



# Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of October 9, 2023, Item 6a

## 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:** County of Ventura  
Resource Management Agency, Planning Division  
800 S Victoria Avenue, #1740  
Ventura, CA 93009

**Property Owner:** California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)  
District 7  
100 S Main St.  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

### II. REQUEST:

A request to downgrade the Santa Gertrudis Asistencia (Chapel) Monument from a Ventura County Landmark to Ventura County Point of Interest No. 13. The site formerly held a chapel constructed for the San Buenaventura Mission on a property currently located on North Ventura Avenue, 0.3 miles north of the City of Ventura water purification plant (5895 N Ventura Avenue, Ventura, CA 93001). (Case No. CH23-0035).

### III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

Location: Along North Ventura Avenue, 0.3 mile north of City of Ventura water purification plant (5895 N Ventura Avenue, Ventura, CA 93001) (Caltrans right of way)  
Common Name: Ventura County Landmark #11 - Santa Gertrudis Asistencia (Chapel) Monument  
Assessor's Parcel Number (APN): N/A  
GPS Coordinates: 34.34751293547659, -119.297052533304

The chapel was likely built by the Mission San Buenaventura to minister to inland Chumash Indians.<sup>1</sup> It is believed to have been constructed in the late 1790s<sup>2</sup> and also used by the Mission padres during periods of crisis at the Mission San Buenaventura.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1812, after a violent earthquake severely damaged the Mission San Buenaventura, the chapel became a substitute mission during reconstruction. Six years later, the threat of invasion by corsair Hippolyte Bouchard and his two ships of Peruvian pirates forced the padres to relocate inland with the Mission's livestock and

<sup>1</sup> Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board (May 2016). "Ventura County Historical Landmarks & Points of Interest" (PDF).

<sup>2</sup> Hillinger, Charles (July 13, 1964). "Freeway Building Spurs 'Lost' Mission Search: Archaeologists Dig in Ruins of Settlement Near Ventura for Santa Gertrudis Relics." *Los Angeles Times*.  
[https://www.newspapers.com/article/19821343/freeway\\_building\\_spurs\\_lost\\_mission/](https://www.newspapers.com/article/19821343/freeway_building_spurs_lost_mission/).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

valuable items, likely to the chapel. The chapel was used again for refuge after the Mission sustained roof damage in an 1857 earthquake.<sup>4</sup>

The chapel was actively used until about 1840; ruins still standing in 1890 gradually crumbled and the site was lost. In 1966, archaeologists determined that the site lay in the path of the Ojai Freeway (Highway 33). The chapel's foundations were located in March 1966. At that time the chapel site was documented with measurements and photographs and artifacts were removed by archeologists. The excavation revealed the foundation of a structure measuring 15.5 meters by 11.25 meters, parallel to and facing the Camino Real.<sup>5</sup> The foundation was built using large sandstone boulders believed to have been carried from the nearby Ventura River and placed in trenches.<sup>6</sup> The structure had four rooms arranged in a U-shaped plan around a sheltered courtyard or patio.<sup>7</sup>

The foundation stones were temporarily removed to another location and on January 25, 1968 they were reburied at a confidential location a little less than one mile from their original site. Some of the foundation stones were used to build the monument marking their new site within the Caltrans right of way. The monument was dedicated with a bronze marker donated by the Native Daughters of the Golden West (El Aliso Parlor #314 and Poinsettia Parlor #318) on May 23, 1970. The site was designated as Ventura County Landmark #11 in December 1970. At the time of designation, detailed criteria for a Point of Interest designation were not yet adopted; these were not added to the Ventura County Code until 1981.

#### **IV. PROJECT SCOPE:**

Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance (Ordinance) No. 4604 Section 1366 provides for the designation of Cultural Heritage Sites by the Cultural Heritage Board where the property owner has no objection to a site's designation. Pursuant to Ordinance Section 1368, a Ventura County Landmark may be downgraded where there is evidence that the property has been defaced, demolished, added to, altered, or moved, or damaged by natural disaster, including but not limited to, earthquake, fire, or flood, and the Cultural Heritage Board determines that the site's integrity has been impacted, through no fault or neglect of the property owner, to the extent that it no longer meets the criteria for a Cultural Heritage Site. An application for the removal or downgrade of the designation of a Cultural Heritage Site may be filed by its property owner, by the County Resource Management Agency, or directly by the Cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Greenwood, Roberta S.; R. O. Browne (October 1968). "The Chapel of Santa Gertrudis." *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly*. p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Heritage Board or a member of the Cultural Heritage Board if approved by a properly carried motion.

The Cultural Heritage Board previously directed Ventura County Planning Division staff to evaluate the designation status of Cultural Heritage Sites within unincorporated areas that no longer exist or do not meet established integrity standards. In July 2023, staff conducted a comprehensive review of Ventura County Landmarks to determine sites potentially eligible to be downgraded due to demolition. The County of Ventura's proposed action on this item is based on available information that the property no longer appears to meet the criteria for a Ventura County Landmark.

**V. POINT OF INTEREST CRITERIA:**

In order to be designated a Point of Interest, Section 1367 of the Cultural Heritage Ordinance establishes that Points of Interest satisfy one of the following criteria:

- (1) The site of a building, structure or object that no longer exists, but was associated with historic events, important persons, or embodied a distinctive character or architectural style; or
- (2) A site that has historical significance, but has been altered to the extent that the integrity of the original workmanship, materials, or style has been substantially compromised; or
- (3) The site of a historic event which has no distinguishable characteristics other than that a historic event occurred at that site, and the site is not of sufficient historical significance to justify the establishment of a Landmark.

**VI. STAFF CONCLUSIONS:**

Based on the previous loss of the buildings and structures on site, in combination with the known significance of the former site, staff supports making the findings under Ordinance §1367(c) that the property is eligible for downgrade from a Ventura County Landmark with designation as a Ventura County Point of Interest.

In addition, staff supports making the additional designation findings in Ordinance §1367-1 as the site has historic character, value, and interest to the general public, there are no foreseeable costs to the County in designating the subject property as a Ventura County Point of Interest, and the designation shall not infringe upon the rights of the Property Owner as the designation does not affect allowable land uses and the Property Owner consents to this designation. Therefore, Cultural Heritage Board staff recommends that your board approve the request for Ventura County Point of Interest designation.

**VII. HEARING NOTICE AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

A notification letter regarding the proposed downgrade was sent by U.S. mail to the Property Owner on July 28, 2023 (Exhibit 1). A public notice was sent by U.S. mail to the Property Owner of the subject property not less than fifteen days prior to the date of this hearing (Exhibit 2). No public comment regarding this item has been received to date.

**VIII. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

Cultural Heritage Board staff recommends that your board take the following actions regarding this item:

1. **CONDUCT** public hearing, **RECEIVE** oral and written testimony, and **CONSIDER** the Planning Division staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto;
2. **FIND** that, in accordance with Ordinance §1366-2 and §1368, the Property Owner was given a 15-day notice of the Cultural Heritage Board’s hearing regarding the proposed downgrade of the Santa Gertrudis Asistencia (Chapel) Monument property from a Ventura County Landmark to Ventura County Point of Interest No. 13, and placement of said designation in County lists;
3. **FIND** that the Santa Gertrudis Asistencia (Chapel) Monument property meets County Point of Interest Criterion 1 as required by Ordinance §1367(c), and the additional standards required by Ordinance §1367-1 based on the substantial evidence in the staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto; and
4. **ADOPT** Cultural Heritage Board Resolution No. 2023-3 (Exhibit 3) approving the downgrade of the Santa Gertrudis Asistencia (Chapel) Monument property from a Ventura County Landmark to Ventura County Point of Interest No. 13.

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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Exhibits:

Exhibit 1: Property Owner Notification Letter

Exhibit 2: 15-Day Public Hearing Notice

Exhibit 3: Cultural Heritage Board Resolution No. 2023-3