

St. Pete Seeks to Lose Historic Status

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St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko has asked the federal government to strip the city, except for its center, of its historical status.

Such a ruling would allow more commercial construction like the recently scrapped Gazprom skyscraper, whose planned site infuriated residents worried about preserving the city's historic skyline.

Culture Minister Alexander Avdeyev has promised Matviyenko that the ruling to change the city's status would be issued, Matviyenko told a news conference Friday, Interfax reported.

St. Petersburg was put on a list of historic towns and cities in 2010, while earlier this month, on Jan. 16, the government obliged local authorities in historic towns to seek permission from the federal culture protection watchdog, the Federal Service for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, before authorizing construction, Interfax said.

In July 2010, Avdeyev issued a [ruling](#) that reduced the number of historic towns from 478 to 41 but ordered the service to propose more towns by Feb. 28. Notably, he excluded Moscow, Pskov and Nizhny Novgorod from the list.

The need to seek permission from the service for construction in St. Petersburg outskirts, which have no historical value, involves unnecessary expenses and delays construction, said Yelena Bodrova, a spokeswoman for a St. Petersburg deputy governor, Interfax reported.

On Thursday, Matviyenko sent a letter to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, asking him to order the government to exclude St. Petersburg, except for its center, from the list of historical towns, Interfax reported.

Last month, Matviyenko withdrew permission to construct tall buildings in the city center and agreed with Gazprom to cancel the Okhta Center skyscraper.

Later in December, the St. Petersburg City Court banned construction of any buildings in the historical center taller than 40 meters.

St. Petersburg is a UNESCO world heritage site, and the UN had threatened to remove the city from its list if it went ahead with the Okhta Center.

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