



## Authenticity? City-Wide Surveys Urgently Needed Now

BY CYNTHIA THOMPSON

Authenticity is defined as “undisputed origin, and/or genuine”.

As the city of San Buenaventura is moving toward adopting “AuthentiCity” as its marketing symbol, it is vital that we define what is genuine about Ventura, particularly our built environment.

The genuine (or authentic) story of Ventura’s growth is found in the character of our historic buildings. Because the city’s geography is bordered by the ocean and the hillsides, one can drive in a straight line from the Mission to Mills Road and see each decade of development unfold.

Historic Resource Inventories, or surveys, are legally recognized documents that help identify potential historic resources within a city. They are used as tools by municipalities when making zoning decisions, and planning development and rehabilitation of older areas of a city. They also provide a basis for the local Historic Preservation Committee to declare landmarks, landmark districts, and points of interest.

In 1983, a Historic Resource Inventory (survey) of the Downtown and West-Side was commissioned by the City of Ventura. The buildings in these areas were evaluated for historic significance and researched to determine their age, architectural style, architect, builder, significant occupants, etc.

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## Ventura’s Downtown Specific Plan History On The Rise?

BY STAFF

For the past several months, the City of Ventura has been actively seeking public input on the terms and strategies presented in its new Downtown Specific Plan (DSP). The stage is set to bring the fully-formed presentation to City Council sometime this summer, including the changes suggested by members of the public at large, residents/property owners/merchants in the downtown and various private organizations such as the Downtown Ventura Organization (DVO) and others. San Buenaventura Conservancy (SBC) board member Jerry Breiner also serves on the DVO board, and he will be bringing the SBC board’s recommendations to DVO over the next month and a half. “Historical aspects of the DSP needs to align itself with environmental historic preservation law, and as such it’s imperative that the needs of our historical preservation community are reflected in this new plan,” says Jerry.

“Including references to **CEQA**, the **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation** and other documents are necessary to make sure we do everything we can to see that no stone is left unturned,” he said, “and encouraging the long-overdue citywide survey is the key to it all.”

One of the ideas the SBC board is suggesting includes returning the Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) back to Commission-status, allowing more HPC flexibility and power in the development/redevelopment process. A critical area of focus is providing a clear and concise definition of what ‘notable buildings’ are. The SBC is advocating preservation training for ALL staff and appointees involved in historic interpretation, planning and redevelopment. The City’s current goal to create a new Historic Preservation Plan, is a public process that the SBC intends to be a part of. ❧

- Ed note: regarding the importance of city-wide surveys, please refer to article at left.

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# Did you know...

# President's Notes

## CITY OF VENTURA

- **Historic Preservation Committee (HPC)** meets every 4th Monday of the month at 4 p.m., Santa Cruz Room/City Hall.
- **Planning Commission** meets the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m., Council Chambers/City Hall.
- **Design Review Committee (DRC)** meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month at 4 p.m., Council Chambers/City Hall.
- **City Council** meets every Monday at 7 p.m., Council Chambers/City Hall. [www.ci.ventura.ca.us](http://www.ci.ventura.ca.us) for agendas and minutes.

## VENTURA COMMUNITY COUNCILS

- **Downtown Ventura Organization** please visit website for meeting times. [www.downtownventura.org](http://www.downtownventura.org).
- **Midtown Community Council** meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7 p.m., Cooper Hall/65 S. MacMillan Ave. [www.midtownventura.org](http://www.midtownventura.org).
- **Westside Community Council** – for meeting times and locations, please visit website at: [www.wcc@wccventura.org](http://www.wcc@wccventura.org).

## CITY OF CAMARILLO

- **City Council** meets the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month at City Hall. [www.ci.camarillo.ca.us](http://www.ci.camarillo.ca.us).

## CITY OF FILLMORE

- **City Council** meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., City Hall. [www.fillmoreca.com](http://www.fillmoreca.com).

## CITY OF OXNARD

- **City Council** meets generally 3 Tuesdays per month at 5:30 p.m., please visit their website for exact dates. [www.ci.oxnard.ca.us](http://www.ci.oxnard.ca.us).

## CITY OF SANTA PAULA

- **City Council** meets the 1st & 3rd Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m., City Hall. [www.ci.santa-paula.ca.us](http://www.ci.santa-paula.ca.us).

## CITY OF THOUSAND OAKS

- **City Council** meets generally on the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month, please visit their website for dates. [www.ci.thousand-oaks.ca.us](http://www.ci.thousand-oaks.ca.us).

# ...now you do!

Get involved!

**Downtown Specific Plan (DSP)** – The DSP draft is now available for public comment. There is a substantial section within the draft plan that addresses cultural historic resources. It is encouraged that all read this section carefully – your input is valuable. The SBC will be crafting a statement of corrections and additions that will be forwarded to our membership. A copy of the DSP draft is available online at: [www.ci.ventura.ca.us/depts/comm\\_dev/downtownplan/index.asp](http://www.ci.ventura.ca.us/depts/comm_dev/downtownplan/index.asp) or a hard copy may be purchased at the city for \$75.

**LANDMARK DECISION Seminar** – Mark your calendar for the SBC educational seminar on May 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM in the Community Room of City Hall entitled **Landmark Decisions – Buyer Beware or Brilliant Buy?** Questions that realtors, developers and interested citizens have about historic preservation will be answered, along with a visual presentation. The first of its kind in the City of Ventura, it is not to be missed! Hope to see you there. See the enclosed flier for more details.

**Olivas Adobe** – A truly ‘once in a quarter century moment’ is to be celebrated with the granting of the California Cultural Heritage Endowment Fund matching grant for the Olivas Adobe of \$1,076,000.00 for badly needed seismic retrofit and repairs. This caps 25 years of reports and studies on the condition of the adobe.

**Meta Motel** – The recent destruction of the Meta Motel once again underscores the need for a strengthening of the planning process with regards to demolition permits and the critical need for an updated Historic Resource Inventory (survey). It was an early prototype of the bungalow court, on sensitive ground, etc. At the very minimum, it should have been documented by photographs and brief history. As the motel was not on the city’s 1983 survey, and it was not in the database as a possible ‘notable building’. An extreme example of the vulnerability of the current system is the Knights of Columbus building. Since it is not currently on the 1983 survey or in the city’s database either, a new owner would only have to go to the planning counter, request a demolition permit and the building could be lost. The SBC will continue to emphasize that **it is the process** (and not subjective opinion) that is the best protection for all historic fabric and resources in Ventura. ❧



Knights of Columbus building in 1973 when Figueroa Street was still open to vehicles.

# Surveys Continued

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Midtown and the East-End area were not included. When a building is included in a survey, it is entered into the City's database as "potentially notable". Therefore, when a survey-listed property is the object of a proposed project, the owner and the city are put on notice that the project must proceed following California State guidelines to ensure as much historic character is retained as possible.

A structure must be at least 50 years old to be included in these types of surveys, therefore, all buildings built between 1933 and 1966 are now eligible for listing but were not included in 1983. Consequently today, a large percentage of our built environment in Ventura is not on a survey either because the survey covered a limited area or because the survey is 23 years out of date. Midtown is completely unidentified. And, as we advance in time, the character of the early East-End neighborhoods of the 1940s and 50s, farmhouses along Telephone and Telegraph roads, along with the Pierpont Bay area also remain undefined as "undisputed, genuine, original, authentic Ventura". Currently a building owner could get an over-the-counter demolition permit for any building in Ventura built after 1934, and demolish the structure later that afternoon.

In this time of development pressure for increased density and infill in the downtown and midtown, it is critical that our 1983 survey be updated, and a program be launched for city-wide surveys to be conducted and regularly updated in order to identify what is **authentic** Ventura.

Community Plans or Specific Plans should not be created without first identifying what the resources are - unless the intent is to demolish everything and start from scratch. Preservation requires deliberate action and commitment from all sectors of the community. Without protections in place, historical assets can become neglected (i.e., the Mayfair) and demolition becomes an acceptable alternative.

**The question is, how are historic buildings an asset?**

The answer is economic development. Historic buildings are the most desirable inventory for the office market and have very low vacancies. Historic retail spaces revitalize old buildings and provide unique experiences not found in the mall, where else can you use a 1920s bank safe as a dressing room? Historic residential neighborhoods have the highest property

values, often historic districts have 10 to 15 percent higher values. Historic towns are the most popular destinations for cultural tourism, bringing the 'Transient Occupancy Tax' to city coffers through hotel stays. And all of the above brings increased revenue for local commerce. Any drive along America's freeways and trips to shopping centers confirms that it is hard to know what town you are in today because they

**“Currently a building owner could get an over-the-counter demolition permit for any building in Ventura built after 1934, and demolish the structure later that afternoon.”**

all look alike. People are searching for authentic places to live, work, shop, and visit. There are two keys to authenticity: independent retailers and unique historic fabric. Ventura is in danger of losing both.

There is a new interest in what is called "green, sustainable" buildings that are environmentally friendly. The ultimate green building program is adaptive reuse of older structures. The most energy efficient, sustainable new building cannot compare to the environmental harm caused by hauling demolished old buildings to landfills.

In conclusion, our most successful economic development plans include our city's historic character; we cannot have a green building program if the city discards tons of debris from the demolition of historic buildings; and, we cannot have 'Smart Growth' without respecting the historic urban patterns and structures that define the city. San Buenaventura cannot live up to the concept of **AuthenticCity** without first determining which parts of its built environment are unique and genuine and, more importantly, irreplaceable.

That determination will come through the updating and implementation of a city-wide survey program. That time has come. ❧



**This quarters' Still Here!**

Located at the corner of California Street and Santa Clara Street

This is an example of adaptive reuse. These buildings are currently not on the '1983 Cultural Resources Survey'.



## Board of Directors

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# 2006 Town Calendar

- 04/10 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 04/12 · SBC Board Meeting
- 04/24 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting
- 04/25 · DSP – Character/Dev Code, 6-8 pm
- 05/03 · DSP – Hsng, Economics, 6-8 pm
- 05/08 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 05/10 · SBC Board Meeting
- 05/17 · DSP – D.V.O. Meeting, 6-8 pm
- 05/22 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting
- 05/24 · SBC Seminar/Workshop - Landmarks
- 05/31 · DSP – Parking/Mobility, 6-8 pm
- 06/12 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 06/14 · DSP – Arts/Public Realm, 6-8 pm
- 06/14 · SBC Board Meeting
- 06/18 · DSP Draft COMMENTS DEADLINE!!
- 06/19 · DSP – Council + Planning Comm Workshop
- 06/26 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting, 7 pm

## Mission Statement

The San Buenaventura Conservancy is a non-profit membership organization that works through advocacy and outreach to recognize, preserve and revitalize the irreplaceable historic, architectural and cultural resources of San Buenaventura and surrounding areas. We seek to increase public awareness of, and participation in, local preservation issues, and disseminate information useful in the preservation of the structures and neighborhoods of San Buenaventura.



Post Office Box 23262

Ventura, California 93002

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800.701.7237



DATED MATERIAL



# Landmark Decisions

## BUYER BEWARE OR BRILLIANT BUY?

SPONSORED BY



- **Ventura Architecture IOI**
- **The Historic Surveys and the secret 50 year rule**
- **The Benefits of Landmarks for owners, buyers and sellers**
- **The Economic and Tax Incentives for historic structures**
- **The “Restrictions” – what can I REALLY DO with a Landmark?!**
- **Research tools and databases**

### THE DETAILS

- **Wednesday, May 24, 2006**
- **6:30 to 9:30 p.m.**
- **Community Meeting Room**
  - **Ventura City Hall (downtown)**
- **\$10 for SBC members**
  - \$20 for non-members (join, learn and save!)**



SAN BUENAVENTURA CONSERVANCY, POST OFFICE BOX 23262, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA 93002

WWW.SBCONSERVANCY.ORG EMAIL: WEBINFO@SBCONSERVANCY.ORG

A NON-PROFIT WITH A MISSION TO PRESERVE AND REVITALIZE THE HISTORIC RESOURCES OF SAN BUENAVENTURA AND SURROUNDING AREAS