



# ***City of Palm Springs***

## ***Department of Planning Services***

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR APPLICANTS

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#### **Topic: HISTORIC DISTRICTS – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.**

**Q: What are historic districts?**

**A:** Historic Districts are delineated geographic areas of the city of Palm Springs, excluding Tribal Trust or Allotted Trust Land, that contain a number of buildings, structures, natural features or sites having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance. (PSMC 8.05.020) The City's Historic Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Section 8.05) section 8.05.090 provides the procedures and regulatory framework for the designation of historic districts.

According to the National Register of Historic Places, a historic district is: "a geographically definable area, urban or rural, possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development. A district may also comprise individual elements separated geographically but linked by association or history."

**Q: What are some of the benefits of historic districts?**

**A:** Historic districts distinguish certain areas within the City that are unique or special. They promote neighborhood pride and recognition. Buildings within a historic district possess shared characteristics that are uncommon or reflect a particular period of development in the City. They enhance the richness and personality of the city by preserving these unique areas. They help stabilize property values by ensuring that architectural standards are maintained or restored. These standards are typically codified in "Historic District Design Guidelines". Studies have shown that property values in protected historic districts tend to be higher than comparable neighborhoods without such standards or protections. Contributing structures within a historic district may qualify for property tax reductions.

**Q: How do areas or neighborhoods become historic districts?**

**A:** The City Council designates historic districts. A historic district application may be made by a recognized neighborhood organization, by an authorized representative of the district under consideration or by the City itself. Often property owners within a particular area of the City recognizing the beauty or uniqueness of their neighborhood pursue historic district status as a means of protecting the unique character of their neighborhood from ensuing redevelopment pressure. Others pursue historic district status as a means of stabilizing property values or as a means of participating in the economic benefits of the City's cultural and architectural tourism industry.

Historic District applications are reviewed by the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO") and considered for recommendation to the City Council at a public hearing of the City's Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB"). Property owners, residents and business owners within the proposed historic district are encouraged to comment and participate in this process. Not less than three outreach meetings are required with the HPO and property owners within the proposed historic district.

Historically significant buildings are categorized as "contributing"; those that are not are deemed "non-contributing" to the historic significance of the proposed district.

Once the HSPB completes its review of the application, its recommendation is forwarded to the City Council for consideration. The City Council then holds a public hearing before voting on whether or not to create the historic district.

**Q: How are owner's views taken into account?**

**A:** Strong community support is important to any successful planning process. This is especially true in the historic district process which involves every property owner, resident and business owner within the proposed district. Community input is sought from the beginning of the process and the community is kept informed through mailings, community or neighborhood meetings, and the noticed public hearings of the HSPB and the City Council. Written approval from no less than 51% of all property owners within the proposed boundaries of the historic district are required. In the case of a City-initiated application a letter of authorization to file the application on behalf of the City is required.

**Q: If my area or neighborhood is designated how will my property be affected?**

**A:** Generally there is no effect on the ongoing use and maintenance of properties in historic districts beyond what is already required by the City. When demolition, new construction or exterior alteration to structures within a historic district is contemplated, the proposed work application is reviewed by the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO"). Minor projects are processed by the HPO at staff level. Major alterations are reviewed by the HPO and forwarded to the HSPB for approval.

When considering new construction or alterations to existing structures in a historic district, the City references the U.S. Park Services' Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Buildings. These standards are used throughout the country to ensure alterations and additions to historic properties are consistent and appropriate.

Owners making exterior changes to their property have an extra review step before a City building permit is issued. Scheduling the HSPB review may require some additional time.

**Q: Are all properties in the historic district treated the same way?**

**A:** Even though a building might not have historic characteristics, exterior changes could adversely impact the historic street and neighborhood setting or ambiance. Consequently, the architectural review process applies to all properties within historic district boundaries.

In terms of financial incentives such as the Mills Act, only contributing sites may qualify. Non-contributing sites in historic districts are not eligible for this property tax reduction incentive program.

**Q: What are the tax advantages to the property owners?**

**A:** A Mills Act Historic Property Preservation Agreement or "Mills Act contract" is a state-initiated program implemented by the City that can potentially provide property tax relief for owners of Contributing buildings or sites within historic districts. Not all contributing buildings will qualify. The 10-year rolling contract requires certain maintenance responsibilities to be carried out by the property owner that protect and preserve the historic characteristics of the property. Property owners should explore this option with their tax advisor and the Riverside County tax assessor's office.

**Q: Will I incur costs to upgrade my property?**

**A:** All physical conditions that exist at the time the historic district is designated are "grandfathered in." Owners are not required to do anything pro-actively to conform to the historic district regulations. When new construction or exterior alterations are contemplated, the historic district design guidelines and the City's architectural review guidelines apply. The cost effect of these guidelines needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the project.

#### **Need more information?**

Contact the City of Palm Springs' Planning Services department by phone at 760-323-8245, by mail at 3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, 92262, or log on to the City's website at [www.palmspringsca.gov](http://www.palmspringsca.gov) – Government–Departments–Planning–Historic Resources. The historic preservation ordinance is Section 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code and is available on line. The Historic Preservation Officer can be reached at 760 322 8364 x 8786.