



Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of March 25, 2024, Item 6a

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

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I. APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

Applicant/Property Owner: MECB PROPERTIES LLC
PO Box 6789
Ventura, CA 93006

II. REQUEST:

Provide a recommendation to the State Office of Historic Preservation on whether the Scarlett-McGrath Ranch meets the criteria for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

Location: 5011 W Gonzales Road, Oxnard, CA 93036 (District 1 – LaVere)
Assessor's Parcel Number (APN): 138-0-090-255
Historic Designation: Ventura County Landmark #144
Common/Historic Name: Scarlett-McGrath Ranch

The subject property is a roughly rectangular, 5-acre portion of what was historically referred to as the Scarlett-McGrath Ranch and comprises a small, developed portion of a larger, approximately 100-acre parcel primarily occupied with agricultural fields.¹ The parcel on which the subject property is located was historically part of a larger property initially developed in the latter half of the 19th century to support the agricultural development of the western Oxnard Plain and has been continually utilized as a residential and agricultural property since that time.² The subject property consists of a centrally sited Queen Anne Style farmhouse surrounded with mature landscaping and a variety of outbuildings and other structures that vary in their dates of construction, many of which post-date the historic period; they include utilitarian buildings for storage and support of land cultivation, residential buildings, and a variety of semi-permanent structures developed in recent decades to support agriculture and farm animal related educational tours of the property.³ Contributing buildings include the Queen Anne Style farmhouse, barn, former brick tank house, and former tractor shed.⁴

IV. BACKGROUND AND REGULATORY CONTEXT:

¹ Perzel, Rachel (August 15, 2023). "Scarlett Ranch." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Rincon Consultants, Inc, Ventura, CA.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

A. Request for Comment by the State of California Office of State Historic Preservation (OHP) from the Cultural Heritage Board

On March 4, 2024, the County of Ventura (County) received a request from the OHP for the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board (“Board” or “CHB”), which is the County’s local historic preservation commission, to comment on whether the Scarlett-McGrath Ranch meets the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), following its nomination to be listed in the National Register (Exhibit 1) (“OHP Request”). OHP made the request pursuant to the Certified Local Government (CLG) Agreement between the State of California (State) and the County (Exhibit 2). According to the OHP Request, the nomination will be reviewed by the State Historical Resources Commission at their May 3, 2024 hearing.

B. Regulatory Context

This OHP request comes to the Cultural Heritage Board as one of several responsibilities the County meets as a participant in the CLG Program. Participants in the CLG program must meet five basic CLG program requirements: 1) to enforce local and state standards for the designation and protection of historic resources; 2) to establish an adequate and qualified local historic preservation board; 3) to maintain a system for the survey and inventory of historic properties; 4) to provide for adequate public participation in local historic preservation programs, *“including the process of recommending properties for nomination to the National Register”*; and 5) to satisfactorily perform the responsibilities designated to the local board by the State (See NHPA, § 101(c)(1)).⁵

1. The County’s Participation in the CLG Program

The County adopted its first Cultural Heritage Ordinance in 1968 with the stated purpose of “preserving and protecting landmarks and points of interest . . . [that] hav[e] a specific historical or aesthetic character or interest.” The Ordinance has been amended several times since it was originally enacted, including in 1991 when the County amended the Ordinance to meet the five basic CLG program requirements after consulting with OHP.

In 1992, the County entered an agreement with the State to become a certified participant in the CLG program (Exhibit 2). The Ordinance, as amended in 1991, was incorporated into the CLG Agreement together with mandatory CLG program procedures then in effect. The current version of the Ordinance was pre-approved by

⁵ See also 54 United States Code, section 302503.

OHP, as required by the CLG Agreement, and adopted by the County in 2022. The current CLG program procedures (CLG Procedures) were adopted by OHP in 2010.

The CLG Procedures obligate the County to provide for adequate public participation in all CLG programs and activities and to participate in the nomination of properties to the National Register pursuant to Section 101(c)(2)(A) of the National Historic Preservation Act.⁶ Section 101(c)(2)(A) of the National Historic Preservation Act provides that the CHB, “after reasonable opportunity for public comment, shall prepare a report as to whether or not such property, in its opinion, meets the criteria of the National Register.” The criteria of the National Register are outlined in the National Register Bulletin publication, “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” (Exhibit 3).⁷

Concurrent with federal and state requirements, the Ordinance promotes the economic and general welfare of the County by preserving and promoting public and private historic, cultural and natural resources which are of special historical or aesthetic character or interest, or relocating or recreating such resources where necessary for their preservation and for their use, education, and view by the public (§ 1361).

Section 1365 of the Ordinance establishes the functions and powers of the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB), to which the CHB is required to adhere:

Section 1365-2: “Forward Recommendations. The Cultural Heritage Board shall make recommendations to policy makers and related staff members on issues related to the preservation and enhancement of cultural, historic, and natural features in unincorporated Ventura County as well as its cities, pursuant to any adopted contract for cultural heritage services with the County.”

V. NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION:

The criteria of the National Register may be found in the National Register Bulletin publication, “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” (Exhibit 3, pg. 11).⁸ As detailed therein, the basis for judging a property's significance and, ultimately, its eligibility under the National Register Criteria, is historic context. The use of historic context allows a property to be evaluated in any number of capacities in order to determine whether the characteristics or associations of the property are significant (Exhibit 3). After identifying the relevant historic context(s) with which the property is associated, the four National Register Criteria are applied to the property. Within the scope of the historic context, the National Register Criteria define the kind of

⁶ See also 54 United States Code, section 302504 (b).

⁷ See also 36 Code of Federal Regulations, section 60.4.

⁸ See also 36 Code of Federal Regulations § 60.4.

significance that the properties represent. National Register Criteria recognize different types of values embodied in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects (Exhibit 3). These values fall into the following categories:

- Associative value (Criteria A and B): Properties significant for their association or linkage to events (Criterion A) or persons (Criterion B) important in the past;
- Design or Construction value (Criterion C): Properties significant as representatives of the manmade expression of culture or technology; and
- Information value (Criterion D): Properties significant for their ability to yield important information about prehistory or history.

The relevant National Register Criterion identified in the nomination is detailed below together with staff's corresponding and interlineated evaluation of whether the property satisfies the National Register Criterion. Information for this evaluation is sourced from the evidence provided in the nomination and based on the additional source material cited therein.

- National Register Criterion A – *Properties can be eligible for the National Register if they are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.*

Discussion:

According to the nomination, the Scarlett-McGrath Ranch is eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level of significance under Criterion A for its association with the pioneering settlement of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1898, and for its association with the agricultural development of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1946.⁹ The property's period of significance spans from 1869, the approximate year of construction associated with the oldest existing built feature on the property (rear portion of the farmhouse), to 1946, the year the McGrath Estate Company divided their holdings throughout Ventura County.¹⁰

In the Plain's post-rancho period (circa 1864-1898), former Rancho el Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia (Rancho La Colonia) lands were subdivided and settled beginning in the 1860s.¹¹ The rear portion of the Queen Anne Style farmhouse was likely constructed by Ventura County pioneer William I. Rice prior to 1874 to support the property's initial development and use for farming grains and raising livestock; the front, two-story portion was construed by Ventura County pioneer John Scarlett in

⁹ Perzel, Rachel (August 15, 2023). "Scarlett Ranch." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Rincon Consultants, Inc, Ventura, CA.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

circa 1889 to further support the property’s settlement and agricultural development.¹² In the period spanning from 1898 to circa 1945, the Oxnard Plain was extensively cultivated and was established as one of the state’s preeminent agricultural producers.¹³ In addition to the farmhouse, significant buildings (barn, former brick tank house and former tractor shed) on the subject property were constructed between circa 1900 and 1930 to support the agricultural development of the property consistent with the trends dominating the Plain at the time.¹⁴

The buildings on the subject property exemplify the trends in settlement and land use patterns that define the Oxnard Plain’s pioneer period, which persisted until World War II.¹⁵ The subject property has been variously modified due to its continual use over many decades.¹⁶ However, the extant built features retain sufficient integrity to convey their significant association with the pioneering settlement and early agricultural development of the western Oxnard Plain.¹⁷

Based on the above, the property appears to be substantially associated with the pioneering settlement of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1898, and for its association with the agricultural development of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1946, and thus likely to meet the criteria for listing in the National Register under Criterion A. Moreover, the property retains sufficient integrity.

VI. STAFF CONCLUSION:

In accordance with Section 101(c)(2)(A) of the National Historic Preservation Act and the CLG Agreement and Procedures, the CHB “shall prepare a report as to whether or not” the property, in the opinion of the CHB, “meets the criteria of the National Register.” Staff concurs with the nomination that sufficient evidence and information exist to warrant the listing of the property in the National Register. Specifically, the evidence demonstrates that the property meets Criterion A for its association with the pioneering settlement of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1898, and for its association with the agricultural development of the western Oxnard Plain, occurring primarily between 1864 and 1946. Moreover, the property retains sufficient integrity.

Therefore, consistent with the recommended actions identified below, staff recommends that the CHB find that the property meets the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places and direct staff to transmit the CHB recommendations and

¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid.

findings to the OHP in advance of the May 3, 2024, State Historical Resources Commission hearing on this nomination.

In addition, the subject property's most prominent built feature is a centrally sited Queen Anne Style farmhouse, a portion of which appears to predate 1874, but much of which was constructed circa 1889 by Ventura County pioneer John Scarlett.¹⁸ The residence retains many characteristics of the Queen Anne Style, including massing and asymmetrical facade, several wall projections (including projecting window bays), and decorative woodwork.¹⁹ Therefore, staff recommends the National Register nomination also consider the property's eligibility for listing based on National Register Criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the Queen Anne Style.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No public comment regarding this item has been received to date.

VIII. 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;
2. Based on the preceding evidence and analysis, **ADOPT** staff's recommendation that the property meets the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places, along with any other Cultural Heritage Board recommendations; and
3. **DIRECT** staff to **TRANSMIT** the Cultural Heritage Board recommendations and findings to the California State Office of Historic Preservation in advance of the May 3, 2024 State Historical Resources Commission hearing on this nomination.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Scarlett-McGrath Ranch
- Exhibit 2: Certified Local Government Agreement between the State of California and the County of Ventura
- Exhibit 3: National Register Bulletin, Criteria for Evaluation