



## RANCHO LOS CERRITOS FOUNDATION

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RANCHO LOS CERRITOS MASTER PLAN

#### **Background:**

Rancho Los Cerritos is a National, State and Local Historic Landmark which opened as a public museum and historic site in 1955. Owned by the City of Long Beach, the Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation assumed responsibility for daily operations and management of the property on January 1, 2014, under a 25-year Lease Agreement with the City.

Built in 1844, the two-story adobe and landscaped grounds at Rancho Los Cerritos echo with the rich history of Spanish, Mexican and American California and the families who helped transform southern California from its ranching beginnings to a modern, urban society. As cattle and sheep pastures gave way to development starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cities of Long Beach, Lakewood, Bellflower, Paramount and Signal Hill grew up on the 27,000-acre Rancho. Today the site is open for public tours and offers garden activities, lectures and workshops, family events, school field trips, summer day camps, concerts, an active volunteer program, and a California History Research Library.

In September, 1997, the Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation contracted with a consultant team led by Architect Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA, to prepare a comprehensive master plan for Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site. The plan is designed to serve as a guide for site development and interpretation, and includes sections on structural and landscape restoration, maintenance, educational programming, visitor amenities, and staff and collections needs. The plan provides for phased development over a 25-year period; Phase I was completed in 2002, and significant projects in Phase II including a new Visitor Center were finished in 2012. In 1999 the plan was honored as a *Save America's Treasures* project by the White House Millennium Council and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and it also received a 2001 Design Award from the California Preservation Foundation and a 2002 Award of Merit from Long Beach Heritage.

#### **Opportunities and Constraints:**

Following a decision approved by the Long Beach City Council in 1993, most alterations made in 1930-31 to the historic adobe and landscaped grounds shall be restored and preserved. However, the interpretive period will cover the years from Native American times through the 1940s.

All work will follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects. Additionally, appropriate Preservation Briefs, the State Historic Building Code and ADA requirements will guide work.

### **The Interpretive Experience:**

The primary goal of the interpretive plan, based on Rancho Los Cerritos' Mission Statement, is to interpret the relationship of the Rancho's diverse peoples to the development of the greater Long Beach area. Interpretive programs will focus on three major themes: home, land and economic growth, and cultural diversity. The main interpretive method within the adobe will involve living history actors from the 1840s-1940s who will portray "Visitors from the Past," assuming the role of historic characters and transcending time barriers to share their personal stories with visitors. These stories will reflect different eras, nationalities, cultures, economic activities and social pastimes. Each "Visitor from the Past" will present a different chapter in the Rancho's history, encouraging repeat visitation to explore additional stories. Rooms within the historic adobe will be furnished to represent activities and lifestyles from the 1840s, 1870s and 1930s, with visitors progressing through time as they progress through the building. The different period room exhibits will provide a "stage" for interpreters from each of these time periods, and also allow for comparison/contrast tours and exercises.

Other methods to interpret the full history of the site will include videos in the Visitor Center (Cota Adobe); outdoor exhibits on Native Americans and Spanish California; small changing exhibits; lectures or workshops in the reconstructed 19<sup>th</sup> century barns complex; films; school lessons in the south wing classroom; demonstrations or hands-on activities; theatrical and musical performances; publications; and special events.

### **Education Programs:**

The proposed Interpretive Plan allows the Rancho's popular 4th grade school program, *Adobe Days Revisited*, to continue with some modifications. Interpretive themes and site resources suggest exciting opportunities for new programs that will meet the goals of the History and Social Science Content Standards for the LBUSD. Recommendations include an expansion of school programming in grades K-12 and added internship possibilities, as well as the development of Teaching Training Workshops and collaborative projects with local colleges and universities. After-school and summer programs for children will also be developed to provide valuable services for the youth in our community.

### **Research and Publications:**

The California History Research Library plays an important role in the development of Rancho Los Cerritos as a community and educational resource and will remain housed at the site, along with the museum's collection of archival documents and photographs. Students, scholars, volunteers and the general public will be encouraged to use the library for research on the history of California and development of the greater Long Beach area, and efforts will be made to publish new material in scholarly journals or in manuscript form.

### **Key Physical Changes:**

Throughout the master planning process, these constraints and needs shaped decision-making:

- Restoration of the historic adobe to the 1930s era
- Restoration of most grounds areas to reflect Cornell's plans
- Seismic retrofit of the historic adobe to meet current codes (completed, June 2002)
- Compliance with ADA (completed for adobe structure, June 2002)
- Upgrades to the security and safety of the site and structures

To meet visitor, staff, security and collections needs and best protect existing historic resources, the following recommendations are key to the proposed plan (please see attached sketch):

- Enhancements to perimeter fence and landscaping to provide a buffer (designs completed; construction on west side of property completed; fence completed)
- Redesign and re-landscaping of the entryway at Virginia Road, including signage improvements (completed, March 2012)
- Removal of the 1980s Spanish-tile Patio and Mexican Courtyard, and restoration of Cornell's orchard (completed, May 2003)
- Construction of a Visitor Education Center, based on the pre-1834 Cota Adobe, which provides visitor orientation and houses the Museum Gift Shop, a docent changing area, the volunteer office and public restrooms; includes removal of parking lot and re-landscaping of area (completed, April 2012)
- Rehabilitation of the arroyo (completed, March 2012)
- Construction of a new Caretaker's residence near the Virginia Road entrance, and removal of the caretaker from the historic adobe (designs completed)
- Removal of the picnic area from the northwest corner of the property, and re-landscaping to reflect a native California landscape (completed, August 2014)
- Development of staff parking area in the maintenance yard (project eliminated; parking to be allowed at Virginia Country Club, and a joint use overflow parking lot across from the Rancho entry on Virginia Country Club property was completed in May 2012)
- Removal of the Visitor Center from the 1930s garage (completed May 2012), and conversion of this space into a classroom/lecture area (in progress)
- Construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century barns complex and barnyard to house staff offices, archives and collections, additional restrooms, a small kitchen and a public assembly area; and removal of these services from the historic adobe
- Removal of the activity area from the southeast corner of the back garden and 1980s planted herb garden, and restoration of these areas according to Cornell's plans
- Construction of a rustic structure to house gardening tools and an exhibit workshop, to replace the current trailer
- Removal of the 1980s public restroom structure (completed, January 2011)

#### **Time Frame:**

The Master Plan is divided into three major phases over a 25-year period. These are divided as such: Phase I, 1999-2004; Phase II, 2005-2014; and Phase III, 2015-2024. In 1999, the City initiated a Traffic and Parking Study as a preliminary requirement for an Environmental Impact Study. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was approved by the Planning Commission in April 2002, and the Master Plan was approved by the Cultural Heritage Commission, Recreation Commission and Long Beach City Council later that year.

#### **Costs and Funding Responsibilities:**

Phase I cost \$1.5 million dollars, and partial completion of phase II projects cost nearly \$4 million. This sum does not include amounts for on-going building and grounds maintenance, increased operational costs and staffing needs, and asbestos and lead paint mitigation measures. Operations costs, including

the addition of staff for the new interpretive program, expansion of programs and development of changing exhibits, are also not included in this figure.

Through the Lease Agreement with the City, the Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation will receive an annual “management fee” to support operations. The Foundation is responsible for raising additional revenue from private donors, corporations and foundations to support operational needs, new programming initiatives and other enhancements. Additionally, the Foundation will take the lead in raising funds to implement remaining Master Plan recommendations.

In 2007 the Foundation launched “Strong Roots, New Growth,” a \$5 million capital campaign for phase II master plan projects that include the visitor education center, arroyo restoration, caretaker residence, entryway improvements and development of the California native garden. In July 2010, the Foundation concluded its campaign, raising nearly \$4.5 million of its campaign goal. The visitor center, arroyo, entryway improvements and an overflow parking lot were completed in 2012. The California native garden was completed in August 2014 with a grant from the Port of Long Beach.

**Conclusion:**

The master plan serves as a guide for site development and interpretation at Rancho Los Cerritos, a National, State and Local Historic Landmark. The Rancho, the place where Long Beach and several neighboring communities began, is in a unique position to serve as a “gateway to the past” and provide visitors with a more complete understanding and connection to the people and forces that shaped the southern California region. Implementation of master plan recommendations will ensure the preservation of this landmark property, while also developing Rancho Los Cerritos as an important educational and community resource.