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Historic Preservation Overlay Zones and Where Housing Gets Built in Los Angeles

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Urban and Regional Planning

by

Larson S. Avery

2026

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2026

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Historic Preservation Overlay Zones and Where Housing Gets Built in Los Angeles

by

Larson S. Avery

Master of Urban and Regional Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor José Loya, Chair

The City of Los Angeles's Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) program adds discretionary review, additional design requirements, and up to 79 days to the entitlement process of new residential projects. Discretion and process-based regulation generally discourages housing construction. Does HPOZ designation meaningfully affect where and how much new housing construction occurs? Permit data from the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety from 1996 to 2025, suggests little construction occurred in HPOZs neighborhoods before designation. This trend continued following designation. HPOZ designation does not affect residential construction within or in surrounding zones in a statistically meaningful way. Policies such as Community Planning, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and corridor-based zoning likely disincentivized housing construction in historic neighborhoods more than HPOZ designation.

The thesis of Larson S. Avery is approved.

Michael Manville

Paavo Monkkonen

José Loya, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who has always been there for me and has supported me through my academic career.

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Introduction

Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs) are geographically contiguous local historic districts intended to protect the City of Los Angeles's cultural and historic resources (LA City Planning). The first HPOZ was founded in 1983, and since then, the city has created 35 zones encompassing 2.4% of parcels (Rypkema, 2020). A unique Preservation Plan guides historic protections in each zone. Los Angeles City Planning staff and local HPOZ Boards approve or deny new projects based on the respective plans (LA City Planning).

American cities, especially coastal cities, have not built enough housing to account for rising demand (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2017). As demand has outstripped supply, housing prices and rents have skyrocketed. In Los Angeles, real home prices have increased by over 450% since 1975 (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2025). Recently housing construction in more affordable metropolitan areas is also tapering off leading to rising prices and rents (Glaeser & Gyourko 2025). American cities are becoming increasingly unaffordable for those without high paying jobs. This has led to declining economic opportunity, rising economic inequality, and widespread gentrification and displacement of the urban working class (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2017; Been et al., 2023). Much of this crisis is a result of policy decisions. Cities and states have created a complex system of overlapping regulatory and procedural barriers such as zoning, design and environmental review, and discretionary review. Combined, they disincentivize new housing construction (Gyourko & Molloy, 2015). The over 642 local historic districts across the United States may constitute a serious disincentive to housing construction that exacerbates the American housing affordable housing crisis (Stanek, 2020).

The HPOZ program's delay and discretionary powers may disincentivize new housing. Alternatively, they may shift new construction to surrounding neighborhoods. This study is the first to quantitatively determine how Los Angeles's historic districts affect the spatial distribution of housing construction. Its findings contribute to the limited national literature on the

relationship between local historic districts and housing construction. Studies in New York City and the Atlanta region found moderate reductions in housing production in neighborhoods following historic districts designation (Been et al., 2014; Patrick, 2025). However, their results are not necessarily generalizable. Specific regulatory, historic, and economic factors in those cities that do not apply to Los Angeles may have influenced the results of these studies. Replicating their methods will better determine if their findings apply to other American cities (Stanek, 2020). Local historic districts are common tools in American urban planning. Since the 1970s, the rate of local historic designation has increased dramatically (Stanek, 2020). Better understanding this relationship helps Los Angeles and California lawmakers determine the HPOZ program's impact on the housing market and housing affordability. More broadly, its findings will help policymakers better weigh the costs and benefits of historic preservation districts.

Section 1: Literature Review

Los Angeles's Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs)

In 1979, the City of Los Angeles adopted the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) Ordinance to prevent development pressures from erasing historic architecture (L.A. Conservancy). Since then, the city has designated 35 zones (Bernstein, 2021). Los Angeles's Historic Resources Survey SurveyLA conducted from 2006 to 2017 turbocharged the designation of new HPOZs (Bernstein, 2021). The City Council approved the designation of 17 of 35 zones since the survey began (LA City Planning).

HPOZ designation is typically a bottom-up community driven process (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024). Neighborhood residents must first gain the political support of their district City Councilor (Bernstein, 2021). After the City Council introduces a motion to study an HPOZ, neighborhood residents lead initial community outreach efforts and begin a historic resource survey (Bernstein, 2021). Once completed city staff review the survey and meet with the community to help draft a preservation plan (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024). A more formal plan must then seek approval from various land use authorities in the city and the full city council (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024). Making sure HPOZ designation moves through these steps requires broad community support and management of diverse coalitions of homeowners, landlords, and renters, and significant neighborhood organizational capacity. (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024).

Development projects within an HPOZ are subject to an additional layer of review from a five to seven-member local HPOZ board and the Los Angeles City Planning Office of Historic Resources (Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources FAQ). The process ensures the development is in line with the local Preservation Plan. Each board consists of five to seven members (Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources FAQ). Three members must be owners or renters living in the district. The City Planning Cultural Heritage Commission appoints two

locals, and the district Councilmember appoints one local (L.A. Office of Historic Resources). The HPOZ process takes up to 75 days. This period is short relative to the average 863-day approval timeline of multifamily projects in Los Angeles (Gabriel & Kung, 2025). For projects that involve demolition or new construction, the board submits input, but City Planning staff have final discretion (Bernstein, 2021). The HPOZ Ordinance only permits demolition when preservation is “economically or structurally infeasible (Bernstein, 2021).

Los Angeles’s governing structure contrasts with New York City’s and Atlanta’s in Been et al. (2014) and Patrick (2025). New York City has a single Landmark Preservation Commission made up of preservation, real estate, and architectural professionals (Landmark Preservation Commission). Along with city staff, these commissioners oversee projects in over 120 historic neighborhoods (Been et al., 2014). In Georgia, jurisdictions are given autonomy to dictate the composition of Historic Preservation Commissions (Patrick, 2025). Commissions could be made up of residents or preservation specialists.

The Homevoter Hypothesis and Neighborhood Defenders Theory

In The Homevoter Hypothesis, William Fischel suggests homeowners use local politics to maximize home values (Fischel, 2001). These “Homevoters” advocate for land use controls such as historic preservation districts to protect and increase their net worth. Preventing new development can preserve or enhance the value of residential properties. For example, building a new apartment building may make parking more difficult or cast shadows on adjacent properties. Preventing its construction will protect neighborhood amenities like street parking and sunlight improving the neighborhood’s attractiveness. More influentially, land use regulation induces artificial scarcity increasing the value of underlying land (Been et al., 2023).

Conversely, Historic district designation’s restrictions on development potential and design flexibility may decrease property values. While restricting density across large areas can

increase land prices, it can make an individual property less valuable. For instance, historic district designation may prevent a property owner from building a garage or adding a new wing to their home (Been et al., 2014). A Homevoter may oppose local historic district designation as it limits its developmental capacity. Historic district designation could potentially increase or decrease land values.

Some studies suggest designation increases home values (Leichenko et al., 2001; Zhou, 2021; Been et al., 2014; Zahirovic-Herbert & Chatterjee, 2012; Thompson et al., 2011). Yet others contend the opposite (Heintzelman & Altieri, 2011; Patrick, 2025). Confronting competing claims on local historic districts' effects on property values, Homevoters act heterogeneously in the face of historic districts (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024).

Historic preservation is not driven only by personal financial motives. In *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*, social scientists Katherine Levine Einstein, David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer suggest a discomfort with change motivates politically active neighbors to oppose development (Levine Einstein et al., 2019). Participatory local institutions such as historic preservation boards are particularly empowering for a wealthy, old, and white minority (Levine Einstein et al., 2019). This group uses their more abundant resources, time, and societal privilege, to dissuade, stop, or scale back new housing development (Levine Einstein et al., 2019).

Homevoters and Defenders' motivations differ. Not all Defenders are homeowners (Levine Einstein et al., 2019). Defenders identify strongly with their community. They have built relationships with their neighbors over decades, their children may be in local schools, and they have fond memories of their neighborhood's past. They are concerned new development will dislocate their community and transform it beyond recognition. Defenders perceive their neighborhood experience as held by the broader community. Unlike Homevoters, whose goal is to protect themselves, Defenders aim to preserve what they see as their community's common

good. Housing developments inspire resistance among Defenders because they are “rapid and highly visible changes” (Levine Einstein et al., 2019).

Research suggests Defenders use historic preservation to maintain control of land use in their neighborhoods. A study of 1990s Washington D.C. found citizens used local historic districts as a “surrogate” to plan their surroundings when other land use controls did not give them adequate protection from change (Gale, 1991). In Los Angeles, external development pressures often catalyzed HPOZ designation (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024). HPOZs give Defenders more opportunities and levers to preserve the status quo. They use these powers to prevent new housing construction (Gabbe, 2018).

Long Regulatory Timelines and Uncertainty Discourage Housing Construction

The relationship between housing supply and land use regulation is firmly established. Limited housing construction occurs in municipalities and neighborhoods that heavily regulate development. A study of California cities from 1970 to 1996 estimated each additional land use regulation reduces new residential permits by 4% (Jackson 2016). A similar analysis in the Boston Metropolitan Area estimated each new regulation decreases construction by 20.6% (Glaeser & Ward, 2009). Other studies of Zurich, Switzerland and Portland, Oregon suggest stringent floor area ratios (FARs) decrease new construction and relaxing those regulations increases housing supply (Büchler & Lutz, 2024; Dong, 2024).

Restrictions on what developers can build are not the only barrier to housing production. Long process-based regulations also discourage housing construction. Holding land while waiting for city approval is costly and uncertainty makes developers less likely to invest in building new housing (Wrenn & Irwin, 2015). Between 2010 and 2022, waiting on city approvals made up 37 percent of the average four-year development timeline for multifamily projects in Los Angeles (Gabriel & Kung, 2025). Research suggests reducing the approval process’s

duration would increase housing production (Gabriel & Kung, 2025). Historic preservation meetings create additional opportunities to delay the construction process, making projects in historic districts less feasible than in other neighborhoods (Mangin, 2014). HPOZ approval adds up to 75 days to the city approval process and adds regulatory uncertainty which may further disincentivize housing.

Historic Districts

Most research suggests local historic district designation hurts housing supply. Two empirical studies have examined a causal link between them. A 2014 difference-in-difference analysis of Historic Districts in New York City found moderate reductions in housing production in neighborhoods after they are designated historic (Been et al., 2014). Areas directly outside of the districts had greater levels of housing construction than other parts of the city. Historic districts are amenities that many will pay a premium to live close to. They suggest market behavior would encourage developers to construct housing just outside their borders where the regulatory market is looser (Been et al., 2014). Yet this study did not account for citywide market and construction trends. Their control groups were areas within the same census tracts as Historic Districts, but outside of the districts. Therefore, its results may reflect construction increasing in neighborhoods surrounding Historic Districts after designation rather than construction decreasing within them (Been et al., 2014).

A recent study of the Greater Atlanta Region seeks to ameliorate this methodological limit using propensity score matching (Patrick, 2025). After controlling for National Register of Historic Places designation, local historic district designation reduced housing construction by 45% (Patrick, 2025).

A study of causal factors of upzoning in Los Angeles found that no parcels zoned for single-family residential within HPOZs were upzoned between 2002 and 2014 (Gabbe, 2018). A

parcel within an HPOZ not zoned for single-family had a 96 percent lower chance of being upzoned than non-HPOZ parcels over the same period (Gabbe, 2018).

Some qualitative research contradicts Been et al. (2014) and Patrick (2025). Prohibitions on duplexes, triplexes, and apartments are not an inherent component of historic districts. (Tisher, 2017). Historic districts hardly ever regulate the interior of structures. When local laws permit, property owners could subdivide a historic building to create additional units (Tisher, 2017). Whether housing construction occurs depends greatly on the difference between the current parcel structure and what zoning allows. If a historic district zoning permits more housing it may grow more than a non-historic neighborhood with zoning does not permit it. Absent historic district designation, other regulations such as unit density, floor area ratio, and allowable uses confound housing construction's spatial distribution. Demand in a historic district may be so high that developers choose to develop there despite needing to adhere to strict architectural rules and expanded timelines.

Historic districts may redistribute new supply rather than suppress it overall. For instance, 20% of Washington D.C. is designated as a local historic district, but has seen considerable housing stock growth (Bryne, 2012). Even if developers pursue fewer projects in historic districts, they may not reduce housing construction overall in a city or metropolitan area. Instead, historic districts may encourage developers to build housing in non-historic neighborhoods (Bryne, 2012). While Bryne does not support his claims quantitatively, his logic is sound. Only 2.4% of Los Angeles's parcels are within an HPOZ (Rypkema, 2020). Making development harder in such a small area may not meaningfully affect residential construction overall as the HPOZ Ordinance does not apply to 97.6% of city parcels.

Section 2: Data

I pulled data from the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) to measure residential construction (Department of Building & Safety). Their dataset includes all permits from January 1996 to June 2025. I only included permits for residential or mixed-use residential permits where the number of dwelling units changed (new construction, accessory dwelling units, demolition, and merging units together). I further narrowed the dataset to permits where the city issued a certificate of occupancy. This excluded projects that were permitted but never built. I also filtered out duplicate permits. Table 1. Table caption example. Table captions go above tables.

Controls and Census Boundaries

I used geographically standardized U.S. Census tract data from the Longitudinal Tract Data Base (LTDB) to create a control group (Logan et al., 2012). Certain demographic factors such as median rent, median home value, share of residents living in single family houses, share of owner-occupied homes, share of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher influence which parcels the city upzones (see Table 1) (Gabbe, 2018). They also likely determine where the city designates HPOZs. Desirable neighborhoods with rising rent and home values may have greater development pressures. Yet these rich and politically connected neighborhoods are likely to adopt land use controls (Gabbe, 2018). The most important factor contributing to an HPOZ designation is whether a neighborhood contains historic structures. To measure historic architecture, I use a tract's share of structures in 1980 built before 1950.

Table 1: Study Controls

Control Variable
Median Rent
Median Home Value
Share of Residents Living in Single Family Homes
Share of Owner-Occupied Homes

Share of Residents with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Share of White Residents
Neighborhood Organizational Capacity (Parking Permit District)
Share of Structures More than 30 Years Old in 1980

The LTDB estimates demographic values across time using standardized tract geographies from the 2010 Decennial Census. This source allows me to calculate the likelihood of HPOZ designation based on demographic data from the 1980 and 2000 Decennial Census, the 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS), and the 2018-2022 ACS. (2000, 2010, and 2020). I combined this data with the 2010 Census tracts boundaries shapefiles from the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These tract boundaries dictate which projects go into the treatment and control groups.

HPOZ Boundaries and Incorporation Dates

Los Angeles City Planning's geospatial data and their database of HPOZ district ordinances contains information on the boundaries and individual zone approvals (Department of City Planning). I used the City Council approval dates as my designation treatment because an HPOZ's local councilmember is the most important political player in the designation process and the rest of the council follows their designation vote (Mawhorter & Kinahan, 2024). Even though the mayor must also approve zones, they do not oppose the City Council's opinion. Therefore, the City Council approval is a moment of certainty to developers that going forward may discourage housing construction in the designated area.

The LA City Geohub, a Los Angeles geospatial database, contains a shapefile of HPOZ boundaries (See Figures 1 and 2). The Los Angeles City Planning website has copies of all the district ordinances which include the dates the City Council designated each zone. The LADBS dataset begins in 1996. Therefore, I excluded six HPOZs approved before the study period

(Angelino Heights, South Carthay, Melrose Hill, Miracle Mile North, Whitley Heights, and Spaulding Square.)

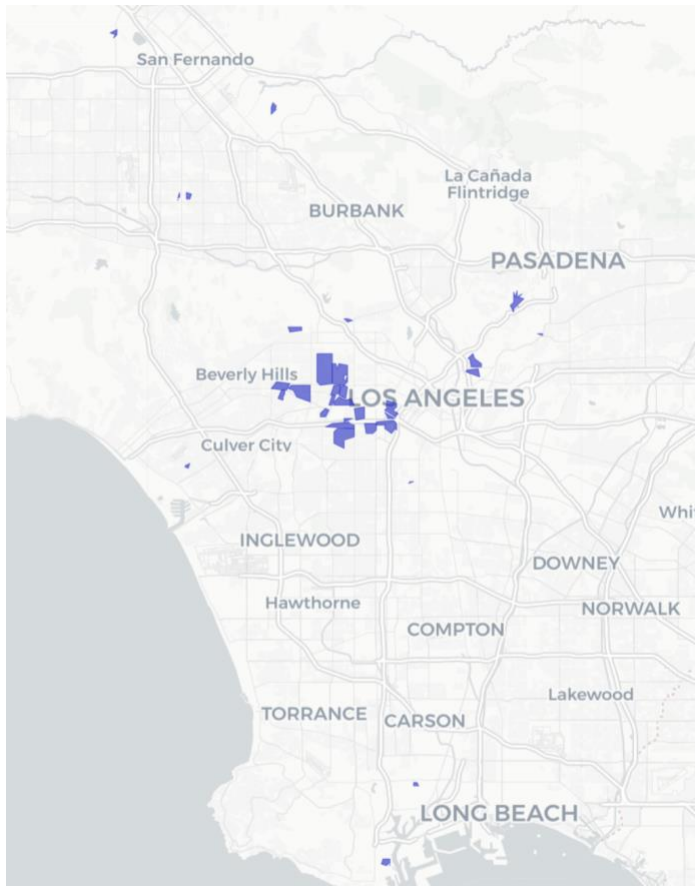


Figure 1: Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZ) in Study

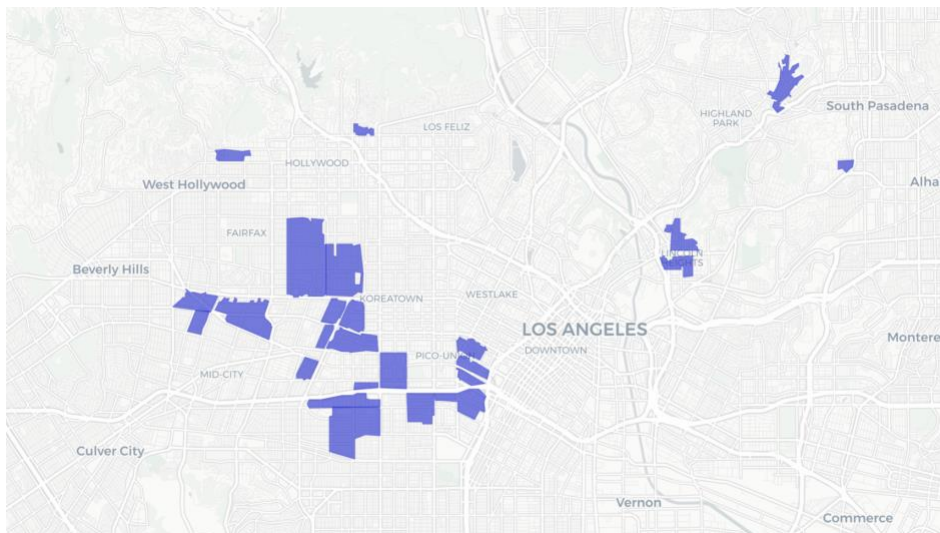


Figure 2: Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) in Study, Central and Northeast Los Angeles

Table 2: Analyzed Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs)

Name	Designated by Los Angeles City Council
Carthay Circle	06/03/1998
University Park	03/22/2000
Adams-Normandie	07/05/2000
Harvard Heights	08/02/2000
Lafayette Square	08/07/2000
Western Heights	03/02/2001
Banning Park	05/09/2001
Gregory Ain Mar Vista Tract	03/14/2003
West Adams Terrace	12/02/2003
Lincoln Heights	08/02/2004
Pico-Union	08/03/2004
Van Nuys	11/16/2005
Hancock Park	08/01/2006
Windsor Square	04/13/2007
Stonehurst	08/12/2008
Balboa Highlands	02/12/2010
Highland Park-Garvanza	09/22/2010
Country Club Park	10/20/2010
Wilshire Park	10/20/2010
Windsor Village	10/20/2010
Hollywood Grove	05/04/2011
Jefferson Park	06/28/2011
52nd Place Tifal Brothers Tract	06/17/2015
Vinegar Hill	06/24/2015
El Sereno-Berkshire Craftsman	11/29/2016
Carthay Square	12/14/2016
Sunset Square	01/31/2017
Oxford Square	02/01/2017
Miracle Mile	03/28/2017

Section 3: Methodology

Controlling for Endogeneity of HPOZ Designation

Demographic factors do not completely dictate where HPOZ designation occurs. HPOZs may exist in some neighborhoods because residents had the drive and organizational capacity to advocate for them. SurveyLA's Los Angeles Historic Survey identifies many neighborhoods with important historic resources (See Figure 3). While only 2.4% of city parcels are within HPOZs, SurveyLA identifies 6.2% of parcels (Rypkema, 2020). Yet many of them have not become HPOZs. They may lack designation because of the difficult community driven HPOZ designation process.

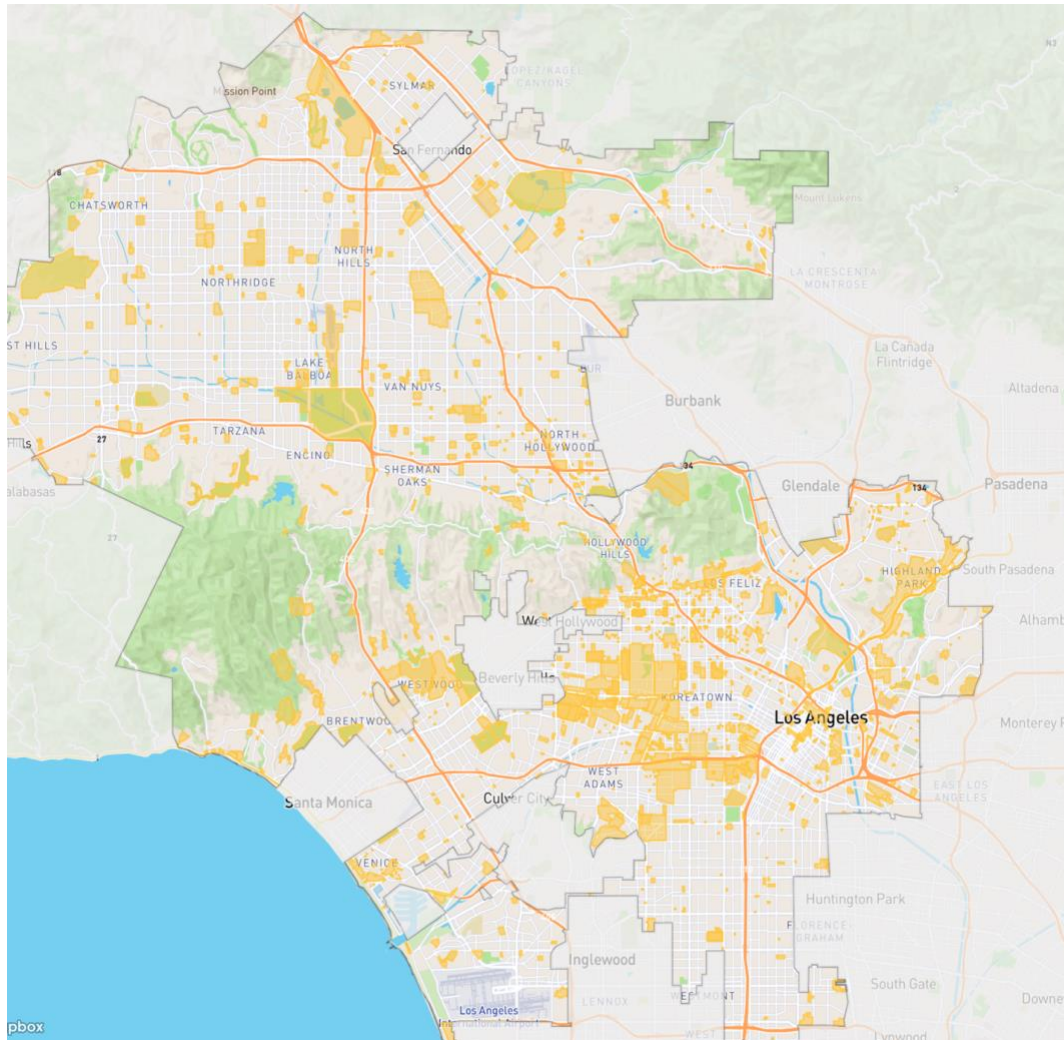


Figure 3: Potential Historic Districts from the SurveyLA Historic Resource Survey, Source: Los Angeles Historic Resources Inventory

To better capture endogeneity, I use the Los Angeles Department of Transportation's (LADOT) Preferential Parking Districts (PPD) as a proxy for community organizational capacity (See Figure 7). Like HPOZ designation, creating a PPD requires strong drive and neighborhood organizational capacity. Concerned residents must first reach out to their local Council District office to set up a meeting with LADOT officials (Bureau of Parking Management). The city then gives them a petition. They must get signatures from at least 75% of residences on each block of the proposed area within 6 months of receiving the petition. If they reach the signature threshold, the mayor appointed Transportation Commission and City Council must approve the

district. Establishing a PPD requires residents' care toward their neighborhood's future, organizational capacity, and comfort advocating to local councilmembers.

I created a dummy variable determining if more than 25% of a census tract is a PPD. This approach does not completely control for endogeneity. Certain neighborhoods may have high organizational capacity and drive but have not petitioned for PPDs because on-street parking demand is too low to warrant a parking district.

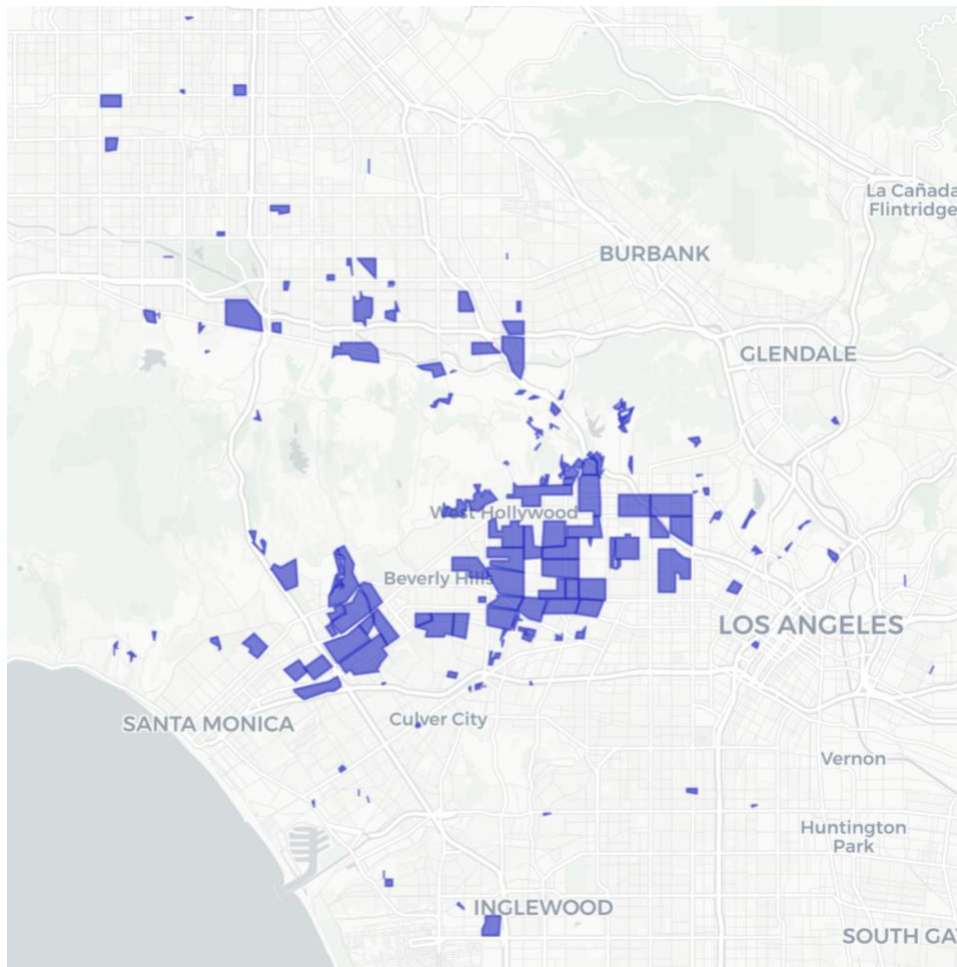


Figure 4: Permit Parking Districts Los Angeles

Matching

I used the R Optimatch package to create a control group of tracts HPOZ designation did not influence. (Hansen, & Klopfer, 2006). I assumed HPOZ designation was a result of

neighborhood demographics, building characteristics, and PPDs (see Table 1). Yet designation should have only depended on neighborhood demographics before HPOZ designation. I divided the experimental groups into three groups based on which data sources' demographics influenced designation. The first group was tracts containing HPOZs designated from 1995 to 2005 which referenced demographic data from the 2000 Decennial Census. The second group was tracts containing HPOZs designated from 2006 to 2013 that referenced data from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2008-2012 Five-Year American Community Survey (ACS). The third group was tracts containing HPOZs designated from 2014 to 2025 that referenced data from the 2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012 ACS, and the 2018-2024 ACS. I drop all tracts that include multiple HPOZs, as determining a single treatment event would be impossible.

The 1995-2005 experimental group was the largest with 40 tracts containing HPOZ designated during the period. For this group, I used 1:1 pair matching to create an equal number of control and treatment tracts. The 2006 and 2013 were smaller (22 and 6 tracts respectively). To increase the size of the control group and make the regression more powerful, I used 1:4 matching using a variable ratio process. To further increase the statistical power of the difference-in-difference regression, I combined the three experimental and three control groups into one dataset. As both experimental and control groups had similar chances of HPOZ designation based on demographic factors, matching should have reduced the endogenous effects of designation (Guo & Fraser, 2015).

Table 3: HPOZs by Designation Period of Designation

	1995-2005	2006-2013	2014-2025
HPOZs Designated	11	9	5
Tracts Containing Designated HPOZs	38	22	6

Difference-in-Difference/Triple Difference Models

Next, I ran difference-in-difference (DD) and triple difference (DDD) regressions determining the average treatment effect of HPOZ designation on the number of residential units constructed within an HPOZ (see HPOZ Zone in Figure 5) or outside of an HPOZ but within the same census tract (see HPOZ Tract in Figure 5). City Council designated each HPOZ individually and at different times throughout the study period. Therefore, the temporal bounds of pre and post treatment groups vary depending on location—or in the case of control group—the treatment tract it is paired to.

First, I spatially joined to only include permits in the two experimental groups and one matched control group. Next, I created a variable tracking each permit's census tract. I created a dummy variable determining if a permit was within the HPOZ zone experimental group, the HPOZ tract experimental group, or the control group. Each permit in the dataset included the date the developer submitted a permit. I created another dummy variable determining if a project submitted permits before or after City Council designated the relevant HPOZ. For projects in the control group, the dummy variable referenced the HPOZ designation date of the associated matched treatment tract.

I ran two regressions determining HPOZ designation's average treatment effect on the number of residential units permitted and eventually built. The first was a DD regression comparing permitting inside HPOZs and the control group. The second was a DDD comparing housing permitting before and after HPOZ designation within the control group and both experimental groups.

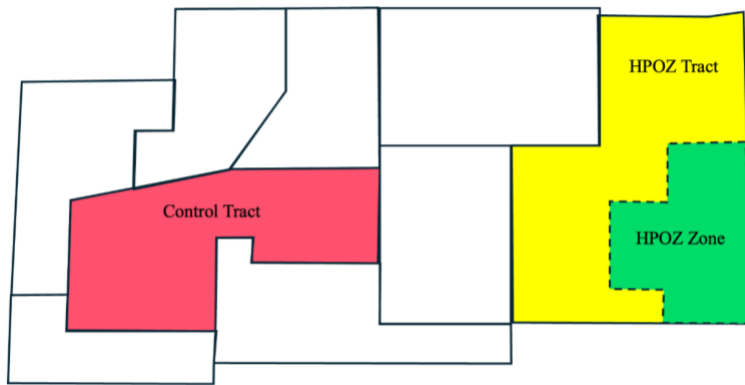


Figure 5: Experimental and Control Groups Diagram

Section 4: Results

Propensity Score Matching

Tables 4-6 compare the demographic values of the experimental tract group containing HPOZs and the matched control tract group. They suggest the 1995-2005 and 2006-2013 are balanced, but the matching process struggled to create balanced groups for the 2014-2025. The columns on the left of the center line labeled “unstratified” compare the mean values of the treatment group with the reservoir of all potential control groups in the city. The average standard deviation of these variables in 0.238 suggests substantial demographic differences do not exist between HPOZ tracts and non-HPOZ tracts across the city. The columns to the right labeled “Pair Matched” compare the average values of the treatment group with the propensity score matched tracts. The average standard mean difference between the treatment and control groups is below 0.1 for the first two regressions. All three matched groups have considerably lower average standard mean difference than compared to all possible control tracts which suggests the matched control group would have a higher chance of HPOZ designation than all non-HPOZ tracts.

Table 4: 1995-2005 Control and Treatment Groups Balance Table

Strata	Unstrat			Pair Matched		
Variables	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.
Median Rent	536	682	-0.43	536	520	0.05
Median Home Value	17,188	65,999	-0.33	17,188	12,063	-0.02
% Own Their Homes	7.22	12.57	-0.56	7.22	7.58	-0.04
% Living in Multi-Family Structures	63.4	52.0	0.37	63.4	61.1	0.08
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher	8.05	15.04	-0.50	8.05	6.68	0.10
% of Tracts with Parking Permit Districts	7.5	21.5	-0.35	7.5	22.5	-0.037
% of Structures More than 30 Years old in 1980	59.7	38.6	0.85	59.7	58.9	0.04
Average			0.48			0.05

Table 5: 2006-2013 Control and Treatment Groups Balance Table

Strata	Unstrat			Matching by Variable Ratio		
Variables	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.
Median Rent (2000)	708	682	0.08	708	715	-0.02
Median Home Value (2000)	76,354	65,999	0.07	76,354	77,031	0.00
% Own Their Homes (2000)	14.1	12.6	0.16	14.1	14.0	0.01
% Living in Multi-Family Structures (2000)	49.3	52.0	-0.09	49.3	49.4	0.00
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2000)	18.8	15.0	0.27	18.8	18.5	0.02
Median Rent (2008-2012)	1,100	1,115	-0.04	1,100	1,120	-0.06
Median Home Value (2008-2012)	582,317	65,999	0.07	582,317	104,531	-0.18
% Own Their Homes (2008-2012)	38.9	36.6	0.09	38.9	38.7	0.01
% Living in Multi-Family Structures (2008-2012)	49.5	52.0	-0.09	49.5	49.1	0.01
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2008-2012)	33.5	27.4	0.30	33.5	33.6	-0.01
% of Tracts with Parking Permit Districts	25.0	21.5	0.08	25.0	28.0	-0.03

% of Structures More than 30 Years Old in 1980	55.2	38.6	0.08	55.2	56.8	-0.06
Average			0.12			0.03

Table 6: 2014-2025 Control and Treatment Groups Balance Table

Strata	Unstrat			Matching with Variable Ratio		
	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.	Treatment	Control	Std. Mean Diff.
Variables						
Median Rent (2000)	632	682	-0.15	610	590	0.06
Median Home Value (2000)	69,445	65,999	0.02	78,125	41,797	0.24
% Own Their Homes (2000)	10.39	12.57	-0.23	11.60	9.68	0.20
% Living in Multi-Family Structures (2000)	57.2	52.0	0.16	51.8	56.2	-0.14
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2000)	21.8	15.0	0.47	18.1	15.9	0.15
Median Rent (2008-2012)	1,130	1115	0.04	1,096	1,070	0.07
Median Home Value (2008-2012)	544,122	445,822	0.50	563,938	532,112	0.16
% White Non-Hispanic (2008-2012)	32.3	27.7	0.18	29.1	27.7	0.05
% Own Their Homes (2008-2012)	26.9	36.6	-0.37	30.2	23.3	0.26
% Living in Multi-Family Structures (2008-2012)	58.6	52.3	0.20	53.5	59.3	-0.18
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2008-2012)	35.3	27.4	0.39	31.2	28.0	0.15
Median Rent (2018-2022)	1,379	1,411	-0.07	1,324	1,267	0.12
Median Home Value (2018-2022)	730,833	631,437	0.33	752,550	652,466	0.20
% Own Their Homes (2018-2022)	27.1	35.7	-0.34	30.3	24.2	0.24
% Living in Multi-Family Structures (2018-2022)	59.9	53.3	0.21	54.9	58.7	-0.12
% with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2018-2022)	36.9	31.5	0.25	33.0	30.4	0.12
% of Tracts with Parking Permit Districts	0.556	0.215	0.83	0.500	0.469	0.08

% of Structures More than 30 Years Old in 1980	61.2	38.6	0.90	59.0	58.9	0.00
Average			0.31			0.14

Figures 6-8 show the locations of experimental (marked in green) and control (marked in red) tracts for each matching set (1996-2005, 2006-2013, and 2014-2025). Ideally, most control tracts should not border treatment tracts as there is a chance HPOZ designation's local effects extend beyond its tract borders. Most 1995-2005 control tracts are in Central or South Los Angeles. A few are in the San Fernando Valley or Boyle Heights. Only six border experimental tracts.

Fewer tracts contain HPOZs designated between 2006 and 2013 than between 1995 and 2005. To prevent the sample size from limiting the regressions' statistical significance, I increase the matching ratio from one experimental tract to one control tract to one experimental tract to four control tracts. The resulting control tracts are mostly in Northeast Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, the Westside, and the southern part of the San Fernando Valley. Only three border experimental tracts.

2014 to 2025 was the smallest experimental group. I again used a 1:4 experimental to control matching ratio. Most control tracts are near the 101 and 110 Freeways across much of the city. Only three border experimental tracts.

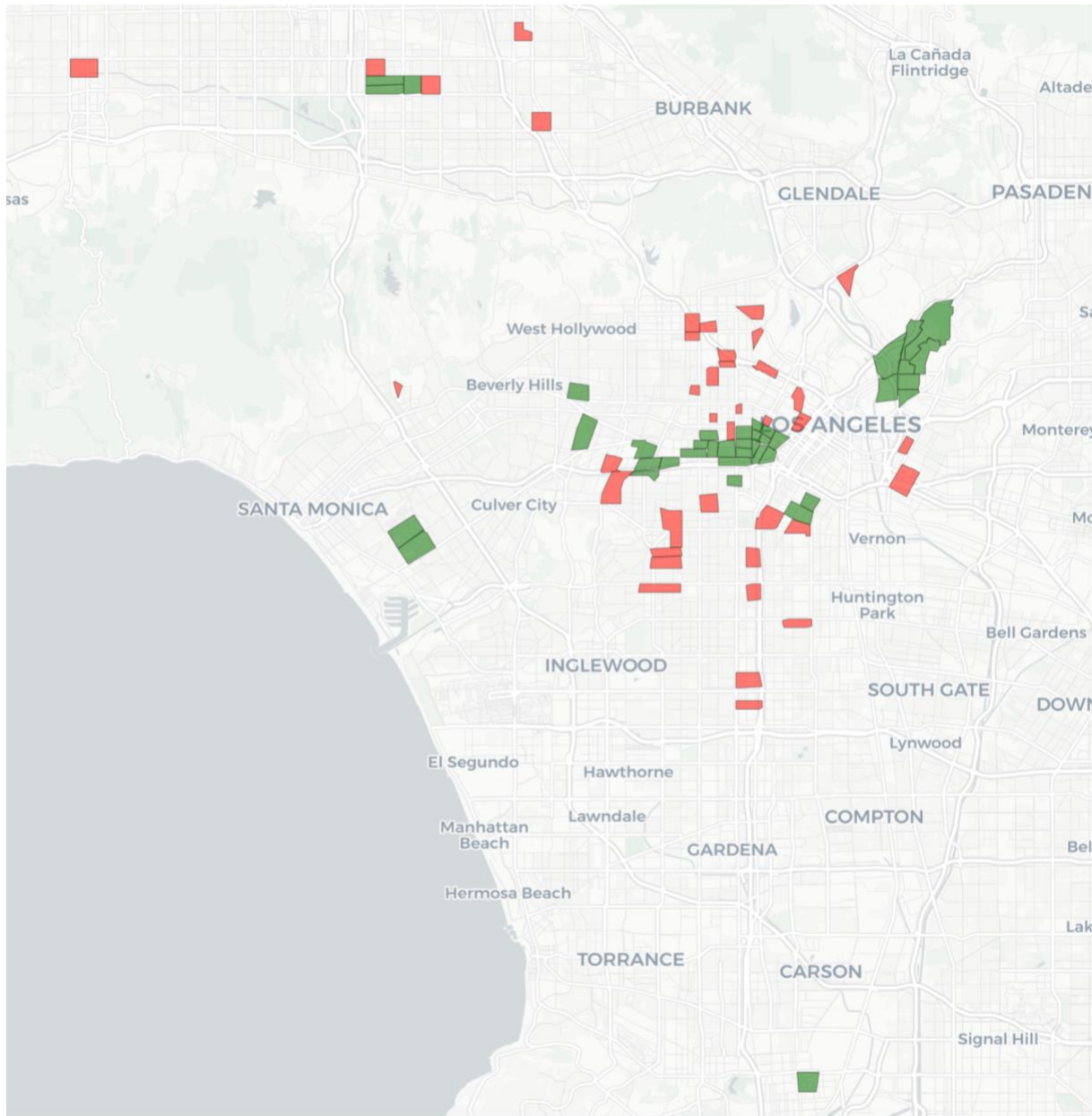


Figure 6: Map of 1996-2005 Control and Treatment Groups

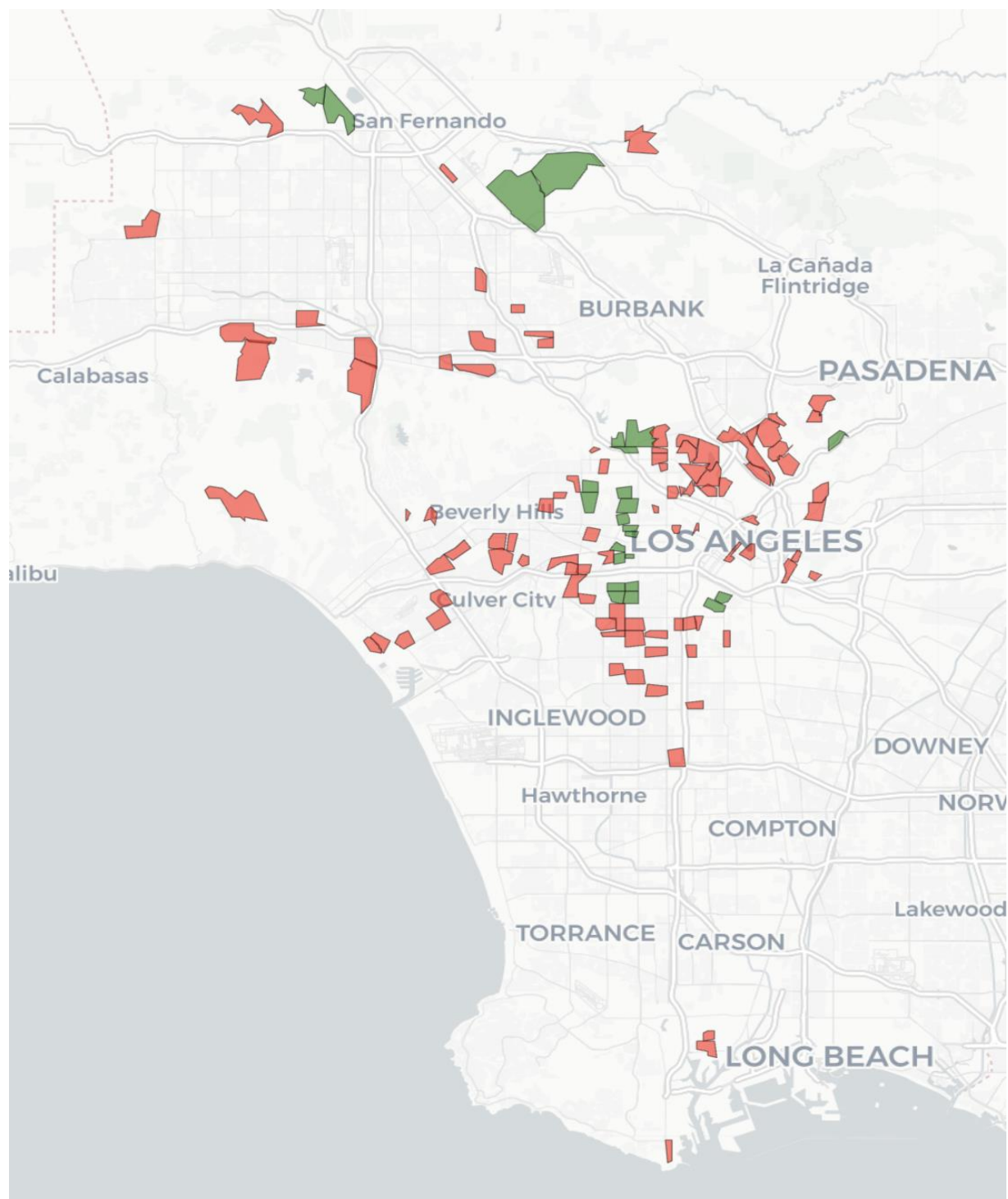


Figure 7: Map of 2006-2013 Treatment and Control Groups

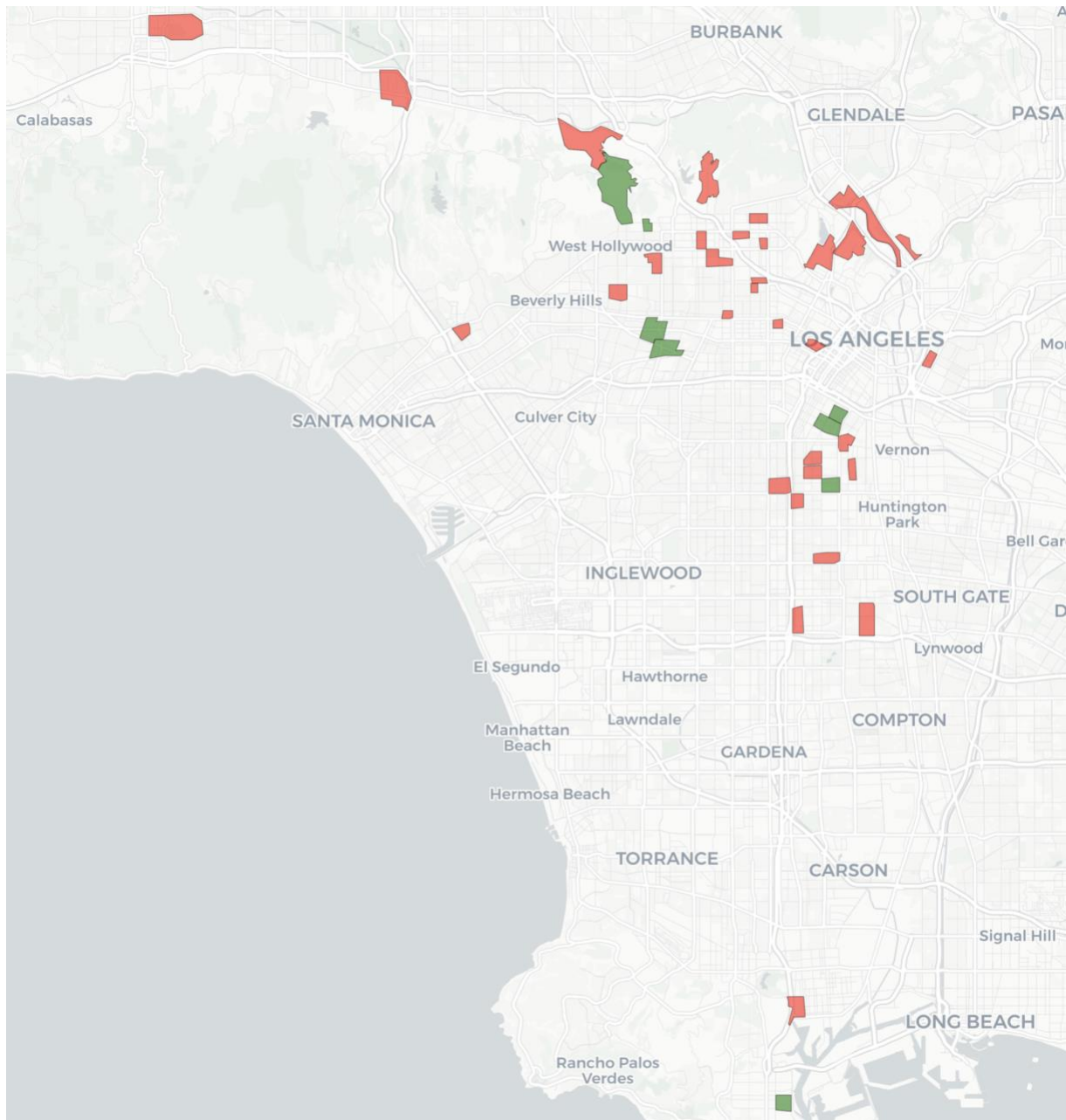


Figure 8: Map of 2014-2025 Treatment and Control Groups

Descriptive Statistics of Permits

Table 7 demonstrates that limited development occurred in neighborhoods containing HPOZ both before and after designation. Since 1996, there has only been 156 residential or mixed-use residential projects yielding 662 units in neighborhoods that were or were later going to be designated as HPOZs.

HPOZs are designated one at a time. When a tract contains one HPOZ, the treatment event is when it was designated. The regression only includes 71 projects yielding only 254 units in the HPOZ zone group (See Table 8). 81 units were built in these neighborhoods pre-designation and 173 units were built post designation. A treatment group this small decreases the regressions' power making finding statistically significant results unlikely. Developers constructed more units outside of HPOZs but inside the same census tract both pre- and post-designation. This difference is not necessarily meaningful as census tracts tend to be much larger than HPOZs. Developers also constructed more units across all groups after the treatment event. This difference reflects the study period. If LADBS had permit data available pre-1996, the groups would be more equal. If they had data available far enough back, the pre-treatment group would likely be larger.

Table 7: Development in HPOZs

	Projects	Units
In HPOZ	156	662

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Residential Permits in Regression

	Projects	Units
Pre-Treatment	1,875	10,577
Post-Treatment	4,949	25,060
In HPOZ	71	254
In HPOZ Tract Outside Zone	1,269	5,885
In Control Tract	5,484	29,498

Regression

The DD and DDD regressions suggest no statistically significant relationship exists between HPOZ designation and housing construction (see Table 9). Column 1 of the regression table is the difference-in-difference analysis comparing housing construction within HPOZs with control tracts. The “HPOZ Zone” term is negative and the interaction “Post Designation x HPOZ Zone” term is positive. Both terms have p-values above 0.05. Therefore, deriving a statistically significant meaning from their values is impossible.

Column 2 of the regression table is the triple difference analysis comparing housing construction within HPOZs, in the same tract as an HPOZ but outside the zone, and in control tracts. Like in Column 1, the “HPOZ Zone” term is negative and the interaction “Post Designation x HPOZ Zone” term is positive. Like in Column 1, neither term is statistically significant. The “In HPOZ Tract Outside Zone” term is positive and the “Post Designation x HPOZ Tract” interaction term is negative and neither are statistically significant.

Table 9: Regression of Constructed Residential Units

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	5.684***	5.588***
	(0.628)	(0.661)
Post Designation	-0.611	-0.300
	(0.736)	(0.792)
In HPOZ	-2.862	-2.766
	(5.136)	(5.140)
Post Designation * In HPOZ	1.860	1.548
	(6.591)	(6.598)

In HPOZ Tract Outside Zone		0.981
		(2.111)
Post Designation * In HPOZ Tract Outside Zone		-1.953
		(2.306)
Observations	6824	6824
R2	0.000	0.000
Adjusted R2	0.000	0.000
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001		

Section 5: Discussion

Historic Neighborhoods Have Not Been the Site of Residential Construction

During the study period, little residential construction occurred in neighborhoods with historic resources before they were designated HPOZs. This trend continued after designation. Throughout the study period (1996-2025), developers built only 156 residential projects yielding 662 units of housing in neighborhoods that had been or later became HPOZs. During the same study period, developers built 158,998 units in Los Angeles. HPOZs constitute 2.4 percent of parcels (Rypkema, 2020). Yet only 0.4% of new units were built in HPOZ neighborhoods. This figure oversimplifies where development occurs as parcels sizes vary widely. However, areas deemed historically important enough for HPOZ designation were not areas of significant housing production, nor were they after designation. This finding is consistent with those in Been et al. (2014).

Explanations for Null Hypothesis

The following section explains why my results suggest historic districts designation does not affect where housing development occurs, but it does in Been et al. (2014) and Patrick (2025). Section 6.2.1 explains the methodological limits of propensity score matching and a small HPOZ Zone treatment group. Sections 6.2.2-6.3.4 explain how the particularities of neighborhood planning, environmental review, and corridor-based zoning in Los Angeles reduced average treatment effect and statistical power of my model but did not in Been et al.'s (2014) and Patrick's (2025). Los Angeles has multiple policy pathways to prevent development in historic residential neighborhoods. In their absence, the HPOZ program's impact on the spatial distribution of housing would be greater.

Methodological Limits

I calculated propensity scores based on a range of demographic variables Gabbe (2018) found had a statistically significant impact on upzoning. Yet, the relationship between demographics and neighborhood resistance to development is difficult to predict using a linear model (Gabriel & Kung, 2025). The same may be the case for HPOZ designation. The control group's composition is sensitive to adding and removing covariates. Therefore, it is uncertain if the control group's likelihood of HPOZ designation is comparable to the experimental groups'. Zoning dictates where developers build new housing. However, my study does not account for existing zoning or zoning changes throughout the study period.

Los Angeles is not the strongest test case to examine the relationship between historic districts and housing construction as HPOZs constitute 2.4% of parcels, most of which are small (Rypkema, 2020). Minimal residential construction in HPOZ neighborhoods both before and after designation is an important finding but underpowers both regressions. Matching with a variable ratio instead of pair matching for the 2006-2013 and 2014-2025 tracts aimed to

overcome this issue. Yet the HPOZ treatment group's size, 156 projects and 662 units, makes deriving a statistically significant average treatment impossible.

Community Planning

Los Angeles's Community Planning program may have disproportionately diminished housing construction in historic neighborhoods before my study period. The preservation of the scale and character of historic neighborhoods began in the 1970s through Los Angeles's Community Planning program. The 34 plans, dictated largely by neighborhood interests, were fully codified more than a decade before the first HPOZ designation in my dataset. Residents used Community Planning to reduce zoning capacity for new housing within their neighborhoods (Morrow, 2013). Citywide, Community Planning reduced zoned capacity for housing by 60% (Morrow, 2013). By 1985, the city's zoning completely conformed to Community Plans (Morrow, 2013). Los Angeles City Council designated the first HPOZ, Angelino Heights, in 1983 (LA City Planning). The first approval within my study period was in 1998, 13 years after the city fully implemented Community Plans. HPOZ designations in my dataset occurred on average 23 years after 1985. Figure 9 summarizes the Community Plan and HPOZ timelines.

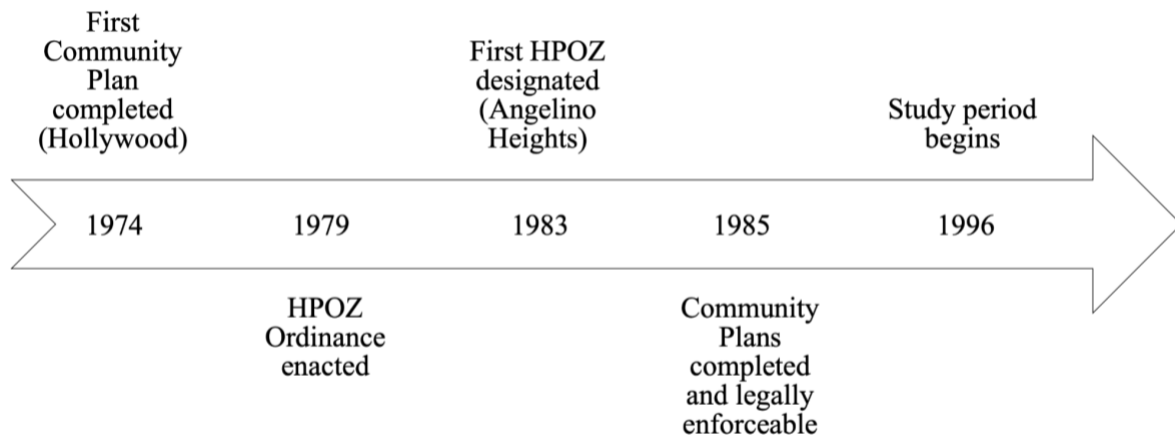


Figure 9: Community Plan and HPOZ Timeline

Los Angeles implemented the HPOZ Ordinance in 1978 in response to these same real estate development pressures as Community Plans (Bernstein, 2021). The HPOZ Ordinance's minor procedural delay compared to Community Plans likely had smaller effects on housing construction. In my study, Community Plans rezoning always predated HPOZ designation, which reduces designation's average treatment effect. Yet in Been et al. (2014), Historic District designation often predates community planning, or neighborhoods with Historic Districts lack community plans altogether. Since 1990, New York City's Section 197-a has allowed the city's 59 Community Boards to submit neighborhood land-use plans within their jurisdiction to the City Planning Commission (Angotti, 1997). Unlike Los Angeles, not all parts of New York City have undergone this community planning process. Been et al. (2014) examines permitting from 1990 to 2009. As of 2008, less than 20 of the 59 community boards began preparing 197a plans (Angotti, 2008). Most plans had not gotten far because community boards have limited planning staff and resources (Angotti, 2008). Therefore, community planning generally did not affect most Historic Districts Been et al. (2014) analyzed. For those it did, Historic District designation predated or occurred at a similar time as community planning affecting the post-treatment more potential exaggerating the average treatment effect of historic district designation.

Additionally, the impact of Section 197a is limited (Angotti, 1997). Like in Los Angeles, 197-a plans often aggressively downzone their neighborhoods (Angotti, 2008). Yet unlike Los Angeles, the city is not legally obliged to implement the plans (Angotti, 1997). In fact, Community Plans do not greatly impact where housing is built (Angotti, 1997). Community planning is less likely to dampen the effects of historic district designation in Been et al. (2014) than my study because New York City's community planning is not city-wide, happened later relative to the study, and is less powerful than Los Angeles's program.

Patrick (2025) differs from Been et al. (2014) and my study because the study area encompasses multiple municipalities. Municipal planning within a metropolitan area is akin to community planning. Towns and cities have discretion to control their own land use planning. Like in my study, local planning predates local historic district designation. Unlike my study, The Atlanta Metropolitan Region has a much less regulated residential land use environment during Patrick's study (1990-2015) than the City of Los Angeles (Gyourko et al., 2021). Therefore, municipal planning did not confound Patrick's study as much as Community Plans did in mine. If it did confound her study, its effects on the distribution of housing construction before and after local historic district designations would be unclear.

Environmental Review

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) limited housing construction in Los Angeles throughout my study period, often on the grounds of historic preservation. This likely diminished the average treatment effect. New York's City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) also affected housing construction throughout the study period in Been et al. (2014), but Georgia's Environmental Policy Act did not meaningfully confound Patrick (2025).

CEQA limited residential construction in Los Angeles's historic neighborhoods decades before my treatment events. Plaintiffs sue residential projects using CEQA to protect historic

resources. The city interprets a historic resource broadly to include structures, sites, monuments, and HPOZs (LA City Planning 2023). However, no level of governments needs to have designated a resource as historic for it to trigger the law (LA Conservancy). Beginning in the 1970s, litigants, often neighbors, used CEQA to prevent residential development or reduce their size (Morrow, 2013). CEQA protected historic neighborhoods from residential development long before they were designated HPOZs. In fact, in a guide titled *Using CEQA to Protect Your Community*, the Los Angeles Conservancy suggests communities use the law's historic resource provisions to encourage developers to protect certain structures, reduce the scale of their projects, or sell the property back to the community without developing it (Los Angeles Conservancy). In the guide, the Conservancy demonstrates CEQA historic resources protections allowed residents and conservationists to prevent the redevelopment of the 1,187 units Wyvernwood Garden Apartments into a 4,400 unit mixed-used project (Los Angeles Conservancy).

Conservation's role in preventing or accelerating gentrification, a large component of Wyvernwood conservation, is beyond the scope of this study (see Rypkema, 2020; Gorska, 2015; McCabe, 2019). Instead, it exemplifies CEQA's ability to play a similar regulating role in Los Angeles's housing market as the HPOZ program. An environmental challenge or the threat of a challenge on historic grounds, disincentivizes residential development. The costs, time, and uncertainty associated with CEQA's Environmental Impact Reports and litigation far outweigh HPOZ's 79-day discretionary review process (Hernandez, 2022). This would help explain some of my results. CEQA litigation on historic resource grounds was a consideration for any development in HPOZ neighborhoods even if they had not yet been designated, reducing the average treatment effect.

SurveyLA, the catalogue of the city's historic resources, furthers CEQA's confounding effects. SurveyLA identifies 57,456 properties and 1,184 historic districts as possible historic

resources. Their count is far more extensive than the HPOZ program (see Figure 3) (Los Angeles Historic Resources Inventory, 2026). While only 2.4% of city parcels are within HPOZs, SurveyLA identifies 6.2% of parcels as potentially historic (Rypkema, 2020). Both my treatment and control tracts contain many of these historic resources. A property's SurveyLA designation indicates to those who do not want new residential development that they could challenge it using CEQA on historic preservation grounds (Freedman, 2017). Since the city completed SurveyLA in 2017, CEQA on historic preservation grounds has applied widely across the city. Since the city designated all HPOZs in my dataset 2017 or earlier, the survey likely decreases the number of units in the post-control group, which dampens the isolated HPOZ designation treatment effect.

In Been et al. (2014), New York City's Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) process confounds Historic District designation but to a lesser extent than in Los Angeles. CEQR obligates agencies to study environmental consequences of permitting private projects and requires developers to mitigate environmental damage (U.S. Department of Energy). It also gives neighbors standing to sue projects (Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination, 2025). Like CEQA, CEQR increases regulatory uncertainty and expands development timelines, which discourages residential development. The city enacted CEQR in the mid-1970s—long before the study period in Been et al. (2014) began (U.S. Department of Energy). CEQR covers city designated historic resources including Historic Districts (Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination, 2025).

Environmental review does not affect the results of Patrick (2025). Georgia does have an environmental review process, the Georgia Environmental Policy Act, but it does not apply to non-government projects such as housing even if they require government permits (U.S. Department of Energy).

Recent legal changes may reduce environmental review's confounding effects on historic district designation. California's AB 130, enacted just after my study period in July 2025, exempts infill residential projects from CEQA (AB-130, CA, 2025). In June 2024, New York City's City Planning Commission exempted green residential projects up to 250 units from most of the CEQR process (Department of City Planning). As of March 2026 on the national level, both The House of Representatives and Senate have pushed forward housing bills streamlining the National Environmental Policy Act when applied to new housing (Waters et al., 2026). These changes may increase housing construction within historic districts as district status will not trigger environmental review. This change should reduce the confounding effects of historic resources outside of HPOZ boundaries and increase designation's average treatment effect.

Development Along Major Arterial Roads

State and local priorities have significantly shifted residential development toward major arterials away from residential areas. This shift limits my treatment group's size. Recent State legislation such as the State Density Bonus, AB 2345 (2020), that allows developers to develop transit proximate parcels above the allowed density if they provide affordable housing, and (2020) and AB 2011 (2022), that permits residential construction in all commercially zoned areas have encouraged housing construction in commercially zoned along major arterials (California Assembly 2020; 2022). In fact, between 2013 and 2019, developers constructed 57% of Los Angeles's new housing units on non-residentially zoned parcels such as commercial (Phillips et al., 2021) Most HPOZs aim to protect historic residential structures. Although many are close to commercial corridors, few protect them. Concentrating development along arterials reduced my treatment's size making statistically significant results less likely.

Section 6: Conclusion

Between 1996 and 2025 HPOZ designation did not have a statistically significant effect on construction within or surrounding the zones. Little residential construction occurred in Los Angeles neighborhoods with historic resources before they were designated Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs). This trend continued after designation. Developers constructed 156 residential projects or mixed-use residential projects yielding 662 units of housing in neighborhoods that had been or later became HPOZs. Other policies such as the city's Community Plans, state environmental review (CEQA), and corridor-based development likely hindered residential construction in historic neighborhoods to a greater degree than other areas before HPOZ designation and continue to do so after to after. The HPOZ process is another layer in the strong regulatory regime that discourages housing construction in certain neighborhoods.

My results complicate Been et al. (2014) and Patrick's (2025) findings that local historic district designation reduces housing construction within district boundaries. Analyzing other American cities will help decisionmakers better understand the policy implications of these districts. This study suggests the relationship between historic district designations and where residential construction occurs is not the same in all American cities. The impact of various land use policies on the spatial distribution of housing construction differs based on local contexts. Additionally, future research should analyze how zoning, specific plans, Community Plans, and HPOZs interact. It also should explore if a changing urban planning regulation, particularly AB 130 (2025), California's effort to dampen CEQA's impact on infill housing, increases the impact of HPOZ designation on where developers build housing.

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