



Staff Report and Recommendations Agenda of August 26, 2024, Item 6a

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency

800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009-1740 • (805) 654-2478 • www.vcrma.org/divisions/planning

I. LEAD AGENCY:

Joshua Knudson
Architectural Historian
Caltrans, District 7
Division of Environmental Planning
Cultural Resources Unit
100 S. Main Street, Suite 100, MS 16A
Los Angeles, CA 90012

II. REQUEST:

A request for review and comment pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on the California Department of Transportation's US Highway 101 (US 101) Improvement Project. The project would widen the northbound US 101 to provide a shoulder and an auxiliary lane, which will include the removal of approximately seven mature eucalyptus trees of the eastern side of the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove. All work would take place within the existing US 101 right-of-way.

III. LOCATION AND PROPERTY INFORMATION:

- Eucalyptus Trees Along US Highway 101 (US 101), roughly between Dawson Drive and Santa Rosa Road, Camarillo, CA 93012 (Ventura County Landmark No. 3) (Supervisorial District 3 – Long).
- All work would take place within the existing US 101 right-of-way within the city of Camarillo.
- Historic Designation: Ventura County Landmark No. 3 and listed in California Register of Historical Resources; determined eligible for National Register of Historic Resources

The Eucalyptus Trees Along US 101, also known as the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove, is a dual row of trees, some of which remain from the original 650 eucalyptus trees planted by Adolfo Camarillo in 1892 along the old two-lane El Camino Real near Camarillo's eastern entrance. The El Camino Real later became US Highway 101 and this grove of Eucalyptus trees became a Ventura County landmark in 1978. A traversable pathway still exists between the tree rows. Photo 1 and Photo 2 below show the Eucalyptus Trees Along US Highway 101 in 2007 and 2018, respectively.

Figure 1 – Photo of Eucalyptus Trees Along US Highway 101



Source: VenturaPhoto.com, 2007

Figure 2 – Eastern End of Eucalyptus Trees Along US Highway 101



Source: Craig Baker, 2018

IV. PROJECT SCOPE:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in coordination with the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC), is proposing improvements along 27 miles of the US 101 (between State Route 23 in Ventura and State Route 33 in Thousand Oaks, and Postmiles 4.1 and 30.9) in Ventura County (Exhibit 1). A location map of the trees proposed to be removed is included in Exhibit 1. The US 101 Improvement Project includes proposed improvements within the city of Camarillo to widen the northbound US 101 to provide a shoulder and an auxiliary lane, which will taper from a combined width of approximately 20 feet near Arroyo Calleguas bridge to 10 feet near Village At The Park Drive. The work will include the removal of approximately seven eucalyptus trees of the eastern side of the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove. All work would take place within the existing US 101 right-of-way.

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Eucalyptus trees have a rich, complicated history in Southern California. Originally native to Australia, eucalyptus trees were brought to the state in the 1870s to serve as windbreaks on agricultural lands to save crops from being destroyed in the wind.¹

In 1892, Adolfo Camarillo planted 650 eucalyptus trees along the old two-lane El Camino Real near that city's eastern entrance. The El Camino Real would later become the U.S. Route 101 freeway and this grove of eucalyptus trees became a Ventura County landmark in 1978. The Heritage Grove has a period of significance of 1892 (year of its planting) to 1958 (the year of Camarillo's death). The historic property boundary is the area roughly bounded by US 101 to the south, Mission Oaks Boulevard/Dowson Drive to the west, Mission Oaks Boulevard to the north, and Arroyo Los Posos (Calleguas Creek) to the east. Character-defining features of the Heritage Grove include the eucalyptus trees, double-row design, traversable pathway between the rows, and proximity to and relationship with the Camarillo Ranch house to the north (Exhibit 1).

Previous Changes

In 1973, a project to widen the US 101 between Thousand Oaks and Oxnard was proposed, posing a threat to the trees. Five years later, an alternative design was approved. This plan involved rerouting the freeway around the trees since the trees were located on the median strip between the northbound and southbound lanes. The

¹ Ballantine, W., Camacho, M., Sakamoto, M., Snyder, D., Initial Study: 07-VEN-101 12.7/13.1 In Camarillo, Calleguas Creek to 0.2 miles South of Lewis Road Removal and Trimming of Eucalyptus Trees 07216 – 02703, California Department of Transportation, September 1981.

approved plan shifted the entire freeway to the south, leaving the trees along the northern side of the freeway instead of in the middle.²

In 1982, concerns were raised about the trees posing a hazard. Due to substantial tree height (eucalyptus trees can reach up to 300 feet high) and increased motorist usage of the US 101, a number of accidents occurred involving motorists injured by the trees or falling branches. In addition, the condition of the trees was very poor, leaving them sick and weak. In order to improve the safety of the road, 118 of the 482 trees in the grove were removed. Eighty-four additional trees were pruned, and approximately 250 trees had their tops removed.³

VI. PROJECT ANALYSIS:

The project is a federal undertaking that could potentially affect historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and the January 2014 *First Amended Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the California Department of Transportation Regarding Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, As it Pertains to the Administration of the Federal-Aid Highway Program in California*.

According to Caltrans, because the proposed project would remove apparently healthy trees, which are a character-defining feature of the Heritage Grove, it will diminish the historic property's integrity. Therefore, the project would result in an adverse effect on the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove (Exhibit 1). An adverse effect under Section 106 is defined in 36 CFR § § 800.5(a)(1) as an action that may directly or indirectly alter character-defining features in a manner that would diminish history integrity and affect the property's eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Following project implementation, a substantial number of trees would remain; however, at this time, it is not known how many of the trees were originally planted by Mr. Camarillo.

The County of Ventura Cultural Heritage Board, as a Certified Local Government pursuant to the NHPA, has been identified as potentially having an interest in the undertaking and may participate as a consulting party within the context of Section 106. Any comments or recommendations the Cultural Heritage Board may have would be forwarded to Caltrans for their review and consideration.

VII. STAFF CONCLUSION:

² Steele, K.D., [Letter regarding Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove], July 27, 1982.

³ Ibid.

CHB staff concurs with the Caltrans assessment of the project's potential to result in an adverse effect on the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove. Removal of approximately seven eucalyptus trees and potential changes in spacial relationships relative to the traversable pathway between the rows would negatively affect the integrity of the site. Therefore, CHB staff recommends the CHB adopt the following recommendations related to the scope of work in order to reduce impacts to the greatest extent feasible:

- **Recommendation #1: Tree Replacement.** The lead agency should replace each removed tree with the installation of a minimum of two 15-gallon size trees of the same species.
- **Recommendation #2: Ensure Health of Remaining Trees.** It is recommended that the lead agency work with a certified arborist to develop further treatment recommendations for measures to maintain and improve the health of the remaining Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove to prevent further loss of integrity.
- **Recommendation #3: Pursue Nomination for Listing in the National Register of Historic Places.** Within 6 months of project completion, it is recommended that the lead agency pursue nomination of the Eucalyptus Trees Along US 101, also known as the Adolfo Camarillo Heritage Grove, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, if it is determined that sufficient integrity remains.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

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

IX. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

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

1. **CONDUCT** public hearing, **RECEIVE** oral and written testimony, and **CONSIDER** the Planning Division Staff report and all exhibits and attachments hereto; and
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the proposed project based on the preceding evidence and analysis.

Prepared by:



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

Reviewed by:



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

Exhibit:

Exhibit 1: Caltrans Request for Consultation, July 18, 2024