



# Staff Report

## City of Pomona Historic Preservation Commission

April 1, 2026

**FILE NO:** HDD-000111-2026

A request to Designate the Pomona Fairplex as a Local Historic District.

**ADDRESS:** 601 West McKinley Avenue

**APPLICANT:** City of Pomona

**PROJECT PLANNER:** Geoffrey Starns, AICP, AIA, LEED AP, Planning Manager

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve File No(s). HDD-000111-2026 and adopt HPC Resolution No. 26-019 recommending that the City Council designate the Pomona Fairplex as a Local Historic District.

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### Project Information:

**GENERAL PLAN DISTRICT:** Fairplex

**ZONING DISTRICT:** Special Campus District 3

**TRANSECT:** Special Campus

**SPECIFIC PLAN DISTRICT:** None

**GENERAL PLAN DENSITY:** None

### Property Background:

The Pomona Fairplex is an event space that hosts numerous events every year but is known for being the home of the Los Angeles County Fair. The Property is over 500 acres.

### Critical Issues:

- Context and integrity of the barn areas
- Creation of a noncontiguous district
- Drag Strip

## Discussion of Critical Issues:

1. The barn area was identified as historic in the 2011 LSA Study, however, since 2011 major alterations have occurred that has severely compromised the historic context and the integrity of the area to a point that staff no longer believes the vast majority of the barns are historic. The barns' significance, other than Barn 1, are tied directly to the horse racing track at the Fairplex. Horse racing ceased in September 2002. For many years the racing track sat vacant. Sometime after the 2011 LSA Study, the track, guard rails, and other structures associated with the track were demolished. This caused a significant impact on the historic context and integrity of the barns. The barns no longer had a purpose and their locations in relation to the tracks were lost. Also, since 2011, numerous barns were demolished, further compromising the integrity of the existing barns. Finally, over the years the barns had been moved back and forth on the property, changing numerous times. One of the reasons for the move was that at one point the racetrack was enlarged. This area of the Fairplex was in constant flux. For all these reasons, staff included Barn 1 in the proposed historic district but excluded all the other barns.
2. Most historic districts are contiguous, keeping all structures within their borders. This is the case with Pomona's existing five (5) historic districts. However, there are examples of non-contiguous districts. Typically, these districts are created when circumstances hinder creation of a contiguous district. For example, when a district is based on a specific architectural style, structures not of that style will be excluded from the district. In this case, the Fairplex is 500 acres in size. Including all the vacant land would create an unnecessary hardship on the Fairplex and would do nothing to preserve the historic portions of the Fairplex. Therefore, staff is proposing a district that is three (3) areas, the first is Barn No. 1, the second is the Flower Building, and the third is the Grandstands and Exposition Buildings.
3. The Drag strip is isolated from the rest of the Fairplex, and the grandstands around the drag strip is not considered historic. Therefore, at this time staff did not feel it was appropriate to include the drag strip in the historic district. In the future, it could be add to the district, or it may be significant enough to be considered to be designated a local historic landmark.

## HISTORY:

In 2011 LSA, a consultant firm prepared a Cultural Resources Assessment for the City related to a proposed project that was never built. As part of this assessment, LSA researched the history of the fairgrounds. Their research is as follows:

In 1837, the subject property became part of the approximately 20,000-acre Mexican land grant Rancho San Jose (Brackett 1920; City of Pomona 2010). The Rancho was granted to Ygnacio Palomares and Ricardo Vejar with the main purpose being graze land for sheep and cattle. In 1841, additional acreage, referenced on USGS maps as the Rancho San Jose Addition, was granted to Luis Arenas, Palomares' brother-in-law (Brackett 1920). This additional acreage, which was later sold to the English Captain Henry Dalton, is where the current project area is located (USGS 1966, PR1981).

Despite the changes that occurred in the mid-to-late 1840s and the cession of California by Mexico to the United States, ranch life did not change much (Brackett 1920). In the early 1860s, the Vejar family lost its approximately 10,000-acre portion of Rancho San Jose to Los Angeles merchants Tischler and Schlesinger (*ibid.*). Schlesinger apparently died in 1863 and, in the mid-1860s, deeded to Louis Phillips "all the Vejar

interest in the San Jose Rancho and the cattle that Tischler had owned..." (Brackett 1920:78). The cattle and sheep industries remained strong until the mid-1860s when the Pomona Valley experienced a severe drought. With the Valley economy in near ruin, the livestock and grain industries began being replaced by grape crops and later olive groves (Brackett 1920).

In 1875, shortly after railroad tracks were laid through the region and the Southern Pacific rail station was opened at First and Main Streets, the original town site of Pomona was created by the Los Angeles Immigration and Land Co-operative (Pomona Heritage 2007; City of Pomona 2010). The town was named "Pomona" after the Roman Goddess of fruit and fruit trees. The town founders purchased water rights and sunk several artesian wells throughout the region.

In the 1880s, Southern California, including Pomona, experienced a land boom that was largely the result of the introduction of the railroad to the area. The land boom ushered in a new era in California and ended the region's geographic isolation as rail lines expanded and connected to nearby cities. By 1880, there were enough residents in the area to warrant a commercial center, and Pomona's was located on West Second Street west of Garey Avenue, approximately one-and-a-half miles southeast of the subject property (Pomona Heritage 2007). Throughout the 1880s, the City experienced a massive residential and economic boom, and in 1888, Pomona incorporated and Pacific Electric cars began service through the new city, providing further impetus to establish business enterprises along the main thoroughfare with outlying residential areas.

Since its early beginning, Pomona established itself as a productive agricultural community. During the 1880s, the grape and wine industries flourished throughout the Valley. However, in the early 1890s, as European wine production began competing with local production, olive groves began replacing vineyards. By the beginning of the 20th century, Pomona was producing a variety of deciduous fruits, including oranges, peaches, prunes, apples, and pears (Lothrop 1976:74). In addition, the Pomona Valley became an important center of dairy production with several large ranches in Pomona.

Agricultural development and the relentless quest for reliable sources of irrigation water plagued the Pomona Valley well into the 20th century. In 1913, the Los Angeles Aqueduct was completed from the Owens Valley in the Eastern Sierra to the Los Angeles Basin, providing further impetus for the development of the rich agricultural lands in the Pomona Valley. Between 1900 and 1920, Pomona's population more than doubled, largely due to Pomona's increasing importance as an agricultural producer (United States Census Bureau n.d.).

As early as 1854, the State officially recognized the importance of agriculture to its economy and began actively promoting it with the adoption of the California State Agricultural Society Act of 1854 (Haymond et al. 1892). That same year, the State Agricultural Society sponsored a State Fair that was held in San Francisco (Anonymous 2011; Anonymous n.d.). The fair included an exhibition of horses, cattle, mules, and other stock, and agricultural, mechanical, and domestic manufacture and productions [and] promoted the new state's growing agricultural industry" (Anonymous n.d.). By the 1880s, a number of county fairs had been organized and were taking place on an annual basis. However, as late as the 1920s, Los Angeles County still did not have a fair of its own.

In 1921, a merchants' exposition was held along the Southern Pacific Railway in downtown Pomona (Fairplex 2010). The exposition was presented by Harry La Breque, a promoter of community celebrations for Foley & Burke Shows, a railroad carnival, and Clinton B. "Jack" Afflerbaugh, a Pomona druggist and city

councilman (ibid.). The exposition, which consisted of exhibits in a tent and a carnival, set the stage for what would become the Los Angeles County Fair as its success inspired Afflerbaugh and others to consider having a fair (ibid.). L.E. Sheets, a local music store owner who had experience with fairs in Iowa, was asked to present plans for a fair to the Pomona Chamber of Commerce and then to the City Council (ibid.).

In 1922, a fair board was formed with Sheets as President, Afflerbaugh as Vice President, and Charles P. Curran as second Vice President. The City of Pomona agreed to purchase a 43-acre beet and barley field from the Ricardo Vejar estate for use as the fairgrounds (Fairplex 2010). Afflerbaugh contacted Sacramento and obtained permission to use the name "L.A. County Fair," and the fair was incorporated as the Los Angeles County Fair with Sheets as its first president (ibid.). It was organized primarily for the promotion of the agricultural, horticultural, and animal husbandry interests of the great Southwest" (ibid.:74). Financing came from a combination of private loans, the sale of stock, and the County Board of Supervisors (ibid.).

In August 1922, the Los Angeles Times reported that the City of Pomona had purchased a 40-acre tract of land adjacent to Ganesha Park for a fair that promised to be the "...greatest exposition of the country's resources ever presented" (Los Angeles Times 1922a). The fair was to be held October 17– 21 and it was reported that eight (8) buildings were being constructed along with a 400-foot long horse barn, a half-mile racetrack, and a 68,900-square foot tent for the industrial exposition (ibid.). A horse show with \$7,000 in prize money, as well as horse racing and livestock competitions were promoted as highlights of the upcoming fair (Los Angeles Times 1922a). The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce reportedly was very interested in the success of the fair because "...development of the agricultural and citrus growing districts is essential to the continued development of Los Angeles City" (ibid.).

Ground was broken and access roads were built along with the promised half-mile racetrack, a grandstand seating 4,000, two (2) cattle barns, two (2) livestock buildings, a livestock barn, and an administration building (Fairplex 2010; Figure 3). A wooden fence surrounded the grounds (ibid.) was also constructed. The fair opened to great enthusiasm and success with 10,000 people reported the first day (Los Angeles Times 1922b). There were more varieties of livestock than anticipated and the racetrack which was created in less than three months, held its own with the more established tracks in the region (ibid.). By all accounts, the first Los Angeles County Fair was a great success with wildly varying estimates of total attendance ranging from 49,461 (Fairplex 2010) to 100,000 (Los Angeles Times 1922c). Highlights included harness racing, chariot racing, and an airplane wing-walker (Fairplex 2010).

In 1923, a \$75,000 bond issue was approved that facilitated the purchase of an additional 62 acres and the construction of permanent buildings (Fairplex 2010). The following year, Afflerbaugh became the Fair's first paid manager, a post he held until 1960 (ibid.). That same year (1924), a building for the home arts (no longer extant) was constructed, and attendance grew to 93,163 (ibid.). In 1925, attendance exceeded 100,000, and the fair was held in September (ibid.). A Los Angeles Times article from October 1926 proclaimed "The Fair has Arrived" and included a picture of the new Administration Building (extant, but enlarged (Los Angeles Times 1926; Figure 4). This Spanish Eclectic style building, which featured a large arched opening that functioned as the entrance to the Fair, was reportedly designed by Pomona resident Peter Ficker (Fairplex 2010). Ficker was born in Magyos, Hungary in 1885 and immigrated to St. Louis, Missouri in 1904 via New York and the ship Wilhelm II (Ancestry.com). He became a naturalized citizen in 1913 in Los Angeles, where he resided and worked for the Harbor Engineers Office (ibid.; Lassell 1999). While there, he designed several buildings including Los Angeles Municipal Warehouse No. 1, which had lions-head gargoyle downspouts that were cast from an original sculpture produced by Ficker (Lassell

1999:4). For several decades, the building was the largest structure at the Port of Los Angeles and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) in 2000 (*ibid.*; National Park Service 2009). Ficker apparently relocated to Pomona sometime after 1920 and is credited with designing several of the major exhibit buildings and/or renovations to them (Ancestry.com; Lassell 1999; Richards 2011).

By the 1930s, California had become one of the nation's foremost agricultural producers, growing some of the leading varieties of citrus, nuts, avocados, and beans. Because California's agricultural production played a major role in the development of the State, the fairs that exhibited these products became very important (Tibbet and Carmack 2006). The 1934 local City Directory promoted Pomona by noting that it was home to three (3) transcontinental railroads, an electric inter-urban railroad linking it to Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County fairgrounds, two (2) hospitals, one (1) newspaper, seven (7) parks, four (4) service clubs, several lodges and fraternal orders, and approximately 21,000 people (Los Angeles Directory Company 1934). In addition, the City's primary agricultural products were listed as citrus, walnuts, deciduous fruits, poultry, rabbits, and dairy, while its main manufacturing products were pumps, tile, paper, and knitwear (*ibid.*).

Despite the effects of the Depression, in 1930, the 108,000-square foot Exhibits Building ("the largest exhibit building in the world") was constructed at the fairgrounds at a cost of \$250,000 (Fairplex 2010:75; Figure 5). In 1931, the Fair was presented in combination with the Southern California Fair formerly held in Riverside), and Millard Sheets, renowned artist and Pomona native, was named to the Fair's tenth annual art exhibition jury and apparently acted as the superintendent of the art exhibit (Los Angeles Times 1931 and 1932). However, attendance dropped that year by nearly 32,000 from the previous year (*ibid.*). In 1932, Sheets once again acted as the superintendent of the art exhibit, a post he held until 1957 (Los Angeles Times 1932; Fairplex 2010). In 1994, the Fine Arts Building was dedicated as the Millard Sheets Gallery (Fairplex 2010:78). From 1932 through 1937, the Orange County Fair was added making it a tri-county harvest festival (*ibid.*). In 1933, the State legalized parimutuel wagering and the Fair "became the first in Southern California to allow fans to bet on horse racing" (Fairplex 2010:75). In 1935, the Fair's Garden Railroad, which began in 1924 and originally had all handmade rolling stock that "ran on one-half inch scale standard gauge custom laid steel track," was moved to an outdoor location (Schreyer 1999). With over 4,500 feet of track, in 1999 it was reportedly the largest operating garden railroad in the United States (*ibid.*).

Throughout the 1930s, several new buildings were constructed on the fairgrounds. These included new horse and cattle barns (1932); a concrete and steel grandstand (1932; Figure 5); a lagoon (1935); three (3) new horse barns (1935); dressing rooms in the grandstand (1935); a stage in the grandstand (1935); a sunken band stand in the grandstand (1935); a new arts and crafts building (now Administration 2 Building; 1936); two (2) buildings for rabbits, poultry, and youth exhibits (1938); Anthony's (now Avalon; late 1930s); and a childcare center (1939; Fairplex 2010). In addition, from 1937 through 1939, a number of buildings were constructed as WPA projects. These include the Fine Arts Building (now Millard Sheets Building; 1937); barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls 5 and 6 (1937); barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls 7 and 8 (1938); the Home Arts Building (now NHRA Motorsports Museum; 1939), and possibly the cafeteria (now Avalon; 1937 or 1939).

Although the agricultural industry began to decline through the late 1930s and into the 1940s, any economic lull attributed to the agricultural industry was soon replaced by the war economy. In October 1941, three days after the Fair closed, the huge Exhibits Building was severely damaged by a fire (Fairplex 2010). On December 14, 1941, just one week after the attack on Pearl Harbor and before the fire damaged building could be repaired, the United States Army took over the fairgrounds (*ibid.*). Three regiments

occupied the grounds and the Army established its headquarters in the Home Arts Building (now the NHRA Motorsports Museum; *ibid.*). On March 25, 1942, newspapers reported that the 1942 fair had been officially canceled (Los Angeles Times 1942a). The same day, Fair Manager Afflerbaugh announced that a 29-foot by 26-foot addition to the Administration Building would be completed within the next six weeks (Los Angeles Times 1942b). Afflerbaugh also noted that the addition would be of similar architecture and would include an 11-foot by 12-foot vault (*ibid.*). Fair personnel were allowed to retain use of the Administration Building during the war.

In March 1942, a complex was constructed in the west parking area that consisted of 420 prefabricated buildings including houses, latrines, showers, laundry facilities, mess halls, warehouses, a hospital, a post office, a library, administration buildings, a recreation hall, and a visitors' area (Progress-Bulletin 1942b; Figure 6). The complex, which functioned as an Assembly Center for Japanese-Americans held a total of 5,514 persons and was surrounded by a high fence and guard towers (Blackstock 2009; The California State Military Museum n.d.; refer to Appendix A for news articles, photographs, and maps). On May 7, 1942, the first "evacuees" arrived (Japanese American National Museum 2011). In August 1942, the vast majority of the detainees at the fairgrounds were relocated to the Heart Mountain concentration camp in Wyoming and by August 27, 1942, the assembly center had been completely vacated (Progress-Bulletin 1942d).

Early in September 1942, the "center was turned over to the Army's Ordnance Motor Transport Agency and became known as the Pomona Ordnance Depot" (The California State Military Museum n.d.). In 1943, the Army used the facility as a desert training center, and in 1944, the Ordnance Command shop was established on the grounds (Fairplex 2010). In September 1945, Japan signed an unconditional surrender officially ending World War II (WWII). The fairgrounds, which remained under the control of the Army, were then used as an Italian and German prisoner of war (POW) camp until March 1946 (Fairplex 2010). The POWs were reportedly used to work the nearby groves and fields and were regarded as a reliable and affordable labor force (Los Angeles Times 1945). Although many of the local growers lobbied to keep the POWs, Afflerbaugh insisted that the fair was even more important to the local economy and eventually succeeded in securing the removal of Assembly Center buildings and closure of the POW camp. Finally, in March 1946, the POW camp was closed (Fairplex 2010).

In 1947, 35 acres were annexed to the fairgrounds for the establishment of a trailer park and the County Board of Supervisors earmarked \$733,364 for repairs to the Exhibits Building that had been burned in 1941 (Fairplex 2010; Los Angeles Times 1947). In 1948, the Fair reopened with a new official mascot, Thummer the Pig (Fairplex 2010). The Exhibits Building (renamed the Agricultural Pavilion) was designed by Peter Ficker and was reconstructed at a cost of \$750,000 (Fairplex 2010:76). At nearly 120,000 square feet, it was reportedly the largest structure of its kind west of the Mississippi (*ibid.*). "Other new construction projects included a horse racing tote board, a tunnel under the track to the infield and new cattle and swine barns. Attendance topped the one million mark for the first time "...making the event the second largest fair in the country, surpassed only by the Texas State Fair" ( *ibid.*). In 1949, the six-lane road that is now known as Fairplex Drive was constructed providing better access to the fairgrounds (Fairplex 2010). In addition, 62 acres were added for parking, and the Administration Building was expanded with the addition of more than 8,200 square feet including a board of director's room with an outdoor balcony (Fairplex 2010).

In the immediate post-WWII era, many of Pomona's agricultural groves were replaced with new roads and housing tracts to support the post-war population boom, which erupted throughout the United States during this period. From about 1950 through the mid-1970s, the average income of the American worker rose by 50 percent and the middle class grew and prospered (Randl 2004:32). With more disposable

income and more leisure time (thanks in part to the nearly universal 40-hour work week), the demand for recreational activities grew. A new leisure industry consisting of magazine editors, builders, realtors, and sporting goods and vehicle manufacturers emerged (Randl 2004). Between 1940 and 1970, the number of paid holidays and vacation days had more than doubled for most workers and Saturdays were no longer part of the work week. Recreation was America's new hobby and the car culture led the way.

The post-war period saw resurgence in the popularity of hot rodding and drag racing. "By 1950, hot rodders who had been racing in dry lake beds were taking to the streets" sometimes injuring or killing themselves or others (Allen 2008). In those days, if you were a hot rodder, it was the same as being in a gang today (ibid.). Pomona had its share of illegal street racers, but it also had a "car-loving" police chief (Ralph Parker) and a young motorcycle sergeant named Bud Coons who was a car enthusiast (ibid.). Parker and Coons were also interested in safety and, with this in mind, Coons began organizing rally runs and shows and barbecues for racers (ibid.). In 1951, Chief Parker, Coons, and the Lions Club approached the Fairplex with the idea of setting aside an area for drag racing (ibid.). Soon street racers had a legal straightaway and complaints about speeding, as well as deaths from speeding, dropped dramatically (ibid.). This success prompted the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to send a bulletin to other jurisdictions regarding the Pomona approach (ibid.). The same year (1951), Wally Parks founded the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) with the goal of promoting safety (Parks 2008). In 1937, Parks was a founding member of the 1937 Southern California Timing Association (SCTA), which was focused on conducting land speed events. Parks also was involved in the first Hot Rod Show in America presented by SCTA in 1948, the introduction of Hot Rod Magazine in 1948, the opening of Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah for hot rod speed trials in 1949, and was editorial director for all of Bob Petersen's magazines (Hot Rod Magazine 2009). As early as 1972, Parks began receiving awards for his participation in automotive sports including Man of the Decade (1962–1972 by Popular Hot Rodding magazine) and Man of the Year (1973 by Specialty Equipment Marketing Association [SEMA]) (ibid.). Among his myriad awards, in 1992, he was "drag racing's first inductee into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame" in Talladega, Alabama, and in 1993 he was "inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame in Novi, Michigan" (ibid.:2).

On April 11–12, 1953, the NHRA held its first sanctioned event, the Southern California Championship Drag Races, at Pomona Raceway, located at a far corner of the grounds. Over the weekend, 375 cars ran 850 timed races" (Fairplex 2010:77). With a first-class drag racing facility and supervised races, drag racing became a true sport (Parks 2008). In 1961, the "NHRA held its inaugural Winternationals at Pomona Raceway in February before the largest single-day audience in the brief history of drag racing" (Fairplex 2010:77). In 1984, Pomona hosted the NHRA Winston Select Finals for the first time (Fairplex 2010:78). In 1993, the NHRA completed extensive improvements to the drag strip and, in 1998, the NHRA Motorsports Museum opened in what was formerly the Home Arts Building (Fairplex 2010).

In addition to the drag strip, many other improvements were made to the fairgrounds during the 1950s. These include installation of the world's largest man-made ski jump (1951, no longer extant); construction of the flower and garden building (1952); the clock tower (1952; removed in 2001); the Mexican Village (1952, now the Plaza de las Americas); the fire station and first aid building (1954); a barrel-roofed building (8A, no longer extant); a tunnel under White Avenue (1959); completion of the "ranchero" carving by John Svenson (1954); and, in 1957, participation by the Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey Circus for the first time at any fair (Fairplex 2010). In addition, at the 1955 Fair, Fred Morrison sold flying disks that were later marketed as the Frisbee (ibid.).

In 1960, "Phillip D. Shepherd took over as general manager, following the death of Afflerbaugh" (Fairplex 2010: 77). In 1962, a monorail (removed in 1996) and Storybook Farm (now California's Heritage Square) were added, followed by a clubhouse connected to the racetrack grandstand in 1964, and the Golden Empire Mine in 1965 (closed in 1997; Fairplex 2010).

As might be expected, the fair has continued to grow and change throughout the intervening decades. Buildings have been relocated, remodeled, replaced, or removed. Exhibits have come and gone and new land has been added. In 1985, the racetrack was enlarged from a half-mile to five-eighths mile and the next year the grandstand and clubhouse were renovated (Fairplex 2010). Some of the WPA buildings (5, 6, 7, and 8) were remodeled and nine (9) new horse stables (Barrett's Equine Complex) were added in 1989 (ibid.). In 1992, the Sheraton Suites Fairplex hotel opened and in 1996 the Mexican Village was renovated (ibid.). In 2003, one of the barrel-roofed buildings (8A) was demolished to make room for the trade and convention center (ibid.). Many other changes have occurred in the modern period (1961–present), but the Fair remains a successful enterprise that is a key component of the local economy.

Today, the Los Angeles County Fair is the largest county fair in North America and in 2009, had an attendance of 1,372,383 people, which was the fourth largest of all fairs and exhibitions in North America that year (Fairplex 2010:35). Except in 1963, attendance has topped one million at each fair since 1948 and nearly 83 million people have visited the fair since its inception in 1922 (ibid.).

#### Historic Context Statement:

The Fairgrounds is mentioned in several sections of the Citywide Historic Context Statement. It is mentioned in Chapter VIII. Expansion, Growth, and Depression (1920-1940) under both the Commercial Theme, as a center for entertainment, and the Civic and Institutional Development Theme, under the New Deal, because of the improvements completed at the Fairgrounds during that time. Finally, it is also discussed in Chapter IX. Pomona During World War II (1941-1945) in regards to the role the Fairgrounds played in interring Japanese-Americans during World War II.

#### Survey Information:

The Fairgrounds were surveyed in 2011 as part of the LSA study. The survey forms are included in the study, which is attached (Attachment No. 3).

#### City Directories:

The City Directories do not provide any information regarding potential significant persons associated with the fairgrounds.

#### Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps:

Only a portion of the fairgrounds is on the Sanborn maps. And they only confirm the locations of the buildings that the report discusses.

### Significance:

The Fairgrounds is significant for a variety of reasons as discussed in the history above. Architecturally it is significant through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects completed on the site. Culturally it is significant for being the site of the Los Angeles County Fair and the NHRA. Finally, historically and culturally it is significant for being the Pomona Assembly Center and the role it played in the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

### Designation Criteria:

The property was evaluated as part of the LSA report for both the local register and the California Register. Staff also reviewed the project for the National Register, and reviewed the findings for California Register, and local designation criteria to determine whether the property is historic.

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CRITERIA

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds are associated with events that are significant in local, state, and national history. As the site of the Los Angeles County Fair since 1922, the fairgrounds played a significant role in the agricultural and recreational history of Pomona and the surrounding region. The fair has also contributed greatly to the local economy and is the largest county fair in the nation. Despite the economic depression in the 1930s, the fair continued and even enjoyed a small construction/employment boom between 1937 and 1939 thanks to the WPA. During the war years of the 1940s, the fair temporarily ceased (1942–1947) as the grounds were taken over by the U.S. Army and used first as a Japanese-American assembly center, then as an ordnance depot, and finally as a POW camp that provided inexpensive and reliable labor to nearby farms. In the 1950s, the growth of the middle class, coupled with increased prosperity and leisure time, resulted in new demands for recreation and spurred the return of the hot rod and dangerous and illegal drag racing on local streets. Working with the local police and Wally Parks, the fairgrounds provided a drag strip where the first legally sanctioned NHRA race took place in 1953. Many of the buildings and features related to these historic events remain in place and retain at least a moderate level of integrity, which allows the Fairplex to convey its association with these important events in history. Therefore, the Pomona Fairplex appears to meet this criterion for significance at the regional level as a historic district with a period of significance from 1922, when the fair first opened, to 1961, which is currently the end of the historic period. Therefore, Staff agrees with this Criterion.

2. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past (Criterion B).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds are associated with a number of fairly well-known people. Of these, architect Peter Ficker, artist Millard Sheets, and NHRA founder Wally Parks are of particular note. Peter Ficker was reportedly the architect of either original designs or remodeling projects for the Administration Building, the Palace of Agriculture, and most of the fairground exhibition halls. In addition, he designed noteworthy buildings in Los Angeles County, including Los Angeles Municipal Warehouse No. 1, which is listed in the National Register. While Ficker's association with some of the fairground's buildings is noteworthy, none of these buildings appears to be the sole remaining building of his design or the best

example of his work. In addition, their association with Ficker is not enough to make the fairgrounds or any of the individual buildings or features significant under this criterion.

Award-winning artist and Pomona-native Millard Sheets is the designer of the Second Street Pedestrian Mall (1962) in downtown Pomona. Sheets served as Director of the Fine Arts Exhibit for many years and was important in the success of this aspect of the fair. Although it has not been verified, he may have designed the Fine Arts Building. While his long-time involvement with the fair is notable, by itself, this association is not important enough to make the fairgrounds or the Fine Arts Building (now Millard Sheets Building) significant under this criterion. However, if in the future evidence is found indicating that he did indeed design the Fine Arts Building and that it is a rare, high-quality example of a building designed by Sheets, that could result in a different determination under this Criterion.

NHRA founder Wally Parks is one of the biggest names in drag racing and motorsports. Born in Oklahoma, but reared in California, Parks was a founding member of the 1937 SCTA. The SCTA was focused on conducting land speed events. Parks also was involved in the first Hot Rod Show in America presented by SCTA in 1948, the introduction of Hot Rod Magazine in 1948, the opening of Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah for hot rod speed trials in 1949 and won numerous awards from 1972 to 2003 for his participation in automotive sports. Parks was drag racing's first inductee into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992 in Talladega, Alabama. Parks' association with drag racing at the fairgrounds does not, by itself, make the fairgrounds significant. However, because we are not considering the drag strip at this time, the relationship is to the rest of the Fairplex is tangential and it does make the drag strip, which was the location of the NHRA's first official race, a contributing element to the fairgrounds historic district.

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction (Criterion C).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds embody the distinctive characteristics of a fairground such as the horse racetrack and related barns and stables, the grandstand, and the exhibition halls. In addition, there are a number of buildings that are good examples of various architectural styles as adapted to fairground/exhibition hall uses. These span a period of four decades (1920s–1950s) and include Administration Building 1 (1926), Palace of Agriculture (1930/1941), Grandstand (1932), Administration Building 2 (1936); Millard Sheets Building (1937; former Fine Arts Building), WPA barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls (1937–1938; Buildings 5–8), Avalon (1937–1939), NHRA Motorsports Museum (1939; former Home Arts Building), the Longboard Bar (circa 1939), and Flower Building (1952). In addition, some of these buildings are associated with architect Peter Ficker and/or the WPA. Therefore, the fairgrounds appear to be significant under this criterion as a property type that retains several major buildings dating to its period of significance (1922–1961). In addition, based on the quality and integrity of their architecture, as well as their associations with important events and people in history, the buildings listed above, along with the horse racetrack (1922/1985), the horse racing stables (1–12A and 14–28), and the drag strip (1953/1993), are contributing features to the historic district. Therefore, Staff agrees with this Criterion.

4. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory (Criterion D).

Criterion 4, which is usually associated with archaeological resources, the fairgrounds do not appear to have the potential to yield information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

## CALIFORNIA REGISTER OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

1. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States (Criterion 1).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds are associated with events that are significant in local, state, and national history. As the site of the Los Angeles County Fair since 1922, the fairgrounds played a significant role in the agricultural and recreational history of Pomona and the surrounding region. The fair has also contributed greatly to the local economy and is the largest county fair in the nation. Despite the economic depression in the 1930s, the fair continued and even enjoyed a small construction/employment boom between 1937 and 1939 thanks to the WPA. During the war years of the 1940s, the fair temporarily ceased (1942–1947) as the grounds were taken over by the U.S. Army and used first as a Japanese-American assembly center, then as an ordnance depot, and finally as a POW camp that provided inexpensive and reliable labor to nearby farms. In the 1950s, the growth of the middle class, coupled with increased prosperity and leisure time, resulted in new demands for recreation and spurred the return of the hot rod and dangerous and illegal drag racing on local streets. Working with the local police and Wally Parks, the fairgrounds provided a drag strip where the first legally sanctioned NHRA race took place in 1953. Many of the buildings and features related to these historic events remain in place and retain at least a moderate level of integrity, which allows the Fairplex to convey its association with these important events in history. Therefore, the Pomona Fairplex appears to meet this criterion for significance at the regional level as a historic district with a period of significance from 1922, when the fair first opened, to 1961, which is currently the end of the historic period. Therefore, Staff agrees with this Criterion.

2. Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history (Criterion 2).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds are associated with a number of fairly well-known people. Of these, architect Peter Ficker, artist Millard Sheets, and NHRA founder Wally Parks are of particular note. Peter Ficker was reportedly the architect of either original designs or remodeling projects for the Administration Building, the Palace of Agriculture, and most of the fairground exhibition halls. In addition, he designed noteworthy buildings in Los Angeles County, including Los Angeles Municipal Warehouse No. 1, which is listed in the National Register. While Ficker's association with some of the fairground's buildings is noteworthy, none of these buildings appears to be the sole remaining building of his design or the best example of his work. In addition, their association with Ficker is not enough to make the fairgrounds or any of the individual buildings or features significant under this criterion.

Award-winning artist and Pomona-native Millard Sheets is the designer of the Second Street Pedestrian Mall (1962) in downtown Pomona. Sheets served as Director of the Fine Arts Exhibit for many years and was important in the success of this aspect of the fair. Although it has not been verified, he may have designed the Fine Arts Building.

NHRA founder Wally Parks is one of the biggest names in drag racing and motorsports. Born in Oklahoma, but reared in California, Parks was a founding member of the 1937 SCTA. The SCTA was focused on conducting land speed events. Parks also was involved in the first Hot Rod Show in America presented by SCTA in 1948, the introduction of Hot Rod Magazine in 1948, the opening of Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah for hot rod speed trials in 1949 and won numerous awards from 1972 to 2003 for his participation in automotive sports. Parks was drag racing's first inductee into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992 in Talladega, Alabama. Parks' association with drag racing at the fairgrounds does not, by itself, make the fairgrounds significant. However, because we are not considering the drag strip at this time, the relationship is to the rest of the Fairplex is tangential and it does make the drag strip, which was the location of the NHRA's first official race, a contributing element to the fairgrounds historic district. Staff generally agrees with the determination that the property is not historic under Criterion 2. The other associations are more questionable but could also support designation.

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values (Criterion 3).

The LSA report found that the fairgrounds embody the distinctive characteristics of a fairground such as the horse racetrack and related barns and stables, the grandstand, and the exhibition halls. In addition, there are a number of buildings that are good examples of various architectural styles as adapted to fairground/exhibition hall uses. These span a period of four decades (1920s–1950s) and include Administration Building 1 (1926), Palace of Agriculture (1930/1941), Grandstand (1932), Administration Building 2 (1936); Millard Sheets Building (1937; former Fine Arts Building), WPA barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls (1937–1938; Buildings 5–8), Avalon (1937–1939), NHRA Motorsports Museum (1939; former Home Arts Building), the Longboard Bar (circa 1939), and Flower Building (1952). In addition, some of these buildings are associated with architect Peter Ficker and/or the WPA. Therefore, the fairgrounds appear to be significant under this criterion as a property type that retains several major buildings dating to its period of significance (1922–1961). In addition, based on the quality and integrity of their architecture, as well as their associations with important events and people in history, the buildings listed above, along with the horse racetrack 1922/1985), the horse racing stables (1–12A and 14–28), and the drag strip (1953/1993), are contributing features to the historic district. Therefore, Staff agrees with this Criterion.

4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation (Criterion 4).

Criterion 4, which is usually associated with archaeological resources, the fairgrounds do not appear to have the potential to yield information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

## CITY OF POMONA LANDMARK DESIGNATION CRITERIA

### Architecture / Physical Features

1. It embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship (Criterion 3 in previous ordinance);

The fairgrounds embody the distinctive characteristics of a fairground such as the grandstand, and the exhibition halls. In addition, there are a number of buildings that are good examples of various architectural styles as adapted to fairground/exhibition hall uses. Many also relate to the Works Progress Administration during the depression. It, therefore, meets this criterion.

2. It is the work of a notable builder, designer, landscape designer or architect (Criterion 5 in previous ordinance);

As discussed above, the association with Peter Ficker and the WPA is significant in Pomona's History. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

3. It embodies elements of architectural design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant structural or architectural achievement or innovation (Criterion 7 in previous ordinance);

The buildings do not have any features that represent an achievement or innovation. Therefore, the property does not meet this criterion.

4. It is similar to other distinctive properties, sites, areas, or objects based on an historic, cultural, or architectural motif (Criterion 8 in previous ordinance);

The Fairplex is unique in Pomona and does not meet this Criterion.

5. It has a unique location or singular physical characteristics or is a view or vista representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the city of Pomona (Criterion 6 in previous ordinance);

The Fairplex is unique to Pomona and Southern California. It is a unique location and has unique physical characteristics. It is an established and familiar visual feature that is significant to Pomona. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

6. It reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, particular transportation modes, or distinctive examples of park or community planning (Criterion 9 in previous ordinance);

The Fairplex has a strong relationship to the agricultural history of Pomona, but this relationship does not meet the intent of the Criterion, and therefore, the property does not meet it.

7. It is one of the few remaining examples in the city of Pomona, region, state, or nation possessing distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or historical type or specimen (Criterion 10 in previous ordinance).

Fairplex is unique in Southern California and is the largest fairgrounds in Southern California. Its development through the WPA makes it one of the few remaining examples of its kind. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

### Person(s) and Events Important in Our History

1. It is identified with persons or events significant in local, state, or national history (Criterion 2 in previous ordinance);

As Discussed above, the fairgrounds are associated with a number of fairly well-known people. Of these, architect Peter Ficker, artist Millard Sheets, and NHRA founder Wally Parks are of particular note. Millard Sheets, in particular is a significant person in Pomona History, and Wally Parks is a significant person in Southern California history. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

2. It exemplifies or reflects special elements of the city of Pomona's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history (Criterion 1 in previous ordinance);

As discussed above, the fairgrounds are associated with events that are significant in local, state, and national history. As the site of the Los Angeles County Fair since 1922, the fairgrounds played a significant role in the agricultural and recreational history of Pomona and the surrounding region. The fair has also contributed greatly to the local economy and is the largest county fair in the nation. It is also the site of the first NHRA race, contributing greatly to California's car culture. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

### Archaeology

1. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

Criterion 4, which is usually associated with archaeological resources, the fairgrounds do not appear to have the potential to yield information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

### CITY OF POMONA HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION CRITERIA

1. It is a contiguous area possessing a concentration of eligible historic resources or thematically related grouping of structures which contribute to each other and are unified by plan, style, or physical development; and (b) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction; represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values (*Criterion 4 in previous ordinance*);

As discussed above there are a number of buildings that are unified by plan and style and are architecturally similar and distinctive as WPA projects. Therefore, the property meets this Criterion.

2. It reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and

growth, particular transportation modes, or distinctive examples of a park landscape, site design, or community planning (*Criterion 9 in previous ordinance*); and

As discussed above, The fairgrounds represented the growth of the agricultural industry and Pomona and the area as a whole.

Meets at least one of Landmark Designation Criteria as follows:

- a. Architecture / Physical Features Criteria 1, 2, 3, or 4; and/or
- b. Person and Events Criteria 1 or 2.

The area meets multiple criteria for designation and is eligible to be designated as a local historic district.

### Integrity:

As discussed in the critical issues, the barn area was severely compromised with the demolition of the racetrack. Staff, therefore, is proposing to not include the barn area in the proposed historic district. The Fairground buildings, including the exposition halls, have a high degree of integrity and make up much of the proposed district.

### Conclusion:

For the reasons discussed above, the Pomona Fairplex appears eligible for listing in the National Register as a historic district under Criterion 1 for its associations with the development of agricultural fairs and the WPA and under Criterion 3 as a property type (county fairgrounds) with several extant contributing buildings and features including the racetrack; Administration Building 1; Palace of Agriculture; Grandstand; Administration Building 2; Millard Sheets Building; WPA barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls (Buildings 5–8); Avalon; NHRA Motorsports Museum; Flower Building; the Longboard Bar; and Horse Racing Stable 1. The horse racing stables 2–12A and 14–28; no longer have integrity or context to be historic. The drag strip is not being considered at this time, but could be considered at a later date.

It also appears eligible for listing in the California Register as a historic district under Criterion 1 for its associations with the development of agricultural fairs and the WPA, potentially Criterion 2 for its association with Millard Sheets and Peter Ficker, and under Criterion 3 as a property type (county fairgrounds) with several extant contributing buildings and features including the racetrack; Administration Building 1; Palace of Agriculture; Grandstand; Administration Building 2; Millard Sheets Building; WPA barrel-roofed Exhibition Halls (Buildings 5–8); Avalon; NHRA Motorsports Museum; the Longboard Bar; Horse Racing Stable 1; and the Flower Building.

In conclusion, the area appears eligible for designation as a local historic district based on multiple criteria, as discussed above.

### Attachments:

1. Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 26-019
2. Proposed District Map
3. LSA Cultural Resource Assessment, 2011