

HistoricSaMo

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a citywide survey?

The City's existing Historic Resources Inventory (HRI), last updated in 2008 and released to the public in 2011, contains approximately 1600 properties, derived from initial surveys (Phases 1 and 2 between 1983 and 1986, Phase 3 in 1993) and area updates in 1994, 1997, 2002, 2004 and 2006. This existing survey information provides a strong foundation for planning, which will be enhanced during this project with updated evaluations using the latest preservation standards and technology. The current project will consolidate all existing survey data into a single digital repository to make it more accessible to City staff, property owners, and the public.

Information gained from the survey will give property owners and developers greater certainty about the historic significance of a site so that they can plan accordingly. It will also inform thoughtful decision-making by City officials, property owners, residents, and preservation professionals. Survey results will shape community plans, facilitate environmental review processes, and assist in disaster planning and tourism efforts. The survey will not result in the designation of properties as City Landmarks or Structures of Merit, which requires more in-depth research and an application process. Survey findings will be presented and discussed during public hearings before the City's Landmarks Commission.

What is a historic context statement?

In order to understand the historic significance of a given area, it is necessary to examine those resources within the appropriate historic context(s). A historic context statement is a written document that provides the framework for evaluating a property for historic significance and integrity. The purpose of a historic context statement is to place built resources in the appropriate historic, social, and architectural contexts so that the relationship between an area's physical environment and its broader history can be established. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history. Instead, its purpose is to highlight trends and patterns critical to the understanding of an area's built environment.

What is a historic resources survey?

A historic resources survey is a process of systematically identifying, researching and documenting properties that reflect important themes in the city's growth and development such as architecture, city planning, social history, ethnic heritage, politics, industry, transportation, commerce, entertainment and others. Historic resources include buildings, structures, objects, cultural landscapes, natural features and groupings of resources or areas known as historic districts. Examples of types of resources, or "property types," that may be included in the citywide survey are residential subdivisions, banks, bridges, religious buildings, courtyard apartments, canneries, and parks.

How is a historic resources survey conducted?

A survey typically begins with background research on a property, area or district to provide a basis to evaluate significance. Survey teams then conduct field inspections in order to identify the resource's architectural, physical, and visual qualities and characteristics; assess the impacts of changes or alterations; and document overall condition through photography. These field inspections assess the exterior of resources and are conducted from the public right-of-way. Survey teams do not need to obtain access to private property, nor do they ask questions of property owners or residents.

How are resources evaluated?

Individual resources and districts are evaluated for significance in accordance with criteria established for listing in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and [California Register of Historical Resources](#) as well as for local designation as City Landmarks, Places of Interest, or Historic Districts.

Do surveyed resources automatically become designated?

No. Although surveys identify and evaluate resources that may be eligible for designation, no actual designation results directly from survey activity. Designation by the City of Santa Monica and nominations to the California or National Registers are separate processes which include property owner notification and public hearings.

How will survey information be recorded?

Information about properties and districts will be recorded in a customized database, which will both integrate seamlessly into Santa Monica's existing GIS framework and include all fields traditionally found in California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523 series forms. Information on previously surveyed properties is accessible from the Department of Planning and Community Development's [Historic Resources Inventory](#) web page. Data will be added to the website after survey findings are approved.

What type of information will be in the survey database?

The database will include various types of information on individual properties and historic districts relating to construction and ownership history, architecture, significance, and relevant evaluation criteria. The database will also include photographs, maps, and other locational information.

Who is conducting the survey?

The survey and resource evaluations will be completed by [Architectural Resources Group](#) and [Historic Resources Group](#), both consultant teams that meet professional qualification standards as historians and architectural historians. The team is under contract to the City of Santa Monica and under the supervision of the Planning and Community Development department.

When will the survey begin?

The development of the historic context and the community outreach effort will begin in January 2016. The field survey is scheduled to begin in Summer 2016.

What resources will be surveyed?

The survey will cover the entire city and identify resources dating from approximately 1875 to 1977. This period will encompass the earliest extant resources in Santa Monica and will ensure that, when the project is completed, resources 40 years of age or older have been surveyed.

Can resources that are less than 50 years old be considered "historic"?

The National Register, California Register, and City of Santa Monica Landmark criteria differ somewhat in how they address properties of the "recent past." A resource that is less than 50 years old may not be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places unless it is of "exceptional importance." Such a resource may be considered eligible for the California Register if it can be demonstrated that sufficient time has passed to understand and gain a scholarly perspective on its historic significance. The City of Santa Monica's Historic Preservation Ordinance does not have a minimum age threshold for Landmarks. City of Santa Monica Structures of Merit must be at least 50 years old.

What does it mean if my building is identified?

If your building is identified and recorded as part of the survey it means that professional surveyors found it eligible for designation by the City of Santa Monica and/or for listing in the California and National Registers. Identification in the survey is not the same as designation. Survey activity will not directly result in designation. Designation by the City of Santa Monica and nominations to the California or National Registers are separate processes which include property owner notification and public hearings. More information on the designation process can be found [here](#).

How will the survey results be used?

Survey results will be used in a variety of ways. They provide an important planning tool for various City agencies and departments to help inform community plan updates, zoning decisions, environmental reviews, plan approval and permits, disaster response, and cultural tourism programs. Information on surveyed properties is accessible from the Department of Planning and Community Development's [Historic Resources Inventory](#) web page. Data will be added to the website after survey findings are approved.

What if I don't want my property to be surveyed?

All legal parcels in Santa Monica will be part of the survey. The survey is a way of gathering information on properties within Santa Monica that may meet eligibility requirements for designation by the City and/or for listing in the California and National Registers. Surveyors will only record information from the public right-of-way and no access to private property or contact with property owners is needed.

Will inclusion on a historic survey affect my property value?

There is no indication that property values go down based on inclusion in a historic survey; in fact, [studies](#) indicate that the value of homes in historic districts tend to appreciate at a slightly higher rate than similar building stock outside a district.

Will historic designation affect my property taxes?

Historic designation does not impact property taxes unless you have an active [Mills Act](#) contract with the City.

What are the benefits of historic designation?

For information regarding the [Mills Act](#) and other benefits contact Scott Albright, Senior Planner, in the Planning and Community Development Department at (310) 458-8341 or scott.albright@smgov.net.

I have historic memorabilia. How can I help?

Please contact samosurvey@historicrosourcesgroup.com if you would like to share photographs or other materials that you feel may contribute important information to the survey.