

## 1. Why is The Showbox threatened?

There are many forces at play here, but the short answer is zoning. The site where The Showbox now sits is zoned to 440 feet, despite currently being occupied by a two-story building. Developers use site-by-site zoning analysis to determine the most profitable locations for a project. The Showbox is a thriving, beloved cultural institution that is threatened because of its location, past planning decisions, current market forces, and the cavalier attitude that newer and taller equals “progress.”

## 2. How is The Showbox significant?

Take your pick of reasons! 1) The building itself dates back to 1916, and the ballroom space inside has remained intact since it began housing The Showbox in 1939. 2) Every major musician from Seattle has played in this venue. 3) Thousands of visiting musicians, comedians, and other performers have created cultural history there. HistoryLink [has a great summary](#) of just how important this place is.

## 3. Can landmarking help save The Showbox?

Yes, but just as a first step. The Landmarks Preservation Ordinance, in its current form, does not protect the use of a property. So, if the building is designated a landmark, it’s not a guarantee that The Showbox will remain after its current lease expires. If the building is not designated a landmark, however, it is a guarantee that The Showbox will be torn down.

## 4. How does landmarking work?

In steps:

1. Anyone can submit a landmark nomination application for a building/site/object. Buildings can qualify for any one of six possible criteria, ranging from architectural to historic to cultural significance.
2. A nomination meeting is held, where the Landmarks Preservation Board votes on whether to nominate the building. The all-volunteer Board is comprised of architects, historians, urban planners, finance and real estate professionals, and at-large members of the community.
3. If the building is nominated, a designation hearing is scheduled, where the Board votes on whether to designate the building as a landmark. A majority of the total number of current and confirmed board members (not just members present) must vote to approve the designation.
4. If the building is not designated, then the process ends, and the property receives no landmark protections. If the building is designated, it moves into a controls and incentives negotiation with the owner. City Landmarks staff negotiates with the owner to create an agreement that covers protections for the property and offers incentives like tax breaks, building code relief, and options to transfer development rights (in some areas of the city).
5. For designated buildings, staff prepares legislation that turns the agreement into an ordinance (basically a law) for City Council to vote on the Designating Ordinance.

**Did you know only 0.5% of buildings in Seattle are designated as local landmarks?**

**The national average is 4.3%. This means that, although our city has a strong landmarks ordinance, we are far behind the rest of the country in protecting our historic buildings.**

## **5. What is Historic Seattle doing to save The Showbox?**

On August 8, Historic Seattle's advocate coalition – Friends of Historic Belltown and Vanishing Seattle – submitted a landmark nomination for The Showbox. By submitting the nomination ahead of the developer, our advocates are allotted more time at Board meetings to demonstrate the significance of this iconic place and to make the case for why it must be protected as a landmark. Because landmarking cannot currently protect use, this is just the first part of a three-part strategy to save The Showbox. Part 1: Landmark; Part 2: Policy protections (see question 6); Part 3: Identify a Showbox-friendly buyer, investor, or donor that can step in.

## **6. What other ideas beyond landmarking can help save The Showbox?**

Seattle City Council and the Mayor can pursue several policy solutions to protect The Showbox and culturally significant places like it in the future. Historic Seattle is proposing these ideas:

1. Expand the Pike Place Market Historic District and its associated protections to include the block where The Showbox is located, as well as others nearby.
2. Further define the controls element of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance to include protections for categories of use, including cultural venues.
3. Introduce an environmental impact fee on demolitions/new development to help fund seismic retrofitting for Seattle's 1,100 historic unreinforced masonry buildings, including The Showbox.

## **7. Who decided that The Showbox building was “category 4” in the City’s Downtown survey, and what does that mean?**

The City of Seattle conducted this survey in 2007 to identify possible sites of architectural or historic significance. Surveyors examined The Showbox, from the outside only, and noted that the building seemed to lack physical integrity to convey significance. Just like you can't judge a book by its cover, you can't judge The Showbox by its façade. The Showbox's significance lies in its cultural history, reaching the community, City, state, and country. No one can deny its 80 years of cultural impact, which is still reflected in the building's exterior and interior architectural features.

## **8. How can The Showbox be saved while still addressing the need for housing in Seattle?**

At some point, it seems, people decided that preservation and affordable housing are enemies. That's simply not true - a false choice pitting two positive goals for the city against each other. In fact, Historic Seattle owns several historic properties that provide dozens of affordable housing units. Historic buildings are more naturally affordable than new construction and contribute significantly to livability.

If The Showbox is protected, the developer's proposed 44-story tower could still be built on another site, one that doesn't require the demolition of an iconic part of our city's cultural history. Building that same project elsewhere still provides the associated fees for the City's affordable housing fund.

## **9. Why can't we just move The Showbox somewhere else?**

You can't recreate the authenticity and patina of a place with this much history. A new Showbox would be nothing more than a knockoff.

## **10. What can I do to help SAVE THE SHOWBOX?**

In the coming weeks, we'll continue to work with City leaders and the public to make progress on the policy proposals to save The Showbox and places like it. We'll help you learn more about those ideas and any opportunities for public support. We'll also keep you posted on how to help the building gain landmark status. Remember: this is a marathon; not a sprint!

**Questions? Contact Eugenia Woo, Director of Preservation Services,  
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