



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## STRUCTURE OF MERIT INFORMATION



### DEFINITION:

A *structure of merit* is any structure which is deserving of official recognition as having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance, and which is designated a *structure of merit* under the provisions of Municipal Code Chapter 22.22.

### ELIGIBILITY:

In considering a proposal to designate a structure as a *structure of merit*, the Historic Landmarks Commission applies any or all of the following criteria as reasons for a decision:

- a. Its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;
- b. Its location as a site of a significant historic event;
- c. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City, the State or the Nation;
- d. Its exemplification of a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City, the State or the Nation;
- e. Its exemplification of the best remaining architectural type in a neighborhood;
- f. Its identification as the creation, design or work of a person or persons whose effort has significantly influenced the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;
- g. Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship;
- h. Its relationship to any landmark if its preservation is essential to the integrity of that landmark;
- i. Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood;
- j. Its potential of yielding significant information of archaeological interest;
- k. Its integrity as a natural environment that strongly contributes to the well-being of the people of the City, the State or the Nation.

## **PROCEDURE:**

1. A proposal for designation of a *structure of merit* may begin with action initiated by the Historic Landmarks Commission itself, or with a letter written to the Commission by the property's owner or by an interested person.
2. The Commission may request a staff report and recommendation on the proposal. The Commission may also refer the proposal to its designations subcommittee for comment.
3. The Property owner will be notified that the matter is being considered.
4. The Commission may then designate a structure as a *structure of merit* by majority vote.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

The City of Santa Barbara completes surveys of buildings in order to identify, categorize, create inventories and possibly designate buildings based on the level of known historic significance.

Only exterior alterations must be reviewed by the HLC and determined to not cause a substantial adverse change in the historical significance of the resource in order to be approved. Additions or alterations are also likely to be approved if they are compatible with the neighborhood, with the existing structure and if essential features that make the structure historically significant are retained.

The Historic Landmarks Commission does not review any interior changes.

Historic resources are integral components of the City's heritage because they are historically or architecturally significant. The Structure of Merit designation status was established to encourage the preservation of our City's streetscapes and building fabric. Structures of Merit are historically significant, but to a lesser degree than a City Landmark. The HLC designates a resource a Structure of Merit. The determining factors of a Structure of Merit designation rather than a City Landmark designation are: the amount of eligibility criteria met, the level of integrity of the historic resource and, the quality or number of resources of this type remaining in the City. Once designated a Structure of Merit, all exterior alterations are under the jurisdiction of the HLC.

Before a project is approved, the Historic Landmarks Commission must determine that one or more of the following findings are applicable to the proposed alteration, relocation, or demolition:

1. The exterior alterations are being made for the purposes of restoring the Structure of Merit to its original appearance or in order to substantially aid its preservation or enhancement as a Historic Resource.
2. The relocation of the Structure of Merit will substantially aid in its long-term preservation or enhancement as a Historic Resource.
3. The Structure of Merit has been damaged by an earthquake, fire, or other similar casualty such that its repair or restoration is not reasonably practical or economically feasible and specific measures have been imposed as pre-conditions on the demolition or alterations, which measures mitigate the potential for adverse historic resource impacts resulting from loss of the Structure to a less than significant level or which measures are sufficient to warrant a finding of overriding considerations pursuant to the CEQA.
4. The Commission has determined that the preservation of the Structure of Merit is not economically feasible or that the demolition of a Structure of Merit is warranted in order to avoid or lessen the economic hardship to the Owner, and the Commission has conditioned the issuance

of a City demolition permit upon specific measures which will mitigate the potential for adverse historic resource impacts resulting from the demolition of the Structure of Merit to a less than significant level or such measures are sufficient to warrant a finding of overriding considerations pursuant to the CEQA.

5. The Commission has determined that the proposed changes to the Structure of Merit do not constitute a demolition as defined by this Chapter and constitute alterations which are not incompatible with the goal of long-term preservation or enhancement of the Structure as a City Historic Resource.

## **BENEFITS AND INCENTIVES**

### **PRESERVATION BENEFITS**

Historic preservation is not just about regulations that prevent inappropriate changes to historic resources. Residential homeowners also find that property values stabilize or increase when historic preservation standards are used in rehabilitating their homes. This occurs in part because of the investments made to rehabilitate the homes, as well as the added prestige of owning a designated structure. Nationwide studies also show that preservation projects contribute more to the local economy than do new building programs because each dollar spent on a preservation project has a higher percentage devoted to labor and to the purchase of local materials. By contrast, new construction typically has a higher percentage of each dollar spent devoted to materials that are produced outside the local economy and to special construction skills that may be imported. National and California State studies have proven that local designation provides the following benefits:

- Increases neighborhood stability
- Increases property values
- Preserves the physical history of the area
- Promotes an appreciation of the physical environment
- Fosters community pride and self-image by creating a unique sense of place and local integrity
- Increases the awareness and appreciation of local history
- Attracts potential customers to city businesses
- Increases city tourism

### **STATE AND FEDERAL TAX CREDIT INCENTIVE**

Economic incentives are available to historic preservation projects at the local, state, and federal levels. The State of California and the Federal Government offers rehabilitation tax credits to designated and qualified projects and properties.

## **MILLS ACT PROPERTY TAX INCENTIVE**

The Historical Property Contract Program (Mills Act) provides property tax abatement to properties designated as Structures of Merit or City Landmarks. Under the program, property owners receive a significant reduction in local property taxes in exchange for their promise to actively participate in restoring, rehabilitating, repairing, and preserving their properties. Participants enter into a perpetual 10-year contract with the City. For details, please refer to the web site:

<http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/services/community/historic/preservation/mills.asp>

## **CALIFORNIA STATE HISTORICAL BUILDING CODE**

One of California's most valuable tools for the preservation of historic resources is the California State Historical Building Code (CHBC), which is defined in Sections 18950 to 18961 of Division 13, Part 2.7 of Health and Safety Code (H&SC), a part of California Law. The CHBC is intended to save California's architectural heritage by recognizing the unique construction issues inherent in maintaining and adaptively reusing historic resources. The CHBC provides alternative building regulations for permitting repairs, alterations, and additions necessary for the preservation, rehabilitation, relocation, related construction, change of use, or continued use of a "qualified historical building or structure." The CHBC's standards and regulations are intended to facilitate the rehabilitation or change of occupancy so as to preserve their original or restored elements and features, encourage energy conservation and a cost effective approach to preservation, and provide for reasonable safety from fire, seismic forces, or other hazards for occupants and users of such historic resources, structures, and properties, and to provide reasonable availability and usability by the physically disabled.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS**

"The greenest building is one that is already built." Preserving an historic structure is sound environmental conservation policy because "reusing" saves energy and reduces the need for producing new construction materials. Many historic resources are inherently "green" in the following ways:

- Energy is not consumed to demolish a building and dispose of the resulting debris.
- Energy is not used to create new building materials, transport them, and assemble them on site.
- The embodied energy which was used to create the original building and its components is preserved.
- By reusing older historic resources, pressure is reduced to harvest new lumber and other materials that may have negative impacts on the environment.