

Would an HPOZ Be Good for Los Feliz?

Several years ago, the city of Los Angeles nominated four neighborhoods to be added to the list of over 20 neighborhoods that are Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs). Of those neighborhoods, (Windsor Square, Hancock Park, Larchmont Village and Los Feliz) only Los Feliz has yet to become an HPOZ. Many people are not aware of HPOZs—or worse, they misunderstand the idea of HPOZs. Let's take a look:

What is an HPOZ? An HPOZ is an area within a municipality that is recognized as having special architectural, cultural and/or historical attributes that are worth preserving for both the benefit of the neighborhood, as well as for the municipality in general.

Is an HPOZ necessary? The only way that a neighborhood in Los Angeles can directly control development or re-development of a neighborhood is through the HPOZ process. Zoning regulations, building codes and community plans will not preserve the way a neighborhood looks—in fact, in some ways, the latter encourage change. HPOZs discourage “tear-downs” and radical alterations to a building's façade by requiring a review board to approve such changes.

Who benefits from an HPOZ? Historically, property values rise when a neighborhood becomes an HPOZ because buyers are willing to pay more for properties in areas where change evolves according to established styles and patterns of development. Current and future property owners benefit from HPOZs. Crime is lower in HPOZs, as well.

Who doesn't benefit from an HPOZ? One group who do not benefit from HPOZs are developers who want to change their properties with minimal control from, or accountability to, existing property owners. This type of speculator is typically from outside the neighborhood, has a short-term interest in the community and moves on to another project and locale quickly. The results of their endeavors, whether good or bad, last a lifetime or more.

Will an HPOZ cost me money? HPOZs do not require property owners to initiate work to their properties. Only if you decide to do work to your property that is visible from the street will you need the approval of the HPOZ review board. An HPOZ review board does not care about work, such as kitchen remodels, that is not visible from the street.

Are there tax benefits to HPOZs? There can be tax benefits to owners of qualifying properties in an HPOZ under the Mills Act. If your property has an assessed valuation of less than \$500,000 (there is an exemption process for properties assessed at more than \$500,000) and you sign a 10-year contract with the city to maintain or to restore your property, you may qualify for property tax

relief of up to about 60% of your tax bill. Under the Mills Act, you may also pass on your present assessed valuation to subsequent owners, thus offering a sales incentive when you sell your property.

How does an HPOZ work? Every HPOZ has a review board of five members, some of whom have particular expertise such as architecture, construction, real estate, engineering and the like. Members are appointed by the local councilperson, mayor, Cultural Heritage Commission or the board itself. Terms are for four years, with a two-term maximum. At least three residents of the particular HPOZ neighborhood are on the board. Whenever a property owner applies for a building permit for work that affects the exterior appearance of the building, the permit application is reviewed by the board for its “appropriateness” to the HPOZ’s preservation plan. Sometimes changes are suggested as a condition of permit approval. Often, the expertise of the board can be of great benefit to local property owners.

Should I support a Los Feliz HPOZ? If you are concerned that a “McMansion” could be built next to you that could spoil the light, air, privacy and value of your property, support the Los Feliz HPOZ. If you grew up in Los Feliz and consider your “hometown” to be an heirloom, support the Los Feliz HPOZ. If you love Los Feliz, live here by choice and would like to preserve its unique beauty and history for us today and for future generations, support the Los Feliz HPOZ.

For more information, visit: <http://www.laconservancy.org>.