



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

7 FAQs: Sunset District Historic Resource Survey

1. What is a Historic Context Statement and a Historic Resource Survey?

A Historic Context Statement helps to organize historical information for a particular geographic area and provides an evaluative framework that can be used to identify important buildings or themes. A Historic Resource Survey is a process that identifies, evaluates and documents properties and places that reflect important themes in the City's history. This survey primarily identifies buildings that are architecturally or historically important and those that are not.

The *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925-1950, Historic Context Statement* documents the development history of the neighborhood; identifies key builders and architects; documents the primary architectural styles and the features associated with them; and provides guidance for future review by the Planning Department for buildings constructed during this era.

2. Why was a survey conducted in the Sunset District, and who conducted it?

The Planning Department conducted the survey because very little was known about the architecture and developers of the Sunset District. The neighborhood contains clusters of extraordinary residential tracts that were designed by several master builders in addition to significant individual buildings designed in either the Streamline Moderne style or in exuberant expressions of various Period Revival styles. The project was funded by a grant from the California Office of Historic Preservation.

The Department will present the results of the survey to the Historic Preservation Commission at a noticed public hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to provide a forum for the Historic Preservation Commission to hear from the Department and the public, and to confirm that the survey was completed according to industry standards.

3. What will the survey and historic context statement be used for?

The information allows the Department to determine the historic importance of buildings within the survey area. This information will be used as a planning tool to streamline the permit review process for property owners and for the required state-level environmental review processes.

When starting the building permitting process, some property owners are surprised to learn that across San Francisco, certain alterations to buildings over 50 years old require environmental review. This state-mandated environmental review may involve additional fees and review times. A complete survey often reduces or eliminates these additional fees and review times and allows the Department to more quickly and cost effectively review permit applications.

4. Can property owners opt out of a survey?

No, property owners cannot opt out of a survey. It is important to note that the survey evaluated buildings only from the public right-of-way.

5. Does the survey mean that my property is a Landmark or a contributor to a Landmark District?

No, the results of a survey are not a Landmark designation of a building. A survey is an information gathering tool. Landmark designation is a completely separate process that requires additional property owner notification and several public hearings at the Historic Preservation Commission and Board of Supervisors.

6. Will the survey make it harder to change the exterior of my property, such as replace my windows? Or, will it make it harder to remodel the interior of my house, such as my bathroom?

No. A common misconception is that a historic building cannot be altered and is “frozen in time.” The Department is generally concerned with exterior alterations, but the survey results do not prohibit property owners from making alterations to the exterior or the interior. For specific window questions, please refer the Department’s [Window Replacement Standards](#), which apply across San Francisco to all properties, surveyed or not.

Obtaining a permit to make exterior alterations to your surveyed property can be accomplished in the same amount of time as other building permits. Understanding a building’s historic status, ahead of time through the survey process, brings more certainty to the permitting process and will allow the Department to more quickly review property owners’ proposals.

7. As a property owner, how does the survey affect me?

Owners, tenants, and prospective buyers typically view a survey as an advantage. Complete survey information allows property owners to know their building’s historic status before beginning the permitting process. Due to the state-required environmental review process, property owners who are not located in survey areas are usually responsible for providing historic background information for their building. Since survey evaluations determine whether your property is considered a historic resource or not, properties within the survey area can benefit from a streamlined review process and lowered fees at the Department.

While the survey is not a landmark designation, those properties included in the survey that are determined to be historically significant, may qualify for financial or process-related incentives associated with permit review.

Quick Facts about the Sunset District Survey Area:

- 2,874 properties are in the survey area. Of those, 2,762 properties were evaluated (the Planning Department only evaluated single-family houses constructed between 1925-1950).
- 2,289 buildings that were evaluated were determined NOT to be historic resources. This means they are not eligible as individual resources and they are not located within an identified eligible historic district.
- 84 buildings appear to be individually eligible historic resources.
- 3 districts (containing 389 buildings) appear to be eligible for listing in the California Register or the National Register.

In percentages, this means:

- 83% of evaluated buildings were found ineligible for listing in the California Register or the National Register.
- 17% of evaluated buildings appear to be historic resources (either individually or as part of an identified eligible historic district)
 - 3% of evaluated buildings appear to be individual historic resources
 - 14% of evaluated buildings are located within an identified eligible historic district

If you have questions about the survey or survey findings, planners will be available to answer questions at an upcoming Community Meeting and at an Ask-a-Planner Night. You may also contact Preservation Planner Mary Brown at 415-575-9074 or Mary.Brown@sfgov.org.

To speak with a Chinese-speaking Department staff member, please contact Cathy Thai at 415-558-6476 or Cathy.Thai@sfgov.org.