

# Santa Barbara Structures of Merit Program

Historic Preservation beyond Landmark Status or  
Historic Districts

John Perlis, member HCPC

# The city of Santa Barbara (CLG since 2019) has a Robust Historic Resources Program comprising four Components

1. Landmark Status Designation
2. Historic Districts
3. Structures of Merit Designation
4. CEQA Review

All four components add structures to the historic resource inventory for historic preservation

All structures 50 plus years old are potential candidates for historic preservation

Santa Barbara has a body similar to the Petaluma HCPC called the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC)

Santa Barbara also has an Architectural Historian on Staff, Nicole Hernandez, who kindly helped me understand how their Structures of Merit program works.

# Handout Materials

1. CEQA Section 15064.5 Text
2. Santa Barbara Historical Structures Style Guide Example
3. Santa Barbara Historic Significance Report Example
4. Link to Santa Barbara Historic Preservation Ordinance

<https://santabarbaraca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Services/Historic%20Resources%20Design%20Guidelines/Historic%20Resources%20Ordinance%206006.pdf>

# CEQA Review

Upon submittal for a project or permit all buildings over 50 years old may be evaluated to determine historic significance as part of environmental review.

Based on CEQA guidelines sections 15064.5 and 21084.1 which treat historic and archeological resources as part of the environment. The city is lead agency (usually). If a property is determined to meet eligibility requirements it is added to City Historic Resources Inventory and an Historic SPAR is completed by the HLC. To establish eligibility the Architectural Historian prepares an Historic Significance Report which is submitted to the HLC for approval.

Similarly infill projects adjacent to historical resources are evaluated to assure sensitivity to their setting. Same guidelines.

# Structures of Merit Program I

This is the program Santa Barbara put in place to recognize historic resources outside of historic districts, and at a considerably lower level of documentation than landmark status requires.

Eligibility: The structure, site, or feature must be 50 years of age, meet one or more of the criteria outlined below, and retain historical integrity--in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

- It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution in our past;

- It is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

- It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, architectural style, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic or historical value, or represents a significant and distinguishable collection whose individual components may lack distinction;

- It yields, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history; or

- Its unique location or singular physical characteristic represents a neighborhood's established and familiar visual feature.

# Structures of Merit II

## Nomination

Designation begins with a nomination by the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), a property owner, or a member of the public. Contact the City's Architectural Historian with your request.

## HLC Recommendation

The HLC reviews nominations at a public hearing to determine if the Significance Criteria are met.

For the full Commission hearing, the Architectural Historian prepares a Historic Significance Report recommendation on the proposal. If the HLC approves designation as a Structure of Merit, they adopt a Resolution of Designation. Should the HLC deny the designation, the decision shall become final within ten (10) calendar days unless appealed directly to the City Council.

In preparation for public hearings, staff prepares a presentation and a notice is published in the newspaper and mailed to surrounding property owners.

## Resolution of Designation

Upon the HLC's adoption of a Resolution of Designation as a Structure of Merit, the City's Architectural Historian shall record the Resolution of Designation in the Santa Barbara County's Office of the Recorder, and also mails a copy of the recorded resolution and Certificate of Designation to the property owner(s).

# Structures of Merit III

Historic preservation is not just about regulations that prevent inappropriate changes to historic resources. Residential homeowners also find that property values stabilize or increase when historic preservation standards are used in rehabilitating their homes. National and California State studies have proven that local designation provides the following benefits:

- Eligible to apply for a property tax reduction with the Mills Act program

- Eligible to use the California Historical Building Code for some relief on current building codes.

- Increases property values

- Preserves the physical history of the area

- Promotes an appreciation of the physical environment

- Fosters community pride and self-image by creating a unique sense of place and local integrity

- Increases the awareness and appreciation of local history

- Attracts potential customers to city businesses

- Increases city tourism

- Property owners may (at their own expense) affix a plaque of specific materials and dimensions showing the Structure of Merit designation and date of approval

# Historic Significance Report

The city architectural historian has prepared a set of style sheets for the most common architectural styles in the city. See example handout.

The style sheets allow the production of an historic significance report to be prepared in 2-4 hours usually.

The target audience of the report is the public and the property owners. It is less formal and more accessible than a state DPR form. See example handout.



# Structure of Merit Program Advantages

1. Allows the city to augment their historic resources inventory and hence to preserve historic resources without commissioning a full survey.
2. Same process used for CEQA review.
3. Designation process at the HLC level does not require council action.
4. Designation occurs on the city's schedule as time and resources permit.
5. Structures of merit extend opportunities for the city to review infill projects for impacts on historic resources.

# Applicability to Petaluma

If Petaluma were to plan for a similar program in the next general plan update, a major issue would be the design of the Historic Significance Report.

We have now seen two examples of reports designed to support the addition of a structure to the historic inventory; the Santa Barbara example, and the survey report which Jeri Holan showed us at our last meeting. A third example is available in the planning department, namely the Peterson Inventory from 1978ish.

The balance appears to be between level of polish and cost of production. It seems to me however, that a significance report sufficient for the HCPC to come to a decision and significantly less expensive to produce than the Santa Barbara example(s) could be designed.

A second consideration is the nominating process. Do we want to limit nominations to property owners? Property owners plus the HCPC or Planning?

A third consideration is volume. Would we need to limit the number of nominations considered per year in order to match volume with resources. If so, what would the service discipline be? FIFO? Importance? Criticality?

Support for Mills Act grants.

Name of Program/designation.