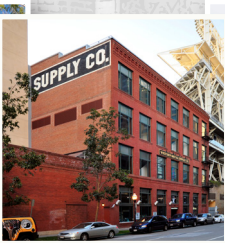


GUIDE & TOOLKIT FOR

PRESERVATION ADVOCACY



SAVE OUR HERITAGE ORGANISATION

Protecting San Diego's architectural and cultural heritage since 1969.

www.SOHOsandiego.org

GUIDE & TOOLKIT FOR



PRESERVATION ADVOCACY

SOHO serves all of San Diego County. It covers 4,200 square miles, or roughly 2.7 million acres with 18 cities and 45 unincorporated areas.

The historic and cultural resources in this large region represent our collective heritage, ranging from residential, commercial, and industrial buildings and landmarks, to cultural landscapes, archeological sites, and transportation corridors.

Attending community meetings throughout the county we hear citizens expressing concerns about their quality of life, and about the historic environment, older neighborhoods that attracted them to the area in the first place, and the loss of historic resources and how this impacts them. They explain to public officials how the preservation of historic continuity and character enhances their neighborhoods and how important this is to them.

When a threatened historic site has the interest, concern and support of the community, it goes a long way in allowing SOHO to successfully argue its case.

Community groups' and organizations' preservation advocacy has been successful with Mission Hills Heritage, La Playa Heritage, and others, along with the established historical societies of University Heights, La Jolla, Lemon Grove, Coronado, La Mesa, Kensington, Hillcrest, Ocean Beach, Oceanside, and Escondido. All of their community plans have a strong preservation element.

We've put together a database of San Diego City and County historic preservation commissions (HPCs) that indicates if your city has a historic commission, and, if so, when and where they meet. (<http://www.sohosandiego.org/resources/hpcssandiegocounty.pdf>).

[SOHOsandiego.org](http://www.sohosandiego.org) is a good place to start. There you can download best practices, state and federal regulations, historic designation information, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, contact information for officials, and more.

These are all building blocks for protecting and preserving your neighborhood. And, we are always just a phone call or email away to answer questions. If you are not already a member, join SOHO, as there truly is strength in numbers. **Together we are a force.**

First, discover whatever you can about the building or site that you are trying to preserve; identification of the site's importance is the first order of business.

What makes the building or place significant?

- Is the architecture unusual or special?
- Did a famous or local architect design the place?
- Did an important builder build it?
- Did a famous person live there?
- Did an important event take place there?

SOHO has an online step-by-step guide of how to research a historic site that can help you to determine these next important areas; visit [SOHOsandiego.org/resources/researchhouse.htm](https://www.sohosandiego.org/resources/researchhouse.htm). If you do not have internet access, just call our office and we will mail you a copy.

Is it on the National Register of Historic Places?

- You can locate National Register status at the National Register Information System <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm#table>
- A register listing doesn't always protect a building but it does show significance of the structure.
- Usually structures and landscapes in historic districts are protected by district regulations
- If not part of an existing local historic district, consider the building or site's ability to be incorporated into one by visiting [SOHOsandiego.org/resources/historicdistricts.htm](https://www.sohosandiego.org/resources/historicdistricts.htm)
- Does it have any other type of important designation or status in the community?

Determine the exact nature of the threat to the building/landscape

Is it owner neglect? If so, most cities have a local health and zoning law that requires that buildings be maintained. San Diego City has a Demolition by Neglect ordinance. Call the City immediately to notify them and make a formal complaint.

Is it threatened with demolition or with alteration beyond recognition?

Check to see if your community has a demolition delay ordinance that will halt the demolition. If permit signs have been posted, copy information from the sign to contact the owner or developer to find out more about the proposal.

Can you offer the owner any prudent and feasible alternatives to destruction?

Consider adaptive reuse via private ownership. Old/historic buildings can be successfully converted to office, residential, retail or other use.

Determine your goal (or that of your group)

- Do you want to save and stabilize a building or are you considering long-term plans for the building/landscape?
- Long-term plans require a great deal more funding, planning and energy than just short-term stabilization. Make sure that you have a solid plan (which includes funding sources) before you embark on any large projects.

Determine who else is trying to save the building (local historical societies, preservation organizations, government agencies) and join forces with them.

- Along with this, make friends throughout the community. Often a variety of people (environmentalists, business leaders, local officials) not just preservationists will join you if they believe in your cause.
- A group is more effective than a lone protestor.

Make the community aware of the threatened site. Show people why it is important to save.

- One way to illustrate this is to show images of the site with and without the historic building/landscape.
- When you present reasonable/feasible alternatives to demolition, you provide the community with more reasons to oppose demolition of the building or site. There are often reasons cited for demolition, you should be able to provide reasonable/feasible alternatives.
- Contact the media and keep the issue in the public eye.
- Contact your elected officials and inform them about the threat to the building/landscape. State your concerns about the potential destruction of the building/site and why it's important to save it. Present your plan for alternatives to demolition.
- Work with SOHO and your community group, if one exists in the neighborhood where the building is, to help preserve the historic building/landscape. SOHO can help you with these keys to successful advocacy, and can also provide information on restoration contractors, engineers, architects and researchers. The City of San Diego Historical Resources Board and the County's Historic Site Board can assist with the historic designation process, as can most cities throughout the county.

Always maintain professional behavior

- Listen to the opposition (as you would have them listen to you) and learn from them.
- When you are called to make presentations, you should be clear and succinct.
- Emotional outbursts are counterproductive and will alienate potential allies.

Once successful in your efforts, work with SOHO and the City government whose area it is in to determine the best ways to protect the site

- A good first step is to get a stay of demolition.
- Another approach is to place a preservation easement on the property. A preservation easement is a legal agreement that grants a limited right to a qualified nonprofit organization to protect the property from changes, which are not in keeping with its historic, architectural or natural character. It provides assurance that the property will be protected for generations to come.
- Or, consider other historic designations such as the National or State Registers of Historic Places, historic districts, and local landmarks status.

Important points to remember when writing and calling your elected officials

- Keep the letters and calls brief and concise (letters generally not more than 3 to 5 paragraphs; phone calls generally 1 to 2 minutes).
- Inform the Legislator who you are and if you are from his/her district.
- Say why you are writing/calling.
- Explain the action you want the elected official to take.
- Explain what this action will accomplish (especially in his/her district).
- Ask for his or her vote. Ask if you can count on his/her commitment.
- If the official is unavailable when you call, speak to the staff member. This is more likely to get the message across than waiting for a return phone call, especially if a vote is pending. Staff is very helpful and is there to assist.

Make Your Letter Count - Essential Components of a Letter to Your Elected Official

- Introductory Paragraph. Give a reason for your letter; identify yourself and your interest in the historic site.
- State the action you are seeking. Communicate reasons why they should act in support of the site. These reasons might include historical facts, logic, data, credible opinion, personal experience, and the weaknesses of opposing points of view.
- Letter closing. Restate the action you are seeking, ask for the official's comment. Express appreciation for considering your views. Indicate willingness to help.

Thanks to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation for providing portions of these advocacy steps.