



Administrative Report

N.2., File # 26-0005

Meeting Date: 1/6/2026

To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

From: MARC WIENER, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

TITLE

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE GENERAL PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT UPDATE WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON POLICIES RELATED TO HISTORIC PRESERVATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City's Historic Preservation Program was created to encourage property owners to participate in the recognition and preservation of local historic resources. Key features of the program include the voluntary owner nomination of properties for historic landmarking, Mills Act contracts that substantially reduce property taxes for homeowners, and requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations or demolition of designated landmarks or potential historic resources.

The City is in the process of updating the Land Use, Open Space & Conservation, Safety and Noise Elements of the General Plan. The draft Land Use Element Update includes policies pertaining to historic preservation. Staff is seeking direction from the City Council on historic preservation policies prior to preparing the Land Use Element for final consideration.

BACKGROUND

The primary purpose of the City's Historic Preservation Program is to foster public appreciation of Redondo Beach's historical and architectural heritage. The Redondo Beach Municipal Code (RBMC) specifies some of the following reasons for the program (RBMC 10-4.102):

- To safeguard the City's heritage by encouraging the protection of landmarks representing significant elements of its history.
- To foster civic and neighborhood pride and a sense of identity based on an appreciation of the City's past and the recognition and use of historic resources.
- To enhance the visual character of the City by preserving diverse architectural styles reflecting phases of the City's history and by encouraging complementary contemporary design and construction.
- To conserve valuable material and energy resources by ongoing use and maintenance of the existing built environment.
- To take whatever steps are reasonable and necessary to safeguard the property rights of owners whose property is declared to be a landmark or is located in an historic district.

While historic preservation can add value to the community and reduce property taxes through the Mills Act, it can also potentially impact property values by limiting the ability to modify or demolish the

existing structure, as discussed later in this report. Propoerty rights are protected by making owner's consent required to designate a property.

The Historic Preservation Program is composed of 1) the Historic Preservation Ordinance, which is codified in the RBMC; 2) the Historic Context Statement, which provides background information on the City's history and early development and provides context for making determinations on the historicity of a property; and 3) the Historic Preservation Plan, which provides additional information and guidance on the City's historic preservation standards. Each of these items is included with this report for reference.

A summary of how the program is implemented is contained below:

Nomination Process

Nominations of a historic resource as a landmark can be made only by the property owner, as per RBMC Section 10-4.301. In order to be eligible for consideration as a landmark, an historic resource must be at least 50 years old, with the exception that an historic resource of at least 30 years of age may be eligible if it is determined that the resource is exceptional or at risk of demolition or inappropriate alteration.

In addition to landmarking individual properties, the Ordinance includes a process for the creation of an historic district, which may arise from a property owner or group of property owners in a given area, or from the City, based on information from an historic survey. Only properties nominated by their propoerty owners are considered for inclusion in any proposed historic district, and any established historic district boundary would include only properties approved in writing by their owners. The RBMC also includes procedures for the removal of historically designated properties.

Historic Landmark vs. Potential Historic Resources

RBMC 10-4.104 defines a "Landmark" property as one that is designated by the City, at the request of the owner, and is deemed to have *"historical, cultural, aesthetic or architectural character or value, or which represents one or more architectural periods or styles typical to the history of the City."* There are currently 154 properties on the City's Historic Register, of which three are on the State Register and five are on the National Register.

RBMC 10-4.104 defines "Potential Historic Resources" as properties that have not been designated at the request of the owner, but are *"listed in the City's Historic Resources Inventory with a National Register rating of 1-5 or a local survey rating of A or B; and/or (2) listed in the National Register of Historic Places or California Register; and/or (3) that has been evaluated pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and determined by the Community Development Director to meet the criteria listed in (1) and/or (2) above."*

The Historic Resources Inventory was prepared from a windshield survey that occurred between 1986-1996 and includes 1,024 properties, of which 173 are rated either A or B and meet the definition of a Potential Historic Resource. The City treats the Potential Historic Resource properties as historic, in that they require a Certificate of Appropriateness (explained in the next section) for modifications and demolitions. This appears to be in conflict with the requirement for owner consent and the objective of safeguarding property rights. Furthermore, the survey must be updated every five years (California Public Resources Code 5024.1) in order to support a presumption of historicity.

Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)

A COA is required from the Public Amenities Commission (PAC) prior to making alternations or demolition of structures that are either Landmark properties, in a Historic District, or deemed a Potential Historic Resource with a rating of "A" or "B." As previously explained, Landmark and Historic District properties are listed with owner consent, while the Potential Historic Resource properties resulted, primarily, from the 1986-1996 windshield survey. The following criteria is applied when issuing a COA for Landmark properties:

- (1) Conforms to the prescriptive standards adopted by the Commission (Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitations); and
- (2) Would not detrimentally alter, destroy or adversely affect any exterior improvement or exterior architectural feature; and
- (3) Would retain the essential elements that make the resource significant

The City's Historic Preservation Plan makes reference to the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation," which is a set of guidelines issued by the National Park Service for making alternations to historic properties. Most jurisdictions, including Redondo Beach, refer to these standards when evaluating modifications to historic properties. The application of these standards is somewhat subjective and varies depending on the jurisdiction.

CEQA and Historic Preservation

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires public agencies in California to evaluate and disclose the environmental impacts of projects they approve or undertake.

Under CEQA, historic resources are considered part of the environment. This means a building, site, structure, or district that is either listed, or eligible for listing, on the California Register of Historical Resources (or a local register) is protected. Demolition, alteration, or relocation of a historic resource may be considered a "significant impact" under CEQA. The four criteria used to evaluate for eligibility of the State Register include the following:

- **Criterion 1** - Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage
- **Criterion 2** - Is associated with the lives of persons important in our past
- **Criterion 3** - Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic values
- **Criterion 4** - Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

The majority of properties in Redondo Beach listed as Historic Landmarks or Potentially Historic have not been evaluated for eligibility of the State Register and are not subject to the protections under CEQA. The City's Historic Context Statement may be used as a reference for determining whether the property meets the criteria.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION POLICIES

The City's current General Plan Land Use Element does not contain any goals related to historic preservation. The draft Land Use Element Update, which is pending City Council adoption, includes

the following goals and policies related to historic preservation:

Goal LU-7 (Historic Preservation)

Historic buildings, streets, landscapes and neighborhoods, as well as the story of Redondo Beach's people, businesses, and social and community organizations, are preserved and serve as a point of civic pride and identity for the community.

Policy LU-7.1 Historic landmarks and districts

Encourage the voluntary designation of potentially historic resources as landmarks or historic districts.

Policy LU-7.2 Protect designated landmarks and districts

Continue to use the Certificate of Appropriateness process for reviewing applications to demolish or alter designated landmarks and for projects within designated historic districts and in proximity to landmark properties.

Policy LU-7.3 Public and institutional facilities

Consider the designation of potentially historic public or institutional resources under threat of demolition or deterioration.

Policy LU-7.4 Adaptive reuse and sustainable development

Promote historic preservation as sustainable development and encourage adaptive reuse of historic or older properties.

Policy LU-7.5 Historic resources as cultural tourism

Promote historic places and cultural tourism as an economic development strategy.

Policy LU-7.6 History and cultural heritage

Support and encourage efforts to document and share the cultural heritage and history of Redondo Beach.

Policy LU-7.7 Culturally inclusive planning

Ensure that historic preservation planning is culturally inclusive and reflective of the unique background and diversity of neighborhoods in the city.

Policy LU-7.8 Incentives and technical assistance

Provide assistance to owners of potentially eligible and designated historic properties with tools and incentives to maintain historic resources. Consider providing restoration assistance to owners of historic sites and/or structures in return for agreements or deed restrictions prohibiting their destruction or alteration inconsistent with their historic character. Continue to provide Mills Act Agreements to owners of historic sites to maintain, rehabilitate, and preserve the character defining features of historic properties.

Policy LU-7.9 Salvage architectural features or materials

Encourage the preservation or reuse of historic architectural features on site or within the community.

Planning Commission Recommendations: The Planning Commission reviewed the draft Land Use Element on August 1, 2024, and recommended that the following amendments, shown as underlines,

be made to Policy LU-7.1 and Implementation Measure LU-66:

Policy LU-7.1 Historic landmarks and districts. Encourage the voluntary designation of potentially historic resources as landmarks or historic districts. Strengthen the City's objective identification of potentially historic buildings, resources, landmarks or historic districts in residential, commercial, public/institutional, and industrial zones.

IM-LU-66 Historic preservation ordinance. Update and periodically review the historic preservation ordinance to incorporate findings of the updated Historic Resources Survey. Develop the City processes and ordinances to objectively designate historic buildings, resources, landmarks, and historic districts. Develop the City processes and ordinances required to protect and preserve historic buildings, resources, landmarks, and historic districts that have been designated as historic.

The Commission's recommended amendments to Policy LU-7.1 and Implementation Measure LU-66, imply that the City should adopt an ordinance to increase protection of historic resources, possibly by providing the City with the authority to designate properties. This would be a departure from the current requirement for owner's consent through a voluntary program.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The primary policy consideration for the City Council is whether Land Use Element policies and associated ordinance should continue to support voluntary historic designation, or provide the City with the ability to impose it on a property without the owner's consent. The City may lawfully adopt such an ordinance to provide greater protections for aging and potentially historic properties. However, it would infringe on property rights, and there could potentially be challenges and controversy associated with mandating historic designation.

It is worth noting that three to four properties are listed as historic landmarks each year under the current process, which requires owner consent and is incentivized by the Mills Act Contract. The PAC has formed a subcommittee to work with staff on exploring ways to educate the community and promote the benefits and value of owning a historic landmark, which could lead to an increase in the number of voluntary nominations.

If the City Council wishes to maintain the requirement for owner approval for designation, it would be prudent to direct staff to maintain the Land Use Element policies as originally drafted and prepare an ordinance amending the RBMC process for "Potential Historic Resources." As previously noted, a Potential Historic Resource is a property listed on the Historic Resources Survey with a local survey rating of A or B. The Historic Resources Inventory was prepared from a windshield survey that occurred between 1986-1996 and includes 1,024 properties, of which 173 are rated either A or B. Property owners did not provide consent to be included on this Inventory, nonetheless, those rated as A or B rating are treated as historic resources in that they are required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the City for any modifications or demolition of the structure. The Certificate of Appropriateness is a discretionary entitlement with the decision being made by the PAC.

Council could direct staff to research the options for scaling back the voluntary aspect of the historic designation process. It should be noted that the City Council previously set aside funding to hire a consultant to prepare an updated historic survey, which would likely expand the list of Potential Historic Resources under the current RBMC requirements. Staff is also seeking Council direction on whether to proceed with an updated historic resources survey.

COORDINATION

This administrative report was prepared in coordination with the City Manager's Office.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funding for the preparation of this report and zoning amendments is available as part of the FY 2025 -26 Operating Budget for the Community Development Department.

APPROVED BY:

Mike Witzansky, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

- Redondo Beach Municipal Code - Title 10, Chapter 4, Section 10-4.104 - Historic Resources Preservation
- City of Redondo Beach Historic Context Statement
- City of Redondo Beach Historic Preservation Plan