

Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of August 25, 2025, Item 6b

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 • rma.venturacounty.gov/divisions/planning/

I. APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

Applicant: County of Ventura
Resource Management Agency, Planning Division
800 S. Victoria Avenue
L #1740
Ventura, CA 93009

Property Owner: Briggs School District
P.O. Box 185
Santa Paula, CA 93061-0185

II. REQUEST:

A request to designate the original Olivelihoods School, formerly located at 12465 Foothill Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060 (unincorporated Ventura County), as Ventura County Point of Interest No. 17. (Case No. CH25-0037).

III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

12465 Foothill Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060 (unincorporated Ventura County)
Assessor's Parcel Number (APN): 064-0-320-045

The subject property consists of a 5.17-acre parcel in the Open Space General Plan land use designation and the Open Space Zone. The property contains the modern Olivelihoods School, built in 2003. The original Olivelihoods School was built in 1913 and began with two rooms and 20 students. The Limoneira Company deeded the land for \$10 to the Briggs School District to build the school for its workers' children. It was later enlarged in 1924 by master architect Roy C. Wilson. In the early 2000s, the school was deemed structurally unsound and demolished.

IV. PROJECT SCOPE:

Ventura County Cultural Heritage Ordinance No. 4604 (Ordinance) Section 1366 provides for the designation of Cultural Heritage Sites by the Cultural Heritage Board where the property owner has no objection to a site's designation. CHB staff identified the original Olivelihoods School as appearing eligible for Point of Interest designation.¹ The requested designation is consistent with the CHB's adopted goals for the Cultural Heritage Program for 2025-2026.

¹ A Point of Interest is defined as the location of, or site of, a former improvement or natural feature, or event possessing historical or cultural characteristics which satisfy the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.

Figure 1 – Former Olivelihoods School Building, 2001



Credit: Mel Melcon, Los Angeles Times

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Historical background information on the original Olivelihoods School, as well as photos, are contained in Exhibit 1. The land that the present Olivelihoods School sits on was once part of the Olivelihoods Ranch. In 1886, Indiana native Elam Harrold bought more than a thousand acres of land between Wheeler Canyon and Santa Paula along with his wife, Clarise Risley. The pair moved to the County and named the newly acquired land Olivelihoods. Harrold's father-in-law bought land parallel to Olivelihoods and later sold it to them; by 1892, the Olivelihoods orchards contained more than 9,000 walnut trees and 10,000 olive trees. Olivelihoods' workers also managed grains, cattle, and lima beans. Following her husband's death in April 1897, Clarise stayed at Olivelihoods and resumed operations, eventually selling the land in 1907 to the Limoneira citrus company.

The Limoneira Company deeded the land for \$10 to the Briggs School District to build the school for the children of its workers', most of whom were Mexican farm workers. The Olivelihoods School was originally built in 1913 as a two-room schoolhouse and

was one of the first segregated schools in the county.² As a result of the increasing population of Mexican farm workers, other communities followed suit and opened “Mexican schools,” operated by administrators that openly declared non-white persons as academically and intellectually inferior.

Throughout Ventura County, there were designated “Mexican Schools” which relied on geographic boundary manipulation and portable classrooms to segregate Latino and Black children from White communities. Civil rights groups like the Ventura County Community Service Organization and the local NAACP chapter began to organize against school segregation. Luis Soria, a Ventura County parent, led this movement and filed a lawsuit. In the landmark federal case, *Soria v. Oxnard School District Board of Trustees*, the plaintiffs (Luis and other parents) won. Their victory helped end discriminatory school policy in Oxnard and influenced broader social equity in Ventura County, which included the desegregation of Olivelihoods School in Santa Paula.

Architectural Significance

The Olivelihoods School building was constructed in 1913 and then later expanded in 1924 by Roy C. Wilson,³ who is often regarded as the pioneer of Santa Paula architecture. The building architecturally reflected the early 20th century through its design features. The building’s design was simple, practical, and unadorned. The stylistic aspects of the school reflected the early century’s departure from the extremely ornate Victorian style of the 18th century. Standing on raised ground, the builders used natural topography allowing for ground-level access on both floors of the school building. The school’s large windows were distinct features of this period; natural light and airiness were the main priorities in similar style buildings from this era. These features were believed to improve students’ learning capabilities and attitude.

The architectural style of Olivelihoods School reflected the influence of the Progressive Era (spanning roughly from 1890 to 1920), which placed a greater emphasis on the social role of public institutions, including schools. There was a systematic push to improve the physical and social environments in which children learned. This rested on the belief that good design could enhance academic performance, as was witnessed in the construction of the expanded Olivelihoods School.

² Chawkins, S. (2001, July 5). To Some, Old School Offers History Lesson. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved August 4, 2025, from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jul-05-me-18962-story.html>.

³ Woodard, J. (1994, May 12). Structures: Blending the Old and New. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved August 4, 2025, from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-05-12-vl-56690-story.html>.

Roy C. Wilson's Influence

In 1924, Roy C. Wilson was commissioned to expand the two-room Olivelihoods School built by the Limoneira citrus company. Wilson, the very first licensed architect in Ventura County, was one of the most influential architectural figures in the county's history, with much of his work still visible today. Wilson was born in 1887 in Kansas and was the third of five children. His family settled near the Arroyo Seco in what's now Highland Park, Los Angeles, after arriving in California in 1900. Roy Wilson left school in seventh grade to help support the family, working various jobs—including as a draftsman for architect Edwin C. Thorne. Inspired by Thorne, he moved to Berkeley to study architecture, but the 1906 San Francisco earthquake ended his education. However, he gained valuable hands-on experience during the city's rebuilding. In 1911, he returned to Southern California and married Agnes Thorne, his mentor's daughter.

Wilson and his wife Agnes purchased land in 1914 in Santa Paula and immediately started building. During the mid-1910's, Wilson opened his architectural practice in Santa Paula and began receiving commissions. Wilson often incorporated local materials such as fieldstone from nearby riverbeds into structures like the Roy Wilson House (designed in 1929). By the 1920's, Wilson became the first licensed architect in the County; his original office was located at 959 E. Main Street, and then later at 112 S. Mill Street.

In the early 1920's, Roy C. Wilson was a key architect in Ventura County, securing major commissions from the Limoneira citrus company, one of which included the expansion of the Olivelihoods school. Nearly every building that stood along Santa Paula's Main Street during this period was designed by Wilson. Due to his contributions to the region, he is one of the most influential figures that shaped the county's architectural landscape.

Demolition of the Olivelihoods School

By the early 2000s, the school building was declared structurally unsound. In 2003, the Briggs School District in Santa Paula approved a construction bond that would provide for the demolition and reconstruction of the Olivelihoods School in order to meet the district's needs. However, due to the school's history, the project faced some concerns. At the time, some called for the school's preservation to serve as a reminder of the county's past.

It was proposed that because Olivelihoods School was historically and culturally significant to the local Latino community, it should be moved instead of demolished. Ultimately, plans for repurposing the space were scrapped due to the building being deemed structurally unsound, and the original building was demolished to make room for a new building.

Today, the reconstructed Olivelihoods Elementary School serves around 240 students, teaching students from Kindergarten to Fourth grade,⁴ and features nearly 12,000 square feet of classrooms, administration areas, library, media center, kitchen, and food service areas.

VI. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The original Olivelihoods School is historically important as an early segregated school for Mexican farmworker children and for its later desegregation as part of the region's broader civil rights progress, as well as for its 1924 expansion by Roy C. Wilson, Ventura County's first licensed architect. The architectural style of Olivelihoods School reflected the influence of the Progressive Era, which placed a greater emphasis on the social role of public institutions, including schools.

VII. STAFF CONCLUSIONS:

The evidence provided in Exhibit 1 and this staff report supports making the findings under Ordinance Section 1367(c) that the original Olivelihoods School is eligible for designation as a Ventura County Point of Interest. In addition, the evidence provided in Exhibit 1 and this staff report supports making the additional designation findings in Ordinance Section 1367-1 as the site has historic character, value, and interest to the general public, there are no foreseeable costs to the County in designating the subject property as a Ventura County Point of Interest, and the designation shall not infringe upon the rights of the Property Owner as the designation does not affect allowable land uses and the Property Owner has not objected to this designation. Therefore, CHB staff recommends the CHB approve the request for Ventura County Point of Interest designation.

VIII. HEARING NOTICE AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:

A public notice was sent by U.S. mail to the Property Owner of the subject property not less than fifteen days prior to the date of this hearing (Exhibit 2 – 15-Day Public Hearing Notice). In addition, public notices were sent by U.S. mail to the Property Owner on December 18, 2024, and March 6, 2025, with information on the historical significance of the property and the original Olivelihoods School's identification as a potential Point of Interest, along with a consent form regarding designation. Staff received a returned Property Owner-signed consent form on June 9, 2025.

No public comment regarding this item has been received to date.

⁴ California Department of Education (n.d.). School Profile: Olivelihoods Elementary. CA, United States. Retrieved August 4, 2025, from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sd/profile/details.aspx?cds=56724476054977>.

IX. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

CHB staff recommends the CHB take the following actions regarding designation:

1. **CONDUCT** public hearing, **RECEIVE** oral and written testimony, and **CONSIDER** the Planning Division staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto;
2. **FIND** that the Property Owner was given a 15-day notice in accordance with Ordinance Section 1366-2, and that the Property Owner consents to designation;
3. **FIND** that the original Olivelihoods School meets County Point of Interest Criterion 1 as required by Ordinance Section 1367(c), and the additional standards required by Ordinance Section 1367-1 based on the substantial evidence in the staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto; and
4. **ADOPT** CHB Resolution No. 2025-12 (Exhibit 3) approving the designation of the original Olivelihoods School, formerly located at 12465 Foothill Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060, as Ventura County Point of Interest No. 17.

Prepared by:



Dillan Murray, Senior Planner
Ventura County Planning Division
(805) 654-5042

Prepared by:



Harrison Dargahi, Intern
Ventura County Planning Division

Reviewed by:



Tricia Maier, Manager
Planning Programs Section
(805) 654-2464

Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Olivelihoods School Historical Background and Photos
- Exhibit 2: 15-Day Public Hearing Notice
- Exhibit 3: CHB Resolution No. 2025-12