



**THE PLANNING, ZONING AND HISTORICAL APPROPRIATENESS COMMISSION
(PZHAC) WILL BE HAVING A WORK SESSION AT THE MESILLA TOWN HALL,
2231 AVENIDA DE MESILLA.
MONDAY- FEBRUARY 2, 2026, AT 5PM
(Minutes)**

COMMISSIONERS

- Chairperson – Eric Walkinshaw (absent)
- Vice Chair – Eric Gallegos
- Secretary – Lori Miller
- Commissioner – Rosemary Alvillar
- Commissioner – Martha Mulvihill
- Alt. Commissioner – Stevie Paz
- Alt. Commissioner – Mary Lucero

STAFF

- Community/Economic Development Director (CED) – Eddie Salazar
- Historic Preservation Specialist (HPS) – Liana Aguirre
- NM Construction Industries Division (CID) – Thomas Maese

PUBLIC

- Trina Witter
- Mary H Ratje

**ADDITIONAL WORK SESSION REGARDING AMENDMENTS
TO MESILLA TOWN CODE 18.65 SIGNS. FOCUS ON GENERAL
COMMERCIAL ZONE (C) SIGN CODE
AND SANDWICH SIGNS IN HISTORIC
COMMERCIAL
ZONE (HR)**

CED Salazar

February 2, 2026, Planning and Zoning work session—Planning and Zoning Historical Appropriateness Commission. This is a work session regarding sign ordinance amendments or proposals for amendments to the sign ordinance. This is our second review of the ordinance.

The reason I wanted to come back together again is that the more I thought about it, the harder it became not to contradict one end of the code versus the other, while also trying to capture all the possible scenarios that somebody could request. I am open to suggestions, obviously, and solutions—maybe point out some stuff.

One of the things I gathered is that there are municipalities—three of them that I checked—that base sign size on square footage relative to the linear feet of the frontage wall the sign is placed on. For example, one municipality allows one and a half linear feet for every one square foot of signage. Sunland Park has a similar standard, and I think the county does as well. So it's all around that ballpark.

But with that said, if we change that, what if one side of a building is bigger than the other? What if one side is much bigger—does that automatically qualify them to put up a larger sign? Is there a cap to the size of signs? The way we did it last time we reviewed it, we said the sign can't be more than 10% of the wall, which is very simple. But again, that raises questions.

Some of my suggestions would be to go off linear feet, put a cap on it, or treat individual circumstances on a case-by-case basis. I mentioned in the code that Planning and Zoning has the right to consider any out-of-the-norm requests—anything not mentioned in our code. It's almost like a special use permit, but without having to go through all the hoops and additional fees. Special use permits require postings, hearings, and cost the applicant about \$350, and I don't think it's fair for someone to have to do that for something we didn't foresee in our code.

I did add that language, and I don't know if the Board of Trustees will go along with it, but that is my recommendation. Obviously, I'd like to hear from all of you as well.

Let's jump to the first section of your packet: General Provisions. We're going to skip that for now. Let's go to the sign section on page 30.

I'm not going to go through every single section again, but the first thing I crossed out in red is Section 18.65.040. Specifically, Section C, which states that five years after the ordinance codified in this chapter is in effect, nonconforming signs approved by the Mesilla Board of Trustees—or signs not in conformity but permitted under previous ordinances—may continue until certain conditions occur.

The five-year period has already passed. My recommendation is to remove that language. What I've learned, especially in code enforcement, is: if you're not going to enforce it, don't have it written down. Otherwise, it can be used against you. It also becomes controversial people will ask why one violation was enforced and another wasn't. So either we reword it or remove the outdated timeframe.

This ordinance dates back to 2018, and the five-year window would have expired in 2023. So it's already past due.

Historical Signage Exception (18.65.070)

Moving on to 18.65.070—exceptions. Letter N refers to signs of historical significance, which are exempt from this section. These signs must still meet certain requirements, but they are exceptions.

We had a case a couple of years ago where someone wanted to put up a “historical” sign that had nothing to do with the building. If someone wants to do a mural, for instance, it can be an exception, but it should relate to the building or structure it’s on. You can’t just put up a mural of Pancho Villa anywhere and call it historical.

Permit Issuance & Special Circumstances (18.65.090)

Section 18.65.090 states that permits may be issued administratively if the sign complies with all requirements. For other signs, approval must come from the Planning and Zoning Historical Appropriateness Commission and the Board of Trustees.

I added language stating that the Commission reserves the right to consider requests under special circumstances where the regulations of this title do not specifically apply. However, we also need to ensure this doesn’t contradict other parts of the code that say anything not mentioned is prohibited unless approved by the Board of Trustees.

Suggested wording change: Replace “extenuating circumstances” with “**special circumstances**” or “**mitigating circumstances.**”

Permit Fees (18.65.110)

Currently, sign permit fees are very affordable—\$2 per square foot, with a maximum fee of \$50. I proposed increasing the fee to \$5 per square foot and removing the \$50 maximum. Some sign applications are time-consuming to review, and the cap no longer reflects the actual administrative cost.

Temporary Signs (18.65.130)

In the commercial zone, businesses are allowed two temporary signs. This causes issues for businesses like fireworks stands, which use feather flags for seasonal sales. Under current rules, each flag is considered a separate sign, which limits them severely.

We discussed increasing the allowance to **four temporary signs per year** in commercial zones (excluding the plaza), with limits on how many can be displayed at one time.

Sandwich Boards / A-Frame Signs (18.65.135)

A sandwich board or A-frame sign may be permitted for a business establishment and must be brought inside when the business closes. The sign shall be no larger than six square feet, and only one sandwich board is allowed per business.

We discussed concerns about sidewalk obstruction and ADA compliance. The recommendation is:

- Sandwich boards must be **on the business’s property only**
 - They must **not obstruct sidewalks or pathways**
 - **A permit should be required**
 - Businesses with no room on their property may not place sandwich boards in the public right-of-way
-

Wall Signs (18.65.140)

The wall sign area in commercial zones may not exceed 10% of any wall area, with a maximum of 25 square feet (whichever is less). The consensus was to **keep the 25-square-foot cap** and handle larger requests on a case-by-case basis.

Closing Remarks

The purpose of these regulations is grounded in the Cultural Properties Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. These laws emphasize the importance of preserving historical and cultural heritage for future generations. While times are changing, preservation remains a core responsibility of the Commission.

**THE PLANNING, ZONING AND HISTORICAL APPROPRIATENESS COMMISSION
(PZHAC) WILL BE HAVING A REGULAR MEETING AT THE MESILLA TOWN HALL,
2231 AVENIDA DE MESILLA.**

MONDAY- FEBRUARY 2, 2026, (AFTER WORK WESSION)

(MINUTES)

COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson – Eric Walkinshaw (**absent**)

Vice Chair – Eric Gallegos

Secretary – Lori Miller

Commissioner – Rosemary Alvillar

Commissioner – Martha Mulvihill

Alt. Commissioner – Stevie Paz

Alt. Commissioner – Mary Lucero

STAFF

Community/Economic Development Director – Eddie Salazar

Historic Preservation Specialist – Liana Aguirre

NM Construction Industries Division – Thomas Maese

PUBLIC

Trina Witter

Mary H Ratje

1. Call to Order

We are here at the Planning, Zoning and Historical Appropriateness Commission meeting for Monday, February 2, 2026.

Please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pledge of Allegiance:

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

2. Roll Call

Vice Chair **Gallegos** present.
Commissioner **Miller** present.
Commissioner **Alvillar** present.
Commissioner **Mulvihill** present.
Chair **Walkinshaw** **absent**.
Commissioner **Paz** present.
Commissioner **Lucero** present.

Mr. Vice Chair, you do have quorum. Very good. Since Chair Walkinshaw is absent, Vice Chair Gallegos will preside and Commissioner Paz will fill the empty seat.

3. Changes and Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda by Commissioner Miller.
Second to approve by Commissioner Mulvihill.

Commissioner Mulvihill

There are some typos. Do we need to correct them now, or leave them as is?

CED Salazar

This item is to approve the agenda itself. Corrections will be addressed during the consent agenda.

Any other discussion? (none)

Vote:

Commissioner Paz – Yes
Commissioner Mulvihill – Yes

Commissioner Alvillar – Yes

Commissioner Miller – Yes

Mr. Vice Chair, the motion passes 4-0.

4. Public Input

Mr. Vice Chair opened the floor for public input.

Anyone? Once? Twice?

Mr. Vice Chair, there is no public input.

5. Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion for approval of the consent agenda.

First motion by Commissioner **Alvillar**.

Seconded by Commissioner **Mulvihill**.

Corrections Noted:

- Page 8 of 10, second-to-last line: replace “me” with “**Meline**.”
- Page 10: restaurant name should be **Don Felix**, not The Phoenix.
- Corrections to alternate commissioner references on the same page.

Those are the only corrections identified.

Vote:

Commissioner Paz – Yes

Commissioner Miller – Yes

Commissioner Alvillar – Yes

Commissioner Mulvihill – Yes

Motion passes with corrections.

6. Staff and Commissioner Discussion

Mr. Vice Chair opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Salazar stated that no permits or applications had been received recently, which is typical during the holiday season and colder months. He clarified that administrative approvals are still being issued when appropriate and that this does not mean items are being approved without Commission review.

Mr. Salazar emphasized the importance of being proactive and addressing potential code issues before they become controversial. He raised examples such as shipping containers, RV parking, and what constitutes “permanent fixtures” under the code. He noted that interpretations often differ, particularly when code language is unclear or silent.

He discussed the three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—and how the Commission operates in a quasi-judicial role during hearings. He stressed the importance of not crossing roles and following due process, including avoiding site visits and outside communication related to cases.

Mr. Salazar explained that the Board of Trustees is the legislative authority responsible for final ordinance changes and approvals, while the Commission serves as a recommending body. He suggested that even denied applications should continue to the Board of Trustees with a recommendation, rather than stopping at the Commission level.

He further discussed the need for training, clarifying that while procedural training is appropriate (e.g., Open Meetings Act, rules of conduct), commissioners should not be trained to think a certain way, as interpretation naturally varies. He suggested that commissioners may develop subject-area familiarity (e.g., fencing, signage) to help the group interpret code more consistently.

7. Code Interpretation and Enforcement

Commissioners discussed situations where activities are not explicitly addressed in the municipal code. It was noted that if an item is not specified in the code, it is generally considered prohibited unless reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees. However, concerns were raised about practicality in situations such as temporary weather screening for businesses.

Mr. Salazar compared code interpretation to law enforcement discretion, emphasizing the importance of professional judgment while remaining consistent with ordinance language. He noted the need for fairness and consistency to avoid allegations of favoritism or liability.

Commissioners discussed code enforcement challenges and communication gaps between departments. Mr. Salazar stated that efforts are underway to improve coordination, including new software tools to track permits geographically and over time.

He emphasized the importance of building relationships between code enforcement officers and business owners to encourage compliance through communication rather than purely punitive measures.

8. Consistency, Fairness, and Prior Approvals

Discussion continued regarding past approvals of structures that may not meet current design standards. Commissioners expressed concern about fairness when similar structures exist but new applications are denied. It was noted that past approvals do not necessarily justify future non-compliant structures and that evolving standards may require stricter application of code.

Mr. Salazar acknowledged the frustration inherent in differing interpretations and emphasized that majority vote governs Commission decisions, even when individuals disagree.

9. Recommendations to the Board of Trustees

Commissioners discussed whether denied applications should proceed to the Board of Trustees with recommendations. Concerns were raised regarding legal liability and the importance of transparency in the review process. It was agreed that recommendations—whether approval or denial—should be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for final consideration when appropriate.

10. Community Engagement and Historic Preservation

Ms. Aguire shared updates on community engagement efforts, including potential collaborations with DACC to catalog historic structures, create educational materials for children, and develop a small documentary on historic preservation. He emphasized the importance of involving the Board of Trustees, community members, and businesses in preserving Mesilla’s historic character, noting that historic preservation is both a cultural and economic resource for the town.

11. Commissioner and Staff Comments

No additional comments were offered.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.
Thank you to all commissioners and staff for their time and discussion.



Chairperson - Eric Walkinshaw

ATTEST:



Town Clerk/Treasurer – Gloria Maya
