



Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board Staff Report Agenda of October 22, 2012, Item No. 4(a)

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • Planning Division
800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 • ventura.org/rma/planning

SUBJECT:

Recommendation regarding a Historical Property Mills Act Contract request for Ventura County Historical Landmark No. 4 (Cook-Newhall Mansion) located at 829 Park Street, Piru, CA, 93040. Project No. CH12-0010.

APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

James Tashjian, Limelight Investments, LLC.
1143 Highland Avenue
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266

REQUEST:

Consider a recommendation to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors to establish a Historical Property Contract (also known as a Mills Act Contract) for the subject property pursuant to Ventura County Ordinance No. 4225 and Section 1364-10 and Section 50280 of the California Government Code.

LOCATION AND PARCEL NUMBER:

829 Park Street, Piru, CA
APN: 056-0-030-140

BACKGROUND:

Historical Background:

The single family dwelling built on the site in 1983 is a nearly faithful reconstruction of the original David C. Cook Mansion (originally constructed in 1890 and destroyed by a fire in 1981). After the fire only the Sespe stone foundation, tower, and brick chimneys remained. The property owners at the time, Scott and Ruth Newhall, hired the Santa Monica architectural firm Flood, Meyer, Sutton & Associates to reconstruct the Mansion as close to its original form as possible. Deviations from the original Queen Anne style architecture made during the reconstruction are detailed in the attached Historic Resources Mitigation Report (Exhibit 2).

The Mansion was originally designated Ventura County Historic Landmark No. 4 on January 20, 1969.

County of Ventura
Board of Supervisors
**Exhibit 2 – 10/22/12 CHB Staff
Report and Attachments not
included in Board Letter's Exhibits**

Architectural Background:

The single family dwelling is 5,828 square feet (sq.ft.) encompassing two floors. The unfinished basement is 2,550 sq. ft. in size and the third floor attic is 2,139 sq.ft. in size. There are currently six stately bedrooms and six baths in the home. The David C. Cook Mansion exemplifies the Queen Anne style of the Victorian period. The designer of the original Mansion was never documented, but has been attributed by some sources to be the architectural team of Samuel and Joseph Cather Newsom, renowned California architects in the 1880s and 1890s.

Landscape Features:

Over its 122 year history, the landscape surrounding the Mansion has gone through numerous changes with each of the property's three long-term owners. Currently the property surrounding the Mansion is 9.03 acres in size. Landscape features on the site have included various species of trees, shrubs, orchards, stone and concrete walls, and fountains. The attached Historic Resources Mitigation Report (Exhibit 2) provides descriptions of the landscaping installed during various periods of the Mansion's history.

PROJECT ANALYSIS:

The current property owner, James Tashjian, is requesting to enter into a Mills Act Contract with the County of Ventura for the benefit of property tax savings in exchange for the continued preservation of the replicated Cook Mansion (now known as the Cook-Newhall Mansion), located at 829 Park Street, Piru. Concurrently, Mr. Tashjian is preparing submittal of a Conditional Use Permit application to the Planning Division. Planned uses for the property include special events such as historic tours, weddings, family reunions, charitable events, Bar Mitzvahs and the like. Mr. Tashjian's vision is to transform the Cook-Newhall mansion and property into a Cultural Interpretative Center and to restore and maintain defining characteristics of the Cook-Newhall Mansion.

Once submitted, this CUP application will require further review by your Board and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness. This future review will provide an opportunity for your Board to identify and address any impacts of the proposed CUP on the historic integrity of the site and its structures.

Mr. Tashjian submitted a Historic Property Summary with his Mills Act Contract application (Exhibit 3) and a preliminary Site Plan (Exhibit 4). The Historic Property Summary describes his intent to restore the historic landscaping as well as his commitment to ongoing rehabilitation, maintenance and restoration of the site.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Mills Act Findings: As required by the language of the contract, the following findings must be made by your Board:

1. Limelight Investments, LLC possesses and owns real property located at 829 Park Street in the Community of Piru, Ventura County, California;
2. The property is a qualified historical property that is privately owned, not exempt from property taxation;
3. The owner desires to carry out the relevant purposes of the California Government Code for the entire site and structures thereon; and
4. The owner desires to limit the use of the Historical Property to retain its characteristics as a property of historical significance.

The proposed Mills Act Contract is attached for the Board's information including the proposed 10-Year Rehabilitation Plan (Exhibit D of the attached Mills Act Contract), information regarding the historic characteristics of the subject property and Secretary of the Interior maintenance standards (Exhibits B and C, respectively of the attached Mills Act Contract).

Prepared by:



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

Exhibit 2: Historic Resources Mitigation Report dated February 5, 2007

Exhibit 3: Historic Property Summary from James Tashjian

Exhibit 4: Preliminary Site Plan dated October 5, 2012

Exhibit 5: Proposed Mills Act Contract

Mills Act Contract Exhibit A: Legal Description

Mills Act Contract Exhibit B: List of Significant Character Defining and Historic Features

Mills Act Contract Exhibit C: Mills Act Minimum Standards for Maintenance, Use, and Preservation

Mills Act Contract Exhibit D: Mills Act 10-Year Rehabilitation Plan

Exhibit 6: Resolution No. CHB 12-001 to the Board of Supervisors

Historic Property Summary

Piru Mansion (Cook Mansion) – Landmark #4

The historic property located at 829 Park Street, Piru, California, was originally a working citrus orchard of extensive acreage. The citrus orchard was planted by the original owner, David C. Cook, and maintained by a subsequent and longtime owner, Hugh Warring. The “Piru Mansion,” as the property and home are known, became the symbol of the Piru Citrus Association’s “Mansion Brand” citrus trees.

The house was originally constructed in 1890. A 1981 fire leveled the property, which was virtually replicated by Scott and Ruth Newhall during the years 1981-1983. The reconstructed home is a three-story classic Queen Anne Revival, with 19 rooms and an unfinished basement and attic. There is also an original outbuilding on the property, “The Outhouse,” which dates from 1890 and matches the American Queen Anne Style house.

A previously submitted Mills Act Contract clearly shows that the intent of the owner is to restore many of the defining characteristics of the original building, while minimizing changes to the exterior, site, and environment. The long-term development plans are for the property to become a destination for public tours, special events, and overnight guests. A CUP application will be processed with the Planning Division of the City of Ventura, to further this request.

A number of Planning Division requirements need to be implemented, such as ADA accessibility and public bathrooms. None of these items will affect the exterior appearance of the Mansion.

The mission statement of the property use remains the same – that the historic character of the property shall be retained, maintained, and preserved. Due to considerable historical resources available documenting the Mansion, the owner is confident that the historical integrity will be not only safeguarded, but enhanced during his stewardship.

Distinctive features and finishes of the Mansion will be preserved to the greatest possible extent. The exterior will be refurbished as required to return the property to its original beauty. Restoration will be limited to projects that are essential to historic significance. These include items such as the replacement of the two original windows under the third floor front gable and one tower window.

The restoration of the Scott and Ruth Newhall landscape layout (ca.1984) is central to the proposed Mills Act Rehabilitation Plan. The orange grove will be replanted in its original location, but strategically designed to screen the required parking from both the entry and the Mansion. An additional 76 trees will be planted within the parking area to conform to State shading requirements.

In addition, reconstruction of the Newhall landscape elements will be undertaken, including the retention of the two-tiered fountain (Sespe brownstone and tile base); preservation of the existing historical tree palette (Olea, Schinus, Punica, and Washingtonia species); and flowering shrubs to accent the immediate Mansion planting area.

Thank you for your consideration to our Mills Act Contract.

Sincerely,

James Tashjian, General Manager