

Certified Local Government
Historic Preservation Fund Pass-Through Application
Federal Fiscal Year 2017

1. City of Mesa Historic and Endangered Neon Sign Survey
2. Survey and Inventory
3. Project Description:

The City of Mesa is renowned for its collection of neon signs and their history. As the city expands, these features are being lost or at least threatened due to age, vacancy or development. They help to create a unique sense of place for the city and we need to protect and revitalize our history before they are lost forever. As the pace of development due to Light Rail increases, the future of these signs needs to be determined and their preservation escalated. Just last December (2016), the Sunland sign at 2602 E. Main disappeared overnight. The Mesa Historic Preservation Commission, Mesa Preservation Foundation (MPF), residents and historians have become active to make more people aware of this endangered history, but to date, there are no preservation measures of any kind in place. This needs to change.

To enable preservation initiatives and plans to be created and implemented, a complete and thorough research study and survey of Mesa's neon signs needs to occur. Working closely with the MPF, the first step—to complete a photographic inventory of signs—has been created and partially made available to the public at: <http://www.mesapreservation.org/neon-signs-of-mesa.html>. The City's new historic preservation website cites many of them as endangered: <http://www.mesaaz.gov/residents/historic-preservation/endangered>. Discussions are also underway within the City to create and implement a Historic Sign Section of the Sign Ordinance. The thorough study and survey is the critical next step. This would enable the players to work closely with owners and hopefully move forward with protective measures.

A Pass-Through grant would enable this study and survey to be completed. The end product would include not only the history of neon signs in Mesa and a survey of all remaining signs, but also include general conservation measures required to preserve them. The Diving Lady's history and preservation would be included as a case study. All this information would facilitate the City and concerned professionals in finding funding for conservation, approaching owners with appropriate preservation measures such as easements, and other means to revitalize and restore this important aspect of Mesa's history.

Neon signs on Main Street

Take a self-guided road trip to view the enduring historical neon signs in Mesa. In the mid-20th century, these neon signs lit up the main drag in Mesa to guide people to the motor courts along the road. Neon also was used to attract people to shops and restaurants. This chunk of history has endured on Main Street.



4. Relationship of the Project to the CLG Priorities:

The neon signs have been on the Historic Preservation Office's list for many years. It was moved to a top priority after the Mesa Preservation Foundation saved and restored the Diving Lady neon sign in 2013, but initiatives stopped when the City's sign ordinance was required to be reevaluated. Historic sign measures within the ordinance have moved forward to enable neon signs to once again become a priority. (See attached copy of the Historic Preservation annual report.)

5. Relationship of the project to the goals outlined in the Arizona Historic Preservation Plan (AHHP) update 2014:

Many of the goals cited in the AHHP are met with this project on Mesa's Neon Signs. Completion of this project directly furthers the State Goal 1: Better Resource Management, Goal 3: Maximized Funding and Goal 5: Proactive Partnerships as this project will study and survey the neon signs within the City of Mesa to enable the various professionals (Mesa Historic Preservation Commission, Mesa Preservation Foundation (MPF), residents and historians) involved to initiate the next steps and preserve them as a record of their history. The City now has a part-time historic preservationist whose time and funding is devoted to preservation matters. One of the duties includes involving residents in projects and writing grants as needed. Goal 6: Public Support is already part of the history of saving and preserving these signs and will continue. An updated City historic preservation website as well as those belonging to MPF, e.g., publicize current preservation issues and expand awareness (<http://www.mesapreservation.org/diving-lady.html>). Updates on the progress with the neon signs will be an ongoing feature of the websites.