

# HOW TO APPLY FOR THE HISTORIC REGISTER AND MILLS ACT



by Marc LaFont

If you've been thinking about applying for the Santa Ana historic register, now's the time! The application to be on the historic register and apply for the Mills Act was lowered from \$7,000 to \$3,000. Prior to that, it would have cost you \$10,000.

If you have an older home in Floral Park, and most of us do, you most likely want to preserve and restore the home's historic qualities. After all, that's what makes our homes unique, and gives it value. Being on the historic register guarantees that your home will maintain its unique historic charm and character. But it also offers additional advantages.

Studies have shown that homes and neighborhoods on the historic register are worth more than those that aren't. That's a plus if you ever want to sell your home. There are currently more than 200 homes in Floral Park listed on the Santa Ana Register of Historic Properties. Another advantage is that being on the register qualifies you for The Mills Act.

The Mills Act encourages owners of historic properties to maintain their homes by offering savings on property taxes. In turn, owners are able to put that savings back into the care of their historic home. The expectation is that you will maintain your property and keep it in good condition. Penalties will be imposed for a breach of contract or failure to maintain a historic property. A Mills Act contract lasts ten years and is transferred to the new owner when a property is sold. Ac-

ording to the OC Tax Assessor's Office, the Mills Act can mean savings from 8% to nearly 70% off your pre-contract property tax bill!

Santa Ana establishes its own rules to determine which properties are selected. To qualify in Santa Ana, homes must be listed on the city's list of historic properties and be owner-occupied, single family residences. Because the Mills Act contract passes on from owner to owner into perpetuity, new owners may keep the same low tax base. This enables new buyers to afford a home for which they may not otherwise qualify. This is another major advantage when selling your home.

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***“Restoration not only restores the house but restores the story... of the home and the neighborhood”***

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The Mills Act is not for everyone, however, and while some homes will see tax benefits, others may not. Those purchasing or who recently purchased a historic home along with those selling a historic home may receive the most benefit. If you've owned your home for some time and it's under a Prop 13 valuation, you may not realize a tax savings.

Wondering whether or not your home qualifies to be on the list of historic properties? Well if it's in Floral Park, there's a good chance that it does. Most of the homes here were built between

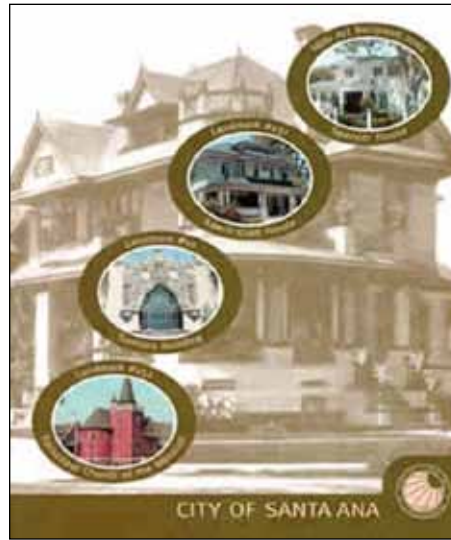
1920 and 1960, all which may qualify as long as the exterior of the property hasn't significantly changed in appearance. Anyone can nominate a property, including their own, for the Santa Ana historic register. Being a part of a national historic district (which we hope will be finalized this year), will be a big plus when applying for the register.

To submit a historical property application to be placed on the register, you'll need to complete an application found at [FloralPark.com/your-home](http://FloralPark.com/your-home) or the city's website mentioned above. Fill in your name, the property description, when it was built, any changes to the original property and why you think your home should be on the registry. Much of the information can be found on the building permit history card which can be obtained at the Santa Ana planning department counter. If you decide to apply for the Mills Act, now is a great time complete that application too. For it, you need to list what rehabilitation or maintenance work you plan for the next ten years, photos of all elevations of the structures (home, garage, etc.), a copy of grant deed reflecting ownership of applicant, fully dimensioned site plan illustrating all structures on the site, distances to property lines, and parcel dimensions plus preliminary title report within six months.

For some people, doing the research on the historic nature of your home can be a fun treasure hunt. But if not, help is on the way in the form of [HistoricAssets.com](http://HistoricAssets.com), a historic research service founded by Dylan Almendral, the historian who did the research for Floral Park's National Historic District

application. He'll research the chain of ownership and occupancy, do an archival search, check the permit history, document grant deeds, and look up historic events from tea parties to crimes. You'll even get photography and an aerial map. You can then submit your own forms with this information, or hire him to package this information for submission.

Once submitted, someone from the Planning Department will visit and inspect the exterior of the house to make sure it qualifies (vinyl windows, doors, and siding, and non-historic revisions and alterations will disqualify a home almost immediately). They will then research your property, complete the necessary forms, assign a property category and prepare a presentation for the HRC meeting. Properties are assigned one of three categories: contributive, key and landmark. Contributive means that structure or site contributes to the overall character and history of a



neighborhood and is a good example of period architecture. Key means the structure has a distinctive architectural style and quality, is characteristic of a significant period in the history of the city, or is associated with a significant person or event in the city. Landmark means the structure is on the National or California Register, appears eligible

for listing on the National or California Register, has historical/cultural significance to the city, or has a unique architectural significance.

Next, a temporary sign will be placed in your yard announcing a public meeting to be held to discuss and vote on your application. Your neighbors within 500 feet will be notified and you may be visited by one or more commissioners. The HRC currently meets online quarterly on the first Thursday of January, April, July and October. Once they approve your application, it then goes before the City Council. Someone from the planning department will present your home and you will be given the opportunity to talk about it before the council votes whether or not to approve your application.

Once approved, you're on your way to huge tax savings starting with the next calendar year's property taxes. For more information, go to [floralpark.com/your-home](http://floralpark.com/your-home).

*Q. Do I need to apply for the Santa Ana historic register before I can apply for the Mills Act?*

**A** You can do both simultaneously.

*Q. Why should I maintain the historic features of my property?*

**A** By maintaining the historic features of your property you are helping to preserve the city's rich history and historic streetscapes. You can also increase the value of your property and the surrounding neighborhood. It also makes your property eligible for the City's Mills Act program.

*Q. Can I swap out my old windows?*

**A** You should always maintain, repair and restore older windows instead of sacrificing them in the name of energy efficiency. Replacing the windows of a historic home erodes its character and integrity. Fortunately, there are a number of energy efficiency retrofitting options available such as tinting and

weather-stripping. See Window Restoration & Repair's ad/link at [floralpark.com/sponsors](http://floralpark.com/sponsors).

*Q. Can I be historic and still have solar panels on my roof?*

**A** Yes, Solar panels installed on a historic property in a location that cannot be seen from the public right-of-way or primary elevation will generally meet the Secretary of Interior Standards. For more, go to [FloralPark.com/your-home](http://FloralPark.com/your-home).

*Q. If I'm on the historic register can I still modernize the interior of my home?*

**A** Yes. The HRC is only concerned with the exterior of your home.

*Q. How are my property tax savings calculated if I am awarded a Mills Act contract?*

**A** There are a number of factors that contribute to a property tax savings calculation. For an explanation of how your property tax will

be calculated and an estimate of how much you may save under the Mills Act program, call the Mills Act contact at the Orange County Assessor's Office at (714) 834-2959.

*Q. What regulations am I required to follow on my historic property?*

**A** If you own a historic property, you are expected to retain and preserve the historic features. When applying for a building permit, historic preservation staff will review the proposed plans and contact you and provide recommendations on how to preserve your home's historic features.

*Q. What about paint colors?*

**A** The City does not regulate paint colors for historic properties, it is recommended that you research historic paint colors appropriate for the style of your architecture. Dunn-Edwards maintains a data base of historic colors.