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SITE ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

General Instructions for Building a Backyard Cottage as an Accessory Structure

Welcome;

The following information is provided in order to assist our clients with the sometimes difficult task of determining whether it is possible to build a cottage, office or studio in their backyard.

BEFORE YOU BUY a set of plans, we highly recommend that you read these instructions and talk to your permitting agency. If you do your "Due Diligence" and still don't know if it's possible, you can send the information to us and we'll try to help.

In zoning terms, the types of buildings we are concerned with are normally referred to as "**Accessory Structures**", as they are intended to be placed on a site already occupied by a main residence. Specific requirements vary from lot to lot, city to city and state to state and are affected by an overwhelming number of circumstances. The best way to determine whether your lot will support an Accessory Structure is to ask the people whose task it is to decide that question. That is your local **Building, Planning and Zoning Department**. If your lot is in Sonoma County, chances are we can fill in the blanks without you having to do anything other than provide the lot and ownership information on our Questionnaire.

The Questionnaire attached is a document that we have assembled in order to quickly determine whether our designs meet local building and zoning codes. The list of questions was developed over many years and is based on the design of hundreds of buildings in the US. The list is quite extensive and there is a good chance that much of the data requested will not be relevant to your property. However, there is no harm in asking. Failing to find out a critical requirement could cost you a great deal of money and time.

BEFORE YOU GO ANY FURTHER you should answer Question #1:

Does the property on which you want to build have the correct zoning to allow Accessory Structures to be built in the backyard?

Before wasting your time, we recommend you call, or better yet visit, your Building Department and ask them that specific question. The answer may be as simple as yes or no. If they do not allow Accessory Buildings, you might have to ask your local Councilmember, Supervisor or Mayor, WHY NOT? And then refer him or her to our section titled "**Why a Cottage?**", which describes the advantages and the politics of building accessory structures on existing residential properties.

If the Building Department answers yes or maybe to Question #1, we invite you to proceed with the task of gathering the information that you will need to permit your own **Backyard Cottage**. Give us a call if you need some help.

Robert R. Garant,
President

The following is information and instruction that will hopefully guide you through the
“SITE ASSESSMENT INQUIRY”

A Note from Us on the Value of this Document and Your Participation:

You will probably find this task both frustrating and taxing; however you should be aware that this process will probably save you \$5000 to \$10,000 or even more on your project. The work you put into this assessment is normally performed by the architects, engineers, surveyors and environmental experts hired to design and permit a project. Each expert might have to spend hours familiarizing themselves with the project, waiting for planning and zoning staff, traveling back and forth to the Building Department and traveling to the proposed site. With the typical hourly charge for professionals being at least \$150 per hour, these costs can mount quickly. None of these tasks require an expert. If you run into a problem we're here to help.

So Press on Regardless!

**General Instructions on How to
COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

PROPOSED BUILDING SITE INFORMATION

This section describes the parcel of property on which you propose to place your building. Besides the obvious address information, it is almost certain you will need the:

APPRAISER'S PARCEL NUMBER (APN):

This number can be found on your property tax bill, a deed of ownership or perhaps on your insurance papers. If you can't find any of those, you can go to your property appraiser's office (or web site), give them your street address and they will give you the APN of your property.

SITE AREA & LOT DIMENSIONS:

If you have a survey of your property, the area of your site should be noted on it. Just fill in the box on the form. Remember to take the survey drawing with you to the Building Department.

If you don't have any type of drawing showing the area or dimensions of your lot you should probably get a copy of your **“Parcel Map”** and your **“Building Record Documents”**. Both of which you will find at the Appraiser's Office. Just take your address or APN number to the Appraiser's office and ask for a copy of each. For a small charge they are obligated to print copies for any property owner. These drawings will be very useful at the Building Department. They could also save you a lot of money, if you decide to draw your own site plan rather than hire a surveyor.

UTILITIES:

Water Service – Fill in the name of your water supplier or say “private well”. The water meter size can be filled in if you know it. You will sometimes find it noted in the water meter box. If you don't know the size, leave the space blank. It will only be an issue if fire sprinklers are required.

Sewer Service – If you are connected to a public sanitary sewer line, just state the name of the sewer system operator in the box. If you are on a private sewage disposal system such as a septic tank, just write “Private” and check the “Septic” Box with a “Y”.

Note that private septic systems that are “at capacity” or “obsolete” may limit your ability to build a Cottage with sleeping quarters. It may however be possible to build one of our Studios, Offices or Shops, which are designed specifically for this situation.

Electrical Service – Fill in your Power Company’s name.

For “**Service Size**” you should fill in the amperage rating of the main electrical service panel that brings electricity into your house from the street. That rating is nearly always stated on the inside of the electrical panel door. (i.e. The door you open to access the breakers or fuses). See Question #7c. for more about your electrical service.

OWNER’S NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION

This information will be needed by us at Victorian Cottage Corp for Site Plan preparation and Engineering Documentation. It will also be used by the Building Department when you submit an application. Fill the information in as it applies. You should use the Owner-of-Record shown on the Deed in the Box labeled “Name”.

It should be noted that Building Departments are much more likely to give building and zoning information to the Owner-of-Record of the land in question. Sometimes the information they have is considered confidential and available only with the owner’s consent. They may ask for identification before answering some questions or coping files. So if you are thinking about sending someone other than the Owner-of-Record to get answers to these questions, we strongly suggest the owner accompany him or her.

ZONING, BUILDING AND UTILITY QUESTIONS

Most large building departments are split into several different departments, usually broken down into divisions such as Zoning Department, Building Department and Department of Public Works. We have tried to group the types of questions asked to account for this division of responsibility. However you may get sent to other departments or to specialized personnel while trying to get all your questions answered. **Have patience, take your time and be polite** this process may be a bit frustrating. And it might require multiple visits. Just remember, they are public servants, they work for you, although that might not be apparent at all times. To be fair, they have a very tough job.

Because the questionnaire/approval process may involve multiple contacts with little time for discussion, it is recommended that you always write down the name and direct contact phone number of the person who gave you the information (Getting a business card is even better). If a question arises about a response or if we at Victorian Cottage Corp have a follow-up question, it is essential we know who gave the original answer. A space is provided for adding this information.

ZONING QUESTIONS

Question #1: is the primary question.

Does the property on which you want to build have the correct zoning to allow Accessory Structures to be built in the backyard?

As stated in the introduction this is a question that must be answered before you do anything else. If the Zoning Department says it does not allow Accessory Buildings, you might have to ask your local Councilmember, Supervisor or Mayor, WHY NOT? And then refer him or her to our section titled “*Why a Cottage?*”, which describes the politics and advantages of building on existing residential properties.

However, unless the zoning changes or you can get a special exception, there is no reason to spend a lot of money on plans you can’t use.

If the answer is YES or even just MAYBE, it’s worthwhile to continue.

Questions #1a - #1e: Will define what use is allowed in an Accessory Structure in your Zoning District. These questions will describe various uses you can or cannot have in your backyard structure. (Bedroom Suite, Den/Bedroom, 2nd Unit, Rental Unit, Office, Studio or Workshop). The response to these questions will determine which of our plans will be allowable in your backyard, so pay special attention to these rules and your entry in the boxes. If the answer is too complex for the blank space we have given you, request a copy of that section of the Zoning Code and we’ll take a look at it and advise you.

Questions #2a & #2b: Accessory structures usually have different setbacks, coverage and height requirements than the primary structure. You (or We) will need this information when creating your Site Plan. Again, if the rules are too complex, ask for a copy.

Question #3: Fire Districts have been established in many rural areas in order to set standards of Fire Protection to prevent the spread of wild fires and to protect property. This may affect many things in your Cottage, including the type of venting in your ceiling, the glass in your windows, the rating of roof materials and the siding choice on your building. If your property lays with-in one of these districts you will need a copy of the rules or instruction on where to find them. This is a problem for which you will probably need our help.

Question #4: The Federal Government under FEMA has instituted standards across the country, which restricts the building of any structure in a known flood zone. Flood Zones have been established nationally to predict flood water levels. The local permitting agency is in charge of enforcing these rules.

It is essential that you establish whether this will affect your project. Personnel at your Zoning Department should have FEMA Flood Maps on hand with which they can identify any flooding problem relating to your lot. If there is a potential problem, ask for the number of the FEMA Flood Map that affects your property. We can take it from there.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT QUESTIONS

Question #5: The official Building Code in use on a parcel of property is not always immediately apparent. Although most of the Country uses some type of National or International Building Code as their basic reference, most states and/or cities chose to modify these codes for local or regional use. To further complicate things the National Codes are normally updated and republished annually, while the state codes are adopted on a three or four year cycle. The end result is that we have dozens of different codes in affect nationally at any one time.

We generally use the current version of the “**International Building Code**” for our designs. But there are situations in which an older version of this or some other code will be in effect. For this reason we need to know the basic Building Code Name and Date of Issue applicable to your lot to ensure we comply with local standards. Our clients from California need not be concerned with this question, because we maintain compliance with the California State Codes continually.

Question#6: Specific Design Requirements are those that are “site specific” to your community and usually include specific structural, energy, mechanical and green code criteria. If your community has a specific value or requirement for any of these items please note such. Remember to ask whether your Building Department will require engineering calculations for any of these. The following is a description of what might be required and how our plans address each item:

#6a. Maximum Design Wind Speed - Our designs are based on a 150 mph (ASCE-7 Strength Design) wind pressures. This velocity will meet the requirements of approximately 95% of the continental United States. Wind Engineering Calculations are available as part of our Engineering Documentation Package. Designs with higher wind speeds for Hurricane Zones or Coastal Wind Borne Debris areas are available on request.

#6b. Maximum Earthquake Loads – Our standard designs are based on an **S_s** acceleration value of 1.587 in a Seismic Design Zone “D”. These values meet all but the absolute worst conditions in the United States. Seismic Design Calculations are available as part of our Documentation Package. Special Seismic designs for properties located very close to major active fault lines (**S_s** to 2.20 in Seismic Design Zone “E”) are available on request.

#6c. Energy Code Standards – All our designs are based on the current California Energy Code. The most recent California Energy Code produces extremely energy efficient buildings that will be just as efficient any place in the country. Since the energy calculations are based on your climate zone we will

need the address of your property before we can verify compliance with any applicable regulations. Energy Code Calculations are available as part of our Documentation Package.

#6d. HVAC Load Calculations – All designs are computer analyzed by the current version of “Energy Pro” software by EnergySoft to provide accurate cooling and heating load information. Designs outside of Sonoma County will require address information to create calculations specific to their climatic region.

#6e. Fire Sprinklers – The requirement for Fire Sprinklers in Accessory Structures is a local choice for Fire Marshalls and/or Permitting Agencies. Calculations and Fire Sprinkler Plans are available for all our designs but it will be up to the local government to determine if they will be required. Our Fire Sprinkler Drawings and Materials lists include all components of the Fire Protection system for the Do-It-Yourself builder.

#6f. – Minimum Footing Depth – Our designs assume a minimum footing depth of 12” below grade. This depth satisfies the vast majority of the country. But the upper tier states and mountainous areas may require greater depths. Your Building Department should be able to tell you what is required in your area.

#6g. – Green Code Compliance - All our designs meet the “2013 California Green Building Standards Code” and the “Tier 1” criteria of Sonoma County. Compliance criteria are noted on our plans and shown in our specifications. A Green Code “punch list” is also included. The Green Code data is part of our Documentation Package.

#6h. – Site Plan – Providing a Site Plan for an Accessory Building is sometimes not required by permitting agencies. When it is required, the regulations can call for anything from an 8-1/2”x 11” hand drawn sketch to an elaborate civil engineering plan attached to a formal survey prepared by a Professional Land Surveyor. The costs can be considerable, so it’s best to ask up front what will be required.

Drawing Your Own Site Plan: If all that is needed is a hand drawn sketch, you might choose to draw it yourself. With information gleaned from the Parcel Map and Building Plans from the Appraiser’s Office you might have enough information to satisfy the Building Department. We have included in this package a sample of a typical “Site Plan” that you can use as a guideline. Also included is a blank copy for you to draw your own site on. If you’re not comfortable drawing it yourself, there are generally local drafting services around who can prepare it for you. If that is not practical, you can send your site plan information to us and we will prepare the Plan and add it to your set of drawings for a reasonable cost.

Question #7 Existing Utilities: One of the ways you will save the most on your backyard cottage is by using the utility connections that are already being used by your main house. You should note that “Accessory Structures” are not considered to be “2nd Units”, “rental apartments”, residences, etc. They are intended to be extensions of the original house. Therefore they do not require separate utility hook-ups, meters or power poles. New water, sewer and electrical connections running into the street can cost \$100,000 or more when utility connection fees, street repair, curbs, sidewalks and grading are included. So getting these utility questions answered correctly before you start is critical. **Just remember you are asking for connections to an “Accessory Structure” and not to a “2nd Unit”.**

#7a. Sewer Lines – Our Cottage sewer systems normally consist of a small sewage pump station installed next to the cottage, then connected to the main sewer by a 2” diameter PVC “low pressure force main”. This technique saves a lot of excavating and plumbing costs and allows the cottage to be located practically anywhere on the site. Although it is normally not a problem, you should make sure a sewage pump system is acceptable to the permitting agency.

#7b. Water Extension - There should be no problem extending a new water line from your existing house line to your cottage. However, you should ask whether you can connect the line inside the house or must it connect between the house and the water meter. This would normally involve a great deal more excavation and buried water line.

#7c. Electrical - Our Cottages, Studios and Offices are designed as very efficient, well insulated structures in order to meet the most stringent modern building codes. Because of this fact, a single 30 amp/240 volt circuit (Equivalent to an Electric Clothes Dryer circuit) is all that is necessary to connect one of our cottages to your house. If you have room for this breaker in your existing house panel, your electrical capacity should not be a problem. However, we would recommend and the Building Department may require that you have a Licensed Electrician inspect and approve the additional circuit.

SITE ASSESSMENT INQUIRY for Accessory Structures

PROPOSED BUILDING SITE INFORMATION			
Address: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	City: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	State: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	Zip: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
Assessor's Parcel Number(APN): <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>		Site Area: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/> sf	
Water Service By (Utility Name or On-Site) <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>		Meter Size: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/> in.	
Sewer Service By (Utility Name or On-site) <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>		Septic(Y/N) <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	
Electrical Service (By Utility Name or On-Site) <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>		Service Size? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/> Amps	

OWNER'S NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION			
Name: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>			
Address: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	City: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	State: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	Zip: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
Phone: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	e-mail: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Fax: <input style="width: 20%;" type="text"/>	

ZONING QUESTIONS:	Provided by: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Phone #: <input style="width: 30%;" type="text"/>
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1	Is the Property zoned properly to allow a backyard ("Accessory Use")structure?(Y/N)	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
1a.	Does zoning allow a sleeping room?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
1b.	Does zoning allow a studio, office or pool house?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
1c.	Does zoning allow a full Bathroom?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
	a Bath with Shower?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
	a Powder Room Only?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
1d.	Does Zoning Allow a Kitchen?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
1e.	Does Zoning Allow a Wet bar?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
2	What are the Minimum Yard Requirements?	
2a.	Floor Area: Minimum: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Maximum: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
2b.	Req. Setbacks: Side: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Rear: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
	Seperation From Main House: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Max % of Yard Area: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
	Maximum Height above Grade: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Max % of Yard Width: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
3	Are Special Fire Standards Required beyond the Basic Building Code?	
3a.	If Yes, Please Describe: <input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>	
4	Is the proposed structure in an established Flood Zone(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	If Yes, FEMA Map #? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
4a.	If yes, will the flood Zone require elevating the floor level (Y/N) <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	How High? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>

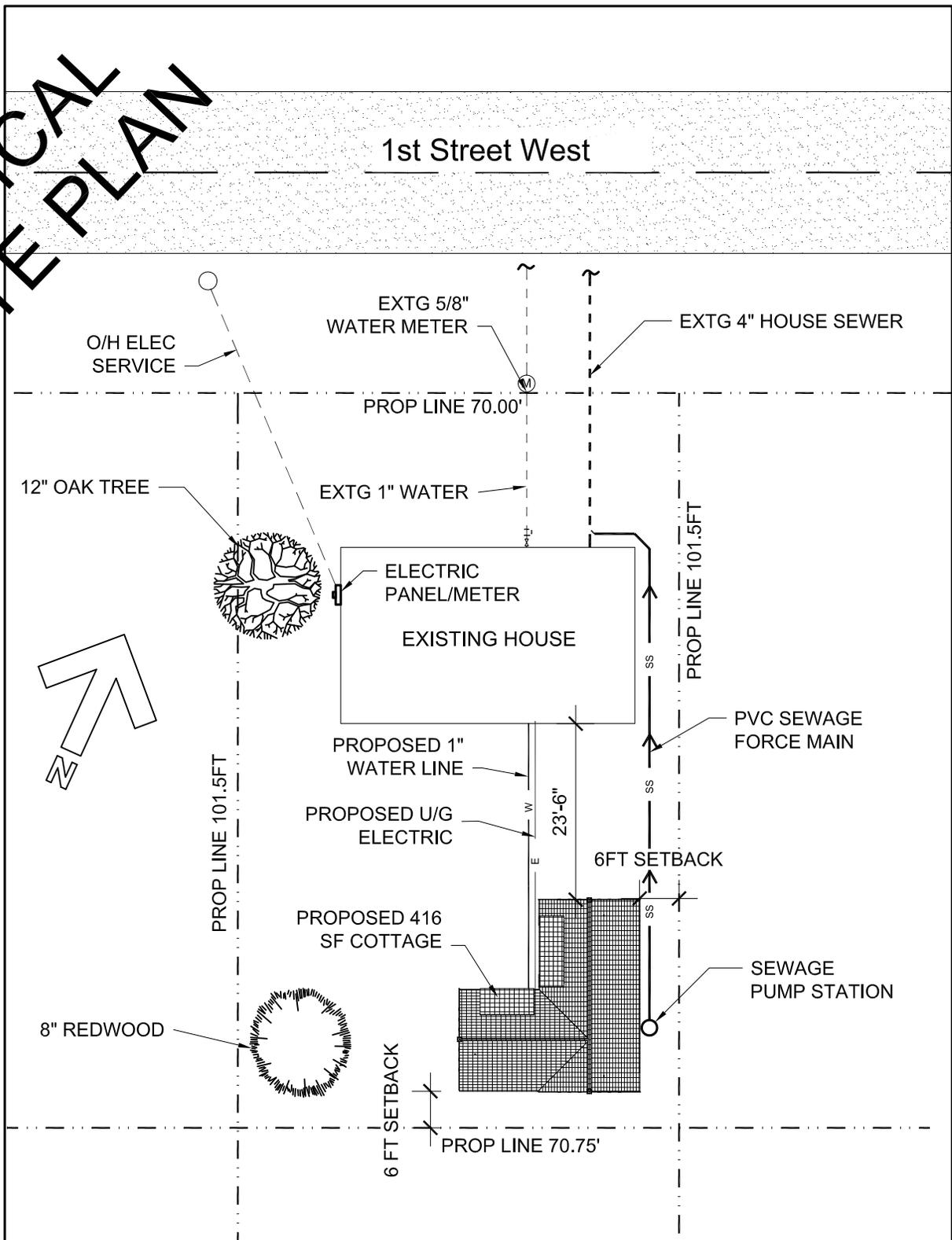
BUILDING DEPART QUESTIONS:	Provided by: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Phone #: <input style="width: 30%;" type="text"/>
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5	What basic building code should be used?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
6	Specific Design Requirements:	
6a.	Max. Design Wind Speed of? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/> MPH	Structural Calcs Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6b.	Seismic Design Zone or Ss? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Structural Calcs Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6c.	Energy Code Standards Req.? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Energy Code Calcs Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6d.	HVAC Load Design? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Mechanical Calcs Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6e.	Fire Sprinklers Required? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Hydraulic Calcs Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6f.	Minimum Footing Depth? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Is a Soils Report Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6g.	"Green Code" Elements Req.? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	What Tier Level of "Green" Design? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>
6h.	Is a "Site Plan" Required? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Is a Survey Required(Y/N)? <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>

UTILITY QUESTIONS:	Provided By: <input style="width: 40%;" type="text"/>	Phone #: <input style="width: 30%;" type="text"/>
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7	Are Existing Site Utilities Capable of Handling the Accessory Addition?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
7a.	Can the Accessory Sewer be connected to the existing Main Building Sewer(Y/N)?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
7b.	Can the Accessory water Line be connected to the existing Main Building Water Line(Y/N)?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>
7c.	Can the Accessory Electrical Sub-Panel (30amp/240v Circuit) connect to the main bldg. panel?	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>

TYPICAL SITE PLAN



LEGAL DESCRIPTION:
 LOT 5, BLOCK 2 PB #3
 TURNBULL SUBDIVISION
 APN# 018-002-345-000

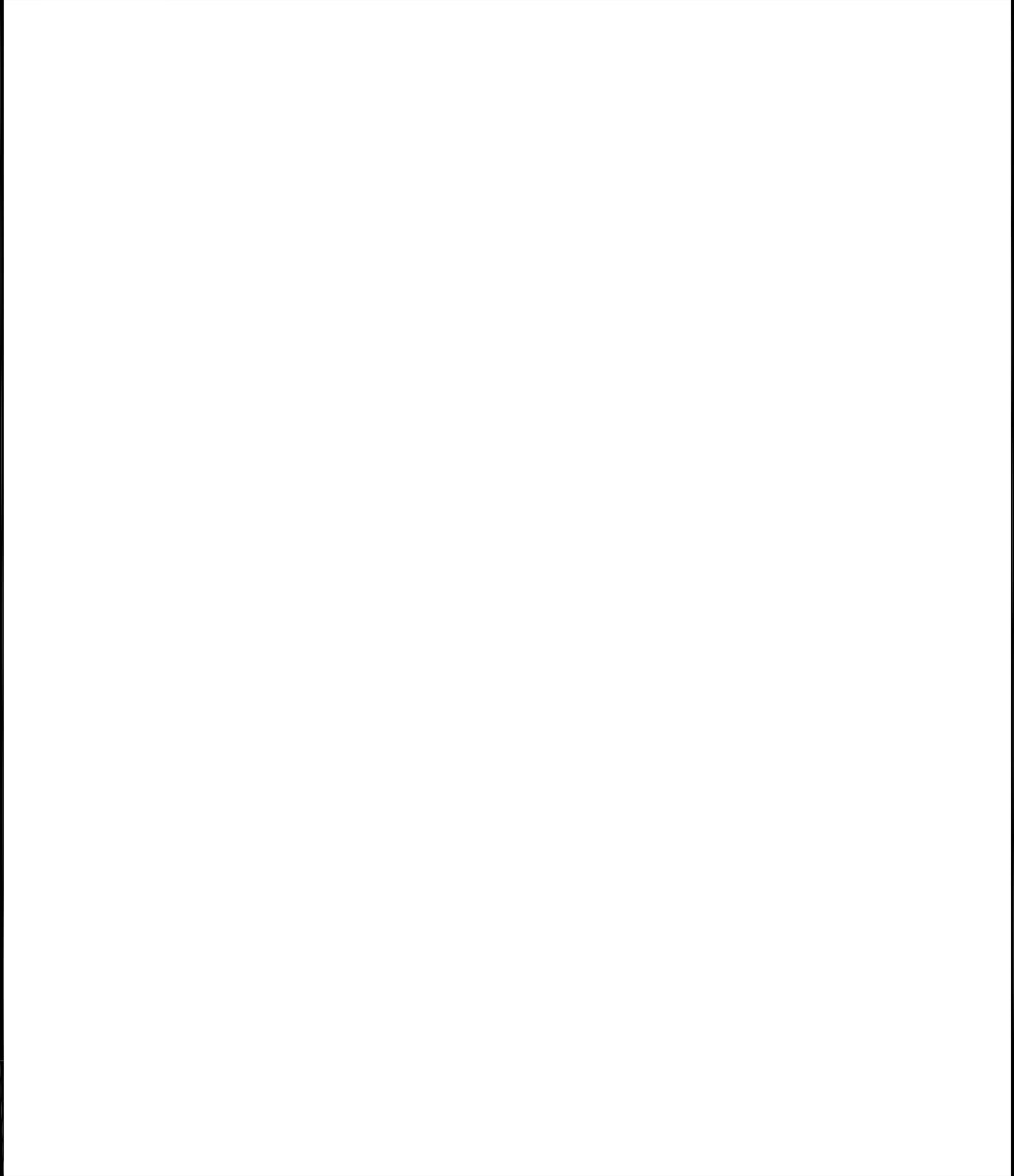
PROPERTY OWNER:
JOHN DOE
 111 S. MAIN STREET
 ANYWHERE, CA 92222
 PHONE: 000-342-4565

DATE:
 OCT 14-2014
 SCALE:
 NONE

PROJECT:
ACCESSORY BUILDING ADDITION
 SITE ADDRESS:
 123 1ST STREET WEST
 ANYWHERE, CA 92222

DRAWN BY:

RRG



PROPERTY OWNER:	DATE:	PROJECT:	DRAWN BY:
PHONE:	SCALE:	SITE ADDRESS:	