

HISTORIC PARKS IN SAN FRANCISCO

For residents and visitors alike, San Francisco's parks are among the most beloved and culturally significant destinations in the city. Golden Gate Park alone, considered by many to be the central jewel of the park system, attracts over 15 million visitors every year. Despite unwarranted fears that landmark status will "freeze [parks] in time" and protect "every blade of grass," historic designation can be a valuable planning tool to streamline park management and inform decision making, while enabling these public spaces to evolve to meet changing needs.

City Parks with Historic Status

Many City-owned parks are already listed as local, state or national landmarks and that does not hamper their ongoing maintenance and improvement. **Alamo Square Park** was designated as part of the City's Alamo Square Historic District in 1984. Many new features have since been added to the park, including a children's playground, picnic tables, benches and lighting, and an ADA accessible pathway. Likewise, **Civic Center Park** is a contributor to the locally-designated Civic Center Historic District. After residents blocked repeated proposals to raise **Washington Square Park** up over a parking garage, it became the city's first park to receive individual Landmark status in 1999. Downtown business leaders blocked Landmark status for **Union Square**, although it has been listed in the California Register of Historic Resources (with **Portsmouth Park**, **Glen Canyon Park** and Washington Square Park). Within **Golden Gate Park**, the **Lawn Bowling Greens** are designated as a City Landmark and have been beautifully maintained with no conflict with their designation. The **Music Concourse** was designated in 2006, after early plans for a parking garage proposed to cut down the 100-year-old trees in front of the Bandshell. The garage was successfully completed, but located in such a way as not to detract from the beauty and appeal of the area.

Golden Gate Park

Designed by William Hammond Hall and John McLaren in the 1870s, Golden Gate Park boasts an incredible array of historic buildings, sculptures and monuments, and original landscape features. In January 2011, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) initiated a study of identify significant historic features of the park for its possible designation as a City Historic District. If designated, the HPC will be able to provide early input on major changes to historic features and consider their impact on the integrity of the park as a whole. The park was listed as a National Register Historic District in 2004 and, since that time, major projects such as the De Young Museum and the California Academy of Sciences have been completed.

Benefits of Local Designation

Informs decision-making by identifying significant features: By providing a comprehensive list of "character-defining features," landmark designation helps guide treatment decisions by park officials, such as clarifying where (and where not) to locate new development, identifying features that should be protected, and allowing for early input by the HPC on major projects.

Establishes a process to streamline review of park projects: Following a model used in other cities, such as Balboa Park in San Diego, designation of City parks should include a process for classifying projects as major or minor, delegating approval of minor projects to staff, and requiring HPC approval for only major projects. New York City, Los Angeles, San Diego and Chicago all have large urban parks that are local landmarks. Most have drafted agreements between multiple city agencies to streamline management and project review.

Saves time and money by avoiding controversy: Based on contentious disputes over individual Golden Gate Park projects, HPC review early in design development could reap significant financial savings for the City by ensuring that changes are compatible with the park's most enduring qualities – thereby helping to avoid costly and time-consuming review under the California Environmental Quality Act.