

What in the world is an HPOZ?



IMPLY PUT, AN HPOZ IS A HISTORIC DISTRICT.

Technically defined, a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) is a city-designated historic district composed of a group of buildings (either an entire neighborhood or part of a neighborhood) that 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.

The protection of Los Angeles’ historic neighborhoods is not a new phenomenon. Since 1979, when the Los Angeles City Council adopted the city’s first HPOZ Ordinance, 22 diverse and wonderful neighborhoods representing many aspects of the city’s cultural and architectural history have become HPOZs. Grassroots efforts of neighborhood residents drive the creation of these historic districts. Recently, interest in this approach to the protection and preservation of historic neighborhoods has accelerated, with more than a dozen new HPOZs in various stages of formation.

What does it mean to own a home in an HPOZ? Residents and property owners are not required to improve or “fix up” their property or pay membership fees. For some, it means assurance that what they love about their neighborhood, whether it’s the architecture or the general ambiance, will be protected from significant change. For others, HPOZ status brings higher property values and the stabilization of the neighborhood. For still others, it brings a sense of enhanced community.

A five-member board, including an architect and at least one member with real estate or construction experience, oversees the HPOZ. The Mayor, the local City Council representative, and the Cultural Heritage Commission appoint a total of four board members, and three of the five must be residents of the HPOZ. Only exterior alterations to structures within the district are subject to review by the board to insure that the changes are in keeping with the historic character of the neighborhood. A Preservation Plan, a set of design guidelines specific to the needs of their neighborhood, created in cooperation with the residents and property owners in the HPOZ, guides each HPOZ board in its decision-making process.

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, provide cautionary tales about the potential for the loss of our city’s historic communities. The Los Angeles Conservancy, in cooperation with the HPOZ Alliance, the HPOZ boards, and our many preservation partners, is delighted to foster the growth of this community preservation effort, one that will protect the historic built environment of our city for generations to come.