

CITY OF GLENDALE
INTERDIVISIONAL COMMUNICATION
STAFF REPORT

Date: August 15, 2024

To: Historic Preservation Commission

From: Jay Platt, Principal Planner

Subject: **Verdugo Woodlands (Selvas de Verdugo) Historic District Overlay Zone Designation Application**

Introduction

The Planning Department has received an application for a proposed Verdugo Woodlands historic district overlay zone (Exhibit 1). The proposed area consists of the portion of the Verdugo Woodlands neighborhood located to the west of Canada Boulevard, which serves as the eastern boundary. The south side of San Gabriel Avenue is suggested as the northern boundary and Verdugo Park is included at the south. The west boundary is irregular but generally conforms to the areas of relatively early development at the lower elevations of the Verdugo Mountains. The proposed district will surround the Niodrara Drive Historic District, which was designated in 2016. The proposal includes 788 properties, but includes the previously designated Niodrara Drive Historic District, containing thirty-two homes. For this reason, the exact number of properties is uncertain pending a decision by the City about whether Niodrara Drive will remain a standalone district or if it will be subsumed into a new, larger district.

The area features a number of early residences, including the Catalina Verdugo Adobe (GR No. 1, c. 1860) and the 1912 home of the Woodland's initial developer, John Pirtle. Several Craftsman-style homes from the 1910s and 1920s remain, but much of the area's development reflects the Revival styles popular in the 1920s and 1930s, along with the Minimal Traditional style that came to prominence in the years prior to World War II. Numerous Ranch and Modern style properties were built on undeveloped lots in the 1940s and 1950s, with the neighborhood being largely built about by the mid-1960s. True to its name, the area is notable for the number of mature trees on both private and public property, including many oaks and sycamores, that dominate its streetscape.

The boundary proposed by the applicants contains properties within the following addresses or address ranges (see Exhibit 2, proposed boundary map):

- 1344-1462 Andenes
- 2107-2128 Armour
- 2300-2324 Blanchard
- 1898-2411 Bonita
- 1501-1645 Camulos
- 1801-2421 Canada
- 2623-2967 Canada
- 1300-1661 Capistrano
- 1439; 1619; 1951 Colina
- 1600-2993 Country Club
- 1601-1661 Del Valle
- 1600-1661 Don Carlos
- 1400-1655 El Rito
- 1630-1647 Fernbrook
- 1602-1659 Glorietta
- 2301-2977 Hermosita
- 1309-1645 Hillside
- 1437-1515 La Vista
- 1800-2011 Niodrara
- 1300-1654 Opechee
- 1600-1651 Ramona
- 1606-1676 San Gabriel
- 1306-1370 San Luis Rey
- 1600-1681 Santa Barbara
- 1613-1681 Santa Maria
- 1602-2983 Santa Rosa
- 1345-1361 Selvas
- 2001-2023 Sierra
- 2211 Verdugo Court
- 1411-1643 Wabasso
- 1318-1630 Wabasso
- 2506; 2510; 2011 Weston
- Verdugo Park

This application is the first to be reviewed under the streamlined designation process approved by City Council in 2023 (Exhibit 3: Designation Process Flowchart). Tonight’s meeting is the first in which a community forum, intended to introduce the proposed district to property owners and residents in an informal setting, answer questions, and hear from those who may or may not support the proposal. The forum is immediately followed by the Historic Preservation Commission hearing, which allows the commissioners to formally review the nomination in terms of the requirements of the historic district ordinance. If the Commission makes a preliminary finding that the proposed district appears likely to meet those requirements, it can vote to authorize staff to begin the process for retaining a historic preservation consulting firm to conduct a survey of the area. Under the previous process, the Commission would need to authorize district proponents to circulate a petition among property owners to determine if the owners of over 25% of the properties supported conducting a survey. With the new designation procedure, this petition is skipped unless the commissioners believe the proposal may lack support in the neighborhood, in which case it can require a petition as under the previous process.

Regardless of HPC’s decision, no final determination about the district will be made at this hearing and such a decision only occurs after several public hearings and another community forum are held, with local owners and residents being informed of each. Once the draft historic district survey is completed, which will likely occur in 2025, it will be made available to the area’s property owners and residents for review and another Community Forum/HPC Hearing will be held to discuss and consider the results. If the draft survey finds the area is eligible for designation, HPC can vote to approve those findings and support the district’s designation. At that time the commission will also authorize circulation of a petition among property owners requesting that City Council designate the district. This petition, which was also a requirement under the previous process, must be signed by the owners of over 50% of the owners within the final boundary approved by HPC. If this threshold is successfully met, the Planning Commission will review the nomination to make a recommendation regarding the

historic overlay district zone change to City Council, which ultimately makes the final decision regarding the district's possible designation.

Although Planning staff considers the current application to be complete, as the designation process proceeds, its components may change or be superseded due to new information supplied by the applicants, City staff, the project consultant and/or the public. Any changes to the application, such as adjustment of the boundaries or supplements to the Historic District Design Guidelines, must be reviewed and approved by the Commission as part of any final determination it makes regarding the adequacy of the historic district survey.

Historic Background and Description

The application submitted by district proponents provides an overview of the Verdugo Woodlands area's history and development. Some of this information comes from the survey prepared by Architectural Resources Group for the Niodrara Drive neighborhood in 2015 because the larger Verdugo Woodlands area shares much of the same developmental history. Staff believes that the research conducted for that survey, as augmented by the current district proponents in the nomination under consideration, is adequate and provides a clear picture regarding the importance of the area's development and the people associated with its inception.

The streams that historically flowed through Verdugo Canyon have made it a desirable area since prehistoric times. For Native American tribes, these waters provided fertile grounds for hunting, acorn gathering, and other activities. The area was used seasonally but no evidence of any permanent settlement has been discovered. The canyon was part of the land grant of Rancho San Rafael to its namesake, Jose Maria Verdugo. His daughter, Catalina, lived in the adobe house built by her nephew Teodoro sometime around 1860 – it still stands on Bonita Drive and is believed to be the oldest house in Glendale.

After Teodoro died in 1904, residential speculation of the area began. The Forest Grove Land Company's effort to subdivide the land fizzled in 1906, likely because streetcar lines didn't reach the area until 1910. John Pirtle's Verdugo Land Company began subdividing large lots on the west side of today's Canada Boulevard, with advertising emphasizing the picturesque qualities of the canyon, especially its trees and streams. Though a few lots were developed, including Pirtle's own home which still stands, the project failed to gain traction.

The entire canyon was annexed to Glendale in 1912, which may have spurred the more successful work of developer F.P. Newport, who began re-subdividing the area with smaller lots in 1917. He called the area "Selvas de Verdugo" and largely shaped the neighborhood we see today, including its street patterns and the picturesque stream/streetscape featured along Niodrara Drive. This work, led by horticulturalist

John McLaren, tried to preserve natural features wherever possible to allow newly built homes to have a limited impact on the landscape.

As noted above, homes designed in many styles are found throughout the proposed district, reflecting the tastes and trends that changed over the first half of the 20th century. As with many areas developed in Glendale and around the country during this period, Newport chose to place race-restrictive covenants on the lots he sold and used racist dog whistles in his advertising for the area. Catalina and Teodoro Verdugo would have been prevented from owning a home in the canyon that was once theirs.

Preliminary Staff Determination of Eligibility

In addition to assessing the nomination against the eligibility criteria established by the Historic District Ordinance, Planning staff also considers the apparent appropriateness of the district boundary, period of significance, and name proposed by the applicants, as follows:

Proposed Boundary

The boundary proposed by the applicants will, if designated, result in the City's largest historic district, with at least 750 properties. By way of comparison, Rossmoyne, the largest designated district, contains 504 properties. The boundary appears appropriate based on Newport's involvement with the initial subdivision and its expansion until his company's bankruptcy in 1934. The feel of the neighborhood, which played a role in the determination of the boundaries for the Royal Boulevard and Brockmont Park districts, as well as the pending Bellehurst district, does shift somewhat between the east portion of the neighborhood, with its more rectilinear streets and flatter parcels, and the western areas that push against and into the hillsides, with winding streets and irregular, sloping lots. This is not necessarily a problem and staff will be interested to hear the consultant's thoughts in terms of the overall area's sense of place. Ultimately, staff believes the neighborhood's huge number of mature trees link these two areas and give it a sense of coherence that suggest the proposed boundary is appropriate. *Staff believes the proposed boundary is appropriate.*

Proposed Name

The proponents chose to use F.P. Newport's name of *Selvas de Verdugo* as their proposed name for a district. This is in keeping with the use of original names for other subdivisions that later became districts, such as Rossmoyne. For the purposes of the public noticing of the present forum and hearing, staff chose to use the name Verdugo Woodlands, which has been in use for decades and is widely known to area residents. This was done to avoid any confusion for those less aware of the neighborhood's history and is not an indication of disapproval of the proposed name. Staff recommends waiting until after the survey is conducted to see if any information suggests one name is more or less appropriate.

Staff believes that either the proposed name, “Selvas de Verdugo,” or the more commonly used name of “Verdugo Woodlands” will be appropriate if the proposed district is designated.

Proposed Period of Significance

The applicants propose a period of significance of 1909-1965. The initial date reflects when the area had been platted and opened to prospective buyers, as well as when the street pattern, still largely seen today, was established. It would be interesting for the survey consultant to consider whether extending the initial date to the c. 1860 period of the Verdugo Adobe would be appropriate. While neither Catalina nor Teodoro Verdugo had a hand in developing the area, Newport used the adobe as a sales tool for both its picturesque qualities and its connection to “Early California.” Doing so could be a way to honor the memory of the Verdugo family, which was so shamefully treated after the Great Partition of 1871, in their native tongue. The latter date was selected because the proponents feel there was a shift in the architectural design of the houses built starting in 1966. Staff is uncertain about this date and awaits more detailed information from the consultant about construction dates and stylistic shifts before weighing in. That said, the proposed range is similar to that of the Niodrara Drive district and in the ballpark of other designated districts, so the proposed date range may ultimately be appropriate.

Staff believes the proposed period of significance is roughly appropriate but that careful consideration by the consultant could result in a recommendation to change the initial and/or final dates.

Contributing Structures

Staff has visited the Verdugo Woodlands neighborhood many times over the years, with several in-depth drive-throughs at various points. Many of the properties in the area appear to be likely contributors based on the construction dates and due to their time of construction and limited levels of alteration. While it is impossible to state that the requirement that at least 60% of the properties be contributors, staff believes this is highly likely. If the survey consultant were to find this isn’t the case, it might recommend boundary changes that could allow the threshold to be met.

Staff believes it is highly likely that the proposed district will meet the 60% threshold for contributing structures.

Eligibility Criteria

A proposed district must meet at least one of the nine criteria established by the historic district ordinance in order to be considered for designation.

Staff believes that the proposed Verdugo Woodlands Historic District appears to meet at least four of the nine criteria, as follows:

A. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history.

The varied styles and designs of the homes in the proposed district reflect tastes and trends that mark significant aspects of Glendale's cultural, social, aesthetic, and architectural heritage over several decades. The developer's conscious effort to integrate the homes into the natural setting and to embellish aspects of that setting through picturesque street configurations represents a successful melding of engineering with the natural landscape.

*Staff believes the proposed district **appears to meet** Criterion A.*

B. Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history.

The proposed district has strong associations with the two locally significant developers, John Pirtle and F.W. Newport, who helped create a neighborhood that feels distinct from so many other parts of Glendale. The Verdugo family's association may also be significant if the consultant, and HPC, ultimately determine that extending the start date of the period of significance is appropriate.

*Staff believes the proposed district **appears to meet** Criterion B.*

C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.

The proposed historic district contains a collection of houses that reflect the architectural styles employed throughout the first half of the 20th century. The varieties of expression even within the individual styles is notable, particularly as seen over the area's varied topography. However, the language of this criterion suggests an expectation of a more cohesive visual character that would not be expected in a neighborhood developed over many decades with the work of many designers.

*Staff believes the proposed district **probably does not meet** Criterion C.*

D. Represents the work of a notable builders, designers, or architects.

Though the work of Newport and McLaren gives the Woodlands a special visual and experiential sensibility, the parcels were ultimately sold to people who developed the properties to suit their own style and taste. Their work was not guided by any singular vision. Furthermore, many local and regional builders and architects were involved in the construction of the houses rather than one significant architect.

*Staff believes that the proposed district **does not appear to meet** Criterion D.*

E. Has a unique location or is a view or vista representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood community or of the city.

The proposed district is located in the foothills at the base of the Verdugo Mountains. Although it is a striking location and its setting and view were a component of early marketing efforts, its overall setting is similar to other neighborhoods built along the base of Glendale's hills. The development along the Niodrara stream obviously meets this criterion, which is reflected in the City's final determination, but its distinctive features, such as the stonework found at its walls, bridges, and streambed, do not consistently extend into the larger neighborhood. The proposed district's location in Verdugo Canyon, which is more forested than most other parts of Glendale could be seen as a "unique location," but staff is not sure that this rarely used criterion is met.

*Staff believes that the proposed district **probably does not meet** Criterion E.*

F. Embodies a collection of elements of architectural design, detail, materials or craftsmanship that represent a significant structural or architectural achievement or innovation.

Although the Verdugo Woodlands area has a collection of excellent collection of homes in various architectural styles, the overall application of the designs, details, materials, and craftsmanship associated with these historic styles is not strikingly different from that of other neighborhoods. In their overall context, the properties in the proposed district are not representative of any significant architectural achievement or innovation.

*Staff believes that the proposed district **does not appear to meet** Criterion F.*

G. Reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, transportation modes, or distinctive examples of park or community planning.

The proposed historic district reflects a significant era of growth in Glendale during the 1910s and 1920s, as well as after World War II. The failure of the first two subdivision attempts reflects just how important the introduction of the streetcar was to this neighborhood. The growing popularity of cars allowed for the development of the steeper hillside portions of the neighborhood. For these reasons, staff believes this criterion is met. The application includes Verdugo Park within the proposed boundary. Until the 1940s, this area was undeveloped, but the application does not provide enough information to understand how it was connected to the Woodlands neighborhood to the north except for its immediate proximity. It formally became a city park in 1944, with a design by noted landscape architects Ruth Shellhorn and Ralph Cornell, which is of interest but again the nomination does not provide enough background to assess any significance under this criterion. Further research by the consultant may shed

light on these relationships and whether the park itself is appropriately included within the proposed boundary.

*Staff believes that the proposed district **appears to meet** Criterion G.*

H. Conveys a sense of historic and architectural cohesiveness through its design, setting, materials, workmanship or association.

The trees that help define the Woodlands are probably the most important aspect of why the proposed district meets this criterion. They help unite the distinct east and west sides of the neighborhood, helping smooth the transition from flatland to hillside development. Though the homes vary considerably in style and construction date, their one- and two-story massing and consistent setbacks (especially at the flatter east area) help establish the cohesiveness found in Glendale's designated districts at the base of the Verdugo Mountains, most of which were found to meet this criterion.

*Staff believes that the proposed district **appears to meet** Criterion H.*

I. Has been designated a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historical Resources.

The area has not been previously designated or determined eligible for the National or California Registers.

*Staff believes the proposed district **does not meet** Criterion I.*

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information submitted with the nomination and the assessment above, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission preliminarily find that the proposed Verdugo Woodlands Historic District is eligible as a historic district overlay zone and authorize staff to begin the process of retaining a consultant to conduct a historic resources survey.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit A: Historic District Application

Exhibit B: Map of proposed district boundary

Exhibit C: Flow Chart Summarizing Historic District Designation Process