



# Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of June 12, 2023, Item 6e

## 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:**

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Cultural Resources Unit  
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### II. **REQUEST:**

A request for review and comment pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on the California Department of Transportation's State Route (SR) 23 Drainage Restoration Project.

The project is located on SR 23/Chambersburg Road between Bellevue Avenue and East Guiberson Road (postmile 22.5 to postmile 22.9) near the community of Bardsdale in unincorporated Ventura County. The project would rehabilitate the existing earthen drainage channels on the northbound and southbound sides of SR 23. All work would take place within the existing state right-of-way.

### III. **LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:**

- Palm Trees Along Chambersburg Road (unincorporated Ventura County; Supervisorial District 3 – Long).
- All work would take place within the existing state right-of-way on SR 23/Chambersburg Road between Bellevue Avenue and East Guiberson Road near the community of Bardsdale in unincorporated Ventura County (approximately one mile south of the City of Fillmore)
- Historic Designation: Ventura County Landmark No. 122, determined eligible for National Register of Historic Resources

The 38 Mexican fan palm trees (*Washingtonia robusta*) along SR 23/Chambersburg Road from Guiberson Road south to Bellevue Avenue, Bardsdale, were designated as a Ventura County Landmark (No. 122) in December 1988. The approximately 100-foot-tall Mexican palm trees are the tallest visual landmark in Bardsdale and the surrounding area (refer to Figure 1 below). There is no record of the trees' age but a descendant of the family that once owned the land recalls that the trees were there when he was in grammar school in 1905. The surrounding area is characterized by sparse residential development and agricultural fields.

Figure 1 – Photo of Palm Trees Along Chambersburg Road



Source: Jeff Carr, Caltrans, District 7, 2023

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

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is proposing the SR 23 Drainage Restoration Project on SR 23/Chambersburg Road between Bellevue Avenue and East Guiberson Road (postmile 22.5 to postmile 22.9) near the community of Bardsdale in Ventura County, California (Exhibit 1).

On February 27, 2023, Caltrans submitted a Historic Property Survey Report and Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the undertaking to the State Historic Preservation Officer. At the time, the effects of the undertaking were undetermined because the project design was undergoing revisions to avoid effects to the Palm Trees Along Chambersburg Road, a historic property within the area of potential effects of the project. The previous project description included regrading the existing drainage channel adjacent to the historic property, which would have required trimming the roots of the palm trees. Caltrans contracted a certified arborist to examine the health of the trees and to make recommendations to incorporate into the project that would ensure the continued preservation of the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road (Exhibit 4).

Following this evaluation, the project was redesigned to avoid root trimming. The revised scope of work consists of the following (described in Exhibit 2):

1. Divert most of the runoff from the northbound (NB) to the southbound (SB) direction using box-culvert, and past Pasadena Ave, divert the runoff back to the earthen channel in the northbound direction.
2. Place Soldier Pile Timber lagging 7.5 feet away from center line of each existing palm trees' exclusion zone in the NB direction to the first driveway (the existing eroded trapezoidal earth channel will stay in place).
3. Leave the existing cross-pipe culverts in place at three driveways in the NB direction.
4. Replace the existing eroded trapezoidal earth channel with a concrete rectangular box culvert in the southbound (SB) direction.
5. Repair the existing cross pipe at three driveways in the NB direction.
6. Construct a transition structure to join the existing four feet wide by four feet high box culvert at Guiberson Road.
7. Replace the existing double cross pipe culverts with double corrugated metal pipe at Bellevue Avenue/Chambersburg Road.
8. Replace the existing cross box culvert with reinforced concrete box culvert at Pasadena Avenue.

## **V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

According to the Historic Resources Evaluation Report prepared for the subject property (Exhibit 3)<sup>1</sup>, the initial development of the broader community of Bardsdale is described as follows”

*“The extension of the Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) branch line from Newhall down the Santa Clara Valley toward Ventura and Santa Barbara beginning in 1886...spurred the largest land and population boom in Ventura County’s history up to that time. During that time, companies (including the SPRR) and individuals waged promotional campaigns seeking to entice land buyers and tourists to Ventura County. One such individual was Roys G. Surdam a land entrepreneur who had undertaken land and oil business ventures in Ventura County since the 1860s, sometimes with his friend and business associate Thomas Bard. Among Bard’s ventures was the promotion of Ojai as a health resort and the construction of a brick kiln in Ventura. In 1887, Surdam purchased from Bard 1,300 acres south of the Santa Clara River and laid out the community of Bardsdale in 10-acre parcels intended for citrus cultivation and city blocks set aside for other community services. To secure water for the area,*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Carr, Principal Architectural Historian, California Department of Transportation, District 7, *Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the SR 23 Drainage System Restoration Project*, February 2023.

*the Southside Improvement Company was formed in 1887 with Bard as president and purchased rights from local ditch owners. Despite efforts to promote Bardsdale, investors were difficult to secure. However, Bardsdale began to gradually grow in the 1890s with the settlement of several German families. Oil discovered by the Union Oil Company near Bardsdale led to additional settlement during that decade. Bardsdale continued to develop as a ranching community focused on the cultivation of apricots and later citrus. While the community was laid out with city blocks reserved, the community did not develop as a business or municipal center, rather residents relied on the nearby town of Fillmore for business needs. Today, Bardsdale remains a sparsely developed agricultural community consisting of agricultural fields and orchards, farmhouses, and two churches.”*

The Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road extend along the western edge of two 8-acre parcels and one 10-acre parcel.<sup>2</sup> The subject property was evaluated in the 1987 *Phase IV Santa Clara Valley Historic Resources Survey* prepared by San Buenaventura Research Associates (Exhibit 5).<sup>3</sup> According to a 1987 interview with Bismark Basolo, whose family owned most of the land where the trees are located, the trees were present when he attended grammar school around 1905, indicating they were planted during community’s initial period of development.<sup>4</sup> As part of the historic survey, the property was assigned a Historical Resource Status Code of 3D as an identified contributor to an eligible overall rural historic district eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).<sup>5</sup> The district boundaries include the unincorporated areas whose historic landscape elements contain agricultural lands primarily devoted to citrus and dotted with ranch houses, barns, sheds and packing houses.<sup>6</sup>

As part of the 2023 Historic Resources Evaluation Report prepared for the subject property, the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road were determined eligible for listing the NRHP under Criterion C at the local level of significance as an important and rare example of a roadway tree row in the community.<sup>7</sup> Character defining features of the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road include the trees, as well as

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> San Buenaventura Research Associates, *Phase IV Santa Clara Valley Historic Resources Survey*, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Carr, Principal Architectural Historian, California Department of Transportation, District 7, *Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the SR 23 Drainage System Restoration Project*, February 2023.

their linear alignment and the regular spacing between the trees.<sup>8</sup> The eligible NRHP boundary for the historic property corresponds to a strip of land extending approximately five feet beyond (east of) the existing right-of-way line, beginning approximately five feet south of the southernmost palm tree (approximately 175 feet north of Bellevue Avenue) and ending approximately five feet north of the northernmost palm tree (approximately 60 feet south of Guiberson Road).<sup>9</sup> The historic property retains integrity in terms of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.<sup>10</sup>

## **VI. PROJECT ANALYSIS:**

The project is a federal undertaking that could potentially affect historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (“NHPA”) and the January 2014 *First Amended Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the California Department of Transportation Regarding Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, As it Pertains to the Administration of the Federal-Aid Highway Program in California*.

Following identification and assessment of the National Register-eligible structures, Caltrans, A has determined a Finding of No Historic Properties Affected is appropriate for this undertaking because the identified historic properties will not be affected. The County of Ventura Cultural Heritage Board, as a Certified Local Government pursuant to the NHPA, has been identified as potentially having an interest in the undertaking and to participate as a consulting party within the context of Section 106. Any comments or recommendations the Cultural Heritage Board may have would be forwarded to Caltrans to be addressed during the final design and construction phase of the project.

## **VII. STAFF CONCLUSION:**

As mentioned, Caltrans contracted a certified arborist to examine the health of the trees and to make recommendations to be incorporated into the project that would ensure the continued preservation of the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road (Exhibit 4). Following this evaluation, Caltrans revised the design of the project to avoid root trimming altogether.<sup>11</sup> As currently designed, the project would divert most of the water from the NB side of the roadway to the SB side (which will reduce water

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jeff Carr, Principal Architectural Historian, California Department of Transportation, District 7, *Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the SR 23 Drainage System Restoration Project*, February 2023.

flow through the channel adjacent to the trees) and install soldier pile timber lagging between the trees to impede soil erosion.<sup>12</sup> Because root trimming is no longer proposed and soil erosion around the trees will be reduced by the project, Caltrans determined the redesigned project has little potential to affect the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road and would result in No Effect.<sup>13</sup> CHB staff concurs with the Caltrans assessment of the project's potential to affect the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road.

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

- **Recommendation #1: Pursue Nomination for Listing in the National Register of Historic Places.** Within 6 months, it is recommended that Caltrans pursue nomination of the Palm Trees along Chambersburg Road for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, if 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 based on the preceding evidence and analysis.

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Caltrans Request for Consultation
- Exhibit 2: Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report
- Exhibit 3: Historic Resources Evaluation Report
- Exhibit 4: Arborist Tree Assessment Report
- Exhibit 5: Historic Survey Evaluation, 1987