

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY SURVEY

What is Mill Valley’s Historic Resources Inventory Survey?

The City of Mill Valley began to identify and protect potentially historic structures in the 1970s. In 1975, the City of Mill Valley adopted the Historic Overlay (H-O) zoning designation and applied it to 27 designated historic properties, including the Outdoor Art Club, the City’s only property that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The H-O zone requires design review of additions or alterations to designated structures, in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. It also provides cost saving incentives that include building fee waivers and use of the California Historic Building Code.

In 1998, the Mill Valley Historical Society (MVHS) compiled the “MVHS Partial List of Historic Structures,” which included 94 additional properties that the organization believed were worthy of H-O zoning protection. In 2010, the Mill Valley Planning Department recommended that these structures be zoned “H-O”; however, the Planning Commission did not act on the recommendation at that time. Since then, members of the MVHS and other community members have provided the City with additional lists of potentially historic properties.

In 2013, the City of Mill Valley adopted the *Mill Valley General Plan MV2040*, which includes a variety of policies and programs that are aimed at protecting and enhancing Mill Valley’s community character and its historic properties. These types of policies and programs are very common in cities throughout California, including Marin County cities such as San Rafael, Larkspur, Tiburon, and Sausalito. Two of the Land Use chapter’s policies are:

LU.6 Resources Inventory: Work with the Mill Valley Historical Society to develop and implement a comprehensive survey of potential historic and archeological resources.

- **LU.6-1** Create a Mill Valley Historic Resources Inventory that includes a community-wide survey of property types and historic, architectural, or cultural contributions and an evaluation of the integrity and significance of these resources.
- **LU.6-2** Make the inventory available to the public, City staff, and decision-makers and incorporate historic preservation considerations into the City’s decision-making process.

In order to implement these *MV2040* historic preservation policies and goals, the City of Mill Valley contracted with Page & Turnbull, a San Francisco-based historic preservation architecture and planning firm in 2017. Their task was two-fold: 1) to prepare a Historic Context

Statement, a narrative history of Mill Valley from the perspective of its built environment, and 2) to survey 174 properties identified as potentially historically significant by the Mill Valley Historical Society to determine their integrity and eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and California Register of Historical Resources. All of the 174 surveyed properties are located within the incorporated boundaries of the City of Mill Valley. Properties that qualified for eligibility were compiled into a Mill Valley Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) list. This list will be available for public review and comment prior to a community meeting, followed by formal review by the Planning Commission and City Council.

An overview of the historic preservation program, including the Draft Historic Context Statement and Historic Resources Inventory is available on the City's website:

https://www.cityofmillvalley.org/gov/departments/building/planning/longrangeplanning/historic_context_statement_survey_update.htm

Historic preservation is at the heart of creating vibrant and meaningful places. Mill Valley's historic buildings and sites represent the community's unique history and physical development over time. They contribute to a strong sense of place and identity for local residents. History and community character are long-held values in Mill Valley. While future development patterns and lifestyles no doubt will change, the city's historic built environment maintains a dependable, expressive connection to its past. Historic preservation does not simply mean keeping old buildings exactly as they were in the past. Rather, contemporary preservation practice includes a dynamic set of considerations—cultural, economic, environmental—that recognize the numerous benefits that come with maintenance and rehabilitation.

What is included in the HRI Survey?

The HRI Survey provides a reconnaissance-level survey of the 174 properties previously identified as having potential historical significance. A reconnaissance-level survey includes taking photographs from the public right-of-way and conducting limited property-specific research, versus an intensive-level survey, which would include a detailed examination and research of the property. Other age-eligible properties in Mill Valley (those that are at least 50 years old) have not been surveyed as part of this process, though they may have historic significance (e.g., associated with a significant person(s), event(s), and/or architecture) and retain the integrity of their original design. Such properties could be surveyed in a future effort.

What does historic integrity and significance mean?

Historic significance and integrity are two interrelated concepts that provide the foundation for identifying historic resources. In order to be an eligible historic resource, a property must be significant within the context of history. Historic context themes often relate to the historic development of a community, such as commercial or industrial activities. They may relate to the occupation of a group, the rise of an architectural movement, the work of a master

architect, specific events or activities, or a pattern of physical development that influenced the character of a place at a particular time in history.

Historic integrity has very specific connotations regarding historic properties. Historic integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance from the past through its physical characteristics. Historic integrity is the composite of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

How was the HRI Survey conducted?

Mill Valley's HRI Survey was undertaken using the previously identified list of properties, Geographic Information System (GIS) data, field observation, and the Historic Context Statement, among other information. In order for these properties to qualify as historic resources, they needed to meet evaluation criteria as well as retain sufficient integrity to convey their significance today. Page & Turnbull's evaluation began with a visual survey from the public right-of-way of all 174 buildings to narrow down those that retained integrity and should be considered for historic significance, using the integrity thresholds outlined in the HCS. As part of the analysis, the 174 properties were photographed from the sidewalk or street.

The Historic Context Statement was then used to evaluate the historic significance of buildings that retained integrity using eligibility criteria for the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources. All surveyed properties were documented in a survey database, which includes information about their appearance, historic context, and evaluation of significance. The methodology for the survey and the survey results were summarized in a Survey Report, which will be released for public review and comment in draft form.

How does inclusion in the Historic Resource Inventory affect my ability to remodel my property?

In Mill Valley, major remodels (interior or exterior) of all buildings require a building permit. Extensive exterior changes of buildings also require Design Review permit approval. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the Mill Valley Municipal Code are the regulatory documents that guide the treatment of historic properties in Mill Valley. Interior alterations are typically not under CEQA purview, particularly in the case of private residences, unless the interiors are publicly accessible and considered historically significant.

According to CEQA, all buildings constructed over 50 years ago that possess architectural or historical significance may be considered potential historic resources, and proposed changes to these buildings may require some level of environmental review. CEQA review is a state-mandated process that, in part, determines whether a building is or is not considered a historic resource, and whether the proposed changes will have a negative impact on the resource.

In the CEQA review process, a Historic Resource Evaluation (HRE) may be required to determine whether the property has historic significance and retains integrity of design. In addition, if the structure is a historic resource, the HRE analyzes the project design for the potential to cause a negative impact. Development projects that are designed to be sensitive to the historic character of the property will receive a Categorical Exemption (Cat. Ex.), which means that no further environmental review is required, while projects that introduce a large amount of change, including demolition, could require more intensive environmental review. More information about the CEQA environmental review process as it relates to historic buildings is located at the California Office of Historic Preservation website: http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21721.

The Mill Valley Municipal Code includes requirements for Design Review of certain types of development projects as well as the Historic-Overlay Zoning designation, which applies to specific historic properties.

Properties that are included in the HRI follow the same Building Permit and Design Review process as non-listed properties. However, there are potential benefits to being included in the HRI when remodeling, such as a more streamlined CEQA review process and Building Permit process, which are outlined in the following FAQ.

How does inclusion in the Historic Resource Inventory benefit property owners?

Properties that are included in the HRI have the benefit of a potentially shorter and less expensive CEQA review process because only the proposed project must be evaluated, not whether the structure *is* a historic resource. Thus, a more limited HRE could be completed in less time. The HRE would summarize the structure's significance, include limited property-specific research, and outline character-defining features that will assist a historic preservation professional to analyze the proposed project pursuant to CEQA.

In addition, owners of qualified historic buildings have the opportunity to use the California Historical Building Code (CHBC) when maintaining or remodeling a building. The CHBC is a more flexible alternative to the California Building Code (CBC) for the preservation or rehabilitation of buildings designated as "historic." These regulations are intended to facilitate repair or accommodate a change of occupancy so as to preserve a historic resource's original or restored architectural features. Issues addressed by the CHBC include: use and occupancy; means of egress; archaic materials and methods of construction; fire protection; alternative accessibility provisions; mechanical, plumbing, and electrical requirements; and alternative structural regulations. These more flexible provisions of the CHBC can result in significant time and cost savings to the property owner.

Will listing on the City of Mill Valley's HRI affect my property tax?

No. The HRI is not used for tax assessment purposes. However, some jurisdictions develop programs to provide property tax relief for owners who maintain their historic properties, such

as the [Mills Act program](#). The Mills Act Program is a state law that cities can choose to implement, which allows the city to enter into a contract with the owners of historic buildings; the contracts provide a reduction of property taxes in exchange for the continued preservation of the property. Properties that are identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and that will be used for a business or other income-producing purpose may also be able to apply for [Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits](#).

It is also worth noting that concern about negative economic effects is often raised when discussing historic preservation. However, many studies have shown a direct correlation between the creation of historic preservation programs and policies and a long-term increase in property values. A sampling of articles and resources on the topic are located here:

<http://www.sohosandiego.org/resources/historicvalues.pdf>;

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e8e5/f6506c288db4b4b4f914037096499d7e7302.pdf>;

<https://www.achp.gov/initiatives/community-revitalization-economic-benefits/area-studies>

My property is not listed on the HRI. Does that mean my building is not historic?

No. The vast majority of buildings in Mill Valley have not been surveyed, documented, or listed as historic resources. However, according to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), all buildings constructed over 50 years ago may be historical resources and proposed alterations require some level of environmental review.

My property is not listed on the HRI, but I think that it may qualify as a historic resource and I'm interested in having it listed. What can I do to seek listing?

The Mill Valley Planning Department would be happy to consider additional properties for inclusion in the HRI. Please contact Lisa Newman, Senior Planner via phone 415.388.4033 x 4811 or email lnewman@cityofmillvalley.org to discuss.

When will the HCS and HRI Survey be completed?

The HCS went through a public review and comment period in May and June 2018 and received a recommendation for approval by the Planning Commission on June 26, 2018.

The Draft HRI Survey Report is available for public review and comment prior to Community Meeting scheduled on November 9, 2020. The Community Meeting will be followed by public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council in 2021. Visit the project website for more information and updates: (<http://www.cityofmillvalley.org/historic>) .

HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

What is a Historic Context Statement?

A Historic Context Statement (HCS) is a specialized historic study. It focuses on the physical development of an area—how and why it developed, what types of properties characterized that development, and whether or not they may be historically significant. An HCS identifies significant themes, patterns and property types, so that interested parties can recognize the forces that shaped the built environment over time. This provides a framework that helps in the identification, evaluation, and treatment of historic properties.

What is the purpose of an HCS?

In 2013, the City of Mill Valley adopted the *Mill Valley General Plan MV2040*, which includes a variety of policies and programs that are aimed at protecting and enhancing Mill Valley's community character and its historic properties. The HCS fulfills Land Use Element Policy LU.8: *Promote education about and greater appreciation of historic preservation.*

The HCS achieves this General Plan policy by helping the community to:

- better understand historic properties, even in the absence of comprehensive knowledge about specific buildings
- establish preservation goals and strategies
- support the update of the City's informal inventory of historic properties
- provide the basis for future preservation planning decisions & programs

What is not included in an HCS?

An HCS is a summary of an area's physical development. It is not intended to be a comprehensive community history, nor does it evaluate the significance or eligibility of individual properties to be considered historic resources.

Who uses the HCS?

The HCS may be used by anyone. It is intended to help property owners, members of the community, architects, historic resources planning consultants, city planners, and decision-making bodies such as the Planning Commission, recognize and consider protection of historic properties.

Can the HCS tell me when my property was built?

Generally speaking, the HCS does not provide specific construction dates for particular properties. However, it can help you focus on the period when your property was constructed. By reading about the property types and architectural styles that are associated with different periods of development in Mill Valley, you should be able to make an educated guess about when your property was built.

Where can I learn more about the history of my property?

For those interested in learning more about their property, visit the Mill Valley Public Library either in person or online. The Mill Valley Public Library’s Lucretia Little History Room collection includes maps, city directories, newspaper articles, photographs, ephemera, and other pertinent publications. The Mill Valley Historical Society is another online resource for articles and photographs; their annual publication, *Mill Valley Historical Society Review*, is available digitally through the Mill Valley Public Library.

A photo of my property appears in the HCS. Does this mean it is historically significant?

Not necessarily. The photos in the HCS are intended to support the text descriptions, or to provide examples of property types. However, just because a photo of a building appears in the HCS does not automatically mean that the property is an eligible historic resource.

Will the HCS place restrictions on my property?

No. The HCS is an informational document that is intended to implement General Plan policies and integrate with the City’s existing development review process. It will help building owners, planners, and other interested parties evaluate the potential historic significance of a property, but does not establish any official designation, development restriction, or other limitation.