Community Planning and Development
Denver Landmark Preservation

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STAFF REPORT

This document is the staff's comparison of the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation, Design Guidelines for Denver Landmark Structures and Districts, the Landmark Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 30, Revised Municipal Code) and other applicable adopted area guidelines as applied to the proposed application. It is intended to provide guidance during the commission's deliberation of the proposed application. Guidelines are available at www.denvergov.org/preservation

Project:	#2026-COA-1029	**LPC Meeting:**	September 15, 2026
Address:	101 West 14th Avenue Pkwy	**Staff:**	Brittany Bryant
Historic District:	Civic Center Historic District		
Year structure built:	c.1909 (Design Guidelines Period of Significance: 1909-1979)		
Council District:	#10 - Chris Hinds		
Applicant:	Department of Transportation & Infrastructure (DOTI) | Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR)		

Project Scope Under Review:
Electrical – Transformer Box

Footprint: 4' X 18' **Height: 8'-6"**

Staff Summary:
The applicants, the Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) and Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR), are requesting approval to remove an existing transformer box from Civic Center Park and install a new transformer box adjacent to the McNichols Building. The new transformer will provide electrical service to support the redesigned park and the new Greek Theater stage.

Civic Center Park is at the heart of civic life in Denver, with the Colorado State Capitol to the east and the City and County Building to the west. The park has long served as an important gathering space for significant cultural and civic events throughout the state, including remembrance vigils, political speeches, climate protests, Pride, A Taste of Colorado, parades, the Christmas light display at the City and County Building, the Denver Christkindl market, and other annual events.

The McNichols Building was constructed in 1909 and designed by architect Albert Randolph Ross. The building originally served as Denver's Central Carnegie Library. Civic Center Park was part of a series of improvements proposed by Mayor Robert W. Speer as part of Denver's City Beautiful movement. In 1916, Speer hired Edward H. Bennett, a protégé of Daniel Burnham, to develop a plan for the park. Bennett incorporated ideas from earlier plans prepared by Charles Mulford Robinson and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and added the Greek Theater, Voorhies Memorial, and seal pond, as well as the realignment of Colfax Avenue and 14th Avenue Parkway around the park. Civic Center Park officially opened in 1919.

Civic Center Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, designated a Denver Landmark Historic District in 1976, and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2012.

The park is currently undergoing renovation as part of the Civic Center Next 100 plan. Led by Denver Parks and Recreation in partnership with the Civic Center Conservancy, the plan seeks to strengthen the park's traditional uses while reactivating and enhancing the park as a civic and community gathering space. Public input identified four key areas of focus: Bannock Street, the Greek Theater, the central promenade, and the central gathering space.

Excerpted from Denver's Civic Center Design Guidelines, March 17, 2009

Guidelines	Meets Guidelines?	Comments
V. General Park Guidelines e. New Elements Guidelines 1. Respect the two Areas of Influence identified for each New Element • The Primary Area of Influence is the horizontal space where new improvements may occur… • The Secondary Area of Influence is an additional horizontal space that the design may include	Yes	The proposed transformer box will be located within the secondary area of influence of the McNichols Building. The primary area of influence is in front of the building, while the secondary area of influence encompasses the areas to the south of the building. New site elements may be located within the secondary area of influence, where they have less impact on the building's primary architectural setting.
VI. McNichols Civic Center Building (Carnegie Library) c. Guidelines 2. Allow modifications to the south façade of the McNichols Building to improve its physical and visual connection to Civic Center. 4. For New Elements, use materials compatible with the McNichols Building's neoclassical design and its original materials. Allow the use of contemporary materials complementing the park's original materials and compatible with the Park's neoclassical design. • Acceptable secondary materials are: o Bronze o Steel or painted steel or when used in conjunction with a primary material.	Yes	While the proposed transformer box is not an alteration to the south façade itself, it will be located adjacent to the south façade of the McNichols Building, where alterations are permissible. The transformer box will be installed on a concrete curb and constructed of metal with a matte finish. It will be painted to closely match the stone of the McNichols Building's façade, helping the new utility equipment blend with the building and minimize its visual impact. The proposed location was selected because this portion of the south façade is largely blank and does not contain windows or other significant architectural features. The transformer box will therefore avoid obscuring windows or character-defining architectural elements of the building

Excerpted from Design Guidelines for Denver Landmark Structures & Districts, March 2026

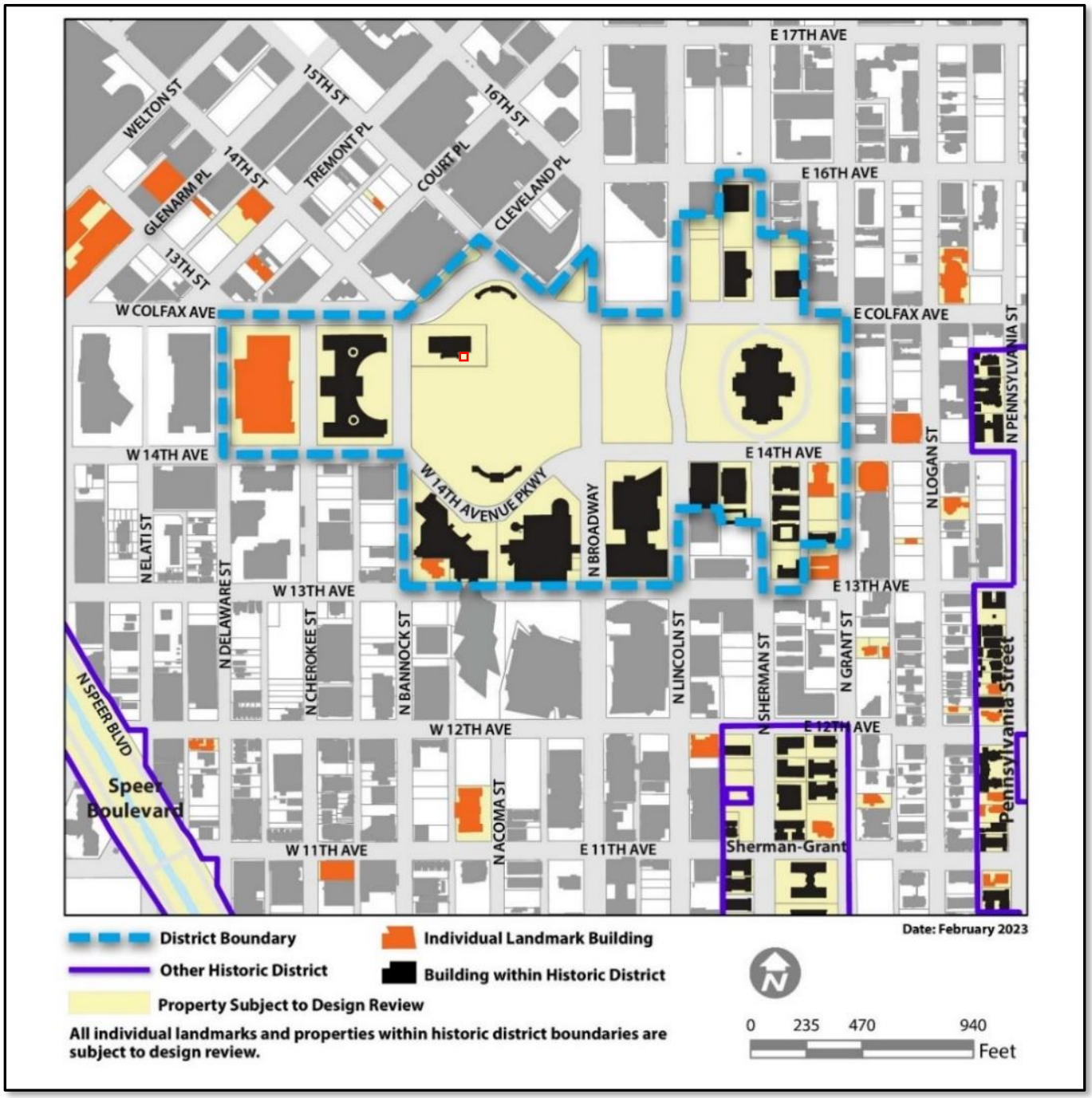
Guidelines	Meets Guidelines?	Comments
2.15.1 Place mechanical, utility and communications equipment to minimize visual impacts on a historic building. b. Locate ground-mounted units in an inconspicuous location and sensitively screen if visible from public vantage points.	Yes	An existing transformer box will be removed from the site and replaced with the proposed new transformer box. The existing transformer is located within the path of the new accessible pedestrian loop approved by the Commission in 2025 as part of the Greek Theater project. Its removal is therefore necessary to

d. Incorporate mechanical equipment with matte or non-reflective finishes that blend with building colors if the equipment will be visible from the street or sidewalk.		accommodate the approved pedestrian circulation improvements. The transformer box will be installed on a concrete curb and constructed of metal with a matte finish. It will be painted to closely match the stone of the McNichols Building's façade, helping the new utility equipment blend with the building and minimize its visual impact.
5.4.4 Site and access service areas and ground-mounted mechanical equipment to minimize impacts on the historic streetscape and disruption of the pedestrian environment. a. Locate service areas and ground-mounted mechanical equipment to the side or rear of buildings. b. Where possible, place a service area or ground-mounted mechanical equipment within a building alcove, especially if it is not located to the side or rear of a building.	Yes	While Civic Center Park does not have a traditional "backside," the proposed transformer will be in a more inconspicuous area adjacent to the rear of the McNichols Building. This location will minimize the visibility of the new utility equipment while avoiding impacts on the park's primary civic spaces and the significant architectural features of the McNichols Building. There are existing mechanical and utility vents associated with the McNichols Building located in approximately the same area. The proposed transformer will therefore be in an area that already contains utilitarian building infrastructure, helping to minimize the visual impact of the new equipment.

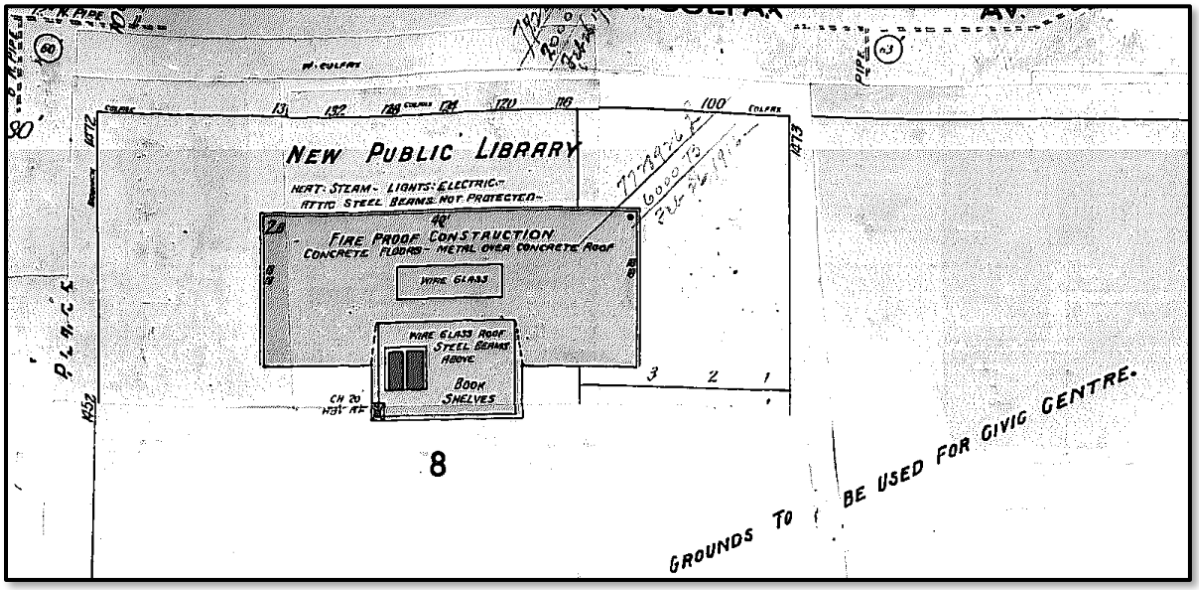
Basis: Proposed transformer box will support the continued use of Civic Center Park as the heart of Denver's civic life while minimizing its impact on the historic property and site. The installation will not damage historic building fabric and will be in a relatively inconspicuous area adjacent to the rear of the McNichols Building. The transformer will be painted with a matte finish to closely match the color of the building's façade, further reducing its visual impact and allowing the new utility equipment to blend with the existing setting.

Suggested Motion: I move to APPROVE application #2026-COA-1029 for the transformer box at 101 West 14th Avenue Parkway, as per Civic Center design guidelines V 1 and VI 2 and 4, Design Guidelines for Denver Landmark Structures and Districts 2.15.1 and 5.4.4, presented testimony, submitted documentation and information provided in the staff report.

Civic Center with transformer location outlined in red



1904, corrected 1925 Sanborn Map with the McNichols Building shown



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