

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## AMENDED RECOMMENDATION REPORT

CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2015-770-HCM  
ENV-2015-771-CE

**HEARING DATE:** May 12, 2015  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 7556 N. Woodlake Avenue, 7566 N. Woodlake Avenue, 7572 N. Woodlake Avenue  
Council District: 12  
Community Plan Area: Canoga Park – Winnetka – Woodland Hills – West Hills  
Area Planning Commission: South Valley  
Neighborhood Council: West Hills

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the CIRCLE S RANCH

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**OWNER(S):** William G. & Joy A, Ross, Trustees, Ross Trust  
7566 N. Woodlake Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 91304

**APPLICANT:** Charles J. Fisher  
140 S. Avenue 57  
Highland Park, CA 90042

**RECOMMENDATION**      **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Declare the subject property** a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.7.
2. **Adopt** the staff report and **revised** findings.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE  
Director of Planning

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

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Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect  
Office of Historic Resources

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Nels Youngborg, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments:      Historic-Cultural Monument Application

## **FINDINGS**

- The property “reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state or community” for representing the earliest pattern of residential development in the West Hills area and a rare remaining example of agricultural land use in the San Fernando Valley.
- The property “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction” as an example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style.

## **CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

## **SUMMARY**

Originally built in 1927, Circle S Ranch is a rare remaining example of a large ranch estate in the San Fernando Valley. Development of this kind occurred prior to World War II, where large ranch estates were constructed in the San Fernando Valley to act as vacation or weekend getaways for the wealthy Hollywood elite. Since then, much of this original development has been lost due to suburbanization and consequent subdivision of what used to be large parcels of land.

The home was built for Frank Stewart Howard, a Buick distributor, who purchased the land from a land syndicate that was established by five of Los Angeles’ most prominent businessmen. One of the syndicate’s partners was Harrison Gray Otis, founder and publisher of the Los Angeles Times. The towns of Owensmouth and Van Nuys were also established by this organization. The property changed hands many times throughout its history, notably acquired by Grenville W. Stratton in 1947 after leasing the property for three years. As the landowner, he changed the name of the property to Circle S Stables to suit the needs of his thriving horse racing and breeding business. Under his ownership, Circle S Ranch became widely recognized as a landmark of the San Fernando Valley, as described in a 1954 Los Angeles Times article.

The house, which is the primary structure on the property, exhibits many character-defining features of the Dutch Colonial Revival style including:

- Main entrance framed with pilasters supporting an arched, triangular gabled porch
- Transverse main gable; full gambrel gable on north and south façades
- Long shed dormers along the front and back of the house
- Multi-paned casement windows
- Symmetrical design
- Two stories in height

The property has undergone many additions and alterations between 1931 and 1976, but retained its architectural character and authenticity. Alterations include an added maids' quarters, a 100-foot long horse barn (later moved off the property and demolished), removal of the original barn, and a new chicken coop. Notably, the acreage of the site was reduced in 1956 from 38.5 to 3.46 acres, yet is still uniquely larger than surrounding properties.

## **DISCUSSION**

Circle S Ranch successfully meets two of the specified Historic-Cultural Monument criteria: 1) "reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state or community" and 2) "embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction." As a rare, remaining example of an intact 1920s ranch estate in West Hills, this property demonstrates one of the earliest periods of development within the San Fernando Valley. Also, the use of the property for agricultural purposes is still reflected in the secondary buildings and the unusually large lot size. The property is an excellent example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style and there are very few examples of this style remaining in the San Fernando Valley.

## **CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT ("CEQA") FINDINGS**

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 "*consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment.*"

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 "*consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings.*"

The designation of Circle S Ranch as a Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code ("LAAC") will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to a Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of irreplaceable historic structures. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 31 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals relating to the preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and

reconstruction of historic buildings in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.

### **BACKGROUND**

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the Cultural Heritage Commission voted to take the property under consideration. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, a subcommittee of the Commission consisting of Commissioners Milofsky and Irvine toured the property, accompanied by a staff member from the Office of Historic Resources.

### **REVISED FINDINGS**

The Historic-Cultural Monument shall include the house, guest house, trellis, and surrounding grounds except for the eastern portion of the lot. The eastern portion, from the end of the eastern edge of the trellis to the eastern-most property line (approximately 250 feet in length), shall be excluded from the Historic-Cultural Monument designation.