



May 31, 2022

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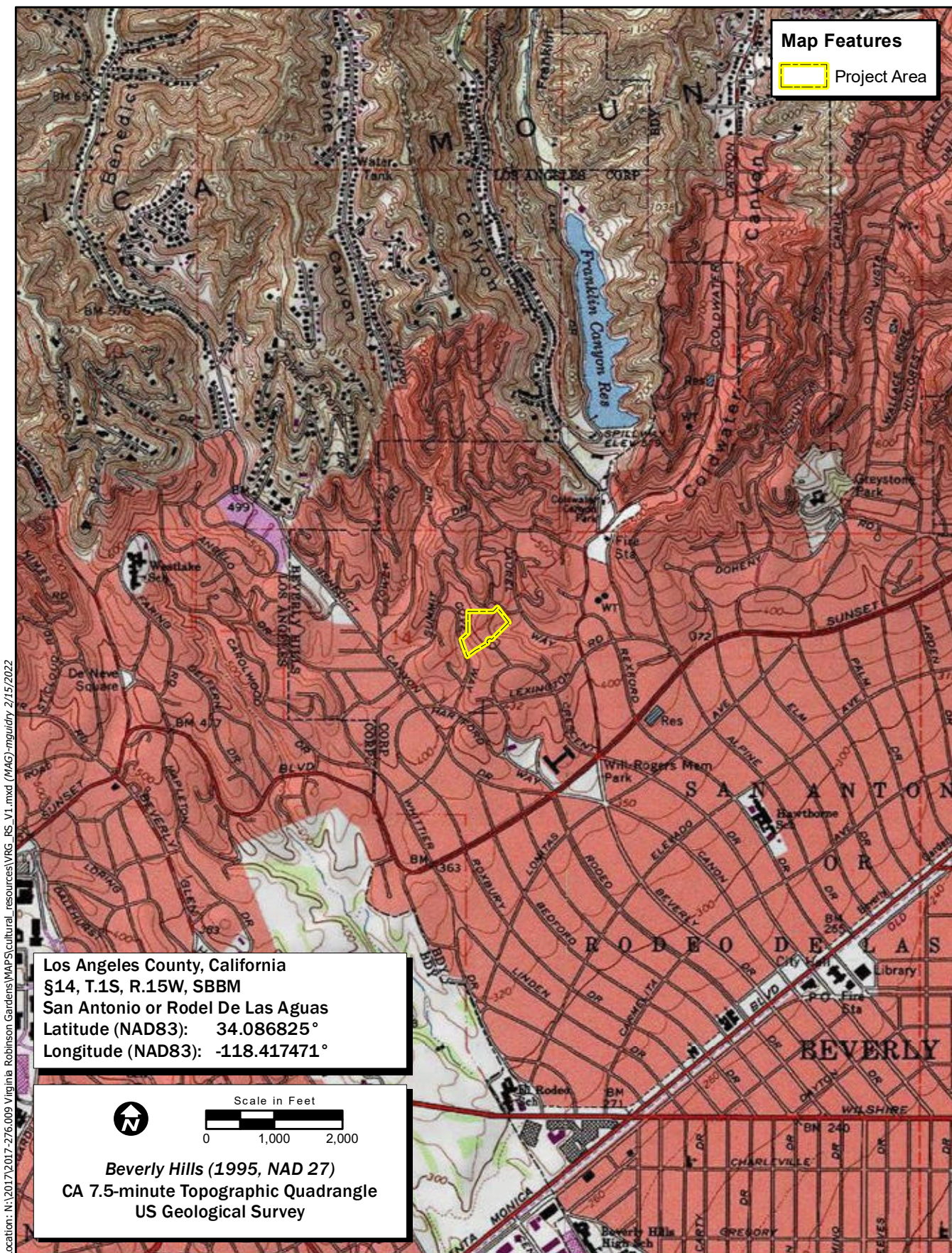
RE: *Historical Resources Memorandum for Proposed Operational Changes at the Virginia Robinson Gardens in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles County, California*

Greetings,

The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (County) and the Friends of the Robinson Gardens are proposing operational changes at the Virginia Robinson Gardens (VROB). The proposed operational changes (Project or Proposed Project) are to expand the use of VROB for maximum community access and benefit by extending the hours of operation, types of programs, and use of public transportation. VROB is located at 1008 Elden Way in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles County, California (Figure 1).

VROB was previously determined to be individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) on November 15, 1978 under NRHP Criterion C for Architecture and under Criterion A for Exploration/Settlement at the local level of significance. The property is recognized as Local Landmark No. 2 under the City of Beverly Hills Historic Preservation Ordinance and registered as a California Point of Historical Interest. On September 4, 2012, the City of Beverly Hills' Cultural Heritage Commission, pursuant to the Beverly Hills Historic Preservation Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 3, Article 32), concluded that the VROB property warranted inclusion as a Local Register of Historic Properties on the City of Beverly Hills and the property is listed on the local historic landmarks list. VROB meets the necessary requirements for the local landmark designation. As such, VROB is considered a Historical Resource in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

In 1980, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors certified an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for a change in the property's land use designation from a single-family estate to a public open space and garden. In 2014, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) for proposed operational changes to VROB. In support of that SEIR, the County retained Atkins in 2012 to prepare a Historic Resource Memorandum that summarized the current historic status of the property and addressed whether the proposed operational changes would have a significant impact on the Historical Resource at that time. Atkins determined that no significant impacts would occur to any of the contributing features of VROB, including the associated structures, gardens, and landscape elements (Atkins 2012). Atkins also stated that none of the proposed operational changes will result in any significant impact to the resource's setting or to its other character-defining features.



Map Features

Project Area

Los Angeles County, California
 §14, T.1S, R.15W, SBBM
 San Antonio or Rodel De Las Aguas
 Latitude (NAD83): 34.086825°
 Longitude (NAD83): -118.417471°

Scale in Feet

0 1,000 2,000

Beverly Hills (1995, NAD 27)
 CA 7.5-minute Topographic Quadrangle
 US Geological Survey

Location: N:\2017\2017-276.009 Virginia Robinson Gardens\MAPS\Cultural_resources\VRG_RS_V1.mxd (MAG) nguidry 2/15/2022

Map Date: 2/15/2022
 iService Layer Credits: Copyright © 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed

Figure 1. Project Location and Vicinity

Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15163, another SEIR is being prepared for additional proposed operational changes for the current Project. To support the preparation of the current SEIR, the County retained ECORP Consulting, Inc. to prepare a historical resource memorandum. This memorandum includes an analysis to determine if the Project, as currently proposed, will have a significant impact on the Historical Resource that is VROB. A brief history of VROB is also provided to clearly identify character defining features and assess impacts.

This memorandum provides details of the Project and includes an assessment of whether the proposed operational changes will have a significant impact on the eligibility, character defining features, or aspects of integrity of VROB. Senior Architectural Historian Jeremy Adams, who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards for architectural history and history, supervised and conducted the architectural history analysis and impact assessment. Mr. Adams and Staff Archaeologist Megan Webb conducted archival and historical research and prepared this historical resource memorandum.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Research Methods

ECORP conducted a records search for the property at the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC) of the California Historical Resources Information System at California State University, Fullerton on March 11, 2022 (SCCIC search #23541.9611). The records search determined that VROB has been previously recorded at the SCCIC as resource P-19-177085 in 1978. The recording included an NRHP nomination form, Historic Resources Inventory form, and Point of Historical Interest Form. No formal Department of Parks and Recreation 523 form is on file. VROB is listed on the NRHP and as a California Point of Historical Interest. ECORP reviewed the City of Beverly Hills local landmark designation information.

ECORP compiled a brief history of the gardens from the SCCIC records search files and public records available online. The impacts assessment includes details of the Proposed Project activities and a high-level assessment of whether those Project activities, which include only operational changes, will have a significant impact on eligibility, character-defining features, or aspects of integrity of VROB. An analysis of long-term cumulative impacts was also addressed.

Brief Historical Overview

The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation operates VROB today. According to the historical listings for VROB, the garden is a beautiful representation of an early twentieth century estate with a blend of Beaux Arts architecture and landscaping. The gardens were officially listed on the National Register in 1978 and as a City of Beverly Hills local landmark in 2012.

The Virginia Robinson estate historically was situated on 20 acres of land and today is situated on approximately 6.5 acres located in Beverly Hills. The estate was constructed in 1911 and was the first of the opulent residential estates archetypal of Beverly Hills neighborhoods (Atkins 2012; Robinson Gardens 2022). Virginia Catherine Dryden was born in 1877 in Missouri. Virginia married Harry Winchester

Robinson in 1903 in Los Angeles. Harry was born in 1878 to Joseph and Julia Winchester. Joseph Winchester was the founder of the J.W. Robinson's Retail Store, originally the Boston Dry Goods Store. Joseph died in 1891 and Harry took over the retail store business. Harry renamed the stores in honor of his late father, Joseph Winchester Robinson. Harry died in 1932 and Virginia became the chairwoman for the retail store business for 30 years (Robinson Gardens 2022).

Virginia's father, architect Nathaniel Dryden, designed the Beaux Arts style mansion on a 20-acre hillside for the newly married couple. Construction began in 1908 and was constructed was completed in 1911 (Snider 1978). The estate was one of the first estates built in Beverly Hills. In 1924, a pool pavilion was constructed near the main house in a unique style inspired by both eighteenth-century French and Palladian styles and expanded in 1929. Together, the architectural components of the property frame the aesthetic setting of the gardens (Ostashay & Associates Consulting 2012). The land was carefully landscaped to integrate the house, poolhouse pavilion, and garden that Virginia oversaw.

Virginia died in 1977, just shy of 100 years old, and the estate was deeded to Los Angeles County under the condition that it would be opened to the public as an arboretum and botanical experience. In the year following Virginia's death, the property was listed on NRHP under Criterion C for Architecture and under Criterion A for Exploration/Settlement at the local level of significance. The Friends of Robinson Gardens was founded in 1982 to help preserve the gardens and manage the educational and docent programs.

Virginia and Harry Robinson were widely known for their line of Robinson's department stores and as hosts of spectacular social and charity events at the estate. VROB provided a lush backdrop to these galas. The gardens were established over several decades and feature a diverse array of plant samples collected by the Robinsons, beginning with their three-year, globe-trekking honeymoon. Mrs. Robinson took a stance of curiosity and ongoing experimentation toward gardening, reflected in the richness of the six defining garden areas. Each of these were crafted based on the geographical origin and botanical characteristics of their plant specimens: The Front Meadow, Great Lawn and Dry Border, Italian Terrace Garden, King Palm Forest, Display Rose Garden, and Kitchen Garden (Robinson Gardens 2022).

The Front Meadow was originally a lawn but has since been converted to a drought-tolerant meadow in light of changing water availability; this adaptive approach is in the spirit of the experimental gardening methods used by Virginia Robinson. The Great Lawn and Dry Border has a Mediterranean theme, including Italian Cypress trees, and was used for hosting outdoor dining events. The Italian Terrace Garden features Neoclassical fountains and meandering brick paths bordered by persimmons, Southern Magnolia, and type-specimen trees such as California's largest coral tree. The King Palm Forest is composed of 1,000 trees, which created a cooling canopy over an array of tropical flowers, a pond, and a waterfall. There is also the Display Rose Garden, which features Virginia Robinson's favorite, the Eiffel Tower Rose, established here in 1957. The Kitchen Garden is host to chickens and seasonal edible vegetables and herbs, as well as a collection of orchids (Robinson Gardens 2022).

The main residence was constructed was completed in 1911 and represents the Beaux Arts style of architecture. The single-story residence has a balustraded parapet and a central porch. The pool pavilion was completed in 1924 and represents a blend of Palladian and eighteenth-century French influences. The buildings and the gardens are integrated through terraces, steps, landscaping, and water, in true Cortile di

Belvedere style. Virginia and Harry Robinson used their estate for civic, philanthropic, and social activities during the 60-year period when they occupied the house on Elden Way.

As a whole, the estate and gardens have been determined eligible to the NRHP under Criteria A and C. As the first estate in Beverly Hills, the property is significant for the theme of early settlement and thus association with historically significant events (Criterion A). The architecture of the estate incorporates design, materials, workmanship, and period of construction embodying high artistic value (Criterion C). The property retains sufficient historical integrity from its period of significance, which is 1911 to 1924.

The NRHP boundary includes the current property boundary, the 1911-constructed main residence, the 1920s poolhouse pavilion, tennis courts, and the associated gardens and landscape features. The landscape features include a swimming pool, patio gardens, palm grove, and a series of *interlocking footpaths and brick stairways* and *paved, fountained patios* (Snider 1978). The property maintains a high level of integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, association, and location (Snider 1978). The property's land use was changed from a single-family estate into a public open space in 1980.

Character-Defining Features for VROB include, but not limited to:

- The Beaux Arts architectural style residence designed by architect Nathaniel Dryden;
- The 1924 pool pavilion designed in a unique style inspired by both eighteenth-century French and Palladian styles;
- The well-established gardens;
- The incorporated architectural features and landscape elements; and
- Hardscape features including the interlocking footpaths and patios.

Pursuant to the City of Beverly Hills Historic Preservation Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 3, Article 32; Beverly Hills Municipal Code 10-3-32), the estate meets the necessary requirements for local landmark designation. The property is recognized as Local Landmark No. 2 under the City of Beverly Hills Historic Preservation Ordinance and is a California Point of Historical Interest (Ostashay & Associates Consulting 2012).

The City of Beverly Hills' Historic Preservation Ordinance (Title 10, Chapter 3, Article 32; Beverly Hills Municipal Code 10-3-32) states that a property may be designated as a Landmark if it satisfies the following three criteria:

- A. A landmark must satisfy all of the following requirements:
1. It is at least forty five (45) years of age, or is a property of extraordinary significance;
 2. It possesses high artistic or aesthetic value, and embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style or architectural type or architectural period;
 3. It retains substantial integrity from its period of significance; and

4. It has continued historic value to the community such that its designation as a landmark is reasonable and necessary to promote and further the purposes of this article

B. In addition to the requirements set forth in subsection A of this section, a landmark must satisfy at least one of the following requirements:

1. It is listed on the national register of historic places;
2. It is an exceptional work by a master architect;
3. It is an exceptional work that was owned and occupied by a person of great importance, and was directly connected to a momentous event in the person's endeavors or the history of the nation.

For purposes of this subsection B3, personal events such as birth, death, marriage, social interaction, and the like shall not be deemed to be momentous;

4. It is an exceptional property that was owned and occupied by a person of great local prominence;
5. It is an iconic property; or
6. The landmark designation procedure is initiated, or expressly agreed to, by the owner(s) of the property. (Ord. 15-O-2682, eff. 11-19-2015).

According to the local designation information, the property meets criterion A. 1, A. 2, A. 3, and A. 6.

The primary characteristics justifying landmark designation and that should be preserved, include, but not limited to:

- the Beaux Arts and Florentine Renaissance architectural styles and other existing design concepts;
- the basic form, composition, materials and features of the residence along the north, south, and west elevations;
- the basic form, composition, materials and features of the playhouse/pool pavilion along the south, west, and east elevations;
- the overall configuration, siting, and topography of the site;
- the roof shape (flat), features, and materials of the main residence including balustrade parapet walls, decorative cornices with molding and dentil course work;
- the roof shape, features and materials of the playhouse/pool house pavilion including the decorative parapet, cornice, and relief work;
- the Palladian style playhouse/pool pavilion;
- the reflecting swimming pool with tiled wainscoting;
- the decorative Tuscan columns and arches;
- the fenestration that includes glazed wood French doors and multi-pane casement, fixed, fanlight, and bay windows some with corbeled balconets;

- the wide, grassy mall connecting the main house to the playhouse/pool pavilion lined with Italian cypress;
- the Italian terrace hillside garden;
- the plan garden;
- the formal rose garden;
- the ninety-year old and eucalyptus tree and coral tree;
- the hardscape features that include interlocking footpaths, brick stairways, and paved
- fountained patios;
- the tennis court area; and
- the unobstructed line of sight of the property from Elden Way.

IMPACTS ASSESSMENT

To determine if the Proposed Project would significantly impact VROB, ECORP reviewed the proposed operational changes presented in the official Project Description and compared them with the current operational changes.

Currently, VROB is open to the public from Monday through Saturday, a total of six days per week. Public hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day. As many as 100 visitors per day are allowed with reservations required. The County proposes to add Sunday, increasing to a total of seven days per week of operation, and change the hours to 9:30 a.m. to sunset, which ranges from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. depending on the season. Further, the County proposes to increase visitor capacity to 200 visitors per day, with reservations still required. All of these changes will increase public use of the property; however, there will be no associated physical changes to the resource that would impact any of its character-defining features or reduce its integrity. Patrons will enjoy VROB under the same rules and conditions as previously used, which are specifically written to protect all features from direct and indirect impacts from patrons. Reservations will still be required, which limits the number of patrons allowed at the same time, therefore not causing an overflow or capacity issue within VROB. Under the protection of the same access rules, no long-term or cumulative impacts will occur because of increased visitor capacity. No additional development is proposed. Therefore, changes related to increased capacity will have a less than significant impact on VROB.

Currently, up to four special-use events are allowed per year. The County proposes to increase special use events to 24 per year and expand public programs and events. The operational change and expansion of educational programs will support local historic preservation efforts in compliance with the stated community goals outlined in the City of Beverly Hills General Plan Policy Historic Preservation 2.1, in which the City specifically states its intention to develop partnerships for public education on local historic resources with preservation groups (City of Beverly Hills 2010), such as the Friends of Robinson Gardens. The management, cost, rules, and oversight of expanded public programs and special events will not

change from those currently in place for special events. Special events are ticketed events that also adhere to city ordinances regarding noise and capacity, in addition to facility requirements. Event-type guidelines will not change from appropriate uses as determined by the Superintendent of the facility. Character-defining features within VROB will continue to be protected from direct and indirect actions of patrons under special event use guidelines, which has successfully occurred for decades. As such, though there will be an increase in usage, that increased use will have a less than significant impact.

Parking at the facility is currently limited to 35 spaces on-site and walk-in access with some exceptions for oversized vehicles and tour busses. Currently, the largest challenge with parking is the public using nearby neighborhood streets for parking, which causes congestion. To offset this, the County proposes to actively promote the use of public transportation services and rideshare services such as Lyft or Uber. The proposed advertisements do not include new physical signage, markings, or other parking-related changes. The proposed activity is a promotional approach to encourage outside transportation services with the intent of reducing vehicle activity on-site. There will be no impact, either directly or indirectly, to any of the character-defining features or aspects of integrity of VROB. As such, the proposed change will have no impact on the Historical Resource.

The detailed results of the comparison between current operation and proposed changes are presented in Table 1 and briefly summarized below.

Table 1. Proposed Changes and their Potential Impact to Historic Resources			
	Current Operational Procedure	Proposed Change	Potential Impact to Historical Resources
Days open to the public:	Monday to Saturday (six days a week)	Monday to Sunday (seven days a week)	Less than Significant
Hours for public use:	9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	9:30 a.m. to sunset (6:00-8:00 p.m.)	Less than Significant
Number of patrons in attendance:	100 visitors per day (reservations required)	200 visitors per day (reservations required)	Less than Significant
Types of events:	Special tours only	Expand public programs and events	Less than Significant
Special Uses:	4 special use events per year	24 special use events a year	Less than Significant

Table 1. Proposed Changes and their Potential Impact to Historic Resources

	Current Operational Procedure	Proposed Change	Potential Impact to Historical Resources
Parking:	With advance reservations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking on property (35 spaces available). • No parking permitted on Elden Way. • For special events, offsite parking is made available so guests can be shuttled to the estate. Valet service is also utilized. • Visitor drop off and walk-ins allowed • All events require a parking/transportation plan. • Promote the use of shuttle service to reduce the number of trips to VRG. 	To reduce traffic and parking impacts to the neighborhood, promote the use of public transportation and ridesharing services such as Lyft/Uber.	No Impact

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed operational changes are consistent in type of use, use guidelines and rules, and long-term management that are already in place. The proposed operational changes will work to promote local historic preservation goals through continued public use and awareness though increased and enhanced regulated access to VROB. Though these proposed operational changes will increase public use of the property, there will be no associated physical changes to VROB. Therefore, there will be No Significant Impact to the character-defining features or aspects of integrity of the Historical Resource, the Virginia Robinson Gardens with the proposed operational changes. The Proposed Project will have No Significant Impact to Historical Resources as defined by CEQA.

If you have any questions or comments about the assessment of impacts, please contact me at JAdams@ecorpconsulting.com or by phone at (916) 782-9100.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Adams
Senior Architectural Historian/Cultural Resources Manager

REFERENCES

- Atkins. 2012. Evaluation of Effects by Proposed Operation Changes At The NRHP-Listed Virginia Robinson Gardens in Beverly Hills, California as Required Under CEQA. Appendix C Historic Resources Memorandum. Prepared by Historian Brandy Harris.
- City of Beverly Hills. 2010. City of Beverly Hills General Plan, Published by the Community Development Department.
- Ostashay & Associates Consulting. 2012. Memorandum Landmark Assessment Confirmation Review: Virginia Robinson Estate/Virginia Robinson Garden, 1008 Elden Way, Beverly Hills, CA. Prepared for William Crouch, City of Beverly Hills.
- Robinson Gardens. 2022. About: Robinson Gardens. Available at <https://www.robinsongardens.org/about/>, accessed March 28, 2022.
- Snider, Sandra. 1978. National Register of Historic Places nomination form: Virginia Robinson Estate at 1008 Elden Way. Prepared March 20, 1978.