



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT



6 FAQs: Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory

1. What is a Cultural Landscape Inventory?

The Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory provides a study of the environments and surroundings that contribute to or enhance the cultural heritage of the Civic Center Historic District.¹ The objective of the Cultural Landscape Inventory is to inform planning decisions within Civic Center and to encourage design treatment and maintenance of the cultural landscape. Find more information about cultural landscapes and cultural landscape inventories at [website](#).

2. What is the Civic Center Historic District?

The Civic Center Historic District comprises a roughly 58-acre and 15-block part of San Francisco that has multiple historic designations. It was designated locally as a San Francisco Landmark District in December 1994, which followed a listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 for state and national levels of significance and a designation as National Historic Landmark in 1987, which is the highest designation for a historic property in the United States.

3. Why was the Cultural Landscape Inventory Survey conducted, and who conducted it?

Previous historic district documentation focused on the architectural elements of the Civic Center and did not look at the district's larger historic landscapes and site planning elements. This inventory fills in the gaps of the previous surveys rather than expanding the geographic scope of the existing Landmark District designation. No new designations are being proposed. Rather the purpose this inventory is to provide specific and in depth research on specific elements of the Historic District.

Three core purposes and goals guided the Cultural Landscape Inventory survey process:

- Deepen the understanding of Civic Center's history and how its existing features relate to the history
- Evaluate the character-defining features of the Civic Center and the historical significance of those features
- Provide information about the important landscape elements of the Civic Center that were not included in previous historical documentation, which focused on the individual buildings within the district

The Planning Department collaborated with MIG, a Berkeley and Portland-based planning firm, to complete the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory and associated survey. The Department will present the results of the survey to the Historic Preservation Commission at a noticed public hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to provide a forum for the Historic Preservation Commission to hear from

¹ The National Park Service defines a cultural landscape as, "a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with an historic event, activity, or person, or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values."

the Department and the public, and to confirm that the survey was completed according to preservation best practices.

4. How will the survey results be used?

The Cultural Landscape Inventory is a guiding document more than a prescriptive document. Because the Civic Center Historic District and its cultural landscape features are already designated, the research in the CLI will be used as background and guidance to assist planners in making more informed and streamlined decisions regarding the treatment of historic landscape features in Civic Center.

5. Does the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory designate new landmarks?

The Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory provided additional information about landscape features within the existing historic district boundaries, established in 1978 when the Civic Center was listed in the National Register. The current CLI proposed no changes to existing boundaries or contributing properties within the district.

6. Where can I find more information on the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory?

Visit our website at [website](#) for more information.

Quick facts about the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory:

- 1,644 individual features were surveyed in Civic Center.
- The period of significance for the Civic Center Historic District is 1896-1951.
- Civic Center Plaza will be evaluated in further detail as part of upcoming projects at the Plaza sponsored by the Recreation & Parks Department.
- UN Plaza will be evaluated in further detail as part of the environmental review for the Better Market Street Plan.

Examples of the more prevalent character-defining features identified in the Civic Center Cultural Landscape Inventory include:

- London Plane trees, the most abundant type of tree planted as early as 1916
- Fire boxes, part of a citywide installation in 1899
- Trolley poles, constructed in 1914 for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition
- Fire hydrants, three years after the 1906 earthquake and fires the Auxiliary Water Supply System is installed throughout the city, marked with blue fire hydrants

If you have questions about the survey or survey findings, planners will be available to answer questions at an upcoming “Ask-A-Planner” booth at the UN Plaza Farmers’ Market, August 20th and 24th and the Open House at the San Francisco Public Library Main Branch. Find more information about the event at the project [website](#). You may also contact Preservation Planner Gretchen Hilyard to learn more at gretchen.hilyard@sfgov.org.