation issue in St. Helena as it is in most communities is how to encourage sensitive rehabilitation of historic buildings and discourage or prevent the insensitive alteration and demolition of historic buildings. Within this umbrella issue are related issues such as design review standards, applicable codes, and unreinforced masonry buildings.

The City currently has a Historic Preservation (HP) Overlay District zoning regulation that enables the City to create an HP District for one property (the Kraft Winery on Madrona is an example) or a group of related properties. Exterior remodeling and demolition requests for buildings with an HP District require City approval based on findings in the zoning code. Other than the Kraft Winery property, there are no other HP District properties in the City. This leaves over 200 historic resources in the City vulnerable to incompatible alterations and demolition. If only a building permit is needed, there is no CEQA review or discretionary planning review.

A related issue is what standards and criteria should be used to review requested alterations where the HP District or other permit requirement applies. Most cities that review alterations to historic buildings either draft their own criteria or adopt the Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation which are focused on National Register properties. St. Helena presently has no adopted standards that guide the review process by the staff, Planning Commission, and City Council.

As noted under the Benefits of Historic Preservation, use of the State Historic Building Code is helpful in reusing existing materials and lowering costs. Use of the code is now mandatory under State law, but it only applies to buildings "officially" recognized by the local government as the result of a survey or as designated landmarks or historic districts. St. Helena has never "officially" recognized the Historic Resources Inventory as the City's official list of historic buildings.

A special issue is how to deal with unreinforced masonry buildings. Of the 28 buildings listed in the City's updated 1991 list of unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs), all but one are noted as historic buildings in the Inventory. Twenty-three of the 28 are judged eligible for the National Register. Over half of the URMs are on Main Street and form the backbone of downtown's character and image. Although the State (in 1993) dictates the technical standards for URM retrofitting, the City still has an opportunity to develop a URM program for this special group of historic buildings in terms of building categories by priority of risk, time schedules to retrofit each category, incentives and other program elements before the State usurps these areas as well.

A design issue is a policy question regarding the design of some new buildings that mimic Victorian styles of architecture. Several new homes in St. Helena create the illusion of being 19th century homes when in fact they are not. If done tastefully, such recreation can be a positive addition to the community. However, if not carefully regulated through appropriate design criteria, such replicas can change the overall character.

Another design issue is procedural: who should review alterations proposed to historic buildings? Staff, Planning Commission, City Council or a design review body? Who reviews is related to what criteria the City wishes to use. The more specialized the criteria, the more the need for a group with professional expertise.

Last, there is the issue of interdepartmental coordination within the City staff to make sure that conflicts that might arise regarding the treatment of historic buildings between Public Works, Building and Planning Departments can be easily resolved.

## **7.5 HISTORIC PRESERVATION POLICIES**

The following policies are intended to further the goal of protecting the City of St. Helena's unique historic resources as identified in the Historic Resources Inventory:

### **Guiding Policies**

- 7.5.1 Preserve the City's historic and cultural resources as they contribute to the special character and quality of the City and help support its economic base.
- 7.5.2 Protect the historic resources that exist in the downtown commercial area.
- 7.5.3 Encourage new commercial and office development in all districts to be compatible with the image and character of the historic Main Street area.
- 7.5.4 Include the preservation of the City's historic resources in all future planning decisions where identified historic resources may be affected.

### **Implementing Policies**

- 7.5.5 Recognize the Historic Resources Inventory as the City's official list of historic resources.
- 7.5.6 Use the Historic Resources Inventory in future planning decisions.
- 7.5.7 Include the preservation of historic resources in an urban design plan.
- 7.5.8 Establish downtown design guidelines to protect historic buildings and guide facade changes.
- 7.5.9 Require new development in or adjacent to historic areas or buildings, to be compatible in pattern and character with existing historic buildings.

- 7.5.10 Amend the existing zoning regulations to require City review prior to demolition of the City's historic resources and apply the regulations citywide.
- 7.5.11 Develop a program to mitigate the life-safety risks posed by unreinforced masonry buildings, that is flexible, yet achieves a reasonable minimum level of safety while recognizing the economic impact on building owners and tenants.

## **7.6 HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACTION PROGRAMS**

To further implement the City's preservation policies, the following action programs are:

### **7.6.1 Historic Preservation Ordinance**

A Historic Preservation Ordinance would serve to implement the policies in the Historic Preservation Element. The ordinance would establish a program of designating individual City landmarks and historic districts and a process of review of changes proposed to landmarks and historic district buildings. The primary tool would be a citizens advisory body reporting to the Planning Commission and/or City Council. The duties could include:

- update the Historic Resources Inventory
- recommend the designation of landmarks
- recommend the designation of historic districts
- review changes proposed to landmarks and buildings in historic districts
- delay changes that threaten the integrity of landmarks, historic districts or sites in order to search for alternatives
- comment on potential environmental impacts involving cultural resources
- assist the City to establish interdepartmental review procedures to ensure that preservation policies are respected in all City decision-making
- develop community awareness programs and additional protection tools

### **7.6.2 Design Guidelines**

As part of the urban design plan for the City, special attention should be devoted to design guidelines for alterations to landmarks and historic district buildings and for construction of new buildings adjacent to landmarks or in historic districts. The guidelines should be performance oriented rather than prescriptive. The guidelines might reference the Secretary's Standards or incorporate them in part or as a whole. The guidelines should strike a balance between the rights of

property owners and the community's desire to protect its historic character and image.

### 7.6.3 Unreinforced Masonry Buildings

The City's URM's require special attention by developing a program that respects the intrinsic historical elements of each building; seeks to improve each building to a minimum level of life-safety; and results in the least economic impact on owners and tenants. Elements of such a program could include:

- Adopt a basic "anchorage and bracing" approach to seismic hazard mitigation with the goal of minimizing life-safety threats. The separation of brick walls due to lack of adequate anchorage and the collapse of unbraced parapets are common life-safety threats.
- Include a policy that encourages the retention of existing historic buildings by means of flexible time requirements, flexible permit handling and economic incentives. This policy should include a "preservation whenever possible" objective.
- Clearly state that the State Historical Building Code (SHBC) is applicable to URM's with historic significance. The SHBC reduces life-safety hazards and earthquake damage, but it also allows architects and engineers the flexibility to design innovative solutions that are sensitive to historic buildings.
- Owners and tenants should be fully informed about the development of the program as early as possible.
- Include a flexible time frame for repair work that allows sound financial planning by owners and avoids economic disruption for owners and tenants.
- Limit work required to mitigation of seismic risk hazards only. Adding unrelated code compliance such as fire safety, asbestos abatement and handicapped access may throw the costs beyond the economic ability of the property and result in demolition. Some owners may be able to voluntarily satisfy other codes.
- Financial assistance - such as front-end subsidy of studies and design work, tax relief, fee waivers, lender pooling for low interest loans, and voluntary assessment district - should be included in the program.
- Ensure that engineers and architects with historic masonry building experience who understand that alternate codes for historic buildings can greatly lower costs are used. Using one engineering firm for all URM's could further cut design costs.
- Investigate use of the Mills Act state property tax incentive, federal 1986 Tax Act credits for historic rehabilitation, and IRS deductions for donation of historic easements as further financial incentives to owners

7.6.4 Education and Awareness

An ongoing education program could include:

- speaking engagements by City officials and advisory body members
- walking tours, house tours and commercial building tours that educate the public
- publication of self-guided walking tour brochures
- publication of the Historic Resources Inventory