



ROBERT W. CHERNY
PROFESSOR *EMERITUS* OF HISTORY
San Francisco State University
e-mail: [REDACTED]

August 15, 2025

Task Force on Commissions
San Francisco City Hall

RE: Historic Preservation Commission

Dear Task Force Members:

I am writing to you in support of maintaining the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) as a decision-making body.

I was a member, for five years, of the predecessor to the HPC, the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (LPAB), appointed first by Mayor Brown and reappointed by Mayor Newsom. I also served as vice-chair of that board.

The LPAB was, as the name indicates, *advisory*. Our decisions went to the Planning Commission for review and approval. The LPAB included specialists in architecture, history, and preservation. During my time on the board, there were always at least two architects, especially those with experience in preservation. There was often a building contractor. The board included one or more preservation specialists. I was there to provide expertise on the history of the city. The HPC continues this pattern by having seats designated for relevant professionals.

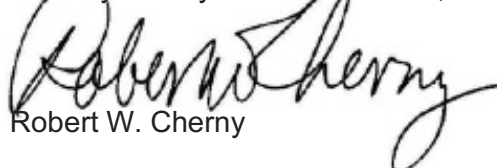
I have to tell you how frustrating it was when the LPAB came to a difficult decision and forwarded it to the Planning Commission, only to have the entire issue hashed out again in that body. I recall having to go to such meetings to defend the professional decisions that had been made by the LPAB.

In short, if you revert to having such decisions made by an advisory body rather than a decision-making body, *the result will only be an increase in the work of the Planning Commission.*

It was in recognition of this reality that the voters of the city, in 2007, approved Proposition J, creating the Historic Preservation Commission. I am attaching the ballot arguments from that election. *And please note that there was NO opposition to the measure.* I encourage you to read the ballot arguments carefully, and note that *one key purpose of the proposition was to streamline decision-making.* And please note, too, that 56% of the city's voters approved making the HPC a decision-making body, and that it was approved in all but two supervisorial districts.

If you follow through, and change the nature of the HPC, you will be acting directly contrary to the will of the voters, increasing the work-load of the Planning Commission, and complicating the approval process for remodeling or new construction.

Thank you for your consideration,


Robert W. Cherny

J

Creating a Historic Preservation Commission

PROPONENT'S ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF PROPOSITION J

HELP PRESERVE OUR WORLD-CLASS CITY. VOTE YES
ON J

As one of the world's most-beloved historic cities, it's time for San Franciscans to adopt world-class best practices that have protected the history and vitality of other great American cities. – that's why we need Proposition J.

ADOPTS BEST PRACTICES FROM AROUND THE
COUNTRY

San Francisco's preservation apparatus is more than forty years old, and needs serious reform. The body currently charged with preserving historic buildings has no final decision-making authority.

Proposition J adopts best practices and national standards of historic cities around the country – including New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia – that have independent preservation commissions with jurisdiction over historic buildings and neighborhoods.

STREAMLINES PERMITTING AND IMPROVES
EFFICIENCY

Proposition J streamlines the review of applications for changes to historic resources and helps prevent the demolition of the landmark buildings and neighborhood character that make San Francisco unique.

Proposition J was drafted collaboratively with the City's Planning Department, Mayor's Office, Landmarks Board, and the California Office of Historic Preservation. The result is a good government measure that provides clear guidance to homeowners, architects, and builders, and gives city staff the best tools available to make sound decisions about our historic buildings and neighborhoods.

PROMOTES ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

Improving San Francisco's preservation efforts will also help the City meet its environmental goals. Supporting the preservation of existing historic structures conserves resources and prevents demolition debris from ending up in California landfills. Construction and demolition waste can comprise up to thirty percent of landfill content.

IT'S TIME FOR PROPOSITION J

It's time we bring San Francisco in line with other great cities by reforming the permitting process for historic buildings and giving an independent commission a voice on preservation issues.

San Francisco Architectural Heritage
National Trust for Historic Preservation
San Francisco Democratic Party
San Francisco Tomorrow

REBUTTAL TO PROPONENT'S ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF PROPOSITION J

NO REBUTTAL TO PROPONENT'S ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF PROPOSITION J WAS SUBMITTED

Arguments printed on this page are the opinion of the authors and have not been checked for accuracy by any official agency.
Arguments are printed as submitted. Spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected.



Creating a Historic Preservation Commission

J

OPPONENT'S ARGUMENT AGAINST PROPOSITION J

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ROBERT W. CHERNY
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF HISTORY
San Francisco State University
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August 18, 2025

Task Force on Commissions
San Francisco City Hall

RE: Historic Preservation Commission

Dear Task Force Members:

Please consider this a follow-up to my previous letter to you, dated August 15. In that letter, I stressed that the creation of the Historic Preservation Commission was, in part, an effort to streamline the process for proposing changes to properties more than fifty years old, by giving the HPC decision-making authority, as opposed to the previous system of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, whose decisions had to go to the Planning Commission for approval.

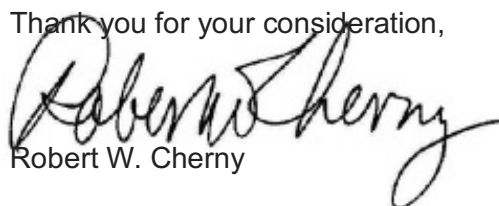
There is another and very important reason to maintain the HPC as a decision-making body. Proposition J of 2008 was carefully written to create a commission that meets the requirements for a Certified Local Government (CLG) Program as specified in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in 1980. The CLG program is a partnership among local governments, the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), and the National Park Service (NPS). One of the five basic requirements to be a CLG is: establish an historic preservation review commission by local ordinance. Proposition J was specifically designed to meet that and other requirements for a CLG. You can find more information on the website of the California Office of Historic Preservation, especially at https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23581.

Part of the CLG Program includes grants to local governments to assist with historic preservation programs. Since 2008, San Francisco has benefited from having a CLG through the grants program available only to CLGs. These grants have been for various purposes related to historic preservation, including

- ☐ Developing an American Indian National Register Multiple Property Document
- ☐ Developing a Chinese American Experience Historic Context Statement
- ☐ Developing a Neighborhood Commercial Buildings Survey
- ☐ Developing a Sunset District Historic Context and Survey, 1930-1950

In conclusion, changing the HPC to an advisory body would (a) reverse the streamlining created by Proposition J, unnecessarily complicating the process for permits on properties more than fifty years old; and (b) prevent access to future planning grants relating to historic properties.

Thank you for your consideration,



Robert W. Cherny