



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## **South of Market Survey Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the purpose of this survey?**

The purpose of the SoMa Survey is to assemble historic information about the buildings within the study area and to determine which of those buildings have some special historic, cultural, or architectural significance. The SoMa survey is one of several informational background studies used to guide the development of the Eastern Neighborhoods SoMa Area Plan as well as the Western SoMa Community Plan. Historic surveys are only one part of the various specific studies used by the Planning Department in the development of the area plans. Other topics studied include housing, transportation, and open space.

In accordance with California State and Federal guidelines, surveys may identify a property for its historic, cultural, or architectural significance. Associations to people or events cannot be known without conducting a thorough analysis of each individual property, and are unfortunately beyond the scope and budget for many area plan surveys. However, the Western Soma Community Plan is evaluating properties for their association with Filipino and LGBTQ historic contexts as well as an architectural context. This research is outside the budget and scope of the SoMa Survey; however, it will be used to inform the final survey results. If there is a specific area of study within the survey area that you believe has been overlooked, please contact us. Your information will help the Planning Department in scoping future surveys within the area.

### **Does the survey mean that my property is a Landmark?**

No, the results of a survey are not a Landmark designation of a building. A survey is an information gathering tool. Landmarks designation is a completely separate process that requires property owner notification and several public hearings.

### **What does it mean to be located within an eligible historic district?**

Historic districts are collections of buildings and features that are unified by a shared history or architecture. A district is made of "contributors" and "non-contributors" based on the association to that shared history or architecture. In compliance with California State law, the Planning Department identifies buildings and districts that are eligible for designation. As noted above, a survey is not a formal designation, but it does identify those areas that are "eligible" for designation.

### **As a tenant or property owner, what are the benefits of the survey?**

Owners, tenants, and prospective buyers generally see an advantage to a completed survey because knowing a building's historic status ahead of time brings more certainty to the permitting process. Without a survey, the building permit applicant is usually responsible for providing historic background information on a building. Obtaining this information can add up to a lot of time and money spent before the Planning Department can begin their review of a project. A survey saves everyone time and money because the Department has already completed this part of the review process. Surveys also identify properties that can be designated. There are three separate levels of designation of historic resources: Local (Article 10 & 11), State (California Register of Historical Resources), and Federal (National Register of Historic Places). All three designations qualify buildings to use California's State Historical Building Code and are eligible to apply for a property tax reduction provided by the Mills Act

### **As a tenant or property owner, what are the disadvantages of the survey?**

The determination of whether a property is of historic, cultural, or architectural value is based on factual documentation. While there will always be some owners or tenants that do not agree with the final determination, a survey strives to evaluate each property within the study area in a balanced and objective manner. If there is a factual error in our documentation or you have additional information regarding a property, please let us know – we want to hear from you. Contact information is listed on the survey notice.

While some may see a historic survey determination as a disadvantage, the truth is that the permit review process is identical for all properties regardless of whether or not a survey has been completed. With or without a survey, California State regulations require the Planning Department to make a determination on the historic status of a property when almost any permit application is submitted for review. A survey provides the needed information to complete that review and facilitates the Department's permit review process.

### **I don't want to be part of the survey. How do I opt out?**

A survey was initiated to supplement the development of the Eastern Neighborhoods SoMa Area Plan as well as the Western SoMa Community Plan, and all properties are required to be evaluated in some form to provide information on the areas of historic, cultural, or architectural significance within the plan areas. If there is a factual error in our documentation or you have additional information regarding a property, please let us know – we want to hear from you. Contact information is listed on the survey notice.

### **Will the survey impact my property's taxes or its value?**

No. As far as property taxes are concerned, neither the valuation of property by the Assessor's Office nor the tax rate is affected directly by a survey. There are specific benefits available under federal and local economic incentive programs to owners that choose to have their surveyed building designated. Again, designation is an entirely separate process and is required to be eligible for these incentives. Additional information about these incentive programs is available at: <http://www.sf-planning.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=5075>.

### **Will the survey make it harder to remodel the interior of my property, such as remodel my kitchen or bathroom?**

No. There is no change in the manner in which the Department reviews building permit applications to remodel the interior of a residential building or commercial space. There are no additional fees, level of review, or delay in the processing of a permit application for interior work to a surveyed property.

### **Will the survey make it harder to change the exterior of my property, such as replace my windows?**

This is one of the most commonly asked questions. A common misconception is that a historic building cannot be altered and is "frozen in time." While the Planning Department is generally concerned with exterior work that is visible from the surrounding public right-of-way, such as the street or the sidewalk, the survey results do not prohibit one from making alterations to the exterior.

Obtaining a permit to make exterior alterations on a historic property can be accomplished as quickly as any other permit. Understanding a building's historic status ahead of time brings more certainty to the permitting process and will facilitate the Planning Department's review of any proposed exterior changes. In regards to window replacement, the Planning Department has developed window replacement guidelines that apply across San Francisco to all properties, surveyed or not. For more information please visit the Planning Department's website at: [http://www.sfplanning.org/ftp/files/publications\\_reports/Standards\\_for\\_Window\\_Replacement.pdf](http://www.sfplanning.org/ftp/files/publications_reports/Standards_for_Window_Replacement.pdf) or call the Planning Information Center at 415-558-6377 for a hard copy.

**For more information**, please visit the Planning Department's Preservation FAQ webpage:

<http://www.sfplanning.org/index.aspx?page=1832>

[www.sfplanning.org](http://www.sfplanning.org)