

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Identification and Documentation of Historic Properties

I know that my property is historic; does the County require that my property be listed?

No, under the draft Ordinance participation in the Alameda County Register is **voluntary; no property may be placed on the Register without the owner's consent**. However, the County strongly encourages owners to consider placement, as your property provides important, tangible evidence of Alameda County's heritage. Historic resources offer a link to past, an understanding of our cultural origins, landmarks by which to navigate, and a sense of place that distinguishes Alameda County from all other places.

Registration of your property is an important step to take to increase the likelihood that the property will be preserved for years to come. Only properties placed on a local Register are eligible for State and Federal historic preservation tax incentives. These monetary benefits can be to invest in the rehabilitation and preservation of your property so that it will remain for years to come. Furthermore, if you should choose to sell, these benefits are passed on to the new property owner. **Please refer to the section entitled "Historic Preservation Incentives" for more information.**

I own a property that is over 50 years old, is my property automatically placed on the Register?

The draft Ordinance does not provide for the automatic placement of a property once it reaches 50 years of age. Under the draft Ordinance properties are only placed on the Register if they have been nominated for placement, and meet the criteria of one of the three Registration categories provided for an individual property: Landmark, Structure of Merit or Contributing Resource (for properties in an established Historic district). Generally speaking, nominations are considered based upon documentation **supporting the properties "historic significance"**. **Please refer to the question, "What criteria are used in assessing a property's 'historic significance'?"** for more information. Also, participation in the Register is **voluntary**; a property may only be placed on the Register **with the consent of its owner**.

I think that my property is historic, how can I get my property on the Alameda County Register?

First, check to see if the property is on the draft Register. If not, you can submit your request to nominate a property after the Ordinance has been adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The draft Ordinance establishes a

procedure for the nomination and registration of historic properties. Currently, there are four categories of registration for individual properties: Landmarks; Structures of Merit; and Contributing Resource (for properties within an established historic district).

### Which properties are historic?

For the purposes of the Alameda County Historic Preservation Ordinance, historic properties are those that have been listed in any of the following documents:

- California Historical Landmarks
- California Points of Historical Interest
- California Register of Historical Resources
- National Register of Historic Places
- or the Alameda County Register of Historic Resources (to be adopted)

These listings are not exhaustive and may be amended at any time (as described in the ordinance itself).

### What criteria are used in assessing a property's "historic significance"?

The federal, state, and proposed local processes do vary somewhat from one another; however, there are some basic guidelines used to evaluate resources historic significance:

1. Association with significant events or broad patterns
2. Association with significant persons
3. Association with an important architectural style or builder
4. Ability to yield important historical or pre-historical information

In addition, any analysis must consider the integrity of the resources, which the Secretary of the Interior defines through seven aspects or qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

For more information on this topic, please refer to the website address <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15.pdf>

### What is a historic resources survey or inventory?

A historic resources survey is the primary planning tool used to identify, record, and evaluate historic properties within a community, neighborhood, project area, or region. Many local, state, and federal governmental agencies have undertaken, or are now in the process of performing such surveys. The historic resources inventories generated from these survey activities form an

important component in local preservation programs, and ultimately contribute to our knowledge of historical resources statewide.

#### Who conducted the surveys of the unincorporated areas?

Over the past several years, Alameda County has retained professional historians, architectural historians, archeologists, and other specialists, in the supervision of both historical research and field inspection to conduct research on properties and areas of significance within the unincorporated areas. The Secretary of the Interior has established guidelines for the selection of a qualified consultant, and these criteria were used in the selections of consultants on County sponsored surveys.

#### What is the PRHC?

The Parks, Recreation and Historical Commission, also referred to as the PRHC, is a 15 member commission that is tasked with promoting and advising the County on areas of Historic Preservation. The members are appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The PRHC was established in 1964, and is authorized under section 2.86 of the Alameda County Administrative Code. The PRHC currently reviews applications for demolition and alteration of structures where there is evidence that the property may be of historical significance. The proposed Historic Preservation Ordinance would formalize and standardize the current review process that will in turn lead to greater transparency and efficiency of project review.

#### How was my property placed on the draft Register?

Properties that were selected for the draft Register were identified in a historic resources survey, and were deemed significant based on the **consultant's assessment of the resource's** historic value.

The criteria can be summarized as follows:

1. Properties deemed likely significant in previous surveys (properties **rated "Y" in the Ashland & Cherryland survey, "1" in the San Lorenzo survey and "K" in the East Alameda survey**) that, as part of the Comprehensive Survey of Historic Sites in unincorporated Alameda County, were verified to merit continued listing;
2. All landmarks, contributing buildings and historic preservation districts identified in the Comprehensive Survey that were not identified in any of the three previous surveys

Why does the County care about protecting historic properties?

The County has long recognized the need to protect the architectural and cultural heritage of the unincorporated areas. Examples include the creation of the PRHC in 1964, the preparation of various historical surveys, and its support for the San Lorenzo Pioneer Cemetery. In addition, under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) historic and cultural resources are considered part of the environment. As a result, when the County reviews development projects it must consider whether or not it would cause an impact to a historic or cultural resource. (California Code of Regulations Section 15064.5).

## Historic Preservation Incentives

Why would a property owner want their property to be listed on the Register?

- Federal and County tax incentives for rehabilitation of designated historic properties consistent with local and State rehabilitation standards.
- The pride, knowledge, and satisfaction of preserving the rich cultural heritage within the unincorporated County.
- Contribution to preserving a 'sense of place' in our community by protecting historically significant landmarks.

What incentives are available to persons whose property contains a historic resource?

- *California State Historic Building Code*
- *Mills Act Contracts*
- *Federal Tax Credits*
- *Historic Preservation Easements*
- *Flexible application of zoning code*
- *Expedited permitting*
- *Technical assistance with building rehabilitation*

What is the California State Historic Building Code?

The California State Historic Building Code (SHBC) provides regulations for the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, relocation or reconstruction of qualified historic buildings or properties. These regulations are intended to facilitate alternative solutions for such historic buildings or properties so as to preserve their original or restored architectural elements and features as well as meeting safety, access, and energy efficiency needs.

What is the Mills Act?

Economic incentives foster the preservation of residential neighborhoods and the revitalization of downtown commercial districts. The Mills Act is the single most important economic incentive program in California for the restoration and preservation of qualified historic buildings by private property owners. Enacted in 1972, the Mills Act legislation grants participating local governments (cities and counties) the authority to enter into contracts with owners of qualified historic properties who actively participate in the restoration and maintenance of their historic properties while receiving property tax relief. **Please note that the County cannot establish a Mills Act Program without first implementing a registration program for historic resources.**

### What federal tax credits are available to owners of historic properties?

The California State Office of Historic Preservation administers the 20% Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program for California in partnership with the National Park Service.

In addition to the 20% Federal Tax Credit for Historic Preservation, the federal government has other tax and investment credit programs, and makes grants to local governments and other entities for preservation activities.

### What are historic preservation easements?

**The term “preservation easement”** is commonly used to describe a type of conservation easement – a private legal right given by the owner of a property to a qualified nonprofit organization or governmental entity for the **purpose of protecting a property’s conservation and preservation values.** Conservation easements are used to protect land that has outdoor recreational value, natural environmental value (including natural habitat), open space (including farmland, forest land, and land with scenic value), *or* land that has historic, architectural, or archaeological significance. Preservation easements are conservation easements whose principal purpose is to protect a property with historic, architectural, or archaeological significance, although the easement may also protect natural land values as **part of a property’s historic setting. (Correspondingly, other types of** conservation easements held by conservation organizations or land trusts typically are given for the purpose of protecting natural characteristics of a property, but they may also protect historic resources, such as historic farmland or archaeological sites.)

Property owners who donate qualified preservation easements to qualified easement-holding organizations may be eligible for a charitable contribution deduction from their federal income taxes for the value of the historic preservation easement – provided that the contribution meets the standards of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

For more information about historic preservation easements, please visit the National Trust for Historic Preservation website at <http://www.nationaltrust.org/>

## Property Rights and Values

### How might a historic designation affect my property rights?

Placement on the historic register does not interfere with one's property rights. The property owners still retain the right to transfer or sell their property; however, there are some restrictions associated with certain tax incentives. Alterations to properties listed on the County's Register may be reviewed by the PRHC to determine the potential impact to the property.

Furthermore, the Ordinance would not limit the use of listed buildings or require owners to erect or purchase plaques, nor would it require that properties be accessible to the public or open to the public.

### How might a historic designation affect my property value?

There have been several studies published on the impact of historic preservation on a property's value, and none has shown a decrease in property value. In fact most show a marked increase over homes of similar vintage and features. Here is a listing of resources that discuss the impact of historic preservation on property values.

#### ***Assessing the Impact of Local Historic Districts on Property Values in Greensboro, North Carolina*** (1994)

[www.preservationbooks.org/](http://www.preservationbooks.org/)

This study may be downloaded for a nominal fee from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

#### ***Historic Preservation and Residential Property Values: An Analysis of Texas Cities*** (2000)

[geography.rutgers.edu/people/faculty/leichenko/leichenko\\_coulson\\_listokin2001.pdf](http://geography.rutgers.edu/people/faculty/leichenko/leichenko_coulson_listokin2001.pdf)

A 15-page study. Key chapter/section titles:

"Empirical Studies of Historic Designation and Property Values"; "Data"; "Modeling Approach"; "Empirical Results"

#### ***Historic Districts Are Good for Your Pocketbook: The Impacts of Local Historic Districts on House Prices in South Carolina*** (2000)

[www.state.sc.us/scdah/propval.pdf](http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/propval.pdf)

An 11-page, illustrated study. Key chapter/section titles:

"Study Results: Columbia"; "Study Results: Beaufort"; "Study Results: Greenville"; "Study Results: Aiken, Anderson, Georgetown, Rock Hill, Summerville, and Sumter"

***The Impact of Historic Districts on Residential Property Values [New York City]*** (2003)

[www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/](http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/) (follow "Publications" link)

A 10-page report. Key chapter/section titles:

"The Data"; "Overall Trends in Class One Housing Prices in New York City";

"Statistical Models of Housing Prices"; "Model I: Dummy Variable for

Inclusion in Historic Districts"; "Model II: Time Trend Variables."

***Property Value Appreciation for Historic Districts in Alabama*** (2002)

<http://www.ncshpo.org/current/pdfinitiatives/Alabama.pdf>

A 36-page report that analyzes appreciation of property values in seven historic districts in Alabama.

***Use It or Lose It*** (1996)

[www.preservationbooks.org/](http://www.preservationbooks.org/)

This report focuses on how official Federal, State, and local historic landmark or landmark district designation affects commercial property values. It may be downloaded for a nominal fee from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.