



Staff Report and Recommendations

Agenda of July 22, 2024, Item 6a

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

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

I. APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

Applicant: Tracy Cortez
1299 Inverness Drive
Pasadena, CA 91103

Property Owner: Billiwhack Ranch, LLC
3565 N Figueroa St
Los Angeles, CA 90065

II. REQUEST:

A request for a Certificate of Review for the reconstruction of Building H2 at Billiwhack Ranch, located at 2275 Aliso Canyon Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060 (Site of Merit). The scope of work is intended to partially abate violation case no. CV22-0472 and involves the reconstruction of a five-bedroom, two-kitchen historic caretaker dwelling (Building H2) back to its original size and footprint of 2,646 SF and an attached carport of approximately 450 SF. (Case No. CH24-0003).

III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

Location: 2275 Aliso Canyon Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060
Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs): 064-0-130-125, 064-0-130-145
Historic Designation: Site of Merit
Common/Historic Name: Billiwhack Ranch

Billiwhack Ranch, a former stock farm/dairy complex, is composed of silos, dairy barns, milking barns, a creamery, and employee housing, as described in the July 1996 *Phase V Western Santa Clara Valley Historic Resources Survey* ("Historic Survey") prepared by San Buenaventura Research Associates. Most of the buildings on site were constructed in 1925-26, although some were not completed until 1931. A road leads up the gently sloping hillside to a large, terraced area containing the once-operating dairy buildings. Today, these buildings function as a mix of housing, offices, and storage related to the citrus operation on the surrounding 97.73-acre property. All of the buildings are built of reinforced concrete and are tile lined. The subject building, Building H2 ("Milker's Dormitory"), was built between 1925-1934 and contains 2,646 square feet. This single-story building contains a rectangular plan and features a low-pitched gable roof.

IV. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SCOPE:

In September 2019, the Ventura County Code Compliance Division recorded a notice of non-compliance regarding the following code violation, among others, at the subject property (case no. CV22-0472): non-permitted modifications to Building H2, including

removal of the attached carport; removal of exterior and interior walls; removal of plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems; and removal of the floor/slab. As approved on September 26, 2023, by the Board of Supervisors in appeal case no. PL20-0032, the building was determined to have been involuntarily destroyed in 2019 by a combination of natural mudflow from a storm event and deferred maintenance, prompting the property owner to remove all walls, roofing, and exterior cladding, leaving only an exposed steel frame supporting the concrete roof. Therefore, the previous involuntary destruction is not included within the present scope of work; the applicant is currently pursuing reconstruction of Building H2 and completion of the appropriate permit review process.

In order to partially abate the violation case, the applicant requests a Certificate of Review (COR) for the reconstruction of Building H2 at Billiwhack Ranch, located at 2275 Aliso Canyon Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060 (Site of Merit). The scope of work is intended to partially abate violation case no. CV22-0472 and involves the reconstruction of a five-bedroom, two-kitchen historic caretaker dwelling (Building H2) back to its original size and footprint of 2,646 SF and an attached carport of approximately 450 SF. The roof material would consist of salvaged Spanish tile (if feasible) and the siding would be off-white stucco to match the original material; windows and doors would be steel frame. Refer to Exhibit 1 for proposed plans and existing elevations, Exhibit 2 for photographs of the building prior to the removal of building materials, and Exhibit 3 for proposed door and window cut sheets.

On August 12, 2019, the CHB reviewed a request for a COA for the rehabilitation of several structures located at Billiwhack Ranch, consisting of the following scope of work (case no. CH19-0021):

- Building 4 – Remodel and structural repair of an existing 17,310 square foot building built circa 1926;
- Building 2 – Remodel of an existing 4,564 square foot building built circa 1926; and
- Building H1- Interior Remodel of an existing 2,385 square foot building built in 1926

At the August 12, 2019, hearing, the CHB continued review of the item to a future date in order to receive a completed historic resource report and more information on potential affects to character-defining features. However, the CHB authorized staff to approve an administrative COA for the stabilization and structural repair of a falling portion of Building 4; this administrative COA was subsequently issued by staff on August 28, 2019 (case no. CH19-0027). At the September 9, 2019, hearing, the CHB denied the requested COA due to the continued lack of a submitted historic resource report and insufficient information on potential affects to character-defining features. The scope of work as proposed was ultimately not effectuated. Refer to Figure 1 for an aerial view of the subject property, Figure 2 for a contemporary oblique aerial view

of the site with historic building names, Figure 3 for a historical view of Building H2 (Milker's Dormitory), and Figure 4 for a current view.

Figure 1 – Aerial View of Subject Property



2022

Figure 2 – Contemporary Oblique Aerial View of Site with Historic Building Names



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates; Google Maps, 2020

Figure 3 – Historical View of Building H2 (Milker's Dormitory)



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates, 1995

Figure 4 – Contemporary View of Building H2 (Milker's Dormitory)



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates, 2020

V. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:

Billiwhack Ranch was previously evaluated in July 1996 as part of the *Phase V Western Santa Clara Valley Historic Resources Survey* (“Historic Survey”) prepared by San Buenaventura Research Associates (Exhibit 4). At that time, the property was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a rural historic district, in the California Register of Historical Resources, and as a Ventura County Landmark. The property was found significant because of the role it played in the history of dairy farming and stock breeding in the Santa Clara Valley. It was the largest dairy farm in the county when it was built by August Rubel between 1925 and 1934 and no other dairy in the county compared in size to the Billiwhack Stock Farm & Dairy and its state-of-the-art buildings (Exhibit 4).

In April 2020, Billiwhack Ranch was further evaluated for historical significance by San Buenaventura Research Associates (Exhibit 5) and additional historical context was developed. Please note that the project description evaluated in Exhibit 5 is no longer applicable; however, Exhibit 5 is included herein for the historical background information and context it provides.

Historical Background

In 1923, August Rubel, a native of Switzerland and Harvard graduate, purchased 308 acres of land in Aliso Canyon with his wife and began developing it into the largest dairy of its kind in Ventura County. Albert J. Mazurette, a renowned California architect and engineer, was retained to design and supervise the construction of what was to become a state-of-the-art milk processing facility. Adolf Schroeder, a local contractor, constructed the Billiwhack Stock Farm and Dairy. The facility included the most advanced buildings and techniques available at the time. Rubel purchased the finest Holstein herd he could afford, which included Prince Aggie, a prize bull from Thomas Bard’s Berylwood Ranch near Port Hueneme. After Prince Aggie, an undefeated California champion and the primary showcase of Rubel’s dairy farm, died unexpectedly, the loss proved disastrous for Rubel and prompted him to sell the dairy in 1928. The original 308-acre stock farm and dairy were sold off into smaller parcels in 1930 and it would operate as a dairy until 1943. Subsequently, the property operated as a citrus ranch and faced periods of abandonment and neglect. The property owner states that the property is currently operated as a citrus ranch.

Property Description

According to the 1996 Historic Survey, the property is described as follows:

The former stock farm/dairy complex is comprised of silos, dairy barns, milking barns, creamery and employee houses. Two roads lead up the gently sloping hillside to a large, terraced area containing the once operating dairy buildings. Today these

buildings function as offices and storage for the citrus operation on the surrounding 70-acre parcel. All of the buildings are built of reinforced concrete and are tile lined. Located in a long row, on the east side of the road, from south to north, are the three dairy barns, a creamery building (milk processing), a milking barn, and a second dairy barn. To the east of this barn is a milker’s dormitory, west of the buildings, against the hillside, are three large hollow clay silos and a concrete building that housed a hammer mill. In the center of this large flat area originally stood a large number of open-sided livestock feeding sheds, measuring approximately 20 by 60 feet. A two-story dormitory for the employees has also been demolished and only the underground parking area remains. A small office building is located adjacent to the parking area.

The Billiwhack Stock Farm & Dairy buildings are significant in the role they played in the history of dairy farming and stock breeding in the Santa Clara Valley. This was the largest dairy farm in the county when it was built by August Rubel between 1925 and 1934. A number of smaller family dairies were established in the area between 1920 and 1950, including the Orr Family’s Orange Grove Dairy and the Golden State Dairy operated by the Lindsey Family, and later by the Pinkerton family. However, no other dairy compared in size to the Billiwhack Stock Farm and Dairy and its “state of the art” buildings.

VI. CULTURAL HERITAGE ORDINANCE ANALYSIS:

The scope of work requires a Certificate of Review from the CHB. Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance (Ordinance) §1372-2 provides that the CHB use *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (“Secretary’s Standards”) in its evaluation of the property and the proposed scope of work. The Certificate of Review process consists of the provision of voluntary recommendations on the scope of work to better conform to the Secretary’s Standards. CHB staff determined the standards for rehabilitation are appropriate for this request and evaluated the scope of work against the relevant standards below.

Standards	Staff Comments
#1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.	The scope of work involves the reconstruction of Building H2 to be used as a legal nonconforming duplex following its involuntary destruction. The proposed use is compatible with the existing structure and overall property. Staff determined that this Standard has been met.
#2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The	The Secretary’s Standards ¹ encourage the retention of historic features that contribute to the

¹ Weeks, Kay D., *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, revised 2017, pg. 140.

Standards	Staff Comments
removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.	<p>interpretation of the significance of a historic property and, when appropriate, repair of materials and limited replacement of deteriorated or missing parts rather than full replacement.</p> <p>Building H2 was previously determined to have been involuntarily destroyed due to mud damage, resulting in the loss of walls, windows and doors, and roofing material. The loss of the building negatively affected the historic integrity of the property. However, the proposed reconstruction of the building's walls, windows, doors, and roof would generally introduce components and materials that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that currently occupy the site. Therefore, the project would not result in further loss of historic integrity.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has been met.</p>
#3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.	Not Applicable.
#4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.	<p>There do not appear to be changes to the property that have acquired historic significance in their own right.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has been met.</p>
#5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.	<p>The proposed reconstruction of the building's walls, windows, doors, and roof would generally introduce components and materials that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that currently occupy the site.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has been met.</p>
#6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires	It would have been preferable to retain as many building materials as feasible prior to their removal from Building H2 following its involuntarily

Standards	Staff Comments
<p>replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.</p>	<p>destruction. The proposed reconstruction of the building’s walls, windows, doors, and roof would generally introduce components and materials that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that currently occupy the site. However, as evidenced in the applicant’s existing and proposed elevation plans (Exhibit 1, sheet A-4) and historical building photographs (Exhibit 2, pages 9-12), the applicant proposes windows and doors where none existed historically, and window sizes and proportions that did not exist previously. According to the National Park Service, “windows are one of the most visible aspects of a building’s exterior, and play a crucial role in determining a building’s significance from an architectural perspective.”² Replacement of missing features, such as windows and doors, should be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has not been met.</p>
<p>#7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.</p>	<p>Not Applicable.</p>
<p>#8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.</p>	<p>Not Applicable.</p>
<p>#9. 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>The proposed reconstruction would maintain the same footprint, height, form, and massing of the building as existed previously, thus preserving spatial relationships that characterize the property. Moreover, the project would generally introduce components and materials that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that</p>

² National Park Service, “Windows,” <https://www.nps.gov/articles/windows.htm>, last updated July 5, 2018, accessed July 10, 2024.

Standards	Staff Comments
	<p>currently occupy the site. Therefore, the project would not result in the loss of any additional historic materials and features.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has been met.</p>
<p>#10. 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.³</p> <p>The previous involuntary destruction of the building and subsequent removal of building materials already negatively affected the historic integrity of the property. The proposed reconstruction of the building’s walls, windows, doors, and roof would generally introduce components and materials that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that currently occupy the site. If the building were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would not be further impaired over current conditions.</p> <p>Staff determined that this Standard has been met.</p>

VII. STAFF CONCLUSION:

Based on the above considerations, the scope of work appears generally consistent with the Secretary’s Standards. It would have been preferable to retain as many building materials as feasible prior to the removal of building materials from Building H2 following its involuntarily destruction. The proposed reconstruction of the building’s walls, windows, doors, and roof would generally introduce components and materials

³ Ventura County Ordinance Code, Article 5 of Chapter 3 of Division 1, Section 1363.

that are historically appropriate to the property because they are architecturally in-kind, both with what existed at the building previously, such as stucco siding and tile roof materials, and with other buildings that currently occupy the site. However, the applicant proposes windows and doors where none existed historically, and window sizes and proportions that did not exist previously. Replacement of missing features, such as windows and doors, should be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

Based on the above, CHB staff recommends adoption of the following recommendation related to the scope of work in order to better conform to the Secretary's Standards:

- **Recommendation #1: Window and Door Pattern.** The applicant should retain the previously documented pattern of fenestration by avoiding to the greatest extent feasible construction and/or size modification of window and door openings where they are not documented to have existed previously. Windows and door opening locations and sizes should match those on the previous structure to the greatest extent feasible.

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; and
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the proposed project in accordance with Ordinance §1372 based on the preceding evidence and analysis.

Prepared by:



Dillan Murray, Senior Planner
Ventura County Planning Division
(805) 654-5042

Reviewed by:



Tricia Maier, Manager
Planning Programs Section
(805) 654-2464

Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Proposed Plans and Elevations
- Exhibit 2: Before Photographs
- Exhibit 3: Door and Window Cut Sheets
- Exhibit 4: Historic Survey, 1996
- Exhibit 5: Phase II Historic Resources Report, 2020