

## 6.0 Historic Resources

A key defining element of Downtown Burlingame is the variety and character of its buildings. They include a range of periods and styles, providing a setting that is unique among area downtown districts. The notion that older buildings or districts can have meaning for cities has been proven in cohesive historic neighborhoods, in renewed commercial districts and in the conservation of landmark structures. The renovation and adaptive reuse of these historic buildings is often a benefit to the community as a whole and the owners of surrounding properties.

In downtown Burlingame, there are a number of older buildings, some of which may qualify as historic resources. Other buildings may have historic architectural features that also contribute to the character of the downtown. The challenge is to balance the benefit that these buildings and features provide to the downtown as a whole with the cost to the property owners of preserving the buildings and features. To do this, the Burlingame Downtown Specific Plan proposes a number of incentives to encourage property owners to maintain historic buildings. The Plan also proposes a refinement of the current mandatory design review process for all buildings in the downtown area (as described in the Design Guidelines chapter of this plan) to reinforce the importance of maintaining the historic character of the Downtown area.

### 6.1 DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

The Downtown Specific Plan applies design review to downtown projects to ensure high-quality design and architectural compatibility throughout Downtown. Key features of the design review framework include:

- requiring design review for all new buildings and most renovations in downtown, not just historic buildings. Design guidelines are described in Chapter 5 – Design & Character;
- allowing historic character and features to be considered in the context of the project as a whole, which will enable the decision makers to weigh benefits and costs of different approaches;
- consideration of historic character and features of each building individually, and encouraging property owners to preserve buildings and features as appropriate.



## 6.2 INVENTORY OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Downtown Specific Plan includes an Inventory of Historic Resources that identifies which properties appear to be eligible as historic resources, based on State and federal criteria. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all local governments to determine the impacts of any project for which the city grants a discretionary permit. Buildings that are identified in the inventory as eligible for the State or federal registers must be considered historic resources for purposes of analysis pursuant to CEQA.

For significant exterior alterations (e.g. changes that significantly alter the appearance of the structure, or additions to the structure) to a potentially historic property, the property owner would need to hire a qualified historic resource consultant to evaluate the property to first make a determination of the property's eligibility as an historic resource. If found to qualify as an historic resource, significant alterations to the exterior of the structure would be evaluated for consistency with the historic character of the structure. A property owner's ability to perform routine maintenance of the exterior of properties and interior alterations are not affected by the identification of a property as a potential historic resource.



## 6.3 INCENTIVES FOR PRESERVING HISTORIC RESOURCES

Some buildings may already qualify for state or federal programs that provide incentives for property owners. To provide further incentives, the City will consider establishing several new programs as described in this chapter. The Downtown Specific Plan includes the framework to allow interested property owners to pursue registration on the State and Federal registers should they be interested. The Inventory of Historic Resources prepared for the Downtown Specific Plan provides initial qualification criteria for utilizing preservation incentives.

A key element of the implementation programs of the Downtown Specific Plan is the creation of a voluntary local register of historic properties. Under the program, owners of potentially eligible properties may apply for listing on the local register in order to take advantage of other programs that promote the maintenance, rehabilitation and/or preservation of historic resources. These programs are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

## 6.4 HISTORIC RESOURCES PROGRAMS

### 6.4.1 DOWNTOWN BURLINGAME REGISTER OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Implementation of the Downtown Specific Plan will include creation of the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources. The register will be voluntary, and only the property owner may apply for designation of his/her property as a local resource. An historic resource evaluation by a qualified professional would be required prior to inclusion on the local register. Inclusion on the register will allow property owners to obtain Mills Act tax abatements, and take advantage of other programs that promote the preservation of historic resources. Applications for structures on the Downtown Register would follow the same design review procedures as all other downtown projects.



Alternatively, property owners may choose to apply to be listed on State or National registers, but not elect to be listed on the Downtown Register. An historic resource evaluation by a qualified professional would be required to determine eligibility for State or National registers.

#### 6.4.2 STATE HISTORICAL BUILDING CODE (SHBC)

Buildings designated as historic resources either at the local (Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources), State or federal level may benefit from the application of the State Historical Building Code (SHBC). The SHBC provides an alternative to the regular Building Code for historic buildings, to allow them to meet building code requirements in a way that is more compatible with the historic nature of the building.

#### 6.4.3 MILLS ACT

The Mills Act Property Tax Abatement Program is the most important preservation incentive program in California. Mills Act contracts are between the property owner and the local government granting the tax abatement. Each jurisdiction individually determines the criteria and requirements for participation. Properties listed on an officially adopted local, State, or federal register may qualify for the Mills Act program.

#### 6.4.4 FEDERAL REHABILITATION TAX CREDITS

The Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) administers the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program for California in partnership with the National Park Service pursuant to federal regulations (36 CFR Part 67). This program provides federal tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, including buildings included on a historic resources inventory and buildings constructed before 1936.

#### 6.4.5 REDUCED PERMIT FEES FOR HISTORIC RENOVATION

As part of the Implementation Program for the Downtown Specific Plan, the city will consider reducing planning and building permit fees for historic renovation projects that conform to the Secretary of



The Burlingame Garden Center Project on Chapin Avenue involved the restoration and adaptive reuse of the historic Farrell Residence (left), together with the addition of a contemporary office wing (right).

Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. (codified in 36 CFR 67 for use in the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program) Properties must be listed on the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources to qualify.

#### 6.4.6 REDUCED PARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR ADAPTIVE REUSE

As part of the Implementation Program, a zoning code amendment should be considered that would allow, through the design review process, the Director of Community Development the discretion to grant parking reductions for projects that maintain the integrity of locally registered resources. Parking reductions may be in the form of a waiver, a partial reduction, and/or reduced parking in-lieu fees for projects within the Downtown Parking Zone. Properties must be listed on the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources to qualify.



#### 6.4.7 DESIGN EXCEPTIONS

The Implementation Program would also consider code amendments that would allow, through the design review process, the Planning Commission to have the discretion to grant leeway in setbacks, building coverage, and building height for projects that maintain the integrity of locally registered resources. Properties must be listed on the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources to qualify.

#### 6.4.8 FACADE RESTORATION GRANTS

For property owners wanting to maintain or restore an historic façade, the City may be able to offer a grant for a portion of the project cost. The ability to implement this program will depend on City resources, but establishing the program could be a longer-term goal as finances allow. Ultimately, projects would need to conform to the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (codified in 36 CFR 67 for use in the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program), and properties must, at a minimum, be listed on the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources to qualify.

### 6.5 PROMOTION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Downtown Specific Plan recognizes the significance of historic resources to the charm and appeal of Downtown Burlingame. To recognize and promote the importance of historic resources, the following actions are encouraged:

- Map of Historic Resources – A map providing a self-guided tour of buildings and resources on the Downtown Burlingame Register of Historic Resources and State and federal registries can be an attraction for residents and visitors wanting a diversion.
- Tours of Historic Resources – The historical society could host monthly (or more frequently, if demand warrants) tours of registered buildings and resources, with the consent of the affected property owners. This could be an additional attraction for residents and visitors wanting a diversion, and be informative to those interested in Burlingame and its history.
- Historic Tourism – As an economic vitality initiative, promotion of historic resources could be packaged with shopping, dining, or lodging.

