



STAFF REPORT – PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

TO: Honorable Chair and Commissioners

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: Kelsey Fletterick, Planner II

DATE: April 14, 2026

TITLE: **Approve Design Review Permit for Interior and Exterior Modifications at 725 and 735 8th Street; File No. 256-014-DR**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Commission receive a staff report, receive public comment, then approve the Design Review Permit by adopting: 1) California Environmental Quality Act §15331, Class 31 Historical Resources, environmental review exemption; and 2). the Action with Findings of Approval and Conditions of Approval and Plan set (Attachment A).

INTRODUCTION:

The applicant is proposing rehabilitation and renovation work to two adjacent commercial buildings located at 725 and 735 8th Street on the Arcata Plaza. The buildings share a single parcel (APN 021-108-004) and were constructed with matching Classical Revival facades in 1917. The building at 735 8th Street is designated as a Local Historic Landmark under Ordinance 1168. The proposed work includes structural repairs, electrical upgrades, interior renovations connecting the two spaces for use as a single commercial business, ADA accessibility improvements, and exterior facade work at both buildings. The Planning Commission's approval would authorize the proposed improvements as described in the project application materials (Attachment B).

DISCUSSION:

The project site is located within the Arcata Plaza Historic District and Plaza Area Combining Zone. The building at 735 8th Street, known as the Old Post Office, is a fine example of Classical Revival architecture and has retained the integrity of its 1917 Plaza-facing facade. The adjacent building at 725 8th Street is not individually designated as a Historic Landmark but contributes to the character of the Plaza district. Its Plaza facade was altered in 1917 to match its neighbor, creating the distinctive twin appearance visible today. As documented in the 1989 Historical Research and Architectural Analysis that was part of the historic landmark listing, the 725 8th Street facade subsequently suffered significant non-historic alterations including brick facing and replacement windows that diminished its historic integrity, precluding it from local listing.

The proposed work at 735 8th Street preserves all Plaza-facing character-defining features identified in Ordinance 1168. The recessed entry alcove will receive a new display window installed set back from the existing stucco opening so that the entry niche continues to read architecturally as part of the facade; this work is reversible and does not alter any original historic fabric. At the rear facade, the two original double-hung window openings, currently infilled with plywood and undersized modern windows will be restored to their historic configuration with new custom redwood double-

hung windows. The proposal includes removal of the steel security bars over those windows, which are identified as character-defining features to be preserved under Ordinance 1168. Staff and the Historic Landmarks Committee find that this modification does not undermine the overall historic significance of the landmark, as the bars were functional elements associated with the building's ten-year period of postal use, and the architectural significance of the Old Post Office derives primarily from its intact Classical Revival Plaza-facing facade. A condition of approval requires the applicant to retain the bars on the premises following removal so that they may be reinstalled in the future if appropriate.

The proposed work at 725 8th Street replaces the previously documented non-historic facade alteration with a new symmetrical storefront featuring a centered ADA-accessible entry, display windows, a tiled transition wall, and restored historic transom windows. The surrounding 1917 architectural elements are fully preserved. Staff and the Historic Landmark Committee find that the work improves the building's consistency with the Classical Revival character of the building and overall character of the district and reinforces the twin relationship between the two structures.

During the referral process, the Finance Department identified an existing shared water meter configuration between the two buildings that requires resolution prior to issuance of a building permit. A condition of approval has been added to address this requirement.

Staff referred the project to the Historic Landmarks Committee, which recommended the Planning Commission approve the project as submitted, finding the proposed scope of work is compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and consistent with the historic character of the Arcata Plaza. Staff concurs with this recommendation and recommends the Commission adopt the proposed Action including the Findings of Approval and Conditions of Approval.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):

The project qualifies for a California Environmental Quality Act §15331, Class 31 Historical Resources, environmental review exemption.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Action, Findings of Approval, Conditions of Approval Action, and Plans
- B. Project Application Materials and Drawings
- C. Ordinance 1168
- D. Historic Landmark Committee Meeting Staff Report
- E. Historic Preservation Element Excerpt