



MYTHS ABOUT HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Myth: Living in a historic district creates added expenses.

In general, there are no initial fees or annual dues for property owners or residents in historic districts. However, when a property owner applies for a building permit for additions, repairs, etc., there may be additional fees for design review by the local historic preservation commission.

As for construction or rehabilitation costs, although preservation practices can sometimes be initially more expensive than standard new construction, they are often more cost effective over time. The key is good maintenance. For example, retaining, reusing, and upgrading existing wood windows can extend their already long lifetime and avoid the need to replace vinyl or PVC windows every twenty years.

Myth: Historic district residents can't remodel or build additions to their home.

In general, historic district designation does not regulate interiors, with kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects typically exempt from review altogether. Additions are fine, as long as they meet the approval of the design review board or city agency issuing the building permit. The reviewing agency just wants to ensure that the addition fits the character and style of the existing residence.

Myth: The property value of homes in historic districts will go down.

Homes and structures in historic districts often experience greater property value increases than do similar structures elsewhere. Historic district designation gives potential homebuyers two rare and economically valuable assurances: that the very qualities that attracted them to their neighborhood will endure over time, and that they can safely reinvest in sensitive improvements to their home without fear that their neighbor will undermine this investment with a new "monster home" or inappropriate new development.

Myth: Historic districts are only for the rich and elite, and for high-style buildings.

History belongs to everyone. The historic districts of Los Angeles County are incredibly diverse and become more so with each passing year. City of Los Angeles HPOZs such as Lincoln Heights, Pico-Union, and Van Nuys are just a few examples of moderate-income neighborhoods with historic designation. And all types of architectural styles exist, ranging from the vernacular stone houses of the Stonehurst HPOZ, to the modernist, postwar homes of the Gregory Ain Mar Vista Tract HPOZ.

Myth: Historic districts will freeze a neighborhood in time like a museum piece.

Historic preservation is about managing change, not preventing it. Historic district regulations exist simply to maintain the unique and authentic character of neighborhoods, which is likely what drew residents to them in the first place.

Myth: Historic districts are an invasion of private property rights.

The regulations and guidelines for historic districts no more infringe on property rights than do many other laws and rules that Americans have long accepted. Though everyone likes to believe “my home is my castle and I can do whatever I want,” this statement simply doesn’t reflect reality.

Zoning laws prevent you from replacing your single-family home with an apartment building or a five-story vertical mansion. We should all be happy that such laws prevent our neighbor from putting a landfill or a skyscraper behind our back fence.

If you live in a condominium or gated community, your property rights are limited by Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs), documents that can legally prevent you from owning a pet, washing a car in your driveway, or having a basketball hoop over the garage. CC&Rs are far more onerous than historic preservation laws, yet are commonly accepted even by vocal property rights advocates.