



# *City of Palm Springs*

## *Department of Planning Services*

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR APPLICANTS

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#### **Topic: OUTLINE FOR CREATING HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN STANDARDS**

#### **INTRODUCTION.**

This outline was developed to assist property owners in historic districts to write their own Historic District Design Standards.

Historic District Design Standards help guide physical changes in historic districts so that over time, the district does not lose the historic character which made it unique in the first place.

Design Standards apply to alterations of existing properties as well as new construction on property within the boundaries of the historic district.

The Palm Springs Historic Preservation Ordinance (Municipal Code Section 8.05) denotes that Historic District Design Guidelines shall include but not be limited to the following components: Development Standards, Aesthetic Standards, and Approval Criteria for Alterations, that assist in preserving the character of the district and contributing buildings therein.

#### **THE BASIC PARTS OF A GOOD HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN STANDARD.**

1. Official Name of the Historic District and date that the standards were written or adopted by the City.
2. Brief "Executive Summary" or statement summarizing what is significant about the district that makes it historically important.
3. A map showing the boundaries of the historic district. (Ideally the map will identify individual parcels or properties within the boundaries of the district.)
4. A list of "Contributing Sites" by address and/or Assessor Parcel Number ("APN").
5. A list of "Non-contributing Sites", also by address and APN.
6. Photographs of each contributing and non-contributing building in the district. The photographic record should include any prominent site features (landscape, garden walls, etc.) that are significant within the district. The photographs should be dated.
7. Identification of the uses found in each building in the district (e.g. commercial, residential, office, industrial, mixed use.)
8. Identification of the Period of Significance that the historic district reflects.
9. Identification of the predominant architectural style(s) or character-defining features, if any, of the contributing buildings in the district.
10. Description of the relationship of open space to buildings. (I.e. do the buildings have a common front alignment along the street? Do the buildings define outdoor courtyards or other outdoor common space that contributes to the significance of the district? If outdoor space was filled in would it strengthen or weaken the physical characteristics of the district?)
11. Bulleted list of generally desirable characteristics for new construction or alterations. ("We like this, it strengthens the character of the district.") These might be also called "Development and Aesthetic Standards".
12. Bulleted list of generally undesirable characteristics for new construction or alterations. ("We don't like this, it detracts from, or diminishes the character of the historic district.")
13. List the predominant Materials, Colors, Landscape, Signage and/or other aesthetic factors or physical characteristics that unite the various buildings or properties in the district.

14. Outline the procedure for processing alterations and new construction that a property owner in the district must follow to have proposed changes considered and ultimately approved. This should include reference to procedures for processing alterations in historic districts from the City's Municipal Code Section 8.05.120 ("Demolition, Alteration or New Construction within a Historic District"). It may also include review and approval by a neighborhood's architectural review committee and/or homeowners association.
15. Reference the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. As a general rule this national standard is a good place to start in establishing design guidelines for the processing of physical alterations to buildings and properties in a historic district.
16. Keep the guidelines simple, succinct and easy to reference and use.

#### **USEFUL DEFINITIONS** (From Palm Springs Municipal Code Section 8.05.020.)

**ALTERATION.** Any exterior changes or modification affecting the visual characteristics of a historic property such as architectural details, paint color and surface texture, grading, surface paving, new buildings or structures, a structural addition, cutting or removal of trees and other natural features, disturbance of archaeological sites or areas, and the placement or removal of any exterior objects such as signs, plaques, light fixtures, street furniture, walls, fences, steps, planting and landscape. The term "alteration" does not include routine maintenance or the reconstruction or replacement of any feature of a historic resource with a suitable substitute on a "like for like" basis, as determined by the Director of Planning Services.

**MAJOR ALTERATION.** Removes, encloses or modifies 25% of the lineal footage of a street-facing building elevation and/or garden wall, or 50% of the lineal footage of all exterior elevations such that they no longer function as exterior elevation(s), or removes 50% or more of the cumulative area of the buildings' footprint. Application processing time for major alterations is typically one to two months from the time the application is deemed complete. Contact the Planning Department for applications to request alterations to a historic site.

**MINOR ALTERATION.** Any alteration that is not a demolition or a major alteration.

**TEAR DOWNS.** The full demolition of a building or structure. Requires the approval by the HSPB for Class 2, Class 3 and Class 4 properties. The HSPB has the authority to approve demolition applications or can "stay" a demolition request for up to 180 days and refer the application to the HPO for study and possible recommendation to the City Council to re-classify the property to a higher (Class 1 or Class 2) designation. City processing of a tear-down application may take several months from the time the application is deemed complete.

**HISTORIC DISTRICTS.** These are areas of the City designated by the City Council in which a number of properties have cultural or historic characteristics in common. Historic districts have "Contributing" and "Non-contributing" properties within them. Contributing properties are similar to Class 1 historic properties. They are properties that contribute to the historic character and significance of the district. Most historic districts have Design Standards which assure that proposed alterations and new construction in the district are compatible and harmonious with the character of the historic district. Proposals for new construction in historic districts are reviewed by the HSPB for design compatibility. Application processing time for new construction in historic districts is typically 1 to 2 months from the time the application is deemed complete. Contact the City Planning Department for a listing of historic districts and contributing sites and to submit an application for consideration of a proposed historic district. Application processing time for proposed historic districts is typically several months from the time the application is deemed complete.

**CONTRIBUTING RESOURCE.** A site, structure, building or object within a historic district which individually meets the criteria for historic designation, or contributes generally to the overall distinctive character of a historic district and is united historically or visually by plan or physical development.

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For more information contact Sarah Yoon, Historic Preservation Officer at the City of Palm Springs Planning Department at 760 322 8364 x 8768 or at [sarah.yoon@palmspringsca.gov](mailto:sarah.yoon@palmspringsca.gov), or the Planning Department main number at 760 323 8245.