

# Cultural & Historic Resources

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# Historic & Cultural Resources

*The purpose of this section is to provide current information on cultural resources in the City of Ventura, as well as emerging trends.*

*Key issue areas discussed in this section include:*

- *History of Ventura and how it is preserved today through various archaeological, tribal, and cultural resources.*
- *List of existing historical sites and cemeteries in the City.*
- *Description of regulations and local agencies that govern the preservation of cultural resources in Ventura.*
- *Discussion of controversial monuments, and how this might affect preservation of historical landmarks in the future.*

## Policy and Regulatory Context

### Senate Bill 18

Senate Bill (SB) 18 was passed in 2004, establishing responsibilities for local governments to contact, provide notice to, refer plans to, and consult with tribes prior to the adoption or any amendment of a general plan or specific plan (OPR, 2005). It also states that tribes must be consulted before the designation of open space if the affected land contains a cultural place. A local government must notify the appropriate tribes of the opportunity to conduct consultations for the purpose of preserving, or mitigating impacts to, cultural places located on land within the local government's jurisdiction that is affected by the proposed plan adoption or amendment.

### Assembly Bill 52

Assembly Bill (AB) 52, passed in 2014, requires lead agencies to begin consultation with a California Native American tribe that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the proposed project prior to determining whether a negative declaration, mitigated negative declaration, or environmental impact report is required for a project. The bill required an update to Appendix G (Initial Study Checklist) of the CEQA Guidelines to include questions related to impacts to tribal cultural resources. These changes to Appendix G were approved by the Office of Administrative Law on September 27, 2016.

### National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was the first national policy governing preservation, establishing permanent institutions and a clearly defined process for historic preservation in the United States. It created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and National Register of Historic Places, an official list not only of individual buildings and structures, but also of districts, objects, and archeological sites that are important due to their connection with the past. Individual states were also

required to take more responsibility for historic sites in their jurisdiction. The California Office of Historic Preservation administers both federal and state historic preservation programs, with the goal of furthering the identification, evaluation, registration, and protection of California's historic resources.

## Mills Act

The Mills Act is a self-directed, economic incentive program designed to provide private property owners the opportunity to actively participate in the restoration of their properties while receiving property tax relief. If a homeowner's property is listed on the city landmark register, they may qualify for property tax relief by pledging to rehabilitate and maintain the historical and architectural character of a property for at least a 10-year period. Mills Act participants may realize a property tax savings of up to approximately 50 percent each year for newly improved or purchased older properties.

## General Plan Action

Action Item 9.19 of the current Ventura General Plan states, "For any project in a historic district or that would affect any potential historic resource or structure more than 40 years old, require an assessment of eligibility for State and federal register and landmark status and appropriate mitigation to protect the resource." In 2010, a Policies and Procedures for Historic Resources Protection document was adopted by the City Council with the purpose of providing clear direction and a standardized format for all historical resource assessments prepared for the City of Ventura and review procedure for demolition applications of potential historic structures. This helped to allow both city staff and members of the Historical Preservation Committee (HPC) to more efficiently and effectively review potential historic resources being considered for development or historic designation. The City is currently undertaking a citywide historic context statement and survey. The General Plan Update also will include a Historic Preservation Element.

# Emerging Trends

## Controversial Monuments

The United States has been experiencing increasing protests regarding statues and landmarks that are seen as insensitive for the figures or institutions that they represent. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Ventura City Council voted to remove the statue of Junipero Serra from outside City Hall, after protests against similar statues in other California cities. The statue has now been removed. There may be similar situations in the future that require a response from City officials and affect the preservation of historic landmarks in Ventura.

## Historic Preservation and Native Americans

Since the last General Plan, there has been a greater emphasis in Ventura and throughout California on historic preservation and outreach to Native Americans before the development of new projects. With the passage of SB 18 and AB 52, state law now requires more outreach with Native Americans about historic sites for new projects and General Plans. The downtown and Midtown areas of Ventura lie on the site of an old Native American village, where there is a high concentration of historic resources. The City has been working to redevelop these areas of the City but has run into challenges due to the number of

historic resources there. This will continue to be a constraint in the future for new development in these areas of the city.

## Existing Conditions

### Cultural Setting

The cultural history of Ventura and the surrounding Ventura Hills can be divided into three major eras: Native-American, Spanish-Mexican and Anglo-American. Remnants from these unique eras exist in the region as a diverse range of tribal, archaeological and architectural resources. The Ventura Hills served as part of the larger Chumash territory that extended from the coast and Channel Islands and inland to include Santa Barbara, most of Ventura, parts of San Luis Obispo, Kern and Los Angeles Counties. The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the influx of Spanish-Mexican culture, with the establishment of large Spanish Land Grants in the area along the coast, while the modern Anglo-American era began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the break-up and sale of the Spanish Land Grants.

#### Native American Era

The Chumash were the primary Native American inhabitants of Ventura before the arrival of Europeans. The earliest inhabitants of Southern California were transient hunters visiting the region approximately 12,000 B.C.E., who were the cultural ancestors of the Chumash. At the peak, the Chumash population was estimated to be in the tens of thousands, with territory of around 7,000 square miles that spanned from Malibu to Paso Robles, stretching inland to the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley. They lived in dome-shaped homes that up to 50 people could live in at one time.

The Chumash people were known as skilled boat builders, allowing them to travel up and down the Pacific Coast and inhabit the Channel Islands. Their villages became increasingly permanent over time, with chiefs and shaman priests generally at the highest positions of authority. Women could serve equally with men as chiefs and priests. One chief would often hold responsibility for multiple villages. The Chumash Native American population was decimated due to European disease in the 1700s and 1800s, spread primarily by Spaniards as the mission system was founded and as the region was increasingly colonized by Mexicans and Americans.

#### Spanish-Mexican Era

Ventura, officially named San Buenaventura, was founded in 1782 when Saint Junipero Serra established Mission San Buenaventura, the ninth of the California missions. Serra named the mission after the Italian Saint Bonaventure. After the earthquake of 1812-1813, the Mission land was divided up among the settlers. Administrators were appointed to transfer such lands to private property owners and to proceed with secular development of the area. This is now known as the Rancho Era, which ended with the transfer of California from Mexico to the United States following the Mexican-American War.

#### Anglo-American Era

Americans from the United States began arriving in California in the 1840s. By the 1860s, Mission San Buenaventura was a thriving hub of orchards and gardens watered by a seven-mile aqueduct and the largest ranching operation in California. The city transformed quickly after the State legislature incorporated "the town of San Buenaventura" on April 2, 1866 and became the County seat in 1873.

Around this time, the railroad magnate Thomas Scott acquired a variety of holdings in the area, including investments in oil exploration near Ojai. His nephew, Thomas Bard, was sent by him in 1965 to Ventura

County to develop his various properties. Thomas Bard played a significant role in the organization and growth of Ventura and the rest of the county. The Ventura oil field was first worked in 1885 the first commercially viable well was drilled in 1916.

An oil boom, a real estate boom, and growth in agricultural operations brought immigrants, wealth, bridges and roadways to the city from 1910 to 1930. Production at the Ventura Oil Field peaked in the 1950s, although the field is still active today. Ventura continued to prosper with an eclectic architectural mix of red brick storefronts, terra cotta "Beaux-Arts" buildings, Victorian and Spanish Revival style homes and a new Ventura County Courthouse built in 1913 (now Ventura City Hall). Until the completion of the Ventura Freeway from Los Angeles to Ventura in 1969, the city was relatively isolated from the rest of the Southern California.

## Existing Cultural Resources

### Historic Landmarks and Points of Interest

The history of Ventura is preserved in several historical landmarks and points of interest. The city's historic landmark designation is currently approved by the City Council based on advice and recommendations by the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission is informed by the City's Historic Preservation Committee, which is a five-member body that makes recommendations concerning the designation of historic districts, landmarks, sites, natural configurations, buildings, structures, and points of interest significant to the heritage and development of the city. In total, the City has designated 111 sites as Ventura Historic Landmarks and five areas as Ventura Historic Districts. The Mission Historic District, the first historic district, includes more than ten historic landmarks, the Ventura Mission among them.

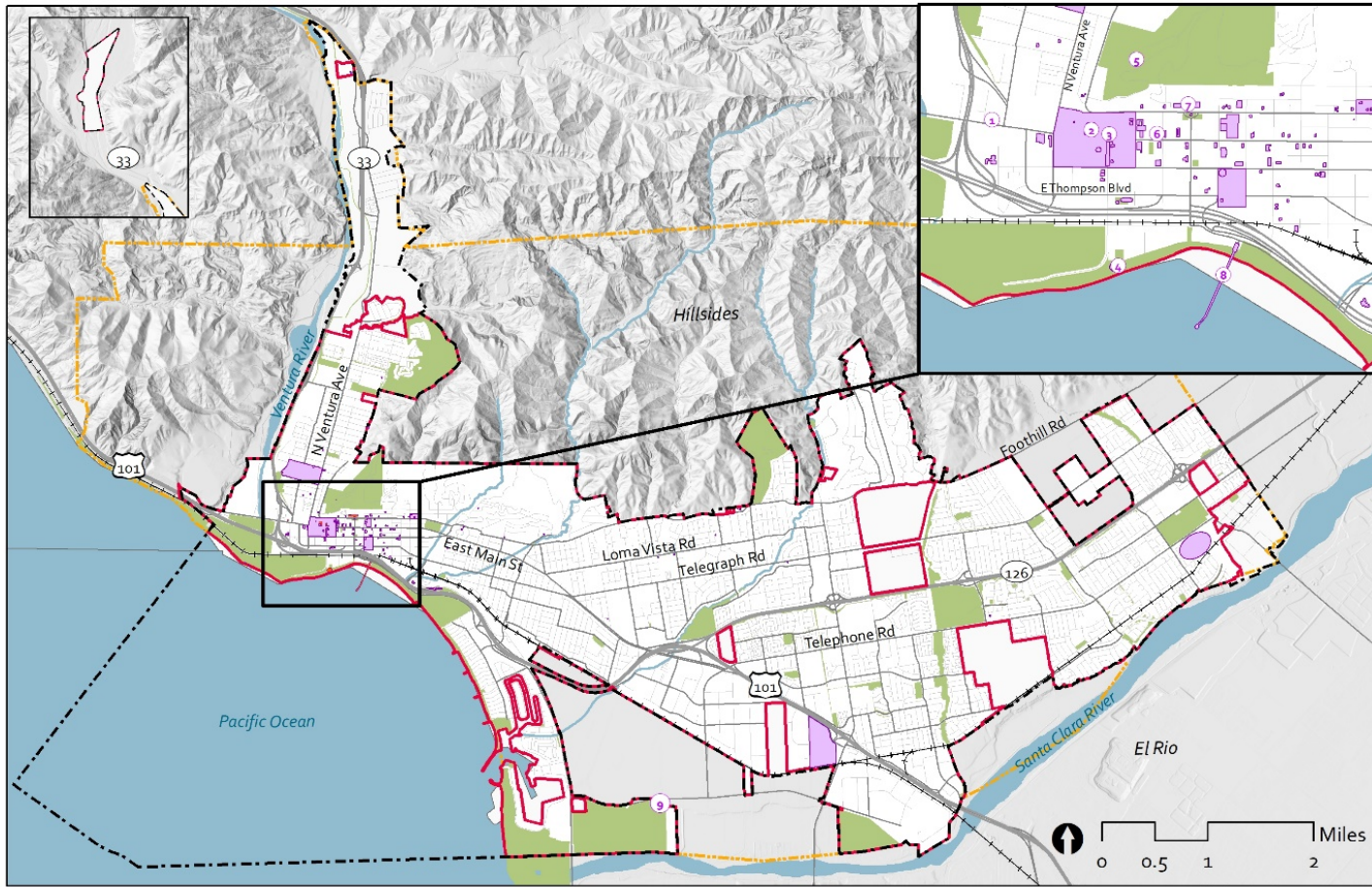
The following is a description of the city's primary existing landmarks and points of interest as listed on the city's website, with locations shown in Figure 1.

- **Father Serra Statue.** This bronze statue was designed by John Palo Kanges and represents an idealized image of Father Junipero Serra, the founder of Mission San Buenaventura. Located in front of Ventura's City Hall on California Street, the original cement statue, a Works Progress Administration project, was unveiled in November 1936. Due to weathering, the original statue was placed in storage in 1989 and replaced by the present bronze one. The wooden statue used to mold the bronze statue is located in the atrium of the City Hall. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, the City Council voted to remove the statue from the grounds of the City Hall and move it to a non-public location. It has been removed.
- **First Post Office Building.** This building housed Ventura's first Post Office. Built in 1902, it was used until 1919 for that purpose. It was designated in 1976.
- **Grant Park Cross Site.** The wooden cross, made of pine from Santa Paula Canyon, was placed on this site in the 1940's to replace a cross that was erected by ladies of the ECO Club, a service club, on Admission Day, September 9, 1912. The wooden cross commemorated the original cross erected by Father Junipero Serra when he founded Mission San Buenaventura in 1782.
- **Mission Plaza/Albinger Archaeological Museum Site.** The Mission Plaza Archaeological Project studied the area west of Mission San Buenaventura Church and along Valdez Alley from 1973 to 1975. A number of important features covering 3,500 years of history were uncovered at the site. These features include five mission building foundations, ceramic pipelines, an adobe brick factory, a well, an earth oven, and a water filtration building. Nicknamed El Caballo (the

Horse) because of a carved wall feature in the shape of an animal head, the filtration building, built sometime after 1782 by Chumash labor under the direction of Father Pedro Cambon, is the oldest standing structure in Ventura County. In the late 1860s, the building was used as a jail.

- **Olivas Adobe.** This two-story Monterey style adobe was the center of San Miguel Rancho. Built in 1847 by Don Raymundo Olivas, a prominent cattle and sheep rancher, it was owned by the family until 1899. Restored in the late 1920's by millionaire Max Fleischmann, of Fleischmann Yeast and Margarine fame, for use as a hunting lodge, the historic house was given to the City of San Buenaventura in 1961. Now a historic museum, it is dedicated to Ventura's rancho heritage. In 1979, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and it is also designated as a California Historical Landmark.
- **Ortega Adobe.** The Ortega Adobe is an architectural example of smaller adobe homes that once lined Main Street in sharp contrast to the residences of wealthy landowners nearby. It was within this adobe that Emilio Ortega first began fire-roasting chiles in 1897, believed to be the first commercial food operation of its kind in California. It has been City property since 1921 and was restored in the 1970s.
- **San Buenaventura Mission.** Father Junipero Serra founded Mission San Buenaventura on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782. It was the ninth and final mission founded by Father Serra. Construction on the present stone and adobe church started in 1792, and was completed in 1809. The Mexican Government secularized the missions in 1834, and in 1846, Mission San Buenaventura was sold to Jose Arnaz and became known as Rancho Ex Mission. In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln returned the Mission San Buenaventura Church to the Catholic Church, which owns it to this day.
- **Shisholop Village Site.** Located directly on the beach at the foot of Figueroa Street is the site of the Chumash Indian Village called Shisholop by the missionaries who settled Ventura. Believed to have been a Chumash provincial capital, Shisholop was first settled shortly after A.D. 1000 and reached its zenith about the time it was visited in 1542 by Portuguese navigator Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, while on an exploratory expedition for Spain. The location of Shisholop Village and the Cabrillo Landing was designated as a historical point of interest in 1975.
- **Ventura City Hall.** Constructed in 1912, it served as the Ventura County Courthouse until 1962. Designed by famed Los Angeles architect, Albert C. Martin Sr. in the "Beaux Arts" or Neo Classic style, the building features the faces of 24 monks on the facade and stained glass skylights and domes in the interior. Restored and converted into Ventura's City Hall in 1972, it stands as one of the state's premier civic buildings. The west wing, formerly the County Sheriff's Office and Jail, was restored and added to the City Hall designation in 1988. It has been designated a State of California Historical Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Ventura Pier.** Since 1872, the Ventura Pier has stood as a symbol of the region's rich history and natural resources. Once the cornerstone of Ventura County's agricultural, construction and oil trade, today the Ventura Pier is a favorite attraction for fishing, picnics, sunset strolls and beautiful views of Ventura County's coastline and the Channel Islands. Preservation and maintenance of the pier is supported by Pier into the Future, a nonprofit formed in 1993 by community leaders.

Figure 1: Historical Sites in Ventura



Data provided by City of Ventura, 2019, 2020.

**City of Ventura Historical Landmarks**

- Ventura City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Boundary
- Green/Open Space
- Railroad
- Roadway
- Historic Site

- 1. Ortega Adobe
- 2. Mission Plaza Site
- 3. San Buenaventura Mission
- 4. Shisholop Village Site
- 5. Grant Park Cross
- 6. First Post Office Building
- 7. City Hall/County Courthouse
- 8. Ventura Wharf (Pier)
- 9. Olivas Adobe





## Archaeological and Tribal Resources

Ventura has a long history of human inhabitation. The downtown and midtown areas of the City, between the Mission and Ventura Beach, lie on a Native American village site (Shisholop Village Site). As a result, there is a high concentration of historic resources in these areas. Existing state laws, including Senate Bill 18 and Assembly Bill 52, require that historic resources be considered for preservation and impacts to them are mitigated to the extent feasible, and also require more outreach to Native American groups. As urbanization in Ventura has increased, more cultural resources have been identified as site surveys have been conducted. Due to descriptions and locations of these resources being sensitive, however, these details are not public knowledge to protect them.

Prehistoric archeological sites in the city generally involve traces of at least one of the following resources: middens, milling stone sites, large villages, cemeteries, hilltop bead shrines, flake scatters and camp workshops. The city has 25 recorded archeological sites in total, including the Mission Archeological Plaza and Shisholop Village sites, which are discussed above in detail in the Historic Landmarks and Points of Interest section.

## Cemeteries

Preservation of cemeteries is important to prevent deterioration and to safeguard them from illegal excavation and theft. In addition, it helps to restore cemeteries and facilitates contact with the public and the study of history. Cemeteries in Ventura are listed below.

- **Cemetery Memorial Park.** Originally St. Mary's Cemetery, and also known as Ventura Cemetery, it was opened in 1862 when San Buenaventura Mission was seeking for more room for burial grounds. It was operated by the Catholic Church for a long number of years. The cemetery holds many of the city's founders and over 60 Union veterans are buried there. By 1943, the cemetery was falling into disrepair, leading to the conversion of the cemetery to a city park by the Ventura City Council in the 1960's. This involved moving some remains and removing all headstones at the cemetery. Ventura residents were last buried here in 1944.
- **Ivy Lawn Memorial Park.** Ivy Lawn Cemetery was the first lawn park cemetery in Ventura County, formed in the 1910's. From 1917 through the 1960's, hundreds of individuals were relocated from the Ventura Cemetery and Springville Cemetery near Camarillo. Its mausoleum was built in 1964. The City of Ventura awarded Ivy Lawn Memorial Park historical designation in 2012. Today the cemetery has capacity and offers traditional burials, above ground burials, and cremations.

## Conclusions/Issues and Opportunities

The following identifies issues and opportunities related to historic and cultural resources that can be addressed in the General Plan Update:

- The City should determine an appropriate approach to the treatment of religious historical resources in public spaces.
- The City will need to continue balancing the desire for new development in the downtown and midtown areas with the desire to maintain these areas' historic character and resources by identifying approaches to allowing development of key sites while preserving archaeological/tribal cultural integrity.

- Approaches should be identified to allow the development of key sites in the city while preserving archeological and tribal resource integrity.

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