



# 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. A *structure of merit* is not a designated City Landmark.

### 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.

## **BENEFITS:**

Designated City structures of merit are eligible for a variety of benefits under federal, state, and local programs:

- A. California law (the State Historical Building Code) enables local building officials to permit alternatives to regular building code requirements in order to facilitate preservation of structures of merit. The law also provides for use of equivalent methods under the handicapped access requirements.
- B. Under California law historic properties may be assessed on a “present use” basis rather than the usual “highest and best use” basis for property taxes, under certain conditions. They may also be eligible for rehabilitation loan financing.
- C. Structures of merit are afforded protection through the City planning process. When a governmental agency or private entity prepares plans for an area which includes or is adjacent to a *structure of merit*, it is expected to take this into consideration, and to orient its studies and decisions accordingly.
- D. Chapter 22.22 of the Municipal Code permits a designated *structure of merit* located within a landmark district and not conforming to any of the architectural styles required in the district to be altered in its particular architectural style, under certain conditions.

Designated City structures of merit may be eligible for certain types of tax benefits and for grants and loans if they are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places or are eligible for such a listing.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Structures of merit which are located within designated landmark districts may be altered on the exterior with the written approval of the City Historic Landmarks Commission. The Definition of “alteration” includes any modifications to the structure and changes in paint color.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

Title to a *structure of merit* property does not change as a result of designation. There are no restrictions on sale of structures of merit.

Designation as a *structure of merit* does not prohibit the owner from making an alteration to the structure, or from requesting a permit to demolish.

Designation as a *structure of merit* does not establish a requirement that the structure be open to the public.

In many cases, research performed during the City’s Survey of Architectural and Historic Resources has provided information about the background of individual buildings. The survey forms are available for study by interested persons.

The office of the City Planning Division, Community Development Department, has a collection of publications on the preservation of historic properties. Interested persons are welcome to contact the office to see these publications, or to obtain further information on the designation process. A list of designated structures of merit is available at the office.