



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Frequently Asked Questions Local Landmarks and Landmark Districts

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
415.558.6378

Fax:
415.558.6409

Planning
Information:
415.558.6377

Why are buildings designated as local Landmarks or Landmark Districts?

The purpose of landmark and local landmark district designation is two-fold: to bestow distinction upon and foster appreciation of San Francisco's representative buildings, structures, and objects, and to ensure compatible future exterior alterations.

Over the past 40 years, the City and County of San Francisco has designated 260 landmarks and 11 local landmark districts. San Francisco's landmarks and local landmark districts feature iconic buildings and high-style designs as well as residential, commercial and industrial buildings that reflect the experience and landscapes of everyday San Franciscans. Designating landmarks and local landmark districts of iconic buildings, exceptionally cohesive architecture, and buildings with strong cultural associations, helps retain a tangible connection to our collective past. Property owners benefit from the official commitment to historic preservation and the security of knowing that their property will not be negatively affected by future development trends in the neighborhood.

What are the potential benefits to Local Landmark or Landmark District Designation?

Several local, state and federal preservation incentive programs encourage property owners to repair, restore, or rehabilitate historic properties. See the relevant Preservation Bulletins listed on the Planning Department's website for more details on the **Mills Act** (which can provide up to a 50% reduction in property taxes in exchange for the rehabilitation, preservation, and long-term maintenance of historic properties), **Federal Tax Credits** (which can provide a 20% Rehabilitation Tax Credit for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties) and the **California Historical Building Code** (which allows for a more flexible alternative building code for the preservation or rehabilitation of buildings designated as "historic").

The designation process for local landmark districts can also help build community. Working together to create and maintain a landmark district can bring neighbors together, build a sense of community, and foster civic pride. Designation can provide certainty to the community by maintaining the scale and visual characteristics of the built environment through the discouragement of speculative tear-downs or incompatible alterations.

What are the potential drawbacks to Local Landmark or Landmark District Designation?

In order to ensure that proposals to alter designated landmarks and local landmark districts are compatible with the existing historic fabric, an additional level of review is required for proposed exterior alterations. Proposals to demolish a landmark or building within a landmark district – though not impossible – would likewise require additional review. While some welcome this extra review, others might be concerned about fees or the additional time required for permit processing.

This review comes in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness, which for smaller projects (such as window replacements or a new deck) can be reviewed administratively by Planning

Department staff or for larger projects (such as an addition) by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). There is fee associated with a Certificate of Appropriateness, which is scaled relative to the total construction cost of a proposed alteration. The majority of Certificates of Appropriateness are approved administratively by staff without an HPC hearing. HPC hearings for larger projects can occur concurrently with other standard neighborhood notification requirements, thereby minimizing the extra time required for review.

What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) is the entitlement required for exterior alterations requiring a permit for local landmarks and properties located within a local landmark district. C's of A are reviewed by the HPC or administratively by Planning Department staff to ensure that the character-defining features are preserved and that alterations, demolitions and new construction are compatible with existing historic fabric.

It is important to note that a C of A is not required for any interior alterations including kitchen or bathroom remodels, nor is it required for ordinary maintenance and repairs – i.e., work done solely to correct deterioration, decay, or damage – if the replacement materials and details are in-kind. Examples of ordinary maintenance and repair include roof replacement, repair of dry rot, and the replacement of front stairs or railings.

As part of the collaborative landmark district designation process, the Department will work with the community to specify in the designation report the scopes of work that would require a C of A in order to preserve important architectural features. The community is encouraged to participate in this collaborative effort.

Does Landmark designation affect the interior of my house?

No. Landmark designation of residential buildings applies to the exterior only, including roof lines. Occasionally, designation covers the lobby or interior of public or publically accessible buildings such as government buildings or theaters.

What impact does historic designation have on property value?

Independent studies across the country have examined the impact of property values in landmark districts. These studies have shown no indication that property values in landmark districts go down simply because of their landmark status. Rather, the studies indicate that the value of properties in landmark districts appreciate at a slightly higher rate than similar building stock outside the district.

Visit the Planning Department website to access outside studies that have assessed the link between historic preservation and property value in small and large cities.

What is the process to designate a historic district?

The first step is listing a property on the HPC's Landmark Designation Work Program (Work Program). The Work Program is comprised of individual buildings and districts that the HPC has prioritized for listing in Article 10 as a landmark or landmark district. Once a property is listed on the Work Program, the Planning Department will proceed with additional research, documentation and outreach to stakeholder groups including property owners, residents, commercial tenants, and the wider community.

Community buy-in is essential in the creation of a successful landmark designation. Owner consent is not required; however, the Department favors a collaborative approach which

emphasizes extensive community outreach and participation. Through a series of meetings, stakeholder groups and the Department will define the community-supported level of review required for proposals to alter properties within the potential landmark district.

After this collaborative process, the HPC will begin the process of formally designating the proposed landmark district. This process will include numerous opportunities for public input at hearings before the HPC, Planning Commission, and ultimately the Board of Supervisors. Final approval of a landmark or landmark district requires a majority vote at the Board of Supervisors. Public comment opportunities are available at all of these public hearings.

What can we expect to read in a landmark designation report once it is completed?

Once completed, the report will include a history of the landmark or local landmark district including cultural associations, significant persons, and the architectural development of a building or area; a list of contributing and non-contributing properties; a list of character-defining features; a technical document that outlines the entitlement and review process for those features; and a draft ordinance and recommendation by the Planning Department. A short description of some of the technical terms that will be included in the report is provided below.

Contributing and Non-Contributing: Contributors to a landmark district are those buildings, structures, sites, or objects that were constructed during the Period of Significance and retain their physical integrity. When a landmark district is created, qualified historians identify a Period of Significance for the district. For example, in one district, the Period of Significance may be 1884-1929. Buildings or features that were constructed outside that period would be considered non-contributing. Buildings and features that were constructed within the period and possess a high level of integrity would be considered contributing. Also, features that were constructed within the period but were heavily altered (possessing a low level of integrity) would also be deemed to be non-contributing.

Integrity: The authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s Period of Significance. Integrity is the composite of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. When buildings, structures, objects, and sites retain integrity, they are able to convey their association with events, people, and designs from the past.

Character-Defining Features: Character-defining features are the elements of the historic resource that represent its significance. For instance, the character-defining features of a building may include roof forms, proportion, window and door openings, shape, projections, trim, setting, cladding materials, craft details, and finishes. Each building, structure, object, and site in a proposed landmark district will be identified as either contributing or non-contributing and the character-defining features of the district will be catalogued in the designation report.

Will landmark designation require me to restore my building to its original appearance?

No. You are not required to do anything to the property except maintain it to the minimum standards of the building code, something that is required of **all** property owners in the City and County of San Francisco.

Can I add a horizontal or vertical addition to my property?

Yes. The HPC and the Planning Department review proposed additions to landmarks or buildings within a landmark district for compliance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* (Standards) as well as requirements of the Planning Code. The Standards were developed by the National Park Service and are used nationwide for the review of proposed alterations to historic properties. Proposals to add an addition to landmark properties are reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the HPC.

Does the HPC regulate landscaping, driveways and sidewalks?

No, however any Planning Code and Department of Public Works requirements will still apply.

Can I replace my windows?

Yes. Windows that are visible from the street or other public right-of-way can be replaced with windows that are appropriate to the landmark property's Period of Significance. For example, if the building was originally constructed in 1908 with double-hung wood windows, then the replacement windows should be double-hung wood windows with similar exterior dimensions. Replacement windows may use double-panes for energy efficiency. However, only those windows visible from the public right-of-way need to conform to these standards. All others can be replaced as the owner sees fit.

Can a building owner opt-out of a landmark designation?

Individual owners, with the exception of religious properties, can not opt out of a local landmark or landmark district designation. The goal, however, is to build support for individual landmark and landmark district designation through a collaborative community process.

How can I share additional information regarding the history of my house or district?

The Planning Department welcomes additional information regarding buildings or districts proposed for landmark designation. Please contact the Department if you are interested in sharing historic photographs, water tap records, maps, architectural plans, building permit histories or other relevant information regarding your property or neighborhood.

Where can I get more information?

The Planning Department website: www.sfplanning.org contains additional information related to local landmark and landmark district designation. In the coming months the Department will develop additional content related to proposed landmarks and landmarks districts as well as more specific information related to the designation process and scheduled community meetings and hearings. Department staff is also available to answer questions; contact Mary Brown, Preservation Planner, at 415-575-9074 or Mary.Brown@sfgov.org

This material is based upon work assisted by a grant from the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior.