

historic resources



## in this section

introduction

goals and policies

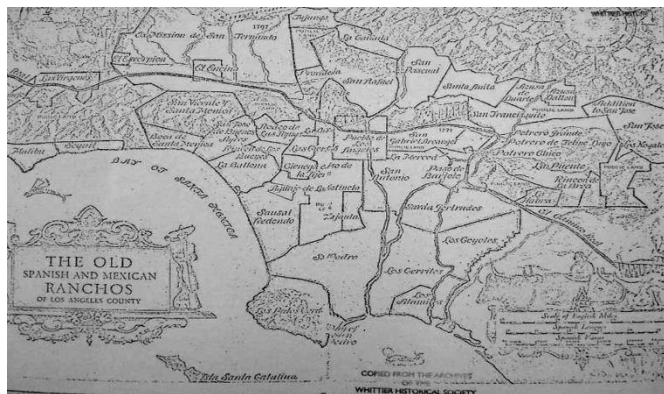
## introduction

Historic preservation is a tool that communities use to assist in maintaining unique community character and has been a significant component of the City of Whittier's planning efforts. The 1993 Whittier General Plan included a Historic Resources Element, the Envision Whittier General Plan updates the earlier Element. The City has chosen to include an Historic Resources because the community values its history and culture and seeks to identify goals and policies that promotes the preservation of historic and cultural resources. Whittier's tangible links to the city's past promote public understanding, appreciation, and civic pride for those people, places, events, and cultures that contribute to making Whittier a desirable place to live and work.

With a rich past worthy of preservation, the City has acted proactively with regard to historic preservation policies, as evidenced by the adoption of an optional Historic Resources Element in 1993. Additionally, the City has received consistently high ratings from the non-profit, historic preservation county-wide advocacy organization the Los Angeles Conservancy in its Historic Preservation Report Card, last updated in 2014. The Historic Resources Element allows Whittier to consider its current programs, policies, and practices and establish a path to implement goals and policies that will continue its tradition of best practices in Historic Preservation.

## historic and cultural heritage

### early establishment



*Map of old Spanish & Mexican rancho boundaries across Los Angeles County*

Before western settlement, the Indians of the Shoshonean language group, who historians later referred to as Gabrielinos because of their association with the missionaries, were the earliest known inhabitants. It is believed that many of the first permanent settlers and original native people of Whittier also included the Tongva tribe.

Spanish California (1769-1821) influences resulted in the establishment of both missions and large ranchos. In 1784, Jose Manuel Nieto, who served on the Portola expedition, received a 300,000-acre land grant as a reward for his military service. While the area of Nieto's land grant was reduced in 1790 as the result of a dispute with Mission San Gabriel, the land grant stretched from the hills north of Whittier to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Santa Ana River to the San Gabriel River. After Nieto's death in 1804, his property was bequeathed to his family's descendants.

After Mexico gained her independence from Spain, she ruled California (1821-1848) during an era of thriving ranchos. Mexico continued the Spanish practice of granting land to citizens in good standing to encourage settlement in California. This was accomplished by secularizing the old Spanish missions and dividing up the mission lands to establish new ranchos. In doing so, it ended the influence of the California mission system on the region's inhabitants. One of the recipients of these Mexican land grants was Juan Crispin Perez, who established Rancho Paso de Bartolo in 1835.

During the time of the 1840s Mexican–American War, much of the land that would become Whittier was owned by Pio Pico, a rancher and the last Mexican governor of Alta California. Pio Pico purchased the Perez Grant in five parcels and re-named it "El Ranchito". Pico built his hacienda home east of the San Gabriel River. Pico House was considered one of the finest hotels at the time. Pico used it as a country house to get away from the pressures of business in Los Angeles. It also became a gathering place for neighbors and business acquaintances that traveled long distances as a result of the California Gold Rush. It is presently the Pio Pico State Historic Park in Whittier.

### quaker community roots and whittier's first settlers



*Illustration of "Quaker Girl", a reference to Whittier's history as a "Quaker Colony"*

After the Mexican–American War, in 1868, German immigrant Jacob F. Gerkens paid \$234 to the U.S. government to acquire 160 acres of land under the Homestead Act. Gerkens built a small cabin (also known today as "the Jonathan Bailey House"). Gerkens' land was owned by several others. By 1879, Gerkens sold his property to John Thomas, who established a 1,259-acre ranch in present day Whittier. The Thomas Ranch was subsequently sold in 1887 to the Pickering Land and Water Company who subdivided the ranch and sold lots to establish a "Quaker Colony" under the stewardship of Johnathan Bailey, John Painter, Hervey Lindley, Aquila Pickering,

and T.E. Newlin. Although Whittier was established on Quaker (Friends) principles, the Pickering Land and Water Company often donated land to non-Quaker congregations to develop their churches as well.

As the community's Quaker foundation soon took root, it led to the City of Whittier's incorporation in 1898 with 585 residents. The City's name was chosen to honor the 19th Century Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier. The area soon became known as a thriving citrus ranching region, with "Quaker Brand" fruit being shipped all over the United States. Beginning in 1887,

## HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

walnut trees were planted, and Whittier became the largest walnut grower as well as a major producer of pampas grass in the United States.

### whittier college

In 1888, the Southern Pacific Railroad built the first railroad spur to Whittier, which helped promote the boom of the 1880s. Many Quakers on the east coast bought lots sight unseen, but settlement was opened to all “fair-minded people.” Development was further enabled by the construction of a freshwater flume from the San Gabriel River, reservoir, and pumping station in 1891. The Pickering Land and Water Company set aside a 20-acre parcel of land for the development of a college, but a collapse in the land boom stalled construction. Progress on developing a college was sporadic, but on July 30, 1896, the Whittier Academy, operating since 1891, officially changed its name to Whittier College.

### whittier’s state school

It is also important to note the establishment of Whittier’s State School for Juvenile Offenders in 1891 was intended to help the City after the depression of 1890 and establish a solid economic base for the community. The Quaker reformers supported the idea that troubled youth could excel in a community of self-reliant, industrious farmers. Soon after the Los Angeles-Whittier trolley line opened in 1904, the area became more desirable for residential and commercial development. The new school serendipitously found itself situated in a convenient location just southwest of the rail line; it was served by the depot across Whittier Boulevard to the northeast, just off Hadley Street. The State School, which later became the Fred C. Nelles youth correctional facility, closed in 2004.

### commercial/residential establishments

Whittier’s first large commercial enterprise, a cannery, was followed by a lumber mill and a grist mill. Farmers planted barley, beans, cabbage, corn, oats, peanuts, tomatoes, and citrus. Whittier became an important oil industry center following sale of land in the Puente Hills to the Central Oil Well Company in 1897. Companies, including the Standard, Union, and Richfield Oil Companies established oil wells in the nearby hills.

As Whittier’s population steadily grew to 14,822 by 1930, so did the diversity of goods and services provided within Whittier along with the rise of substantial new public and private buildings like the Murphy Memorial Hospital (1921), First National Bank (1923), and the Hoover Hotel (1930). Most of Whittier’s new development during this period remained concentrated in the greater Uptown area, with residential development becoming increasingly dense around Whittier’s commercial core.



*Philadelphia Street, circa 1902*

During the 1920s and 1930s, residential and commercial development was becoming increasingly geared toward accommodating the automobile. This became evident as residential garages replaced barns and streets were widened and paved with parking spaces to accommodate automobile traffic as the use of public rail for transportation waned and eventually ended in

Whittier by 1938. This ultimately gave rise to the automotive commercial-retail strip that became the primary expression of the automobile’s impact on the mid-20th Century landscape in Whittier and resulted in the explosion of development away from the greater Uptown area in favor of Whittier Boulevard and other surrounding thoroughfares.

Like other communities, Whittier’s growth slowed during the Great Depression (1929-1941). However, Whittier’s agriculture and oil industries remained active. Although new construction was limited during this period, the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided assistance with funding and jobs for public projects. An example of the WPA’s work in Whittier is readily found in the numerous improvements constructed throughout Penn Park that are still used today.

Although Whittier’s agriculture and oil industries declined after World War II (1939-1945), Whittier’s growth continued to accelerate as distribution and manufacturing became important industries in the community because of its proximity to Los Angeles, major road networks and a large worker population. New construction also flourished during this period.

Between 1940 and 1960, Whittier’s population more than doubled from 16,115 to 33,663 residents. Vast new tracts of residential homes and apartment buildings were developed in conjunction with commercial, industrial, medical, and institutional uses, which replaced the former agricultural land and oil fields that were once the backbone of Whittier’s economy.



*Aubrey Wardman House, built in 1927, is on the official Local Register of Historic Resources*

By 1970, the City’s population climbed to 72,863.

Several annexations of unincorporated areas into Whittier during the 1950s and 1960s were partially responsible for this large population increase. Whittier was also experiencing the same kind of rapid growth that was occurring throughout Southern California after World War II. This growth was induced, in part, by an influx of returning soldiers, new families moving into California and rising birth rates. Whittier was now a firmly established bedroom community with a well-developed infrastructure and the ability to provide its residents with numerous goods and services. However, to maintain the aesthetic appeal and to entice additional growth and

## HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

development, rehabilitation and redevelopment would play a major role in the future of the City as the 1970s dawned in Whittier.

During the 1980s, Whittier witnessed growth, suburban neighborhoods, indoor malls (big box retail), and commercial destinations still created for cars.

Today, the commercial and residential landscapes in Whittier continue to evolve with progressive changes, more housing types and higher densities, green measures, a shift away from malls and big box to lifestyle/experiential destinations, and adaptive re-use that embrace design that allows both old and new.

## current and past preservation efforts

Past historic preservation efforts by the City and its partners include the following:

### 1970s – 1990s

- Whittier Redevelopment Agency revitalizes Uptown Whittier
- Historic Resources Ordinance within Municipal Code Chapter 18.84 adopted and updated
- Citywide Centennial celebrations and activities highlighting Whittier's 100 years of history
- Local Register of Historic Resources developed
- Three historic districts (College Hills, Central Park, and Hadley-Greenleaf) were established
- 1993 General Plan's Historic Resources Element adopted



*Dorland House, built in 1888, is on the official Local Register of Historic Resources*

2000s

- Historic Resources surveys were initiated including: Residential resources, Non-Residential resources (including Modern Movement related resources)
- Planning Division dedicated resources to inform and participate in decision-making and project review related to historic preservation
- Historic preservation webpage created for the City’s website
- “A Brief History of Whittier to 1970,” published on City’s website
- City of Whittier Public Library History Room established
- Earlham Historic District established
- Continual promotion of the Mills Act Property Tax Reduction for landmark designations and/or contributing resources within an established historic district and subsequent Mills Act contracts
- Uptown Specific Plan’s revitalization goals and policies
- Archaeological policies developed related to CEQA mitigation measures
- Certificate of Appropriateness application and review process established



*Central Park Historic District Marker*



HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

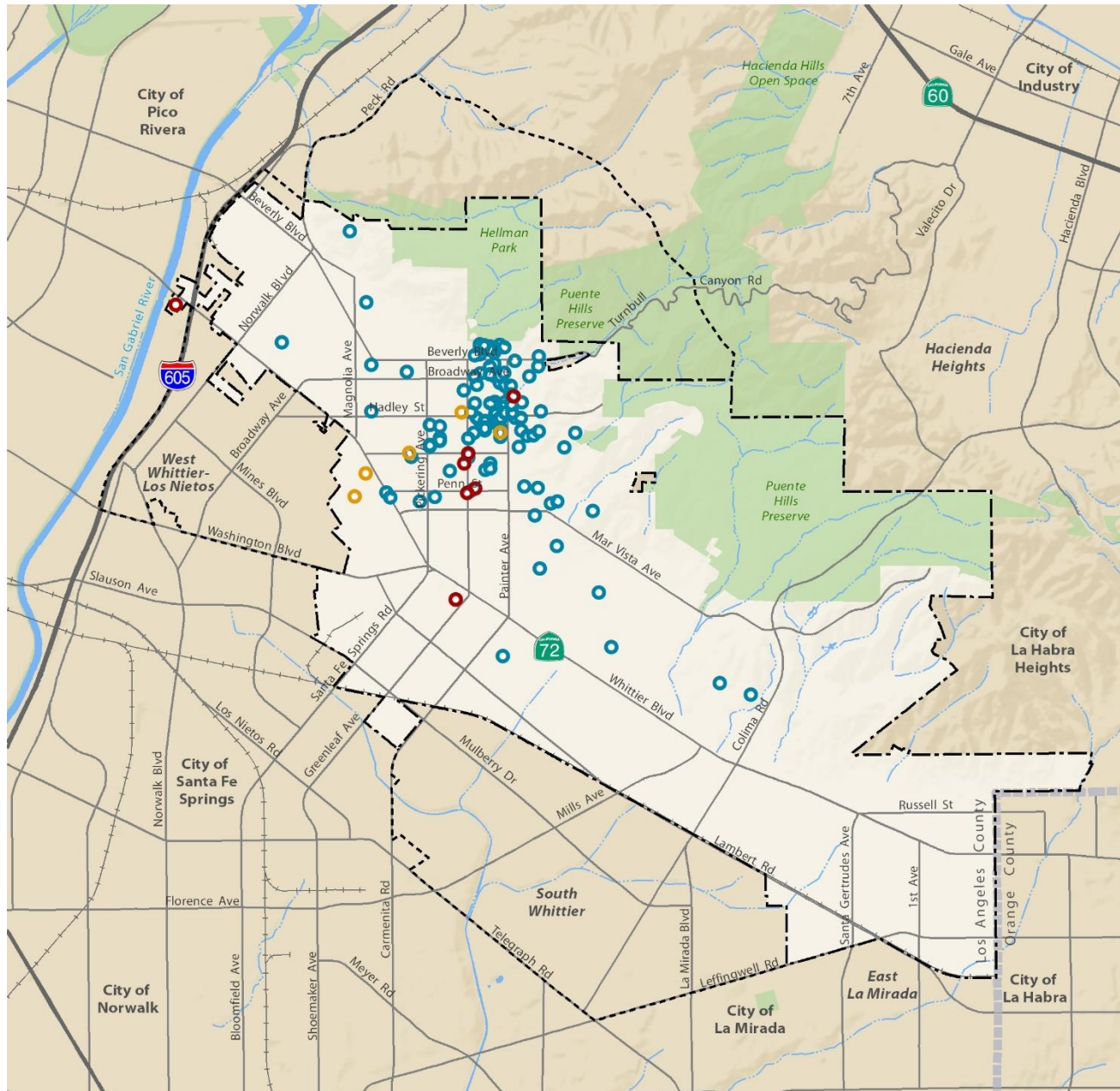


Figure HR-1:  
Historic  
Landmarks (2017)

- Historic Landmarks**
- National Register of Historic Places (7)
  - California Register of Historical Resources (12)
  - Local Official Register of Historic Resources (109)

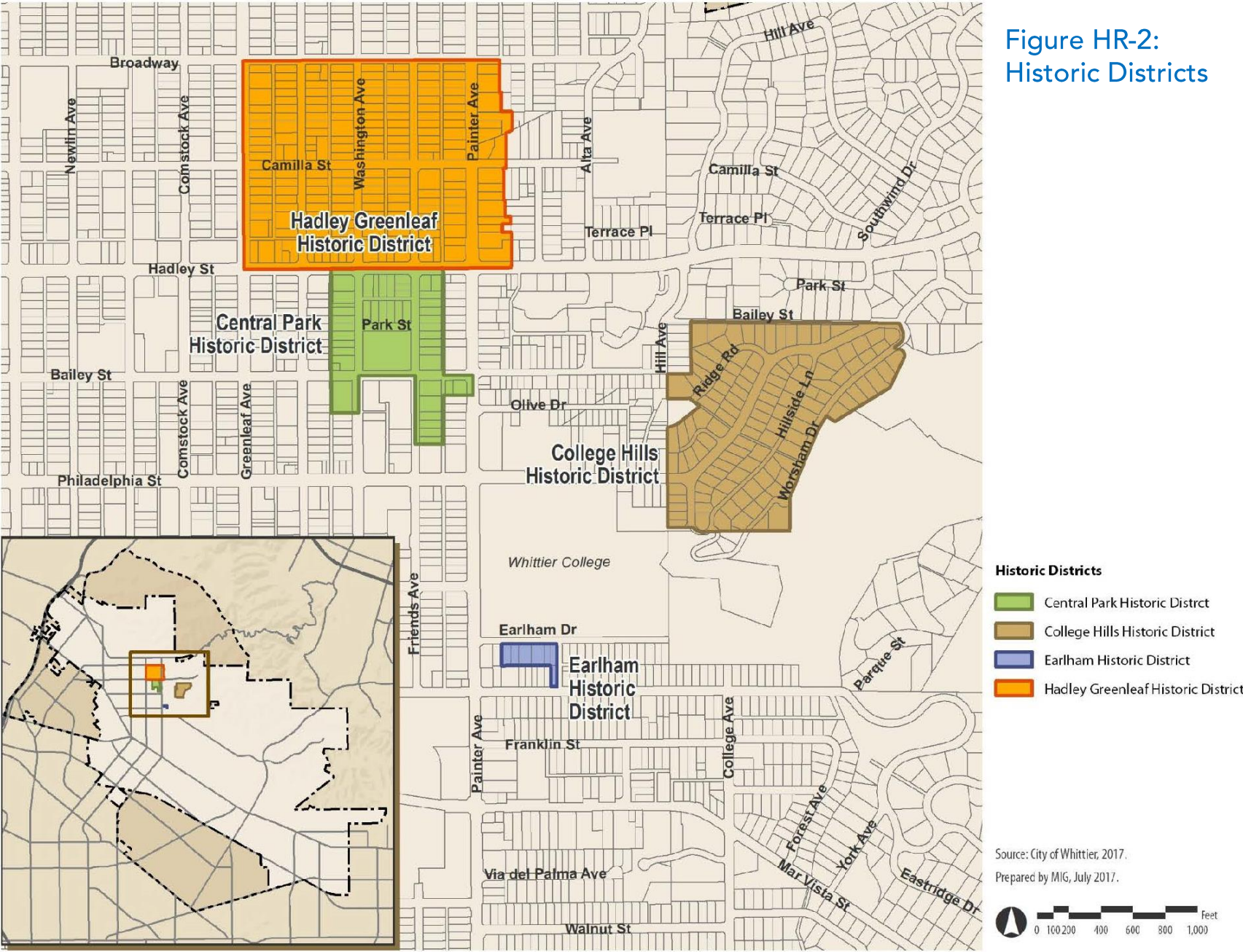
- Base Map Features**
- Whittier City Boundary
  - Whittier Sphere of Influence
  - County Boundary
  - Major Streets
  - Freeways
  - Railroads
  - River and Creeks
  - Waterbodies
  - Open Space/Natural Areas

Source: City of Whittier, 2021.  
Prepared by MIG, June 2021.



Figure HR-2:  
Historic Districts

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## goals and policies

**Goal 1:** Historic Resources Identification: Identify historic, cultural, and archaeological resources.

- HR-1.1: Evaluate potential historic resources and evaluate/provide required contextual statements for additional residential and commercial historic districts, as requested by the City Council and/or individual property owner(s).
- HR-1.2: Consider documenting Whittier's post World War II residential neighborhoods. View Whittier's post-World War II neighborhoods holistically rather than building by building to gain an understanding of how they developed and what the context of their design and development means within the history of Whittier's residential enclaves.
- HR-1.3: Determine the appropriateness of designating historic districts within the Uptown District.
- HR-1.4: Ensure each of the four already-designated historic districts clearly identifies contributing and non-contributing resources within defined boundaries.
- HR-1.5: Identify and map areas of archaeological resources sensitivity.
- HR-1.6: Understand that areas located along the San Gabriel River and in the Puente Hills have high potential for archaeological resources.



*A post-war home in Whittier as pictured in a 1963 Chamber of Commerce promotional publication.*

**Goal 2:** Update the City's Historic Preservation Program to align with best practices

- HR-2.1: Enhance, restore, preserve, and protect, as appropriate, historic resources throughout Whittier.
- HR-2.2: Encourage the retention and/or adaptive reuse of historic residential, commercial, and industrial buildings.
- HR-2.3: Consider relocation of structures with officially designated landmark status to vacant sites, preferably within established districts when no other alternative exists for their preservation, or if a particular structure is not protected by ordinance.
- HR-2.4: Provide guidance to the owners of designated historic landmark sites to preserve and rehabilitate structures.

- HR-2.5: Align the Historic Preservation Program with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- HR-2.6: Encourage cooperation and collaboration between City departments, commissions, boards, and community groups to respect designated historic resources when proposing, reviewing, and approving new or infill development.

**Goal 3:** Protect historic and cultural resources from demolition, destruction, or inappropriate actions or consequences.

- HR-3.1: Consider the impact of climate change on historic and cultural resources and act to take preventative measures.
- HR-3.2: Suspend development activity when archaeological and/or paleontological resources are discovered during construction.



*A vintage postcard view of Whittier City Hall; one of Whittier's first Modern buildings. Designed by architect William Henry Harrison in 1959*

- HR-3.3: Encourage compatible new development of and near buildings, structures, sites, districts, and landscapes with historic designations to ensure limited physical and visual impact to existing historic resources and within older neighborhoods.
- HR-3.4: Suggest Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) take into consideration the character and features of the neighborhood in which it will be placed.
- HR-3.5: Strive to have historic resource evaluations consider the neighborhood context and potential for a larger historic district, rather than just evaluate singular resources.
- HR-3.6: Consider how landscapes may affect historic buildings.
- HR-3.7: While balancing public safety and insurance issues, consider encouraging the retention of mature landscaping and built landscape features as these elements contribute to the overall character of Whittier's older residential neighborhoods.

**Goal 4:** Promote the Whittier's historical and cultural resources (including adaptively reused structures) in a manner that contributes to Whittier's overall economic development.

## HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

- HR-4.1: Understand heritage tourism has strong economic impacts to local businesses and institute a focused locally inspired promotional program in partnership with organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and local civic clubs and organizations.
- HR-4.2: Understand the Pio Pico State Historic Park's contribution to Whittier's heritage and heritage tourism.
- HR-4.3: Promote public awareness of Whittier's history, diverse heritage, and cultural influences.



*Pio Pico State Historic Park,  
Courtesy of California State Parks.*

**Goal 5:** Promote historic, cultural, and archaeological resources as a source of community identity and pride.

- HR-5.1: Encourage public knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Whittier's role in local and regional history.
- HR-5.2: Foster civic and neighborhood pride and a sense of identity based on the recognition and use of historical and cultural resources.

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