



City of Santa Barbara
Planning Division

Memorandum

MEETING DATE: March 20, 2019

TO: Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC)

FROM: Nicole Hernandez, City Urban Historian

SUBJECT: **Structure of Merit Mass Designations**

Beginning in 2017, the City Planning Division has been making a concerted effort to hold the mass designation hearings of properties listed on the Potential Historic Resources List. The list had grown to have over 700 properties, many of which have been on the list since 1978, without an update to their eligibility status. Once on the list, a property is under the jurisdiction of the Historic Landmarks Commission for any exterior improvements to the property to protect exterior character-defining features on building that qualify them to be eligible to be designated. However, the historic status to the property owner is unclear and property owners are often alarmed and confused that upon submittal for proposed exterior improvements to the building they are being routed to the Historic Landmarks Commission.

The purpose of the mass public hearing on March 20, 2019 will be to review the historic survey form associated with the proposed designation, take public comment regarding the **historic significance** of the property, and vote by the Commission if the property qualifies to be designated a Structure of Merit or does not qualify to be a historic resource. This allows property owners the opportunity at the public hearing to provide evidence regarding the **historic significance** of their property.

It is important to note:

- Decisions of the HLC may be appealed to the City Council in writing and filed with the City Clerk at City Hall within 10 calendar days of the meeting at which the Commission took action.
- Upon the Commission's adoption of a resolution of designation as a City Structure of Merit (or upon a final decision of the City Council on an appeal of such a designation), the Community Development Director shall cause such resolution of designation to be recorded with respect to the real property thereof in the Office of the Recorder of the County of Santa Barbara within sixty (60) days of the Commission's adoption of the resolution of designation.
- If the property is not designated a Structure of Merit, and significant evidence is on record that it qualifies as a historic resource, it has to stay on the Potential Historic Resources List
- If the Commission finds that a building does not meet qualifications to be designated a Historic Structure of Merit, the property will be removed from the Potential Historic Resources List and noted as not a historic resource for purposes of CEQA and local historic preservation ordinance finding.

The designation as a Structure of Merit will have little impact on the manner by which the City reviews proposed improvements to the building since it is already considered eligible to be a designated historic resource. The Historic Landmarks Commission currently reviews all properties listed on the Potential Historic Resources List and also reviews Structures of Merit to protect exterior character-defining features.

To rectify this situation and offer more transparency to the property owners, at their meeting of March 22, 2017, the Designation Sub-Committee directed staff to update the qualification information on the properties on the Potential Historic Resources List and hold the full designation hearings for the properties eligible as Structures of Merit in mass, approximately 50 at a time, approximately quarterly, with the process outlined in section 22.22.085 of the Municipal Code. The full Historic Landmarks Commission agreed with the approach to address the overwhelming number of buildings listed on the Potential Historic Resources List. The mass designation approach will fulfill the goal of the Historic Resources Element of the General Plan adopted by City Council in 2012. Implementation action number HR8.4 states “designate identified resources expeditiously, at least annually. As soon as possible after the identification of significant eligible resources, process designations of historic resources to have the applicable structure of merit, landmark or historic district designation.”

Staff prepared designation reports for each property outlining the criteria for which it qualifies to be designated a Structure of Merit and mailed the report with notice of the hearing date to the property owners. The information is also available on-line on the City’s Historic Resources Database.