

## What is an HPOZ?

A Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) is designated by the City of Los Angeles as a historic district composed of a group of buildings (either an entire neighborhood or part of a neighborhood) which are related to one another historically, architecturally, and/or culturally. Individual buildings within an HPOZ need not be of "landmark" quality — the cohesiveness, uniqueness, and architectural integrity of the area as a whole serves to make it eligible for HPOZ status.

As areas with historic and aesthetic significance, representative of the city's cultural and architectural history, these districts are unique and irreplaceable assets. The destruction of communities such as Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine, and the fragmentation of neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights provide cautionary tales about the potential for the loss of our city's historic communities. In 1979 in response to these concerns, the Los Angeles City Council adopted our first HPOZ Ordinance.

### What Are the Benefits of HPOZ Designation?

- 1) **Control Over Inappropriate Alterations:** HPOZs are one of the few effective tools to help retain the unique character of historic neighborhoods. Throughout Los Angeles, historic neighborhoods are struggling to prevent insensitive additions, control mansionization, and prevent stucco from covering over historic wood siding. HPOZs provide for clear design guidelines and a process to control such harmful changes.
- 2) **Enhanced Sense of Community:** Working together on an HPOZ and helping to maintain the character of an historic neighborhood helps pull neighbors together and build a sense of community. HPOZ districts often find that this community cohesiveness helps the neighborhood constructively address other local problems, including crime and safety issues.
- 3) **Increase in Property Values:** According to numerous studies, homes and structures within historic districts such as HPOZs experience greater property value increases than do similar properties not protected by a historic district designation. This occurs because potential homebuyers are assured that the historic character that made the neighborhood attractive will endure over time. For further details, see the Conservancy's publication, "The Economic Benefits of Historic Residential Districts," available on our web site ([www.laconservancy.org](http://www.laconservancy.org)).
- 4) **Tax Savings:** Designation as an HPOZ makes all "contributing structures" to the HPOZ (homes within the period of significance that have retained their architectural character) eligible for property tax reductions. Under the Mills Act, a State law implemented by local governments such as the City of Los Angeles, owners of historic properties contract with the City, agreeing to preserve and properly maintain their home for at least 10 years. In exchange for this agreement, the owner's property tax liability is recalculated using a state mandated formula that can result in a substantial tax reduction. Property tax reductions vary widely but generally range from 25-60%, which could mean hundreds or even thousands of dollars a year in savings. For more information on the Mills Act, contact the City Planning Department, or see the Conservancy's publication, "Incentives for Preserving Historic Buildings" on our web site.
- 5) **Neighborhood Expertise:** The HPOZ Boards serve as an informal resource for homeowners, providing invaluable advice on how to pursue historically sensitive renovations in a cost-effective manner.

### How Are HPOZs Governed?

Each HPOZ is overseen by a board whose five members have a demonstrated knowledge and interest in the history and architecture of the HPOZ area. Three of the five must be owners or renters who live within the HPOZ. One of the members must have extensive real estate or construction experience and is appointed directly by the Mayor. The Council member of the District where the HPOZ is located



appoints another board member (who must be a renter or owner in the HPOZ). Two members — one licensed architect and one HPOZ resident are appointed by the Cultural Heritage Commission. The final member of the HPOZ board is selected by a majority vote of the other four members, and also must be a resident of the HPOZ. Members of the HPOZ Board serve for a term of four years. To facilitate speedy project review for property owners, each HPOZ Board must schedule a minimum of two meetings per month.

### **What Does an HPOZ Board Review?**

An HPOZ Board has oversight concerning exterior alterations only. Interior modifications, such as bathroom or kitchen remodeling, may proceed without HPOZ Board review. In general, exterior changes, such as additions to the structure, installation or removal of fencing, or window and door replacement, first need to be reviewed by the Board. Ordinary exterior maintenance and repair to structures usually does not require review.

Each HPOZ Board is guided in their decision-making process by a Preservation Plan. When an HPOZ is created, the Board, residents, and property owners create a set of design guidelines specific to the needs of their neighborhood. Until a Preservation Plan is adopted, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are used for project evaluation.

Residents and property owners do not face initial fees or annual dues because of an HPOZ designation. The HPOZ's regulations do not require or force residents to improve or "fix up" their property. Should a home be destroyed by a natural disaster, residents are not required to duplicate the previously existing structure. All residents are invited to public meetings and hearings with the five-member board and can participate to the extent they desire.

### **How Does a Community Become an HPOZ?**

The HPOZ process may be initiated by the City Council, Planning Commission, Cultural Heritage Commission, or by the owner or renter of a property within the proposed HPOZ. Most communities begin by organizing neighborhood meetings to inform residents about the HPOZ process and to discuss the benefits of having an HPOZ established in their neighborhood. Frequently, community members ask the City Council representative for assistance; the Council member can introduce a City Council motion initiating the HPOZ process. However, without united and organized community support, there is little chance of the successful establishment of an HPOZ.

Before an HPOZ may be designated, a detailed cultural resource survey of the neighborhood must be completed, a process which also defines the proposed HPOZ's boundaries. This survey identifies the structures within the proposed HPOZ and identifies them as either "contributing" or "non-contributing". In general, structures identified as "contributing" are those buildings which are examples of the predominant styles of the area, built during the time period when the bulk of the structures in the HPOZ were constructed. "Non-contributing" structures are those which have been severely altered and/or were built after the majority of the historic structures and therefore do not contribute to the historic architectural fabric of the area. Landscaping and natural features can also be identified in the survey. The survey also includes an overview of the community's history and development, detailing the significance and context of the area history and its architecture. In addition, the survey contains photographs and a brief description of each structure.

The assembled HPOZ application, including the completed survey and letters of support from the community, is first sent to the Planning Department, then reviewed by the Cultural Heritage Commission and the City Planning Commission, before going to the City Council for final approval. The entire process generally takes six months to one year after applications are submitted.

