

RECOGNIZING

# Important Places



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## Owning a Historic Property in San Francisco

### Benefits, Responsibilities, and How Preservation Supports Housing and Community Stability

#### What is Landmarking?

Landmarking recognizes a building, district, place, structure, or object, as historically, architecturally, aesthetically, and/or culturally significant. It ensures that important features are preserved while still allowing the property to remain in active use and evolve over time.

Landmarking does not freeze a building in place. Owners can continue to maintain, repair, and adapt their property, including making changes that support new uses such as housing or mixed-use development.

#### Why Property Owners Choose Landmarking

Property owners choose landmarking for a range of reasons, which may include long-term investment, rehabilitation plans, or interest in available incentives. In some cases, owners have great pride in their historic properties and are interested in the recognition and cache of being a city landmark.

Landmarking can provide a combination of financial benefits, regulatory flexibility, and long-term value, while also supporting broader city goals related to housing, sustainability, and cultural preservation.

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## Key Benefits for Property Owners



### Financial Incentives

Programs such as the Mills Act can reduce property taxes for owners who commit to maintaining and rehabilitating historic buildings. These incentives help offset the cost of improvements and support long-term investment. For a complete list of incentives, visit: <https://sfplanning.org/preservation-incentives>



### Historic Building Code Flexibility

The California Historic Building Code offers alternative ways to meet technical requirements, making it easier to retain original materials and features while still satisfying health and safety standards which helps to reduce the cost of rehabilitation.



### Adaptive Reuse Opportunities

Historic buildings may qualify for code incentives that make it easier to convert them into housing, commercial, institutional, or mixed-use spaces. San Francisco's adaptive reuse program can lower the cost and simplify the process of bringing older buildings back into active use.



### Development Opportunities

Some properties may be eligible for programs such as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), which allow owners to sell unused development capacity. This can generate additional revenue and support preservation without reducing overall development potential.



### Long-Term Value

Designated historic properties often retain strong market appeal due to their location, quality, and unique features. Landmarking can also provide greater certainty about how a building will be maintained over time.

## Considering Landmarking

Landmarking is one way to recognize and preserve a historic property while accessing incentives and support. Property owners choose to pursue landmarking at different points, depending on their goals and plans.

For some, landmarking is most useful when planning a major rehabilitation, conversion to housing, or long-term investment in the property. Others may consider it after completing improvements or when exploring financial incentives.

Even if you are not ready to pursue landmarking immediately, understanding how designation could support future projects can help keep options open. Early coordination with staff can help identify opportunities and ensure that available tools are considered at the right time.



## How Your Property Supports the City

Maintaining and preserving a historic property contributes to broader city goals while supporting your building's long-term use.



### Housing

Landmarking support housing in multiple ways – enabling conversion of existing buildings into new housing, supporting production through tools like TDR, and helping maintain and extend the life of existing housing stock.



### Community Stability and Continuity

Preserving and reusing existing buildings helps support long-term stability for residents and local businesses by retaining existing buildings and spaces. It also helps retain places that are important to communities, including spaces for housing, local businesses, and cultural activities.



### Sustainability

Reusing existing buildings reduces demolition waste and lowers the environmental impact of new construction by making use of existing materials and structures.



### Cultural Preservation

Landmarking helps protect places that reflect the city's history and the experiences of its communities, contributing to a shared understanding of San Francisco's past and present. Landmarked buildings can be a focal point for historical walking tours or educational programming, and valuable tools for placemaking, and place-keeping.

## What to Expect

Owning a landmarked property involves both opportunities and responsibilities.

Owners are expected to maintain key historic features and coordinate with the City on certain exterior changes. As with any property, ongoing maintenance and safety improvements can help manage long-term operating costs. In return, the City provides access to incentives, guidance, and tools that support ongoing use and investment.

## Getting Started

Early coordination can help identify opportunities and clarify requirements. Staff can provide guidance on incentives, eligibility, and next steps.

Contact the Landmark Designation Program staff at:

**[CPC.Landmarks@sfgov.org](mailto:CPC.Landmarks@sfgov.org)**



## Common Misconceptions

### “I won’t be able to make changes to my property.”

Owners can continue to make changes. Exterior work is reviewed to ensure historic features are respected, but the goal is to support continued use and adaptation of the building.

### “Even basic home repair and maintenance will take longer and be more expensive.”

Repair and maintenance permits of landmarked buildings can be reviewed over the counter and do not require Preservation entitlements. Basic projects such as replacement of windows and siding can be reviewed administratively by Preservation Planning staff and do not need to be heard by the Historic Preservation Commission.

### “Landmarking will make projects more expensive.”

While there are requirements, incentives such as tax reductions, code flexibility, and development rights can help offset costs. In many cases, reuse can be more cost-effective than demolition and new construction.

### “It will prevent me from adding housing.”

Landmarking does not prevent housing. Many historic buildings are converted into housing, and programs such as TDR allow development potential to be used on other sites.

### “It’s only about preservation, not practicality.”

Preservation tools are designed to support real-world use, including housing, commercial activity, and mixed-use development.

### “Landmarking will affect my insurance.”

Insurance costs are influenced by many factors, including building condition, location, and market conditions. Landmark status alone does not determine insurance rates.

In some cases, insurers may consider the cost of repairing historic features. Maintaining buildings in good condition and making safety improvements can help manage risk over time. Check with your insurance company on any potential impacts to insurance rates for landmarked buildings.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

Landmarking is not about limiting what you can do with your property. It provides tools and support to help property owners maintain, adapt, and invest in their buildings. It can support housing, sustainability, and long-term stability while allowing flexibility for future plans.

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### Learn more

For more information about preservation incentives, including financial programs and development tools, scan the QR code or visit:

<https://sfplanning.org/preservation-incentives>



### Contact us



For questions or to discuss your property, email the Landmark Designation Program at:

[CPC.Landmarks@sfgov.org](mailto:CPC.Landmarks@sfgov.org)