



# Staff Report and Recommendations

## Agenda of May 8, 2023, Item 7a

### County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 • [www.vcrma.org/divisions/planning](http://www.vcrma.org/divisions/planning)

#### I. APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

**Applicant:**

Mitchel Turner  
June Street Architecture  
8730 Santa Monica Boulevard, Ste H  
West Hollywood, CA 90069

**Property Owner:**

Charles Ward and Michael Lombardo  
1901 Hermitage Road  
Ojai, CA 93023

#### II. REQUEST:

A request for a Certificate of Review (COR) (Cultural Heritage Ordinance (CHO) §1372) related to the construction of a one-story, 443-square-foot farm worker dwelling unit with 148 square feet of habitable attic space at the Hermitage Ranch, located at 1901 Hermitage Road in the Ojai Valley. (Case No. CH23-0016).

#### III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

1901 Hermitage Road, Ojai, CA 93023 (unincorporated Ventura County)  
Assessor's Parcel Number (APN): 014-0-030-275  
Historic Designation: Site of Merit  
Historic Name: Hermitage Ranch

Zoning: AE-40 ac/MRP – Agricultural Exclusive 40 Acre Minimum Lot Size (Temporary Rental Units Overlay Zone and Ojai Valley Dark Sky Overlay Zone)  
General Plan Designation: Open Space

The approximately 43-acre Hermitage Ranch contains a 3,895 square foot main residence built in 1903, guest house, and gym building, along with site improvements such as stone site paths, pool and spa, and horse facilities, such as a corral, hay barn/tack room, and 200-foot arena. The structures are surrounded by citrus and avocado orchards and the property is accessed by Hermitage Road, a private road.

#### IV. PROJECT SCOPE:

The applicant requests that the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) provide a COR for the construction of a one-story, 443-square-foot farm worker dwelling unit with 148 square feet of habitable attic space. The proposed dwelling would be located approximately 120 feet southeast of the main residence. The proposed project is described across the site plans and elevations included in Exhibit 1. The proposed new construction would visually align with the existing residence's Hardie® shingle siding, roofing materials, and wood-clad windows with a simplified pattern of divided lites. A proposed

stone porch would be located off the dwelling unit's south elevation utilizing old concrete that exists on the property from previous structures, and a new gravel/dirt, driveway would connect from its east. Refer to Exhibit 2 for Architectural Cut Sheets and Exhibit 3 for Existing Photos.

## **V. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

The Hermitage Ranch was evaluated in the 1985 *Phase III Ojai Valley Cultural Heritage Survey* ("Historic Survey") prepared by San Buenaventura Research Associates (Exhibit 4).<sup>1</sup> Commonly known as the Hermitage, the subject property is historically significant as the Hermitage Ranch, originally a 290-acre citrus ranch owned by Lewis H. Green, an eastern merchant. The 290 acres was subdivided in the 1970s and the home is currently on a lot that is 43 acres in size. Refer to Exhibit 5 for a feature article of the property in the *Ojai Magazine*, Fall 2022.

The property address was formerly identified as 2484 Gridley Road and was officially changed to 1901 Hermitage Road in 1997. According to the Historic Survey, the main residence was built in 1903. A former owner, Ms. Margaret Menninger, informed CHB staff in 2015 that the house was designed by architect John C. Austin of Los Angeles (who designed Griffith Observatory, Hollywood Masonic Temple, Shrine Auditorium and Los Angeles City Hall, to name a few). According to Ms. Menninger, the main residence was altered in 1927 by former owner, Berkeley Brandt, a Chicago architect who designed Ventura County Landmark No. 62 (County Fire Station No. 21). Mr. Brandt was responsible for remodeling the interior and adding Craftsman style by installing large picture windows, French doors, a bay window in the dining room and moving the main residence's stone fireplace to the guest house.

The Historic Survey describes the main residence at the Hermitage as follows:

*"This large single story residence on an imposing hillside. location maintains a commanding view of the Ojai Valley. The medium pitched hip roof has two intersecting hip roofs which extend over the porch and main entry. Large picture windows and slanted bay windows take advantage of the view. Some windows are multi-paned, as are the French doors. The Craftsman influence is seen in the shingle siding, stone chimneys and exposed rafters."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> San Buenaventura Research Associates, *Phase III Ojai Valley Cultural Heritage Survey*, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1 – Photo of Main Residence at 1901 Hermitage Road, Ojai



Figure 2 – Photo of entrance to 1901 Hermitage Road, Ojai





According to the Historic Survey, the property was assigned a Historical Resource Status Code of 3 as appearing eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, and as a Ventura County Landmark.

**VI. CULTURAL HERITAGE ORDINANCE ANALYSIS:**

The Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance (CHO) §1372, requires that the CHB provide a COR in the case of a permit application to construct, change, alter, modify, or remodel in a manner a Site of Merit that affects the exterior character-defining features or integrity of the site.

CHO §1372-2 provides that the CHB uses the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings (“Secretary’s Standards”) in its evaluation of the property and the proposed scope of work. The COR process consists of voluntary recommendations for the applicant’s consideration in order to better conform to the Secretary’s Standards. CHB staff determined the standards for rehabilitation are appropriate for this request and evaluated the proposed scope of work against the relevant standards below.

<b>Standards</b>	<b>Staff Comments</b>
<p><b>#9.</b> New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.</p>	<p>New construction is most appropriately located where its visibility from the primary views of the historic building is minimized.<sup>3</sup> This is often a rear or obscure elevation. Inherent in all of the guidance is the concept that new construction needs to be subordinate to the historic building. The size, scale, and massing of new construction all pertain to the construction’s overall volume and three-dimensional qualities.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, size, scale and massing are critical elements for ensuring that new construction is subordinate to the historic building, thus preserving the historic character of a historic property.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>The proposed new construction would be located approximately 120 feet southeast of the main residence’s primary elevation and across the existing driveway. The proposed farmworker</p>

<sup>3</sup> National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, “New Construction within the Boundaries of Historic Properties,” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/new-construction-in-historic-properties.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<b>Standards</b>	<b>Staff Comments</b>
	<p>dwelling unit will be visible in and around the primary elevation viewshed. However, the siting of the unit takes advantage of existing site conditions, including a drop in grade, that has the effect of limiting visibility of the new construction.</p> <p>The exterior of the addition would be in keeping with the architectural style of the buildings on site (particularly the gym building, shown on page 1 of Exhibit 3) while the proposed roofline of the unit would follow a form that is clearly differentiated from the architectural style of existing structures on site. Specifically, the building mimics much of the historic architecture while the necessity of the sleeping loft changes the pitch to prevent the structure from adding conjecture that the structure is original.</p> <p>Based on the above considerations, CHB staff determined the scope of work is consistent with this Standard.</p>
<p><b>#10.</b> New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.</p>	<p>Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to convey its historical significance, or the authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics and materials that existed during the property’s historic or pre-historic period of significance. A property would typically possess several (although not necessarily all) of the following seven aspects of integrity, as defined in National Register Bulletin 15, to convey its significance: Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>The proposed farmworker dwelling unit would be detached from any existing structure and sited at a distance from the main residence. If removed in the future, such a design would not preclude the ability to maintain the essential form and integrity of the historic property.</p> <p>Based on the above considerations, CHB staff determined the scope of work is consistent with this Standard.</p>

<sup>6</sup> Ventura County Ordinance Code, Article 5 of Chapter 3 of Division 1, Section 1363.

**VII. STAFF CONCLUSION:**

Based on the above considerations, the proposed scope of work appears consistent with the Secretary's Standards. Following implementation of the project, the property would retain a majority of its character-defining features and sense of integrity.

CHB staff recommends the CHB adopt the following recommendation related to the scope of work:

- **Recommendation #1: Ventura County Landmark Designation.** It is recommended that the property owner pursue designation as a Ventura County Landmark. For more information, refer to Section 1370 of the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance for a description of the variety of financial and land use incentives available to owners of landmark properties. Please note that additional historic evaluation may be required prior to designation.

**VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

No public comment regarding this item has been received to date.

**IX. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

CHB staff recommends the CHB take the following actions regarding the request:

1. **CONDUCT** public hearing, **RECEIVE** oral and written testimony, and **CONSIDER** the Planning Division Staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto;
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the proposed project in accordance with CHO §1372 based on the preceding evidence and analysis; and
3. **RECOMMEND** that the property owner pursue designation of the subject property as a Ventura County Landmark pursuant to CHO §1366.

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Proposed Plans and Elevations
- Exhibit 2: Architectural Cut Sheets
- Exhibit 3: Existing Photos
- Exhibit 4: Historic Survey Evaluation
- Exhibit 5: Ojai Magazine Article, Fall 2022