

August 19, 2025

Task Force on Commissions
San Francisco City Hall

Regarding: Historic Preservation Commission

Dear Members of the Task Force on Commissions:

I understand that the Task Force will consider retention, modification, and elimination of commissions according to a publicly available schedule. However, it has become evident that criteria are being established now that could affect how some commissions are evaluated and treated over the next several months.

Of particular concern is the possibility that the Historic Preservation Commission, the result of a popular citizen's initiative, Proposition J, in 2008, would be changed from decision-making to advisory only.

The City's original Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, established in 1967, was a relatively early preservation review body in the U.S., but by the late 1990s, the LPAB was anachronistic for a city the size and significance of San Francisco. The campaign to create a commission equal to those of other major cities and that met the criteria of the National Park Service's Certified Local Government program (as per the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, amended in 1980) met no opposition and was supported by 56% of the voters.

The most significant changes between the LPAB and the HPC were the following:

- Commission members are required to have specific professional qualifications
- Commission approval of permits for the alteration of designated historic buildings
- Commission ability to offer recommendations regarding proposed ordinances and resolutions concerning historic resources

These changes, as outlined by the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, brought expertise to the disposition of historic resources, thereby making planning and development review and decision making better informed and more efficient.

Well over 2,000 CLGs exist in the U.S. A program of the National Park Service, the CLG program provides significant funding and program assistance to those local governments meeting the criteria. In six of the last 12 years, the San Francisco Planning Department has been awarded substantial grants through the CLG program.

I urge this Task Force and the staff supporting it to retain the HPC as a decision-making body and to call on experts with knowledge of historic preservation law, policy, and practice to help inform your evaluation and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Courtney Damkroger

Former member of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board

Former Vice President of the Historic Preservation Commission

Former Historic Preservation Officer, City of San Jose and Assistant Regional Director of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation