



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**MEMO**

April, 28, 2011

Land Use & Economic Development Committee  
Attention: Alisa Somera, Clerk  
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Dear Chairperson Mar and Members of the Committee,

Imagine the Castro without the Castro Theater, the waterfront without the Ferry Building, Alamo Square without the Painted Ladies and San Francisco without cable cars. Imagine Mid-Market with the Fox Theater proudly at its center. Historic sites are more than just buildings or features. They represent the culture and fabric of our city, and yet, these historic resources are often threatened because preserving them is not viewed as a practical option, or may be in conflict with other policy objectives. In 2008, the voters of San Francisco approved Prop J to establish The San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) as more meaningful and equal voice for the conservation of our city's historic resources.

The HPC has jurisdiction over 279 individually designated landmarks and an additional 1,836 properties that are contributing structures in the city's 16 designated historic and conservation districts. These 2,115 properties represent just 1.38% of all properties within the City and County's boundaries. Since its establishment in 2009, the HPC has reviewed 102 Certificates of Appropriateness and Permits to Alter and has approved 101 of them, for an approval rate of 99%. In that same time period, the HPC has recommended the designation of two individual landmarks to the Board of Supervisors. The role of the HPC is to be the voice for the preservation of sites that represent the city's cultural and architectural heritage. It is a role that is intended to be complimentary to the Planning Commission, and other Commissions and departments, and not to duplicate the role other Commissions already play.

Historic preservation is the practice of protecting and preserving sites, which reflect our local, state and national history. Preservation has diverse purposes and rewards, including the strengthening of local economies, the stabilization of property values, the fostering of civic beauty and community pride, and the appreciation of local, state and national history. As an economic development tool, historic preservation consistently outperforms other industries in job creation, creation of household income, and is a singularly powerful downtown revitalization tool. When it comes to tourism, heritage tourists stay longer, visit more sites and tend to spend up to two and one half (2.5) times more than other visitors.

While San Francisco was one of the earliest western cities to establish an historic preservation program, it was not until the passage of *Proposition J* in 2008 that the scope of the City and County's preservation program equaled that of the larger cities in the United States. New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles had, for many years, been able to recommend landmark designation to their respective City Councils and to rule on alterations to and demolitions of historic landmarks. With the 2008

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revisions to our City Charter, San Francisco joined the ranks of the country's major urban centers and significantly clarified and streamlined its historic preservation program.

The adoption of historic preservation ordinances around the country flourished after the U.S. Congress adopted the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. From that time on, municipalities have conscientiously created economic incentives to complement preservation regulations. San Francisco is no exception, offering the California Historical Building Code, the Mills Act property tax program and transfer of development rights in portions of the downtown. Together, the San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco Architectural Heritage and the Historic Preservation Commission do their level best to educate the public about other economic incentives such as the 20% federal historic tax credit, the seismic retrofit tax program and preservation easements. The HPC, however, believes it and the Planning Department could significantly improve public education about these important benefits and invites the Board of Supervisors to work with us to better position preservation incentives for our residents and investors.

On behalf of the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission,



Charles Edwin Chase, AIA

President