



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Frequently Asked Questions Individual Landmarks and Landmark Districts

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### **Why are buildings designated as Individual Landmarks or Landmark Districts?**

The purpose of individual landmark and 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 individual landmarks and 11 local landmark districts. San Francisco's local landmarks and 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 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.

### **Can Landmark designation change rent control rules in any way?**

There is no connection between San Francisco's Rent Control Ordinance, or California Civil Code provisions that address: Building Maintenance, Evictions, Security Deposits, or Rent Increases. All provisions of the Rent Control Ordinance remain in place regardless of landmark designation.

### **What are the potential benefits to local Landmark 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. 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, is one benefit. **Federal Tax Credits** include a 20% Rehabilitation Tax Credit for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties is another. The **California Historical Building Code** allows for a more flexible alternative building code for the preservation or rehabilitation of buildings designated as "historic".

Designation can also help build community. Working together to protect and recognize the City's landmark properties can bring neighbors together, build a sense of community, and foster civic pride. Designation can provide certainty to the community by providing additional assurance that the significant sites, buildings, and structures within the neighborhood will remain for future generations to enjoy. Designation also provides certainty to the permit review process. A designating Ordinance will identify the features of the landmark that are significant and should be protected, while allowing for alterations and modernization to promote economic viability.

### **What are the potential drawbacks to local Landmark Designation?**

Most permit applications are also required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (C of A) to ensure that proposals to alter individual landmarks and landmark districts are compatible with the historic character of the landmark building and the district. Proposals to demolish a landmark or

building within a landmark district – though not impossible – would likewise require a C of A. While some welcome this extra review, others might be concerned about fees or the additional time required for permit processing.

Planning Department staff issues C's of A for smaller projects, such as window replacement or the installation of a new storefront. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) issues C's of A for larger projects, such as an addition or new construction. There is a fee associated with a C of A, which is scaled relative to the total construction cost of a proposed alteration. The majority of C's of A are approved administratively by Planning Department staff without an HPC hearing and without requiring extra review time. 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 alterations to individual landmarks and properties located within a 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 interior alterations to non-designated spaces, including kitchen, bathroom remodels, or HVAC upgrades, nor is it required for ordinary maintenance and repairs. Examples of ordinary maintenance and repair include roof repair or re-glazing of existing windows.

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

### **Does Landmark designation control the interior of my building?**

Not in most cases. Landmark designation in this case will apply to the exterior only and will not affect the use of the interior. However, a designation can be written to specifically cover the lobby or other significant interiors of municipal buildings, or publically accessible interior spaces such as theaters, lobbies or performance halls.

### **What impact does Landmark 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 local Landmark?**

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 owner(s), and as appropriate, 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 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, and for districts only, the Planning Commission. Final approval of an individual landmark or landmark district requires a majority vote at the Board of Supervisors, and the Mayor's signature. Public comment opportunities are available at all of these public hearings.

**What can we expect to read in a local Landmark designation report once it is completed?**

Once completed, the report will include a history of the individual landmark or 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.

**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 individual 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.

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

No. Individual owners, with the exception of religious properties, can not opt out of an individual 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 property or neighborhood?**

The Planning Department welcomes additional information regarding properties 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](http://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 Moses Corrette, Preservation Planner, at 415-558-6295 or [Moses.Corrette@sfgov.org](mailto:Moses.Corrette@sfgov.org).

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