



# NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

## Historic Context Statement and Historic Resource Survey

### Frequently Asked Questions

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#### **What is a Historic Context Statement?**

A historic context statement is a technical document that is used to organize and interpret history. It pulls together information about a particular theme, in this case commercial development and storefronts, in a geographic area, such as San Francisco, for a given period of time, in this case 1865-1965. It provides a look into the development of the City, merchandising trends and popular architectural styles at each point in time. The historic context statement provides the foundation for a historic resource survey.

#### **What is a Historic Resource Survey?**

A Historic Resource Survey is a process that identifies and evaluates properties that reflect important architectural, cultural, and historical themes in the City's history. During a survey, Planning Department staff will document a building's appearance and history in order to determine whether or not it is a historic resource.

#### **What is the focus of this Survey, and who is conducting it?**

The Neighborhood Commercial Historic Resource Survey (Survey) is being conducted by the Planning Department. It focuses on neighborhood commercial buildings constructed prior to 1965, which may be subject to the recently enacted mandatory seismic retrofit program for soft-story buildings and buildings within neighborhood commercial corridors.

#### **Why is the Survey being conducted?**

The Planning Department is conducting the Survey in order to speed the review of required seismic and accessibility retrofits that may result from the Soft Story Retrofit Ordinance requirements. A survey will provide property owners and commercial tenants with a better understanding of their building's historic status and what, if any, features should be protected during seismic or accessibility upgrades.

#### **What is the Soft Story Retrofit Ordinance?**

The recently enacted Soft Story Retrofit Ordinance requires mandatory seismic strengthening of soft-story buildings that contain five or more dwelling units and three or more stories. Many of these are mixed-use buildings with ground story commercial units. Seismic retrofit automatically triggers compliance with state accessibility requirements, which can result in alterations to the storefront. The Soft Story Retrofit program is administered by the Department of Building Inspections. The following websites contain useful information regarding the Soft Story Retrofit program:

<http://sfdbi.org/mandatory-soft-story-program> & <http://www.sfgsa.org/index.aspx?page=6048>

#### **What are the benefits of the Survey?**

Property owners and commercial tenants of evaluated buildings will benefit from the upfront identification of a property's historic status and character-defining features. This saves time and money during the Planning Department's review process for certain building alterations. Owners and commercial tenants of buildings that are determined to be historic resources will also benefit from the early identification of the building's character-defining features that should be retained during future rehabilitation projects. Historic buildings that are formally listed as City Landmarks, California Register, or the National Register may qualify for local, state, or federal financial incentives.

#### **Can property owners opt out of the Survey?**

No, property owners cannot opt out of a survey. The survey only evaluates buildings from the public right-of-way and does not include a building's residential or commercial interiors.

#### **For more information about the survey, please contact:**

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