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TYPE I HISTORICAL DESIGN REVIEW STAFF ANALYSIS

To: Planning Commission
(serving as the Historical Design Review Board per SMC 17.35.055)

From: Mona Davis, Community & Economic Development Director

Date of Report: June 29, 2026

Date of 1st Meeting: April 20, 2026

Date of 2nd Meeting: July 20, 2026

Project Name: 8050 Shipping Container

Site Address: 8050 Railroad Ave SE

Parcel Number: 7849200496

Project Number: DRB2026-0004

BACKGROUND:

The City of Snoqualmie ("City") received an application for Type I Historical Design Review, dated March 17, 2026. The City determined the application to be complete on April 7, 2026, pursuant to SMC Section 14.30.050. The project is located at 8050 Railroad Ave SE and is within the Downtown Historic Overlay District ("Overlay District") and the Historic Downtown Commercial Landmark District ("Landmark District").

The project was initially presented to the Historic Design Review Board on April 20, 2026. In response to the Board's request, staff prepared this revised report to incorporate detailed consistency analysis, formal findings and staff conclusions, as well as recommended conditions if approved.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This historical design review permit is for the placement of a shipping container located to the rear of the lot behind the existing building ("non-contributing" or non-historic). The shipping container received approval for temporary placement under building permit COM2025-016. The applicant is applying for Historical Design Review to allow the structure to be permanently placed on the property to be used as an ancillary use to the primary business. The shipping container is located less than ten feet (10') from the primary structure, pursuant to SMC 17.55.060.B.4, the structure is considered an addition to the primary structure.

The container will be outfitted with large commercial style windows, double entry doors, window/door trim, and exterior lighting. The rear façade of the existing building and the shipping container will be painted consistent with the Approved Exterior Color Palette. Exterior lighting will be installed to match the existing

lighting on the primary façade of the building. A cedar fence will be installed along the property line and will help screen the structure from Falls Avenue SE.

The following materials are provided in support of the Historical Design Review application: Application form (Attachment 1); Design Review Proposal (Attachment 2); Downtown Snoqualmie District and Overlay Map with Landmarks (Attachment 3); Approved Exterior Color Palette (Attachment 4).

OTHER PERMITS REQUIRED:

In addition to this Historical Design Review approval, permanent placement of, and improvements to, the shipping container will require a building permit. If any new signs are proposed in the future, the applicant will need to submit materials for Historical Design Review again and obtain a Sign Permit. Fencing shall be installed consistent with SMC 17.55.130. Fencing taller than 6' will require a building permit. The construction of commercial buildings under 10,000 sq. ft. is exempt from SEPA in accordance with Washington Administrative Code ("WAC") Subsection 197-11-800(1)(b)(iv) and SMC 19.04.110.A.3.

BUILDING HISTORY AND CONTEXT¹:

The existing structure on the site was constructed in 1953 and is designated a "non-contributing," or *non-historic*² structure. The building has been altered somewhat since that time. Shortly after the building's construction, a partial second story was added for an apartment. The original porch canopy had a flat roof; the current hipped roof was a later addition. Assessor's records indicate that the wood siding on the 1953 building may have originally been vertical rather than horizontal wood. Originally, a two-story wooden building with a false front (1901) stood on this site. Archibald Dry Goods occupied the building from c. 1908 until 1921, when it was purchased by F. Harding and operated as Harding's Dry Goods. In 1953, Harding's son tore down the 1901 building and constructed the current building. Harding's store continued in business in this location until 1994. Two shop spaces have since been created.

The property owners received a Type-I administrative Historic Design Review approval on June 23, 2025 for improvements to the exterior façade on Railroad Avenue (DRB2025-0003).

¹ Source: City of Snoqualmie Historic Commercial Landmark District Registration Form

² SMC 17.35.040(Y) defines "noncontributing building or site" as any building or site not specifically designated as a contributing building or site in a landmark district.

SCOPE OF AUTHORITY:

The Overlay District and the Landmark District are two separate (but overlapping) districts established in Chapter 17.35 SMC – Historic Overlay Zones and Landmarks. SMC 17.35.150(A) allows the director to refer review of a Type I project to the Historical Design Review Board. SMC 17.35.055 authorizes the Planning Commission to serve as the Historical Design Review Board.

PROJECT LOCATION:

The site is located between Railroad Avenue SE and Falls Avenue SE. The site and existing structure are considered “non-contributing,” or *non-historic*. Figure 1 below shows the sites location in relation to the Overlay District and the Landmark District.

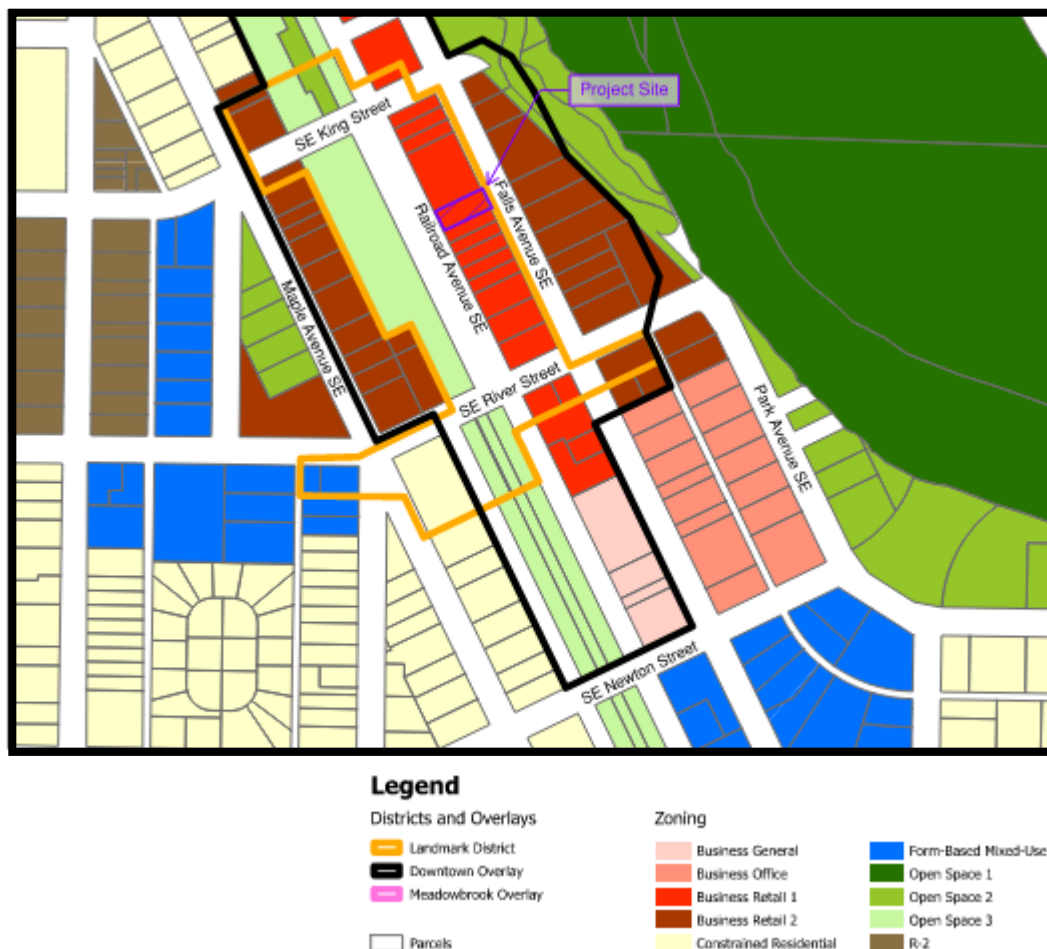


Figure 1: Map of the Snoqualmie Historic Downtown Commercial Landmark District

REVIEW CRITERIA

Use, Bulk and Dimensional Regulations:

The Site is located within the Business Retail 1(BR-1) zoning district. Pursuant to SMC 17.55.020, the existing use, Retail Sales, is permitted within the district. The proposed addition will provide ancillary office space and storage for the primary retail use. Dimensional standards for commercial districts are provided in SMC 17.20.040. The following dimensional standards apply to all new structures and additions within the BR-1 zoning district; the proposal complies with the standards as proposed.

	Standard	Proposed
Minimum Front Yard	0'	N/A
Minimum Side Yard Setback	0'	0'
Minimum Rear Yard Setback	0'	3'
Maximum Height of Structure	35'	9' 6"
Maximum Impervious Surface	100%	100%

Historic Design Review:

As noted above, because the proposed storage container is located less than 10 feet from the primary structure, it is considered an “addition” to the existing structure on the property. Pursuant to SMC 17.35.120.A.5, all additions to noncontributing buildings or structures require Type I Historical Design Review. Under SMC 17.35.130, no work may be commenced on a project for which Historical Design Review is required until Historical Design Review approval is obtained, and no building permit may be issued for building, grading, or demolition.

Type I projects are evaluated against the purposes of the historic districts as described in SMC 17.35.020; the objectives and principles of Historic Design Review as described in SMC 17.35.180; the general standards provided in SMC 17.35.190; and the architectural design standards set forth in SMC 17.35.210. The purposes, objectives, principles, and standards within these subsections are established to ensure that development activities meet the objectives and principles of the Overlay District and Landmark District. Many of the standards provided in these subsections apply to the maintenance, modification, and construction of contributing buildings. Yet the objectives and standards that apply to non-contributing buildings remain vitally important to the purposes of SMC Chapter 17.35. They aim to ensure that construction activities are designed to enhance, but not mimic, the historic character of the downtown, by using forms, details, colors and materials similar to those of contributing buildings or structures. SMC 17.35.180.C. New additions and exterior work must be designed so that they are “differentiated from the old, while remaining compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of the old sections.” SMC 17.35.190.J. The overall objective is to preserve historic buildings and the unique sense of place that make Snoqualmie distinctive and attractive. SMC 17.35.180.A.

Staff Response: The rear façade of the existing building, along with the shipping container addition, will be painted with colors selected from the Approved Exterior Color Palette (rear façade: Rookwood Dark Green – SW 2816; and accent/trim: Black – BM 2132-10). The proposed shipping container will not alter the existing roof line. These elements of the applicant’s proposal are consistent with some of the principles found in SMC 17.35.190.C, which provides that any changes to post-1940 buildings shall reflect, to the extent possible, the features and character of the surrounding structures and overall historic overlay zone, such as through roof configuration, window and door type and placement, and color selection.

However, the proposed shipping container addition is inconsistent in several important ways from other objectives, principles, and standards for Historic Design Review. Although the shipping container addition is proposed to include windows, window and door trim, and lighting consistent with the style of the existing building's primary façade, other elements of the project fail to meet the intent and objectives of the downtown historic overlay zone. Key concerns regarding the shipping container project include the following:

- 1) Incompatible materials and texture
 - The exposed corrugated steel is a distinctly industrial material that does not align with the historic material palette of the district.
 - Even if painted, the form and texture remain visually discordant, drawing attention rather than blending with the historic fabric.
- 2) Failure to meet "compatible but differentiated" standard
 - While differentiation is appropriate, the design reads as an industrial object attached to a historic building, not as a compatible addition.
- 3) Window pattern and proportions conflict with historic character
 - Cut-in container windows typically lack the vertical proportion, alignment, and rhythm found in historic structures.
 - This disrupts the visual coherence that the code seeks to preserve.
- 4) Adverse impact on the integrity of the contributing structure
 - The addition introduces a competing visual element that diminishes the historic building's prominence.
- 5) Precedent risk within the Landmark District
 - Approval would establish an expectation that industrial-style additions could be approved in Historic Design Review despite being inconsistent with the district's preservation goals.
 - Over time, a succession of similar additions risks eroding the cohesive historic character the municipal code is intended to protect.
- 6) Availability of feasible, less impactful alternatives
 - Additions can be designed in ways that are clearly modern, while still compatible with the historic context.
 - Because viable alternatives exist, this design represents an unnecessary departure from applicable standards.

A mitigating factor for these incompatibilities is that the proposed addition is located at the backside of the existing building and is not visible from the primary street frontage (Railroad Avenue). The proposed fence will reduce the visibility of the shipping container along Falls Ave SE; however, the ability to screen the proposed shipping container is not a reason to support its approval under Historic Design Review. Screening may be allowed and even encouraged for certain elements of a historic site, but the ability to fence around certain necessary uses or elements of a site that "tend to be unsightly" is not a mark in favor of approving incompatible development. See SMC 17.35.200.D.6.

Other design review standards found in SMC 17.35.190 are not applicable to this application, except where noted below:

- A. Retain and preserve the historic character of contributing buildings. Avoid removal of historic materials or alteration of the features that characterize the property.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. The proposed improvements are to a non-contributing building.

- B. Make changes to any building or structure constructed prior to 1940 as authentic as possible, based upon that building's own history and materials. Preserve pre-1940 era changes to an original building if such changes have historic significance of themselves or are good examples of that era. For buildings constructed prior to 1940, changes should reflect the building's earlier appearance as shown in pre-1940 photographs. Materials, style and detailing should reflect this period as much as possible.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. According to the City of Snoqualmie Historic Commercial Landmark District Registration Form (hereby referred to as the "registration form"), the building was built in 1953.

- C. Any changes to a post-1940 building shall reflect to the extent possible the features and character of the surrounding structures and overall historic overlay zone in which it is located. This shall be accomplished through size, massing and setback, roof configuration, window and door type and placement, materials and color.*

Staff Response: See discussion above.

- D. Prior to maintenance or repair work, each building's historic features shall be identified, and a plan developed to retain, maintain and repair such historic features. The identification of historic features shall be based upon the use of photographs from different periods, if possible, to understand the historic development of the building, its style and features and its uses.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- E. Repair rather than remove or replace deteriorated historic features. If replacement is necessary, use a new feature that matches the old feature in design, texture, color and other visual qualities, and where possible, matches the original materials.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- F. Avoid changes that create a false sense of history, such as the addition of architectural features from another era. Respect the physical record of each building's own time, place and past uses. If a feature is missing, replace it only if there is physical or historical evidence demonstrating the original appearance.*

Staff Response: Not Applicable.

- G. Preserve distinctive features, finishes or examples of craftsmanship or construction techniques that are characteristics of the property.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. The project does not contemplate any changes to distinctive features, finishes, or examples of craftsmanship or construction techniques that are characteristic of the existing site.

- H. Use the gentlest means possible to clean all surfaces. Avoid irreversible damage by improper cleaning of historic materials, such as sandblasting of brick.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- I. Preserve a building's character even if its interior use changes. If property is no longer used for its historic use, adopt methods to ensure that the new use minimizes changes to the building's defining characteristics and surroundings.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- J. Design new additions and exterior alterations to preserve historic materials. New work shall be designed so that it is differentiated from the old and is compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of the old sections.*

Staff Response: The proposed addition will not be structurally attached to the existing building and will not alter/remove any existing materials. Limited compatibility is achieved through a shared scale, height, and massing profile, but cut-in container windows typically lack the vertical proportion, alignment, and rhythm found in historic structures. Even though the modern materials provide the necessary differentiation to prevent the addition from being mistaken for the original historic structure, the proposed shipping container addition reads as an industrial object attached to a historic building, not as a compatible addition. The exposed corrugated steel is a distinctly industrial material that does not align with the historic material palette of the district.

- K. Design new additions or alterations such that, if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and historic integrity of the property would be unimpaired.*

Staff Response: The lack of compatibility would be partially mitigated by the fact that the proposed shipping container addition will not be structurally attached to the existing building and could be removed from the site in the future with no impact to the 1953 building.

The other architectural design standards found in SMC 17.35.210 are not applicable to this application, except where noted below:

- A. Construct new or replacement structures to be similar to but not mimic other existing contributing structures in the district. Use architectural styles and materials representative of the pre-World War II era.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. The project involves an addition to an existing non-contributing structure within the Landmark District. No new or replacement structures are proposed.

- B. *Continue the pattern of massing, height, bulk and setbacks established by the existing pre-World War II structures. All new commercial or industrial structures shall relate specifically in style, massing, materials and fenestration to at least one contributing structure, preferably to one in close proximity to the new structure.*

Not applicable. Not applicable. The proposed addition is to an existing non-contributing structure within the Landmarks District. No new commercial or industrial structures are proposed.

- C. *Building height shall be governed by applicable zoning standards in SMC 17.20.040.*

Staff Response. The proposed addition will be consistent with the maximum building height for the BR-1 zone. Maximum building height is 35'.

- D. *Organize commercial building facades with the three-part horizontal division and vertical columns typically found in Snoqualmie's pre-World War II structures. Primary facades should have a clear base, middle and top. Box-like designs should be avoided.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. The existing building is not a pre-World War II structure.

- E. *Emphasize primary building entrances with a recessed entry and transom windows.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- F. *Break up street-facing walls more than 30 feet wide with recesses, columns, bays or entryways. Avoid long uninterrupted walls.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- G. *Design and maintain rooflines to reflect traditional commercial roof configurations and pitches found in contributing buildings. These configurations include gabled, flat and shed-roof styles, usually with a decorative parapet wall.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. There are no proposed changes to the primary roofline of the building.

- H. *Accent the roofline with a dominant parapet wall in one of the styles commonly found in Snoqualmie. The most common styles include pediment, cornice molding, cresting and stepped front.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. There are no proposed changes to the primary roofline of the building

- I. *Make details on each building appropriate to its style. Most buildings are simple in style with minimal detailing.*

Staff Response: This criterion is met in some respects, but not in others, as discussed above.

- J. *Use traditional finish materials found in the Snoqualmie historic area, including brick, stucco, and horizontal or vertical wood siding. Modern materials and synthetic substitutes are to be avoided where they are easily visible from the street.*

Staff Response: Corrugated steel is not a traditional finish material, even though it can be found on some neighboring structures, such as the Railroad Building (8125 Falls Ave SE) and 100 Falls Avenue. The applicant proposes to paint the container to match the building's rear façade to better disguise the corrugated steel's lack of harmony with the primary building. Additionally, a proposed fence along the rear property boundary would provide visual buffering to reduce visibility from Falls Avenue.

- K. *If synthetic siding is used where it is not easily visible, it shall conform to the existing siding in dimension, profile and relationship to corner boards, window trim and other architectural details. Trim or details shall not be permanently removed.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. Synthetic siding materials are not being proposed for this shipping container addition.

- L. *On Railroad Avenue, include an awning or other sidewalk covering suitable to the style of the building, consistent with the awning and canopy standards set forth in the next section.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- M. *Choose paint and material colors appropriate to the style and setting of the building. Colors should coordinate with the entire facade and not conflict with adjacent buildings. Color schemes should be simple, in keeping with the community's history. The historic design review board shall establish an approved color palette, which shall be maintained by the historic preservation officer and be available for public inspection and use.*

Staff Response: As noted above, the project adheres to the updated Approved Exterior Color Palette. Both the existing rear façade and the proposed new addition will be finished in the following approved tones:

- o Rear Façade: Rookwood Dark Green (SW 2816)
- o Accent/Trim: Black (BM 2132-10)

- N. *Assure that rooftop mechanical equipment is not visible from the street.*

Staff Response: As conditioned, this criterion is met. The project will be required to screen all new roof top mechanical equipment. Consistency with this standard will be reviewed under the subsequent building permit. All screening materials shall be installed prior to final inspection.

- O. *Retain original window and door openings, keeping the original placement, size and spacing. Whenever possible, repair and re-use original openings and trim, including glass, sash, lintels and sills, steps, doors and hardware.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- P. *Retain original types and styles of windows, such as doublehung, casement or large commercial. Avoid modern window styles.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. The Project does not propose to replace or eliminate windows on the existing or proposed structures.

- Q. *Provide generous amounts of clear glass for the ground floor of buildings facing sidewalks to allow passersby to see into the building. Include windows on the second floors of street-facing facades. Alignment, proportions and groupings of windows should relate to the first floor building elements. Windows should have detailing suitable to the building's style and materials.*

Staff Response: The Project cannot meet this architectural standard because the proposed addition is located on the backside of the property with a cedar fence screening the shipping container from the sidewalk on Falls Avenue. Passersby will not be able to see into the proposed addition from the street.

- R. *Avoid the use of vinyl or other synthetic materials, or anodized aluminum, on window or door frames on the principal facade.*

Staff Response: Not applicable. No changes are proposed to the primary façade of the building.

- S. *Use replacement glass when needed of similar size, color and reflective quality as the original.*

Staff Response: Not applicable.

- T. *Design exterior lighting to enhance the building design, with fixtures of a design and size suitable to the building's style. Excessively bright or colored lighting is prohibited, except for temporary holiday decorations.*

Staff Response: The proposed lighting will be consistent with the fixtures approved under DRB2025-0003 along Railroad Avenue.

STAFF SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

For the foregoing reasons, Staff finds that the application, on balance, does not satisfy the municipal code's requirements to preserve the historic character and ensure compatible additions to historic structures within the Overlay District and Landmark District described by SMC 17.35. Therefore, Staff cannot recommend a favorable decision to allow the shipping container addition at 8050 Railroad Avenue SE under permit DRB2026-0004.

The Historical Design Review Board may approve, approve with conditions, or deny the proposed development. If approved with conditions, the Historical Design Review Board may require that such conditions be fulfilled prior to the issuance of a building or occupancy permit, where appropriate.

The Historical Design Review Board may deny the proposed development plans if they do not satisfy the requirements of Chapter 17.35 SMC.

If, however, the Board disagrees with staff's conclusions and determines that the Historical Design Review should be approved, Staff recommends imposing the following conditions:

1. If any additional work to the front or rear structures is proposed, a building permit is required. No work onsite shall take place until approval of all associated permits.
2. If any new signs are proposed in the future, the applicant will need to submit materials for Historical Design Review and obtain a Sign Permit.
3. Fencing shall be installed consistent with SMC 17.55.130. Fencing over 6' tall shall obtain a building permit prior to installation.
4. Rooftop mechanical equipment shall be screened from view. The screening materials shall be reviewed and approved by the Community Development Director. All screening materials shall be installed prior to final inspection.

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD DECISION:

_____ *The Historical Design Review Board adopts the staff report above as its findings and conclusions for this project, DRB2026-0004, and therefore **DENIES** the application.*

_____ *The Historical Design Review Board adopts the staff report above as its findings and conclusions for this project, DRB2026-0004, and therefore **APPROVES** the application with the following recommended conditions:*

1. If any additional work to the front or rear structures is proposed, a building permit is required. No work onsite shall take place until approval of all associated permits.
2. If any new signs are proposed in the future, the applicant will need to submit materials for Historical Design Review and obtain a Sign Permit.
3. Fencing shall be installed consistent with SMC 17.55.130. Fencing over 6' tall shall obtain a building permit prior to installation.
4. Rooftop mechanical equipment shall be screened from view. The screening materials shall be reviewed and approved by the Community Development Director. All screening materials shall be installed prior to final inspection.

Ashley Kilcup
Chair, Planning Commission
(sitting as the Historical Design Review Board per SMC 17.35.055)

Date

APPEAL:

Pursuant to SMC 17.35.170, The findings and decision of the historic preservation officer for a Type I project, and the findings and decision of the historical design review board for a Type II or Type III project, may be appealed to the hearing examiner by filing a notice of appeal as specified in Chapter 14.40 SMC. The hearing examiner shall render their decision on the appeal per Chapters 2.14 and 14.40 SMC.

Pursuant to SMC 14.10, all appeals shall be filed within 14 days of the Notice of Decision. Appeals must be received by the community development department prior to 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the appeal period.

Attachments.

1. Application form, dated 03/17/2026
2. Design Review Proposal, revised 4/24/2026
3. Downtown Snoqualmie District and Overlay Map with Landmarks
4. Approved Exterior Color Palette (2025)