



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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What Can I Do With My Historic Building?

Many County residents who own or are considering purchasing a property listed on the Historic Resources Inventory for Santa Cruz County would like to know, “Can I do anything with the historic building?” The answer to this is yes, you can do many things to a designated historic property, including repairs, alterations and additions, as long as the proposed project protects the historic integrity of the resource. Let’s take a look at proposed work to the inside and the outside of a historic building separately.

1. Proposed work on the **inside** of a historic building

For structures designated as NR-5 (of local historic significance) in the Historic Resources Inventory, you can make changes to the inside of the building without regard to the historic preservation regulations. You would, of course, still need whatever building permit, electrical permit, etc., would normally be required, but you would not need any approval from the County’s Historic Resources Commission (HRC). For historic properties rated NR-1 through NR-4, proposed alterations to the interior of the structure may also require historic review.

2. Proposed work on the **outside** of a historic building

Work proposed on the outside of a historic building generally requires approval of a Historic Resource Preservation Plan application by the HRC, except for painting and ordinary maintenance that doesn’t involve changing the design or materials. There is no fee for the HRC review if it is required.

What does the HRC look at when it reviews an application? There are a number of criteria that the HRC uses when reviewing an application for work proposed on the outside of a historic building. These ten criteria are listed in County Code Section 16.42.060(C). New construction on a property with a designated historic resource may also require a historic preservation plan and review by the HRC. Which of these criteria apply depend upon the specifics of the particular project. Essentially, the HRC considers how the proposed work would affect the historic significance and architectural features of the existing building. Illustrated guidelines about implementing the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, which address additions, windows, roofs, and porches to help you better plan for work you may wish to do to the exterior of your historic building, are available from the Planning Department.

We do have some incentives that allow you various “breaks” when it comes to changes to your historic building. These include use of the *State Historic Building Code*, which allows greater flexibility for projects in some cases through the use of non-standard materials and methods, where necessary to protect the historic significance of the structure. Other incentives applicable only to historic buildings include the following:

1. Nonconforming additions to a non-conforming historic building, if within the footprint of the existing building, do not require a variance.
2. Alterations to historic structures do not trigger the need to follow certain geologic hazard requirements.

If you have further questions about the historic resource designation, please contact the historic resources planner at 454-3111 or pln400@co.santa-cruz.ca.us.