



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024

# City of San Diego Begins Comprehensive Update to Heritage Preservation Program

## EFFORT WILL MODERNIZE HISTORIC PROPERTY REGULATIONS TO PRESERVE IMPORTANT PLACES AND STREAMLINE NEW HOME CONSTRUCTION

SAN DIEGO – To streamline the process for building new homes while protecting places of historic, architectural and cultural importance and encouraging their adaptive reuse, today the City of San Diego launched the [Preservation and Progress initiative](#) to update its Heritage Preservation Program.

**“This top-to-bottom review of our historic preservation will ensure we are truly preserving the architecture and buildings that are historically significant to San Diego, while also making sure the criteria is clear and this process is not used to block revitalization and new home construction,”** said Mayor Todd Gloria. **“This will make historic determinations more efficient so we can both preserve our heritage and revitalize our communities with new housing for San Diegans.”**

Under the City’s existing program, development that impacts an older property is evaluated for possible historic significance as part of the permit review process, the vast majority of which are determined not historic. This review process results in significant time and money invested in identifying what is not historically significant, rather than what is important and worthy of protection, and adds time and uncertainty for builders.

Under Preservation and Progress, staff will comprehensively update existing [policy and regulatory documents](#) guiding the City’s Heritage Preservation Program to fix these inefficiencies and remove regulations unnecessarily impacting properties lacking historical or cultural importance. The initiative aims to identify and protect historic properties and districts truly important to the city’s history and culture. It will provide clearer requirements to builders and clearer procedures for protecting important resources and facilitate adaptive reuse of historic properties to meet our City’s changing needs.

**“Many of our urban neighborhoods have wonderful historical resources worth preserving as well as opportunities to add much-needed housing,”** said Councilmember Stephen Whitburn. **“Preservation and Progress will enable the City to more effectively and efficiently advance both of these important goals for current and future generations.”**

While updating the policies and regulations, City staff will also look to advance equity in preservation to ensure it works better for everyone, particularly communities that have been harmed by injustice and exclusion, including Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), as well as LGBTQ+ communities. The initiative will also evaluate the Mills Act program to ensure it is equitable and incentivizes the protection and restoration of important places in a fiscally responsible manner. This State Act allows the City to grant property tax relief to qualified historic property owners who are actively participating in restoring and maintaining their historic property.

**“Identifying and protecting the places, events and people that have shaped our city and history continues to be of high importance, but as our city grows, we must find more efficient ways to preserve our history while also meeting the needs of today’s city,” said City Planning Director Heidi Vonblum. “Preservation and Progress will allow us to navigate change, not stop it, so places can evolve while keeping what makes them most meaningful.”**

Community members, organizations and others wanting to provide input can visit the [Progress and Preservation webpage](#) to learn more and submit comments. The initiative will ultimately go to the City Council for approval, and San Diegans will have an opportunity to provide input throughout the public hearing process.

The City remains committed to assisting project applicants with navigating existing historic preservation requirements. Members of the public can view this [quick explainer](#) and [contact City staff](#) with any additional questions.

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City of San Diego logo



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# Preservation and Progress:

# An Update to the City's Heritage Preservation Program

Feedback



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Các Dịch vụ Biên dịch và Phiên dịch

The Preservation and Progress initiative is a comprehensive update to the City's Heritage Preservation Program that will streamline processes for new homes and other uses while protecting places of historic, architectural and cultural importance and encouraging their adaptive reuse.

As we look ahead and plan for our future growth and progress as a city, we also look back to the places, events and people that have shaped our city and its history in an important way. The primary purpose of the City's Heritage Preservation Program is to identify and protect the places that matter to our collective history, while allowing those places to evolve to continue to meet our needs as a growing city. In doing so, the program allows us to navigate change, not stop it, so places can evolve while keeping what makes them most meaningful.

Protecting historic places connects us to our past in a tangible way and fosters a sense of belonging and pride of place. By giving historic places new uses, making compatible additions and integrating new development, we get a vibrant mix of places and a distinctive, livable community.

*"No city can hope to understand its present or forecast its future if it fails to recognize its past. By tracing and preserving its past, a city can gain a clear sense of the process by which it achieved its present form and substance."*

**- Historic Preservation Element of the City of San Diego General Plan**

# Strategic Plan Priority Areas of Focus

This initiative focuses on the following priority areas of the [Strategic Plan](#):



## Create Homes for All of Us

Updates the City's Historic Preservation Program to provide clear pathways for permitting more new homes and other uses on properties with historic and cultural resources while more effectively preserving and adaptively reusing these resources.

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## Protect & Enrich Every Neighborhood

Provides opportunities for new homes and other uses that benefit our communities, while identifying and protecting resources that tell a shared story important to the City's architectural, historical and/or cultural history and identity and encouraging its continued progress and evolution.

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## Champion Sustainability

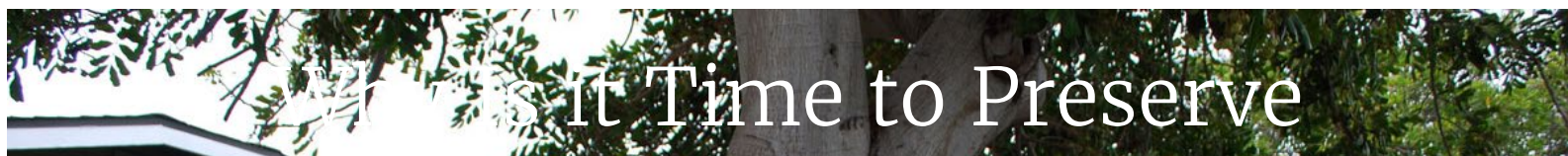
Supports adaptive reuse of existing buildings and provides clear pathways for permitting new homes and other uses in areas located near transit.

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## Foster Regional Prosperity

Strategically identifies, preserves and celebrates our City's rich history, culture and heritage providing economic opportunities for generations to come.





# History and Advance Progress Now?



## Reactive Preservation vs. Proactive Preservation

The Heritage Preservation Program, in its current form, is largely reactive in nature, waiting for someone to nominate a property for historic designation or for development to impact a property that may be historically

important before it is evaluated and brought forward for designation. Our current regulations and processes therefore result in significant time and money invested in identifying what is not important rather than what is important and worthy of protection. It focuses on looking at things that may be old but that, in most instances, are not historically significant. This results in uncertainty and inefficiency for property owners and the public.



## Impacts to the Construction

## of New Homes

The reactive nature of the Heritage Preservation Program also unnecessarily burdens projects on properties that do not have historical importance or value through added review requirements, processing times and uncertainties. Additionally, adaptive reuse and expansion of historic properties can be hindered by requirements that lack clarity for developers. The City continues to suffer from a lack of supply of homes affordable to people of all incomes, and more certainty is needed to allow for the building of more homes to combat this crisis. The Mayor's Middle-Income Housing Working Group also



identified these issues as a challenge for the development of new middle-income housing in San Diego.



## Equity

Just as with past planning practices, historic preservation policy and practice have contributed to systemic racism and injustice. A primary goal of Preservation and Progress is to fully integrate equity into the City's Heritage Preservation Program. This starts with updating City policies and practices so that preservation works better for everyone,

particularly communities that have been harmed by injustice and exclusion, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) as well as LGBTQ+ communities. Through the development and implementation of Preservation and Progress, the City can support these traditionally marginalized communities to elevate histories local government has often excluded, celebrate their cultures and contributions, and make our communities more equitable and resilient.

## Commitment to Best Practices in Heritage Preservation

Certified Local Governments (CLG) are municipalities that have demonstrated, through a certification process, a commitment to local preservation and saving the past for future generations.

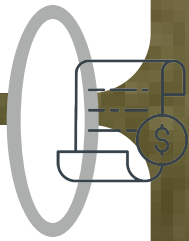
The City of San Diego is one of the three oldest CLGs in the state and joins the 14 other largest cities in the nation in maintaining CLG status and a commitment to preserving

historic places consistent with professional standards and best practices.

# Goals of the Preserving History and Advancing Progress Initiative



**Advance equity in preservation** and prioritize protection of resources important to BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and other historically marginalized communities.



**Evaluate the Mills Act program** to ensure the program is equitable and incentivizes the protection and restoration of important places in a fiscally responsible manner.



**Identify and protect** historical properties



and districts that are important to the City's history and culture, with a focus on historic districts.



**Reform permit processes** to better encourage the adaptive reuse of historical buildings on their original sites.







**Adopt design standards**

for historical properties and districts to provide clear, objective requirements and by-right approval for additions and new development.



**Remove regulations**

that unnecessarily impact properties that lack historical or cultural importance.

Integrate Equity as a Core Value

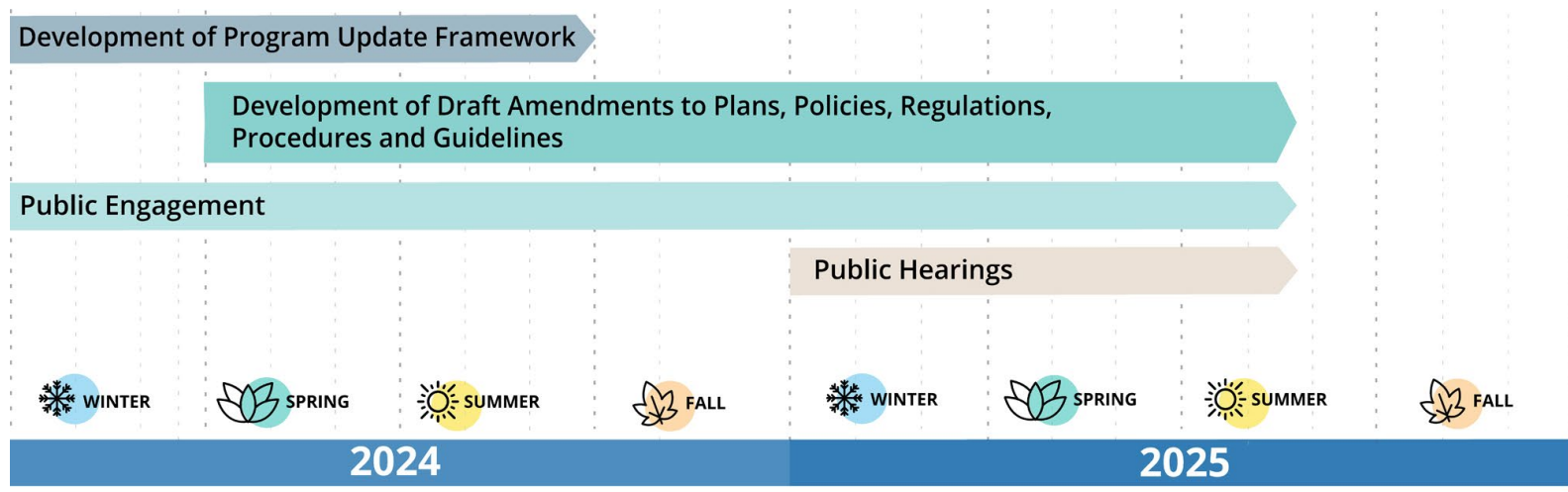
Protect Important Places

Streamline Processes for New Homes

To accomplish these goals, Preservation and Progress will take a comprehensive look at all of the [policy and regulatory documents](#) that guide the City's Heritage Preservation Program. This includes the Historic Preservation Element of the General Plan, the Designation Procedures and Historical Resources Regulations in the Land Development Code, the Historical Resources Guidelines in the Land Development Manual, City Council Policy, and a number of Historical Resources Board policies and procedures.

While these documents have been updated individually over the past several decades, it has been many years since the Heritage Preservation Program was comprehensively updated. The City's commitment in recent years to new housing, equity, sustainability, and resilience goals and policies, as well as new State housing legislation and evolving best practices in heritage preservation nationwide require a fresh look at how the City's Heritage Preservation Program is structured and implemented.



## Comprehensive Timeline



Do you have ideas as to how the City’s Heritage Preservation Program should be updated to achieve our goals? Please share them with us through this [online portal](#). If you would like to be informed of initiative progress, document releases, meetings and public hearings, please [sign up for our email distribution list](#).

## Develop New Homes Now

The City is committed to assisting project applicants with navigating the existing historic preservation requirements.

Please view this [quick explainer](#) , and [contact our staff](#)  if you have any additional questions!

## Nomination Process

The City is committed to protecting our important places. If you are interested in nominating a place of historical, architectural, or cultural importance you

can find information on how to do so [here](#).

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## Share Information with Friends and Family

To facilitate learning about the Update to the City's Heritage Preservation Program, easily sharable materials have been developed and are linked below.

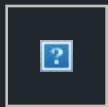
[Fact Sheet](#) 



## Send Us Your Comments

The project team welcomes questions and comments about preservation and progress. Please email us at [historicplanning@sandiego.gov](mailto:historicplanning@sandiego.gov).

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San Diego Mayor  
**TODD**  
**GLORIA**



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