



**HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
May 12, 2026**

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**Prepared by:** Amy Wolfson, City Planner

**DATA SUMMARY**

**Application Number:** 26PLN-0012  
**Subject:** Plan Revision to replace Historic Bell Tower with Portico  
**Location/APNs:** 236 S. Church Street / APN 008-472-014  
**Applicant:** Ryan Woodard, property owner  
**Zoning/General Plan:** Neighborhood General (NG-2)/Urban Low Density (ULD)  
**Entitlement:** Plan Revision – DRC Review  
**Environmental Status:** Categorical Exemption

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the Historical Commission recommend that the Development Review Committee approve the proposed exterior modification removing the historic bell tower with a portico, as may be modified at the public meeting, and which includes the following actions:
  - a. Determine the project Categorically Exempt pursuant to Section 15301, Class 1, of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Guidelines, as detailed in the Staff Report;
  - b. Adopt Findings of Fact for approval of the Bell Tower Removal as presented in the Staff Report; and,
  - c. Approve the Bell Tower Removal in accordance with the Conditions of Approval, as presented in this Staff Report.

**BACKGROUND:**

The property is located within the area characterized as the “West Residential District Character Area” as noted in the Historic Review Guidelines. The West Residential District includes many of the city's earliest residential buildings. The district is also characterized by its moderately steep topography, views of the city, large parcels, and wide variety of introduced shrubs and trees. A diverse assemblage of homes spans the district, reflecting the full range of architectural styles found in Grass Valley. The original church the late 1800s or early 1900s, but was destroyed in a fire in the early 1930s. The current church was constructed in 1937, in a Romanesque/Mediterranean influenced style. The property is noted on the Historic District Map as a Priority 2 structure, though no inventory record could be located. Priority 2 structures are significant in contributing to the historic character of the area and have retained good integrity.

According to the Historic Design Guidelines, the West Residential District Character Area is characterized by the following attributes:

- Wide diversity of house types
- Gable, cross-gable, clipped-gable and hip roof forms
- Raised central or wrap-around porch designs
- Wood-frame or stick-frame buildings predominate
- Buildings heights vary from one to two-stories.
- Attic conversions for sleeping quarters
- Wide variation in yard sizes and building setbacks

In September 2025, representatives of the church requested a demolition of the bell tower, citing its dangerous condition. Based on engineer, Jean Jackson's report confirming the substandard nature of the tower and the potential threat it posed to life and property, staff issued a demolition permit with a condition that the reconstruction effort go before the Historical Commission and Development Review Committee for review.



*Picture of church prior to bell tower removal*

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**PROJECT PROPOSAL:**

The applicant is requesting to replace the bell tower with a simple portico entrance and relocate the cross to an existing tower feature that faces School Street.

Chapter 15.60 of the Grass Valley Municipal Code provides guidance regarding historic building demolition. Section 15.60.040 exempts buildings determined to be dangerous or substandard from having to adhere to the requirements of the chapter, including from the requirement of providing an historic evaluation report.

Regulatory Authority: Pursuant to Section 17.52.040 of the Grass Valley Municipal Code (GVMC), one of the duties of the Grass Valley Historical Commission is to “provide interested property owners with advice and information on building design and materials that can maintain the historic character of a building.”

Section 17.52.070 of the GVMC establishes that minor projects to historic resources include “exterior modifications or alterations that maintain the historic integrity of the building and that comply with the Guidelines”, while major projects are defined as those that include “exterior modifications that alter the character defining features, such as its shape, elevation, massing, and scale and do not comply with the guidelines.” In this case, the proposed exterior modification include altering all the wood siding in a different profile from the original, and the wood windows with vinyl windows.

#### Historic Design Guidelines:

Section 6.2 of the Grass Valley Historic Design Guidelines emphasize treatments of “preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction,” for character defining features of historic structures.

The design guidelines do not override municipal regulations but are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in making decisions regarding additions, alterations, infill, and other similar types of changes to historically significant structures within the Grass Valley Historic Townsite. The applicant has indicated that the cost to restore or reconstruct the bell tower is beyond their means.

#### **GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING:**

**General Plan:** The Grass Valley 2020 General Plan identifies the site as Institutional-Non Government (ING). This designation is used to identify areas in non-governmental institutional ownership / control. It is intended to accommodate facilities and services to meet community needs.

**Zoning:** The Public (P) zone is applied to the sites of existing and proposed federal, state, and local government uses, and non-profit community service uses. The P zone implements and is consistent with the public, institutional, non-governmental, school, and utilities land use designations of the general plan.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

The proposed project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to Section 15301, Class 1, of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Guidelines. A Class 1 Categorical Exemption consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alternation of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency’s determination. The proposed window replacement will not result in expansion of use of the residential property.

#### **FINDINGS:**

1. The Grass Valley Community Development Department received a complete application for Plan Revision 26PLN-0013.
2. The Grass Valley Historical Commission reviewed Plan Revision application 26PLN-0013 at their regular meeting on May 12, 2026.
3. The Grass Valley Development Review Committee reviewed Plan Revision application 26PLN-0013 at their regular meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The Development Review Committee reviewed the project in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and concluded that the project qualifies for a Class 1, Categorical Exemption in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act and CEQA Guidelines.
5. This project is consistent with the City's General Plan and any specific plan.
6. The project, as conditioned and to the extent feasible, maintains the historic integrity of the structure and complies with the City of Grass Valley Community Design Guidelines and the Design Review Guidelines for the 1872 Historic Townsite.

**B. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS:**

1. The final design shall be consistent with Plan Revision application and plans provided by the applicant and approved by the Development Review Committee (26PLN-0013). The project is approved subject to plans on file with the Community Development Department. The Community Development Director may approve minor changes as determined appropriate.
2. Prior to any work occurring, a building permit shall be obtained from the Community Development Department, Building Division.
3. The applicant agrees to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the City of Grass Valley in any action or proceeding brought against the City of Grass Valley to void or annul this discretionary land use approval.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Vicinity Map
2. Aerial Map
3. Applicant Statement
4. Church Photos
5. Proposed Portico Sketch
6. Site Plan
7. Engineer's Report