

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the 2023 Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey?

The City of Palo Alto is working with Page & Turnbull, an award-winning historic preservation planning and architecture firm, to complete the 2023 Historic Resource Reconnaissance Survey. This Survey will look at approximately 155 buildings and structures that were identified as “eligible for the National Register” during the 1997-2001 Palo Alto Survey Update, and identify whether the properties remain eligible as historic resources. Eighty percent of the properties are residential, and 20 percent are non-residential. Page & Turnbull will survey the properties from the public right-of-way, then compare the current condition of the property with documentation collected in 1997-2001. Properties that have been demolished or extensively altered (such that their historic integrity has been lost) in the 22 years since the Survey Update was completed will be removed from the list of eligible properties. Those properties that retain their historic materials and character, and therefore retain eligibility, will be nominated by the City for designation in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory.

The 2023 Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey will also nominate properties to the Historic Inventory that have recently been identified as individually eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources through completed Historic Resource Evaluations by qualified preservation consultants. Approximately 10 properties are currently expected to be nominated for designation in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory from this process.

What does historic significance and integrity mean?

Historic significance and integrity are two interrelated concepts that provide the foundation for identifying historic resources. A property must be significant within the context of history. This context can relate to the historic development of a community, the occupation of a group or individual, the rise of an architectural movement, the work of a prominent architect or designer of merit, as the location of specific events or activities, or as a representation of a pattern of physical development.

Historic integrity is the ability of a property to convey its historic significance through its physical characteristics. Based on guidance from the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places, historic integrity consists of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

What is the Palo Alto Historic Inventory?

The Palo Alto Historic Inventory was established in 1979 and is the official list of noteworthy historic sites, buildings, structures, and districts that are significant for their design, original owners or historic occupants, historic events, and local traditions. The historic Inventory, when first created, included around 500 properties that were generally located in Downtown Palo Alto or adjacent neighborhoods that reflected the early development of Palo Alto. Properties are added to the Historic Inventory through a nomination procedure outlined in Palo Alto's Historic Preservation Ordinance, involving the Historic Resources Board (HRB) and the City Council. More information on the Historic Inventory, including the criteria for designation and the categories of significance, can be found here: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation/Historic-Registers>.

What is the timeline of the Survey?

The bulk of the data collection and fieldwork will be completed by the end of April 2023. After the data collection is complete, the project team will analyze each property to determine which properties will potentially be nominated for designation in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory as Category 1 or Category 2 buildings. This phase of the project will begin in May 2023 and continue through July 2023. A community meeting (date to be determined) will be held to share the findings of the 2023 Survey, solicit community feedback, and answer questions. Several designation hearings will also be held with the Historic Resources Board (HRB) and City Council.

Are there incentives for property owners of historic resources?

Currently, property owners of the approximately 155 properties to be studied are required to pay for a historic resource evaluation of their property when they propose a project that involves discretionary Planning Department review or demolition. With the completion of the 2023 Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey, property owners and city staff will already know that a building is, or is not, a historic resource and the review process is streamlined. The Planning review process will focus on exterior changes to the building or structure, and will assess the project using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, which have been established to create consistent treatment guidelines for historic resources. City staff will be able to direct property owners to resources and guidance that will support the development of their proposed project.

Within Palo Alto, the Palo Alto Building Code (PABC) and the Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) offer development incentives that assist owners of historic resources in preserving, rehabilitating and improving historic structures and sites, compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These incentives are only available to property owners whose property is listed in the

Historic Inventory. More information on these incentives can be found on the City's website at <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation/Preservation-Incentives>.

Owners of qualified historic buildings also have the opportunity to use the California Historical Building Code (CHBC) when maintaining or remodeling a building. The CHBC is a more flexible alternative to the California Building Code (CBC) for the preservation or rehabilitation of buildings designated as "historic." These regulations are intended to facilitate repairs or accommodate a change of occupancy and can result in significant time and cost savings for the property owner.

Palo Alto also offers owners of historic properties on R-1 zoned parcels the option of creating a flag lot in exchange for placing a preservation covenant on the historic building on a lot. This provides additional flexibility that is not normally allowed in R-1 zones under the Subdivision Code. For more information, refer to the section on the Subdivision Code at <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation/Preservation-Incentives>.

Additional incentives for property owners, such as eligibility to participate in a Mills Act program in Palo Alto, may be introduced in the future. The [Mills Act program](#) is a state law that cities can choose to implement, which allows the city to enter into a contract with the owners of historic buildings; the contracts provide a reduction of property taxes in exchange for the continued preservation of the property. While Palo Alto does not currently have a Mills Act program, the development of a pilot program is under discussion and, with additional public support, could be adopted in Palo Alto.

While eighty percent of the properties within the 2023 Reconnaissance Survey are single-family residences, it is worth noting that properties identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and are used for a business or other income-producing purpose may also be able to apply for [Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits](#). Owner-occupied residences are not eligible for the Federal Tax Credit.

Will listing on the Palo Alto Historic Inventory affect my property tax?

No. The Historic Inventory is not used for tax assessment purposes. However, as mentioned above, some jurisdictions develop programs to provide property tax relief for owners who maintain their historic properties, such as the Mills Act Program.

It is also worth noting that concern about negative economic effects is often raised when discussing historic preservation. However, many studies have shown a direct correlation between the creation of historic preservation programs and policies and a long-term increase in property values. A

sampling of articles and resources on the topic are located here:

<https://www.sohosandiego.org/resources/historicvalues.pdf>;

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e8e5/f6506c288db4b4b4f914037096499d7e7302.pdf>;

<https://www.achp.gov/initiatives/community-revitalization-economic-benefits/area-studies>

Will I have a chance to engage with the 2023 Reconnaissance Survey before it is completed?

In addition to the first community meeting on April 25, 2023, a second community meeting will be held in Summer 2023 to share the findings of the survey. At that time, the list of properties that have been identified as eligible for designation in the Palo Alto Historic Inventory will be known, and property owners will know whether their property is or is not a historic resource for the purposes of Planning review. The second community meeting will allow an opportunity for questions and discussion about what listing in the Historic Inventory means to individual property owners. Additionally, public comments at HRB and City Council hearings will be solicited throughout the remaining duration of the Survey. The dates for the second community meeting and relevant HRB and City Council hearings will be shared on the city's website at <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation/2023-Reconnaissance-Survey>.

My property wasn't identified in the 1997-2001 Palo Alto Survey Update, does that mean it is not historic?

If your property was not identified in the Survey Update, that does not necessarily mean that your property is not historic. Analysis of the historic significance and integrity of a property commonly takes place when a significant project is proposed, unless a survey of your neighborhood or an alternate historic study is undertaken.

The 2023 Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey will only look at the approximately 155 properties previously identified by the Survey Update as eligible as individual resources for the National Register, and those properties that have recently been identified as individually eligible for listing in the California Register. No additional properties will be studied, and the lack of inclusion of your property does not mean that it is not a historic resource; merely that it may still need to be evaluated for historic significance at a future date if it was constructed over 50 years ago.