

September 2, 2008

Brenda Salas, Mayor
City of Banning, California
99 E Ramsey Street
Banning, CA 92220

RE: Preservation of the Historic San Gorgonio Inn

Dear Ms. Salas,

The Old Riverside Foundation is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the built environment in Riverside County. It is our hope and intent to inform people about various preservation projects and guide efforts throughout the area. The San Gorgonio Pass Historical Society is a non-profit community organization dedicating to preserving and informing about the history of the San Gorgonio Pass area of Riverside County.

It has recently come to our attention that the City of Banning is in the process of acquiring the historically significant San Gorgonio Inn property, perhaps for redevelopment. We applaud the City for its efforts in obtaining the property, which has sat vacant for over a year now. However, we are concerned that future development plans for the property may include the demolition of this historically-significant building.

The San Gorgonio Inn represents a unique, fascinating, and very significant part of the history of Banning. To demonstrate this, we have attached a researched and documented article entitled "San Gorgonio Inn Dates to Banning's Earliest Days" by local historian Steve Lech, who used the article to nominate the San Gorgonio Inn for landmark status through the County of Riverside.

It is our sincere hope that you will give serious consideration to an adaptive reuse for the building. Its Spanish style of architecture (albeit slightly modified by later additions) fits well into the City's downtown design guidelines of using the California Mission Architectural Style. According to the City's website, "The California Mission architectural style contains strong massing, colonnades, arches, white plaster, pitched mudded tiled roofs, wrought iron, exposed ridge rafters, and recessed windows." Many of these elements exist already on the building, and can easily be incorporated into the guidelines desired by the City for the Downtown District. As far as a use is concerned, considering it has been a restaurant for nearly 80 years, reusing it as such could be the anchor for a redevelopment plan incorporating the entire parcel, if desired.

Historic preservation, including adaptive reuse of buildings, is the desired outcome in many projects for several reasons. For one, it makes sense economically. According to Donovan Rypkema, noted preservationist economist and author of *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, preserving historic places brings more money into an area through vehicles like tourism. His research shows that people visiting historic sites spend 2.5 times as much money compared to other visitors. They tend to stay longer, spend more per day and have a greater economic impact. This fits right into the City's desire to join together in the San Gorgonio Pass Heritage Corridor. In addition, property values for buildings in historic areas increase more on average than those that are not. Prices for those properties are generally more stable in turbulent times.

Adaptive reuse of a building also fits the current trend of "going green." Referring again to Rypkema, tearing down one building erases the environmental benefit of recycling 1.344 million aluminum cans through the creation of huge amounts of waste that end up having to be transported

to a landfill. How long does it take residents of the City of Banning to recycle that many beverage containers?

The arguments in favor of preserving a building such as the San Gorgonio Inn are too numerous to continue in this letter. Suffice it to say that members of our organizations would be more than happy to meet with City officials to outline additional reasons and/or assist in design development that incorporates the existing building into a redevelopment plan.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to apprise the City of its obligations concerning historic resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). For several reasons, the San Gorgonio Inn would be considered a historic resource under CEQA, including:

1. The preponderance of evidence that it is historically significant (see attached aforementioned article);
2. The building is identified as significant in an historical resource survey meeting the requirements section 5024.1(g) of the Public Resources Code (see attached Historic Resources Inventory sheet for the San Gorgonio Inn, compiled by the Riverside County Parks Department and dated August 19, 1983).

Due to these parameters, the San Gorgonio Inn shall, in the opinion of the Old Riverside Foundation and the San Gorgonio Pass Historical Society, be presumed to be historically or culturally significant under CEQA.

Given the above and the fact that demolition of a historic resource is considered a significant impact that must be evaluated through the EIR process, adaptive reuse of the building is clearly the preferred and most advantageous alternative for all of the reasons cited in this letter.

The Old Riverside Foundation and the San Gorgonio Pass Historical Society stand ready to assist the City of Banning in finding an acceptable form of adaptive reuse for the San Gorgonio Inn and incorporating it into an overall redevelopment plan for the parcel that would mesh harmoniously with the direction the city has adopted for the downtown area. If you would like to discuss any of these points further, please feel free to contact either of us. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David Leonard, President
Old Riverside Foundation
P. O. Box 601
Riverside, CA 92502
leonarddla@earthlink.net

Virginia Ross, President
San Gorgonio Pass Historical Society
P. O. Box 753
Beaumont, CA 92223
Rossbooks@earthlink.net

CC: City of Banning Council Members
City of Banning Redevelopment Department
City of Banning Planning Department
Steve Moore, Press-Enterprise