



# Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of January 13, 2025, Item 9a

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 • [www.vcrma.org/divisions/planning](http://www.vcrma.org/divisions/planning)

## I. APPLICANTS/PROPERTY OWNERS:

**Applicants/Property Owners:** David Hertz  
9199 Cotharin Road  
Malibu, CA, 90265

Frances Rehwald  
11688 Cotharin Road  
Malibu, CA 90265

## II. REQUEST:

A request to designate properties at 9199 Cotharin Road and 11688 Cotharin Road, Malibu, CA 90265 as contributors to the proposed Tony Duquette Historic District (Case No. CH24-0041).

## III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

9199 Cotharin Road and 11688 Cotharin Road, Malibu, CA 90265 (unincorporated Ventura County)

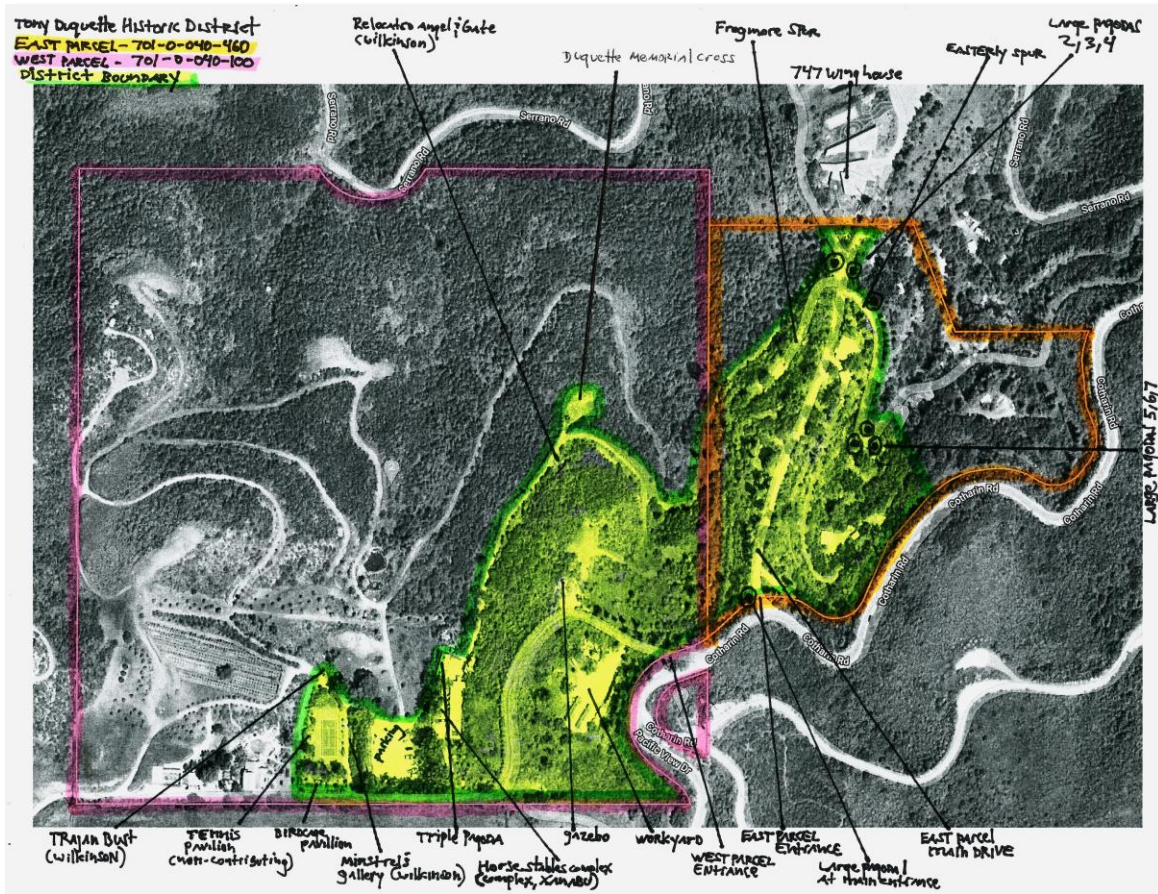
Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs): 701-0-040-100 and 701-0-040-460

The proposed Tony Duquette Historic District, focused upon the creations of nationally significant artist and designer Anthony "Tony" Duquette, includes multiple resources across two parcels under separate ownership. The proposed district represents the former home and one of the last bodies of larger-scale work by Duquette (1914-1999). The historic district boundary follows the presence of contributing resources and is situated upon, but not fully inclusive of, the following two Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs): 701-0-040-100 (39.4 acres) and 701-0-040-460 (10.9 acres).

## IV. PROJECT SCOPE:

Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance No. 4604 Section 1366 provides for the designation of Cultural Heritage Sites by the Cultural Heritage Board where the property owner has no objection to a site's designation. The property owners request to designate properties at 9199 Cotharin Road and 11688 Cotharin Road, Malibu, CA 90265 as contributors to the proposed Tony Duquette Historic District (Exhibit 2). Figure 1 provides an overview of the proposed Tony Duquette Historic District boundaries relative to the subject properties.

Figure 1 – Tony Duquette Historic District: Overview Diagram



Credit: Daniel D. Paul

**V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

In December 2024, the property owners’ architectural historian, Daniel D. Paul, completed a Historic Resources Report (Historic Report) in support of the Tony Duquette Historic District nomination (Exhibit 1).<sup>1</sup> The Historic Report describes the proposed district as focused upon the creations of nationally significant artist and designer Anthony “Tony” Duquette, and inclusive of multiple contributing resources across two parcels under separate ownership.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Daniel D., *The Tony Duquette Historic District, County of Ventura Historic District Application*, December 20, 2024.

Anthony “Tony” Duquette (1914–1999)

Tony Duquette born in Los Angeles on July 11, 1914.<sup>2</sup> His mother, Elsa Fuhrer, an England-born musician, played in a string quartet and introduced Tony to live stage performances, which strongly influenced his artistic sensibilities. Duquette attended Los Angeles’ Chouinard Art Institute, where he gained experience designing displays for department stores like J.W. Robinson’s and Bullock’s.<sup>3</sup> Concurrently, he freelanced for prominent interior designers Billy Haines and Jimmy Pendleton and created displays for Adrian, a renowned Hollywood costume designer.<sup>4</sup>

In 1941, Duquette opened his interior design studio, receiving mentorship from Elsie de Wolfe, the pioneering interior designer who recognized his genius.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time, he befriended MGM director Vicente Minelli, who became a lifelong collaborator. Duquette later became the godfather to Minelli’s daughter, Liza.<sup>6</sup> However, World War II interrupted his burgeoning career. Duquette enlisted in the Army, serving at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro for four years. After the war, Duquette resumed his career with vigor, working in set design for films such as *Yolanda and the Thief* (1945), *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), and later *Kismet* (1955), the only film he fully designed.<sup>7</sup> His first one-man show at Los Angeles’ Mitch Leisen Gallery in 1947 cemented his reputation.<sup>8</sup>

In 1949, Duquette married Elizabeth "Beegle" Johnstone, a painter and his creative partner.<sup>9</sup> The couple traveled to Paris for their honeymoon and to prepare for his landmark exhibition, *Oeuvres de Tony Duquette*, at the Louvre’s Pavilion de Marsan in 1951. After returning to Los Angeles, Duquette’s work featured in exhibits at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and San Francisco’s M.H. de Young Memorial Museum.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid-1950s, Duquette was a top interior designer for Hollywood royalty and high society, including clients like Doris Duke, J. Paul Getty, and Elizabeth Arden.<sup>11</sup> Among his notable projects were the interiors of Doris Duke’s “Falcon’s Lair,” the Hilton Hawaiian Village, and the Los Angeles Music Center. Duquette’s jewelry designs also gained fame, such as a necklace for the Duchess of Windsor.<sup>12</sup>

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2        Ibid.  
3        Ibid.  
4        Ibid.  
5        Ibid.  
6        Ibid.  
7        Ibid.  
8        Ibid.  
9        Ibid.  
10       Ibid.  
11       Ibid.  
12       Ibid.

The Duquettes purchased a Malibu ranch in 1955, naming it “Sortilegium,” meaning “enchantment.”<sup>13</sup> Over decades, they built 21 structures, including pavilions and decorative follies. These creations were made possible through the assistance of skilled craftsmen and primary laborers, including Elias Rodriguez and Abraham Quinonez, whose talents contributed significantly to bringing Duquette’s visions to life. The ranch became their creative haven for the rest of their lives.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to their Malibu property, the Duquettes acquired a Victorian house in San Francisco, “The Little House of the Flowers,” in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> They split their time between these homes and their Beverly Hills residence, Dawnridge. Duquette’s embrace of counterculture aesthetics during the 1960s was evident in the light shows at his Robertson Boulevard studio and hippie-themed parties at Sortilegium.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Duquette expanded his creative endeavors to set and costume design for productions like the Salzburg Festival’s *Jedermann* and Broadway’s *Camelot*, starring Richard Burton and Julie Andrews.<sup>17</sup> His costume designs for *Camelot* earned him a Tony Award in 1961, shared posthumously with Adrian.<sup>18</sup>

Hutton Wilkinson, who began working with Duquette as a teenager during Duquette’s 1971 “Personal Culture” exhibit hosted by the City of Los Angeles, became a key figure in Duquette’s later career.<sup>19</sup> Wilkinson evolved from protégé to business partner and biographer, helping preserve and promote Duquette’s legacy.<sup>20</sup>

Despite their success, the Duquettes faced tragedy, including the loss of Sortilegium in the 1993 Green Meadow Fire, which destroyed all but a few structures.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Tony and Beegle rebuilt on the adjacent property owned by Hutton Wilkinson, creating an elaborate, multi-layered promenade centered around a repurposed horse stable.<sup>22</sup> This final project epitomized Duquette’s philosophy of transforming found objects into magical environments. Elizabeth “Beegle” Duquette, Tony’s wife and collaborator, passed away in 1995. Tony continued working and creating until his death in 1999.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>15</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>16</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## VI. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

### Tony Duquette Historic District

The proposed district represents the former home and one of the last bodies of larger-scale work by Duquette.<sup>24</sup> The historic district boundary follows the presence of contributing resources and is largely defined by the concentration of Tony Duquette’s remaining creations as they exist on both parcels. The district also includes variety of contributing resources informing the biography of Duquette’s later years. These include a handful of structures and objects made by Duquette’s multi-year protégé Hutton Wilkinson who, at the time, owned the western parcel, an earthen workspace to which salvaged post-fire objects were relocated, and a memorial cross salvaged from *Sortilegium* and installed after Duquette’s passing by Elias Rodriguez, Duquette’s primary laborer for many years.<sup>25</sup>

Duquette’s work within the proposed district showcases his signature use of found and repurposed materials, reminiscent of “art environments” like Watts Towers in Los Angeles and Bottle Village in Simi Valley.<sup>26</sup> He incorporated diverse elements such as scrap metal, surplus materials from military and Hollywood backlots, satellite dishes, fiberglass components, and succulents rescued from Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles. These materials, combined with salvaged movie set pieces like the gazebo from *The Gazebo* (1959), illustrate Duquette’s ability to transform discarded objects into cohesive and enchanting designs.<sup>27</sup>

Duquette’s approach mirrored his set design process, where he directed teams of skilled craftsmen, including Rodriguez and Abraham Quinonez.<sup>28</sup> The east parcel, originally part of *Sortilegium*, once housed structures like “The Star Barn,” lost to the fire, while the west parcel features post-fire works and a memorial cross installed by Rodriguez.<sup>29</sup> As part of making his art environment upon Wilkinson’s property, Duquette continued to work with fiberglass fabricators with whom he had worked for years in Hollywood, and it featured fiberglass shells, finials, and even the casting of a tree root system from which Duquette carved various animals.<sup>30</sup> The district represents Duquette’s bold, unorthodox creativity and his legacy as an innovator who reimagined the boundaries of art and design.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>29</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Evaluation of Significance:

The Tony Duquette Historic District is eligible for designation under significance Criterion 3 of Ventura County Ordinance 4604, Section 1367(a), for its distinctive artistic features, its association with a master artist, and its high artistic value.<sup>32</sup> The district includes two parcels that showcase the creative work of Tony Duquette, a well-known artist and designer. Duquette was famous for his contributions to interior design, jewelry, set design, and large-scale public art environments, was the first American to exhibit at the Louvre’s Pavillon de Marsan, and was a Tony Award winner.<sup>33</sup>

One parcel of the district contains “Sortilegium,” the Duquettes’ Malibu ranch, which was severely damaged in the 1993 Green Meadow Fire.<sup>34</sup> Despite the destruction, important sculptures, landscape features, and buildings remain, reflecting Duquette’s unique style of combining found materials with fine art and antiques. After Duquette’s death in 1999, his long-time laborers restored many of these pieces. The second parcel, known as “Xanabu,” features another art environment created during Duquette’s final years. Together, these two parcels form an interconnected artistic legacy.<sup>35</sup>

Duquette’s work in the district demonstrates his ability to create extraordinary spaces by blending everyday materials with art and rare objects.<sup>36</sup> This district is one of the few surviving examples of his large-scale designs, alongside his former home “Dawnridge” and the Los Angeles Music Center interiors. Most of his other large-scale works are now lost.<sup>37</sup> The district also tells a story of loss and recovery, which was a recurring theme in Duquette’s life.<sup>38</sup> While he worked with Hollywood elites, his approach to art was similar to that of outsider artists, using whatever materials were available to create immersive environments. With the help of his wife Elizabeth and a small team, Duquette’s work in the district showcases his unique and historically significant creativity.<sup>39</sup>

Period of Significance:

The proposed historic district’s period of significance is 1955 to 1999.<sup>40</sup> 1955 was the year that Tony and Elizabeth Duquette purchased the proposed district’s east parcel

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>37</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>39</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

that became “Sortilegium,” beginning improvements upon it by 1957. Tony Duquette worked upon the horse stables complex on the proposed district’s west parcel until his passing on September 9, 1999.<sup>41</sup>

Boundary Justification:

The proposed district’s boundary is defined by the concentration of Tony Duquette’s remaining works across two adjacent parcels.<sup>42</sup> It includes a range of resources that reflect Duquette’s later years, including structures and objects created by his protégé Hutton Wilkinson, who owned the western parcel at the time, and a memorial cross installed by Elias Rodriguez, Duquette’s longtime laborer, after his death. The district also encompasses a footpath Duquette created, which connects his former Sortilegium ranch on the east parcel with Wilkinson’s property on the west parcel.<sup>43</sup>

The district boundaries are as follows:<sup>44</sup>

- The northern boundary aligns with a footpath Duquette used to walk between the east and west parcels.
- The southern boundary follows the continuous parcel boundary along Cotharin Road.
- The eastern boundary includes the remaining Duquette pieces along the main drive and the Easterly Spur and ends near three large-scale pagodas that survived the 1993 fire.
- The western boundary includes non-contributing features like a tennis court and pavilion, but also the Birdcage Pavilion and Minstrels Gallery, both of which are contributing resources. The boundary also includes a standalone Trajan Bust and the horse stables complex, incorporating the Triple Pagoda.

Integrity:

The proposed historic district retains integrity,<sup>45</sup> which is defined as the ability of a property to convey its historic significance through seven aspects: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Spanning the period from 1955, when Tony Duquette purchased the eastern parcel, to 1999, the year of his passing, the district showcases his artistic legacy, despite the losses sustained during the 1993 Green Meadow Fire.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>42</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>43</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>44</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>45</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



The district retains its integrity of location, with key elements remaining within the original boundaries, even if relocated or repurposed after the fire. Its design is evident in the integration of salvaged materials, such as military surplus and Hollywood set pieces, which exemplify Duquette’s ability to fuse disparate elements into cohesive works of art.<sup>47</sup> The hilly Serrano Canyon setting, with views of Boney Mountain and the Pacific Ocean, enhances the district’s historic ambiance and contributes to its integrity of setting. The eclectic materials used throughout the district, including succulents rescued from Chavez Ravine and Balinese carved wood panels, reflect Duquette’s resourcefulness and creative approach, preserving its integrity of materials. These features, handcrafted or directed by Duquette and his team, also showcase his Hollywood set design expertise, maintaining the integrity of workmanship. The district evokes the fantastical, immersive qualities of Duquette’s vision, preserving its integrity of feeling, while the direct ties to Duquette and his work uphold its integrity of association.<sup>48</sup>

Although the 1993 fire destroyed much of the east parcel’s Sortilegium, key sculptures and landscape elements survived, preserving the district’s significance.<sup>49</sup> Post-fire renovations by Duquette’s long-time assistants, Elias Rodriguez and Abraham Quinonez, adhered closely to his aesthetic style, ensuring the continuation of his artistic legacy. Some alterations, such as modifications to the Triple Pagoda and the paving of the east parcel’s main drive, do not detract from the district’s overall ability to convey its historic character.<sup>50</sup>

The rarity of surviving large-scale Duquette works further justifies the inclusion of the east parcel, despite the fire’s impact.<sup>51</sup> The west parcel, which escaped the fire, retains Duquette’s original creations with minimal alterations. The proposed district remains a rare and significant representation of his large-scale art environments. It reflects not only his artistic mastery but also his ability to adapt and respond to the destructive fires that shaped his later life, incorporating these experiences into his creative narrative.<sup>52</sup>

### District Contributors

The proposed district consists of the contributing elements identified below. All of these contributors are described in detail, along with photos, in Exhibit 1.<sup>53</sup>

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47      ibid.  
48      ibid.  
49      ibid.  
50      ibid.  
51      ibid.  
52      ibid.  
53      ibid.



East Parcel:

- 13 ceramic insulator sculptures
- Seven large pagoda sculptures
- Nine light standards converted to flag masts
- Four stacked drum pagodas
- *Winter Sun* sculpture
- Four drum stack sculptures topped with A-frame racks
- Two smaller-scale concrete Pagoda sculptures
- Four fiberglass egg-topped posts

West Parcel:

- Duquette-made art environment and promenade (“Complex”; “Horse Stables Complex”; “Xanabu”)
- Triple Pagoda
- Birdcage Pavilion
- Gazebo
- Open-space work yard
- Trajan Bust sculpture (Wilkinson)
- Minstrels Gallery (Wilkinson)
- Angel and Gateway installation (Wilkinson)
- Foot trail linking the two parcels
- Tony Duquette Memorial Cross (Installed by Elias Rodriguez)

Character-Defining Features

In addition, general character-defining features of the entire proposed district include the following:<sup>54</sup>

- Found object constructions
- Military and industrial-grade objects as art media
- Unorthodox use of materials and media
- Axial arrangements
- Symmetrically paired sculptures and objects in procession
- Tower, mast, stacked, or otherwise vertically acclimated sculptures and objects, and toppings
- Multitude of finials and spires

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<sup>54</sup>

ibid.

- Coral red coloration
- Three-point arch motifs, often cut into various drums; their cut-out pieces reused as flag-like tailings
- East and Southeast Asiatic theming
- Landscape elements
  - Succulent specimens that include jade, aloe, yucca, blue agave, and foxtail agave.
  - Pepper trees, spider fern, geraniums, oleander, and cypress trees
  - Pre-existing coniferous, oak and eucalyptus specimens
  - Yard and planter edging of Marston Mat; perforated cable trays; and radiator panels of waffle or knobbed forms
  - Asiatic vases, vessels and urns; oversized examples in symmetrical processions
  - Dried tree branches painted coral red, bunched or set in emanating, coral-like designs

## **VII. STAFF CONCLUSIONS:**

The evidence provided in the Historic Report (Exhibit 1) supports making the findings that the proposed Tony Duquette Historic District satisfies the criteria for a Historic District pursuant to Ventura County Ordinance 4604, Section 1367(d). Namely, the proposed district possesses a significant concentration, linkage, and continuity of sites, structures, and objects united historically or aesthetically by plan and physical development; it contains precisely mapped and defined boundaries based upon a shared relationship among the properties constituting the district; it has at least one of the criteria for significance of Ordinance Section 1367(a); and it retains sufficient integrity as described in Ordinance Section 1367(a).

In addition, the evidence provided in the Historic Report supports making the additional designation findings in Ordinance Section 1367-1 as the site has historic character, value, and interest to the general public, there are no foreseeable costs to the County in designating the subject properties as a Historic District, and the designation shall not infringe upon the rights of the property owners as the designation does not change allowable land uses and the property owners request this designation. Therefore, staff recommends the CHB approve the request for district designation.

## **VIII. HEARING NOTICE AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Public notices were sent by U.S. mail to the property owners of the subject properties not less than fifteen days prior to the date of the hearing (Exhibit 3 – 15-Day Public Hearing Notice). No public comment regarding this item has been received to date.

**IX. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:**

Staff recommends the CHB take the following actions regarding this item:

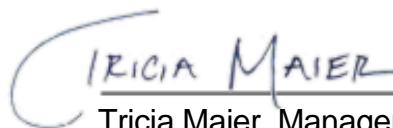
1. **CONDUCT** the public hearing, **RECEIVE** oral and written testimony, and **CONSIDER** the Planning Division staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto;
2. **FIND** that the property owners were given a 15-day notice in accordance with Ordinance Section 1366-2 and that the property owners concur with the designation by the CHB of the subject properties as the Tony Duquette Historic District and placement of said designation in County lists;
3. **FIND** that the Tony Duquette Historic District meets the County's district criteria as required by Ordinance Section 1367(d) and the additional standards required by Ordinance Section 1367-1 based on the substantial evidence in the staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto; and
4. **ADOPT** CHB Resolution No. 2025-1 (Exhibit 4) approving the designation of properties at 9199 Cotharin Road and 11688 Cotharin Road, Malibu, CA 90265 as contributors to the Tony Duquette Historic District.

Prepared by:



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Reviewed by:



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Tricia Maier, Manager  
Planning Programs Section  
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Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Historic Resource Report, December 20, 2024
- Exhibit 2: Property Owner Letters
- Exhibit 3: 15-Day Public Hearing Notice
- Exhibit 4: CHB Resolution No. 2025-1