



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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04 HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservation is an important component of West Hollywood’s urban landscape and culture. This chapter addresses the goals and policies of the City of West Hollywood in preserving and protecting its historic resources.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Although not required by the California Government Code, the City of West Hollywood has chosen to include a Historic Preservation element in its General Plan. This topic is included because the City values and seeks to recognize its built environment, its history, and its culture. West Hollywood has been an important site both for the generation of culture and innovation in entertainment and the arts, and for leadership in political and social movements.

CONTEXT

Overview of Historic Preservation

In the United States, the concept of preserving a community’s past emerged during the decades preceding the Civil War, concentrating on Colonial buildings and other structures connected with important figures in American history. Public concern over the possible loss of important parts of the nation’s heritage prompted Congress to adopt the Antiquities Act of 1906, offering protection to prehistoric and historic sites located on Federal properties. A policy of preserving cultural resources of national significance for public use and inspiration was established by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which established the National Historic Landmark Program. The legislation empowered the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the National Park Service, to use the Historic American Building Survey to document, evaluate, and preserve archaeological and historic sites.

Historic preservation efforts in California began in the nineteenth century with the formation of the Association for the Preservation of Missions in 1889 and the founding of the Landmarks Club in 1895. Preservation in the Los Angeles region was rooted in early battles to save landmarks such as Irving Gill’s Dodge house, once located on King’s Road in West Hollywood, in 1965, and the founding of the Los Angeles Conservancy in 1978 in response to the threatened demolition of the Downtown Central Library. An important event in the history of historic preservation in West Hollywood was the failure of the County of Los Angeles to save the oldest house in the City, the Eugenio Plummer house on its original site in Plummer Park. In 1983, a year before West Hollywood’s incorporation as a city, the house, badly damaged from neglect and fire, was moved to the grounds of the Leonis Adobe Museum in Calabasas.

There are many benefits of historic preservation to West Hollywood, in addition to the more traditional goals of preserving buildings for architectural or cultural reasons. With the tourism, interior design, and film industries playing important roles in the economy, West Hollywood's cultural resources create an inviting and attractive built environment for the business community. Familiar landmarks also establish a sense of permanence and well-being for residents. Preservation begins with cultural resources and the effect they have on our lives. History comes alive through the built environment, which is a tangible reminder of the past. The history of buildings and cultural resources in West Hollywood provide its diverse population with a common history. Knowledge of the community's past helps in understanding emerging patterns and future expectations. In a fully built community such as West Hollywood, preservation planning is a key approach to reviving or maintaining the viability of the City. A greater knowledge of the community's cultural resources provides a stronger base for better planning and more informed decision-making.

Historic preservation projects increase community pride. Such projects are an important component in ensuring community cohesiveness, which in turn improves the quality of life for West Hollywood residents. Cultural resources, with their charm and character, make West Hollywood an appealing place to live and work. Many of the major landmarks that distinguish West Hollywood from surrounding communities are cultural resources.

The adaptive reuse of historic buildings often provides environmental benefits through conservation and reuse of existing resources. Reuse of existing buildings is often far less material- and energy-intensive than demolition and new construction. One of the main environmental benefits of reusing buildings is the retention of the original building's "embodied energy." New buildings require new concrete, wood, and steel to be produced and transported to the site. By reusing buildings, their embodied energy is retained, making the project much more environmentally sustainable than entirely new construction.

Throughout the country, rehabilitated historic buildings and districts have become focal points for economic development. Other economic benefits include the prestige that recognition and restoration of historic buildings bring and the attendant interest for tourists and business patrons. Recycling older structures can sometimes be more cost effective than demolishing them and replacing them with new buildings. Because historic buildings can be exempted from some code requirements (under the State historical Building Code), the reuse, rehabilitation, and restoration of existing buildings can sometimes be cheaper and the value per square foot greater.

Cultural Resource Designation

Cultural resource designation is a good way of elevating specific resources that deserve recognition. Designations can be made through federal, state, and local cultural resource programs. As is the case in West Hollywood, resources are often designated under more than one cultural resource program.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is an authoritative guide used by federal, state, and local governments, private groups, and citizens to identify the nation's cultural resources and to indicate which properties should be considered for protection from destruction or impairment. Buildings, districts, objects, structures, and sites may be placed in the National Register. To be eligible for listing in the National Register, a property must generally be over 50 years old and meet a number of specific criteria.

Listing in the National Register is primarily honorary and does not—in and of itself—provide protection of a cultural resource. While state and local laws provide protection, National Register properties are eligible to use certain financial incentives including the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit and conservation easements. In West Hollywood, there are 17 buildings and one historic district listed in the National Register.

California Register of Historical Resources

The State Historical Resources Commission designed this program for use by state and local agencies, private groups and citizens to identify, evaluate, register and protect the state's significant historical and archeological resources.

The California Register program encourages public recognition and protection of architectural, historical, archeological and culturally significant resources. Additionally, the program identifies historical resources for state and local planning purposes, determines eligibility for state historic preservation grant funding and affords certain protections under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

West Hollywood Cultural Preservation Ordinance

The City of West Hollywood's Cultural Preservation Ordinance provides a high level of protection to designated cultural resources. Districts, as well as groupings of structures related by common characteristics or uses, may be designated under the Ordinance. Under the City Ordinance a property may be designated a cultural resource if it meets one of the designation criteria including distinctive architectural character, reflecting important geographic patterns, or association with significant persons or events.

As of 2010, 77 buildings have been individually designated as West Hollywood Cultural Resources and there are six historic districts and groups.

Referencing Information on the History of West Hollywood

Although West Hollywood has a rich and colorful history, there is limited information available on the City's past. There is no exhaustive and complete published history of the City and no single place to conduct historic research. The sources of information that do exist are usually found in one of many histories of Hollywood or in architectural histories of Los Angeles. Historically, the West Hollywood Branch Library, operated by the County of Los Angeles, did not have a significant collection of information or documents on the history of West Hollywood, but with the establishment of the West Hollywood Room in the new and larger library building (scheduled for completion in 2011) more resources may become available.

Existing Historic Districts in West Hollywood

West Hollywood has a number of historic districts, most of which were designated in the 1990s. These districts include clusters of buildings from the first part of the twentieth century, with modern, craftsman, and Spanish influences, among others.

Harper Avenue National Register District (designated in 1992)

This District contains excellent examples of the 1920s and 1930s styles of period revivals, many built around courtyards. These elegant apartment houses catered to the growing movie industry and were home to many Hollywood stars. These buildings were also among the first designed to accommodate automobiles. Several of the structures were designed by the architect/design team of Arthur and Nina Zwebell, whose innovations helped set the precedent for courtyard design in Southern California.

Courtyard Historic District (designated in 1992)

Courtyard housing is an important multi-family dwelling type both in Southern California generally and in West Hollywood in particular. It responds to the region's mild climate by extending interior spaces into the outdoors and integrates the desire for individual housing and a yard with the practical need for higher density development. Historically, the courtyard building derived from Spanish architecture, but it is also expressed in many different revival styles. Fireplaces, benches, water elements, and landscaping, as well as distinctive craftsmanship such as tile work, iron grilles, and carved wood, give courtyard spaces a unique character. The higher density of the buildings in this district reflects the increasing demand for housing that accompanied the rapid growth of the Los Angeles region in the 1920s. The district's location between Hollywood and Beverly Hills and its adjacency to the developing Sunset Strip made it a highly attractive area for such luxurious residential development.

Plummer Park Apartment Grouping (designated in 1991)

In 1929, several parcels of land were purchased from Eugenio R. Plummer on the western border of what is now Plummer Park. These brick buildings share a common architectural vocabulary, inspired by the Andalusian region of Spain. Character-defining features include: stucco, wood balconies and shutters, red clay tile roofs, arches, casement windows, abbreviated towers, and three-bay facades.

Craftsman District (designated in 1993)

The Craftsman bungalow was one of the most prominent residential styles in Southern California. In the early 1910's, the Craftsman bungalow replaced the hip-roofed cottage as the housing type of preference in West Hollywood. The Craftsman district comprises the largest concentration of this building type in West Hollywood. Built on the gently sloping foothills between Beverly Hills and Hollywood, these homes fused nature (by incorporating porches, large windows, garden spaces) and modernity (driveways and garages for automobiles).

Lingenbrink Commercial Grouping (designated in 1995)

A rare example of commercial buildings by early Modern architect Rudolph Schindler for William Lingenbrink, this complex juxtaposes works by Schindler ten years apart.

Old Sherman District

The Old Sherman District contains some of the original residences of West Hollywood, then known as Sherman. Built between 1899 and 1907, these dwellings were homes for many of the workers at the Pacific Electric Railway. The buildings contain common architectural elements including hipped roofs, narrow wood clapboard sidings, simple endboards, and window trim, front porches and simple floor plans. Known as the "Plains Cottages," these homes pre-date the craftsman-style dwellings, which were built after 1910. They reflect the housing styles familiar to the Midwestern emigrant workers that settled in Sherman. The homes in this Old Sherman District are representative of West Hollywood's birth as a distinctive city and evoke its modest beginnings.

Mechanisms and Incentives for Historic Preservation

A number of mechanisms and incentives are available to the City and to property owners in West Hollywood. These include surveys, tax credits, and other funding mechanisms, as described below.

Historical Context Statements

An historical context statement is “a body of information about cultural resources organized by theme, place and time.” The historic context statements developed by surveys conducted in 1986 and 2008, along with the 1998 Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan, helped significantly to fill in missing historical gaps. Likewise, the information gleaned from these surveys will assist in the future evaluation of cultural resources.

Cultural Resource Surveys

Cultural resources surveys are the most common method of identifying, quantifying, and evaluating the relative significance of cultural resources. The City of West Hollywood received a grant from the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) in 1985 to conduct an historic resources survey. The survey was completed in 1986 and documented 118 potential resources. In a City of only 1.9 square miles, it might be assumed that all cultural resources have been recognized. However, as more research is conducted and as time passes, additional historic resources come to light. For example, some post-World War II buildings have been designated as cultural resources. Properties associated with gay and lesbian history or more recent architectural movements may also become eligible for listing as cultural resources. The 2008 update of the Historic Resources Survey examined all properties in the R2, R3, and R4 zones built prior to 1961. A total of 61 additional properties were determined to be eligible cultural resources.

The primary mechanism for the protection of cultural resources from demolition, inappropriate alteration, and neglect is through cultural resources designation programs. While listing in the National Register and California Register may dissuade demolition and inappropriate alterations, such listings also trigger environmental review through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the California Environmental Quality Act. Designation under the West Hollywood Cultural Heritage Preservation Ordinance offers the strongest protection. Buildings may only be demolished if their preservation will result in economic hardship for the owner. Alterations to these cultural resources are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Educating the public is the key to creating a lifelong appreciation for cultural heritage and expanding the base of support for historic preservation activities. With its many layers of history the cultural landscape of West Hollywood is complex. Recognizing this landscape and how it has evolved is essential in interpreting the City’s history for the public. There are many creative ways to build public awareness of the City’s history and cultural resources through education, public art, websites and community awareness programs.

Use of the State Historical Building Code (SHBC) in conjunction with prevailing codes can provide flexibility to owners of historic structures in meeting code requirements. A major problem that historic property owners face when making improvements to mechanical or structural systems, for example, is compliance with prevailing building codes. The SHBC provides alternative mechanical, plumbing, and electrical requirements for qualified historical buildings.

Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits

The historic rehabilitation tax credit is the nation's largest federal incentive promoting urban and rural revitalization through private investment in reusing historic buildings. The credit allows the owner of a certified historic structure to receive a federal income tax credit equal to 20% of the amount spent on qualified rehabilitation costs. Since it was enacted in 1976, the credit has been widely used as an effective tool for transforming vacant and underutilized buildings into safe, decent, and – in many cases – affordable places to live and do business.

Mills Act

West Hollywood is currently one of the local communities in California using the Mills Act to its full advantage. The Mills Act is a state law allowing cities to enter into contracts with the owners of historic structures. Such contracts require a reduction of property taxes in exchange for the continued preservation of the property. Property taxes are recalculated using a formula in the Mills Act and Revenue and Taxation Code. Each Mills Act property has a plan by which the property tax savings are reinvested back into the property through appropriate preservation and maintenance, which is often more expensive than conventional maintenance.

Mills Act properties must be privately owned, not exempt from taxation, and: (a) listed in the National Register of Historic Places; (b) located in a National Register historic districts; or (c) listed in any state, city, or county official register of historical or architecturally significant sites, places, or landmarks. As of 2010, the City of West Hollywood has approved a total of 83 Mills Act contracts.

Other Incentives

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is permitted under the Cultural Heritage Preservation Ordinance but has yet to be used. The ordinance allows owners to sell unused density from designated Cultural Resources for use in the development of another parcel. TDRs are widely used in many cities. However, this program may not be as beneficial in a city the size and scale of West Hollywood. Many of the historic buildings do not have any development rights to sell because they are larger than would be currently allowed by zoning regulations.

Permitting changes of use, granting variances, and relaxing other codes have been used effectively as rehabilitation incentives in West Hollywood. Some cities have created loan and grant programs to assist the owners of historic buildings. Grant programs usually require a matching contribution by the property owner and loan programs feature low interest rates or offer disappearing loans (effectively becoming grants); A percentage of the transient occupancy tax and a cultural resources bond initiative are two of several ways such programs are funded.

GOALS AND POLICIES

HP-1: Expand the base of information on the City's history.

Intent: The City has planned for and made provisions to recognize its history in a West Hollywood Room in the West Hollywood Library. To expand the City's effort in the creation of this special room, the City will develop policies for and obtain documents, maps, photographs, and other materials that are relevant to the City's past. To maintain relevant historical documents on-hand at City Hall and the West Hollywood Room that will serve as reference materials to assist the City in making decisions regarding historic preservation.

- HP-1.1 Work with partners to program, curate, and support the West Hollywood Room in the West Hollywood Library and to support the mission to protect and preserve its heritage.
- HP-1.2 Develop an archival policy and archive of historic documents associated with West Hollywood to share with the community, educators, and researchers.
- HP-1.3 As feasible, maintain an internal resource center containing a collection of relevant historic documents.


HP-2: Continue to identify and evaluate cultural resources.


Intent: To ensure that historically significant properties are identified and evaluated for preservation as cultural resources.

- HP-2.1 Continue to revise and update the West Hollywood Historic Resources Survey as needed.
- HP-2.2 Continue to seek designation of eligible properties as West Hollywood Cultural Resources and/or Historic Districts.
- HP-2.3 As feasible, provide assistance in applications for designated West Hollywood Cultural Resources to be nominated as properties in the California and National Registers.

HP-3: Protect cultural resources from demolition and inappropriate alterations.

Intent: To recognize the importance of historic properties as valuable cultural resources and to maintain and preserve these properties for future generations.

- HP-3.1 Revise and update the Historic Preservation Element of the West Hollywood General Plan on a regular basis.
- HP-3.2  Ensure the protection of cultural resources through enforcement of existing codes.

- HP-3.3 Continue to coordinate Section 106 (National Historic Preservation Act) procedures with other environmental review procedures.
- HP-3.4  Continue to allow for the adaptive reuse of cultural resources.
- HP-3.5 Develop post-disaster policies and plans for designated cultural resources to encourage preservation of damaged cultural resources.
- HP-3.6 Suspend development activity when archaeological resources are discovered during construction. The project sponsor will be required to retain a qualified archaeologist to oversee the handling of resources in coordination with appropriate local and State agencies and organizations and local Native American representatives, as appropriate.
- HP-3.7 Continue to coordinate with City staff from various fields so that historic preservation goals are recognized, taking into consideration the implications historic preservation can have on other established City goals.

HP-4: Increase the public's awareness of the City's history and cultural resources.

Intent: To provide the public with an understanding of the City's past and to create a sense of pride in the City's cultural resources.

- HP-4.1 Continue to educate the public about the history of West Hollywood.
- HP-4.2 Continue to memorialize significant people, places, and events in the history of West Hollywood through plaques and public art.
- HP-4.3 As feasible, maintain information on cultural resources on the City website.

HP-5: Promote the preservation of cultural resources through maintenance and rehabilitation incentives and technical assistance.

Intent: To create incentives to encourage and assist property owners and developers in preserving historically significant cultural resources.

- HP-5.1 As feasible, maintain a resource library that includes technical information on the treatment of historic properties.
- HP-5.2 Consider providing relief from some taxes and fees for preservation projects.
- HP-5.3 Explore new sources of revenue such as grants and loans that can be used for the maintenance, rehabilitation, or restoration of cultural resources, or operating the City's preservation program.
- HP-5.4 As feasible, evaluate City programs for opportunities to underwrite the maintenance, rehabilitation or restoration of cultural resources.
- HP-5.5 Consider reevaluating the usefulness of the Transfer of Development Rights Program.
- HP-5.6 Consider directing capital improvement funds towards the preservation and enhancement of cultural resources and historic districts.

HP-6: Use historic preservation concepts as tools for economic development.

Intent: To utilize the City's cultural resources in a manner that assists the overall economic development of the City.

- HP-6.1 Seek opportunities to work with business and professional groups to incorporate cultural resources into their promotions of business and tourism.
- HP-6.2 As feasible, incorporate goals and objectives related to cultural resources into public and private plans for economic development.

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