

Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of July 13, 2026, Item 12a

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

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I. APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:

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

Property Owner: Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation
702 County Square Drive, Ste 200
Ventura, CA 93003

II. REQUEST:

Nomination to designate the Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp (“El Campo”), formerly located at 4268 Center Street, Piru, CA 93015 (Unincorporated Ventura County), as Ventura County Point of Interest No. 18. (Case No. CH26-0041).

III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

4268 Center Street, Piru, CA 93015 (unincorporated Ventura County)
Assessor’s Parcel Number (APN): 055-0-202-010

The subject property consists of a 7.99-acre parcel in the community of Piru that historically contained the Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp (“El Campo”), a complex of simple one-story buildings constructed between 1927 and 1955 to house seasonal agricultural workers. The camp included an office building, mess hall/kitchen, multiple bunkhouses, a washroom/laundry facility, a trash enclosure, and a small concrete-block office building, with several structures moved onto the site in 1950 when the camp was established. The labor camp ceased operations in 2003, and the buildings remained vacant before being demolished in 2011 to make way for new farmworker housing. Today, the site is occupied by the Valle Naranjal Farmworker Housing development. Figure 1, below, shows an aerial view of the camp in 2003, illustrating the arrangement of the buildings. Figure 2 shows the office building as it appeared in 2008. Figure 3 depicts the mess hall in 2008, and Figure 4 shows one of the bunkhouses during the same year.

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 when a property owner does not object and when the site is determined to meet the appropriate designation criteria. CHB staff have identified the former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp as appearing eligible for Point of Interest designation.

Figure 1 – Aerial View of Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp, 2003



Figure 2 – Office building, northern & western elevations, 2008



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates, 2008

Figure 3 – Mess Hall, southern elevation, 2008



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates, 2008

Figure 4 – Bunkhouse, western elevation, 2008



Credit: San Buenaventura Research Associates, 2008

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

In February 2008, San Buenaventura Research Associates completed a Historic Resources Report (Historic Report) for the former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp known locally as El Campo (Exhibit 1). Additional historical information on the property is available from newspaper articles dated March 31, 1988, August 18, 2012, October 3, 2012, and October 4, 2012 (Exhibit 2). The subject property was originally part of Rancho San Francisco and later Rancho Camulos, both owned by the Del Valle family during the nineteenth century. Rancho Camulos developed into a well-known agricultural estate that produced citrus, grapes, grains, and nuts. The property gained national attention after it was featured as the setting of the novel *Ramona* by Helen Hunt Jackson, published in 1884. By the early twentieth century, the citrus industry in the Santa Clara Valley had expanded significantly and local growers sought additional packing and processing capacity.

In 1914, five citrus growers from the Piru area separated from the Fillmore Citrus Association to form a new cooperative that evolved into the Piru Fruit Association. The members initially leased a packing facility from the Piru Land and Oil Company before constructing their own packinghouse in 1919 at Main Street and Telegraph Road. As the operation grew, the association built three bunkhouses for farm workers in 1927 and joined the Ventura County Citrus Exchange in 1928, which organized and supported regional citrus production and marketing.

Beginning in 1942, the federal government created the Bracero Program to bring Mexican agricultural laborers into the United States to address wartime labor shortages.¹ Citrus growers throughout Ventura County relied heavily on these workers; more than 3,000 “braceros” were brought to Ventura County in order to harvest citrus fruit.² By 1950, the Piru Citrus Association constructed a purpose-built labor camp on the subject property to house single male workers. Three earlier bunkhouses dating from 1927 were moved to the site, and several new buildings were constructed, including an office, mess hall, washroom and laundry facility, and additional bunkhouses. The camp served as a center for seasonal agricultural labor from 1950 to 1972 and again from 1989 to 2003.

After the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, many former participants remained in Ventura County and continued to work for local citrus operations. The Piru labor camp remained in use until 2003, after which the buildings stood vacant. By the early 2000s, the structures had deteriorated, and two bunkhouses were lost to fire. In 2011, the remaining buildings were demolished to allow construction of the Valle Naranjal Farmworker Housing Project.

¹ Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance, “Issue Paper No. 2, Farm Worker Housing: A Crisis Calling for Community Action,” June 2002.

² Ibid.

At its December 8, 2008 meeting, the Cultural Heritage Board provided input during the planning of the Valle Naranjal project, including recommendations on how the history of the former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp should be interpreted for future residents and the public. As a result, an interpretive room was established within the community center to ensure that the story of El Campo remains accessible to residents and visitors. The room features original artifacts from the labor camp, a scale model of the site, and a painted mural illustrating the experiences of farmworkers who lived and worked there. A documentary video on the history of the camp was also produced and is on file with the Planning Division.

VI. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp was historically significant for its strong association with Ventura County's agricultural history. Agriculture has been a central economic force in the county since the nineteenth century, and the citrus industry in particular shaped the development of communities throughout the Santa Clara Valley. The labor camp served as an essential component of that system, providing housing and support for the seasonal workforce that sustained local citrus production for more than five decades.

The buildings at the camp reflected the functional character of mid twentieth century farmworker housing and illustrated the methods of construction and layout typical of labor camps established during the years of the Bracero Program. The bunkhouses, mess hall, office, and washroom facility were arranged to support the daily routines of agricultural workers, and the simple gable roof forms, exposed rafters, concrete foundations, and utilitarian materials were characteristic of the period in which the structures were built or moved to the site.

The property is also historically significant for its direct association with the Bracero Program, which brought millions of Mexican workers to the United States between 1942 and 1964. The camp was constructed in 1950 specifically to accommodate this labor force. It represents an important chapter in both local and national history and reflects the broader social and economic patterns that shaped agricultural labor in Ventura County throughout the mid twentieth century.

Although the buildings have since been demolished, the labor camp played a vital role within the regional citrus industry and contributed to the long-standing agricultural identity of the Piru community. The site remains an important reminder of the workers who supported the industry and the structures that once housed them during one of the most significant eras of agricultural production in Ventura County.

VII. STAFF CONCLUSIONS:

The evidence provided in the Historic Report (Exhibit 1) supports making the findings under Ordinance Section 1367(c) that the former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp is eligible for designation as a Ventura County Point of Interest. The Historic Report concludes that the former labor camp is historically significant for its association with the development of the citrus industry in Piru and for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of mid twentieth century farmworker housing. The property reflects important patterns in Ventura County's agricultural history with a period of significance from 1950 to 1955.

In addition, the evidence provided in the Historic Report supports making the additional designation findings in Cultural Heritage Ordinance Section 1367-1. The site possesses historic character and value to the general public due to its ties to the Bracero Program and the citrus industry, and the designation would not result in foreseeable costs to the County. The designation would not infringe upon the rights of the Property Owner because it does not affect allowable land uses, and the Property Owner consents to designation. The proposed designation is also consistent with the Cultural Heritage Board's adopted goals for the Cultural Heritage Program for 2025 to 2026 (*Goal #15: Designate Additional Points of Interest* and *Goal #16: Hold 1-2 Mobile Meetings of the Cultural Heritage Board Each Year at Offsite Locations*). A staff analysis of the required findings for Point of Interest designation are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Required Designation Findings Analysis

Required Finding	Staff Comment
Point of Interest Criteria (1): The site of a building, structure or object that no longer exists, but was associated with historic events, important persons, or embodied a distinctive character or architectural style.	According to the Historic Report, the former labor camp is historically significant for its association with the development of the citrus industry in Piru and for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of mid-twentieth-century farmworker housing. Constructed in 1950 to house Bracero Program workers, the camp played an integral role in supporting Ventura County's agricultural economy during a significant period of citrus production.
Additional Designation Standard (a): It shall have historic, aesthetic or special character or interest for the general public,	The site possesses historic character and value to the general public because of its association with the Bracero Program, the development of Ventura County's citrus

Required Finding	Staff Comment
and not be limited in interest to a special group of persons.	industry, and the broader history of agricultural labor in California. Its significance extends beyond those directly connected with the property by illustrating important social, economic, and cultural themes that shaped the Piru community and Ventura County.
Additional Designation Standard (b): Its designation shall not require the expenditure by the County of Ventura of any amount of money not commensurate with the value of the object to be preserved.	Designation would not result in any foreseeable costs to the County beyond routine administrative activities associated with maintaining the Cultural Heritage Program.
Additional Designation Standard (c): Its designation shall not infringe upon the rights of a private owner thereof to make any and all reasonable uses thereof which are not in conflict with the purposes of the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.	Designation would not infringe upon the rights of the Property Owner because it does not alter the property's existing land use, zoning, or development rights. The property has already been redeveloped with the Valle Naranjal Farmworker Housing Project, and the owner has provided written consent to the proposed Point of Interest designation. Accordingly, the designation recognizes the historical significance of the site without imposing restrictions that would prevent reasonable use of the property consistent with the Cultural Heritage Ordinance.

Therefore, CHB staff recommends that 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 3). In addition, the public notice was sent by electronic mail in advance of this hearing. As part of the public outreach conducted by Planning Division staff in March 2025 regarding potential Point of Interest designation, the property owner indicated their consent to the property being designated as a Point of Interest (see Exhibit 4).

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

IX. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

CHB staff recommends the CHB take the following actions regarding this item:

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 former Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp (“El Campo”) 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. 2026-7 (Exhibit 5) approving the designation of the Piru Citrus Association Labor Camp (“El Campo”), formerly located at 4268 Center Street, Piru, CA 93015, as Ventura County Point of Interest No. 18.

Prepared by:

Reviewed by:



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Exhibits:

- Exhibit 1: Historic Resources Report, February 29, 2008
- Exhibit 2: Newspaper Articles
- Exhibit 3: 15-Day Public Hearing Notice
- Exhibit 4: Property Owner Consent to Designation
- Exhibit 5: CHB Resolution No. 2026-7