
Santa Barbara Historic Districts Frequently Asked Questions



City of Santa Barbara
California

INTRODUCTION

Santa Barbara's thematic business district is surrounded by a collection of residential neighborhoods, each featuring unique architectural styles. These vary from the Victorian styles including Italianate, Eastlake and Queen Ann found on the City's Lower West Side, to the period revival styles of upper State Street, the exotic revivals of the Upper East Side, and the significant collection of Craftsman and Spanish Colonial Revival houses throughout the city. Many of the details that are found on our historic buildings constitute a resource valuable for its ability to exemplify methods of construction, craftsmanship, attention to detail and artistry reflective of each style, illustrate social and aesthetic movements, and convey a sense of place and time. In order to protect the City's unique architectural heritage, the city developed an ordinance in 1977 and formed the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) to review exterior alterations to historic resources.

Historic Resource Surveys were completed for the following neighborhoods and have been adequately documented to contain historic resources:

- Waterfront
- Lower Riviera
- West Downtown

The surveys found areas of high concentrations of historic resources that were identified as potential historic districts.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIALS LIST?

The City of Santa Barbara's Potential List is a list of properties which have been deemed historically significant for their historic characteristics, but have not gone through the process of being deemed a Historic Landmark, Structure of Merit or a contributor to a Historic District.

WHAT ARE HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEYS?

A comprehensive survey identifies all contributing and non-contributing buildings, structures, and lots in the area. It may also include landscape, other natural features, streetscape, or other significant elements. Typically preservation professionals contracted by the city will conduct the survey, although community members may be able to help.

WHAT IS A DISTRICT REPORT?

The result of the survey includes a district report of well-researched history, a description of the architectural features and other characteristics that define the district, and a context of its place in the larger development pattern and history of the city or nation.

WHAT IS A SURVEY FORM?

A survey form is completed for each property within a survey area. The form gives a description, year constructed, architect, style and significance statement of each property.

WHAT ARE HISTORIC DISTRICTS?

A historic district is a formally designated group of buildings, structures, sites, and spaces that relate to one another historically, architecturally, and/or culturally.

A district can span part or all of a neighborhood. It can be large or small, can represent any architectural style(s), and can include streetscape and landscape elements.

Individual buildings within a district don't need to be highly significant on their own. The area's overall cohesiveness, uniqueness, and architectural integrity are what matters.

WHAT CRITERIA WERE USED DURING THE SURVEY TO DETERMINE BOUNDARIES OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT

- A historic district must be significant as well as an identifiable entity; the district represents one or more periods, styles, or types of architecture important in the development of the City.
- A district derives its importance from being a unified entity. The identity of a district results in the interrelationship of its resources, which conveys a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically related properties.
- A district must embody important historical, architectural, archeological, engineering or cultural values.
- Within the boundaries of a historic district, most of the structures must be considered “contributing,” meaning that they are historically significant to the neighborhood and have maintained the integrity of their original design.
- Properties within a historic district fall into one of two types of property: contributing and non-contributing. A historic district includes at least 60% or even a larger concentration of contributing structures which give the area authenticity and integrity.

WHAT IS A “CONTRIBUTING BUILDING” TO A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

Contributing properties embody the historic district's significant historic associations and historic architectural qualities. A property can change from contributing to non-contributing and vice versa if significant alterations take place.

WHAT IS A “NONCONTRIBUTING BUILDING”?

A historic district will inevitably include some percentage of “non-contributing” structures, such as a modern medical clinic. Non-contributing structures are built outside the district's established “period of significance,” as well as those that date to the period of significance but have been greatly altered. The “period of significance” is usually the time period in which most of the original construction in the neighborhood occurred.

A noncontributing building does not add to the historical or architectural qualities of the district, was not present during the period of significance or it has lost its physical historic integrity through alterations or deterioration.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

- Historic Districts enhance property values: National and State studies found properties in historic districts increase housing values by an average of **16 percent**.
- Protect homeowner investment: Historic district designation gives buyers assurance that the unique character and ambiance that attracted them to the area in the first place will endure over time.
- Preserve the physical history of the area: Historic district designation protects the authentic, unique character of a neighborhood. Historic neighborhoods often face threats from demolition and overdevelopment, as well as inappropriate alterations. Historic district designation is one of the few tools cities can use to protect original structures and safeguard against the destruction and degradation of their built heritage.
- Foster community pride and self-image: By creating a unique sense of place and local integrity, historic districts increase city tourism and attract potential customers to city businesses.
- Sustainability: Historic preservation is a sustainable environmental practice, preserving and re-using existing buildings, and contributing fewer building materials to local landfills.
- Tax savings for property owners: Owners of contributing structures in historic districts can participate in the Mills Act Property Tax Abatement Program. This program allows qualifying

owners to receive a potential property tax reduction and use the savings to help rehabilitate, restore, and maintain their buildings. The Mills Act is one of the most important economic incentive programs in California for the restoration and preservation of historic buildings by private property owners.

- California Historic Building Code: The California Historic Building Code allows alternatives to regular building codes when dealing with qualified historic buildings.

WHY IS THE CITY PROPOSING HISTORIC DISTRICTS?

1. California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Under CEQA, cities are required to identify and protect significant historic resources. Based on a preponderance of evidence of historic significance, properties identified eligible historic resources.

In most cases, properties are identified as a result of a professional Historic Resource Survey or study. Future discretionary decisions subject to CEQA would require decision makers to still treat these properties as having significance or historic value (preponderance of evidence on record). Creating historic districts allows the city to clearly define the historic significance of the resources and ensure they are reviewed with the protection of the historic resources in mind.

2. Neighborhood Policies of the Adopted Historic Resources Element of the Master Plan

HR5. Protect Neighborhood Historic Resources. Identify neighborhoods in the city that have substantially maintained historical character, and pursue measures to preserve that character. Protect such neighborhoods, especially those in close proximity to the downtown and commercial cores, from development that might transform their historic character.

HR5.4 Prioritize documented candidates. Fast-track adoption of interim or permanent protection measures—such as historic district status or other appropriate measures—for those neighborhoods that have been adequately documented to contain historic resources.

HR2.7 Secure permanent protection. Continue to adopt measures such as establishment of Historic Districts, architectural compatibility, stepping back of buildings within buffer areas, and other development standards.

3. Creating clarity

Designation of historic districts will create greater clarity for the owners of historic resources about the review and approval process for alterations and additions.

WHAT IS THE PROPOSED PROCESS TO DESIGNATE HISTORIC DISTRICTS?

Currently, planning staff is working with the Ordinance Committee of City Council to create ordinance amendments to facilitate designation of Historic Districts. The proposed process to designate a historic district includes the following:

1. Once the historic resource survey is complete, the HLC holds a public meeting to consider the inclusion of properties identified as having historic significance to the “Potential Historic Resources List” until a full designation hearing at the HLC and City Council is completed. Mailed notice is provided to all the property owners of the affected area.
2. The HLC holds a public hearing to consider recommending that City Council designate the historic district. Mailed notice is provided to all the property owners of the affected area.
3. If the HLC does not recommend creation of the district, then the process ends. If the HLC recommends creating the district, then the recommendation moves forward for consideration by the City Council. Once the HLC recommends creating a district, a hearing before City

Council is scheduled within 90 days. Mailed notice is provided to all the property owners of the affected area.

4. City Council will hold a public meeting to consider the recommendation of the designation of the historic district. The final decision on creating a local historic district rests with the City Council.

WHEN IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT ON THESE DISTRICTS?

1. The Historic Landmarks Commission meeting to add properties to the Potential List.
2. The meetings with the Ordinance Committee on the proposed Ordinance Amendments to facilitate historic district designation.
3. The Historic Landmark Commission meeting to consider designation of the historic district.
4. The City Council meeting to consider designation of the historic district.

The dates for these meetings are scheduled in advance thus giving members of the public opportunity to submit comments. Residents can always communicate with their City Council members and city staff to share their thoughts via phone, email, or mail.

HOW DOES THE POTENTIALS LIST IMPACT MY PROPERTY?

The listing of your property as a potential historic resource changes the review of permit applications for alterations, additions, or demolitions from the Single Family Design Board or Architectural Review Board to the Historic Landmark Commission. The Historic Landmark Commission and staff have expertise in evaluating appropriate solutions for historic resources while protecting historic features.

WHAT CHANGES WILL BE PERMITTED TO A CONTRIBUTING PROPERTY?

The HLC and staff will review the EXTERIOR only of contributing structures in a Historic District. Alterations, additions, and new units will be allowed. HLC does not have jurisdiction over use of a property or interior alterations of structures.

HOW WILL ALTERATIONS BE EVALUATED?

The goal is to have the majority of requests for minor alterations of historic resources to be signed off administratively under the new ordinance through the permit review process, usually on the same day.

HLC and staff intend to adopt guidelines based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, nationally recognized historic preservation standards to base the approval of changes to historic properties.

WHAT TYPE OF PROJECTS CAN HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL?

Staff will review the proposal based on applicable guidelines. This is a great opportunity to gain valuable feedback about your project. Minor exterior maintenance, repairs and repainting of structures that follow the guidelines can receive staff approval.

- ***In-kind repair/replacement:*** All in-kind repairs or replacements that match the existing materials, size, profile, exposure, detail, relief and dimension according to the *Historic Resource Guidelines*.
- ***Restoration:*** Restoration projects that return elements of a building to its original condition according to the *Historic Resource Guidelines*.

- **Minor “As-built” projects consistent with the Historic resource guidelines:** Projects requesting retention of previously completed or ongoing work that did not receive approval prior to installation that complies with the *Historic Resource Guidelines*.
- **Alterations of non-contributing buildings.** Alterations of non-contributing buildings in a historic district that are compatible with the streetscape.

WHAT TYPE OF PROJECTS REQUIRE HLC FULL BOARD APPROVAL?

- **Renovations to contributing structures inconsistent with the Historic Resource Guidelines:** If the applicant does not wish to comply with the *Historic resource guidelines*, the project’s impacts may be required to be evaluated in a historic structures report prepared by a qualified historian and then reviewed by the HLC.
- **As-built projects that are inconsistent with the Historic Resource Guidelines:** As-built projects are requests for the retention of previously completed or ongoing work that did not receive approval. If the work does not meet Historic resource guidelines, the property owner will be notified to appear before the HLC to explain the circumstances of the violation.
- **Additions:** Additions to contributing structures in historic districts: Additions can have an impact on the historic integrity of the historic resource as well as the streetscape and historic district as a whole. Careful review of the proposed design will ensure compatibility with surrounding resources.
- **New Construction.** New construction can have an impact on the historic integrity of a streetscape and a historic district as a whole. Careful review of the proposed design will ensure compatibility with surrounding resources.
- **Relocation.** Relocation of a historic resource is sometimes the only option to save it from demolition. However, the loss of a resource’s original setting can significantly weaken the value of a historic resource.
- **Demolition:** The demolition of all or part of a historic resource is considered drastic since it may alter the character of the area and surrounding buildings.

The Historic Landmarks Commission is staffed by Nicole Hernandez, City Urban Historian.
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